U.S. may tighten rules for foreign students

Foreign students in the United States may be required to reapply every year for permission to stay in the country, if a proposal under consideration by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) is implemented. The move will require regulatory changes that could take up to 18 months, the *Washington Post* reported.

Indians are the fastest growing group among the international student population in the U.S. There are 1,66,000 students from India pursuing higher education in the U.S. now, up from about 1,00,000 two years earlier. A large majority of them pursue science, technology, engineering and math courses. Around 1.4 million international students are currently present in the U.S.

Under current regulations, international students can stay in the U.S. as long as they are enrolled for a programme. Students who enter the U.S on F-1 visas are issued an entry document with an end date that states "duration of stay", which is theoretically open-ended. They can stay as long as they have a valid I-20 document, which is issued by the university, with all details regarding the student's programme of study, financing, etc. They can also move from one programme to another and from one institution to another, by a notification to the DHS, based on a new I-20 document that the institution issues.

But the new proposal, if implemented, will make their visa status time-bound, the report said. The proposed measures could increase costs and paper work for students and universities. A DHS spokesperson told the *Post* that the proposal is part of an ongoing review of the immigration policy to ensure that it "promotes the national interest, enhances national security and public safety and ensures the integrity of our immigration system."

Aparna Dave, an immigration attorney, said the proposal could make the U.S. a less attractive destination for students from India. "There are other countries that offer opportunities with much less administrative requirement. The new proposal will put a burden of $200 on the students each time they reapply, as service charge, which is now a one-time fees," she said.

Negative impact

Ms. Dave said the measures appear to be aimed at tracking the students closely, but the real impact of it will be in diminishing U.S. ability to attract the best talent from across the world.

Rahul Choudaha, CEO, DrEducation, a U.S.-based research firm specialising in international students, said increased immigration scrutiny of international students is misinformed. "International students are already highly tracked. They not only have to go through screening of university admissions systems but also rigorous visa application and interview processes".