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Inside COPO

A newsletter of Council of Pakistan Organization, Brooklyn, New York

Union Square Award for grassroots activism

Services offered:

- **ESL classes**
- **Computer classes**
- **Citizenship test preparation**
- **Immigration, Citizenship**
- **Job assistance and training**
- **Government benefits**
- **Special Registration counseling**
- **Legal Assistance for Detentions and Hate Crimes**
- **Healthcare counseling**
- **Homeowners counseling**

Coming soon:

- **After-School homework**
- **Neighborhood patrol**
- **Auditorium**

COPO's commitment to serve the South Asian community has been recognized with the Union Square Award for the year 2003.

COPO co-founders Abbas Razvi, Shafiq Hassan, Salamat Ali, Mohammad Razvi, Ahmad Razvi, and Jagajit Singh received the award conferred by the Fund for the City of New York on November 21.

The Fund's president commended COPO for its "grassroots activism and contribution to strengthening families and communities in New York City."

The prestigious award recognizes

and encourages individual initiatives to serve pressing social needs in local communities. The Fund is also rewarding COPO for its efforts to "set an example and serve as an inspiration to others."



Brooklyn remembers M.L. King's speech

Immigrants in New York City are rediscovering the relevance of Martin Luther King as many struggle against intolerance and lack of access to justice.

The civil rights activist's famed "I have a dream" speech was the subject of a seminar on February 10. The coalition of nonprofits who formed the "We Are All Brooklyn" iterated that King's dream was the dream of all marginalized people. Brooklyn borough president Marty Markowitz launched the seminar, saying, "If you can't tolerate diversity, then Brooklyn doesn't want you."

Manhattan borough president Virginia Fields also spoke at the seminar.

Keynote speaker and Medgar Evers college president Edison O. Jackson exhorted the activists, "We must remember as citizens of United States that we must have access to justice... We must accept our role as instruments of change."

Jagajit Singh, the second keynote speaker and COPO program director, said King drew inspiration from Mahatma Gandhi, who pioneered nonviolent forms of protest in India. "If humanity is to progress, Gandhi is inescapable," said Singh.

COPO executive director Mohammad Razvi said it mattered that undocumented immigrants have access to healthcare. "Our children are classmates with kids from undocumented families. Illnesses and diseases don't discriminate between them." He added that the city's Resolution 909 safeguarded civil rights when the "Patriot Act is making more people afraid."

A video presentation, *Take Back the Courts*, produced by Stanley Nelson, highlighted how judicial activism could distress the poor and the disabled.

Overview of employment-based immigration

Cyrus D. Mehta

Foreign nationals who are skilled or educated and who have job offers have the possibility of immigrating to the United States. Employment-based immigration is limited by statute to 140,000 persons per year. Usually the process is three fold:

- a) The employer must first obtain a "labor certification" from the US Department of Labor (DOL)
- b) the employer applies for immigrant visa classification under the employment-based second or third preference and
- c) the foreign national applies for lawful permanent residency or the "green card" through adjustment of status in the United States or consular processing overseas.

I. LABOR CERTIFICATION

In most cases, the employer must obtain "labor certification" from the DOL confirming that there are an insufficient number of US workers able, qualified and willing to perform the work for which the alien is being hired. To establish this, the employer must advertise and perform other recruitment efforts to find someone who is already a US citizen or permanent resident qualified to take up the position. The employer should also offer the position at the prevailing wage.

A labor certification is only the first step to obtain the "green card." It is a lengthy process and does not authorize a foreign national to remain or work in the US unless he or she has another nonimmigrant visa that authorizes work, such as an H-1B visa. In some regions, the process could take several years.

a. Can the labor certification process be expedited?

The process can be expedited through a procedure known as "Reduction In Recruitment" (RIR). If the employer has conducted a good faith effort to recruit US workers for a period of six months prior to the filing of a labor certification and failed to find a qualified worker in the country, the DOL

may rely on the employer's efforts to forgo recruitment under its supervision. RIR procedures vary from region to region, though the labor certification is approved more quickly than a regularly filed labor certification application.

In today's economic downturn, DOL views RIR applications with much skepticism. Under a new rule, a traditionally filed labor certification application may be "converted" to an RIR if the application was filed on or before August 3, 2001.

b. Are there other ways to expedite the process if RIR is not possible?

Physical therapists and professional nurses have been exempted from rigorous labor certification requirements. Labor certifications for college and university teachers and performing artists can also be expedited through a process called "Special Handling."

c. Can the labor certification be avoided?

Labor certification is only required for individuals applying under the employment-based second and third preference categories.

Individuals who qualify under the employment-based first preference do not require a labor certification. For instance, a) Persons of Extraordinary Ability b) Outstanding Professors and Researchers and c) Multinationals Executives or Managers.

Applications requesting a waiver of the job offer requirement in the national interest under the employment-based second preference also do not require labor certification.

Cyrus D. Mehta is the Secretary of the Bar of the City of New York

Free legal aid for 'Special Registration' persons

Brooklyn residents subject to "Special Registration" are getting help. COPO organized more than 30 legal clinics since January 2003, giving people of South Asian origin an opportunity to get advice from immigration lawyers about the recent federal regulation.

According to the US Citizenship and Immigration Services' website, "Special Registration is a system that will let the government keep track of nonimmigrants that come to the US every year." Under this regulation, people from Pakistan and Bangladesh are affected. According to the USCIS, people from the affected countries had to undergo re-registration every year. COPO thanks advocacy organizations whose intervention forced the government to withdraw this measure.

Next NTA Clinic at COPO: March 12 from 5 to 8 pm

Photo project set for picture perfect launch

Studies show children prosper in a dynamic learning environment. But conditions in many of New York City schools are far from ideal. Children are often disappointed to see that they cannot relate a subject taught in a classroom with the world outside.

COPO is amending this situation by setting up a photography club to enhance the creativity of children while they explore their neighborhood, culture and religious identity. This exploration of self-identity will in turn encourage a sense of belonging and community participation among the young people.

Weekly workshops from April 2 are being planned where young participants will be taught fundamentals of using the camera. Besides, COPO will organize expeditions in and around New York City to develop art appreciation among the participants. Apart from visiting exhibits at the International Center for Photography, Museum of the Moving Image and the Museum of Modern Art, trips to the wilderness and cultural centers like Jamaica Bay Wildlife Preserve, Bear Mountain and Harlem are in the pipeline.

Free cameras, films and development will be part of the workshop kit. In addition, complimentary transportation, food and workshop materials will also be offered.

The workshop will culminate with a public display of photographs taken by the workshop participants. The proposed exhibition at an art center or museum will coincide with the anniversary of the September 11 tragedy.

About 50 junior high and high school youth are expected to benefit from this project. The six-month project is seeking to merge academics with training in art. For instance, students will be encouraged to keep a journal to document their thoughts on identity, culture, religion, and ethnic heritage. This will be complemented with pictorial

assignments on self, family and neighborhood portraits.

Research shows a combination of arts and academics reinforces skills taught in a formal setting. More important, the holistic nature of the project encourages young participants to improve their self-esteem, class attendance, behavior and decision-making skills.

Several eminent photographers have expressed interest in the project. COPO is also initiating talks to get a generous sponsor for the cameras. The photo project has found a part sponsor in Partners for After School Education.

Another award and recognition:

Mohammad Razvi, COPO's Executive Director, has been awarded the Beacon of Hope award by Congressman Major Owens for outstanding service to the community.



Catch them young: A project to root out bias

Promoting community-building and leadership skills among New York's youth are an integral part of COPO's mission. An offshoot of this objective was the Mosaic Youth Project, a joint collaboration with the Church Avenue Merchants Block Association (CAMBA).

The project for youth between 15 and 18 years took off on a promising note this summer with 21 participants tackling issues as wide ranging as diversity, non-violence, conflict resolution, and leadership training. The facilitators organized not only traditional lectures for the 14 girls and seven boys but also interactive games and field trips across the city. "This multi-level training helped the teenagers to confront the realities of power and oppression with an open mind," says COPO's Marc Fallon.

The Mosaic Youth Project's participants went beyond the confines of their already interactive training to have a glimpse of the Peace Boat, a cruise liner promoting world peace. The budding activists were also treated to shows by respected performing art groups such as the Palestinian Ibadaa and the Urban Youth Collective.

Project facilitators included Ahmad Razvi and Marc Fallon from COPO and Jill Strauss and Debbie Almontaser from CAMBA. "The project is a positive development in addressing issues of diversity and political power in our city," says Razvi.

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A note of thanks to our partners

COPO thanks its patrons whose continuous support has helped us to pursue our mission: serving the community. The New York Foundation, New York Community Trust, Fund for New Citizens, Fund for the City of New York, Urban Justice Center, and the Citizens Committee of New York City have been kind enough to recognize the efforts of COPO and made it possible for us to reach you.

Our collaborative partners include Midwood Development Corporation, CAMBA, Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund, New York Immigration Coalition, South Asian Council for Social Services, Jewish Community Relations Council of New York, Brooklyn Alliance, Brooklyn Bridges, and UMMA.

Selfless service

Without its volunteers and interns, COPO's mission would be incomplete.

Our appreciation extends to Rana Subhan, Shahid, Mohammad Yousef, Umar Bhatti, Mazhar Elahi, Sajid Dutt, Khurshid Khan, Sadaf, and those who want to remain anonymous.



COPO members at the Immigrant Workers' Freedom Ride on October 4, 2003 in Queens

COPO needs you

Join hands with COPO. Volunteer with COPO and take part in our programs. Use your skills to empower the community. Because the community needs you.

**COPO proudly
co-sponsors NYC2012
— our city's bid to host
the Olympic Games**

Alert against hate crimes

About 20 community members benefited from a workshop on hate crimes on February 27. Unlike previous meetings, several Bangladeshi immigrants participated in the clinic, highlighting COPO's outreach efforts.

A representative from the Brooklyn District Attorney's office, Richard K. Farrell, Sgt. Michael Fanning of the Hate Crime Task Force, and two staff members from Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund (AALDEF) provided inputs on recognizing hate crimes and confronting the problem.

To notify police about hate crimes, call 696-610-5267 or 888-440-HATE. Email: HATETF@nypd.org.

Visit our website at www.copousa.org