GOVERNMENT OF INDIA

MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

LOK SABHA

UNSTARRED QUESTION NO: 1703

ANSWERED ON:13.02.2019

Fishermen in Pakistan’s Custody

DEVUSINH JESINGBHAI CHAUHAN

(a)the number of fishermen in Pakistan’s custody and since when, the year-wise details thereof;

(b)the details of efforts made to get those fishermen released who have completed their jail term in Pakistan’s jail;

(c)the details of specific steps taken by the Government to get the Boats that are in Pakistan’s custody since October 2003 onwards released from Pakistan Authorities, which may otherwise get auctioned by them to their locals;

(d)whether any financial or material help is given to those fishermen whose boats are seized to run their household activities and to buy the new fishing boat, if so, the details thereof; and

(e)whether any warning system or International Border demarcation has been put to guide our fishermen and also to desist Pak authorities not to capture our fishermen in Indian waterways and if so, the details thereof ?

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRSbe pleased to state:-

ANSWER

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

(a) & (b)According to the available information, 503 Indian fishermen are believed to be in Pakistan's custody. According to the list shared on 1 January 2019, Pakistan has acknowledged the custody of 483 fishermen who are Indian or believed-to-be-Indian in their jails. These include fishermen who are in Pakistan for over 20 months.

The Government, upon receipt of reports of apprehensions of the Indian fishermen, immediately takes up the matter with Pakistan through diplomatic channels and seeks consular access and their early release and repatriation, along with boats. Government's persistent efforts have succeeded in securing release and repatriation of 1725 fishermen along with 57 boats from Pakistan's custody since 2014. The Government has asked Pakistan to provide consular access as also early release and repatriation of the remaining Indian fishermen along with their boats in Pakistan's custody.

(c)Government regularly takes up the issue of release and repatriation of Indian fishermen along with their boats with the Pakistan authorities. Due to persistent efforts of the Government, 57 boats were released and repatriated in March 2015. Later, visit of a team of fishermen representatives, was organised to Karachi in March 2016 to assess the condition of 22 other Indian fishing boats in Pakistan's custody. Response from Pakistan's Government is awaited for visit of a follow-up delegation for repatriation of these boats.

(d)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.

(e) As per available information, steps have been taken by Indian Coast Guard to guide Indian fishermen not to cross-over the perceived International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL) through various community interaction programmes for the fishing community. The Indian Coast Guard ships also shepherd the Indian fishing boats clear from the perceived IMBL to prevent their apprehension by Maritime Security Agencies of neighbouring countries. One Indian Coast Guard ship/aircraft maintains close surveillance at any given time along the India-Pakistan perceived IMBL. In addition, Government of Gujarat has specified no-fishing zone of five nautical miles along the notional IMBL.

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