

After H-1B, now green card route faces US scrutiny

NIFTY IT Index continues to underperform the market despite some uptick seen in recent months. Owing to weak economic data coming out of the US, war-related geopolitical uncertainty and AI-led disruption; share prices of Indian IT services companies face downward pressure. And a few recent developments have aggravated the risks. First one is the increasing scrutiny over immigration visas. On Tuesday, the US Department of Labor informed that it has suspended Permanent Labour Certification Filings- widely known as PERM-of Cognizant as the US authorities investigate alleged fraud in the immigration program.

PERM is a key route for employers to get employment-based green cards for the foreign workers, whom they bring in to the US for executing project work. Green card enables a foreign worker to permanently reside in the US for work, which can eventually lead to citizenship of the North American country.

With the US suspending PERM filings of Cognizant, the tech major will no longer be able to apply for permanent residency for its workers under the green card route. Industry watchers are of the view that the investigation will not be limited to Cognizant alone and all major Indian IT services providers are likely to face the scrutiny in coming days. This is just the first warning shoot fired by the American authorities.

Such development is bound to spook the market and it has. Nifty IT Index was among the major losers in Indian market on Wednesday with more than 3 per cent fall. All major IT stocks including TCS, Infosys,

Wipro, and a host of mid-tier IT firms have faced selling pressure. Now, the question arises that why market is so nervous and how is it different from restrictive measures introduced by the Trump administration on H1B visa route?

Firstly, H1B visa is a temporary visa program under which technology firms take engineers to the US for a certain period of time for executing project work. In contrast, green card is a permanent residency route with wider implications because this allows really talented individuals to become the US citizens and contribute towards the US technology dominance in the world. Interestingly, most high-flying Indian origin CEOs in US have got the citizenship through this route. Earlier, the Trump administration has made changes to the green card application methods by asking all eligible people to go back to their country of origin and apply from there through the American consulates. Against this backdrop, the suspension of PERM filings of Cognizant indicates that the US is actively discouraging Indian tech professionals to come to the US- whether through H1B visa route or green card one.

This raises some fundamental question on the operating models of Indian IT companies. For years, US has been the biggest market for most IT firms with more than 30 per cent of revenue coming from here. And the operating model has been bringing professionals from delivery centres like India to the US to work on client locations. Now, it has to fundamentally change as the US tightens all forms of immigration.



Politicians want justice. What about the people?

POLITICAL EGOS CANNOT BE BIGGER THAN PUBLIC INTEREST



IT is amusing to watch political leaders shout, "We want justice!" inside Parliament and State Assemblies. They seem to forget that it is not they who need justice. It is the people who elected them.

Voters sent their representatives to legislatures so that they could secure justice in its most basic form—better education, food, shelter, potable water, healthcare, infrastructure, jobs and a life of dignity. Instead, many elected representatives appear more interested in disruption, confrontation and theatrics, often driven by little more than political ego.

We saw the Monsoon Session of Parliament get washed away without adequate discussion on several issues of public importance. Telangana is now witnessing a similar war of words between the BRS and the ruling Congress, where an issue that could have been settled with a simple apology has wasted the time of the Assembly and, ultimately, public money.

The BRS may maintain that its member committed no wrong. But the conduct of some of its leaders on the first day of the Assembly session hardly helped its case. They were seen on live television pushing and manhandling police personnel. Another member, Madhu, was heard making remarks allegedly referring to the Speaker. He later denied this and claimed he was referring to a police officer on duty. But even that explanation raises another question: abusing a police officer on duty, particularly with a caste reference, is hardly behaviour befitting an elected representative.

The confrontation eventually spilled over outside the Assembly and led to a clash between BRS and Congress workers near the farmhouse of Leader of Opposition K. Chandrasekhar Rao. The subsequent "purification" of the area with turmeric water and milk may have provided emotional sat-

isfaction to party workers, but it did nothing for the people of Telangana.

This is precisely the problem. Political parties have become so obsessed with proving who is bigger, louder, and more powerful that they have lost sight of why they were elected in the first place.

A similar question must be asked of the decision of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh Opposition leaders K. Chandrasekhar Rao and Y. S. Jagan Mohan Reddy to remain away from their respective Assemblies. KCR has said he need not attend the House to listen to abuses from Congress leaders. Jagan, meanwhile, has demanded recognition as Leader of Opposition despite his party having only 11 MLAs in the Andhra Pradesh Assembly, which does not meet the prescribed numerical requirement.

But if political leaders like KCR are unwilling to enter the Assembly because they fear criticism or insults, what exactly is their role? Can we really call them seasoned politicians?

If they find the atmosphere unpleasant, they should confront it with facts, figures and arguments. If the government is failing, expose it. If its policies are wrong, demolish them with evidence. If it is not delivering, tell the people why. That is what an Opposition is supposed to do.

Sitting inside a farmhouse or palace and complaining about criticism is not leadership. These are the same leaders who go to voters with folded hands during elections, hug them, kiss their hands, and pose for carefully choreographed optics—preparing tea, making dosas, or sipping tea at roadside establishments. Yet once the election is over, some appear reluctant even to walk into the Assembly and face their opponents. If they are truly seasoned leaders, they should have the courage to face criticism and turn the tables on the government. They should work harder in their constituencies, listen to people, understand their problems, and present an alternative vision for the State. No MLA has the moral right to waste public money by refusing to perform the job for which he or she was

elected. Public office is not a hereditary entitlement, nor is it a permanent privilege. It carries responsibility. The same applies to Parliament. Whether it is the BRS, YSRCP, Congress or any other party in the Opposition, the basic duty is the same: attend the House, debate, question, scrutinise, expose and propose. Then go back to the voters and explain the government's failures.

Instead, too much political energy is spent on trivial controversies, slogans and manu-

days. And once the dust settles, everybody moves on. Nothing changes. The recent deaths of students in unsafe PG accommodation in Delhi should force governments and legislators to ask uncomfortable questions about the mushrooming business of unregulated paying-guest accommodation. But this is not merely a Delhi problem.

Hyderabad too is sitting on a powder keg Areas such as Ameerpet and several other parts of the city have thousands of students and young profes-

sionals living in cramped PG accommodations. Many buildings have questionable structural and fire-safety arrangements. Some may not even be properly registered with civic authorities. The GHMC should ideally have a clear database of such establishments and their safety status. But where is the sustained legislative debate on this?

The uncomfortable truth is that illegal construction survives because enforcement is often compromised. Officials who are expected to keep a hawk's eye on violations sometimes look the other way. The system of "hafta" and informal payments is hardly a secret in many parts of the country.

I experienced this myself nearly three decades ago.

I had submitted a building plan prepared by a reputed architect to construct a house. When I went to the municipal office to check its status, I was told the concerned official was away on a field visit. I made six visits without any progress. Finally, an official suggested that if I paid Rs 2,500, the plan would be cleared within a week. I refused to pay, and on my next visit, however, the town-planning officer told me that

Politicians shout about justice while ignoring the real injustices confronting ordinary citizens. Legislatures are increasingly reduced to platforms for ego, disruption and political theatrics, while unsafe buildings, poor civic services, corruption and public hardships remain neglected. Elected representatives must remember that their first responsibility is to the people, not political posturing

factured outrage. Leaders who should be questioning governments on policies and governance often spend their time questioning who said what to whom. If this is the political legacy they intend to hand over to Gen Z, perhaps even God cannot save the country.

Look at the issues that desperately need legislative attention. Buildings collapse, and students die. Schools and colleges function from unsafe or inadequate structures. Hostels lack basic facilities. Children are served poor-quality food. Food adulteration has become a serious concern, extending even to reputed establishments. Illegal constructions mushroom unchecked. Yet these subjects rarely generate the kind of political outrage that follows when a police officer stops a politician from entering an Assembly or Parliament in violation of the rules.

Then comes the predictable theatre

The Opposition blames the government. The government constitutes a committee. A few officials are suspended. The previous government is blamed. Political leaders make statements. Television channels debate the tragedy for a few

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That is why neither ruling parties nor Opposition parties consistently fight these battles. It is easier to stage a protest over a political insult than to take on the builder-politician-official nexus. It is easier to shout "We want justice!" in an Assembly than to demand accountability for a dangerous building in one's own constituency.

The fundamental question, therefore, is simple: Are our politicians really of the people, by the people and for the people?

Democracy cannot mean merely winning elections and enjoying the privileges of office. It means accepting responsibility after the applause ends.

Politicians may demand freedom from patriarchy, discrimination and every other form of oppression. But they should also ask themselves whether they are willing to free citizens from the far more entrenched colonial mindset of VIP culture, privilege, arbitrary power and impunity.

The people do not need more slogans about justice.

They need politicians who will actually deliver it.

(The author is a former Chief Editor at The Hans India)

Sweden's billionaires rise as egalitarian values evolve

Fewer taxes on wealth made the pursuit of riches more acceptable

HAKAN JOHANSSON & AXEL VIKSTROM



SWEDEN is imagined as the land of equality, modesty and Jantelagen -- the unwritten rule that no one should think they are better than anyone else. But there has also been a fascination within Sweden with its billionaires, especially those who abide by these dominant cultural norms. In the case of Ingvar Kamprad, the founder of furniture giant IKEA, Swedes appreciated that he drove an old car (a Volvo, of course), engaged with employees working on the floor in his stores, and every year personally handed out Christmas gifts. His (some would say strategic) display of ordinariness made people overlook the fact that Kamprad was one of the world's richest people and had moved to Switzerland to avoid Sweden's high taxes. But things have changed.

The Wall Street Journal has written about Sweden's surprising "capitalist makeover" and the Financial Times has reported on the idea the country is "overflowing with billionaires". And in 2024 The BBC broadcast a documentary podcast called Super-rich Swedes. There are good reasons for their interest. While for a long time Sweden was a country with some of the world's highest taxes, this no longer applies to capital taxation. For instance, it no longer has a wealth tax, an inheritance tax or a property tax.

The ideal of egalitarianism doesn't seem to align with patterns of wealth accumulation, especially at the very top. Forbes calculates more than 50 US-dollar billionaires in

Sweden. This becomes even more extraordinary in a country of just 10.6 million people. We used Forbes and UN data and found that in 2025 Sweden ranked fourth globally, with 4.7 dollar billionaires per million people. When excluding micro-states (fewer than one million people), Sweden is outnumbered only by Singapore (9.9), Hong Kong (9.1) and Cyprus (7.3), but before Switzerland (4.6) in fifth place. It ranks much higher than some of the world's largest economies like the US (2.7), Germany (2.1), Canada (2.0) and the UK (0.8). It is difficult to say for sure whether changes in regulation and wealth concentration have altered cultural norms, but there are clear indicators. Younger generations are now expressing strong materialistic values. When they rank what matters in life, earning money comes second to being with friends and far more important than being with family or getting an education. Young Swedes and adults alike dream of building a "money machine" by investing in stocks so they can exit the labour market long before retirement. This might be surprising to some, since Sweden has long been shaped by a strong work ethic, both politically and culturally. In research for a yet-to-be published paper, we found Swedish tabloids and business magazines show a remarkable rise in reporting about billion-

aires. This includes a fascination with their personal lives and framing them in positive terms such as "entrepreneurs", "investors" and "philanthropists" (rather than "capitalists", for example).

Awe and suspicion

This does not mean that wealth is no longer a sensitive topic in Sweden. When studying articles about billionaires in one of the country's leading tabloids, we found an ambivalent form of "wealth porn". In Sweden "wealth porn" tends to oscillate between celebrating it and questioning the luxurious lifestyles of billionaires. The articles tempt readers with drone images and descriptions of lavish mansions – but they also repeatedly point out how reluctant the billionaires are to display and talk about their wealth. This frames the topic as socially sensitive and sometimes even dangerous to the billionaires' personal safety. Readers are invited to fantasise about life as a billionaire – the transgressive act of breaking Jantelagen adds spice to the fantasy. This kind of "wealth porn" remains focused on the moral issues around conspicuous consumption.

Even though Sweden has long been a model of social democracy, the processes through which billionaires accumulate fortunes, and the political influence such wealth can generate, largely escape scrutiny. Swedes' ambivalence towards billionaires is also il-

lustrated in a recent survey we conducted with a representative sample of the population. We asked people a set of questions about their views on money and wealth – it turned out that many find money a strong personal motivator. These people supported statements like "to have a lot of money is an important driver for me". This suggests there is no social taboo around trying to get rich. People also said money matters socially, as they largely supported statements like "money gives status and respect". This indicates that hiding personal wealth may not be so important.

In fact, displaying it might bring social benefits – being seen as a successful entrepreneur and someone to look up to, for example. We also asked about caps on wealth, but found strong support for statements like "one can never have too much money".

While this indicates that Swedes value wealth, they still hold an ambiguous relationship with the super-rich. People reacted strongly against seeing the rich as "good role models for others". Striving to get rich seems to have become more socially acceptable in Sweden. Perhaps it always has been the way, but Swedes just never spoke about it (at least not in public). Actually being rich remains a contested topic.

If Jantelagen still exerts any influence, it seems to be centred on shaping attitudes towards the wealthy themselves – rather than as a force to discourage the pursuit of wealth.

(The writers are associated with the Lund University, Sweden)

Trump's mail voting crackdown tests limits of presidential power

Supreme Court faces a high-stakes decision with the US midterms less than two months away

JOHN E. JONES III



A federal court issued an injunction to stop the rollout of the Postal Service plans, and after the Trump administration appealed that injunction, the Supreme Court is now, finally, considering whether the injunction should be lifted and the administration's plan regarding new mail-in ballot rules can be carried out

THE Trump administration's proposal to crack down on voting by mail in federal elections – articulated in a March 2026 executive order – faces its toughest legal test so far, as the Supreme Court decides whether to allow the measure to go ahead or maintain a lower court's block on its implementation. Despite offering no evidence of widespread fraud, the White House has said the many measures it wants to put in place will "enhance election integrity via the United States Mail."

Those measures include using the Department of Homeland Security, the US Postal Service and the Department of Justice to vet the eligibility of voters, establish new standards for mail ballots and who can use them, and investigate and prosecute any state and local officials who issue federal ballots to ineligible voters, including noncitizens. Two major lawsuits were filed to stop the administration from carrying out plans related to the Postal Service. The lawsuits say the plans would result in widespread disenfranchisement and that the administration had no constitutionally granted authority to interfere in how states run elections.

The cases have worked their way through lower courts, and now the Supreme Court is considering the plans for the second time, having allowed them on Aug. 24, 2026, to go ahead in a technical decision that did not deal with the substance of the administration's plans.

A federal court then issued an injunction to stop the rollout of the Postal Service plans, and after the Trump administration appealed that injunction, the Supreme Court is now, finally, considering whether the injunction should be lifted and the administration's plan regarding new mail-in ballot rules can be carried out.

The Conversation US Politics and Legal Affairs Editor Naomi Schalit spoke about the importance of the legal battle with John E. Jones III, the president of Dickinson College, who served for almost two decades as a federal court judge.

Schalit: I'd like to talk less about the legal issues and more with you about the importance of this case. I thought I'd start with a really obnoxious kind of question that I

have never asked before in my whole career: On a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being the most important and 1 being the least, how important is this?

Jones: Ultimately, the decision in this case is at least a 9, if not a 10. It has the potential, if decided in a certain way, to interfere with the franchise of voting in a way that the federal government has never attempted to do, and certainly the president has never attempted to do before. It literally could disenfranchise thousands and thousands of voters, depending on where the decision lands.

Schalit: Has it happened before that such a momentous case with potential ramifications for voting has come to the Supreme Court this close to an election? The midterms are less than 60 days away.

Jones: I can't think of any historical analogue to this case. My overarching sense from a process standpoint is that it didn't have to be this way. The Supreme Court could have decided it on the first go-round, when it rendered the decision that allowed the order to go ahead by staying the injunction from the lower court and would not address the merits of the challenger's claims.

Schalit: You're a former federal judge. You understand the culture, how things work. How will the justices approach consideration of this case?

Jones: The Supreme Court doesn't convene its term until October. It is not uncommon for the justices to sort of scatter

and do different things. Some teach, some lecture, some write books, some probably relax during the break. That creates some logistical difficulties when there needs to be a coalescing of the members of the court.

The briefs are immediately due, and it does not appear that they're going to have oral argument, since this is coming off the so-called shadow or emergency docket.

Given all those things, and the urgency with which some resolution is required in light of the upcoming election, I am going to go out on a judicial limb and say that I think what the court will likely do is engage in an exercise in balancing. We call it a balancing of the equities. To determine whether one side or the other will suffer irreparable harm.

In other words, who is harmed more? That's what happens when you enter an injunction. You have to weigh the equities. That's what courts do.

So it would be easy to see that the justices could say that, because of the state elections apparatus, the states stand to be harmed more than the administration if this kind of patched-together regime is implemented by the Postal Service. They could say, in fact, it may be impossible to implement it in time for the midterm elections.

I think it is highly possible that they will deny a stay of the lower court's injunction and not allow the executive order to be implemented, at least the part involving the US Postal Service, which is the problematic part in terms of this election. And they may not rule on the constitutionality of the executive order until sometime after the election, perhaps after they conduct oral argument and they have an opportunity to more thoroughly consider the case.

Schalit: So instead of entering this discussion thinking about whether the executive order was constitutional, they would be beginning their consideration by looking at the very immediate problems that may be caused by it, and asking, "Where's the greatest damage going to be done if we let this go on or if we stop it?"

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