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Press release
Department of Immigration and Emigration

The Department of Immigration and Emigration commenced in 2012 the online Electronic Travel Authorization (ETA) Programme, for granting approval to enter to Sri Lanka for the foreigners who visit Sri Lanka and under this programme, only text data was obtained from foreigners. Subsequently, there was a strong requirement to introduce a new methodology for the same due to the fact that this programme was not updated timely to meet the technical requirements of the Department. This requirement was further intensified with the introduction of a new visa methodology. Fifteen (15) new visa methodologies were introduced by the Gazette issued under No. 2360/24 dated 27.11.2023. Later on, two more short-term visa schemes were introduced with the approval of the Cabinet of Ministers. Most of these visa methodologies are helpful for the long-term development of the field of tourism and it was essential to obtain a large number of documents online for each of these visa categories and to verify their accuracy for the responsibility of the Department on national security. Fulfilling this requirement without being a burden to the government and obtaining a proven technology at international level became the priority of the Department.

Identification of obstacles to overcome the future challenges in issuing visa of the Department of Immigration and Emigration

The under-mentioned non-updating of the ETA programme, used by our Department, made further aggravate the aforesaid situation.

- Inability to obtain applicant's photographs, photocopies of Passport, other certificates and documents online to the system. (These documents are essential for security verification.)

- Become an inefficient service due to use of an outdated technology.

- Absence of technology required to carry out modernizations of the system.
- Absence of technical support required to restore quickly the failures in the system at various occasions.
- Inconvenience caused for non-English speaking foreign tourists due to unavailability of multi-language calling facility. (Being a hindrance for tourism development)
- Become a poor service compared to the other international services which provide visa and visa-related other services.
- Inability to use this as a strategy as in the other countries, due to lack of publicity to promote the tourism industry by reason of less number of users as it is a methodology which operates only in Sri Lanka.
- Therefore, the use of a more appropriate institution to fulfill this task was the intention of the Department. For the purpose, the proposal received from VFS Global was referred to a committee appointed on the agreement of the Cabinet of Ministers. Your attention is drawn to the important positive features below among the facts identified thereat.

What are the reasons for selecting VFS Global for this purpose?

- Long term experience of using online methodology to send relevant documents for visa approval.
- Quality checking of the information submitted by the applicant before sending the relevant documents online (to be able to render an efficient service by obtaining accurate data)
- Ability to render services in 5 languages initially under the multi-lingual call centre facility and ability to increase the number of languages according to the requests received subsequently. (Advantage for non-English speaking passengers and help in promotion of tourism)

- As it has an experienced base in obtaining services in 151 countries, ability to promote the tourism industry of Sri Lanka in such countries (Ability to get increased the number of tourist visits)
- Concurrently to this programme, agreeing for a targeted programme of promoting tourism industry of Sri Lanka.
- Being an Institution with experience of operating in 151 countries in the world as above for visa and other visa related services.
- Possession of an exceptional human resource contribution regarding visa and other visa related services.
- Provision of a travel insurance of a sum of 25,000 USD at a low cost amounting to 6.50 Dollars along with the visa for applicants as per their consent.
- Being a globally accessible, user-friendly website and provision of a more convenient experience to the applicant through a quick and simple application process at any place at any time.
- Provision of the frontend interface system software related to the purpose of applying visa online and all related services thereof to the Department free of charge.
- Ability to obtain customer assistance over the phone as a result of Customer Service Centre which operates for all 24 hours and 7 days of the week.
- Ability to obtain services easily for any customer as it is a system with a very safe and recognized process.
- Being a low fee get levied by VFS for providing this service to Sri Lanka compared to many other countries in comparing with 66 countries for which VFS provides services of visa facility.
- Lack of cost to the government due to investment of 200 million dollars made by VFS for the implementation of this programme in Sri Lanka.

- Data handling in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). This method is an internationally recognized method and this method prevents handing over data to a third party and deleting the data in their system after a contractual period and Department receives an international certificate related to the same.
- In any of the above circumstances, "We declare that the Department of Immigration and Emigration reserves the power of approving, issuing or rejecting visa under the Immigrants and Emigrants Act No. 20 of 1948."
- Before a tourist enters this country, he or she will receive in future,
 - Ability to obtain the facility of obtaining the driving license of this country at the airport.
 - Ability to book and bring a suitable motor vehicle to the Airport.
 - Ability to reserve all tourist accommodations.
 - Ability to reserve places with all tourist attractions online.
 - Ability to reserve train tickets.
 - Ability to plan the entire trip before entering the country.

In carrying out this programme with this institution, that institution will,

1. receive the documents related to sending the relevant documents for online visa approval from the applicants and send them to us.
2. designing, continuation and maintenance of the website for that purpose.
3. Quality checking of all the information submitted by the applicant before sending the relevant documents online.
4. Deleting the data from this system in accordance with GDPR after granting the relevant visa approval

It is clear that as per the above methodology, the power of approving, issuing or not issuing visa of the Department of Immigration and Emigration mentioned in the Immigrants and Emigrants Act, No. 20 of 1948 do not impacted anyway.

We request you to make our new e-visa website popular to further popularize this programme.

We emphasize that it is suitable to access our Departmental website initially for a more secure approach.

Website of Department - www.immigration.gov.lk

e-visa website - www.srilankaevisa.lk

In considering the extremely crucial factors such as preventing persons who do not fit to enter the country in respect of national security, we expect that members of the public will properly be informed in order to ensure the success of such programmes for the purpose of removing the misunderstandings of the people at present regarding this project, to earn foreign exchange and to prosper the future of the country. Since the history of our department, by fearlessly associating with technology, our Department has used the technology without fear since past and presented many benefits to the members of the country as well as to the country than any other government institution. We hope that assistance will be extended to this programme removing the misconceptions existed by not interpreting the truth properly at this time, too.



Controller General
Department of Immigration and Emigration

