

Karkala woman recruited for Qatar, sent to Saudi as 'bonded labour'

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MANGALURU: The Human Rights Protection Foundation (HRPF), Udupi, has appealed to public to be wary and avoid 'unregistered recruiting agents' after they came across a case a woman from Karkala, entrapped for about 10 months in Saudi Arabia, almost working as a bonded labour.

Foundation president Ravindranath Shanbhag said Jacinta Mendonca, 46, from Karkala, with three children in their teens pursuing education, landed in Saudi Arabia through a sub-agent, James from Mangaluru, who had assured her a house maid's job in Qatar for a salary of Rs 25,000 per month. She left from Mumbai to Qatar on June 19, 2016, but landed in Yanbhu, Saudi Arabia.

There, she had to look after 10 children of three wives of the Saudi employer and was required to work for over 16 hours a day. In the process her health deteriorated and her pleas of inability to complete the work fell on deaf ears. Shanbhag said on two occasions she was physically assaulted by the employer and his family.

Somehow, in December 2016, she was able to contact her children in India with the help of some of the Indian vehicle drivers in the township and inform them of her sad plight. The shocked children rushed to all and sundry, who they thought might help them. In spite of the best efforts of the secretary of Indian Embassy in Riyadh Jacinta could not be contacted over the telephone numbers she had provided her children.

On December 30, 2016, they approached Shanbhag. Though they were able to get the numbers of the sub-agent James and main agent Shabha Khan from Mumbai, there was no much headway.

The HRPF lodged with Mangaluru police. Even though the police caught hold of James, no information whatsoever was

forthcoming from him. At the end of January, 2017, HRPF contacted the NRI Forum Bengaluru and through them the Indian Embassy in Riyadh once again. This time, they could get the details of the Saudi employer. The employer asserted he had "obtained her services" for two years by paying SAR 24,000 (Rs 5 lakh) to the Indian agent Shabha Khan. The employer said she can be sent back if the sum was refunded to him.

The HRPF then sought services of Sushma Swaraj, minister of external affairs on March 28. Within 24 hours of contacting her, a senior official contacted the HRPF and took all necessary particulars.

Shanbhag said they are eagerly awaiting action and return of Jacinta, but they don't know when. On speaking to Jacintha, HRPF also got info that with her there were two other women - Jane and Diya - commuting in the same flight whose whereabouts are still unknown. Jacintha also had told Shanbhag that same agents had sent four women in April and five women in May to Middle East whose details aren't known as yet.

Shanbhag said : Almost 15 persons are going abroad every month and there's no registered recruiting agent here. Its akin to human trafficking and government should take a note and bring culprits to book.