

'PERMIT TECH VISA CHANGE'

April 26, 2018



MEASURED TONE: Theresa May (seated, centre) and Narendra Modi (seated, fifth from right) presided over the UK-India CEO Forum, attended by business leaders including Ajay Piramal (seated, fourth from right), Lord Jitesh Gadhia (back row, right), Anil Agarwal (seated, second from left), Rakesh Kapoor (second row, fifth from left) and Patricia Hewitt (second row, third from left)

by NADEEM BADSHAH and RITHIKA SIDDHARTHA

UK AND INDIAN CEOs DISCUSS TRADE, TAXES AND EASE OF DOING BUSINESS

BRITISH and Indian business leaders discussed trade, investment and the impact of tax regimes as the prime minister of both countries, Theresa May and Narendra Modi, respectively, presided over the UK-India CEO Forum in London last week.

Co-chairs of the forum, Gerry Grimstone and Ajay Piramal, were joined by more than two dozen business leaders as the group met last Wednesday (18).

Among those who attended were Vedanta's Anil Agarwal, Rakesh Kapoor of Reckitt Benckiser, Lord Jitesh Gadhia and Patricia Hewitt.

Lord Gadhia told *Eastern Eye*: "Both prime ministers were keen to support business-to-business measures to increase trade and investment flows between UK and India."

Britain has been the largest G20 investor in India in the past decade and India has the fourth largest number of investment projects in the UK.

Discussions were centred on India-UK technology collaboration; data usage and protection; and increasing bilateral trade and investment flows, Lord Gadhia said.

“Other ease of doing business issues, such as mobility of talent, common data standards and the impact of tax regimes were also raised by members,” he added.

Lord Gadhia’s comments came as some MPs and lawyers believe that the UK is missing out on talented IT workers from south Asia due to the tougher visa rules, which they believe need to be reviewed.

They have warned of a skills crisis after a cap on the number of visas issued for skilled non-European workers was reached for a record fourth month in a row in March. Until December, the monthly quota had been passed only once since its introduction in 2011.

Tier 2 visas are issued by the Home Office on a points-based system, which measures a person’s qualifications. Higher-paid workers receive priority once employers have shown they cannot hire the staff they need in the country

In 2016, applicants needed to score at least 21 points for their application to be successful. By March, this figure had risen to 56.

Campaigners say the rules mean the UK will continue to lose out on software engineers, programmers and cybersecurity experts from hubs like Bangalore in southern India after Brexit.

Preet Gill, Labour MP for Birmingham Edgbaston, told *Eastern Eye*: “The Home Office needs to urgently review the Tier 2 quotas as the need within many sectors has increased, given the uncertainty over Brexit. The UK needs to attract talent in the IT industry from further afield as opposed to restricting itself. Given its relationship with

Tech London Advocates, a group that promotes the interests of technology, has written to immigration minister Caroline Nokes demanding the annual quota is raised from 20,700. It said the system is “confused” because the private sector is competing with the NHS to secure Tier 2 visas. More than a third of the allocation goes to health service staff.

Vicash Ramkissoon is the business immigration director at Duncan Lewis Solicitors.

He told *Eastern Eye*: “The monthly cap on skilled workers is now likely to be exceeded five times in a row. This will hit tech companies the hardest, given the current shortage of skilled staff in the sector. If this trend continues, it is likely that the UK will lose its international appeal for attracting the brightest talent in the industry, especially software engineers from the Indian subcontinent.

“This situation calls for an open dialogue between the Home Office and the tech sector to propose solutions, such as adding ‘in demand’ IT roles to the shortage occupation list or making them exempt from the annual cap altogether.

“The most practical solution would be to assess trends over the last few months where the monthly quota has been exceeded and to consider increasing the following monthly allocation in line with demand from all business sectors.

“However, this is unlikely, given the current obsession with controlling net migration.”

Amjad Malik, an immigration solicitor in Rochdale, Greater Manchester, added: “Due to several changes in the Tier 2 work permit regime, it’s next to impossible to sponsor foreign nationals to come and work on skilled jobs.

“‘Work, earn, offer your best and pay tax’ must be the motto rather than ‘do not come to Britain at all with your expertise skills and experience’. The Tier 2 regime must be overhauled completely.”

The Home Office said the government had negotiated an implementation period that

"It means that the provisions in the immigration bill... will not be needed until after this ends in December 2020.

"The bills will be brought forward when parliamentary time allows."

Jurmoloya Rava