

First Spelling Bee announced for South Asian children in US

Inspired by the fact that South Asian children routinely win laurels at the national spelling contests in the US, the first-ever annual Spelling Bee exclusively for them has now been announced.

Conceived and organised by Touchdown Media, a major South Asian American advertising agency, the 2008 State Farm South Asian Spelling Bee will start in end June with contests in eight regional centres across the country, culminating in the final on Aug 16 in New Jersey.

Explaining the format, Rahul Walia, chief executive of Touchdown Media, told IANS: 'At each regional centre, children who enrol online will take a written test of spelling 25 words. The 30 highest scorers will then go to the oral round. The three top winners will get prizes ranging from \$200 to \$500.'

Two top winners from each regional centre - 16 in all - will then compete in the final for the \$5,000 championship prize sponsored by Western Union, the global money transfer company.

The contest is open to children younger than 14, with at least one parent or grandparent hailing from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan, Myanmar or Nepal.

Covered by Sony TV and hopefully US television stations, the contest will challenge the intelligence of South Asian students and showcase their highest talent to the world, said Walia.

Supported by State Farm, a major insurance company, the annual event is yet another example of a mainstream US company spending its marketing dollars to reach out to the South Asian community.

Children can register their participation at the nearest regional centre - New Jersey, Washington DC, Dallas, Houston, Chicago, New York, Los Angeles or Bay Area in California.

South Asian children have had a lot of success at the best known spelling contest, the Scripps National Spelling Bee. Last year, over 11 percent of the participants in the contest were South Asian and over the years many South Asian students have been champions. The Scripps contest is scheduled this year on May 29-30 in Washington DC.

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