

Don't say cheese for US visa pic

shburgh: Imagine being asked a passport for, of all things, your teeth. It could seem odd, but not because it is crooked. Under new rules for visa photographs began this summer, the State Department doesn't want to see them at all.

The new guidelines permit applicants to smile for passport visa pictures but frown for interview photos, which applicants are classified as unnatural expressions. The subjects expressed should be neutral (nothing) with both eyes open, mouth closed. A smile is not preferred, according to the guidelines.

Why does the State Department frown on smiles? Smiling distorts other facial features, for example, eyes, so you're supposed to have a neutral expression. The most desirable standard type of identification said Angela Aggeler, spokeswoman for the State Department Bureau of Consular Affairs.

allow for best possible vision. If you smile or frown, your eyes or turn your head, there would be fewer points. So when you go to the counter, you look at the camera in all face to offer the best vision to the picture in passport," said Denis. In a spokesman for International Civil Aviation Organisation.

Job change in UK easier for migrants

By Tina Parekh/TNN

Ahmedabad: In a reprieve to a large number of immigrants working in the UK on work permits, the British home office has announced temporary changes that would ease out the problems associated with switching from one job to another.

According to relaxed rules, that came into effect last month, people holding a work permit and changing employment, will be able to start working for a new employer on the strength of the work permit permission letter. They, however, must have sought a special permission called leave to remain from the home office, covering all or parts of the period of the new employment.

This is an interim arrangement and the home office will review its decision around New Year.

Earlier, immigrants who wanted to switch employment were not allowed to do so, unless the present employer gave his no-objection certificate and consent to the

transfer. Now, there will be increased flexibility for those who want to switch jobs, says immigration lawyer Sandeep Jani.

The home office took the decision after requests from workers seeking to change employment who faced problems due to long application processing periods.

Foreign workers will now start working with another employer by simply applying for a leave to remain, instead of first getting an approval. However, in case they do not get an approval or leave to remain, they would have to say no to the new offer, says another consultant Prasanna Acharya.

This is encouraging news for those who are hoping to work in the UK as they will be less worried about getting bogged down in procedural delays, says overseas consultant Vinod Gambtoo.

On the basis of their work permit letter, workers can submit a leave to remain application after switching jobs. This should be done before the existing one expires, or within six months of switching a job.

The relaxed rule will also not undermine immigration controls in any way, say experts.

Culture quotient: Who has higher self-esteem?

By Swati Desai

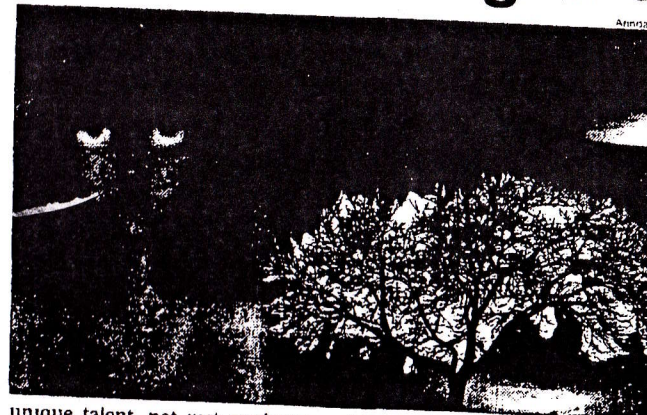
Pradeep, IT specialist who interacts with American clients, may have been right in his comment, "I believe that Indians are more humble compared to the Americans. I think that is a fast diminishing value which indeed needs to be preserved."

Jeanne Tsai, a cultural psychologist from Stanford, notices the following. "If you give a survey to Americans and Asians with statements such as 'I am satisfied with myself', 'I have a positive attitude towards myself', Americans are more likely to agree and Asians are more likely to be self-critical or self-effacing. Asians would have harder time expressing positive regard for themselves. Americans rate higher on the self-esteem scale."

This comes from the way in which self-esteem is regarded differently in the two cultures. Asians in general and Americans in particular. Self-esteem, defined as view of self or worth associated with oneself, is held as a highly important value in the US.

Psychologists would attest to the observation that low self-esteem leads to depression and anxiety, on the other hand, high self-esteem is believed to lead to meeting your potential, having better relationships, and a happier life.

Millions of dollars are spent in the US school system for increasing children's self-esteem through individual attention to each child's



unique talent, not just academics and obedience. Great attention is paid in schools to social interaction, sports participation, and avoiding put-downs to peers. Parenting education advise is filled with how to discipline the kids without using humiliating verbal or physical punishments which could lead to low self-esteem. In traditional Indian environment, the parents in fact learn not to praise their own child in public. Unless the child has academic skills or some outstanding talent, children typically face criticism and the feeling of being ordinary.

In India, the style of communication towards people from the same class is encouraged to be by giving importance to the other. Respecting

elders and people in authority is a cultural value as well. Facial expressions and body language would reflect this difference. Social relationships are so important that Indians are more likely to appear grandiose in describing their connections to powerful people compared to their American counterparts. Americans would appear overly self-confident from an Indian eye in describing their own potential and their relationships. Their assertive and direct style may appear abrupt to us.

One very interesting and ironic observation is made by psychologists. The differences in self-esteem may be in the way it is expressed, but on the fundamental level, Americans and Asians both suffer from

low self-esteem and doubting ones self-worth! For Americans, it is possibly because of the high self-regard they hold for themselves, there is an anxiety when one does not measure up to the self-image. In Asia, India in particular, the low self-esteem may come because of the so called colonial complex, after being invaded so many times and losing respect for the Indianness, in addition to the cultural value on self-effacement.

In the context of cultural globalisation, the notion of self-esteem appears to be changing amongst the ambitious and increasingly Western Indian urban youth. Pradeep may be right in his observation that being humble is a fast diminishing Indian value. The definition of how to show respect and what is respected has become volatile too. In addition, the successful NRI community may have an inflated self image in comparison to where they started. The real quest lies in finding how to heal the wounds from the colonial past without getting caught into just a marketed notion of high self-esteem. The real question is how do we utilise our past to hold high regard for ourselves which leads to happier and more productive lives in today's globalised world.

(The author, a psychotherapist in private practice in Los Angeles and a mental health consultant to South Asian agencies, is on a visit to ISB, Hyderabad)

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By Prathima Nandakumar/TNN

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