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US offers 20000 visas under lottery system

WASHINGTON, Feb 10 (Reuter): The State Department announced on Thursday a special offer of immigrant visas to 20,000 people from 162 countries judged 'underrepresented' in the flow of foreigners to the United States.

The programme, 'designed to enhance diversity in immigration' would make available 10,000 visas in 1990 and 10,000 more in 1991 under a lottery system.

Applicants must apply between March 1 and 31, 1989, the department said.

Several years ago some 1.4 million people applied for 10,000 immigrant visas under a similar programme. Response this time is expected to be the same, department spokesman Philip Covington told Reuters.

Unlike other immigrant visa programmes, this one does not require applicants to have a family member already residing in the United States or a department of labour certifica-

tion of a job offer, Covington said.

"This is a programme for persons who would otherwise not qualify," he said.

Under the rules, those eligible must come from the 162 countries which in 1988 used fewer than 5,000 immigrant visas.

People born in the following countries are excluded from the offer. China, Taiwan, Colombia, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guyana, Haiti, India, Jamaica, South Korea, Mexico, the Philippines and Britain, which includes Bermuda and Hong Kong.

Congress last year mandated the new programme, saying the regular one was biased against people from certain countries.

Because of the Soviet Union's relaxation of emigration restrictions in the past year, the United States has been under pressure to accept more

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US offer

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 Armenian and Jewish emigres. They are among the groups eligible for the new programme.

However, because a computer will randomly select the people who qualify for the visas, it is impossible to predict which nationalities will benefit most, a department official said.

A State Department fact sheet describes rigid rules for applications. All must be typed and sent in an envelope of a specific size.

They will be accepted only during March and must be mailed to a special mail Box: OP-1, P.O. Box 20199, Washington, D.C. 20199-9998.

The names of those chosen will be forwarded to the closest US embassy or consulate which will invite the individual to file a formal immigrant visa application.

Husbands and wives may apply separately. If one spouse is selected, the other spouse and any children also qualify.