

US changing visa rules to attract the highly-skilled

Washington, February 04: To make America more attractive to highly-skilled foreign students and workers, the United States has announced a series of reforms, including changes in the F-1 and H-1B visa rules, that may benefit professionals from India.

The interim measures are aimed at improving the competitiveness of US companies in the world market and stimulating US job creation before comprehensive immigration reforms for "fixing our broken immigration system," the Department of Homeland Security announced.

The proposed changes include providing work authorization for spouses of certain H-1B holders and allowing outstanding professors and researchers to present a broader scope of evidence of academic achievement.

Also proposed is expanding eligibility for 17-month extension of optional practical training (OPT) for F-1 international students to include students with a prior degree in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM).

The changes would also allow for additional part-time study for spouses of F-1 students and expand the number of Designated School Officials (DSOs) at schools certified by DHS to enrol international students.

United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) will launch Feb 22 its Entrepreneurs in Residence initiative with an Information Summit in Silicon Valley, California to discuss how to maximize current immigration laws' potential to attract foreign entrepreneurial talent.

The Information Summit will focus on ensuring that immigration pathways for foreign entrepreneurs are clear and consistent, and better reflect today's business realities, the announcement said.

As a part of comprehensive immigration reform, President Barack Obama supports legislative measures that would attract and retain immigrants who create jobs and boost competitiveness here in the US, DHS said.

These include creating a "Startup Visa," strengthening the H-1B programme, and "stapling" green cards to the diplomas of certain foreign-born graduates in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) fields.

"Together these actions would help attract new businesses and new investment to the US and ensure that the US has the most skilled workforce in the world," DHS said.

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