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Hurdles for F-1 and M-1 Visa Holders in USA

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Why in News

Recently, the USA has announced that **F-1 and M-1 visa holders** who are **planning to take online only models will not be allowed to stay** in the USA.

- Many universities in the USA are planning **to shift all their classes online** for the fall semester due to **Covid-19 pandemic**.
Fall semester starts in late August and ends in late December or early January whereas the Spring semester begins in January and ends in early May.
- **F-1 visas** are issued to study in the USA for **full-time students** whereas **M-1 visas** are issued to students engaging in **vocational or non-academic studies**.
- The announcement comes weeks after the USA President **suspended H1-B** highly skilled worker visas through the end of the year. Most of these visas go to Indian citizens each year.

Key Points

- **Announcements Made:**
 - The students outside the USA **planning to take all courses online** in the fall semester would not be **permitted entry** into the country.
The **USA would not issue visas** to students who are going to take all their classes online due to the pandemic.
 - It also stated that the active students under F-1 and M-1 visas 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.
The USA regulations **do not allow students in F-1 status to be in online classes** but normally F-1 students are allowed to take one class or three credit hours online.

- **Affected Population:**

- There were **more than one million international students** in the United States for the 2018-19 academic year. That accounted for **5.5%** of the total USA's higher education population.

Also, international students contributed **\$44.7 billion** to the USA's economy in 2018.

- **India** is the **second largest source of the foreign students in the USA** after China.

The largest number of international students come from China, followed by India, South Korea, Saudi Arabia and Canada.

- **Consequences:**

- If alternative measures are **not opted** then these students may face **immigration consequences** including, but not limited to, the initiation of removal proceedings.
- It is a difficult situation for students as international travel already faces disruption due to Covid-19.

- **Available Alternatives :**

Affected students may **switch to visitor status** but it is **not a long term** solution as visitor status is short term and there is **no guarantee that it will be approved.**

Way Forward

- Considering the unprecedented pandemic scenario, the USA can amend the regulation for F-1 and M-1 students.
- The one-size-fits-all approach will create more havoc and complexities not only in USA administration but also in diplomatic relations with countries like India and China.

Source:TH