Maritime dialogue resumes

Returning home:Indian fishermen released from Pakistan's Landhi jail showing their travel cards.AfP/File Photo

In a sign of the efforts to improve India-Pakistan relations in recent months, the heads of maritime security agencies of both sides met after a gap of two years and agreed to work on improving exchange of information regarding fishermen apprehended by each other.

The dialogue is significant as last year India had refused to participate in the talks following the controversy over the arrest of former Indian Navy officer Kulbhushan Jadhavby Pakistani agencies.

However, in recent months there have been efforts from both sides to try and improve the bilateral engagement including restarting the Track II Neemrana Dialogue in April.

"During the meeting, the Indian side reiterated the need for instituting Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) for immediate release and repatriation of fishermen who cross the International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL) inadvertently as the issue needs to be approached in humanitarian context," the Indian Coast Guard said in a statement.

Further, both sides also agreed on the need for expeditious exchange of the information about the apprehension of fishing boats and fishermen.

The meeting was chaired by Director General Indian Coast Guard Rajendra Singh and head of Pakistan Maritime Security Agency, Rear Admiral Zaka Ur Rehman.

Rescue coordination

The dialogue is held annually as per the provisions of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed between the two agencies in 2005. To validate the SOPs for efficient conduct of rescue of distressed vessels/crew at sea, the two agencies also agreed to "conduct search and rescue communications exercises" between the rescue coordination centres. The two agencies also agreed to collaborate in preservation and protection ofmarine environment, and towards this agreed to "explore opportunities for cooperation in the field of oil spill response at sea in line with the MoU signed recently with the South Asian Cooperative Environment Programme (SACEP)."

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