

Marine Salvatore Girone will be home 'in a few weeks', says Italy

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Rome: One of two Italian marines facing trial for the killing of two Indian fishermen will return home "in a few weeks", Italian Defence Minister Roberta Pinotti said on Tuesday.

Salvatore Girone "will come back to Italy in a few weeks, but there are still bureaucratic procedures to go through", Pinotti told *Corriere della Sera* daily after a Hague court ruling on the Italian marine's bail conditions.

"The Hague tribunal recognised what we were asking and that is that Girone should return to Italy and live with his family," Pinotti said.

She was referring to Tuesday's ruling by the Hague-based arbitration court that stated: "Italy and India shall cooperate, including in proceedings before the Supreme Court of India, to achieve a relaxation of the bail conditions ... so that Sergeant Girone may return to Italy."

Italy and India dispute jurisdiction over the drawn-out case and an arbitration verdict is not expected before August 2018 at the earliest.

"It's not over and we'll have to wait for the outcome of the arbitration. A lot more could happen, but I'm sure Italy will be vindicated in the end," Pinotti said.

Girone and fellow marine Massimiliano Latorre allegedly shot dead two unarmed fishermen in 2012 after mistaking them for pirates while guarding an Italian oil tanker off the coast of India's southern state of Kerala in February 2012.

The case sparked a diplomatic row between Italy and India and has strained bilateral ties. It prompted Italy to seek international arbitration last June amid fears that an Indian court could convict the marines and sentence them to death over the fishermen's killings.

Rome claims the marines are immune to prosecution since they were serving on a United Nations-backed anti-piracy mission and the vessel they were guarding was in international waters at the time of the incident.

India remains convinced that jurisdiction in the case "is our right", Information Minister Arun Jaitley said on Tuesday.

Latorre has been in Italy for the past 18 months, where he had heart surgery after suffering a stroke. He and Girone have not been charged over the fishermen's deaths but were barred from leaving India and were ordered to stay at the Italian ambassador's residence and report regularly to police.

- PTI