

IT industry upset over new US law to hike visa fee

Indo-Asian News Service
Bangalore, December 24

THE resilient Indian IT industry on Friday expressed outrage over the latest US law to increase the visa fee on its skilled workers to share the healthcare burden of 9/11 victims.

"It's a retrograde step targeting the Indian IT industry again to meet the healthcare costs in the US. It is a disappointing move," Infosys Technologies Ltd Chief Executive S Gopalakrishnan told IANS here.

The James Zadroga 9/11 Health and Compensation Act of 2010, passed by the US Congress late Wednesday, is aimed at raising \$4.3 billion over the next five years by taxing goods and services sourced from countries like India, China and Thailand.

"The latest protectionist move is inconsistent with the ethos that were exchanged during the visit of US President Barack Obama to India," Wipro Executive Vice-President Suresh Senapathy said.

Coming as it does after the visa fee was hiked on Indian techies in August to fund border security, the new healthcare law seeks to meet the treatment of those suffering from illness contracted while clearing the debris of the terror-struck World Trade Centre at the Ground Zero in New York.

"As long as unemployment is high, there will be pressure on politicians and government to do something to show that they are concerned over the situa-

tion. Unfortunately, their focus is on immigrants," Gopalakrishnan said.

Dismayed over the move to even levy two per cent cess on imports, Senapathy said the IT industry hoped that the Obama administration would take steps not to let the healthcare bill pass through the legislation.

"The consolation is the new Act will be applicable for five years (till 2015) as against the 10-year timeframe stipulated in the bill," Senapathy said.

Echoing the concerns of the IT bellwethers and other firms in this tech hub, Nasscom President Som Mittal said the industry representative body did not expect the bill to be enacted into law so soon as the Indian position was already conveyed to the US government.

"Though the bill was in the knowledge of our government and the industry, we thought it may not go through in such a hurry, as the US Congress session was to break for Christmas and year-end holiday season," Mittal said.

Regretting that the US lawmakers were targeting the technology sector and overseas companies each time they have to fund new schemes due to huge deficit budget, Mittal said the 9/11 Health and Compensation Act would impact the Indian IT companies and hurt their bottomline, as they have to absorb the additional cost.



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