

## 'Cocktail of issues' behind attacks on Indians, says Australian MP

The disconnect between the 'established Indian order' and students was a matter of concern, says a prominent Australian parliamentarian who blames a 'cocktail of issues' for the recent attacks on Indian students in his country.

'Basically it is a cocktail of issues that are affecting Indian students. They are socio-economic reasons and security is also an aspect, especially for those who live in the suburbs,' said Laurie Ferguson, MP and parliamentary secretary for multicultural affairs and settlement services.

'What is also important here to understand is that there is not much connect between the established Indian order that comprises businessmen and academics and the students. That is a concern too,' Ferguson told IANS amid anxieties over the increasing instances of Indian students being assaulted in Australia.

Since May 9, 18 Indian students have been attacked, some of them seriously. Most of the cases have taken place in and around Melbourne.

According to Ferguson, the proposed crackdown by the Australian government on some of the dubious private educational institutions that have drawn a large number of Indians could emerge as a political issue.

'But when we move in against some of the education providers who are misleading students, it could turn out to be a political issue.'

Many offshore agents, he agreed, had been misleading students on their course content and on the terms of engagement while in Australia -- dangling the Permanent Residency (PR) status as bait to get them across to vocational institutes that have proliferated in the last two years.

Ferguson outlined a whole set of reasons that had made Indian students vulnerable, including working late hours and sometimes taking on second jobs to pay off loans.

The surge in the Indian population coupled with the arrivals of students, Ferguson added, needed to be addressed carefully.

'Indians are hardworking, peaceful and also bright. Sure, some of them might be enticed by the PR route but they need to be careful considering that they have not been fully apprised of the ordeals they face here.'

Recent demonstrations by thousands of Indian students in Melbourne and Sydney to protest violent attacks on them have worried administrators and, in turn, cast a cloud on one of the country's biggest earners - the education industry.

The Australian government has already decided to review the national code for education and carry out an audit on the rapidly burgeoning vocational sector.

'We can keep a track of the onshore agents of the institutes. The controls are not too bad. But it is the offshore agents that deliberately mislead students and that is a problem, especially for those

enrolling for the cookery and hospitality sectors,' said Ferguson.

Australia's education industry has boomed in recent years to become the country's third-largest export earner behind coal and iron ore, generating about \$12 billion in revenue in 2008.

Indian students - as well as Chinese - have played a big role in that growth. Their numbers rose 54 percent last year, and have doubled in the past three years. Second only to the ranks of Chinese students, Indians now account for more than 90,000 of the nearly half a million foreigners studying here

*Murali Krishnan ( © IANS / India eNews)*