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1. Nimisha Priya Case: What option does Kerala nurse on death row in Yemen have?

Kerala Nurse Nimisha Priya Case

How the case unfolded



THE MURDER CHARGE

Nimisha Priya from Kerala went to Yemen in 2009 to work as a nurse. She set up a clinic in 2015 along with Yemeni national Talal Abdo Mehdi. Media reports have said there was a falling out between the two in 2017 and she murdered him. She was arrested the same year.



THE RESCUE EFFORTS

Priya's family was required to pay a pre-negotiation fee of \$40,000 to Mehdi's kin following talks. Priya's family raised over \$19,800 through collective efforts and paid it in July.

THE DEATH SENTENCE

She was sentenced to death by a court in 2020. After efforts to secure her release through the Islamic tradition of "diyah", or paying "blood money" to the victim's family, stalled, Yemen's President Rashad al-Alimi approved her death sentence on Monday.

The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) recently said it is extending "all possible help" to secure the release of Nimisha Priya, a nurse from Kerala. This comes a day after President of Yemen Rashad al-Alimi sanctioned her death sentence for allegedly murdering a Yemeni citizen in 2017.

The Palakkad native was imprisoned for the killing of Yemeni citizen Talal Abdo Mehdi in July 2017. She was apprehended while trying to flee the country and sentenced to death in 2020. The Supreme Judicial Council dismissed her appeal in November 2023.

What is the case against Nimisha Priya?

After qualifying as a nurse, Priya moved to Yemen in 2008. In 2011, she married Tomy Thomas in Kerala, with whom she returned to Yemen. She worked as a nurse, while he worked as an electrician. Both dreamt of starting their own clinic but to do this, they needed to partner with a local resident under Yemeni law.

Enter Talal Abdo Mahdi. A regular at the clinic where Priya worked as a nurse, the couple approached Mahdi for help. Mahdi even came to Kerala in 2015, to attend the baptism of Priya's daughter. While Priya managed to return to Yemen, the civil war (that began in 2014) prevented her husband and daughter from doing so. They remained in Kerala.

In Yemen, Mahdi opened a new clinic but refused to share his income with Priya. He also allegedly forged documents to present her as his wife. According to Priya's family, what followed was a cycle of physical and sexual abuse. Priya was unable to leave because Mahdi had taken all her travel documents and passports. He also did not allow her to speak to her family in Kerala.

Fed up with this cycle of abuse, Priya, with the help of fellow nurse Hannan, allegedly tried to sedate Mahdi in a bid to obtain her papers. However, an overdose resulted in his death. Panicking, the duo decided to chop up Mahdi's body and dump it in a water tank. Both were eventually arrested.

What is blood money?

According to Islamic law, victims of crimes have a say in how criminals are punished. In cases of murder, this principle applies to the families of victims. Although murder is punished via the death penalty, the victim's family (specifically, heirs) may choose to "forgive" the murderer in exchange for monetary compensation.

This is the principle of *diyya*, or "blood money". It can be traced to the Holy Quran: "O believers! The law of retaliation is set for you in cases of murder — a free man for a free man, a slave for a slave, and a female for a female. But if the offender is pardoned by the victim's guardian, then 'blood money' should be decided fairly and payment should be made courteously. This is a concession and a mercy from your Lord." [2:178]

Scholars believe that the idea behind this is to encourage the virtue of forgiveness, while also providing reparative justice to the victim's family. The scriptures do not set any specific amount as compensation, with the sum generally arrived at via negotiation between the murderer's family/representatives and the victim's family. Some Islamic countries, however, have set minimum compensation amounts.

In November 2023, a \$40,000 payment was made to get negotiations started. Priya's family will likely have to pay up to \$400,000 to waive the death penalty. The 'Save Nimisha Priya International Action Council', formed in 2020, is in the process of raising the required funds.

Relevance: GS Prelims; Indian Diaspora

Source: Indian Express

2. After H-1B visa, protests in the US over OPT: What is this programme used by Indian students

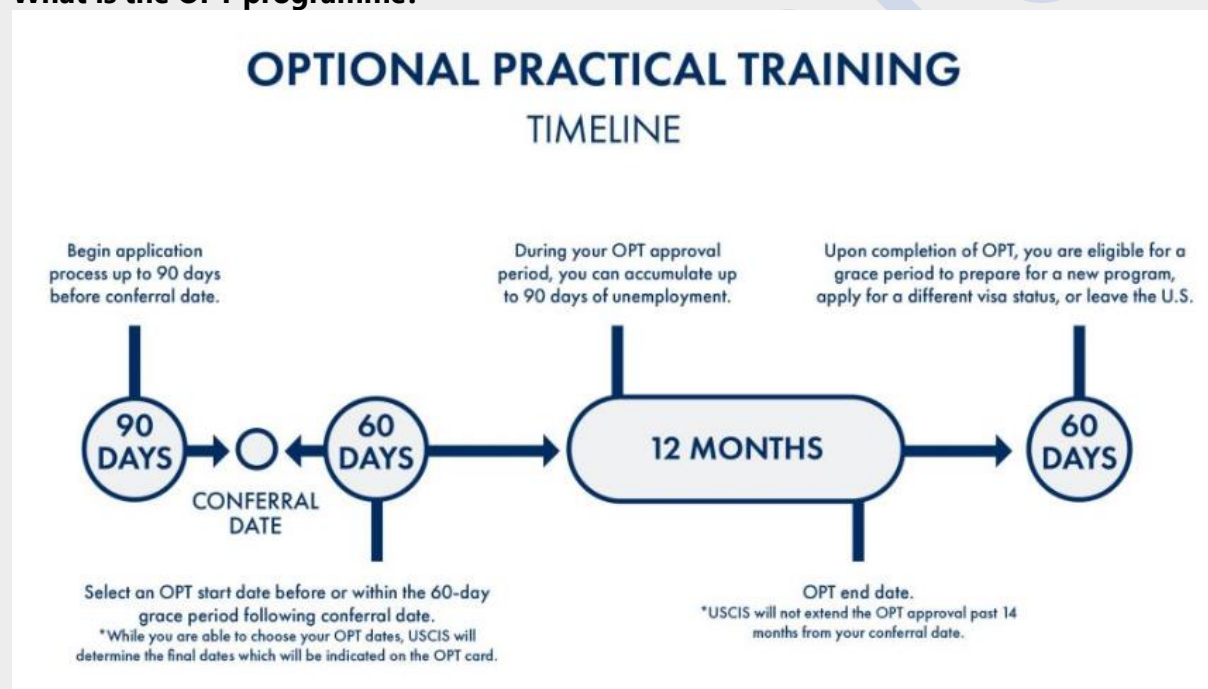
Introduction

Supporters of US President-elect Donald Trump's 'Make America Great Again' (MAGA) idea have turned their ire on the Optional Practical Training (OPT) programme, considered a gateway for international students seeking an H-1B visa.

The OPT programme allows international students in the US to secure work on a temporary basis. This makes them better candidates for the H-1B visa, which allows skilled foreign nationals to be employed in the US for another six years.

OPT is a popular program among international students in the US, and Indian students now make up the largest international cohort in the country.

What is the OPT programme?



The OPT programme authorises international students, who are in the US on an F-1 visa, to work for up to 12 months in an area "directly related" to their major area of study, according to US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). International students who are enrolled full-time for at least one academic year in the US can apply for OPT.

This could be pre-completion OPT, which means that the student can work before completing their studies, or post-completion OPT, which authorises the student to work after completing their studies. A pre-completion OPT allows the student to work up to 20 hours a week while the academic session is underway, and full-time when the session is not. A post-completion OPT requires the student to work at least 20 hours a week or full-time.

Students who have obtained a degree in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) can extend their post-completion OPT by another 24 months. This means that they can

work in the US for a total of three years. USCIS lists degree programmes that are eligible for this extension.

The academic institution where the student is enrolled can recommend them for the OPT, and the student can then apply to the USCIS for the programme. Those authorised to work under OPT remain under F-1 visa status.

How many students are part of the OPT programme in the US?

The 2023-24 Open Doors data shows that of the 8.83 lakh international students in the US, 2.42 lakh (27.47%) were in the OPT programme.

While the largest chunk of Indian students in the US is pursuing postgraduate courses, an increasing number of Indian students have chosen OPT in the past few years. In 2023-24, of the 3.31 lakh Indian students in the US, 97,556 students (29.42%) were in the OPT programme. This is an uptick compared to 69,062 students in 2022-23, and 68,188 students in 2021-22.

The STEM courses, which allow students to obtain a 24-month OPT extension, remain the most popular among Indian students in the US – of the 3.31 lakh Indian students in the US in 2023-24, 24.5% were pursuing engineering, while 42.9% were pursuing maths or computer science.

Why have MAGA supporters opposed the OPT programme?

Their argument against OPT, particularly the extension for STEM graduates, is that it takes jobs away from American citizens.

In 2023, WashTech (Washington Alliance of Technology Workers) petitioned the US Supreme Court in a case challenging the validity of the STEM OPT. The Supreme Court then rejected their appeal to review the ruling of a circuit court, which had earlier upheld the validity of the programme.

The Obama administration had increased the STEM OPT extension to 36 months from 29 months.

Relevance: GS Prelims; International Relations

Source: Indian Express

3. What is Canada's RCIC scheme, how it can help Indians with expiring work permits

Introduction

Over the past year, changes in immigration and study visa rules have made it harder to secure Permanent Residency (PR) in Canada. PR remains the primary goal for the majority of students from India, particularly those from Punjab.

Recently, Canada announced that the Post-Graduate Work Permits (PGWPs) of nearly 7.66 lakh international students are set to expire by the end of next year. Many fear they would have to leave the country if they can't secure PR before their permits expire. However, Canada has introduced a new programme that offers fresh opportunities for such students to settle in the country.

This initiative, known as the Rural Community Immigration Class (RCIC), provides a pathway for foreign nationals, including students, to apply for PR if they commit to living and working in designated rural communities.

What is the Rural Community Immigration Class (RCIC)?



The Rural Community Immigration Class is a new programme launched by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) in December 2024. It aims to address labour shortages and promote development in smaller rural communities by attracting individuals willing to settle long-term in these areas.

For students whose PGWPs are nearing expiration, and who may be struggling to meet the Comprehensive Ranking System (CRS) score for PR or secure high-paying jobs, this programme offers a valuable opportunity.

Where are these communities located, and why has Canada opened PR opportunities here?

These communities are primarily located outside Canada's major cities and regions. They are smaller towns situated in rural areas near larger regions like Ontario, Vancouver, and others. Canada launched this initiative to boost the development of these underrepresented areas by addressing labour shortages, promoting population and economic growth.

Who is eligible for applying to the Rural Community Immigration Class?

According to IRCC, eligibility for this programme includes:

1. Education Level: Applicants can include those with 10+2, graduation, or secondary school qualifications.
2. Studies: Students who have completed at least 18 months of study in one of the designated communities are eligible to apply for PR directly. Those who studied outside these communities can also apply but must meet additional conditions.
3. Job Offer: Applicants need a job offer letter from a registered or designated employer in the community. This job offer can be in any category, including non-skilled roles. The offer must be submitted to the community, which will then issue a certificate supporting the PR application.
4. Work Experience: Relevant work experience is typically required, though this condition may be waived for international graduates who meet certain criteria.
5. Language Proficiency: Applicants must meet the Canadian Language Benchmark (CLB) requirements based on the job's NOC TEER (National Occupational Classification Training, Education, Experience, and Responsibilities) level:

TEER 0-1: CLB 6

TEER 2-3: CLB 5

TEER 4-5: CLB 4

6. Financial Proof: Applicants must demonstrate they have at least half of the low-income threshold for rural areas (as determined by Statistics Canada) to sustain themselves for one year.

7. Intent to Reside: Candidates must provide genuine proof of their intention to live in the designated rural community.

What should applicants keep in mind?

Research participating communities and their designated employers thoroughly. Act quickly, as Post-Graduate Work Permits (PGWPs) are time-sensitive and ensure all documentation, especially proof of intent to reside, is accurate and complete.

What are the specific benefits of this programme for international students?

Rural areas have less competition than larger cities, increasing the chances of securing a PR pathway. Designated employers in these communities often assist with the PR process, easing the application burden, said experts.

Why is this programme significant for Indian students?

Indian students constitute the largest share of international students in Canada, accounting for nearly 40%. Many face challenges transitioning to PR due to increased competition and stricter requirements. Several have even staged protests in Canada over these issues.

Experts suggest that students aspiring to settle in Canada should explore opportunities in rural areas through this programme rather than focusing solely on larger cities.

Relevance: GS Prelims; International Relations

Source: Indian Express & The Hindu