

29-X NEWS
EDITORIAL

India’s Solar Leadership
Shines Bright: Hosting the
8th International Solar
Alliance Assembly

India is set to host the 8th International Solar Alliance (ISA) Assembly from October 27 to 30 at Bharat Mandapam, New Delhi, reaffirming its leadership in the global clean energy transition. The event, bringing together energy ministers, policymakers, and innovators from around the world, aims to deepen international cooperation and accelerate the adoption of solar energy to drive sustainability. For India, this is more than a diplomatic occasion — it is a statement of commitment to a greener, more resilient future. The International Solar Alliance, launched jointly by India and France in 2015 during the Paris Climate Conference (COP21), was conceived as a coalition of solar-rich nations between the Tropics of Cancer and Capricorn. Its vision was to unite countries in harnessing the immense potential of solar power to ensure energy access, security, and transition toward low-carbon economies. Since its inception, the ISA has grown into a formidable institution with 124 member and signatory countries, symbolizing global consensus on clean energy cooperation. Headquartered in Gurugram, India, the ISA stands as one of the few international organizations rooted in the Global South — a testament to India’s diplomatic and developmental vision. Over the years, India has emerged as a torchbearer of the solar revolution. The country’s renewable energy journey has been marked by bold policy interventions and global partnerships. Significantly, India has achieved 50% of its electricity generation capacity from non-fossil fuel sources — five years ahead of its target — an achievement that underscores its seriousness in tackling climate change. With over 70 GW of installed solar capacity, India now ranks as the world’s third-largest solar producer and the second-largest market for renewable energy growth, behind only China. Initiatives like the National Solar Mission, PM-KUSUM scheme, and the solarization of railway and airport infrastructure have demonstrated that sustainable energy can align with rapid economic development. The 8th ISA Assembly offers India an opportunity to shape the global solar agenda in a decade defined by climate urgency. Discussions will likely revolve around financing mechanisms for developing nations, solar grid interconnectivity, and technological innovation — areas where India’s experience can guide collaborative action. Moreover, the event reinforces India’s strategic ambition to emerge as a renewable energy hub for the Global South, helping nations in Africa, Asia, and the Pacific to leapfrog into solar-driven development. As the world grapples with the twin crises of energy insecurity and climate change, India’s stewardship of the ISA demonstrates that sustainable growth and climate responsibility can go hand in hand. Hosting the assembly in New Delhi is both symbolic and practical — a reminder that the path to a clean energy future runs through collective will, technological innovation, and global solidarity, with India at its radiant center.

One step back

Indian graduates could be made more welcome in new international markets that might be keen to utilise relatively cheap but highly efficient Indian workers

ANUP SINHA

The recent changes in the H-1B visa application fees are part of a larger strategy by the United States of America to restrict immigration and increase employment opportunities for its citizens. There will be direct as well as indirect effects of the fee hike to \$100,000 on companies and H-1B visa-holders alike. India has been the largest beneficiary of the H-1B visa programme, receiving more than 70% of the total allotment. One can think of, in a stylised version of the market for H-1B visas, four sets of players who might be impacted. The first are Indian visa-holders and their current and future job prospects. The second set comprises Indian technology companies and their costs of providing services to clients in the US. The third group of players includes big high-tech companies based in the US and the likely impact on their hiring strategies for the best talent worldwide. Finally, there will be consequences for young American graduates entering the skilled labour market. The indirect effects are more long term in nature, depending on how university enrolment might be affected in the US and whether India’s use of its own talent pool would be different from what it is now. The H-1B non-immigration visa was first conceived of in the Immigration Act of 1990 and later modified by the American Competitiveness in the Twenty-First Century Act of 2000. The essence of this development was to enable US companies to hire skilled foreign workers for a temporary period, presumably to make up for shortages in the local market. There was a perceived gap in the number of technology graduates available and the needs of the US economy over a period of time. The number of visas to be given depended on estimates made about these gaps. Something unwritten, but fundamental, about bringing foreign workers into the US was the fact that these workers were very likely to be substantially cheaper than those available in the US market. Hence, there was an incentive to overestimate the gap. For profit-maximising business organisations, the need to minimise labour costs would always trump the political considerations of national identity.

Broadly speaking, there are two categories of Indian H-1B visa-holders



in the corporate job market in the US. The first group — it constitutes the majority — works for Indian IT companies like TCS, Infosys or Tech Mahindra. They are part of the information technology enabled services export boom India has benefited from. Of the total employment in this sector in India, they constitute a small fraction, estimated to be 2%-3%, who are sent to work overseas at the client’s site. They can work for a period of three plus three years (after renewal) on an H-1B visa. While these young workers going to the US are undoubtedly good by any standards, they do not constitute the crème-de-la-crème of young talent worldwide. In other words, they are not the top 1% of global talent. These workers, the overwhelming majority being computer science graduates, get only about two-thirds of what a US local hire would have to be paid.

The second group of Indian technology workers is smaller than the first. But it constitutes some of the finest minds in the world. Typically, they get a good degree from India, and then enter the US on a student visa. They acquire a Master’s or a PhD. They are then picked up by the top technology companies in the US like OpenAI, Google, Meta, Microsoft or Amazon. These companies want these top brains to create innovations in cutting-edge technology. They are not taken for writing codes or maintaining servers. These recruits (along with some non-Indians as well as Americans) are the best in the world and paid accordingly — anywhere between 200,000 to 300,000 US dollars for starters. These people are a truly scarce resource and certainly do not

displace US citizens. The companies will do anything to retain them; paying an extra \$100,000 for six years is not an issue to be even discussed. That is why there has been no noise about the fee hike from the leading technology giants.

For the first group, however, the hike in the fees is costly. In paying an additional \$100,000 for a worker who, on an average, earns somewhere between \$65,000-\$100,000 is substantial for the employer. From a purely economic point of view, the employers would still have to manage so as not to lose clients. The expected disruption, however, is not evident in the reactions of the IT companies in India. The landscape of information technology is changing rapidly and dramatically. The kind of work that was being done by workers on-site in the US is becoming obsolete. Systematic lay-offs had begun even before the fee hike. Many of the existing H-1B workers from Indian companies were not being renewed after three years. Many of these bright young workers had gone to the US with dreams of staying on in America. Indeed, in India too, there are lay-offs happening in the IT hubs. For Indian companies, this is part of an important process of business restructuring.

Many Indian technology graduates already in the US who had been told that their visa support would not be renewed were eager to find alternative ways of staying on. Some headhunters and opportunistic lawyers have fished in these troubled waters. Hence, the tightening of the monitoring of immigrants in the US will mean that many of these youngsters would be

compelled to return to India. However, after returning to India, it would not be easy for them to settle down. IT jobs relevant to their skills would be scarce. India will have its own ITES restructuring problems, with shrinking employment opportunities.

The final set of players who might be directly affected comprises American graduates from US universities who aspire to start their careers as software engineers. For them, the fee hike and changes in immigration may not be as good a piece of news as being promised. One estimate suggests unemployment among US computer science graduates has increased marginally. If the market is soft, and job opportunities in traditional IT are shrinking, Indian companies would offer low salaries to US graduates. In short, salaries are likely to settle between \$65,000 that Indian workers were getting and \$100,000 that US hires would start with. On the other hand, the number of new jobs in cutting-edge technology revolving around the development of Artificial Intelligence would grow. But the total number of these jobs are expected to be smaller than what the IT industry had known previously. Moreover, the skill requirements would be exceptionally demanding. In short, the picture for US graduates does not look substantially different than before.

The four sets of players are going to be affected in distinctly different ways in the immediate future. In India, the long-run benefits are going to be twofold. Indian graduates could be made more welcome in new international markets that might be keen to utilise relatively cheap but highly efficient Indian workers. Also, Indian companies could get their act together and accelerate their journey to the next phase of technological developments. The US, on the other hand, might suffer from the general restriction on skilled labour from foreign lands. These restrictions will lead to a drop in foreign students coming to US universities. In that case, the costs of higher education and a college degree would go up even further. College enrolment might drop as a result; it would then become even more expensive to hire a local youngster educated in one of the beautiful US universities.

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Fair chance

China Diary | Ironically, in spite of China’s reputation for its treatment of the Uighurs, other minority groups complain that the bulk of benefits are given to this Muslim minority

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Pang Zhongwang, a 26-year-old PhD student who addressed freshers when Tsinghua University reopened in August, would be amused by what Indians say about his country on social media. It is now a trend to post pictures of China’s awesome infrastructure, compare it with India’s, and ‘explain’ the gap with the logic: ‘It is because China doesn’t have reservations.’

On the contrary, unlike the United States of America, which recently got rid of its ‘affirmative action’ policies, China has only been increasing them. Pang is a product of these policies. The son of a schizophrenic father and a disabled mother, Pang had to undergo surgery at the age of seven to rectify his heart. His grandparents supported the family, with Pang collecting and selling scrap to complete his schooling. His unlettered mother was bent upon educating her only child, who turned out to be so good at his studies that despite the odds, he kept topping the class. Having scored an impressive 684/750 marks in 2017 in the gruelling pre-university exam, Gao Kao, Pang made use of the additional 60 marks given to students such as him, and got admission into the Mecca of all bright students: Tsinghua University. Reporters found his home bare of all



amenities. Yet, he refused offers of financial aid when he entered Tsinghua, having earned his fees by giving physics tuitions during his vacation. Now Pang is doing his PhD in instruments science from the same university.

Under Mao Zedong, minority ethnic groups, such as Tibetans, Kazaks, Mongolians, Huis and Uighurs, benefited from special schools, with education in their own languages. But the ambit of such preferential policies increased substantially as China’s universities started competing with the world’s best. Today, ‘reservations’ help a range of students enter university: poor students, or those living in remote villages or

backward areas (such as Pang), or those belonging to a minority group. A new programme allows these students to avail of preferential admission into a pre-university preparatory course.

“Had I not been given an extra 20 points, I would not have been able to get into a top university,” said a Tibetan student, while another from Jianxi, a poor province, admitted that 40 students scored more than her but didn’t get admission.

Naturally, as in India, these policies cause heartburn. The bogey of ‘merit’ has been raised here too, with little evidence to back it. Only school toppers are selected for these programmes, and their performance in university has not

been found lacking. For instance, Xiao, hailing from a rural family in inland Hunan, qualified for Tsinghua’s electronics information course even without the additional marks he was entitled to.

There are, of course, students who lag behind. But instead of being dubbed inherently inferior, their low performance is ascribed to mainly two factors: the inferior quality of teaching in their schools and the lack of educated mentors in their families.

As in India, where fake caste certificates are used, in China too, there have been cases of students belonging to the Han majority (91% of the population), hiding their ethnicity to benefit from policies meant for non-Han groups. Again, like in India, here too, elite minority families tend to benefit the most, and tensions exist among groups of beneficiaries. Ironically, in spite of China’s reputation for its treatment of Uighurs, other minority groups complain that the bulk of benefits are given to this Muslim minority.

What is different from India is the way China treats these students. Imagine a ‘quota student’ being called to address freshers in the Indian Institute of Technology or Jawaharlal Nehru University. Pang featured in last year’s official list of “People who moved China”, and has also been appointed brand ambassador for his hometown.