

Situation improving for Indians in Australia: Vayalar Ravi

The situation of Indian students in Australia was improving with constant monitoring by authorities in both countries, Overseas Indian Affairs Minister Vayalar Ravi said Tuesday while an official from the southern continent stressed that her government had a 'zero tolerance policy on racism'.

'Police is taking action one after another and things are under control; maybe there are stray incidents here and there,' Ravi told reporters after his meeting with Lisa Paul, secretary in Australia's department of education, employment and workplace relations.

He added that the Indian High Commission had been in constant touch with the Australian government to monitor the steps taken for the safety of Indian students.

'Things are improving, that is our impression,' said Ravi as news came in of another student being assaulted in Melbourne Monday.

It was the 16th such attack on Indians in Australia since May 9.

Paul said Australia 'absolutely condemned the appalling attacks that have taken place on some Indian students'.

'Today, I have outlined to the minister some of the concrete, positive and urgent steps that Australia has been taking so that all these attacks cease and Indian students are supported well during the duration of their studies.'

She said 'criminal elements' were mainly behind these attacks.

'Efforts in increasing the police capacity in these vulnerable areas, particularly in Melbourne, are just starting to settle in. So, we will see over time a drop in these incidents, but we are monitoring the situation in Australia on more than a daily basis,' said Paul.

Responding to a question on whether there was any hint of racism behind the attacks, she said Australia had a 'zero tolerance policy on racism'.

'We absolutely condemn anything that disturbs the harmony that we value in society.'

Stating that this was the 'most important thing' she was dealing with, Paul said Deputy Prime Minister Julia Gillard had last week called a meeting of provincial education ministers.

'We met with a delegation of students and committed to urgent action on a wide range of areas, including a 24 hour hotline to increasing significantly the amount of information that students receive about Australia,' she said.

In the meeting between Ravi and the Australian official, the issue of ensuring that students working part-time got the minimum wage as per law was also raised.

Nearly 90,000 Indian students are studying in various Australian education institutions. A series of attacks and robberies on Indian students had been highlighted prominently in the Indian media,

which had led to statements of assurance on safety from the highest level of the Australian government.

This month, India released guidelines for Indian students to ensure that they had a safe stay.

Paul also told reporters here that Australia was looking at tightening regulations to ensure the quality of educational facilities in her country.

India has been asking Australia to also register agents working for Australian educational institutions. Besides, the Indian government also wants to keep a tab on the number of students going to Australia.

(© IANS / India eNews)