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676 Pakistanis missing in Afghanistan presumed dead

March 13, 2013

A researcher has declared some 676 Pakistanis reported to be missing in Afghanistan since 2001 are believed to have died there.

Prof Abdullah Khalil, the managing director of non-profit organisation Lego-Academic & Social Services (LASS), told the media he searched for the 676 Pakistani citizens over the past decade, but had been unsuccessful to trace them.

The LASS founder said he compiled a list of the missing persons after being informed of their disappearance by their friends and families.

The retired head of the Area Study Centre in Peshawar said though the missing were presumed to be no longer alive, yet the circumstances leading to their deaths remained unknown to the LASS.

Neither were they able to ascertain the purpose of the missing persons' visit to Afghanistan but their families and friends suspect that they had joined the Afghan Taliban to fight against the US occupation.

Despite visiting various Afghan prisons, Prof Khalil said he remained unsuccessful in gathering any information about those missing, most of whom belonged to Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa and tribal areas.

The professor also met Pakistani diplomats in Kabul and held meetings with Afghan officials from the ministries of foreign affairs, justice and interior to discuss the matter.

According to him, another 1,000 Pakistani citizens are languishing in Afghan prisons, including the Pule-Charkhi Prison east of Kabul and the notorious Bagram Prison north of Kabul, which is controlled by the US military.

Many of them were arrested for violating immigration laws, while some were implicated in cases of spying, terrorism and drug-smuggling, he said.

Pakistani labourers, in the main, are detained for exceeding their stay in the country, said the LASS chief, who also provides free legal assistance to such Pakistanis.

An official in the Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa Home Department pinned the blame on Afghan contractors, who, he claimed, recruit Pakistani labourers without visas and hand them over to the police when they demand their salaries.