

H-1B VISA ROW

Skilled worker movement helps both US, India: MEA

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The movement of skilled professionals, which is an important part of India-US ties, benefits both countries, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said on Friday amid a deepening debate over H-1B visas, on which US President-elect Donald Trump and his backer Elon Musk have recently commented.

"India-US economic ties benefit a lot from the technical expertise provided by skilled professionals, with both sides leveraging their strengths and competitive value. We look forward to further deepening India-US economic ties, which are to our mutual benefit," MEA spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said, replying to questions about the H-1B visa debate in the US.

"Both our countries have a strong and growing economic and technological partnership, and within this ambit, mobility of skilled professionals is an important component," he stressed.

The ongoing debate over the H-1B visa broke out last month (December) after two of Trump's close confidants — Tesla owner Elon Musk and entrepreneur Vivek Ramaswamy — came out in support of the visa. Both have been tasked to head the newly created Department of Government Efficiency. On the other side are leading MAGA (Make America Great Again) proponents, who want US tech companies to hire more Americans. Late last month, Trump said he fully backed the H-1B programme for foreign workers after Musk vowed to go to "war" to defend it.

Indians are the main beneficiaries of H-1B visas, which bring in the best of the talent and brains from across the world. Introduced in 1990, the visas were intended to bring highly skilled foreign workers temporarily to the US. Visa-holders could apply for green cards and extend their stay in the country.

However, the visas are capped at 65,000 annually, with an additional 20,000 for those who received higher education from the US. Indian IT companies have been a major beneficiary of the scheme, and receive visas through a lottery system. India remains closely engaged with the US government on all issues relating to move-



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Spokesperson, Ministry of External Affairs

ment of Indian professionals, including those under the H-1B visa programme, through the appropriate India-US bilateral dialogue mechanism. According to the data released by the US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), Indian nationals received the highest number of H-1B visas, or 72.3 per cent of all the H-1B visas issued by the US for the financial year 2023.

India is keen to strengthen ties under Trump, Jaiswal said. He noted that External Affairs Minister (EAM) S Jaishankar and the Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri visited the US last month and held meetings with Trump's transition team. Both Musk and Ramaswamy have argued that H-1B visas are essential to attract the best of the talent, as the US falls short in many of the specialised fields. They have been joined by Indian American Democratic lawmakers, including Ro Khanna, Raja Krishnamoorthi, and Shri Thanedar, who have come out in support of H-1B visas, after a sudden backlash against it as soon as Trump appointed Sriram Krishnan as his senior policy advisor for artificial intelligence (AI).

Govt protests China's creation of two new counties in Hotan

India on Friday said it has lodged a "solemn protest" with China over establishment of two new counties in Hotan prefecture as parts of these regions fall in Indian union territory of Ladakh. In a strong reaction, New Delhi said creation of new counties will neither have a bearing on India's long-standing and consistent position regarding its sovereignty over the area nor lend legitimacy to China's "illegal and forcible" occupation of the same. External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said India has never accepted the "illegal" Chinese occupation of Indian territory in the area.

PTI

Will protect our interests: Govt on China's plan to build dam on Brahmaputra

Days after China announced its plan to build a mega dam on Brahmaputra river in Tibet, India on Friday said it will continue to monitor and take necessary measures to protect its interests. In its first reaction to the proposed dam, New Delhi urged Beijing to ensure that the interests of downstream states of the Brahmaputra are not harmed by activities in upstream areas. "We will continue to monitor and take necessary measures to protect our interests," External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said. There have been apprehensions that the dam will have adverse impact on Arunachal Pradesh as well as Assam.

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