Seven US tech firms were among the top ten recipients of fresh H-1B visas in 2019

Seven US technology firms including , Amazon, Apple and were among the top ten recipients of fresh H-1B visas in fiscal year 2019, as the President Donald Trump administration continued its policy of favouring American firms to hire computer science professionals from countries such as India on short term work permits.

India's IT services giant Tata Consultancy Services, the third largest recipient of initial or fresh H-1B visas in the year, US-headquartered Cognizant, which follows the offshore model of Indian IT services firms and smaller rival Tech Mahindra were the other firms in the list, according to new data available with the US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS).

The top ten companies accounted for 12% of the 88324 H-1B visas issued in fiscal 2019.

USCIS is the American agency to oversee immigration in the country. It follows the October to September financial year. The US issues 85,000 H-1B visas a year, of which about 70% is awarded to Indian nationals who could be employed by Indian IT services exporters or American technology corporations.

"We noticed that in the award of the visas, companies that are placing candidates at third party sites are automatically held to suspicion. The net effect of this discrimination against companies providing consulting services is that Indian companies are disproportionately affected," said Rajiv S Khanna, managing attorney at law firm Immigration.com.

USCIS data showed that Google received 2,111 H-1B visas, followed by Amazon with 1,612 and Tata Consultancy Services with 1,367 work permits. Facebook (1,132) and Apple (991) were among the top five in the list.

"We are seeing that technology product companies are getting more preference in approvals for initial H-1B petitions and getting a higher share of such visas," a senior executive at the National Association of Software and Services Companies (Nasscom), the software lobby said. "The tech services companies have started accepting that the American tech firms and product focused companies are getting an edge". The person did not want to be named.

While the American technology companies received higher number of fresh H-1B visas in 2019; Indian and India-centric tech services companies have seen "alarming" rate of rejection for their initial petitions filed before the US administration.

For instance, Cognizant received approval for more than 920 fresh visas while more than 1360 petitions were rejected. TCS received approvals for 1367 fresh visas; while 720 petitions were denied.

Cognizant has, however, received approvals for 8767 continuing visa petitions, highest among the top ten. The company was followed by Mumbai-headquartered TCS, which got 4050 continuing visa approvals.

ET had reported that nearly a fourth of all fresh H-1B applications through the third quarter of the financial year 2018-19 (October to June). The rejection rate has jumped three times in FY19 compared to FY15, according to an analysis of H-1B data from US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) by the National Foundation for American Policy.

According to Khanna of Immigration.com, there has been a rise in rejections on various grounds that are often impossible to overcome in the real world.

For instance, it isn't always possible to prove the existence of a project for a duration of three years-- the standard duration for which an H-1B visa issued- as these have their own life cycles, he said.

"There is a rise in denials across the board, but much more in the tech industry. This rise is too dramatic and coordinated to be accidental," he said, "It appears quite obvious and there are indications coming from the government through their disclosure data that show there is a concerted effort by the government to try to decline as many visas as they possibly can, thereby creating a glass wall against legal immigration," said Khanna.