US Immigration Visa Guidelines

Why in news?

The United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement (US ICE) has given new regulations for international students' visa.

What are the new US regulations?

- International students might have to leave the US if their universities moved classes entirely online in the upcoming semester.
- The agency also said that if students would not move back, they would face the risk of deportation.
- Students attending schools offering normal in-person classes can stay.
- However, they cannot take more than one class or three credit hours online.

What do these regulations mean for Indian students?

- Indian students currently enrolled in schools or programmes that are entirely online for the fall semester will have to come back home.
- They can stay back only if they take alternative steps like moving to a school that offer in-person instruction or choose a medical leave.
- As the pandemic forced American campuses to shut down, Indian students had to come back to India.
- These students would not be permitted to enter the US if their classes are entirely online.
- The same applies to prospective students who were going to join in the fall semester.

What would happen to those enrolled in universities with a blend of classes?

- Indian students enrolled in universities that have announced a hybrid blend of in-person and online classes for the fall semester can
    1. Remain in the US, and
    2. Those who returned to India will be allowed to re-enter the US.
- They will be allowed to take more than one class or three credit hours online.
- The university will have to certify to the US government that the student is not taking an entirely online course load for the fall 2020 semester.
- This exemption does not apply to F-1 visa students in English language

training programmes.
- Also, this exemption does not apply to M-1 visa students, who are not permitted to enrol in any online courses.

Why has the US government announced these changes?

- International students in the US are required to do most of their learning through contact classes.
- The campus shutdowns forced the government to provide temporary exemptions for international students to take more online classes.
- However, these exemptions were made only for the spring and summer semesters.
- The Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP), under the US ICE, did not say much on the reasons behind revisiting the above exemptions.
- Some are seeing this as a pressure tactic to get universities to reopen for the fall semester.

How will this affect international enrolment in US universities?

- The US universities have already made admission offers to international students.
- The SEVP announcement could encourage prospective students to defer their joining to the next semester.
- As for the active or enrolled students, they may even drop a semester.
- **QS Survey of international students** - Over half the respondents of the survey intended to defer their entry into foreign universities due to the Covid-related uncertainties.
- The revised US guidelines are only going to cement such intent further.
- This means revenues of US universities, especially those that have announced an online fall semester, are bound to get hit.

How have the US universities reacted to the new guidelines?

- Some universities have been quick on the uptake.
- They have changed their fall semester plans in less than a day of the government announcement.

Source: The Indian Express



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