

However, due to ongoing turmoil in Iraq, the Government is facilitating Indian nationals in Iraq in their safe return to India, if they so desire.

(c) The Government is closely monitoring the security situation in Iraq and is making every effort and taking all necessary steps to ensure safe return of our nationals from there. Our Embassy in Baghdad is in close and regular contact with the Iraqi Government authorities for assisting Indian nationals currently in Iraq. Our Embassy in Baghdad and the Ministry of External Affairs have established 24 hour helplines to assist our nationals in Iraq and their concerned family members in India. We have also set up special camp offices in Basra, Najaf and Karbala and strengthened our Mission in Baghdad through the addition of 25 staff members. These field offices are proactively contacting Indian nationals and companies where they work, offering their services for the facilitation of our nationals to leave Iraq by offering air tickets as well as help with immigration and departure facilities. The details of these helplines have been well publicized through the media.

#### **Permanent solution of fishermen's problem**

957. SHRI SANJAY RAUT: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government is seriously considering the permanent solution for the harassment and arrests of Indian fishermen by the Sri Lankan Government;

(b) if so, the details of talks held with the Sri Lankan counterpart for solving the fishermen issue during the last one year; and

(c) the details of steps taken or proposed to be taken by Government for permanent solutions of fishermen issues?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (GENERAL (RETD.) V.K. SINGH): (a) to (c) Government attaches the highest importance to the safety, security and welfare of Indian fishermen. Government has consistently taken up issues relating to apprehension of and incidents of attack on our fishermen with the Government of Sri Lanka to ensure that the Sri Lankan Navy acts with restraint and our fishermen are treated in a humane and pragmatic manner. The Sri Lankan side has, however, denied the involvement of their Navy in any incidents of harassment or intimidation or attack of Indian fishermen and has stated that none of the alleged attacks have taken place in Indian waters.

An India-Sri Lanka Joint Working Group (JWG) to deal with issues relating to

straying fishermen, work out modalities for prevention of use of force against them, the early release of confiscated boats and to explore possibilities of working towards a bilateral agreement for licensed fishing has been established since 2004. Further, keeping in mind the humanitarian and livelihood dimensions of the fishermen's issue, Government had reached an understanding through a Joint Statement with the Sri Lankan Government on 26 October 2008 to put in place practical arrangements to deal with *bonafide* Indian and Sri Lankan fishermen crossing the International Maritime Boundary Line. As part of these arrangements, it was agreed that there would be no firing on Indian fishing vessels and that Indian fishing vessels would not tread into sensitive areas designated by the Government of Sri Lanka along its coastline. Additionally, in 2014, two rounds of India-Sri Lanka Fishermen's Associations talks have taken place in Chennai (27 January 2014) and Colombo (12 May 2014) towards resolution of the issue. The matter was also discussed recently during the bilateral meeting of PM Narendra Modi with Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapaksa on 27 May in New Delhi. Both leaders called for a permanent solution to the issue.

Government continues to remain engaged with the Government of Sri Lanka to ensure that fishermen on both sides can continue to pursue their livelihood in a safe, secure and sustainable manner.

#### **Fishermen in jails of Pakistan**

958. SHRI PARIMAL NATHWANI: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

- (a) the details and number of fishermen of India who are still in jails of Pakistan, Sri Lanka;
- (b) the details of their crime, innocence or the trials in foreign countries;
- (c) whether there are any guidelines and/or procedure to take actions for early release of the innocent fishermen with their respective boats and equipment, if so, the details thereof; and
- (d) whether there is any provision or the precedent for giving compensation to the family of those fishermen whose custody is prolonged without trial or those who die in jail in foreign country, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (GENERAL (RETD.) V.K. SINGH): (a) to (d) Presently, 249 fishermen believed to be Indian continue to remain lodged in jails in Pakistan (as on 1 July 2014), while 4 Indian