

## 4th yr in a row, 65k H-1B visas exhausted in 5 days

TNN | Apr 11, 2016, 06.40 AM IST



**B**ENGALURU: The tripling of fee for the H-1B US work visa does not appear to have had any impact on the number of applications for the visa that Indian IT companies have filed for the coming year.

The H-1B quota of 65,000 has been exhausted within the first five days beginning April 1 for the fourth consecutive year, highlighting the demand for IT and the shortage of skilled IT professionals in the US. This is a contrast to the 235 days and 73 days it took in 2012 and 2013, respectively, to reach the cap set by the US Congress.

The US Citizenship and Immigration Service did not give out the number of applications it got, but it is believed to be higher than last year's 230,000. This will trigger a computer-generated process -also known as the lottery -to randomly select the petitions needed to meet the caps of 65,000 for the general category and 20,000 for the advanced-degree exemption.

"Once again, we see the absurdity of our broken immigration system and the consequences of congressional inaction," said Todd Schulte, president of Mark Zuckerberg's advocacy group FWD.us in a statement after the USCIS said it had received enough H-1B petitions to reach the cap for 2017. One week -that's all the time our country allows for highskilled immigrants to apply for H-1B visas to try to enter the lottery to be able to stay in the US. Immigration has long been our country's greatest competitive advantage in a global economy, and we should be encouraging the best and the brightest to continue to grow their businesses and create American jobs here at home, instead of denying those dreams and encouraging them to do so in other countries for our competitors. Hitting the H-1B visa cap today underscores the urgent need for reform, and we'll continue working every day to pass a permanent legislative solution," Todd Schulte, president of Mark Zuckerberg's advocacy group FWD.us, said. Indian IT firms are the biggest users of H-1B, which is a non-immigrant visa that allows US employers to temporarily employ foreign workers. H-1B applications are submitted from the first working day of April for the financial year beginning October. H-1B has become a raging debate in the race to the White House after Republican presidential frontrunner Donald Trump first criticized H-1B and then spoke in favour of giving visas to highly skilled immigrants.

Recently, the US notified an additional fee of \$4,000 for H-1B petitioners that would apply to companies that employ 50 or more employees in the United States, with more than 50% of those employees in H-1B or L non immigrant status. "Notwithstanding the recent increase in application fees and the additional restrictions imposed by the US government, it is quite likely we will see a record number of applicants, similar to last year, which was over 230,000 petitions," said Vikram Shroff, head of the HR law practice at law firm Nishith Desai Associates.

However, Saju James, partner and managing director at immigration services firm Fragomen India, said US MNCs and product companies would be applying for higher number of visas this year compared to Indian IT firms due to a sharp increase in the fee and the requirement to meet the 50% threshold.