

U.K. links student visa row to issue of 'over-stayers'

The British government has drawn a direct link between the exclusion of Indian students from a relaxation of visa rules and India's decision to pull out of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on the return of illegal migrants. The relaxation was extended to ten countries, including China and the Maldives, but not India. The Opposition Liberal Democrat party described the exclusion of Indian students as "nonsensical and cruel".

New Delhi's demands for "easier norms" as part of a "constant conversation" between the two countries could not be dealt with without India addressing the issue of "over-stayers," British International Trade Minister Liam Fox said on Monday.

Post-Brexit ties

Asked specifically about whether there was a direct link between the failure to reach an agreement on the MoU and the student visa development, he said that all the issues had to be considered "on balance", and could not be separated. However, he denied that the disagreement would damage Britain's ability to forge closer ties with India after Brexit, insisting that its ambitions related to India extend beyond trade.

His comments, on the sidelines of the launch of a U.K.-India summit, a week-long series of events in London and Buckinghamshire on post-Brexit bilateral opportunities, highlight how long-simmering tensions between the two countries on migration issues threaten to spill over into wider bilateral issues. Earlier this month, it emerged that External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj had intervened at the last minute to prevent the signing of an MoU on returning illegal migrants because of concerns over the British demand that Indian authorities would have 15 days to verify the antecedents of an undocumented migrant.

During her visit to India in 2016, British Prime Minister Theresa May said the U.K. would consider an improved visa deal, "if, at the same time, we can step up the speed and volume of returns of Indians with no right to remain in the U.K."

The student controversy has overshadowed other reforms brought in by Britain's new Home Secretary Sajid Javid, including the removal a cap on non-EU doctors and nurses — many of them from India — coming to Britain. India has welcomed the relaxation but made clear that it continues to have concerns related to Britain's immigration regime. "It's a question of demand and supply. You need more doctors... we give you those doctors," said India's High Commissioner Y.K. Sinha at the event, stressing the importance of a "mutually reinforcing" and "mutually beneficial relationship" that had to be a "win win situation for both sides".

'The larger picture'

"We believe in the free movement of people... While each country has [its] own requirements and [is] absolutely free to decide [its] own immigration policies and visa policies we need to look at the larger picture," he added. "When we go in for negotiation for a free trade agreement... there will be priorities on both sides and we will need to see how we can match those priorities..."

International students contributed "immensely" to Britain's economy and expertise, he said. "International students are the best soft power the U.K. has and for generations Indian students have come here including those who fought for our independence so I think this is something really important... and I think we should facilitate their coming here," he added.

Politicians from Opposition parties have been critical of the government's stance. "The exclusion of certain students, such as those from India, from the relaxation of visa rules is nonsensical and cruel," said Ed Davey, the Liberal Democrat's spokesperson on Home Affairs. "All too sadly, however, this Tory Government's damaging hostile environment policy is turning people away."

All the issues have to be considered on balance; they cannot be separated

Liam Fox

Trade Minister

END

Downloaded from **crackIAS.com**

© **Zuccess App** by crackIAS.com

crackIAS.com