

Beat: News

40 Indian construction workers abducted in northern Iraq

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USPA News - Forty Indian construction workers were abducted near the city of Mosul in northern Iraq on Tuesday while trying to escape clashes between militants from an al-Qaeda splinter group and Iraqi forces, India's foreign ministry said on Wednesday after earlier denying the reports. "Our understanding is, based on information that we have gleaned from a variety of sources, including the International Red Crescent, that these 40 Indian workers - I can confirm to you now - have been kidnapped," Indian External Affairs Ministry spokesman Syed Akbaruddin said at a media briefing on Wednesday.

Akbaruddin added: "These are difficult situations. We are working with the company. Also, we are trying to work with the International Red Crescent, who have confirmed to us, but they have also indicated that at this stage they do not know the location of these 40 Indian workers who are kidnapped." The workers, who are employed by the Baghdad-based construction company Tariq Noor al-Huda, are mostly from the state of Punjab in northern India, according to the spokesman. The workers, among hundreds of Indian nationals who are currently also in various parts of Iraq's north, were working near Mosul. When asked about whether a demand for ransom had been made, Akbaruddin said the Indian government had not received any calls "of any nature, from anyone" regarding the 40 workers. The ministry did not say which group may be responsible for the kidnappings, although some media reports have blamed it on militants from the al-Qaeda offshoot the Islamic State of Iraq and Levant (ISIL). "This has triggered for us a very difficult situation, with us working with several of our partners in Iraq, as well as elsewhere to try and see what would be the best ways to take our efforts further," said Akbaruddin. Earlier in the day the ministry had denied a newspaper report that 40 Indian nationals were abducted by suspected insurgents on Tuesday while trying to escape clashes between ISIL and Iraqi forces near the northern city of Mosul. But the information was later confirmed, and the ministry added that approximately 46 Indian nurses are also stranded in the Iraqi city of Tikrit. India's foreign ministry issued a travel advisory for Iraq last week, requesting that its citizens avoid traveling to the region due to escalating conflict between militants and government forces. Over the weekend, the United States deployed some 275 U.S. troops to Iraq to increase security for American personnel, including to provide additional protection at diplomatic facilities, the White House said on late Monday as militants from an al-Qaeda splinter group closed in on Baghdad. White House Press Secretary Josh Earnest said the forces will provide aid to the U.S. State Department in connection with the temporary relocation of some employees from the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad to the U.S. Consulates in Basra and Erbil and to the Iraq Support Unit in Amman, Jordan. Militants have targeted a number of foreigners since the conflict rapidly escalated earlier this month. 49 staff members, including diplomatic personnel, were abducted from the Turkish Consulate General in Mosul last week when ISIL seized control of the city. 31 Turkish nationals were also abducted from a power plant in the Gyarah region of Mosul on June 11.

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