

Indians facing racial violence

†*336. SHRI NARESH CHANDRA AGRAWAL: Will the Minister of OVERSEAS INDIAN AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that Indians living in foreign countries, including Australia, are facing racial and ethnic violence by local people causing casualties to Indians;

(b) if so, the details of the discussion between Indian Government and the Governments of those countries along with the outcome thereof;

(c) whether Government would consider breaking all diplomatic ties with these countries if such incidents recur; and

(d) if not, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF OVERSEAS INDIAN AFFAIRS (SHRI VAYALAR RAVI): (a) There are no reports of casualties of Indians abroad in racially motivated attacks. However, there have been incidents of attacks on Indian nationals in foreign countries including Australia. Most of these attacks are criminal acts of robbery, assault and violence.

(b) There have been several high level visits from India to Australia and *Vice Versa* and this issue has been discussed. Government of Australia have taken several steps to address the issue which given in the Statement (*See below*).

(c) and (d) Government uses diplomatic channels to address such issues as and when they occur. Government will continue to work with any such countries to redress the issues and improve the situation for Overseas Indians.

Statement

Steps Taken by Australian Government

MEASURES TO IMPROVE SECURITY

A Task Force headed by National Security Advisor Duncan Lewis was set up in June, 2009 in the office of Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, to formulate a 'whole of Government' approach to the issue and liaise with State Governments on the action being taken by them.

In Melbourne as well as in Sydney, the police increased patrolling where incidents had occurred. In Melbourne, police presence was stepped up especially around train stations; the number of transit police, including in plain clothes on late night trains taken by students, was increased; the Victoria State Government's Robbery Task Force was doubled; several offenders were charged. A Community Reference Group for Western Melbourne involving the police and members of the Indian community to

†Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.

facilitate communication on safety issues was established. A hotline was set up for Indian students. Free legal advice and referral for international students was made available at Melbourne. The High Commission and the Consulates General in Sydney and Melbourne directed the State Government's attention to the need for providing more street lighting and CCTV cameras in areas that are prone to such attacks.

The Victorian Government amended the Victorian Sentencing Act 1991 in December, 2009 which requires a sentencing court to have regard to whether an offence was committed by hatred of, or prejudice against, a group of people with common characteristics with which the victim was associated or with which the offender believed the victim was associated. Further, the Victorian Government has appointed a retired Supreme Court Judge, the Hon. Geoffrey Eames AM QC to review the adequacy of the criminal and civil justice system in addressing offences motivated by hatred or prejudice. The findings of the review will be submitted to the Attorney General.

The South Australia Government has set up a taxi council, in which the Consulate is a member, to hold regular discussions with taxi drivers, many of whom are students.

The Senate Committee on Education, Employment and Workplace Relations submitted an inquiry report on welfare of international students in Australia in November, 2009, recommending, *inter alia*, that international students be provided up-to-date information; transport concessions for international students be provided by all States, including Victoria and New South Wales and review of the appropriateness of 20-hour limit on working hours.

The Australian Government has commissioned a study from the Australian Institute of Criminology on crimes against international students using immigration data over the past five years for the five largest international student groups (which includes Indians) cross-matched with police data. The Institute is expected to finalise its report soon.

ALL ISSUES RELATING TO INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

In 2009, the Australian Government commissioned a review by Mr. Bruce Baird of the *Education Services for Overseas Students (ESOS) Act*, 2000, to look into the several problems being faced by international students in Australia.

Mr. Bruce Baird in his report, submitted on 9 March, 2010 titled "Stronger, simpler, smarter ESOS: supporting international students", made a host of recommendations, including:

- tougher registration standards under which higher risk providers pay higher registration fees;

- greater transparency from education providers in providing information to international students including details of facilities and support services and the commissions paid to agents;
- stronger consumer protection mechanisms to ensure students are protected from unscrupulous operators;
- setting up of international student hubs in all capital cities to provide information and advocacy services to international students;
- creation of a single Tuition Protection Service that will allow displaced students to be relocated with public universities and TAFEs.
- a warning that current student protection arrangements have proved inadequate and criticising the existing ineffective regulatory enforcement and exploitation of links between education and migration.
- NSW and Victoria Governments to join with other Australian States and territories in extending transport concessions to international students.
- Education Ministers in the States to ensure that the vulnerabilities exposed in the education quality assurance frameworks by unscrupulous international education providers are addressed;
- Asking whether the current education quality assurance frameworks appropriately assure Australian education and training delivered offshore;
- Regulators and policy makers to actively take into consideration student outcomes and industry benchmarks, where available, when considering the adequacy of a provider's resources, facilities, teachers and support services.

The Australian Government to :

- consider changing the skilled migration program settings to remove the bias towards particular courses and instead focus on higher skilled qualifications in the VET and higher education sectors;
- 'grandfather' future changes to skilled migration policy, where possible appropriate, for international students and recent graduates.
- Further research to be undertaken to better understand the causes and frequency of violence against international students.
- The State and territory police forces to work with providers, student representative bodies and the international student hubs to deliver better safety information to international students.
- International students to have access to equitable travel concessions.

- Providers to play a more active role in securing accommodation for international students.
- The Fair Work Ombudsman to continue to deliver outreach programs that work with providers, unions, students and peak bodies to promote and enforce the safeguards of the Australian industrial relations system.
- The Department of Health and Ageing (DoHA), in consultation with international students, to work with health insurance providers to make a wider range of health insurance policies available to international students.

On 29 October, 2010, Senator Chris Evans, Minister for Tertiary Education released the Council of Australian Governments' (COAG) International Students Strategy for Australia. The Strategy outlines 12 initiatives to address four key areas of concern including: international student wellbeing, consumer protection, the quality of international education and the availability of better information for international students. In April, 2010, COAG committed to a range of practical initiatives to better support international students, as part of the Strategy. These include:

- A national community engagement strategy that will facilitate connections between international students and the broader community, including increased understanding of rights and support services;
- The development of an International Student Consultative Committee in the first half of 2011;
- The Study in Australia information portal, which has been providing authoritative, comprehensive, accurate and up-to-date information for current and prospective students on studying and living in Australia. The portal has been active since 1 July, 2010, with information in 12 languages.
- Overseas Student Health Cover (OSHC), which is now compulsory for international students for the proposed duration of their student visit, not just their first year.

Other measures outlined in the Strategy include international student surveys, the requirement for providers to develop student safety plans, the establishment of provider closure taskforces, and a strengthened Australian Quality Training Framework and Education Services for Overseas Students (ESOS) Act.

These initiatives support the findings of the Baird Review of the Education Services for Overseas Students (ESOS) Act 2000.

Opening of Sanskriti schools across the country

†*337. SHRI KALRAJ MISHRA: Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

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