

202 Indians recruited into Russian forces since 2022: MEA

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As many as 202 Indians are “believed to have been recruited into the Russian armed forces” since 2022, and 26 of them are reported to have lost their lives, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) informed the Rajya Sabha on Thursday, adding that at least two Indians have been cremated in Russia.

“Concerted efforts by the Government have resulted in early discharge of 119 of them; 26 are reported to have lost their lives and seven are reported missing by the Russian side. Efforts are ongoing for early discharge of 50 individuals,” Minister of State Kirti Vardhan Singh said in a written reply.

Mr. Singh was responding to a question by Trinamool Congress MP Saket Gokhale and Congress MP Randeep Singh Surjewala on the number of Indian nationals identified as illegally working or forced to work in the Russian army, along with the count of fatalities and missing people since 2022, when Russia began its war with Ukraine.

The Centre remains continuously engaged with the Russian government, to ensure the safety, well-being, and early discharge of Indian nationals in the Russian army, said Mr. Singh. He said the matter is being discussed at various levels, including during interactions between leaders, Ministers, and officials of the two sides.



A file photo of a family protesting in Delhi seeking the return of a relative enlisted in the Russian army. TAYYAB HUSSAIN S.M.

On December 17, *The Hindu* reported that the bodies of two Indians killed in the Russia-Ukraine war zone over the past three months had been brought to Delhi.

The deceased were identified as Rajasthan resident Ajay Godara, 22,

and Rakesh Kumar, 30, from Uttarakhand. Both Godara and Kumar had gone to Russia in the past year on student visas, but were allegedly enlisted in the Russian Army after being misled by agents who promised them work as cleaners and helpers. In-

dians continue to be enlisted in the Russian Army despite an assurance by Moscow in 2024 that it no longer admits Indians.

Repatriation of bodies

“The Ministry has provided assistance in repatriation of mortal remains of 10 deceased Indian nationals to India, and local cremation of two deceased Indian nationals. DNA samples of family members of 18 Indians, who were reported dead or missing, have been shared with the Russian authorities in an effort to help establish the identity of some of the deceased Indian nationals,” the Minister said.

The MEA, along with the Indian Mission and Posts in Russia, has assisted those Indians dis-

charged from the Russian Army to return to India, “including through facilitation of travel documents and providing air tickets, wherever required,” Mr. Singh said.

The Indian Mission in Russia has also assisted with the task of the evacuation of mortal remains. Once the mortal remains are shifted to a safe zone, the identification process involves the matching of DNA samples with the next of kin, the Minister said. “When the identity is conclusively established, the Indian Embassy assists in completion of requisite documentation for local cremation or transportation of mortal remains to India, in close coordination with the family,” he said in his reply.