# Sri Lanka calls on Russia to discharge its citizens from army

AFP- Sri Lanka has asked Russia to allow its former soldiers fighting in Moscow's war against Ukraine to return home voluntarily, the government said Thursday.
An official delegation held two days of talks in Moscow this week where it called for compensation for 17 Sri Lankans killed in fighting, Colombo's foreign ministry said in a statement.

Sri Lanka's parliament set up a bipartisan inquiry last month to track at least 2,000 veterans who reportedly enlisted mainly on the Russian side of the war.

At least one former soldier has been killed after joining Ukrainian forces, according to Sri Lankan authorities.

The ministry said two days of talks in Moscow focused on tracking Sri Lankans deployed as soldiers, supporting those reportedly wounded and efforts to track those missing.

State minister for foreign affairs Tharaka Balasuriya, who led the delegation to Moscow, raised the possibility of voluntary returns, early termination of contracts and regularisation of remuneration, the ministry said.

When Sri Lanka's economy crashed in 2022, people sought work abroad wherever they could find it – including ex-soldiers who joined forces fighting in Ukraine after Russia's invasion.

The veterans – some of whom swapped their life savings for what they thought would be lucrative, non-combat jobs – are desperate to return home.

Their families have been pressing local authorities to help

bring them back.

The government says around a dozen Sri Lankans are also being held as prisoners of war in Ukraine.

The war in Ukraine has taken a heavy toll on Russian troops, and Moscow has been on a global quest for more forces to fight.

Sri Lanka has maintained a large military relative to its population of 22 million since the end of a decades-long civil war against the separatist Tamil Tigers in 2009.

Moscow is believed to have hired thousands of foreign combatants, many of them from South Asia.

Neither Russia nor Ukraine will say how many foreigners are serving in their militaries or how many they are holding as prisoners of war.

Colombo has remained neutral in the Ukraine war, but reports that Russian authorities supported the recruitment of ex-soldiers from Sri Lanka have sparked tensions.

Police have arrested two retired Sri Lankan generals for illegally acting as recruiting agents for Russian mercenary firms, as well as six people who allegedly helped them with logistics.

The Sri Lankan foreign ministry said earlier this month that Moscow agreed not to recruit any more Sri Lankans to their military.

AFP