

INDIAN COMMUNITY IN CHINA FEELS THE PINCH AS TRAVEL BAN NEARS TWO YEARS

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: India - China

Closed off: Students pursuing medical education in China at a protest seeking government intervention for continuing their studies, in Thiruvananthapuram. File photo

An effective ban by Chinese authorities on travellers from India for the past two years has strained Indian businesses in China as well as families that have in some cases been separated for as long as two years.

Indian community associations in China estimate there are several thousand Indians who are waiting to return to China. This is in addition to thousands of students enrolled in Chinese universities — most in medical colleges — who have been calling on the Chinese government to facilitate their return.

Following talks with visiting Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi in New Delhi on March 25, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar said he “took up strongly the predicament of Indian students studying in China who have not been allowed to return, citing COVID restrictions”.

“We hope that China will take a non-discriminatory approach, since it involves the future of so many young people,” he said. “Minister Wang Yi assured me that he would speak to the relevant authorities on his return on this matter. He also recognised the particular concerns that medical students have in this difficult situation.”

Unlike the students, businesses said their cases, as well as those of families that have been separated by China’s travel bans, have not received similar attention.

More than a dozen people told *The Hindu* in interviews that Chinese authorities have for much of the past two years continued to deny business visas as well as visas for even immediate family members, including spouses and children, of Indian nationals who have remained in China to run their businesses.

Last year, the Chinese Embassy in India said they would “facilitate” travellers inoculated with Chinese vaccines, which are not available in India. This prompted dozens of businesspeople and families to travel to Nepal and West Asia.

“We spent thousands of dollars travelling and staying there for one month to get two shots,” said one businessman who had organised a group. “But when we came back, we were still refused visas,” he said.

Current regulations

China is the only major country still closed off from the rest of the world with restrictions on international travel. Under China’s current regulations, visas are issued only for emergency humanitarian reasons to visit critically ill relatives or to “resume operation and production” including for economic and trade purposes.

While the regulations apply to all countries and are not India-specific, a representative of an Indian community association said that Indian businesspeople were particularly facing some

restrictions.

“We know of businesspeople from several countries who have been allowed to return,” the representative said. “A letter is needed from the local government for the visa application, but we were told by more than one local government that they will not give the letter for Indians. They said there is a clear instruction that they cannot do so.”

One businessman involved in the shoe industry in Fujian who has not been able to return said, “I have to pay rent, salaries for my workers, and I need to visit factories. I cannot do any of those things and I am facing losses.”

Another businessman who runs a company in southern Guangdong, and was back in India for a personal visit when the pandemic began in Wuhan, said he can no longer run his business which involves taking buyers to and sourcing goods from China.

Others have spoken of being separated from their families, with either their spouses and children in China or their family in India unable to join them. “We can travel from China to India, but we are told even if we have a visa we will not be allowed to go back,” said one businessman in Shanghai.

China, which is currently dealing with a surge of Omicron cases especially in Shanghai, has said it will continue with its “zero COVID” approach and there are no signs of opening up. That is expected to continue at least until November when President Xi Jinping is likely to begin his third term following an all-important once-in-five-year party congress, with the government presenting China’s “zero COVID” strategy of the past two years as one of Mr. Xi’s successes and as a contrast from how the West handled the pandemic.

[Our code of editorial values](#)

END

Downloaded from **crackIAS.com**

© **Zuccess App** by crackIAS.com