

# Indian government to fund workers' labour cases in UAE

## Overstay fines and all legal expenses in deserving cases to be paid from expanded community fund

Abu Dhabi: Indian government will fund legal fights of distressed Indian workers in the UAE from the widened ambit of a community welfare fund, Indian officials announced today.

The Indian missions in the UAE will be able to provide financial assistance to a wider spectrum of distressed Indians in deserving cases including labour cases where all aspects of the legal assistance will be covered under the Indian Community Welfare Fund (ICWF).

The new guidelines for the fund, which details its expanded scope, will come into effect from September 1, the Indian Ambassador to the UAE Navdeep Singh Suri said at a press conference.

The most important aspect of the new features of the fund is that the missions in the UAE can now provide all aspects of legal assistance to Indians in distress in most deserving cases, he said.

“That is important because we have a number of ongoing cases where companies have shut down or workers have been laid off and they are unable to obtain compensation and even their salaries which are now due for several months...and they need to go to the court. But they don't have the resources to go to the court. I am hoping that with this new mechanism now we can help these members of the community to at least take up their cases legally in courts of law and obtain redresses,” he told Gulf News later.

While the primary responsibility of workers' welfare contractually relies on the employer, the missions will offer assistance in deserving cases where workers have been wronged by employers and for payment of fines for illegal stay where workers are not at fault.

The missions will make sure that the beneficiaries are genuinely in need. The new regulations require that the missions enter the details of the support received by beneficiaries in their passport to avoid misuse of the fund by availing its benefits repeatedly.

Dinesh Kumar, Counsellor — Community Welfare, said the fund can now also be used to pay overstay fines of workers.

“Those workers who are in a critical stage that their visas are already finished and they are not at fault, we can help them.”

He said the fund can also be used to release Indians from jails and detention centres if the offences are minor and they don't have the means to pay the fines.

There are an estimated 2.7m Indians in the UAE, forming the largest group of expatriates living in the country. The track record of the Indian community is as one of the most law abiding citizens, the ambassador said, pointing out that the number of Indians in jail is significantly low as compared to the huge number of their population here.

The ICWF is primarily funded through service charges on various passport, visa and other consular service from Indian missions. Around Dh3m is contributed to the fund under the missions in the UAE every year.

Set up in 2009 to assist overseas Indians in times of distress and emergency in the most deserving cases on a "means tested basis," the ICWF will now cover "community welfare activities and improvements of consular services," Gulf News had first reported in July.

More details to follow.