

# US Congress under pressure to overhaul immigration laws

REUTERS, Washington

An unlikely mix of Hispanics, farmers and high-tech businesses has stepped up pressure on Congress to overhaul US immigration laws, boosting prospects for a bill that would allow more foreign workers into the country.

Last year, the Republican-led House of Representatives derailed an immigration bill because it would have given a path to citizenship for those who entered the country illegally.

But supporters say chances are good that the new, Democratic-led Congress will pass some form of immigration bill. President George W Bush is likely to renew his call for broad immigration legislation, including a guest worker programme, in his State of the Union address this week.

"I think prospects are good," said Assistant Senate Majority Leader Richard Durbin of Illinois.

Pressure to allow in more workers has been mounting since Congress passed a law in September to fund hundreds of miles of new fences along the border with Mexico and a series of raids against illegal workers last month by the US Department of Homeland Security.

On January 8, the League of United Latin American Citizens and the Hispanic Federation asked Democratic leaders to take action on

immigration within 100 days, saying the raids "stirred further emotion and fear" in the Hispanic communities.

Swift Co., whose meatpacking plant was raided on December 12, said this month that the raid could cost the company as much as \$30 million.

And farm groups said farmers faced millions of dollars in losses this year if a crackdown against illegal immigration continues without a balancing programme to bring in workers legally.

"There is a sense of urgency here," said Sen Larry Craig, an Idaho Republican who, along with California Democrat Sen Dianne Feinstein, introduced a bill that would create a special programme for illegal farm workers to adjust their status.

US companies are also clamouring for more H1B visas to allow foreign software engineers and other skilled workers into the country.

The 65,000 visas allotted for 2007 were taken by the end of May last year, months before the end of the fiscal year in September, said Jack Krumholz, the head of Microsoft Corp.'s government affairs office. It is also difficult to get permanent US residency for foreign workers who would like to stay, he said.

"This is becoming for high-tech companies a huge retention issue,"

Krumholz said. "We will start to see highly valued tech employees emigrate back to their home countries."

Last year, a bill passed the Senate that would have provided more visas for highly skilled workers, combined tougher border enforcement measures with a guest worker programme, and given millions of illegal immigrants a chance to earn US citizenship.

But the bill was never considered by the House, where a solid group of Republicans opposed it, calling it an amnesty for people who broke US law.

Instead the House passed

enforcement-only legislation that further criminalized illegal presence in the United States and tried to make tough immigration enforcement an issue in the 2006 congressional elections.

Since then, some of the more outspoken opponents of the measure, including Republican Rep. John Hostettler of Indiana and Rep. J.D. Hayworth of Arizona, lost their seats in midterm elections on November 7.

But Rep. Thomas Tancredo, a Colorado Republican who led the fight against the Senate bill last year and who is exploring his chances as a potential presidential candidate, says he will push to block any similar comprehensive bill this year.

"If we stop yelling at each other and just calmly and methodically work through the issues... we'll come up with a practical bill that will work and will last," Lofgren said.

House Republican leaders, mindful of the deep split in their party over immigration, say they see a chance for broad legislation, but it will need to put tough border enforcement measures in place before any guest worker programme or other plans for the estimated 12 million illegal immigrants living in the United States.

"There is a path to a bipartisan solution and I think that there are a lot of informal bipartisan discussions going on to try to strike that balance," said Florida Rep. Adam Putnam, a member of the House Republican leadership.

Proponents of a comprehensive bill, though confident of passage, still expect new battles, including whether illegal immigrants should have the chance to earn citizenship.

House Republican Whip Roy Blunt of Missouri said he would not support a bill that offered citizenship for those who entered the country illegally. But Rep. Zoe Lofgren, a California Democrat who is heading the House Judiciary panel on immigration, believes differences can be worked out.

"If we stop yelling at each other and just calmly and methodically work through the issues... we'll come up with a practical bill that will work and will last," Lofgren said.

Pedestrians suffer as Dhaka Water and Sewerage Authority (Wasa) continues its road digging haphazardly for the last two weeks near AGB Colony at Motijheel in the city. The picture was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR



**CA's speech reflects reasonable demands of all parties**  
Says Pak HC

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Pakistan High Commissioner (HC) to Bangladesh Alamgir Babar paid a courtesy call on Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) President AQM Badruddoza Chowdhury at Baridhara in the city yesterday.

After the meeting, LDP Central Joint Secretary Major General (retd) Anwarul Kabir Talukder said they discussed development of bilateral relations.

The Pak HC told the journalists that the visit was aimed at strengthening friendship between the two countries.

When asked by journalists Kabir said, "Our reaction to chief adviser's address to the nation is obviously positive. We welcome the speech as it has reflected reasonable demands of all political parties."

About the resignation of the former chief election commissioner Justice MA Aziz, he said, "Aziz should have resigned long before to avert loss of lives, bloodshed and violence."

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Pakistan said on Monday that fugitive Taliban leader Mullah Mohammad Omar was most likely leading the Islamist movement's insurgency from Afghanistan's southern city of Kandahar.

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