

Current Affairs of the Day

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Trump bars H-1B visa holders from federal jobs

- Donald Trump has signed an executive order preventing federal agencies from contracting or subcontracting foreign workers — mainly those on **H-1B visas**.
- The move comes over a month after the Trump administration on June 23 suspended the H-1B visas, along with other types of foreign work visas, until the end of 2020 to protect American workers in a crucial election year. The new restrictions took effect from June 24.

Value Added Information

About H-1B visa:

- The H-1B is a United States visa under the Immigration and Nationality Act. It has roots in the earlier issued H-1 visa which was later split between H-1A (for nurses) and H-1B. H-1B is one of the most popular visas for foreigners visiting the US for business or trade purpose.
- It is a non-immigrant visa that allows US companies to employ foreign workers in speciality occupations that require theoretical or technical expertise.
- Speciality occupations include specialized fields like IT, finance, accounting, architecture, engineering, mathematics, science, medicine, etc. which usually require a bachelor's degree or higher.
- US employers wishing to bring in staff for long-term assignment prefer H1B visa because its application is quicker than applying for a US Green Card.
- H-1B visa has its roots in the H1 visa of the Immigration and Nationality Act; which split between H-1A (for nurses) and H-1B in 1990.
- Who will be worst hit: Worst hit by the new H1B bill will be Indian companies such as Infosys, TCS, and Wipro, as well as US tech giants like Apple, Facebook and Google, who use the H1B visa to fill positions that cannot be filled by American workers.

How is H-1B visa important to India?

- Majority H-1B visa holder: India has been the only country that takes 70 per cent of the 85,000 H-1B visas applied annually. The H-1B visa is crucial for the IT sector in India.



- IT professionals: The technology companies of US depend on it to hire tens of thousands of employees each year from countries like India and China. Hence, a cancellation of H-1B visas will most adversely affect Indian IT professionals.
- Talent flow: The US should not obstruct the flow of talent from India as it is an important part of the economic cooperation and almost acts as a strategic bridge between the two countries, and is important for the bilateral ties.
- Problems that Indians face with current H-1B rules
- Recent changes in H-1B visa rules: Recently, US proposed revision of “specialty occupations” definition for the H1B visa. H1B visas will be issued to only the most-skilled foreigners or highest-paid beneficiaries.
- USCIS can reject H1B applications that do not provide the necessary required information when submitted.
- New rules require H-1B petitioners to first electronically register with USCIS.
- US can initiate deportation of expired H1-B holders.
- US Department of Homeland Security (DHS) is also considering ban on work authorization for spouses of H-1B visa holders.

32,000 flats in Delhi under housing scheme

- Around 32,000 vacant flats built under various government schemes in Delhi and about 1,000 units in Faridabad will be included in the newly-announced **Affordable Rental Housing Complex (ARHC) scheme**, Union Housing and Urban Affairs Ministry Secretary Durga Shanker Mishra said on Tuesday.
- Mr. Mishra said the government would be signing a memorandum of agreement with States in a month. Under the scheme, around 2.95 lakh dwelling units in the country would be offered as ARHCs.

Value Added Information

Affordable Rental Housing Complex (ARHC) scheme:

- Recently, the Union Cabinet has approved a scheme for providing affordable rental housing to about 3 lakh urban migrants.



- It will be a sub-scheme of the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana- Urban that is implemented by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs.
- The creation of Affordable Rental Housing Complexes (ARHCs) is as a part of the government's economic package to address the Covid-19 crisis. The scheme is in line with the vision of Atma Nirbhar Bharat.

Key Points:

- Target Beneficiaries: Workers who come from rural areas or towns to work in manufacturing, hospitality, health, construction, etc.

Features:

- Affordable Rental Housing: About 1.03 lakh completed government-funded houses across cities that are yet to be allotted to beneficiaries (Urban poor) under existing schemes would be converted into the rental housing complexes.
- Concession Agreements: The conversion will be done through concession agreements for 25 years.
- The States and Union Territories would invite bids to select concessionaires.
- Concessionaires will make the complexes livable by repair/retrofit and maintenance of rooms and filling up infrastructure gaps like water, sewer/septage, sanitation, road etc.
- Complexes will revert to Urban Local Bodies (ULB) after 25 years to run on their own.
- Special Incentives to Entities: Special incentives like concessional loan at priority sector lending rate, etc. will be offered to private/ public entities to develop ARHCs on their own available vacant land for 25 years.
- Technology Innovation Grant: Under it an expenditure of Rs. 600 crore would be provided for projects using identified innovative technologies for construction.



05.08.2020 Wednesday



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Significance:

- Creation of New Ecosystem: It will create a new ecosystem in urban areas making housing available at affordable rent close to the place of work. Hence, cutting down unnecessary travel, congestion and pollution.
- Investment Opportunities: It would create a conducive environment for entities to develop AHRCs on their own vacant land which would enable new investment opportunities and promote entrepreneurship in the rental housing sector.
- Employment: Covid-19 pandemic has resulted in massive reverse migration of workers/ urban poor. Investment under ARHCs is expected to create new job opportunities.

Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana -Urban:

- It was launched in 2015 by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, in which affordable housing will be provided to the urban poor with a target of building 20 million affordable houses by 31st March 2022.
- It provides central assistance to Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) and other implementing agencies through States/UTs.
- Eligibility: All statutory towns as per Census 2011 and towns notified subsequently would be eligible for coverage under the Mission.

Provisions:

- In-situ Rehabilitation of existing slum dwellers using land as a resource through private participation.
- Credit Linked Subsidy.
- Affordable Housing in Partnership.
- Subsidy for Beneficiary-led individual house construction/enhancement.
- The mission promotes women empowerment by providing the ownership of houses in the name of female members or in joint name.



24 million may drop out of school due to pandemic: UN

Key findings:

- Almost 24 million children are at risk of not returning to school next year due to the economic fallout of COVID-19, according to the United Nation's policy brief on the pandemic's impact on education, released on Tuesday. The educational financing gap is also likely to increase by one third.
- More than 1.6 billion learners across the world have been affected by the disruption of the education system, but the pandemic has also served to exacerbate existing disparities, with vulnerable populations in low-income countries taking a harder and longer hit.
- For example, during the second quarter of 2020, 86% of children at the primary level have been effectively out of school in poor countries, compared to just 20% in highly developed countries.
- "UNESCO estimates that 23.8 million additional children and youth [from pre-primary to tertiary] may drop out or not have access to school next year due to the pandemic's economic impact alone. The number of children not returning to their education after the school closures is likely to be even greater," says the policy brief, adding that girls and young women are likely to be disproportionately affected as school closures make them more vulnerable to child marriage, early pregnancy and gender-based violence.
- Even for those who do not drop out of school, learning losses could be severe, especially in the foundational years.
- Simulations on developing countries participating in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) suggest that without remediation, a loss of learning by one-third [equivalent to a three-month school closure] during Grade 3 might result in 72% of students falling so far behind that by Grade 10 they will have dropped out or will not be able to learn anything in school.



‘Entire B2C online sector to come within new consumer law ambit’

- There’s a widespread impression that the new Consumer Protection Act will only regulate the operations of the legacy e-commerce players Amazon and Flipkart. However, that’s a misconception as the new law brings the entire B2C online sector strictly within its ambit, said a top official at the Ministry of Consumer Affairs.
- The Consumer Protection Act has already kicked in, but many online service providers still want to believe they are outside its scope.
- All kinds of B2C online services, irrespective of their size and reach, all mobile app-based services and all businesses running on social media platforms, will come within the bill’s purview.
- There’s no need to resist or ignore a law that aims to clean up the online B2C sector in the country. Only unscrupulous players who exercise unfair trade practices or indulge in counterfeit merchandise need to worry. Otherwise, this is a win-win piece of regulation that will protect the rights of customers and dignity of the brands.