

THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE (SHRI A. K. ANTONY): (a) to (c) In last three years there have been no incidents of attacks on Lakshadweep Islands by Somalian pirates. Isolated incidents of piratical activities in the East Arabian Sea shipping lanes passing close to the islands took place between December, 2010 to February, 2011.

2. Further, no incidents of attack by Somalian pirates on Lakshadweep have happened recently.

3. Indian Navy and Coast Guard ships and aircraft continuously maintain surveillance and patrolling of the Island Territories. In addition, one Indian Naval warship has been deployed in the Gulf of Aden for anti-piracy patrol since October, 2008 continuously. The Indian Naval ship has escorted 2660 merchant ships since then and has thwarted 40 piracy attacks. Other measures taken include Joint operational exercises on regular basis among Navy, Coast Guard, Coastal Police, Customs and others for security of coastal areas including island territories. Further, continuous review and monitoring of various mechanisms have been established by the Government at different levels, involving various agencies, including the State / Union Territory authorities. The intelligence mechanism has also been streamlined through the creation of Joint Operation Centres and multi-agency coordination mechanism. A chain of radars and a network of Automatic Identification System (AIS) covering the country's entire coastline has been operationalised for round the clock surveillance.

Miserable condition of artists

*190 SHRIMATI VASANTHI STANLEY: Will the Minister of CULTURE be pleased to state:

(a) the steps being taken by the Ministry to improve the plight of artists who are living in miserable condition in various parts of the country due to the indifference of Government towards folk art and culture; and

(b) the step taken or proposed to be taken by Government to protect the interests of such artists?

THE MINISTER OF CULTURE (SHRIMATI CHANDRESH KUMARI KATOCH: (a) and (b) The Ministry of Culture administers a scheme namely

'Artistes Pension Scheme and Welfare Fund', earlier called "Scheme of financial assistance to persons distinguished in letters, arts, and such other walks of life who may be in indigent circumstances and their dependents". Assistance from the Government is in the form of monthly allowance. Such allowance given to the Artistes recommended under the Centre-State Quota is shared by the Centre and State Government / UT Administration concerned, with the latter paying a monthly allowance of at least Rs. 500/- per month per beneficiary. The monthly allowance contributed by the Central Government in such cases is not more than Rs. 3500/- per month per beneficiary and in cases of those recommended under Central Quota the assistance is not more than Rs. 4000/- per month per beneficiary. The assistance is remitted by LIC, directly into the artistes' bank accounts. The scheme has been in operation since 1961.

Besides, financial help subject to the prescribed limit, in case of hospitalization and other exigencies is provided to the Artistes already covered under Pension Scheme and the spouse / dependents after the Artistes death.

The Government has set up seven Zonal Cultural Centres with the main objective of the preservation, promotion and dissemination of the traditional folk arts and culture of different parts of the country.

Non-settlement of land rent by Army in Kashmir

*191 PROF. SAIF-UD-DIN SOZ: Will the Minister of DEFENCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that the Army had not settled rent for the lands under its occupation in Anantnag and other areas in Kashmir; and

(b) if so, the list of such areas along with the dates by when rent would be settled?

THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE (SHRI A. K. ANTONY): (a) In Anantnag and other areas in Kashmir region (as distinct from Jammu and Ladakh regions of J&K) rents have been settled in 719 cases. Rentals for these lands are being paid regularly. There are 125 pending cases of settlement of rentals.