



US may oust 1.2 million students!

If they are enrolled in universities offering online-only classes amid the outbreak

● Students taking classes fully online course load will not be issued a visa or allowed entry

TDI, Agencies

Leave the country or face deportation!

The Trump administration has told nearly a million foreign students who are pursuing various degree programmes there.

Reason: Their universities had either switched to online-only classes or planning to do so this fall amid the deadly coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), which runs a major portion of the US student visa programme, has set the new rule.

According to the Migration Policy Institute, a think tank based in Washington, DC, about 1.2 million students who fall under the affected visas were enrolled and registered at more than 8,700 schools nationwide as of March 2018, according to a CNN report.

The question of ICE officials is why staying in the US for online classes when it can be done from their respective home countries.

So ICE officials say students taking classes fully online course load will not be issued a visa or allowed entry, referring to the September to December semester.

The agency suggests students shift to hybrid schools offering a mix of online and in-person classes to continue their stay.

However, that too will require a United States SEVP certification.

International students enrolled in academic programmes at US universities and colleges study on an F-1 visa and those enrolled in technical programmes at vocational or other recognised nonacademic institutions, other than a language training programme come to the US on an M-1 visa.

Surprised and alarmed by the decision, experts said the latest decision will have "long-term repercussions".

This is going to create "more confusion and more uncertainty," vice president of the American Council on Education told CNN.



India sent the largest number of students (251,290 to the US after China (478,732) in 2017 and 2018, according to the United States Student and Exchange Visitor Programme (SEVP)



He asks, "what would happen if the public health situation deteriorates in the fall and universities that had been offering in-person classes feel they have to shift all courses online to stay safe."

Universities in dilemma

Trump administration's decision is thus also derailing the plans of universities starting to roll out online plans to reopen in the fall as a result of the coronavirus pandemic.

CNN points out that at Har-

vard, for example, all course instruction will be delivered online, including for students living on campus. For international students, that opens the door to them having to leave the US.

Harvard University President Larry Bacow told CNN in a statement Monday evening that "we are deeply concerned that the guidance issued today by US Immigration and Customs Enforcement imposes a blunt, one-size-fits-all approach to a complex problem giving international students, particularly those in online programs, few options beyond leaving the country or transferring schools."

Students, who come from countries where internet connection might be very spotty or where classes might fall in the middle of the night local, already expressed their frustration seeing an uncertain future.

Some are concerned that they may not be able to attend classes in their home countries for lack of availability of specific online-only resources required by schools.

Travel restrictions a concern

The bigger issue, however, is the travel restrictions.

Current regulations blocking travel from the United States right now for being a COVID-19 hotspot may not allow students to go home, even if they want.

In fact, the US administration has made a litany of changes to the US immigration system amid the pandemic.

Last month, the White House issued an immigration proclamation dramatically curtailing

legal immigration to the US sending hundreds of people and businesses into a scramble to understand whether their future plans are derailed, CNN points out.

In the proclamation, the administration argued that the "extraordinary circumstances" posed by the coronavirus called for the suspension of employment-based visas. But immigrant advocates, industries and experts say the administration is taking advantage of the pandemic to make sweeping immigration changes and advance its agenda to slash legal immigration.

Monday's announcement, like the changes that preceded it, could similarly result in many foreign students who often pay high tuition to have to return to their home country.

The US Department of Homeland Security will be publishing the procedures and responsibilities in the Federal Register as a Temporary Final Rule.

1.2m

who fall under the affected visas were enrolled and registered at more than 8,700 schools nationwide as of March 2018

What the new law say?

● Nonimmigrant F-1 and M-1 students attending schools operating entirely online may not take a full online course load and remain in the United States.

● The U.S. Department of State will not issue visas to students enrolled in schools and/or programmes that are fully online for the fall semester nor will US Customs and Border Protection permit these students to enter the United States.

● Active students currently in the United States enrolled in such programs must depart the country or take other measures, such as transferring to a school with in-person instruction to remain in lawful status. If not, they may face immigration consequences including, but not limited to, the initiation of removal proceedings.

500 Bahrainis study in the US every year

Manama

Some 500 Bahraini students are enrolled in over the 4,700 accredited institutions of higher learning in the United States each year.

This is according to Justin Siberell, US Ambassador to the Kingdom of Bahrain, who said, "American colleges and universities welcome you, as do the American people and communities throughout our country," in an earlier statement.

"US colleges and universities take pride in providing safe, welcoming environments for all their students, and I want to stress how welcome you are in the United States," according to his statement on the US embassy website.

India to raise the issue

New Delhi

An Indian official reportedly called the decision as "unacceptable" which he said will also adversely impact even the US' image of a credible destination for higher studies.

The issue will be raised at the India-US foreign office consultations with David Hale, the Under Secretary for Political Affairs. The consultations will be held between the Ministry of External Affairs and the US Department of State.



David Hale