

India asks Pakistan to release 641 fishermen

Ahead of his visit to Islamabad next month, External Affairs Minister Pranab Mukherjee Thursday asked Pakistan to release and provide consular access to 641 Indian fishermen and prisoners currently languishing in its jails.

"The (Indian) government expects the government of Pakistan to implement the recommendations of the judicial committee to release and provide consular access to all detained fishermen and prisoners," Mukherjee told the Rajya Sabha in reply to a question.

"In the absence of consular access, it is not possible to determine the details of sentences awarded," he stressed.

He informed the upper house of parliament that 436 fishermen and 205 Indian prisoners are in jails in Pakistan.

Alluding to the first meeting of a joint judicial panel of retired judges held in February, he reminded Pakistan of the panel's recommendation that those prisoners who have completed their sentences and whose national status has been verified be released forthwith.

The Indian jails have 133 Pakistani prisoners and 14 Pakistani fishermen.

The issue of expediting release of prisoners will figure prominently in Mukherjee's discussions with his Pakistani counterpart Shah Mehmood Qureshi when he goes to Islamabad May 21.

During Mukherjee's visit, India and Pakistan will launch the fifth round of their composite dialogue after a review of the earlier round.

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