

Visa hitch irks Indo-Pak couple

Karachi boy treated in City, parents look to smooth visits

By SALIM JOSEPH

Bangalore, July 5: Mehmood Chhotani, a Karachi-based businessman, could be considered a champion of a true bond between India and Pakistan. The bond that began 19 years ago when he married an Indian girl has now attained significance with his youngest child undergoing a surgical correction of his squint eye in a City hospital here on Monday.

Amid the hostility between the two nations, Chhotani remains a simple human being who has crossed the boundaries of enmity to choose his life partner and now to correct his eight-year-old son's 'vision'. "It was a love marriage," he says sitting beside his son Mahad who is recuperating at Narayana Nethralaya.

"And one could say we followed a barter system," says Jameela, his wife, born and brought up in Bangalore, now a Pakistan citizen. Marriage between Chhotani's sister and Jameela's brother had helped matters.

The issue which Chhotani raises highlights the difficult visa procedures existing now. "The official procedures which I had to go through to get a visa to

avail treatment for my son in Bangalore was a real torment. It took me more than 40 days to get a clearance from the Indian embassy," Chhotani says.

This has happened in the case of a little Pakistan boy who has very strong family ties in India. "Imagine the hassles one has to undergo to get expert medical attention, which India now boasts of," he says.

Chhotani could not find an eye surgeon specialised in squint in Pakistan and was left with the option to get it done at his wife's hometown, Bangalore.



Dr Arun Samprathi with Mahad and his parents

Now he is worried about the tribulations he would have to undergo to come for regular follow-ups.

"The child has to come for another check-up after six months and once a year till he attains the age of 12," says Dr Arun Samprathi, one of the few eye surgeons in the City specialised in squint correction.