Indian-Americans secret weapon for economic growth: Rep Jim Himes

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Indian-Americans are a "secret weapon for economic growth", Congressman Jim Himes said showering praises on the thriving community, which is the highest-earning ethnic group in the US.

With a population of more than 4.5 million, Indian-Americans make up 1.4 per cent of the US population and are the largest lot of South Asian Americans.

"You are a secret weapon for economic growth… the future of US innovations," Rep Himes, a Democrat representing the 4th district of Connecticut, said during an interactive session with members of Global Organization of People of Indian Origin-Connecticut Chapter (GOPIO-CT).

Speaking about the Indian-American contributions towards creating a hub of tech innovation in Stamford, Connecticut, Himes said the US must find quicker ways to address Green Card backlog and visa issues.

"The brains of tech innovations are here… We have so much to do on immigration" to enable these tech-savvy and entrepreneurial Indian-American community to have a smoother and faster way to have Green Card and job visas, a GOPIO statement quoted Himes as saying.

The Indian tech industry directly generated $103 billion in revenue in the United States last year, and provided direct employment to 207,000 people, according to a NASSCOM study released this year.

In 2021, there were nearly six job postings in the US for every one available computer and math worker. That number has risen to 11 open postings per available IT worker in 2022, the study said.

According to the Foundation for India and Indian Diaspora Studies (FIIDS), there is an average of over 900 days wait time for appointments for visitors' visa (B1/B2) and an average of 400 days wait time for students (F, M, J).

Petition-based temporary workers like H, L, O, P and Q have to wait for an average of 300 days for visa appointments across US consulates in India.

"We need to advocate with local representatives in every state to solve this backlog," said Himes, who serves on the US Congressional Caucus on India and Indian-Americans.

He told GOPIO members that the visa issue is "a solvable problem", and that the right intention and motive is essential to address it.

According to US-based Cato Institute, the employment based green card backlog for skilled Indians had reached 7.19 lakh in September 2021, with an expected wait time of 90 years.

More than two lakh Indians who are mired in this backlog are likely to die before they can conceivably receive a green card (absent a change in the law), the Cato Institute report said.

In a move that could help hundreds of thousands of immigrant families, especially those from India, the White House is looking into a presidential commission's recommendations to cut the processing time for Green Card applications to just six months and to clear the backlogs by April 2023.