

External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj was not on the same page as the Home Ministry regarding a key pact to be signed with the U.K. on a return of illegal migrants.

After Minister of State for Home Affairs Kiren Rijiju had assured the U.K. authorities of signing the pact during his London visit earlier this year, External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj expressed reservations on some aspects of the pact, putting it on hold.

A senior government official said that the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed after due approval of the Union Cabinet and going back on the “sovereign assurance” had put India in an embarrassing position.

The official said Ms. Swaraj had reservations about a key provision in the pact that gave Indian agencies around 15-days to verify the antecedents of an illegal migrant in the U.K.

“The 15-day duration was for those Indians who had been caught living illegally in the U.K. but were in possession of valid documents. So the 15-day limit was to verify their credentials. This was not agreed to by the Foreign Minister,” said another official.

U.K. Minister Baroness Susan Williams on Monday raised the issue with MoS Home Affairs Kiren Rijiju at a bilateral meeting.

During her maiden visit to India on November 7, 2016, British Prime Minister Theresa May had said that the U.K. would consider an improved visa deal “if at the same time we can step up the speed and volume of return of Indians with no right to remain in the U.K.”

As per the original MoU, the security agencies in India were to verify the antecedents of document-less illegal migrants in the U.K. within 72 days. If no report was given within the stipulated time frame, the illegal migrant would be deported automatically.

A senior MEA official said the agreement was put on indefinite hold after the National Security Advisor Ajit Doval conveyed that the 15-day limit was unworkable.

“At the same time, Indian High Commission had sent a file with suggestions that we will only sign with the U.K. if they give us concessions on visas for professionals and extensions which the Chinese get. Ms. Swaraj then ordered that the agreement is re-evaluated and renegotiated if necessary. In effect it is on hold,” said the official.

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