

FAZAL SHER & ALI HUSSAIN

**Different categories thru online facility ‘Around 31,000 foreign nationals apply for visas**

ISLAMABAD: Around 31,000 foreign nationals from 141 countries have so far applied for Pakistani visas in different categories through online visa facility introduced by the government in March this year to attract tourism and foreign investment.

A senior official of Ministry of Interior told Business Recorder as many as 31,000 applications for visas until March 2019 were submitted out of which 26,000 were issued visas under different categories including tourist visa, tourist visa on arrival, business visa, business visa on arrival, work visa, diplomatic visa, journalist visa, official visa, family visit visa, student visa, Tabligh visa, missionary visa, NGO/INGO visa and domestic aid visa.

He said that the National Database and Registration Authority (Nadra) was dealing with the new facility to attract foreign tourism adding that all foreigners are exempted from registration with the police except nationals of countries that include Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Israel, Nigeria, Palestine and Somalia.

Another senior official of Foreign Office said that when an applicant applies for any category, his/her credentials are checked by Passport and Immigration Department. He said that if any individual/foreign national is found to be on the blacklist, his/her application is rejected.

The sources further said that upon arrival in the country, airports are required to share travelers’ data with concerned departments of all security agencies, including Directorate of Immigration and Passport, Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), Military Intelligence (MI), Federal Investigation Agency (FIA), Ministry of Interior, Intelligence Bureau (IB), Federal Board of Revenue (FBR), Nadra, counterterrorism departments and special branches of all provinces.

The new online visa system is open for citizens of 175 countries with citizens from 50 countries eligible to apply for visa on arrival under tourist category and those from 95 countries eligible to apply for visa on arrival under business category.

According to the official of the Interior Ministry, 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 organization duly recommended by concerned trade organization in Pakistan and a recommendation letter by the honorary investment counselor of Board of Investment (BOI) commerce attaché.

Sources further revealed that the 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, Columbia, Honduras, Mexico, Senegal, Comoros, Hong Kong, Montenegro, Sierra Leone, Vietnam, Cote D'ivoire, Hungary, Morocco and Singapore.

The 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 and Somalia.