

Indian workers to march to White House, return H2B visas

Nearly 100 Indian workers, who claim they were lured to move to the US by false promises of permanent jobs, will march up to the White House this morning and return their H2B visas in a symbolic rejection of the guest worker programme used to traffic them to the US.

The workers, who complain they underwent "slave-like treatment" at a Mississippi shipyard, will also demand a Congressional investigation of their former employer Signal International.

Signal, a Northrop Grumman subcontractor that held them as bonded labourers and is already the subject of a criminal human trafficking investigation by the Department of Justice, a statement issued on behalf of them by the organisers said.

Allies from 'Jobs With Justice', a national campaign for workers' rights in United States, will join the workers, who arrived in Washington last week after a nine-day satyagraha, or "journey for justice" from New Orleans to Washington DC.

The group is among over 500 Indian welders and pipe-fitters trafficked to the US to work for Signal International after Hurricane Katrina.

The workers have filed a major class action anti-racketeering suit against Signal and its US and Indian recruiters in federal court.

Last Thursday, the workers had staged a protest rally at Dupont Circle and then marched to the Indian Embassy on Massachusetts Avenue where they had a three-hour-meeting with the Indian Ambassador Ronen Sen. They had also demanded a CBI probe into their case.

Sen gave the workers and their representatives a patient hearing at the embassy in which he promised to take up their grievances but only through appropriate and established channels.