

GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
RAJYA SABHA
UNSTARRED QUESTION NO-2420
ANSWERED ON-03.01.2019
Fishermen in Pakistans jails

2420 Shri Ram Nath Thakur

- (a) the number of Indian citizens and fishermen imprisoned in the jails of Pakistan and since when they have been imprisoned;
- (b) whether any financial or other assistance has been provided by Government, to the family of such persons, and
- (c) the action taken by Government for getting these people released?

ANSWER

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
[GEN. (DR) V. K. SINGH (RETD)]

(a) As per India-Pakistan 'Agreement on Consular Access' signed on 21 May 2008, lists of civilian prisoners and fishermen of each country lodged in the jails of the other are exchanged on 1 January and 1 July of every year. According to the lists exchanged on 1 January 2019, Pakistan has acknowledged the custody of 483 fishermen and 54 civilian prisoners who are Indian or believed-to-be Indian in their jails. In addition, there is the issue of 83 missing Indian defence personnel, whose custody has not been acknowledged by Pakistan, so far.

(b) The Department of Animal Husbandry, Dairying and Fisheries (DADF) of the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare has a non-plan scheme on Soft Loan Package for replacement of fishing vessels held captive in Pakistan. This scheme envisage one time replacement of a total of 326 fishing vessel held captive in Pakistan with a capital subsidy to the tune of 30% cost of each vessel subject to a ceiling of Rs 6 lakhs. The Marine Products Export Development Authority (MPEDA) has been designated as an implementing agency. In addition, DADF has been providing insurance coverage through Group Accident Insurance Scheme for active fishermen.

(c) The External Affairs Minister, in October 2017, suggested to the High Commissioner of Pakistan that the two sides could work together to resolve humanitarian issues related to elderly, women and mentally unsound prisoners in each other's custody and consider their early release and repatriation. It was, inter-alia, proposed to revive the mechanism of Joint Judicial Committee and that a team of Indian medical experts could be allowed to visit the mentally unsound prisoners with a view to facilitate their nationality verification and subsequent repatriation. Pakistan responded positively on 7 March 2018. India has already shared the details of the medical experts team and the re-constituted Joint Judicial Committee with Pakistan with the request to organise their visit. Pakistan has not responded so far.

Government continues to pursue the matter of early release and repatriation of all Indian prisoners, including civilians, fishermen with boats, and missing Indian defence personnel who are believed to be in Pakistan's custody. Government's persistent efforts have succeeded in securing release of 1749 Indian prisoners, including 1725 fishermen along with 57 boats from Pakistan's custody since 2014. This include 179 Indian prisoners and fishermen who have been repatriated from Pakistan in 2018, so far. The Government has asked Pakistan to provide consular access as also early release and repatriation of the remaining Indian prisoners and fishermen along with their boats in Pakistan's custody.
