

Seamen's Provident Fund Organisation may launch new pension scheme

Our Bureau, Mumbai, June 27:

Seamen's Provident Fund Organisation is likely to start a contributory pension scheme for seamen to ensure a steady monthly income for them.

This was announced by the Union Minister for Shipping, Mr G.K. Vasan, here on Saturday.

Speaking at the occasion of celebration of the Day of Seafarers, he said the annuity contributory scheme will be managed by the SPFO.

According to the ILO Convention, all seafarers have to be issued with biometric identity documents and the Seafarers Identity Document cards will also be issued soon, Mr Vasan said .

The Minister said there is a proposal to increase the amount of monthly ex-gratia monetary scheme paid to seafarers, which is presently only Rs 200 a month.

A grievance redressal day will be conducted across all mercantile marine department offices every six months. The Minister said that the programme will be implemented from next month and will be monitored closely by the Ministry of Shipping.

Among the other benefits and schemes, the Ministry has proposed IT exemptions for seafarers and establishing seaman's clubs at all the major ports. Referring to the release of six Indian sailors held captive by Somali pirates on board the hijacked merchant vessel- *m.v. Suez*, Mr Vasan said that the Indian Navy, in coordination with other navies, is providing security to the ship.

Since 2007, 189 Indian crew members have been held captive by Somalian pirates.

Hostage sailors

The Ministry of Shipping in close coordination with Ministry of External Affairs, Indian Navy and other agencies has made discrete efforts to get the crew members released, the Minister said.

“Out of the 189 Indian sailors held hostage, 150 sailors were brought back safely and the Ministry is stepping up efforts for the release of 39 Indian sailors who had been held captive by Somali pirates,” he said.

On the issue of salvaging attempts on the 9,000-tonne cargo ship, *m.v. Wisdom*, from Juhu Beach, Mr. Vasan said that the next attempt will be made during the spring tide on July 3 and 4. The second re-floating attempt failed recently in view of technical problems, he said.

On plans to deploy armed guards onboard Indian cargo vessels, the Director General of Shipping, Mr S.B. Agnihotri, said that final decision has to be taken in consultation with the Defence Ministry and the Ministry of External Affairs and that consultation process is going on. .