



Immigration Policy must be codified into law: Shashi Tharoor

Mon, 18 Jan 2016-09:30pm , New Delhi , PTI

India has a one of the largest diaspora living in different parts of the world and in 2014-15 alone they contributed sent around USD 70 billion through remittance.

Congress leader Shashi Tharoor on Monday batted for a legal framework to address the issues related to immigration and refugees.

Expressing disappointment over the merger of Ministry of External Affairs with Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs (MOIA), the former Minister of State (MoS) for MEA emphasised on giving more attention to the issues related to NRIs and migrants by an MOS rank official.

"Largest refugee migration was when 10 million Bangladeshis came to India in 1971. We also have a large numbers of migrants from Nepal and Bangladesh. We have been very hospitable and very open, but it's rather very bizarre that a democracy, which even has a seat on UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) Executive Committee, has failed to write itself a refugee law and put a legal frame work to it. I have proposed one in private members bill in the last session. I have also been in correspondence with the Minister of External Affairs (Sushma Swaraj) on Foreign Immigration as many of us feel this is massively over due. An immigration Policy must be codified into a law. At the moment our laws and policies are in grave danger of being out of date," Tharoor said.

"I have also written very very concretely that the Standing Committee on Parliament on Foreign Affairs should be consulted before the government springs any Bill on the nation," Tharoor added. He was speaking at a panel discussion after a launch of book 'The Politics of Migration: Indian Emigration in a Globalised World'.

India has a one of the largest diaspora living in different parts of the world and in 2014-15 alone they contributed sent around USD 70 billion through remittance.

Speaking on the issue MoS in the MEA, Gen (ret'd) V K Singh said the Indian diaspora has not only assimilated themselves in the country they are living in, but have also contributed in different fields, including politics, of that nation.

Asserting that diaspora is an asset but India should not "overtly leverage" on this, he noted that Prime Minister Narendra Modi was maintaining a "fine edge" in approaching the Indians living abroad.

"Today we have Mr Modi essentially asking the citizens of that country receiving him, to come and listen to him as a voice from their homeland. And he is actually walking a very fine edge there between what is appropriate and what is not so appropriate for a visiting overseas leader," the Thiruvananthapuram MP said.

Pointing out the role of "affluent and successful" Indian diaspora in helping India, Tharoor said they were of great influence, especially during the Indo-US nuclear deal and when sanctions were imposed on India post-Pokhran nuclear tests and Kargil wars.

"Should Indian foreign policy start leveraging on this. The answer is yes and no. Yes, but not overtly. The more overtly foreign citizens (of Indian origin) are made to look like sort of Indian power, the lesser their clout becomes. It's better for us to encourage and quietly give them material, but don't officially, publicly ever declare that." Tharoor said now that MEA and MOIA have been merged, he has spoken to

V K Singh and asked for special attention on NRIs' issue.

"You may be aware that the Government of Kerala has officially opposed the merger of MEA and MOIA. I told General V K Singh that there should be full time attention to the NRIs and migrants because the issue was a stepchild of the ministry. The merger means it will be further neglected. But this is rather a large and important set of issues and he has shown me that he is that MoS," the Congress leader said.

Pointing out the role of Indian diaspora in Canada, Nadir Patel, Canadian High Commissioner to India, said as many as 19 MPs are of Indian origin.

"Of these, 17 are from Punjab origin. Interestingly, Punjab does not have more MPs in Parliament (Punjab has 13 Lok Sabha seats) and we have four Cabinet ministers of Indian origin," Patel said.

Sanjay Baru, Director of International Institute of Strategic Studies (IISS), noted that Indian immigration should not be considered as brain drain but "brain gain", a term which he claimed was coined by former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh.