

### **PM launches online visa policy**

Prime Minister Imran Khan on Thursday launched online visa policy, saying that Pakistan is being opened for the world to attract foreign investment and boost tourism in the country. After pressing the button to launch the online visa policy and giving away shields to the foreign minister, state minister of interior, secretary interior and others, the Prime Minister said that there is a Chinese saying that a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.

He said that foreign missions abroad would be asked to promote Pakistan for investment and tourism and the foreign minister and the foreign secretary are working on it. The Prime Minister added that this is the first step to open Pakistan for people and to move away from the mindset of making it difficult for people to come to Pakistan. He added that in the 1960s Pakistan was a fast developing country but in the 1970s, a 'socialist' government came to power and reversed the policies of the 1960s. Making money was considered a sin. Pakistan therefore suffered a lot economically owing to the mindset of the 1970s, added the Prime Minister.

Prime Minister Khan said that visa regime opening is a manifestation of confidence in the country so that investors could come to Pakistan. If they do not come, how would they appreciate the potential of this country, said the Prime Minister. He said that there is great potential of tourism, both religious and beach, and the discovery of 48-feet-long 'Sleeping Budha' statue at Haripur district, which is the biggest Buddha, could be a visiting place for global tourists in particular.

"We need to market religious, beach, ancient and religious sites for tourism and the government is working to bring them on map and promote them for attracting tourists," he further stated.

The Prime Minister said that Pakistan's current account deficit is \$19 billion while earning of Malaysia from beach tourism is \$22 billion and Turkey's \$40 billion. The Prime Minister said that Pakistan is unique because it has variety to offer to the world. Today is a beginning towards promoting tourism.

"Pakistan is secure today and next Pakistan Super League (PSL) edition would be held in Pakistan," the Prime Minister said, adding that Pakistan is on the path of peace and wants good relations with all he neighbours.

State Minister for Interior Shehryar Khan Afridi while speaking on the occasion said that new and revolutionary visa regime would pave the way for opening up of Pakistan for the foreign investment, tourism and religious tourism.

"Under the new visa regime, Pakistani missions abroad will grant three-month e-visas to foreigners in 175 countries within a processing time of 7-10 working days. In the initial phase, we are starting a pilot project for one month for citizens of the United Kingdom (UK), the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Malaysia, China, and Turkey who would be granted e-visas in 7-10 working days," the minister said.

He said the number of countries for visa on arrival for individual tourist/group tourist has been revised from 24 to 50. "Foreign nationals of Indian origin will also be allowed to avail the facility of visa on arrival for religious tourism. The multiple business visas for five years shall be granted within 24 hours subject to provision of the required documents," he added.

"The average visa fee has been reduced by 22 to 65 percent. Importantly for nationals of Bahrain, Malaysia, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and the UAE, Pakistani missions will grant 30 days multiple entry visas," he added.

He said that Ministry of Interior and National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA) along with Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) has carried out extensive workshops, test runs and training sessions for all the stakeholders so that, they are ready to serve the "new Pakistan online system," the minister added.

Pakistan Online Visa System (POVS) will facilitate citizens of 175 countries to visit Pakistan with just an internet connection.

According to POVVS, a comprehensive list of 12 visa categories and policies has been introduced and now the applicants - businessmen, tourists, and students - can apply online at NADRA website.

As per the new visa policy, a visa on arrival facility has been introduced for tourists of 50 countries and business visa on arrival for 96 countries. "Travellers may apply for electronic travel authorisation (ETA) at least 48 hours prior to travelling," it says.

The 12 visa categories include tourist/visit visa, businessmen visa, work visa, official/diplomatic visa, journalist visa, family visit visa, socio-culture/conference/seminar/short training visa, Tablighi visa, missionary visa, international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) visa, student visa and domestic aid visa.

It says that Pakistan missions are authorised to grant three months visit/tourists visa, five years multiple business visa within 24 hours to businessmen and visa on arrival (VOA) for 30 days to be granted to businessmen of 96 countries on production of required documents.

The required documents for businessmen visa include photograph, passport, proof of registration of company which is extending invitation with Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan (SECP), chamber of commerce (CEC), recommendation letter from chamber of commerce and industry (CC&I) of respective foreign country, invitation letter from business organisation duly recommended by concerned trade organisation in Pakistan and a recommendation letter by the honorary investment counsellor of Board of Investment (BOI) commerce attaché.

As per the new visa policy, required documents for visit/tourist visa include photograph, passport, invitation letter by the sponsor or hotel-booking details in case of individual tourist and invitation letter in case of group by the tour operator designated by the department of tourist service.

The 50 countries, whose residents will be granted visa on arrival (tourist), include Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Kuwait, Turkey, Germany, Japan, Italy, Malaysia, Austria, Malta, Bahrain, Azerbaijan, Indonesia, Nepal, Singapore, Jordan, New Zealand, Sri Lanka, South Korea, Oman, Qatar, Switzerland, Brunei, Tajikistan, Spain, Angola, Saint Kitts, Tonga, Argentina, Mozambique, Ghana, Maldives, Tanzania, Lithuania, Finland, Luxembourg, Thailand Nevis, Trinidad and Tobago, Iceland, Saint Lucia, Tunisia, Monaco, Bahamas, Western Samoa, Barbados, Zambia, Botswana, Paraguay, Costa Rica, and Rwanda.

Business visa list of countries include Saudi Arabia, the United States of America (USA), the United Kingdom (UK), China, Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Turkey, Qatar, UAE, Malaysia, Russia, Canada, Germany, Indonesia, Australia, Japan, Denmark, Italy, France, Korea, Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Oman, Switzerland, Bangladesh, Ireland, New Zealand, Spain, Austria, Nigeria, Sri Lanka, Norway, Sweden, Mozambique, Netherlands, South Sudan, Myanmar, Belgium, Finland, South Africa, Argentina, Brazil, Azerbaijan, Kenya, Czech Republic, Algeria, Angola, Croatia, Slovenia, Ivory Coast, Djibouti, Ecuador, Estonia, Kazakhstan, Panama, Tanzania, Paraguay, Thailand, Benin, Peru, Togo, Gambia, Philippines, Tunisia, Bulgaria, Latvia, Poland, Cambodia, Ghana, Lebanon, Portugal, Ukraine, Cameroon, Greece, Lithuania, Guatemala, Madagascar, Romania, Chile, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Mauritius, Colombia, Honduras, Mexico,

Senegal, Comoros, Hong Kong, Montenegro, Sierra Leone, Vietnam, Cote D'ivoire, Hungary, Morocco and Singapore.

Sources said that under the new policy, the name of Bangladesh has been removed from B-list countries and now the list includes the name of India, Israel, Bhutan, Nigeria, Serbia, Somalia and Uganda.

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