

**GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
LOK SABHA**

UNSTARRED QUESTION NO:4010

ANSWERED ON:17.12.2014

IMMIGRATION REFORMS BY US

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Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

- (a) whether the US administration has announced sweeping immigration reforms which is likely to benefit thousands of Indian techies and if so, the details thereof;
- (b) whether Indo-US social security agreement is on the anvil and if so, the benefits likely to be accrued as a result thereof;
- (c) whether issues regarding H1B visa, curtailing number of Indians going to US, steep hike in process fee, etc. were raised during the recent visit of PM to the US; and
- (d) if so, the details and outcome thereof?

Answer

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS [GEN. (DR) V. K. SINGH (RETD)]

(a) On November 20, 2014, US President Barack Obama announced a series of Executive Actions on the US immigration system. In his address to the Nation, he announced, amongst other things, his intention to make it easier and faster for high-skilled immigrants, graduates and entrepreneurs to stay and contribute to the growth of US economy.

Subsequently, the US Department of Homeland Security (DHS) issued a Memorandum on November 20, 2014 directing the US Citizenship & Immigration Services (USCIS) and the US Immigration & Customs Enforcement (USICE) to formulate a number of new policies and regulations aimed at improving the employment-based immigration system, which would enable US businesses to hire and retain highly skilled foreign-born workers while providing them with increased mobility.

In addition to the above DHS Memorandum, a Presidential Memorandum was issued on November 21, 2014 on Modernizing and Streamlining the US Immigrant Visa System. This provides for an inter-agency group to develop recommendations to (a) streamline and improve the legal immigration system with a focus on reforms that reduce government costs, improve services for applicants and reduce burden on employers; (b) ensure that all of the immigrant visas provided by the Congress are used; and (c) modernize the IT infrastructure for the visa processing system.

(b) The last round of discussion on an India-US Social Security Agreement (SSA) was held in May 2010. India has been raising the issue with the US consistently. India raised the issue of social security with the US during the Trade Policy Forum meeting in New Delhi on November 24-25, 2014. In the India and United States Joint Statement on the Trade Policy Forum issued on November 25, 2014, "the United States took note of India's interest in engaging on social security totalization, and agreed to review any information provided by India about developments in its social security regime."

(c) & (d) India has been consistently taking up issues relating to H1 B visas with the US Government at all levels from time to time. During Prime Minister's visit to the United States from September 26-30, 2014, bilateral, regional and global issues of mutual interest, which inter alia includes, strengthening of people-to-people contacts and promoting trade and investment, were discussed. In the Joint Statement issued on September 30, 2014, "both India and the US recognized in particular the contribution of the Indian and US Information Technology (IT) industry and the IT-enabled service industry in strengthening India-US trade and investment relations."

In the meetings of India-US Trade Policy Forum held in New Delhi on November 24-25, 2014, the issues relating to H1 B visa were strongly taken up by India. As per the India and United States Joint Statement on the Trade Policy Forum issued on November 25, 2014, "India and the United States decided to continue their engagement on visa issues, and the United States took note of India's interest in ensuring easier access for Indian professionals in the United States."