

APPENDIX 1.

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MAIN NEWS

Dream of Indian students turns sour Australia changes Permanent Residency policy

Melbourne, August 30

Soma Joseph had come here from India with big dreams but a year after her arrival she is in a state of disarray.

Hoping for greener pasture, the woman from Kottayam in Kerala, who worked as a nurse in Saudi Arabia earlier, had come here last year as a student with her husband Biju. She had taken admission to Community Welfare course in Melbourne International College, a private institute.

She continued her studies and worked in a nursing home, while Biju worked in a restaurant. Soma had expected that she would work in a community welfare sector after completing the course and would get Permanent Residency (PR).

However, her dreams were shattered after the Australian government changed the PR policy, taking off community welfare from the priority list. The government has also closed down the Melbourne International College for lack of facilities. Adding to her woes, Biju met with an accident and suffered from brain injury.

"It is a life and death situation for me here. Now my hope for PR looks faded. My husband has been ailing and I do not have money to support the family," she said. Anita Nair, India's Consulate General in Melbourne, said Soma's case is just tip of the iceberg. Thousands of Indian students are caught in such situation as their dream for PR seems to have vanished.

Nair said Soma is being provided help by certain Indian organisations and Catholic society. The Australian government has changed its PR policy by dropping Community Service, Cookery and Hair Dressing from the priority list. This means students pursuing these courses will face difficulty in getting PR.

Most of these students take loan to pursue higher studies with the hope that they would pay back once they work in Australia after getting PR.

Nair said the problem started with the huge influx of Indian students in the past two years. There are about 97,000 Indian students pursuing higher studies in Australia. The flow of the students increased by 160 per cent in 2007 over 2006, while it again increased by 94 per cent in last year over 2007.

A majority of them come as students and use the studentship as a fast track to get PR. These students come from small towns and their competence level is poor.

She said the Australian government is to be blamed for the huge influx of substandard students from India. The Australian government has said changing the PR policy is its prerogative.

"Australia's need for skill changes from time to time. So the PR policy changes," said a senior official of the Department of Immigration and Citizenship. — PTI

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