Recently, the USA has announced that F-1 and M-1 visa holders who are planning to take online only models will not be allowed to stay in the USA. Many universities in the USA are planning to shift all their classes online for the fall semester due to Covid-19 pandemic.

Fall semester starts in late August and ends in late December or early January whereas the Spring semester begins in January and ends in early May.

***F-1 visas are issued to study in the USA for full-time students whereas M-1 visas are issued to students engaging in vocational or non-academic studies.

The announcement comes weeks after the USA President suspended H1-B highly skilled worker visas through the end of the year. Most of these visas go to Indian citizens each year.

Announcements Made:

- The students outside the USA planning to take all courses online in the fall semester would not be permitted entry into the country.
- The USA would not issue visas to students who are going to take all their classes online due to the pandemic.
- It also stated that the active students under F-1 and M-1 visas in such programs must depart the country or take other measures, such as transferring to a school with in-person instruction to remain in lawful status.
- The USA regulations do not allow students in F-1 status to be in online classes but normally F-1 students are allowed to take one class or three credit hours online.

Affected Population:

- There were more than one million international students in the United States for the 2018-19 academic year. That accounted for 5.5% of the total USA’s higher education population.
- Also, international students contributed $44.7 billion to the USA’s economy in 2018.
- India is the second largest source of the foreign students in the USA after China.
- The largest number of international students come from China, followed by
Consequences:

If alternative measures are not opted then these students may face immigration consequences including, but not limited to, the initiation of removal proceedings. It is a difficult situation for students as international travel already faces disruption due to Covid-19.

Available Alternatives: Affected students may switch to visitor status but it is not a long term solution as visitor status is short term and there is no guarantee that it will be approved.

Considering the unprecedented pandemic scenario, the USA can amend the regulation for F-1 and M-1 students. The one-size-fits-all approach will create more havoc and complexities not only in USA administration but also in diplomatic relations with countries like India and China.