

**GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
LOK SABHA**

UNSTARRED QUESTION NO:660

ANSWERED ON:26.11.2014

RETURN OF INDIANS FROM CONFLICT ZONES

Chandumajra Shri Prem Singh;Charitra Shri Ram;Chavan Shri Harishchandra Deoram;Raghavan Shri M. K.;Rajesh Shri M. B.;Reddy Shri Midhun;Vichare Shri Rajan Baburao

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

- (a) whether reports suggest that several Indian Nationals/Indian Nurses continue to be trapped/held captive in conflict zones of the Middle East and Africa including Iraq, Syria and Libya;
- (b) if so, the details of the steps taken by the Government for their safe release/negotiations with captors along with the number of persons still held captive, released, repatriated country-wise in the recent past;
- (c) whether the Government provides any assistance/ relief/rehabilitation measures to individuals affected/ who have lost livelihood in such conflict zones;
- (d) if so, the details thereof along with number of persons who have been provided with such assistance/relief/rehabilitation in the last one year; and
- (e) the details of the advisory issued by the Government for the benefit/ information of Indian Nationals residing/proposing to travel/seek employment in conflict-prone countries?

Answer

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

(a) to (d) Some Indians were trapped in the conflict areas following sudden attacks and capturing of several cities in northern and central Iraq by the Islamic State of Iraq and Sham beginning 8 June 2014. A group of 41 Indian nationals working in a construction company in Mosul in Iraq were taken captive and still remain so. The Government is making every effort and taking all steps to secure their release.

Another group of 46 nurses working in a local hospital in the city of Tikrit in Iraq were abducted and taken to Mosul on 3 July by an unidentified group. On 4 July, they were released and were brought back to India on the same day by a special Air India flight.

Since the commencement of conflict in Libya in mid-July 2014, over 3,300 nationals have been evacuated through the Government assistance. Some Indians in Libya have preferred to continue with their jobs despite advisories by our Mission in Libya for them to leave. There are no Indian nationals stranded in Syria at present.

The Government has been regularly and closely monitoring the rapidly evolving security situation in the Middle East, including in Syria, Iraq and Libya. Safety and security of Indian nationals in these countries is a matter of foremost concern and preoccupation for the Government. The Government has facilitated return of Indian nationals from conflict zones in Iraq and Libya and continues to make all efforts for the safe return of Indian nationals willing to return from these countries in conflict.

Our Embassy in Baghdad is in close and regular contact with the Iraqi Government and officials for ensuring safety and security of the remaining Indian nationals in Iraq. Our Mission in Baghdad and the Ministry of External Affairs established 24 hour helplines to assist our nationals in Iraq and their concerned family members in India. The Government also set up special camp offices in Najaf, Karbala and Basra and strengthened our Embassy in Baghdad.

Our Embassy in Baghdad has been facilitating return of Indian nationals from Iraq by providing air tickets as well as assistance with travel documents, immigration and departure facilities. As of 20 November, over 7,000 Indian nationals in Iraq have been provided assistance, including air tickets, travel documents and immigration facilitation etc, for return to India. Out of this, over 6,000 Indian nationals were provided air tickets for their return.

External Affairs Minister has requested the Chief Ministers of the States concerned to render assistance to the returnees for their rehabilitation/resettlement and to ensure their well-being under the existing State/ Central government schemes on priority basis.

(e) On 19 June, the Government suspended emigration clearance to Iraq, until further notification and advised Indian nationals to avoid all travel to Iraq. The Government issued travel advisories on 15 June, 24 June and 28 June advising Indian nationals to leave Iraq by commercial means. Our nationals living in areas affected by the ongoing armed conflict were advised to stay indoors as far as possible and to remain in contact with our Embassy in Baghdad for necessary guidance and updated information on the evolving

security situation.

Our Embassy in Libya has been issuing regular advisories, advising Indian nationals to leave Libya on account of the deteriorating security situation. Travel of ECR category workers to Libya from India has also been temporarily suspended.