

GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
MINISTRY OF SHIPPING
LOK SABHA
UNSTARRED QUESTION NO. 1450
TO BE ANSWERED ON 26th JULY, 2018

SAFETY AND WELFARE OF SEAFARERS

1450. SHRI TEJ PRATAP SINGH YADAV:
SHRIMATI ANJU BALA:

Will the Minister of SHIPPING be pleased to state:

पोत परिवहन मंत्री

- (a) whether the Government has taken adequate steps to safeguard the interest of Indian crew members aboard foreign vessels specially in exigencies like pirate hijacking or fatal accidents and if so, the details thereof;
- (b) whether implementation of the relevant Maritime Act/Laws by the Government has been lax in such cases and if so, the details thereof along with the reaction of the Government thereto;
- (c) whether the retired seafarers have protested by hunger strike against discontinuance of the monthly ex-gratia allowance and if so, the details thereof along with the reaction of the Government thereto;
- (d) whether the Seafarers Welfare Fund Society has been set up for the welfare of Indian seafarers and their families;
- (e) if so, the details of objectives, functions and achievements thereof along with the funds released for the purpose so far; and
- (f) other welfare measures being taken by the Government in this regard?

ANSWER

MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF SHIPPING
(SHRI PON. RADHAKRISHNAN)

(a) & (b) To deal with potential maritime security situations arising out of any hijacking at sea of merchant vessels with Indian crew, an Inter-Ministerial Group (IMGO) was set up by the Government under the Ministry of Shipping to deal with the hostage situation arising out of the hijacking at sea of merchant vessels with Indian crew. Government had also approved the Contingency Plan for dealing with piracy and hijacking of merchant ships and constituted a Committee of Secretaries on Anti-Piracy and Hijacking at sea (COSAPH) under the Chairmanship of Cabinet Secretary. In addition to this, the following anti-piracy measures have been put in place for Indian flag merchant vessels and sailing vessels:

- (i) Guidelines for anti-piracy measures to be implemented on Indian Ships through issue of Merchant Shipping Notice No.1 of 2011 dated 14.1.2011. The guidelines provide for elaborate anti-piracy measures (Best Management Practices), including safe house/citadel for vessels.
- (ii) Banning of sailing vessels to ply in waters south or west of the line joining Salalah and Male through Merchant Shipping Notice No. 3/2010 dated 31.3.2010.
- (iii) Advisory issued by Directorate General of Shipping vide Notice No. 35-NT(2)/2017 dated 6th April, 2017 for not transiting through Gulf of Aden.
- (iv) Naval escort provided by Indian naval ships in the Gulf of Aden since 2008.
- (v) Enhanced vigil by the Indian Navy in the Indian Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) and westward upto 65 degree east longitude.
- (vi) Active participation by India in the security meetings of the International Maritime Organization, Contact Group on Piracy off the Coast of Somalia (CGPCS) and other international fora.

As regards fatal accidents, for Indian ships/vessels were caught in distress/distress-like situations due to grounding, collision, sinking, flooding, fire on board, engine failure etc., the Government of India has constituted Maritime Rescue Co-ordination Centres (MRCCs) to deal with such situations and necessary rescue measures are undertaken through various agencies.

(c) Yes, Madam. An ex-gratia allowance of Rs.200/- per month was being paid by Seafarers Welfare Fund Society (SWFS) to some retired seafarers who had worked on foreign going vessels as per government records as on 27.03.2001. SWFS has decided to discontinue the ex-gratia payment due to the erosion of the corpus of the fund on whose interest income the payment of ex-gratia was being made and instead decided to distribute the balance of the corpus amount as lumpsum payment to all the beneficiaries.

One faction of Forward Seamen's Union of India has protested on 25/26.06.2018 about this decision of SWFS. Government had already informed them that merchant shipping is governed by market forces. Seafarers job world-wide is contractual and for a specific period. Pension to an employee is paid by the employer if a provision for payment of pension is mentioned in the employment contract.

(d) to (f) Yes, Madam.

(a) Some of the objectives as set out in the Memorandum of Association of SWFS are as follows:-

- (i) To provide and maintain a fund by the name of the Seafarers' Welfare Fund;
- (ii) To prepare the annual budget of income and expenditure in respect of the Fund for submission to the Central Government.
- (iii) To sell, lease, mortgage, surrender, exchange, dispose of, or otherwise deal with, all or any part of the movable or immovable property belonging to the Society or in its possession or occupation, subject to such limitations as the Central Government may from time to time impose;
- (iv) To invest in any security or keep in deposit with any bank and otherwise deal with any moneys of the Society in such manner as may, from time to time, be prescribed by the Central Government.
- (v) To give pension, gratuities or charitable aid to employees or ex-employees of the SWFS or to their wives, children or other relatives or dependents.

(b) The functions of the SWFS are as follows:-

- (i) To implement welfare schemes for the retired seafarers and their families on completion of age of superannuation/voluntarily retired seafarers permanently medically unfit for seafaring job.
- (ii) To implement welfare schemes for the families of the seafarers.

(c) The achievements of the objectives of the SWFS are as follows:-

The following welfare Schemes are being implemented by the SWFS for the Seafarers-(i) Survival Benefit Scheme (ii) Invalidity Benefit Scheme (iii) Maternity Benefit Scheme for Female Seafarers. These schemes became effective from 21.08.2014 onwards.
