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## India to fix minimum wage for maids abroad

By Aroonim Bhuyan

Abu Dhabi, Jan. 23: Overseas employers seeking to recruit Indian women as housemaids will have to pay a minimum wage of \$300 a month if the ministry of overseas Indian affairs has its way.

"We are going to fix the minimum wage limit for Indian housemaids planning to go abroad at \$300," minister for overseas Indian affairs Vayalar Ravi said here.

Reacting to reports appearing in a section of the press here that the Indian government has fixed \$400 a month as the minimum wage and that the system had become effective from this month, the minister said: "Though we did initially fix the figure at \$400, in subsequent consultations with our ambassadors to various countries, we found that the figure was not really feasible in all countries.

"Hence we are revising the

figure and in all probability will fix the minimum (wage) limit at \$300."

India's ambassador to the United Arab Emirates Talmiz Ahmad added: "We felt that we should arrive at a more reasonable figure and suggested a figure of around \$300-\$350."

The move to fix a minimum wage comes in the wake of reports of exploitation and harassment of Indian housemaids by foreign employers.

"Please note that this move is not to discourage women from going abroad. We are only trying to ensure their welfare and protection in a foreign land," Mr Ravusaid.

The minister, who was here to attend the Fourth Ministerial Consultation on Overseas Employment and Contractual Labour for Countries of Origin and Destination in Asia, said that the number of Indian housemaids going abroad in

search of employment has gone down.

He, however, added that a new trend was Andhra Pradesh throwing up a surprisingly large number of such women going abroad.

"Just imagine, of the round 62,000 Indian housemaids in Kuwait, 40,000 are from Andhra. This is because unscrupulous recruiting agents are taking advantage of such poor people," overseas minister said.

"We are going to come down heavily against such agents and initiate strict action against them," the minister warned.

Currently, over 200,000 Indian women are reported to be working as HSW (household service workers) in the Gulf countries.

The number has gone up sharply in the last three-four years — from about 5,000 women, mostly from Kerala and Andhra Pradesh, in 2004. (IANS)