

U.S. ends amnesty scheme for young immigrants

A demonstration against the scrapping of the scheme. AP Richard Vogel

The Donald Trump administration on Tuesday discontinued an Obama-era immigration reform measure that protected from deportation people who had entered the U.S. illegally as children.

“(T)he programme known as DACA that was effectuated under the Obama administration is being rescinded,” Attorney-General Jeff Sessions said. The former President had introduced the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) as an interim relief even as a debate on a comprehensive immigration reform to address the status of 11 million undocumented residents in America was caught in a political logjam for years.

The Department of Homeland Security stopped processing any new applications under the programme but will continue to renew permits for anyone whose status expires in the next six months. If the U.S. Congress does not pass a law on their status within the six months, people will be at risk of being deported.

Division of power

President Trump said the decision was about constitutional division of power between the executive and the legislature. “As President, my highest duty is to defend the American people and the Constitution of the United States of America. At the same time, I do not favour punishing children, most of whom are now adults, for the actions of their parents. But we must also recognise that we are nation of opportunity because we are a nation of laws... The legislative branch, not the executive branch, writes these laws — this is the bedrock of our constitutional system,” he said in a statement. Ahead of Mr. Sessions’s press conference to announce the roll-back of the programme, Mr. Trump posted on Twitter, “Congress, get ready to do your job — DACA!”

Mr. Sessions said the DACA executive order was unconstitutional. “There is nothing compassionate about the failure to enforce immigration laws. Enforcing the law saves lives, protects communities and taxpayers, and prevents human suffering. Failure to enforce the laws in the past has put our nation at risk of crime, violence and even terrorism. The compassionate thing is to end the lawlessness, (and) enforce our laws,” he said.

Since 2012, the DACA has helped 8,00,000 young adults to pursue education and career opportunities in America. The programme gives beneficiaries renewable two-year work permits and Social Security numbers and more opportunity for higher education. About 1% of the beneficiaries (8,000 persons) of have been of Indian origin, according to the U.S. Customs and Immigration Services.

A Pew study estimated that in 2014, around five lakh — out of a total of 11 million — Indians were in America illegally. “Asia, encompassing South Asian nations such as India as well as East Asian countries including China, was the birthplace of 1.4 million U.S. unauthorised immigrants, or 13% of the total in 2014,” the study said.

‘An inhumane decision’

“The Trump Administration’s cruel decision to not save the DACA programme will affect many Indians in America. A lot of people think that Indians do not have to worry about their immigration status, but this is false... Undocumented Indian youth who have DACA status are now in a position

where they don't know if they can keep their jobs or if they have to live in fear of immigration officials coming to their door. Trump's decision is inhumane, and it reflects this administration's relentless attacks on immigrants and anyone perceived as being different," said Deepa Iyer, senior fellow at Center for Social Inclusion and author of the book *We Too Sing America* .

Several lawmakers, including some Republicans, have opposed the move. Senator John McCain said this was "the wrong approach to immigration policy". "I strongly believe that children who were illegally brought into this country through no fault of their own should not be forced to return to a country they do not know," he said.

However, Speaker Paul Ryan supported the President's move. "Ending this programme fulfils a promise that President Trump made to restore the proper role of the executive and legislative branches," he said.

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