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Govt cracks whip on agents

Announces steps to check trafficking exploitation of women going abroad for jobs

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ALARMED AT the rising incidents of poor women being forced into prostitution by organised gangs abroad, the government has decided to enforce fresh stringent restrictions on employers and agents to check exploitation.

The Ministry for Overseas Indian Affairs has finalised some steps, likely to be announced next week, that would ensure the safety of poor women going abroad for jobs, especially to the Gulf.

"We are taking steps to check that Indian women going abroad do not fall in wrong hands. The measures being taken include not to allow the women going for employment to travel alone outside the country, especially to the Gulf," said Vyalar Ravi, the Minister for Overseas Indian Affairs.

He said restrictions were being imposed on employers and agents for taking domestic servants abroad. "Now the employer would have to first convince the emigration authorities in writing, that they would provide good living conditions," Ravi said.

Good living conditions for domestic servants would include a guaranteed monthly salary of \$300-350 and a mobile phone with a limited number of calls, the minister said.

The minister said earlier unauthorised agents would overcome the restrictions by using different airports to send the women out and managing sponsored visas from their gang members in their countries of operation.

He asked the state governments to check the menace and ensure strict action against agents who send poor people, especially women, abroad, after charging hefty amounts for false employment promises.

"The recent incidents of women being rescued from Muscat, Ukraine and Singapore are a wake-up call for state governments. They should immediately prosecute the agents involved in the heinous crime of these cases of human trafficking," the minister

Follow up

said.

Ravi said Punjab, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Kerala were facing the problem of unauthorised agents duping the poor.

"We have written to these state governments, but the feedback has not been encouraging. I appeal to these states to put in place an effective prosecution machinery to check the thriving human trafficking rackets."

The minister said he was waiting for figures from these states to assess the scale of the problem, "which was already giving the country a bad name in the world".

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RECENT CASES

SARABJEET KAUR, 25, was held captive for over two years in Singapore and Ukraine. She returned home last month. Her family, who lives near Ludhiana, paid agent Gurdev Singh Rs 8 lakh. He had promised Sarabjeet a clerical job. But in Singapore, Sarabjeet was forced to work as a maid and her documents were taken away. She was later taken to Ukraine by the same people and repeatedly raped by a gang of travel agents who wanted her to join the flesh trade.

VEERPAL KAUR, 26, a Mazhabi Sikh from Moga met a similar fate. She too returned last month after spending six years in Singapore as an illegal immigrant.

Veerpal was physically tortured and forced to work as a maid without money for three years after she refused to join a prostitution group. Her father had paid Moga-based agent Parminder Singh Gill Rs 1 lakh.

A WOMAN from Kerala was rescued in Muscat last month by her husband who had to buy her freedom. The woman had landed in the city in January, after which she was sold and resold several times. The couple wanted to work in the Gulf and had approached an agent for it. As her visa came first, she had left earlier. She thought she had landed a maid's job, instead she was trapped in an organised prostitution racket.

STEP FORWARD

- New measures include not allowing women going for employment to travel alone outside the country, especially to the Gulf
- Employers of domestic servants being taken abroad would have to guarantee good living conditions in writing to the emigration authorities
- Monthly salary of \$300-350 a must as well as mobile phone with a limited number of calls
- Ministry says state governments should check the menace and ensure strict action against agents