

Conservatives uphold Amendment to Bill C-49

RENU MEHTA

Toronto

Conservatives are backing the amendments to the Human Smugglers from Abusing Canada's Immigration System Act despite the Liberal announcement saying they would not support Bill C-49. Speaking to the media on December 2, Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism Minister Jason Kenney called the Liberals opposition to the government's effort to crack down on illegal immigration through human smuggling irresponsible.

"As you know, Canadians were deeply concerned about the violation of our immigration laws and the fairness and integrity of our immigration system when we saw two large vessels carrying illegal migrants arriving on the west coast in the past year, most recently with some 500 illegal migrants arriving in August. These illegal arrivals resulted in a massive reduction in public support for immigration to Canada as well as refugee protection. In our view, it's critically important to reinforce and defend public confidence in our immigration and refugee protection systems," said Kenney addressing a number of media in a teleconference call.

The Minister focused on Tamil immigrants using illegal means for entry into Canada.

"The reality is this. We are talking typically here about Tamil immigrants. If someone is really facing potential persecution, why would they pay \$50,000 to come to Canada rather than simply cross the ocean and go to Tamil Nadu, go to Chennai? The answer is very simple; because they're seeking economic opportunities in Canada and they hope to sponsor their family members to Canada," said the Minister quoting a CBC report that had interviewed Tamils from Chennai in India who had paid smuggling syndicates to come to Canada.

"I do not accept for a moment that we should consider people who are paying the criminal gangs money to come here and they are all refugees. Some may be. Each case will be determined by the Refugee Board and the changes we propose would continue that system. Anyone who's found to be a refugee would not be returned. But we have to find a way of sending a message to people that if they want to come to Canada, paying a criminal gang \$50,000 is not the right way of doing it," he stated.

Kenney reiterated that Canada requires strong laws to deter smugglers from targeting Canada.

"I don't want to be a Minister of Immigration on whose watch a vessel coming from Southeast Asia, a leaky, rusty boat acquired by a bunch of criminals that ends up sinking. I



Jason Kenney

don't want to see people losing their lives as they pursue the false dream of coming to Canada through an illegal smuggling operation," he said.

"We need to be able to demonstrate to Canadians that immigration laws in Canada are fair and they're characterized by the rule of law. What these smuggling networks and their customers do is to undermine the fairness of the system by jumping the queue and violating the principle of the rule of law in our immigration system," said the Minister.

For this, said Kenney, Bill C-49 is a strong but reasonable effort to crack down on the smuggling activity that

would impose tough, mandatory, minimum prison sentences on those involved in the smuggling.

"It would increase fines and penalties for the owners of ships used in smuggling ventures and it would also reduce the incentives for people to buy their way into smuggling operations as the customers," he said.

Other opposition parties including the New Democrat party, the Bloc Quebecois and the Green Party also urged Members of Parliament to reject Bill C-49 stating that the Bill may penalize legitimate refugees.

"The Bill allows the federal government to designate 'irregulars', which carries the unacceptable risk of targeting those who seek and are entitled to Canada's protection," said Elizabeth May, Green Party Leader. "In addition, the Bill imposes minimum penalties in an attempt to prevent our courts from tailoring penalties to fit the crime; it grants the Minister wide and arbitrary discretion to detain individuals and then attempts to prevent independent and rational review. These are significant problems that demonstrate this Bill should not pass."

The Bill does not constitute any violation to the Charter of Freedom and Rights, said Kenney.

"If they were the least bit serious about actually helping in the fight against human smuggling and these

illegal boat arrivals, they would at least allow Bill C-49 to go to the Immigration Committee for study, further debate and possible amendment. But they won't even allow that to happen because they're so ideologically opposed to strong measures," said Kenney adding that it is up to the courts to decide whether the bill was in compliance with the law.

"We will still continue to press forward with these reforms. At an appropriate moment, we will still put the bill to a vote. If defeated in Parliament, the government will continue with our efforts to disrupt the smugglers in Southeast Asia," said the Minister. "We've significantly increased the presence of the Canadian police services in Southeast Asia, particularly in Thailand. We've also appointed a special senior envoy to Southeast Asia to work with those countries on the smuggling issue. We are involved in something called the Bali Process which is a diplomatic effort between all of the countries in that region to combat human smuggling," he added saying that only operational measures are not sufficient.

"We also need legislative changes so that these smugglers and their customers know in the long run that it's not worth their while or money to target Canada," concluded the Minister.

Skilled Immigrants to be connected to meaningful employment

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A Ian Rego arrived in Canada from Singapore eight years ago. His goal was to become one of North America's top communications professionals, but instead had to spend two years in positions well below his skill level. The turning point was an internship that allowed him to achieve his dream.

"I was offered an internship with Proctor and Gamble and today I have a Managerial position at the organization," he says.

Pushpa Kanagaratnam, born in Sri Lanka, arrived in Canada from Norway as an International Fellow at the University of Toronto, completing a PhD in psychology.

Her biggest challenge was to find her professional niche when she found she was overqualified for research positions, and most community organizations wanted social workers, not psychologists.

"Underemployment makes it even worse. Why is it so hard to accept that an immigrant can be equally good for a position? It shouldn't be extraordinary for immigrants to do well," she says.

Now there is hope for professional immigrants like Rego and Kanagaratnam arriving in Canada who want to find meaningful employment. The



Top row from L-R: Deloitte's Yezdi Pavri, TRIEC executive director Elizabeth McIsaac, Ontario Minister of Citizenship and Immigration Dr. Eric Hoskins, Scotiabank's Brian Toda and City of Toronto's Joe Pennachetti. Bottom row from L-R: KPMG's Michael Bach, TRIEC chair of the board Ratna Omidvar and TD Bank Financial Group's Carrie Blair. Pic by MANSa photography

Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council (TRIEC) announced Scotiabank's corporate sponsorship that will support thousands of skilled immigrants to establish and strengthen professional networks across the Greater Toronto Area.

Highlighting the details at a Mentoring Partnership Recognition Reception at the Toronto Board of Trade on December 2, the sponsorship will include developing an online learning platform to connect and support members of professional immigrant

networks, host learning exchanges and connect network members to employers, community partners and other relevant stakeholders.

"Helping newcomers to Canada is a priority for Scotiabank," says Ahmad Dajani, vice president, Multicultural Banking, Scotiabank. "Our sponsorship of TRIEC's Professional Immigrant Networks initiative is a natural extension of our focus on providing value added programs and services that will help newcomers get a head start."

Scotiabank was also one of five employers who were specially recognized by The Mentoring Partnership, a program of TRIEC, for being leaders in mentor recruitment.

The partnership, that brings together recent skilled immigrants and established professionals in occupation-specific mentoring relationships, has mentored over 1500 newcomers by employees of D Bank Financial Group, City of Toronto, Deloitte, KPMG and Scotiabank. The event also recognized 27 active corporate

partners who opened doors and created an even playing field for skilled immigrants.

"The Ontario government recognizes the importance of The Mentoring Partnership, a program that we proudly support as part of our Open Ontario plan to support newcomers and create jobs," says Ontario Minister of Citizenship and Immigration Dr. Eric Hoskins. "We also welcome the leadership role Scotiabank is taking with building professional immigrant networks supporting newcomers' success in joining the workforce while making Ontario their home."

Meanwhile, since 2004, over 5300 skilled immigrants have been mentored through The Mentoring Partnership program, giving them industry insights, introducing them to professional contacts, and ultimately bringing them closer to meaningful employment.

"We are delighted to shine the light on these employers and their leadership which has produced such great results and impact," says Elizabeth McIsaac, TRIEC Executive Director, "And with a new focus on professional immigrant networks, we are looking forward to new strategies and opportunities to connect more skilled immigrants to the right jobs, to create new linkages among networks, and to contribute to a more vibrant and prosperous city region."

