



Surrender certificate rule stands unchanged, says Indian embassy

RITU JHA

Last week, the Global Organization of People of Indian Origin issued a press release announcing that the surrender certificate — needed for Indians who have taken citizenship of another country and who want Person of Indian Origin or Overseas Citizen of India cards — requirement has been waived. But the Indian embassy in Washington, DC has denied any such new rules regarding the surrender certificate.

In an e-mail to *India Abroad*, Nikhilesh M Dhirar, second secretary, press, information and culture, Indian embassy, said, “We have been informed that the Indian passport is to be presented for cancelation and issue of surrender certificate (renunciation of India citizenship) irrespective of the time frame of naturalization.”

The e-mail said details of the applicable penalty for misuse of Indian passport after acquisition of foreign citizenship is available on the embassy Web site, www.indianembassy.org/index.php?option=com_content&id=175

[bassy.org/index.php?option=com_content&id=175](http://www.indianembassy.org/index.php?option=com_content&id=175)

GOPIO Chairman Inder Singh said the organization had no intention of misleading the community.

“We received information from the MoIA (*Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs*),” Singh told *India Abroad* over the telephone. “The letter was addressed to the embassy and consulates and they did not share with us. So, we tried to get the paragraph that particularly concerns us. We quoted that verbatim (*in the press release*). We quoted what instruction they have got. We do service for the community and we have no intention to mislead them.”

He said the letter in question was obtained by Ashok Ramsaran, executive vice president, GOPIO International.

“He passed it on to me and that what we have quoted in the press release sent out by GOPIO,” said Singh. He hoped the new rules would be announced formally soon.

In January, a GOPIO delegation comprising Singh, Ramsaran and Dr Thomas Abraham presented a memo-

randum to the Indian government explaining the hardships and delays people have been experiencing in obtaining an Indian visa. In particular, GOPIO wanted that the surrender certificate requirement should not be enforced in case of people who had obtained foreign citizenship more than 10 years ago as Indian passports lose its validity after 10 years anyway.

January 6, GOPIO held a session on this subject at its annual convention in New Delhi, which was attended by a high-ranking representative of India’s Ministry of External Affairs. In May, a high-level Indian government delegation visited the US to look into complaints regarding the visa issue.

Singh said May 26, GOPIO members met the three-member delegation that visited the San Francisco Bay Area and met community leaders and Consul General Susmita G Thomas. GOPIO presented another memorandum, which included demands included in the January 6 memorandum.

Indian lawmaker lends the community an ear

ASHA SHARMA

“The consulate is the face of our country. We all also need the consulate. So we should help to improve it,” said Janardhana Swamy, a member of the Lok Sabha, the lower House of India’s parliament, as he invited members of the San Francisco Bay Area Indian community to a frank discussion on consular problems and their solutions in Sunnyvale, California, June 27.

Swamy, a member of the parliamentary committee on external affairs, said, “Nobody told me to come here. I came here voluntarily,” admitting that in his many years working in the Bay Area he had faced difficulties with the consulate.

“I want to get consolidated information on the subject and take it back to the government and see how things can improve,” he said.

Sitting with India’s Consul General in San Francisco Susmita G Thomas and Consul Ashok Sinha, Swamy heard people’s views about complicated procedures, the confusing visa forms, the delays in visa processing, the unavailability of parking spots even for the old and handicapped, and other complaints. There were also inquiries about dual citizenship and use of the Right to Information Act by non-resident Indians.

The outsourcing agency assigned to processing visa applications came under criticism from Dr Inder Singh, chairman, Global Organization of People of Indian Origin, who traveled from Los Angeles to attend the event.

“People working with the outsourcing

agency often misbehave,” he said. “They do not know the rules. They should be better trained and be sensitive to our people.”

Shail Kumar of the University of California-Berkeley spoke of the difficulty of obtaining an Indian visa. “The Indian consulate should only ask for documents that are necessary,” he said.

Satnam Singh Chahal, president, North American Punjabi Association, and a persistent critic of consulate performance, spoke about the delays experienced by

many in obtaining Indian visas.

Another complainant from Fresno pointed out that many elderly Indian immigrants were uneducated. “They do not know English and cannot even read the application forms. We need to have visa application forms in vernacular languages,” he said.

The wisdom of asking the elderly, including a 90-year-old woman, for their birth or marriage certificate for visa purposes was also questioned.



From left: Indian Consul General Susmita G Thomas, Janardhana Swamy, MP, and Consul Ashok Sinha

Rajesh M, originally from Bangalore, commented on the poor quality of the consulate Web site, describing it as “undergraduate work.” He pointed out that there were different questions on the Web site and on the forms.

“What do I do? Do I go to the consulate?” he asked. “Calling the consulate does not work,” he added, “Nobody answers the telephone or e-mails.”

People also pointed out that the consulate was located far from where the majority of Indian migrants lived — where real estate prices and rents were lower.

Swamy answered the questions amiably and promised to follow up on the issues raised.

“I am your voice; don’t put me on the other side,” he said. “If I was not here, I wouldn’t have known of all these problems.”

Swamy is from Kallihatti village in Chitradurga district in Karnataka. He went on to do his post-graduation in electrical communication at the Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore, and worked at Sun Microsystems in California for many years. In 2007, he returned to India. Two years later he contested the Lok Sabha elections from Chitradurga constituency and was elected, winning his seat with a margin of over 135,000 votes.

Reflecting on his decision to change his career, he said, “It is a different world, but it is necessary for many of us to join the government and see how we can help, rather than criticizing the government for everything.”