

GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
RAJYA SABHA
UNSTARRED QUESTION NO-863
ANSWERED ON- 09/02/2023

RELEASE OF CIVILIAN PRISONERS AND FISHERMEN BY PAKISTAN

863. SHRI NARANBHAI J. RATHWA

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state :-

- (a) whether it is a fact that both India and Pakistan have released civilians prisoners and missing defence personnel and fishermen on the first day of the New Year;
- (b) if so, the complete details of prisoners released by Pakistan;
- (c) whether it is also a fact that Government of India has requested for release of remaining fishermen, civilians and defence personnel; and
- (d) if so, the details thereof along with the response of Pakistan to the said request?

ANSWER

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

(SHRI V. MURALEEDHARAN)

(a to d) As per the 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 2023, Pakistan has acknowledged the custody of 654 fishermen and 51 civilian prisoners who are Indian or are believed to be Indian. There are 339 civilian prisoners and 95 fishermen in Indian custody who are either Pakistani or believed-to-be-Pakistani.

The Government has called for early release and repatriation of civilian prisoners, missing defence personnel, and fishermen along with their boats, from Pakistan's custody. In this context, Pakistan was asked to expedite the release and repatriation of 631 Indian fishermen and 02 Indian civilian prisoners, who have completed their sentence and whose nationality has been confirmed and conveyed to Pakistan. In addition, Pakistan has been asked to provide immediate consular access to the remaining 30 fishermen and 22 civilian prisoners in Pakistan's custody, who are believed-to-be-Indian.

As per available information, 83 Indian defence personnel, including prisoners of war, are believed to be in Pakistan's custody, but their presence has not been acknowledged by Pakistan so far. The Government has been consistently taking up the matter of release and repatriation of the missing defence personnel with Pakistan through diplomatic channels. The matter was again raised by the High Commission of India in Islamabad with the Pakistan Ministry of Foreign Affairs through its communication dated 01 January 2023.

Government attaches the highest priority to the welfare, safety and security of Indian civilian prisoners and fishermen. As soon as cases of apprehension of Indian civilian prisoners, fishermen and their fishing boats by Pakistan are reported, immediate steps are taken by the Indian Mission in Islamabad towards seeking consular access from Pakistan Government. All possible assistance, including legal assistance, is extended to the Indian civilian prisoners and fishermen for their early release and repatriation, along with the release of their boats.

As a result of sustained efforts by the Government, 58 Indian civilian prisoners, 2160 Indian fishermen and 57 Indian fishing boats have been repatriated from Pakistan since 2014. This includes 05 Indian civilian prisoners and 40 Indian fishermen who have been repatriated from Pakistan in 2022.
