



By: Tomorrow's Affairs Staff

India and the USA have a shared interest in reducing illegal immigration



Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi will be one of the first world leaders Donald Trump will receive at the White House after starting his second term. PM Modi will be in Washington "sometime in February," President Trump **said** after their phone call last Monday.

It will be a meeting of allies, of friends who worked quite well together during Trump's previous term and who share a very similar political philosophy of strengthening national sovereignty and global alliances when it serves them.

However, President Trump and PM Modi will engage in more than just pleasant talks about the direction of their cooperation over the next four years. The issue of Indian migrants in the US is a pressing matter that they must address, if not immediately, then at least initiate a swift resolution from their very first meeting.

While watching Trump's campaign promises to deport illegal migrants come true in the first days of his term, India is positioning itself cooperatively.

The head of Indian diplomacy, Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, **met** with the new US Secretary of State, Marco Rubio, in Washington last week and said on that occasion that India is ready to accept the deportation of undocumented Indians who are in the US.

"We have always taken the view that if there are any of our citizens who are not here legally, if we are sure that they are our citizens, we have always been open to their legitimate return to India," said Minister Jaishankar in Washington.

The tip of the iceberg

The US authorities have already determined that about 18,000 Indian citizens have been staying illegally in the US, and their status is now being checked by New Delhi. Even if the two governments agree to deport them, this is a large number of people and just the tip of the iceberg.

The Pew Research Center has **estimated** that there are around 725,000 undocumented Indians in the USA. This makes India the third largest source of illegal immigrants to the USA after Mexico and El Salvador.

Although estimates of the number of undocumented immigrants from India vary, their number is growing the fastest among all nations

However, according to an estimate by the Department of Homeland Security, there are almost four times fewer undocumented Indians in the USA, namely around 220,000 in 2022. Although estimates of the number of undocumented immigrants from India vary, their number is growing the fastest among all nations, by up to 70% in the last decade.

This trend may be more worrying for both governments than the total number of Indian illegal immigrants in the US, which remains relatively small compared to the millions of immigrants from South America.

Students and high-skilled workers

India has an interest in working with the Trump administration, which is clearly determined to consistently curb illegal immigration, as the case of Colombia this week has made very clear.

First of all, it is important for New Delhi not to jeopardise the current visa regime, under which students and highly skilled workers go to the US (H-1B visas).

The number of Indian students at American universities has been **growing** rapidly from year to year. This year, there will be more than 330,000, overtaking Chinese students at the top of the list of foreign students in the USA.

Their **expenses** in the US will exceed USD 17 billion this year. That is about USD 52,000 for

every Indian student in the US, including tuition, housing, and other expenses.

India and the US have reason to avoid restrictions on the legal immigration of high-skilled workers to the US

Any restriction on their entry into the US would undoubtedly affect India, as the country would be left without a large number of highly skilled experts. However, the US would also be affected due to the large profits of universities and the large number of talented experts, some of whom will stay to work in the US.

Moreover, India and the US have reason to avoid restrictions on the legal immigration of high-skilled workers to the US through the H-1B programme. No less than three quarters of the total of almost 400,000 of these visas in 2023 were issued to Indian professionals to enter the US, and only 12% to Chinese high-skilled workers.

Most of these professionals from India work in the fields of science, engineering, and technology; i.e., 65% of them are in IT-related jobs.

Will India receive preferential treatment?

The highly professionalised structure of legal immigration will give India an advantage regarding the Trump administration's cuts to migrants.

But the high rate and sharp growth in the number of illegal immigrants from India to the US disrupt this mutual interest and will undoubtedly be among the priorities of the dialogue between Washington and New Delhi.



The migrant issue has a chance to be resolved more quickly and to mutual satisfaction, much more than other major sources of migration to the US, especially those from Latin America, can expect - Donald Trump with Narendra Modi

The issue of migration and mutual cooperation between the US and India in the high-tech sector is closely intertwined and seems to go both ways, as a large number of American professionals (estimated at 600,000) work in Indian tech companies.

In the upcoming complex talks with Trump, which will certainly include mutual trade tariffs, the migrant issue has a chance to be resolved more quickly and to mutual satisfaction, much more than other major sources of migration to the US, especially those from Latin America, can expect.

This dialogue will take place in a generally friendly framework between the two leaders, but also in a profound strategic interdependence in which both see long-term interests for their countries.