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IATO urges stronger policy support, inbound push for tourism growth

PURI: The 40th Annual Convention of the Indian Association of Tour Operators (IATO) opened with a grand inauguration in Puri's Swosti Resort on Aug 22 with industry leaders, govt. officials and policymakers underlining the urgent need for policy reforms, investment-friendly clearances and a renewed focus on inbound tourism.

The event was officially inaugurated by Gajendra Singh Shekhawat, Union Tourism Minister, Pravati Parida, Dy. Chief Minister, Govt. of Odisha, Suman Billa, IAS-Additional Secretary & DG (Tourism), Ministry of Tourism, Govt. of India, in the presence of other state officials and IATO leadership team.

Shekhawat in his address said:



IATO's 40th annual convention was inaugurated at Swosti Premium Beach Resorts, Puri, with more than 1,200 delegates from across the country. The ceremony began with a traditional lamp-lighting ceremony, graced by Union Tourism Minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat, Pravati Parida, Deputy Chief Minister of Odisha; Suman Billa, Additional Director General, Ministry of Tourism, Neelu Sharma, Chairman, Chhattisgarh Tourism, Ravi Gosain, President, IATO; Rajiv Mehra, Immediate Past President, IATO and JK Mohanty, CMD, Swosti Group of Hotels.

(More Pics on Page 8)

“India's identity as an inbound destination is growing stronger than ever before. And I say this with full responsibility, the way India's scenario is changing, the way economic prosperity is increasing, I clearly see a golden future for



Fly Creative Online Limited CMD Mr VS Abdulkareem with IATO former president Mr Mehra.



inbound tourism in India. As the prime minister always says, India's diversity gives us a unique identity in the world, but what makes us stand apart is the sense of hospitality that is in the DNA of every Indian. That makes us different and stronger.”

The Government of India, he said, is supporting states in this journey - by investing in infrastructure, creating strategies and providing direction. “We are not only

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Govt scraps Country Specific Order for recruitment of nurses

NEW DELHI: The Ministry of External Affairs (OE PGE) division) has discontinued the requirement of Country Specific Order (CSO) for recruitment of Indian nurses to ECR countries. In order to simplify the recruitment procedure, bring in administrative efficiency and promote ease of doing business, it has been decided to abolish the requirement of Country Specific Order (CSO) for recruitment of nurses from

India to the ECR countries with immediate effect, says an office memorandum issued by the ministry. However, the nurses emigrating to any of the ECR countries would continue to require the emigration clearance (EC) from the Protector of Emigrants (PoE) as mandated vide Order No. OI-11012/10/2013-EP dated 12.03.2015 issued by the erstwhile Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs. Knowing the govt decision, the stakeholders such as

the recruitment fraternity, nursing candidates etc were overwhelmed with joy and relief over the positive decision of the govt. It may be recalled that the Indian Personnel Export Promotion Council (IPEPCIL), headed by Mr VS Abdulkareem, had been relentlessly campaigning for the abolition of the CSO system. The IPEPCIL has thanked the MEA (OE PGE) for taking this practical decision to speed up recruitment of nurses.

Kuwait bans public healthcare access for visit visa holders

KUWAIT CITY: Kuwait's Ministry of Health has announced that individuals entering the country on temporary or visit visas will no longer be eligible for healthcare services at public hospitals, specialty centres or primary care clinics.

The move is aimed at preserving resources for citizens and residents already covered by the national health system. The decision was issued by Health Minister Dr Ahmad Al Awadhi. In a statement, the ministry said the mea-

sure is designed to ensure the sustainability of Kuwait's healthcare system, maintain service quality and direct medical resources to those most in need.

The policy shift is part of a “comprehensive health vision” that seeks to balance operational efficiency with fair access to services.

The ministry added that the change will help improve patient satisfaction by preventing overcrowding and reducing pressure on facilities.



Mona Lisa gets a Malayali look in Kerala Tourism's Onam campaign



her timeless expression, now blended with Kerala's festive spirit.

The campaign, carrying the tagline "Kerala Tourism – Timeless. Graceful. Iconic," is part of this year's Onam promotions, which run from Aug 26 to Sept 5, ending with Thiruvonam, the most significant day of the harvest festival.

Within hours of its release, the Malayali Mona Lisa became a social media sensation, drawing thousands of likes, shares and witty comments. Many praised the creative mix of Kerala's cultural identity with one of the world's best-known artworks.

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM: As Kerala gears up for the 10-day Onam festivities, an unusual cultural twist has caught the internet's eye - Leonardo da Vinci's Mona Lisa has been reimagined in a traditional Malayali look on Kerala Tourism's social

media platforms. The AI-generated artwork shows the world's most famous smile draped in Kerala's trademark off-white Kasavu saree and her hair decorated with jasmine flowers. While the attire has changed, the Renaissance icon retains

Make air travel affordable, says Kerala CM

KOCHI: Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan has called for making air travel more accessible to the public by reducing travel and operational costs. He emphasised the need for a planned approach to foster the growth of the aviation industry.

Vijayan was speaking at the inauguration of the Kerala Aviation Summit, organised by Cochin International Airport Ltd (CIAL) in collaboration with the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI). The chief minister highlighted that capital costs should also be lowered and that travel without time loss must be ensured. He praised the significant role that airports have played in promoting

Kerala's tourism sector and ensuring convenient travel for the diaspora.

He noted that CIAL has set a public-friendly model in the aviation industry, embracing technological changes and creating over 30,000 job opportunities. He added that strengthening air transport will attract more tourists and Kerala has immense potential to become a civil aviation hub. Vijayan also inaugurated the Airport Public Health Office (APHO) Health Centre at CIAL, stating that it would strengthen APHO's operations. The objective of the summit includes leveraging Kerala's aviation facilities and investment potential; transforming the state into a global aviation hub.

Canada's updated visa timelines show work permit takes 45 days

TORONTO: Planning to travel to Canada? It could now take slightly longer if you are applying from India. A visitor visa is currently taking about 45 days, while a work permit is processed in just over seven weeks. Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship

Canada (IRCC) released updated timelines for visas, permanent residency, citizenship and passports.

These estimates reflect the time taken to process 80pc of applications. They provide a guide for students, skilled workers, families and entrepre-

neurs preparing to move to Canada. However, IRCC cautions that these are not guarantees. Incomplete applications, rising demand or additional verification checks can extend waiting times.

Why processing varies across countries? Process-

ing times depend on the number of applications received, the level of verification required and the capacity of regional offices. According to IRCC, higher-demand countries such as India and Pakistan often experience longer waits compared with ap-

plicants from the United States or the Philippines.

Citizenship services are updated monthly. Current estimates are: Citizenship grant: 10 months (no change since July)

IATO urges stronger policy support...

Cont from page - 1 working on airports and connectivity but also on uplifting the tourist experience. We are also focusing on human resource development.

By signing MoUs with hotel management institutes and major hotel chains, we are upgrading education standards so that skilled manpower can serve this industry. And today I proudly say, India has started e-visa facilities for almost the entire world. From any category, they can apply online and get access to India," adding that with the consistent efforts of the industry and govt, Indian tourism sector could easily reach its 2047 goals, contributing almost 10pc to national GDP. Even though

outbound tourism is doing quite well, he also stressed on how joint efforts need to be pushed for bringing in more inbound tourists, especially at a time where the currently imposed tariff structures by other major markets can work well in favour for India.

Bringing the policy perspective, Suman Billa, Ad-

ditional Secretary and Director General, Ministry of Tourism, highlighted the structural challenges facing India's inbound sector. "Our domestic demand has increased significantly and business inbound has picked up. But leisure inbound has been shrinking over the past several years, and that is a source

of great concern," he said.

Billa flagged the growing imbalance between India's inbound and outbound flows: "We send out about 28 million people, while receiving only about 20 million. Inbound generates less than Rs 3-lakh-crore in foreign exchange, while outbound spends are almost catching up."

Visa agent booked for cheating

VADODARA: A complaint has been lodged at the Akota police station in Gujarat's Vadodara against a visa consultant accused of duping five Surat residents of Rs 22.81 lakh on the pretext of arranging work permit visas for European countries, police said.

The case was registered on the basis of a complaint by Darshil Niteshkumar Shah, a resident of Rander Asopalav Society in Surat, who alleged that he and his friends Chirag Revdiwala and Kaushik Chauhan were cheated by Naveen Gopalbhai Khandelwal of Patel Colony in Akota and his associates.

According to Shah, the trio had approached a visa consultancy named Align Overseas in Vadodara.



IATO CONVENTION ENDS: The 40th IATO convention ended in Puri with over 1200 members participating Hon Minister made the valedictory address.

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Arrival at Agatti Airport, transfer to the hotel. Enjoy a welcome drink, check-in, lunch, and relax on the beach or explore the island.

**Day 2** Agatti – Water Sports & Sightseeing

Enjoy water activities followed by island sightseeing – visit the jetty, desalination plant, Lagoon Beach, and Archaeological Museum.

**Day 3** Kalpitti Island Excursion

Morning boat trip to Kalpitti Island and return. Overnight at Agatti.

**Day 4** Agatti to Bangaram

After breakfast, transfer to Bangaram by speedboat (1 hour). Welcome drink and check-in at resort.

**Day 5** Bangaram – Water Sports & Optional Island Tour

Indulge in water sports. Optional day trip to Thinnakara & Parali Islands (INR 1200 extra).

**Day 6** Departure

Transfer to Agatti by boat (45 mins) and board flight to Cochin.

GULF FAQs

Expats, for you there is urgent need for a UAE will

When Muhammad Tariq, founder of the UAE's leading will-writing and legacy planning law firm, walked into a hospital for what he thought would be a routine check-up, he didn't expect to face a life-threatening emergency surgery. Despite having helped thousands of clients create wills over more than a decade, he had never finalised his own. "The first thing I thought of wasn't the surgery itself," he recalls, "it was my family. If I didn't make it back, would they be protected?" That moment changed everything. In his most recent podcast, Tariq opens up about facing his own mortality and why it pushed him to act immediately. He clears up

common myths about wills, explains the hidden risks of delay, and shares how a registered will can save your loved ones from unnecessary legal and financial stress. This is a wake-up call for anyone building a life in the UAE.

Why every expat in the UAE needs a will? : Life in the UAE offers incredible opportunities, but inheritance laws here combine civil law and Sharia principles, making them very different from those in most expats' home countries. Without a registered UAE Will, your assets, guardianship decisions and even access to joint bank accounts are decided by the courts, often in ways you never intended.

Here's what can happen without a will: Joint bank accounts are frozen, even if both names are listed.

Guardianship of minor children defaults to the paternal grandfather, with mothers needing court approval to access funds.

Property, assets, and businesses may face costly delays or disputes. A will is not just paperwork, it's a clear plan that spares your family from uncertainty and

ensures your wishes are respected. Where to register your will in the UAE? The UAE has two main options: DIFC Wills Service Centre. Based on the common law, for non-Muslims with assets across the Emirates.

English-language drafting, registration possible via video call. Abu Dhabi Judicial Department (ADJD) Civil law; available to both Muslims and non-Muslims. Requires Ar-

abic translation; generally, more cost-effective.

Beyond wills: Planning for business owners

For entrepreneurs, Wills are only part of the solution. While they address asset transfer, they still involve probate, which can delay business continuity. Tariq emphasises that foundations are often a better tool for business succession, operating much like trusts to provide governance and control without court delays.

Guardianship and minor children's welfare.

One of the most sensitive and misunderstood areas is guardianship. Without a Will: The court decides who becomes a guardian. Mothers may have custody but not financial control without court approval. Children's inheritance is held by the court until they reach legal age.

With a will, you can nominate both permanent and temporary guardians, set conditions for fund access and ensure your children's welfare is protected without legal disputes. Start early. Decide clearly. Leave no uncertainty.

Making a will in the UAE doesn't have to be difficult. With the right guidance, it can be completed quickly, affordably, and even entirely online. For over a decade, Legal Inz has helped thousands of expats secure their legacies, from safeguarding children's guardianship to protecting digital assets, property and businesses.

As Tariq says: "Wills aren't about death; they're about love, responsibility and making life easier for those you care about most." Creating a will in the UAE can be quick, affordable, and fully online. Whether you choose DIFC or ADJD or add a foundation for business continuity, the most important step is starting now.



Does UAE law apply outside country?

Can the UAE govt prosecute a person outside the country for committing a crime? What about if the person is already acquitted in another country? Is extradition treaty between countries necessary?

As students travel abroad for studies and Emirati families settle in foreign countries, cultural clashes may arise, with the social sensitivities of a different land hard to adapt to for those used to UAE norms. However, what about laws? Do legal rights and requirements of a foreign land get overruled by UAE law? Do citizens have to abide by UAE laws no matter which country they are in?

This correspondent spoke to lawyers to get a better understanding of what cases UAE can extend its jurisdiction in. While the UAE Penal Code primarily applies to crimes committed on UAE territory, the jurisdiction extends further in some cases, ac-

cording to Dr Hassan Elhais, legal consultant at Awatif Mohammad Shogi Advocates & Legal Consultancy. This includes cases where the UAE can prosecute its citizens, and cases where the Emirates can take legal action against any person, regardless of nationality. An Emirati citizen who commits a crime abroad can be penalised for it upon their return to the country, under Article 23 of the UAE Penal Code. This is provided that the crime is punishable under both UAE law and the laws of the country where the crime was committed, Hassan said. It is important to note that the "jurisdictional reach applies regardless of whether the offense was committed against a fellow Emirati or not," according to Bassem Ehab, Senior Associate at Habib Al Mulla and Partners.

However, prosecution will not proceed if the individual has already been acquitted or convicted by a final judgment in the

country where the offence was committed, Bassem said. While Emiratis can be prosecuted by UAE for any crime committed abroad, given certain conditions, people of other nationalities can be punished by UAE only for specific types of crimes committed outside the country mentioned in Article 21 and 22, according to Hassan. Bassem detailed the offences that grants extra-territorial application of UAE laws under Article 21 of the UAE Penal Code. This applies to anyone who commits an act as a principal or accomplice in any of the following crimes: Offences against the UAE's internal or external security, constitutional structure or crimes involving the forgery or counterfeiting of official seals, government-issued financial instruments or stamps; Forgery, counterfeiting, or falsification of UAE currency, whether committed within or outside the country, including the distribution or posses-

sion of such currency with intent to distribute.

Forgery or falsification of paper money or coins that are legal tender in the UAE, including their distribution or possession for distribution purposes; Premeditated murder of a UAE citizen, regardless of where the act was committed Under Article 22, "the UAE can also prosecute any person who is found in the UAE after committing a major international crime like terrorism, human trafficking or money laundering anywhere in the world," Hassan said. Article 22 also extends to distribution of drugs — whether as a principal or accomplice — committed outside the UAE should the perpetrator return to the UAE regardless of their nationality, Bassem said.

Moreover, if certain actions committed abroad amount to a crime partially or fully committed in the UAE, the perpetrator can be held accountable under UAE law, he added.

SABARIMALA CONNECTIVITY Airport at Erumeli likely

NEW DELHI: The Centre is considering granting an “in-principle” clearance for the construction of a greenfield airport at Erumeli near Kottayam, Kerala.

The greenfield airport is aimed at serving millions of pilgrims to the major pilgrimage site of Sabarimala. The project is spread over 2,000 acres at Cheruvally Estate near Erumeli, sources said.

“It has already received site and defence clearance from the Centre, as well as “Terms of Reference” approval for its Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA),” sources said. “The Kerala government recently submitted the Detailed Project Report (DPR) to Ministry of Civil Aviation (MoCA).”

According to the DPR, the project will feature a 3,000-metre runway capable of handling large international aircraft such

as Boeing 777s, a passenger terminal with a capacity of seven million annually and a cargo facility. Sources said the projects has reached the second stage of the Centre’s Greenfield Airports (GFA) policy for getting “in-principle” approval to start land acquisition for construction and other activities.

“MoCA along with other agencies such as IMD, as well as associated ministries such as Home and Defence, are deliberating on granting ‘In-Principle’ approval to the project,” sources said, adding, “We are hopeful that ‘in-principle’ approval for this projects will be granted soon.”

However, the journey to this stage hasn’t been easy, as an earlier plan for an airport on the same site was put on hold after the Kerala government had to withdraw land acquisition notices.

What is ‘Nusuk Umrah’?

RIYADH: Saudi Arabia has launched the Nusuk Umrah platform, a new digital service allowing international pilgrims to apply for Umrah visas and book travel services online. Accessible in seven languages, the platform offers visa processing, accommodation, transport and more. Aligned with Vision 2030, it aims to simplify pilgrimage planning, improve service quality and enhance the overall Umrah experience.

What is “Nusuk Umrah”? Saudi Arabia’s new Umrah platform every pilgrim should know about. Saudi Arabia’s Nusuk Umrah platform lets global pilgrims apply for visas, book accommodation, transport, and tours entirely online. A new digital gateway called ‘Nusuk Umrah’ has been launched by Saudi Arabia to simplify and streamline the Um-

rah journey for international pilgrims. Accessible online, the platform lets users apply for visas and book a range of services — all in one place — in line with the country’s Vision 2030 objective of making religious travel more accessible and efficient.

The Nusuk Umrah platform, launched on Aug 20, 2025, offers a new digital alternative for international Muslims planning to perform Umrah. It provides an official online space for applying for an Umrah visa and for booking essential travel services such as: Accommodation, transportation, guided tours and other pilgrimage-related services

Available at <https://umrah.nusuk.sa>, the platform acts as a complement to existing options like accredited travel agents, rather than replacing them. Pilgrims

can either choose from complete travel packages or opt to book individual services based on their needs.

Designed for global pilgrims: The platform is specifically tailored for the international Muslim community. According to the Saudi Ministry of Haj and Umrah, Nusuk Umrah offers a modern, multilingual interface that supports seven languages, catering to a diverse global user base.

It is also fully integrated with other relevant government systems, allowing pilgrims to complete the entire process — from application to visa issuance — digitally and with minimal friction. To improve accessibility, multiple payment options are available, making the platform suitable for a wide range of users, regardless of location or financial tools.

INDIANS BADLY AFFECTED US halts issuing trucker visas

FLORIDA: The increasing number of foreign drivers operating large trucks on US roads is endangering American lives and undercutting the livelihoods of American truckers, Marco Rubio said on social media. The US has stopped issuing work visas for commercial truck drivers, a move that could significantly impact Indian drivers who were hoping to work in the US transportation industry.

The order comes on the heels a tragic accident on Florida’s Turnpike that claimed lives of three people after a semi-truck driver of Punjab-origin made an illegal U-turn, causing a devastating collision with a passenger van. US Secretary of State Marco Rubio announced the change on Thursday, saying it takes effect immediately.

The decision affects all

nationalities, not targeting any specific country, but will pause the visa process while the US conducts a review of the qualifications and screening procedures for foreign truck drivers.

“The increasing number of foreign drivers operating large trucks on US roads is endangering American lives and undercutting the livelihoods of American truckers,” Rubio said on social media. In a written answer to a question from the Associated Press, the State Department said all US visa holders, which can include tourists from many countries, are subject to “continuous vetting,” with an eye toward any indication they could be ineligible for permission to enter or stay in the US. This decision comes despite a shortage of more than 60,000 truck drivers in the US, according to the Amer-

ican Trucking Association. Indian drivers, who have been among those filling labour gaps in the US logistics sector, may now find it much harder to get a US work visa in the trucking industry. The US government said the review aims to ensure that drivers meet high safety standards, including the inability to speak and read English, which officials say is critical to preventing road accidents.

What this means for Indian drivers: New US work visas for trucking jobs are temporarily halted. Indians applying for such jobs will likely face delays or rejections. Even approved drivers may be re-evaluated. The US says it is conducting continuous vetting of more than 55 million current visa holders, and violations could lead to visa revocation and deportation.

Held for usurping land worth Rs 20cr of NRI in Ludhiana

LUDHIANA: The NRI police here have arrested a 79-year-old man for committing a property fraud worth crores of rupees. He usurped land worth over Rs 20 crore belonging to a Canada-based NRI.

The suspect was identified as Manjit Singh Mand, a resident of Sarabha Nagar Extension, Chabra Colony. Karamjit Singh Grewal, a native of Dhandra village, now staying in Canada, said a case of fraud was registered against Manjit and others at the NRI police station. The suspects were roaming freely but the police were not arresting them. He and his relatives staying in Ludhiana had requested the police to nab the suspects but to no avail. Recently, when they filed a writ petition in the High Court

challenging the functioning of the police, the court had issued directions, following which the police arrested the elderly key suspect. He was kept at an old age home by the family from where the police detained him. Grewal said it was irony that the Punjab Police took a long time in registering a case against the suspects as a complaint was filed in April 2023 and they took months to investigate the case and registered an FIR against Manjit, Gangangian Deep Singh of Shaheed Bhagat Singh Nagar and Jasbir Singh of Threke in Feb 2024. The matter was probed by the NRI wing DSP and further examined and verified by the AIG and DIG, NRI wing, and thereafter the DGP took the legal opinion of the DA (legal) and the FIR was lodged.

GLIMPSES OF IATO MEET IN PURI

