

The background of the cover is a photograph of the Statue of Liberty, tinted in shades of blue and green. The torch she holds is overlaid with the colors of the Indian national flag: saffron, white, and green. The text is overlaid on this image.

Pravasi Bharatiya

July 2006 Volume 1 Issue No. 7

MINISTRY OF OVERSEAS INDIAN AFFAIRS

The Indian American

Dream

CONNECTING INDIA WITH ITS DIASPORA

A historic pact

The new social security agreement envisaged between India and Belgium, the first of its kind, will help Indian workers in Belgium get their social security benefits even if they relocate to India

India and Belgium reached a landmark agreement on social security on June 23, which will not only benefit Indians working in this country but eventually serve as a prototype for similar agreements with other nations.

"This is the first agreement ever India has reached with another country in social security," Minister for Overseas Indian Affairs Vayalar Ravi told IANS.

While G. Gurucharan, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs (MOIA) headed the Indian delegation at the negotiations, the Belgian side was led Marshal Crop, Director General, Social Security, Belgium.

The draft of the pact was agreed to by both sides after the second round of negotiations between the two countries at the Belgian capital, Brussels.

The Minister stressed that "this agreement is significant because it will form the basis for our negotiating agreements with other countries in the European Union".

India's Ambassador to Brussels Dipak Chatterjee described the agreement as "historic", noting that this was the first deal of its kind in the social security sector that India has with any other country.

"It is an historical agreement and I am happy that it has seen the light of the day," commented Sunil Prasad, secretary-general of the Europe India Chamber of Commerce (EICC) and president of the Global Organisation of People of Indian Origin (GOPIO),

Belgium.

For all Indians who come and work in Belgium for up to five years, the agreement will provide exemption from contributing to the Belgium social security system.

Belgium has already agreed to exemption period of five years in its agreements with Japan, Australia and the United States.

Secondly, for those Indians who live and work in Belgium on a long-term basis the agreement ensures repatriation of benefits.

Moreover, those Indians who are self-employed like businessmen or shopkeepers will also be entitled to repatriate their benefits back home if they wish to relocate to India.

Most IT or management

POINTS BELGIUM AGREED TO

- The exemption period for detached workers would be 60 months. A detached worker is an employee of a company sent by that company to temporarily work in another country.
- The benefit of detachment shall also be available to a worker who is sent by an Indian company to Belgium from a third country.
- All employed persons contributing to the Belgian social security system shall be entitled to export of the benefit if they come back to India.
- Self-employed persons from India working in Belgium and contributing to the Belgian social security system shall be entitled to the export of social security if they come back to India.

professionals come to Belgium for one, two or three years and they pay the social security here but get nothing in return, Prasad pointed out.

"This agreement is a good one. It is in the interest of both India and Belgium. It will also attract Indian professionals to come and work in Belgium," he said.

About 7,000-8,000 Indians living and working in Belgium are expected to benefit from the agreement.

Gurucharan said the real importance of the agreement was that increasingly there is going to be much

“

This agreement is significant because it will form the basis for our negotiating agreements with other countries in the European Union.

”

higher cooperation between Belgium and India and "we think more and more Indians will get the opportunity to come and work here".

Both countries will now have to process the agreed draft social security agreement for obtaining internal approvals so that the agreement can be formally signed at an early date.

A Belgian delegation is likely to visit India around September for finalising the administrative arrangements.

The Belgium-Indian social security agreement is expected to be formally signed when Belgian Prime Minister Guy Verhofstadt visits New Delhi in early November, 2006.

With the agreement with Belgium being initialled and frozen, plans are on to negotiate similar deals with other European countries as well as with Japan, Canada and the United States. Proposals for Sweden and the Netherlands are already in the pipeline. ■

'MOIA-AAPI MoU a pioneering step'

SPEECH OF MINISTER FOR OVERSEAS INDIAN AFFAIRS VAYALAR RAVI AT THE ANNUAL CONVENTION OF THE AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF PHYSICIANS OF INDIAN ORIGIN IN ATLANTA, GEORGIA

Minister for Overseas Indian Affairs Vayalar Ravi has described the memorandum of understanding (MoU) signed between the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs (MOIA) and the American Association of Physicians of Indian Origin (AAPI) as a pioneering step towards building an institutional partnership to tap the vast knowledge resources of the overseas Indian community.

Addressing the annual convention of AAPI in Atlanta during the course of his visit to the United States from June 27 to July 9, he said, "Let me congratulate the American Association of Physicians of Indian origin and all its members for the distinction and commitment with which you have contributed to healthcare in this part of the world.

"As the largest ethnic medical organisation, I am proud to learn that AAPI is a group with the highest average educational attainment and professional competence compared to any other section of American society."

The Minister said that the Indian diaspora today constitutes a significant economic, social and cultural force in the world. Overseas Indians, estimated at over 25 million, are spread across 110 countries.

"Their industry, enterprise, education and professional skills are widely recognised. Today, overseas Indians are the brand ambassadors of 'global India'," he stated.

Ravi said that the creation of the MOIA acknowledges the fact that the welfare of overseas Indian needs mainstream attention.

"The mission of my Ministry is to promote, nurture and sustain a mutually beneficial and symbiotic relationship between India and its diaspora. I am here to assure all of you, men and women of excellence, of our determination to partner with you for the development of rural healthcare in India."

Coming to the MoU signed between MOIA and AAPI, he said, "Today let me announce the launch of pilot projects in two states: Andhra Pradesh and Bihar. It will

spread into seven areas. They are diabetes, heart disease, prostate cancer, cervical cancer, breast cancer, deafness in the new born, and emergency medical services.

"In the pilot phase, one village in each district of Andhra Pradesh and Bihar will be selected," he said.

The Minister mentioned that achieving an acceptable standard of good health is the main objective of the National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) launched by the UPA Government in India in 2005.

"This ambitious mission seeks to provide universal access to equitable, affordable and quality healthcare to rural India. The key component of the mission is provision of a rudimentary health provider called ASHA (Accredited Social Health Activists) in each village in 18 high focus states," the Minister told the august gathering.

Describing the other aspects of NRHM, Ravi that over

173,000 ASHAs have been selected and their training is in progress to commence community level health initiatives from this year. District plans have been finalised in a large number of districts, he added.

"The goal for eliminating leprosy as per WHO standards has been achieved at the National level. AIDS control programme and population stabilisation are the major concerns now, as these are linked with the development of



Minister for Overseas Indian Affairs Vayalar Ravi speaking at the annual convention of the American Association of Physicians of Indian Origin in Atlanta on July 2, 2006.

the nation," he said.

Referring to the AAPI projects, he said that these pilot projects must be developed as a model and should be replicated in other States.

"We are committed to make this project a success," he asserted.

"I wish to commend Dr. Vijay Koli (outgoing AAPI president) and his team who played an important role in signing of the MoU.

"Let me also commend Dr. Balasubramanian, the new president of AAPI. I have no doubt that AAPI with its dynamic leadership will grow from strength to strength," Ravi concluded.

(For full text of the Minister's speech, log on to www.overseasindian.in)



Engaging with Indian Americans

Minister for Overseas Indian Affairs Vayalar Ravi has described his recent visit to the United States as a total success. He said that each and every programme in the course of his visit from June 27 to July 9 "went off very well".

"It gave me the opportunity to interact, discuss and convey the message of emerging Indianness among our people there," he said in an interview after the conclusion of his tour.

The Minister described the general body meeting of the American Association of Physicians of Indian Origin (AAPI) in Atlanta as the highlight of his tour.

In that meeting, Ravi launched the projects that AAPI would work on to improve rural healthcare in India. The projects were approved in an agreement signed by the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs (MOIA) and AAPI in New Delhi last month.

While in Atlanta, Ravi also attended a luncheon reception by the National Federation of Indian-American Associations (in picture above).

Another highpoint of his trip to Atlanta, he said, was when he got to lay a bouquet of flowers at the statue of Mahatma Gandhi. The statue is located at the Martin Luther King Jr. National Historic Site. (Photo on facing page.)

"It was a proud moment for me," he said about his visit to that historic site. "The statue (of Gandhi) is located at the same place where Martin Luther King Jr.'s soul lives."

Asked what his interaction with the Indian American business community yielded, Ravi said that the businessmen had a lot of questions about avenues for investment, status of citizenship in view of the Indian

government issuing the Overseas Indian Citizenship (OIC) card and voting rights.

"The new scenario in India is the healthy competition between different states to attract foreign investment."

The Minister, who had also announced that the proposal for setting up of a university for people of Indian origin was awaiting approval of the Government, said that professors and intellectuals from the Indian American community showed keen interest in the project.

"I could see that they had high expectations from the proposed PIO university," he said.

As for problems faced by the Indian American community, he said that these were mostly about direct flights from the US to India.

"They also wanted easy passage after landing and better customs facilities."

The problems arising from marriages with non-resident Indians also cropped up in the course of his interactions with the community there.

"I told them that we are starting an awareness campaign and building networks to protect prospective brides and grooms from India," he said.

Appreciating the efforts of the Indian American community to convince US Congressmen and Senators to approve the India-US nuclear deal, the Minister said that he could see the emerging influence of the community in the political and social spheres in the US.

The tour also saw the Minister holding meetings with the Global Organisation of People of Indian Origin and the Federation of Kerala Associations of North America.

He also attended the first ever International Convention of Gujaratis in New Jersey. While in New Jersey, he inaugurated the Rajiv Gandhi Center for International Harmony and Peace.

Ravi also graced the annual convention of the American Telugu Association at Long Beach, California.

The Minister said that wherever he went he found people appreciative of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's move to set up the MOIA, which attaches great importance to the contributions of the NRIs and PIOs to the country.

"I believe I can do my little bit in this endeavour," he said. ■



BY K.P. NAYAR

Ravi's independent mind may be one with which many Americans profoundly disagree, but what they learnt to respect is that he is, by no means, a blotting paper for their ideas, which are not only increasingly being questioned in the US, but also increasingly being accepted by the Indian political elite as the panacea for all of India's ills.

Grassroots politicians rarely fail to surprise. For many years now, the Indian establishment has gone out of its way to send to the United States of America on official visits people whose public persona resonates with the Americans. Ministers, who are on first name terms with their US interlocutors and decision-makers in New Delhi, with an old school tie that can be traced to the time they spent in an Ivy League institution, have increasingly taken over the visitors' circuit in Washington, New York and the west coast, which acts as a magnet for politicians from India because of the Silicon Valley. In recent years, even MPs visiting America have been carefully screened by organisations sending them stateside for any American connections, which are presumed to be endearing for their hosts.

As a result, many Americans dealing with India have forgotten what Indian politicians are like and how or what they think. Because of this gross distortion, many of those in America who have recently jumped on the bandwagon of Indo-US relations, assume that the average Indian political leader is either the mirror image of many of their own or that he is a product of an American university, often with some work experience in the US.

Most of the Indian public figures sent to

America do not, in reality, any more represent the people of India. What is worse, in private discourse at least, they are more vocal in defending American interests and values than those of their own country. Which is why, the visit of Vayalar Ravi, the new Minister for Overseas Indian Affairs, to the US last week was a refreshing change from what had become a pattern in bilateral interaction between New Delhi and Washington in recent times.

Ravi, it was clear to Americans who rubbed shoulders with him for 10 days, has a mind of his own. Which is more than what can be said with certainty about many high profile Indians who have lately been to north America. Ravi's independent mind may be one with which many Americans profoundly disagree, but what they learnt to respect is that he is, by no means, a blotting paper for their ideas, which are not only increasingly being questioned in the US, but also increasingly being accepted by the Indian political elite as the panacea for all of India's ills.

Ravi's visit was a poignant reminder that, because of the way ministers are chosen for the cabinet these days, there are not many members of Manmohan Singh's council of ministers who can narrate an anecdote — as Ravi does — about his two meetings, at the initiative of Indira Gandhi, with the widow of Salvador Allende, the assassinated socialist president of Chile three decades ago.

The new-found wisdom in New Delhi is



that someone with even the most tenuous connections with the Allende family ought to keep quiet about it because of the Central Intelligence Agency's criminal role in getting him killed. Quite the contrary is true in Washington because Latin America is on a leftward-lurch, which is alarming the US, and Americans want an honest exchange with anyone with insights about the region who can offer a discourse on how to deal with what is a perilous issue for them.

Chile itself recently elected a socialist president, Veronica Michelle Bachelet, whose father, an air force general, was tortured to death by the Pinochet regime which overthrew Allende.

Americans do not want Indians or other foreigners to repeat to them as gospel truth what the state department

is putting out for public consumption about Latin America. What they want is a dialogue with Indian ministers like Ravi, who can offer another point of view.

For a change, the highlight of Ravi's packed schedule was not in Washington, with its infrastructure for publicity back home, but in Atlanta, where he shared the stage with Andrew Young, the first black US Congressman from Georgia and America's first black ambassador to the United Nations. Ravi made it a point to visit the Martin Luther King National Historic Site in Atlanta: few Indian politicians travelling to the US take the trouble of making that pilgrimage.

Ravi may have done it because of his convictions or for sentimental reasons, but it is a gesture, which will bring tangible dividends for India. The

Congressional black caucus has been the most difficult for Indians of all the caucuses on Capitol Hill. In recognition of America's black community — whose prominent representative organisations have been opposed to the Indo-US nuclear deal and has traditionally backed Pakistan on issues concerning south Asia — India's Ambassador in Washington, Ronen Sen, has walked an extra mile to woo it. This year, he set up a prestigious annual lecture to honour the legacy of Martin Luther King. A switch in the American black community's attitude towards India is not just a question of numbers on Capitol Hill or elsewhere across the US. It has greater significance.

The head of the Congressional Pakistan caucus is Sheila Jackson Lee, who is also one of the most active members of the Congressional black

caucus. When she switched her allegiance from the non-proliferation camp to support the Indo-US nuclear deal a few days ago, it sent shock waves through Washington's strategic community for what it represented for Pakistan, a key client for Lee.

V.S. Naipaul notwithstanding, New Delhi has generally ignored the Caribbean and given short shrift to its large ethnic Indian population. Partly this is because Caribbean Indians, unlike persons of Indian origin in the US, the United Kingdom or the Gulf, lack money and clout back home, and a high profile. Yet, if New Delhi's decision to set up a Ministry for Overseas Indian Affairs is to be fully realised in spirit, ethnic Indians in the backyard of the US ought not be ignored.

Like his anecdote about Salvador

Allende's widow, the ease with which Ravi tells Indian Americans — many of whom have links with ethnic Indians in the Caribbean — about his meetings in Moscow with Guyana's legendary Cheddi Jagan, the late president, sets him apart from most of India's current crop of cabinet ministers. Ravi is planning to visit Indian communities in Uganda and Kenya too — the very first time New Delhi has taken any interest in Indians in Africa since India decided to globalise itself.

Ravi's real test will come when he tries to operationalise his vision of a university in India for people of Indian origin. A parliamentary bill for creating such a university is in the final stages of discussion. When it is set up, the pioneer university hopes not only to be home to ethnic Indian students from all over the globe. It is also aiming to

bring teaching and research talent from distant shores to a new house of learning, which Ravi wants to showcase as an educator's version of the new India.

The Ministry for Overseas Indian Affairs has already contracted with the American Association of Physicians of Indian Origin, the most powerful Indian lobby in the US, to tap the resource and knowledge base of Indian doctors in America to bring healthcare to rural India. Ravi announced at an AAPI convention in Atlanta that Bihar and Andhra Pradesh have been chosen for pilot projects under this arrangement.

(The writer is the Washington correspondent of The Telegraph, Kolkata. The views expressed here are of the writer and not of the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs.)

© The Telegraph



A NEW LAW IN THE MAKING

A workshop on problems arising from NRI marriages plans a new legislation that is expected to come into place this year

A new legislation to tackle the problems relating to marriages involving non-resident Indians (NRIs) is expected to be prepared this year.

This was announced by Chairperson of the National Commission for Women (NCW) Girija Vyas at a two-day workshop on 'Problems relating to NRI marriages and suggested measures'. The workshop was organised by the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs (MOIA) in partnership with NCW in Chandigarh on June 20 and 21, 2006.

Apart from MOIA and NCW, the workshop was attended by

representatives from the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), legal experts, media and non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

Speaking on the occasion, Vyas stressed the need for enacting a comprehensive legislation within the framework of Indian laws to tackle the problems related to NRI marriages and for an awareness campaign to educate the people in this direction.

She said that the problems relating to NRI marriages could not be tackled effectively for lack of treaties with various countries.

Vyas said that all certificates for NRI marriages be issued in duplicate

and must compulsorily include the social security number of the NRI husband.

NCW will demand the creation of exclusive cells in every Indian high commission and embassy to provide legal assistance and monetary support to abandoned brides in the countries of residence of their absconding spouses, she added.

Among the various recommendations that the NCW would make to the Union Government are amendments to the Passport Act to include special provisions for the cancellation of the passport of the offending NRI spouse.

The Commission would also recommend incorporation in the Emigration Act typical offences in marriages involving NRIs like fraud, dowry and marital cruelty as an additional class of offences under the Indian Penal Code, Criminal Procedure Code and Citizenship Act.

Speaking at the workshop, Haryana Chief Minister Bhupinder Singh Hooda said that the problems relating to marriages with NRIs could

Nirmal Singh, Secretary, Ministry for Overseas Indian Affairs (MOIA), has said that though the issue of problematic marriages involving non-resident Indians (NRIs) is a social problem, a legal remedy is needed to deal with the issue.

Speaking at the workshop on 'Problems relating to NRI marriages and suggested measures', the Secretary said that precise numbers are not available but information gathered from various sources reveals that there are more than 30,000 cases in the country in which the brides have been abandoned by the respective grooms on various grounds.

"These brides have consequently no legal status and are going through a very bad experience in their life. This is a very serious problem and therefore a suitable strategy needs to be debated to tackle this problem," he said.

"Though it is a social problem but considering the magnitude of the problem, a legal remedy need to be found to curb

Secretary speak



such practices," Singh said.

He also mentioned that MOIA is considering a proposal for establishing overseas Indian centres in the United States, Gulf and Malaysia to start with,

for these are the places where there is a significant Indian population.

"Besides other things, these centres will also extend counselling facilities with the help of professional counsellors to those who face the problem of fake/fraudulent/failed marriages," he said.

He also called on state governments and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to play an active role in curbing this problem.

"Though the problem is social in nature but as it is affecting the society and having a great impact on the structure of the society it is necessary that suitable legal remedy for such problem is found at the earliest," he concluded.

(For full text of the Secretary's speech, log on to www.overseasindian.in)

not be solved through legislation alone but also by creating an awakening and changing the mindset of the people.

As compared to Haryana, the problem in neighbouring Punjab was alarming where 15,000 such cases were said to be registered, he said. He urged voluntary organisations to come forward and create an awakening among the people to resolve such problems.

Highlighting the plight of women in NRI marriages, Shruti Pandey of the Human Rights Law Network said NRI husbands were giving false information about

their marital status, immigration status, job and property.

She said once women were cheated in marriage, they had to fend for themselves in faraway countries and face several other problems due to language problem, improper legal aid and lack of monetary support.

Among others who spoke at the workshop were MOIA Secretary



Girija Vyas, Chairperson, National Commission for Women, speaking at the workshop.

Nirmal Singh, Haryana Health Minister Kartari Devi, Punjab NRI Affairs Minister Amarjeet Singh Samra, Punjab Women and Child Development Minister Gurkanwar Kaur, former Union Minister Balwant Singh Ramoowalia and Punjab Women Commission Chairperson Parminder Kaur.

Victims of NRI marriages also gave presentations in the course of the workshop. The main point raised by the victims was the lack of sensitisation in the police to understand their problems. They voiced the need for sensitisation among various authorities in foreign lands as well as in India.

A number of panel discussions were also organised in the course of the workshop. These basically revolved around the issues of international conventions and bilateral treaties, issues relating to *ex parte* decrees in foreign courts and review of the existing legislations and enactments.

The workshop also saw the formation of three working groups: one to work on international conventions and the issue of bilateral treaties relating to *ex parte* decrees; another to work on a comprehensive legislation on NRI marriages; and a third to chalk out strategies for tackling violations and creating social awareness, counselling and implementation of safeguards, institutional and others.

MOIA's team in the working groups and panel discussions was headed by Sandhya Shukla, Director, Social Services.

The Chandigarh workshop was the first of a series of four such workshops being planned by MOIA and NCW.

Three more workshops will be held in Kerala, Andhra Pradesh and Delhi. ■

REACHING OUT FOR HELP

With a number of problematic marriage cases involving non-resident Indians being reported from the United States, here is a brief guideline on how an abused or abandoned spouse from India in that country can seek help

BY ARUN C. VAKIL

With cases of problematic marriages involving non-resident Indians (NRIs) increasing, there is need for awareness among potential brides or grooms in India about the laws of the country where she or he is going after marriage.

The United States is one such country from which a large number of such problematic marriages are reported. Instances have increased wherein many US citizens (USCs) and lawful permanent residents (LPRs) of Indian origin come to India to marry Indian girls and after reaching the US, either fight with them, use them as servants or slaves or dump them away from their homes. This causes untold hardship and depression to the spouse who has immigrated to the US after marrying USC or LPR.

So, when a bride or groom from India is getting married to someone in the US, she or he should know what lies ahead and what she or he can do if something goes wrong.

This article is an attempt to give a brief guideline to potential brides and

grooms who are planning to marry someone in the US.

First of all it should be kept in mind that getting a spouse to the US requires specific steps. The petitioner must file a marriage certificate if he or she is bringing in a wife or a husband. It must be a certificate issued from a civil, rather than a church, registry. All marriage certificates should have a seal affixed.

If either the sponsoring relative or the incoming beneficiary is divorced or widowed, he or she must present proof of the termination of the marriage. Two authenticated copies of the divorce papers must be submitted along with two certified English translations.

If you are divorced or separated and have children who are single and under 18 years of age, you must present documents showing who has legal custody of the children. If the children are not coming into the country with the parent, you must file an affidavit that says who is going to be financially responsible for the children and who is looking after them.

You should also provide an affidavit indicating that, if the children wish to immigrate at a later date, an

affidavit of support will be provided by you and your present spouse on their behalf.

IMMIGRATION BENEFITS FOR A BATTERED SPOUSE

Generally, USCs and LPRs file an immigrant visa petition with the US Citizenship and Immigration Service (USCIS) on behalf of a spouse or child, so that these family members may immigrate to or remain in the US.

USCIS Form I-130, Petition for Alien Relative is filed by the USC/LPR, **the petitioner**, on behalf of the family member who is **the beneficiary**. The petitioner controls when or if the petition is filed.

Unfortunately, some USCs and LPRs misuse their control of this process to abuse their family members, or by threatening to report them to immigration and naturalisation authorities. As a result, most battered immigrants are afraid to report the abuse to the police or other authorities.

Under the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) passed by the US Congress in 1994, the spouses and children of USCs or LPRs may self-petition to obtain lawful permanent residency. The immigration



provisions of VAWA allow certain battered immigrants to file for immigration relief without the abuser's assistance or knowledge, in order to seek safety and independence from the abuser.

To be eligible to self-petition as a battered spouse, you must be married to a USC or an LPR. Unmarried children under the age of 21, who have not filed their own self-petition, may be included on your petition as derivative beneficiaries.

To file a self-petition, the abused spouse should fulfill the following criteria:

- A self-petition may be filed if the marriage was terminated by the abusive spouse's death within the two years prior to filing. Such a petition may also be filed if the marriage to the abusive spouse was terminated, within the two years prior to filing, by divorce related to the abuse.
- You must have been abused or battered in the US unless the abusive spouse is an employee of the US government or a member of the uniformed services of the US.
- You must have been battered or subjected to extreme cruelty during the marriage, or must be the parent of a child who was battered or subjected to extreme cruelty by the USC or LPR spouse during the marriage.
- The self-petitioning spouse is required to be a person of good moral character.
- He or she must have entered into the marriage with a USC or LPR in good faith, not solely for the purpose of obtaining immigration benefits.

ORGANISATIONAL HELP
There are a number of women's organisations and charities in the US that provide help to battered women and work towards providing shelters

and alternative life to them.

Manavi is a non-profit organisation for women who trace their cultural heritage to India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka.

Manavi is the first organisation in the US to focus on violence against women in South Asian communities. Manavi concentrates on issues of violence against South Asian women who reside in New Jersey.

Operated entirely by volunteers, Karuna Charities works solely to provide help for extremely deserving cases, which may otherwise have little



Participants at the regional workshop on 'Problems relating to NRI marriages and suggested measures' organised by the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs in partnership with the National Commission for Women in Chandigarh; (facing page) a victim of such a marriage speaking at the workshop.

or no recourse. Since its inception in 1993, its visionary and permanent chairperson, Lekha Sreenivasan, has headed Karuna Charities.

Karuna's primary beneficiaries have been orphanages, nursing homes, soup kitchens, battered women's shelters, AIDS sufferers, and individuals in need of expensive life-saving medical procedures.

Human Options is another organisation that helps battered women in California. Human Options provides safety for women and their children, long-term support to rebuild lives and education to create a safe community

Its 24-hour hotline number 949-854-3554 provides necessary help.

There is also the National Domestic Violence Hotline (NDVH) in the US that helps women in distress. Help is available to callers 24 hours a day, 365 days a year and the hotline answers to one call at a time. Assistance is available in English and Spanish with access to more than 140 languages through interpreter services. NDVH can be reached at 1-800-799-SAFE (7233) or TTY 1-800-787-3224.

LEGAL SERVICES

Since 1988, the Immigration Law Project (ILP) in the US has provided free and low-cost services to victims

of crime, torture, and abuse in immigration proceedings. ILP has represented hundreds of battered women in Violence Against Women Act self-petitions and adjustment proceedings as well as gender-based asylum claims.

Safe Horizon's Domestic Violence Law Project (DVLV) and Immigration Law Project (ILP) provide free legal information and advice to domestic violence victims with family and immigration law-related matters. Additionally, Safe Horizon provides

direct legal representation to low-income and indigent domestic violence victims in family and Supreme Court proceedings and immigration matters throughout New York City.

Safe Horizon can provide help in the following matters: orders of protection; child and spousal support; child custody and visitation; divorce; and immigration. Safe Horizon can be reached from Monday to Friday (9:30 am-5:30 pm) at 718.834.7430.

(The writer is a consultant on US immigration issues. He can be reached at ask@arunvakil4usvisas.com. The views expressed here are of the writer and not of the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs.)



The Konark Sun Temple is located in the state of Orissa near the sacred city of Puri. It is a masterpiece of Orissa's medieval architecture and is on the list of UNESCO's world heritage sites. The entire temple has been conceived as a chariot of the sun god with 24 wheels, each about 10 feet in diameter, with a set of spokes and elaborate carvings. Seven horses drag the temple.



Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs

www.moia.gov.in

www.overseasindian.in

(Designed and produced by IANS (www.ians.in) on behalf of Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs)