

Iraq says search is on for 39 Indians abducted in Mosul, Sushma to bring up issue in bilateral talks

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Iraqi authorities are trying to trace 39 Indians taken hostage by the IS terrorist group in Mosul in 2014, the war-ravaged country's embassy said on Sunday.

The fate of these Indians, who were in Mosul when the IS captured the city, is set to come up during bilateral talks between foreign minister Sushma Swaraj and her Iraqi counterpart Al Ibrahim al-Jaafari on Monday.

Regarding the Indian citizens who were taken prisoner by Daesh (IS) terrorist group in 2014, search operations are on and there is high-level coordination between Iraqi and Indian authorities to locate them, the Iraqi embassy said.

But the foreign ministry didn't issue any statement about the missing citizens ahead of the meeting.

India pushed for information about the 39 Indians after Iraqi forces liberated Mosul this July after three years of fierce fighting that left thousands dead and turned millions of people into refugees.

The Indian government sent two delegations to Iraq to check how these people could be traced and rescued. The Iraqi mission reiterated the move.

Other than that, there was little clarity about these Indians.

Ambassador Fakhri H Al-Issa said the embassy has no information about these people.

I don't want to say anything. Sometimes no news is good news. They might be in Badush prison, news agency ANI quoted him as saying.

Hindustan Times published a report that said the prison near the Iraqi city of Mosul is a desolate and abandoned structure that has been unoccupied for weeks, if not months. The place is rigged with landmines.

The families of the missing Indians are set to meet Swaraj again after an interaction a week ago.

The foreign minister assured them on July 16 that we can probably find out the whereabouts of the missing nationals once the fighting stops in Badush and the area is cleared.

Government officials said they are doing everything possible to trace the Indians.

Iraqi foreign minister al-Jaafari will be on his maiden official visit to India. Accompanied by a delegation of senior officials, he will be here from Monday to Friday.

The visit is expected to add impetus to our mutually beneficial bilateral engagement, a foreign minister press note said.

India and oil-rich Iraq have been trading partners for long. Iraq is the second-largest supplier of crude oil to India and the volume of bilateral trade between the two countries was nearly US\$ 13 billion in 2016-17.

Besides, thousands of Indians visit Iraq every year for pilgrimages to the Muslim holy cities of Najaf and Karbala.

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