

Obama administration politicised trafficking report on India

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Washington: US lawmakers have alleged that the Barack Obama administration has "politicised" its annual human trafficking report by improving the status of India, Malaysia and Cuba, despite "minimal progress" by their governments.

The State Department which prepared the Congressional-mandated report released last month, however, denied any wrongdoing and asserted that its report was based on facts.

Senator Bob Corker, chairman of the powerful Senate Foreign Relations Committee, appeared unsatisfied with the response of senior State Department officials who testified before a Congressional hearing yesterday.

He threatened to subpoena information with the department over internal deliberations about questionable upgrades for countries with poor records of combating human trafficking.

The Senate Foreign Relations Committee convened a hearing on the issue after a media report alleged many of the enhanced ratings in the annual Trafficking In Person (TIP) report occurred despite objections from staff with the Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons (J/TIP), who were overruled by diplomatic personnel.

Citing the report, Corker alleged this year's TIP report improved the status of Cuba, Malaysia and India, despite their "minimal progress" in addressing trafficking aggressively.

"It's hard for me to understand how India could possibly be a tier two entity, and I hope the Secretary will explain to us what those competing equities were there because I'm not sure I fully understand," said Corker.

"...in India, it's an amazing thing. As I understand it, the Government of India seized the passports of trafficking victims and their families who were issued T visas, which are reserved, for trafficking victims by the US."

"In other words, we were trying to get trafficking victims here to safety. And we understand that the government of India seized their passports. They've denied international travel to others," he said.

In her response, Under-Secretary of State for Civilian Security, Democracy and Human Rights, Sarah Sewall, defended State Department's decision to rank India as a Tier II nation.

"India's tier two ranking indicates that it does not fully comply with minimum standards but is making efforts to do so," she argued, Sewall said.

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