

U.S. tightens H-1B approval process, IT firms worried

The U.S announced fresh measures to tighten the scrutiny of H-1B visa petitions, mandating fresh documentary requirements for workers at third-party worksites.

- The move will impact Indian IT services providers that place employees with H-1B visas at American companies that contract them, by imposing more paper work and processing hurdles.
- The companies filing H-1B petitions for their employees will have to associate a particular project to the individual visa, which could be approved only for the duration of the project.
- The measures are meant to bring the client-vendor-employee relations in business models based on bringing high-skilled H-1B workers to the U.S. under closer scrutiny.

Vendors that get contracts from American companies often subcontract the job to other companies or hire H-1B employees brought by other companies, creating multilevel structures, a practice that immigration authorities have been monitoring more closely and trying to curb. Industry insiders said lower level jobs would be hit harder under the new regulations.

Govt. behind delay in posting of HC judges: SC

The government is inordinately delaying the appointment of judges to High Courts, the Supreme Court observed in a judgement.

- At a time when judicial vacancies in the 24 High Courts remain at an all-time high, the Supreme Court passed scathing remarks in a 31-page judgment on how the government keeps names forwarded by the judiciary pending for an “unduly long time.” There are a total of 403 judicial vacancies in the High Courts.

Equally at fault are the High Courts for the present quandary, the court said. Instead of sending the fresh names to the government for vetting a month prior to an anticipated judicial vacancy, the names are sent late or not sent at all.

- In case the fresh names are sent to the government, the files are kept pending at the Executive level for long before they are sent to the Supreme Court Collegium for approval along with the government's inputs on the names proposed.
- Even after the clearance of the names by the Collegium, these remain pending at the level of the Executive. All this results in inordinate delay. Sometimes, it takes more than one year to complete the process from the date of forwarding the names till appointment," the court observed.
- As a result, the careers and tenures of future High Court judges recommended by the Supreme Court Collegium are invariably cut short because of the delay, the court said.

The court was hearing a challenge to the appointment of two retired district judges as Additional Judges of the Rajasthan High Court. Their names were recommended by the Rajasthan Chief Justice in February 2016, while they were still in judicial service. However, the appointment process took over a year to complete in May 2017, and they had already retired by that time.

NIA taps into legal aid pacts

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) sought assistance from countries under the Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty to extract digital evidence to prove the involvement of a Pakistan diplomat stationed in Colombo in planning terror attacks across India.

- Though the agency arrested the two agents hired by the diplomat, Amir Zubair Siddiqui, it could not gather adequate evidence to name him in the chargesheet.
- The NIA then initiated steps to seek the expertise of some foreign countries under the Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty to extract digital evidence to prove the involvement of the diplomat. Since visual elements

were sent by e-mail and Facebook, we approached U.S Intelligence agencies through Interpol seeking their support in cracking the case.

The plan was to smuggle in two Pakistan nationals to carry out the attacks using fake passport and visa.

Pak. to face monitoring by international review group

Pakistan, which has been put back on the “Grey List” for terror financing by the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) Plenary , under a “Compliance Document,” now be required to furnish a fresh report to the International Co-operation Review Group (ICRG).

- Earlier Pakistan had claimed victory in the ongoing FATF meeting, as a preliminary discussion in the ICRG failed to build a consensus on putting it again on the watch list, after China, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and GCC countries objected to Pakistan’s nomination.

At the end of the Plenary session, when the FATF Chair asked, there were no objections to the nomination of Pakistan, a move that could see it face financial strictures, and ratings downgrades by international banking and credit rating agencies until Islamabad carries out a full crackdown on terror groups.

Leaders break ground on Afghan section of TAPI

Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan and India ceremonially broke ground on the Afghan section of TAPI.

TAPI is an ambitious, multi-billion dollar gas pipeline expected to help ease energy deficits in South Asia.

The quartet aims to complete the 1,840 km pipeline and begin pumping natural gas from Turkmenistan’s giant Galkynysh gas field by the beginning of 2020.

The bulk of the 33 billion cubic metres of gas to be pumped annually through the conduit will be purchased by Pakistan and India.

ICAI seeks details of PSB borrowers

The CA regulator — Institute of Chartered Accountants of India (ICAI) — has written to the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) for a list of corporate borrowers of all Public Sector Banks having outstanding loan amount of ₹2000 crore and above.

This is in the wake of alleged irregularities in state-owned Punjab National Bank (PNB).

This was to have such a list “examined by Financial Reporting Review Board (FRRB) of ICAI for any possible violation of applicable standards of accounting as well as auditing.”

The ICAI is a statutory body established under the Chartered Accountants Act, 1949 for regulating the CA profession in India and comes under the Ministry of Corporate Affairs.

Wants list of CAs

The ICAI has also written to the Corporate Affairs Ministry requesting it “to prevail upon the SEBI, the CBI, the ED and PNB to share their findings with the ICAI to accelerate action against any CA who has played any role in this fraud.

Ombudsman scheme for NBFC clients

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has announced an ombudsman scheme for customers of non-banking finance companies.

This is to redress complaints against deficiency in services concerning deposits and loans among others.

To begin with, the scheme will be operationalised for all deposit-accepting NBFCs.

Based on the experience gained, the scheme would be extended to include the remaining identified categories of NBFCs.

Certain NBFCs like infrastructure finance companies are excluded from the ambit of the ombudsman scheme.