

32 migrant workers from Telangana caught in war torn Iraq

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HYDERABAD: From the dangerous war torn Libya, the two Professors belonging to Hyderabad recently returned safely but alarmingly the Consulate General of India in Iraq few days ago informed Prime Minister's Office, that there are atleast 32 migrant workers from Telangana state who are now stranded in Iraq and sword is hanging on them since Iraq government declared that they cannot return to India until they pay hefty penalty of \$ 800 for their illegal stay.

All the 32 migrant workers went to Iraq either on visiting or tourist visa for a month and first reached Kurdistan, later moved to other parts of the Iraq, where presently there is travel ban imposed by government of India due to the prevailing dangerous situation due to internal fighting, to work

at the construction sites.

"In the past, some Indian workers did not extend/regularize their visas after the initial one month period was over. They used to work here for 2-3 years, and thereafter could exit Kurdistan by paying a penalty of US\$ 450. However, since March 2016, the Government of Kurdistan has enforced stricter residency rules. Now, this penalty has been revised upwards to US\$ 800 for each month of overstay. After this change, there are a number of workers who are left stranded because they cannot afford payment of such huge penalties," Consulate General of India in a reply to PMO, which inturn shared the details to Migrant Rights Council-India (MRC-India), an NGO in Mahaboobnagar.

The 32 workers contacted Indian consulate, which started functioning from the August, since it disbanded its services due to

threat from terror outfits, to help them return to India. The number could be much higher as there are several persons from other states too.

"Majority of Indian migrant workers here are from Telangana region, who arrived on visit/tourist visas, usually of one-month validity," Consulate General of India said.

Meanwhile, in the war raved countries like Afghanistan there are about 70 Indians working after obtaining emigration clearance, similarly in Sudan, Yemen there are about 29 members. In Middle East, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand as per Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) reply to Right To Information (RTI) application there are 7.8 lakh migrants from India. It is learnt that atleast 3.5 lakh workers among the 7.8 could be from Telangana and Andhra Pradesh.

But members of Migrants Rights Council said that the number of persons from India actually residing in Middle East would be several times more than the official 7.8 lakh, since most of them go to those countries illegally.

"In countries like Iraq and other Middle East, maximum persons from Telangana go illegally and then face difficulty in returning back to India. Neither Telangana nor Andhra Pradesh did any survey to know the number of migrant workers residing abroad and hence there is no precise data. In Kerala, its government successfully did this exercise," P Narayana Swami, President MRC-India, told TOI.

From India, the maximum migration is from to Saudi Arabia (3 lakhs), followed by United Arab Emirates (2.25 lakhs).