

## **Govt seeks release of abducted priest Father Tom, Yemen says he is alive**

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**New Delhi:** External affairs minister Sushma Swaraj on Tuesday held extensive talks with the Deputy Prime Minister of Yemen during which she conveyed India's concern over the safety of Father Tom Uzhunnalil, who was abducted in the Arab country last year, the ministry said.

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On his part, Abdulmalik Abduljalil Al-Mekhlafi conveyed that, according to available information, Father Uzhunnalil was alive and the Yemen government has been making all efforts to secure his release and assured all cooperation in this regard.

According to a statement by the External Affairs Ministry, Sushma Swaraj stressed India's concern for the safety and well-being of the priest who was abducted in March 2016 from Aden and reiterated the request for continued assistance from the Yemeni authorities in securing his safe and early release.

Father Uzhunnalil, who hails from Kerala, was abducted by the ISIS terror group which attacked an old-age home run by Mother Teresa's Missionaries of Charity in Yemen's port city.

In a video posted on a Yemeni news portal in May this year, he said: "They are treating me well to the extent they are able."

"My health condition is deteriorating quickly and I require hospitalisation as early as possible," said a frail-looking Father Uzhunnalil.

Father Uzhunnalil said his kidnappers had contacted the Indian government and the Catholic bishop in Abu Dhabi with their demands, but the response was "not encouraging".

"My dear family people, do what you can to help me be released. Please, please do what you can to help to get me released. May God bless you for that," he said.

Meanwhile, the MEA statement also said that the visiting Minister appreciated India's steadfast support for Yemen during difficult times, including India's humanitarian assistance.

The nation has been virtually under siege since from 2015, when a coalition of Arab nations led by Saudi Arabia attacked Shia Houthi rebels in that country who toppled the government of President Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi.

India executed Operation Raahat the same year in which over 5,500 Indian nationals and citizens of other countries were evacuated.

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