

PM announces merging of OCI, PIO cards

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NEW DELHI, 8 JAN: Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh today announced merging of the Overseas Citizen of India (OCI) and the Persons of Indian Origin (PIO) cards into a single facility to simplify visa-free entry and participation of Indian diaspora in business and other activities here.

Dr Singh also said that the government had decided to extend the facility of the Indian Community Welfare Fund to all the Indian Missions from the present 42.

Hailing the Indian diaspora, he pointed out that the government had introduced the OCI and PIO cards to facilitate visa-free travel of NRIs and Indian Origin people to India as well as to provide them rights of residency and participation in business and educational activities.

"We have reviewed the functioning of these schemes, and have decided to merge the OCI and PIO cards into a single facility. We hope to iron out some of the problems that have risen in the implementation of these schemes," he said addressing the 9th Pravasi Bharatiya Divas here. In a bid to encouraging PIOs (Indians who have shifted, migrated permanently to other countries over centuries) to visit and invest in India, such people were given PIO cards.

A PIO card holder does not require a visa to visit India and the card is valid for 15 years. A PIO card holder enjoys several economic and educational benefits.

On the other hand, the OCI card is a kind of lifelong visa and any India-origin person can apply for it if his host country allows dual citizenship. Talking about the Indians who emigrate for work, Dr Singh said their welfare is "a matter of special concern for us".

To improve the conditions for migration, India has signed Social Security Agreements with 12 countries and finalised Labour Mobility Partnerships with two others, he said, adding a generic arrangement is also being negotiated with the European Union also. "As a further measure, we have now extended the facility of the Indian Community Welfare Fund to all Indian Missions," he said. At present, such funds are available in 42 Missions.

Dr Singh said the government has decided to establish new Indian cultural centres in the USA, Canada, Saudi Arabia, France and Australia.

"I urge the Indian communities in these countries to support and patronise these centres so that they become effective instruments for projecting the diversity and splendour of Indian culture," the Prime Minister said. In his address, Dr Singh invited the Indian diaspora to invest in the North-east and contribute in accelerating the pace of development in the region.

"I represent Assam in Parliament and I know what countless potential the region has to contribute to nation building given the right opportunities... Providing gainful employment opportunities for the youth is a real challenge. I encourage the diaspora to join hands with local and national efforts to accelerate the pace of development of this region," the Prime Minister said.

The ministry of overseas Indian affairs, which organises the Pravasi Bhartiya Divas, has partnered this time with eight North-eastern states and ministry of development of North-eastern Region to project the region as an attractive destination for investment.

The Prime Minister said the government has decided to start a "skills initiative" for overseas employment of people from North-eastern states.

http://www.thestatesman.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=355064&catid=36