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Wait for Green Card Gets Longer

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NEW DELHI: If the H1B cap wasn't tough enough to deal with, here's another piece of bad news for those dreaming the American dream. The wait for a green card is only growing longer.

A study conducted by the **National Foundation for American Policy (NFAP)** estimates that the current wait in the skilled workers and professional category exceeds five years.

The problem, it states, will go from bad to worse if Congress doesn't increase the number of employment-based immigrant visas. "The problem has got worse in the last few years.

Now, it takes anywhere between six to twelve years to get a green card," says Aman Kapoor, a computer programmer who moved to the US in 1997.

By December last year, when Congress killed a budget amendment that would have paved the road for highly skilled professionals like him, Aman's patience had worn thin.

An online message board soon transformed into Immigration Voice, a non-profit organisation determined to push for immigration reform. Says co-founder Aman, "We decided to make a collective change."

Six months later, Immigration Voice boasts of 5,000 members and has hired high-profile lobbying firm Quinn Gillespie to make its voice heard on Capitol Hill.

With the immigration debate in the US centred around illegal aliens, more than half-a-million high skilled immigrants a large percentage from India have seen their applications disappear into a green card black hole.

According to the US department of labour, there are 3.5 lakh applications pending in the first stage, some dating back to 1999.

Meanwhile, the applicant can't switch jobs, relocate, get a promotion or even a pay hike because that would mean applying fresh. Swati and Aradhana Srivastava, both software engineers who aspire to become filmmakers, are at the end of their tether.

"Our aspirations have changed: we now want to become filmmakers but can't because of one document. The US is supposed to be the land of dreams but our dreams are slowly dying here," says 28-year-old Swati.