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PASSPORT TO GLOBAL JOB OPPORTUNITIES



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H-1B visa registration starts on March 7

WASHINGTON: The US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) has announced that



the initial registration period for the highly sought-after H-1B visas for fiscal year 2026 will take place from March 7,

2025 to March 24, 2025. The H-1B visa, a non-immigrant visa, enables US companies to

hire foreign workers in specialised fields requiring technical or theoretical expertise, with Indian IT professionals being

the largest beneficiaries. The registration window will open at 12 PM Eastern Time (10:30 PM IST) on March 7 and close at the same time on March 24, USCIS stated.

During this period, prospective petitioners and representatives must use a USCIS online account to register each beneficiary electronically for the selection process and pay the associated \$215 registration fee," the agency said.

Employers and representatives can create USCIS online accounts at

(Cont. on page-2)

Australia's new student visa rules released

SYDNEY: First-rate education, lively cultural opportunities and favorable career prospects draw thousands of international students to Australia each year. However, this year has experienced a few changes.

Students planning to further their education in Australia need to examine the student visa regulations as the government have changed its visa policies.

The revised regulations aim to streamline the visa application process, while

also improving educational standards and ensuring that international students continue contributing to the country's economy and workforce. Therefore, if you are a prospective student planning to continue your education at an Australian University, this article is meant for you.

In the past, a Letter of Offer from Australian universities was the key document needed by a person to apply for a student visa. It included all

(Cont. on page-2)

Over 2000 exhibitors to participate in SATTE

MUMBAI: SATTE (South Asia's Travel & Tourism Exchange) 2025 will take place from Feb 19-21, 2025, at Yashobhoomi, New Delhi.

This year's event will host over 2,000 exhibitors and attract more than 40,000 visitors from across the globe, further solidifying SATTE's position as the premier platform for the travel industry.

SATTE, Southeast Asia's largest and most influential travel and

tourism exhibition, has launched its bold new "+1" marketing campaign, underscoring its position as the undisputed leader in the industry. In addition to this ambitious campaign, SATTE 2025 is set to feature a series of exclusive events and partnerships, making it the must-attend event for industry leaders worldwide.

SATTE offers a comprehensive platform to domestic and interna-

(Cont. on page-7)

UAE airports set new record

ABU DHABI: Airports in the UAE shattered 2023 passenger forecasts of 140 million and welcomed 147.8 million passengers last year.

Passenger traffic grew 10pc compared with the 134 million passengers UAE airports welcomed in 2023, according to the General Civil Aviation Authority (GCAA). Air traffic movements reached 1.03 million flights last year, marking the highest recorded air traffic volume in the country's history.

According to Abdullah bin Touq Al Marri, the

UAE Minister of Economy and Chairman of the GCAA, these figures are not just growth indicators, they are a clear tes-



tament to the strength of the UAE's aviation sector and its key role in supporting the nation-

al economy. "The sector continues to enhance the country's position as a global hub for air transport, trade, tourism,

and investment," Al Marri said. Next week, Abu Dhabi will host the

(Cont. on page-2)

Air India's Mumbai-Melbourne flight to turn seasonal from March 29

MUMBAI: Air India has decided to convert the Mumbai-Melbourne route, which is served thrice a week, into a seasonal operation from March-end, leaving the passengers with no choice of direct flight between the two cities. The airline has suspended the operations of flight AI310 from Mumbai to Melbourne and flight AI311 flying back from Melbourne to Mumbai from March 29 to Sept 13.

The direct flights on

this route will be operational again from Sept 14 with a changed time-



table. Flight AI310 that departs from Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj In-

ternational Airport at 12.50am and reaches Melbourne at 6.10pm,

will depart at 1.35am and reach at 5.30pm. Similarly, flight AI311 that

departs from Melbourne at 8pm and reaches Mumbai at 2.35am, will leave at 7pm and will reach Mumbai at 2.35am.

The suspension of the only direct flight between both these cities will result in increased travel time between both the cities which currently takes around 12 hours. Other options of connecting flights take longer to complete the journey, ranging from 13hr 25min to more than 52 hours.

The decision is expect-

ed to affect more than 30,000 people on this route who might be travelling for business, education and tourism. According to the data from Director general of civil Aviation (DGCA), 16,307 passengers travelled from Mumbai to Melbourne, whereas 16,758 passengers flew from Melbourne to Mumbai in the second and third quarter of 2024. These passengers will now have to choose from the connecting flights available on this route.

Foreigners can apply for Omani citizenship

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq issued Royal Decree

clare in writing his desire to renounce the nationality of the country

born in the Sultanate of Oman or their normal residence is in it.

courts do not have jurisdiction to consider matters of nationality and related disputes.

must be fluent in reading and writing Arabic, must have good conduct and behavior, must not have been previously sentenced to a final penalty for a felony or a crime that violates honor or trust, even if his reputation has been restored, must be in good health and free from infectious diseases, as specified in the regulations, must have a legitimate source of income that provides him with enough to meet his needs and the needs of those he supports.



17/2025 promulgating the Omani Nationality Law after reviewing the Basic Law of the state and the Omani Nationality Law issued by Royal Decree No 38/2014, and based on what the public interest requires.

of which he holds nationality, and that he does not hold the nationality of another country other than the country of which he will renounce nationality. Minor children acquire Omani nationality according to their father if they were

application without giving reasons. Article 4: The

Article 3: Applications related to nationality issues shall be submitted to the Ministry of Interior, which shall study and decide upon them by the procedures and controls specified in the regulations. The ministry may reject any appli-

As per Article 17 of the Law, a foreigner may apply for Omani citizenship if he or she meets the following conditions: The application must be preceded by his lawful and continuous residence in Oman for no less than 15 years and his absence during one year for a period not exceeding 90 days shall not prevent his residence from being considered continuous,

The applicant must de-

Australia's new student...

(Cont. from page-1)

the information regarding the student, including the programme they are enrolled in, course length, costs and the commencement date.

However, after the introduction of the new regulations on Jan 1, 2025, every application for a student visa must contain a valid Confirmation of Enrolment (CoE); otherwise, the application will be considered invalid.

WHAT DOES COE STAND FOR? As per the revised guidelines, the CoE will serve as a digital document that Australian universities will issue to confirm an international student's enrollment. Like a Letter of Offer, it will similarly contain information about the study programme, course duration and related fees. To obtain this document, students need to confirm their enrollment by being accepted into an Australian educational institution and paying the required tuition fees.

These regulations affect not just international students but also those already residing in the country wishing to extend their student visas. All student visa applications submitted after the rules take effect must

include a valid CoE. It is crucial to understand that if a visa application is deemed invalid due to the absence of CoE, the bridging visa also cannot be granted. In the same vein, a related bridging visa cannot be granted if a student's current visa runs out. Consequently, students ought to obtain a legitimate CoE regardless of whether they are applying for a new visa or renewing their current one.

New regulations prompt inquiries about the fate of visa applications filed before Jan 1, 2025. Legislators have considered this issue while establishing the new regulations. Any student visa application submitted before the announced date with the attached Letter of Offer will be deemed valid.

As Australia enacts these new regulations for international students in 2025, potential applicants should remain informed and proactive to guarantee a seamless entry into the nation's education system. These modifications indicate a wider initiative to improve transparency, maintain academic standards, and synchronize student visa policies with national priorities.

UAE airports set new...

(Cont. from page-1)

ICAO fourth Global Implementation Support Symposium (GISS 2025) alongside the launch of the Global Sustainable Aviation Marketplace -- an initiative by the UAE aimed at accelerating global efforts to scale up the production of sustainable, low-carbon aviation fuel. "These landmark events will be instrumental in advancing a safe and sustainable aviation ecosystem, with the UAE at its core," Al Marri said.

Dubai International Airport (DXB), the world's busiest inter-

national hub, set a new milestone by serving 92.3 million passengers last year. Meanwhile, Abu Dhabi Airports, which manages the UAE capital's five major commercial airports, reported 29 million passengers, and Sharjah Airport welcomed 17 million passengers.

The airports welcomed 41.6 million inbound passengers while 41.7 million departed and 64.4 million transited through airports last year, said GCAA. The aviation sector also witnessed a notable increase in workforce numbers,

with 9,622 registered pilots, 35,899 cabin crew members, 4,493 engineers, 461 air traffic controllers, and 419 dispatchers

Air cargo also saw a notable 17.8pc growth to reach 4.36 million tons compared with 3.7 million tons last year. These results reflect the sector's sustainable growth and operational efficiency and its vital role in connecting the world through the UAE. DXB served over 92 million passengers last year and has set a target to reach the 100 million milestone by 2026.

H-1B visa registration starts on ...

(Cont. from page-1)

any time. However, they can only submit beneficiary details and pay the fees starting from March 7. The selection process will take place after the registration period ends, so there's no urgency to register on the first day itself.

For FY 2026, USCIS will continue with the beneficiary-centric selection process, which was first introduced for FY 2025. "Under this process, registrations will be selected based on unique beneficiaries rather than the number of registrations submitted for them," USCIS explained.

This change aims to reduce the chances of fraud and ensure that each applicant has an

equal opportunity of being selected, regardless of how many times their name is submitted by different employers.

If USCIS receives enough unique beneficiary registrations by March 24, it will randomly select beneficiaries and send out notifications through the USCIS online accounts. If not, all properly submitted registrations will be selected.

The registration fee for each beneficiary is \$215. To accommodate the high volume of transactions, the US Department of Treasury has temporarily increased the daily credit card transaction limit from \$24,999.99 to \$99,999.99 for this H-1B season.

For transactions ex-

ceeding this limit, payments can be made through the Automated Clearing House (ACH). The USCIS advised that ACH users may need to inform their banks in advance to avoid any potential blocks on transactions.

The US Congress has capped H-1B visas at 65,000 annually, with an additional 20,000 slots for those holding advanced degrees from US institutions.

For FY 2026, the USCIS has introduced several improvements to its online system, including: Allowing paralegals to work with multiple legal representatives. Simplified procedures for legal representatives to add paralegals to company accounts.

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Indian companies keen on Saudi's \$63b Diriyah project

RIYADH: Several Indian firms have shown a keen interest in investing in Diriyah, a US\$

63-billion Saudi Arabian giga project, while some big names like Tatas and Oberois having already signed up, its CEO Jerry Inzerillo said.



Diriyah, being billed as the City of Earth, is being built on the outskirts of Saudi Arabia's capital Riyadh and it will have homes for one lakh people and office space for a further 1one lakh plus.

This new city will include over 40 luxury hotels, more than 1,000 shops, over 150 restaurants and cafes, a uni-

versity, arts and cultural assets, museums, an opera house, a 20,000-seater multipurpose event arena, a golf course and an international equestrian and polo centre, among other facilities.

The real estate development and tourism project aims to restore the historic birthplace of the modern Saudi kingdom and the site includes the UNESCO World Heritage Site of At-Turaif."At Diriyah we are keen to enhance the impact of India as one of Saudi Arabia's largest trading partners, ranking among the top in bilateral trade, with a trade volume of about \$52.8 billion in 2022-23," Inzerillo told a TV channel.

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FOREX RATES
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Japanese Yen	0.58	0.57
Swiss Franc (CHF)	96.93	95.10
Canadian Dollar	61.62	60.42
Australian Dollar	55.47	54.43
Norwegian Krone	7.85	7.70
Swedish Krona	8.06	7.90
New Zealand Dollar	49.93	49.08
Hong Kong Dollar	11.34	11.12
Kuwaiti Dinar	284.06	278.13
Singapore Dollar	65.27	63.97
Saudi Arabian Riyal	23.56	23.11
United Arab Emirates	24.05	23.59

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GULF FAQs

Can banks close accounts after multiple bounced cheques?

My two post-dated rent cheques bounced in the past six months because I forgot to maintain the required balance amount in my account. The landlord told me that my bank account would be closed if a third cheque bounced. Is this true? Can a bank close my account due to bounced cheques? And if my current account is closed, can I open a new one at a different bank? What is the legal view on this?

As to the first part of your queries, all banks at the time of entering a contract (for opening of current account) with a customer (i.e., the prospective account holders) are obliged to inform their customers in writing the consequences of returned cheques which include, fees, closure of the current account and/or a negative report to the competent "Credit Information Agency" (Al Etihad Credit Bureau). This follows Article 2.1.2.7 of the Regulatory Standards form part of the Consumer Protection Regulation (Circular No. 8 – 2020) of the UAE Central Bank (CBUAE), which reads as follows:

For accounts with a chequebook facility, licensed financial institutions must inform consumers in writing of:

a) Any limit on

the number of cheques permitted in their chequebook; and
b) The repercussions of returned cheques including fees, closure of the current account and/or a negative report to the Credit Information Agency.

Furthermore, it is learnt that onshore banks/financial institutions in the UAE have had instructions from

the below passage from the Q&A.

"As for the impact of this on the issuance of the chequebook, as per the CBUAE's instructions, for people to whom at least four cheques are returned due to insufficient funds, within a maximum period of one year between the first cheque and the fourth cheque, in this case, their accounts must be closed

Therefore, as to whether your bank can close your account if "a third cheque" bounces or whether the policy requires your bank to close the account after the return of four cheques within a year, it would be prudent for you to peruse through the terms and conditions of your current account (as issued by your bank) to get more clarity on

banks are now required to carry out checks with the Al Etihad Credit Bureau (AECB) to ensure the creditworthiness of their customers.

"Banks should advise their customers that returned cheques due to insufficient funds on the account will be recorded with the AECB and will negatively affect the creditworthiness of customers."

Accordingly, if your current account is closed by your present bank for returned cheques due to insufficient funds, the matter will invariably be reported to the AECB. Please note that this may adversely/negatively affect your overall creditworthiness score.

Therefore, if you subsequently apply to a

different bank to open a new account (with a chequebook facility), such bank (in consideration of your application) will check your AECB creditworthiness score – the basis on which the bank may accept or reject your 'account opening' application.

the Central Bank to close a current account for two years if four cheques (from the account) are returned for insufficiency of funds in a given calendar year, and if this is repeated then the account is to be closed for three years. This was reported in the "Q&A on the new amendments to the Commercial Transactions Law regarding provisions relating to cheques issued under Federal Decree-Law No. 14 of 2020 dated 9/27/2020, amending some provisions of Federal Law No. 18 of 1993 promulgating Commercial Transactions Law" published by Central Bank. Please see

for a period of two years. If this is repeated, the period must be extended to three years, and their remaining unused cheques shall be recovered."

Notably, the Q&A was issued in respect of the Federal Decree-Law No. 14 of 2020 dated 9/27/2020 amending provisions of Federal Law No. 18 of 1993. The Federal Law No. 18 of 1993 has since been replaced entirely by the Federal Decree Law No. 50/2022 Issuing the Commercial Transactions Law. It is however established that onshore banks in the UAE do have a right to close accounts in cases of returned cheques.

the matter. You may also contact your bank's customer helpline/your designated customer relationship officer (as applicable) to understand your bank's current and applicable policies on the subject.

As to the second part of your queries, reference may be made to the CBUAE press release titled "Banks to Assess Credit Worthiness of Customers with Al Etihad Credit Bureau Before Issuing Cheque Books" dated Dec 10, 2018, whereby the following provisions (self-explanatory) may be noted.

"Before issuing customers with chequebooks,

It is also possible that, depending on the bank's internal policies, the CBUAE instructions (to the bank), the applicable laws and the basis of your AECB score, the bank may elect to impose certain restrictions on account usage, if the bank elects to accept your application.



India to achieve \$800b worth exports

NEW DELHI: India is on the path to achieve US\$800 billion in exports in the 2024-25 fiscal for the first time signalling a robust economy



and continued growth across sectors. According to Union Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal, exports have been growing and have risen significantly in the last four years.

“We will end the fiscal year with over \$800 billion exports for the

first time,” the minister said during the Question Hour in the Rajya Sabha. However, certain imports like petroleum products, coking coal, pulses and edibles oils are unavoidable owing to domestic shortages and high demand. The growth in imports is a good sign for the economy as domestic consumption rises. According to the minister, it will take some years to establish and set up production units in those sectors.

As demand for Indian products in the global market surges across

categories, the country’s total exports reached about \$778 billion in FY2023-24, compared with \$466 billion in FY2013-14 — a whopping 67pc growth.

India’s share in world merchandise exports also improved from 1.66pc to 1.81pc with the country advancing in rankings from 20th to 17th position, according to Goyal. The feat was achieved as the government implemented several initiatives to sustain and accelerate export growth.

The country has recorded a sharp increase in exports for several key product categories with the country maintaining

or improving its rank among the top 10 global suppliers. The country’s strategic focus on electronics and semiconductors has yielded impressive results. In the Union budget 2025-26, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman had announced the setting up of an Export Promotion Mission, with sectoral and ministerial targets, driven jointly by the ministries of commerce, MSME and finance. It will facilitate easy access to export credit, cross-border factoring support and support to MSMEs to tackle non-tariff measures in overseas markets, she had said.

Heavy remittances by Gulf NRIs reported

MUMBAI: The rupee has crashed to another new low of Dh23.94 against a dirham, over more concerns about US President’s Donald Trump latest tariff talk. The rupee was at Dh23.80 to the dirham when the currency markets closed.

What this means is that the favourable situation continues for NRIs in the Gulf in sending money back to the home country.

There had been heavy remittances over the last weekend as many NRIs had thought the rupee could be in with a chance to firm up this week, RBI sources revealed. Especially after the RBI’s meeting on Friday last, which cut interest rates for the first time in nearly five years and where the new central bank governor gave his thoughts on where the Indian economy is heading.

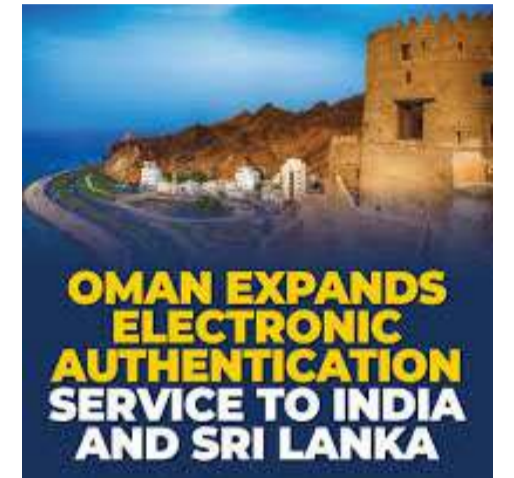
But then Trump brought up the subject of tariffs on aluminum and steel imports into the US from anywhere, and that was enough to bring back the market jitters all over again.

In the first 10 days of this month, the rupee’s

drop has been nearly 1.5pc falling from the closing level of 23.58 (86.64 in dollar terms) on Jan 31, 2025, said NeelshGopalan, senior foreign exchange analyst.

Oman to launch e-authentication service in India, Sri Lanka

MUSCAT: The ministry of foreign affairs will launch the second phase of the electronic authentication



tication service in India and Sri Lanka on Feb 13.

There will be no need to visit the Sultanate of Oman’s missions in these countries to obtain the authentication service.

The electronic authentication service was launched on Jan 23 in the UAE, Bahrain and the Kuwait and will be activated later in other countries according to the stages of the work plan, in co-operation with Oman Post.

Dubai airport city to create thousands of jobs

DUBAI: Dubai South developers anticipate a surge in the population over the next “two to three years” as the emirate’s new airport terminal takes shape, a top official has said. Currently home to around 25,000

olis — an airport city — to cater to this demand. Dubai South is already among the top five areas in demand for new developments across the emirate.

“The announcement of the new passenger terminal at Al Maktoum International Airport last year has further amplified demand for properties in Dubai South,” Nabil Al



residents, the residential district of the master development will house over one million people expected to move to the area once the airport opens.

The Dh128-billion passenger terminal at Dubai World Central – Al Maktoum International (DWC) will “fully absorb” the current Dubai airport’s operation over the next decade. Dubai is building an aerotrop-

Kindi, CEO of Dubai South Properties, said.

The 145 sq km master development is Dubai’s largest, focusing on the aviation and logistics sectors, with mixed-use and residential communities. With its ecosystem offering up to five lakh job opportunities, it will have a “multi-modal transport infrastructure connecting air, land, and sea”, according to its website.

Over 2000 exhibitors...

(Cont. on page-1)

tional buyers and professionals from across the travel, tourism and hospitality industry along with National and State Tourism Boards (NTOs and STOs).



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