

## **INFORMATION NOTE**

### **Visa Policy on Foreign Visitors**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

This information note briefs Members of the Legislative Council Panel on Security on Government's visa policy on foreign visitors.

#### **IMMIGRATION POLICY ON FOREIGN VISITORS**

2. Hong Kong maintains a liberal visa regime to facilitate the travel convenience of bona fide visitors and businessmen. Nationals from about 170 countries and territories enjoy visa-free access to the HKSAR for a stay ranging from 7 days to 6 months. Only travellers from 48 countries need to apply for visas to visit Hong Kong and a list of these countries is at Annex.

3. Visitors are required to have adequate funds for the purpose of their stay without working and, unless in transit to the Mainland or Macau SAR, to hold onward or return tickets. If one wants to stay longer than the visa-free period allowed, he must apply for a visa before travelling to the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) at either the nearest Chinese diplomatic and consular mission (CDCM) overseas, or by post or through a local sponsor to the Hong Kong Immigration Department (ImmD) under the "Direct Visa Application (DVA) Scheme". Foreign residents living in the Mainland may also submit their visa application to the Immigration Section of the Office of the Government of the HKSAR in Beijing. The DVA Scheme does not, however, apply to residents of Taiwan as there are separate arrangements to deal with their entry.

4. Visitors are not allowed by law to take up employment (paid or unpaid), to establish or join in any business, or to study in schools as students.

5. The visa requirements for foreign visitors are subject to constant review and changes will be introduced if circumstances so

warrant. Factors to be considered in a review include the immigration and security risks posed by nationals of the country or territory concerned; the economic, social and cultural ties between Hong Kong and the country or territory; the track records of the travellers, and the circumstances of individual country or territory.

## **VISA POLICY ON PAKISTANI NATIONALS**

6. The visa-free access for Pakistani nationals visiting Hong Kong was abolished in March 2003 following a review conducted by ImmD. A visa is required for Pakistani nationals for all purposes, including airside transit.

7. Following a further review in April 2003, it was decided that the visa requirement would not apply to holders of Pakistani diplomatic and official passports for a visit not exceeding 14 days, and Pakistani operating aircrew and sea crew. Besides, the visa requirement for airside transit passengers had been suspended since November 2003 to facilitate the travel of genuine transitees, provided that the passenger possesses a valid onward visa, and is scheduled to depart within 12 hours of his scheduled arrival in Hong Kong and is at all times during the transiting period under the escort of the concerned airline staff.

8. The transit without visa (TWOV) arrangement was subsequently tightened by ImmD in 2005 due to increasing abuses by Pakistani transitees. With effect from 21 November 2005, Pakistani nationals will only be allowed airside transit through Hong Kong without a visa provided that they are:

- (a) holding valid entry visas for destinations in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Japan, South Korea, United Kingdom, USA or Schengen States (Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden); or
- (b) holding residence visa/permits of the countries specified in (a); and
- (c) are scheduled to depart within 12 hours of their scheduled arrival in Hong Kong; and
- (d) are under escort of the concerned airline staff.

The arrangements also apply to passengers on their return journey to Pakistan via Hong Kong after visiting their destination countries.

9. As regards Members' concern about reports that some Pakistani visitors who were in transit had encountered problems in immigration clearance at the airport, immigration records reveal that since the tightening of the TWOV arrangement on 21 November 2005 and up till 15 February 2006, 38 Pakistani transit passengers who failed to meet the criteria for TWOV arrangement had arrived at the Hong Kong International Airport without transit visas. Visitors from visa required countries arriving in Hong Kong without a valid visa would normally be refused entry. Of the 38 Pakistani visitors who arrived in Hong Kong without a transit visa during this period, 29 were exceptionally granted with transit visas after secondary examination owing to the extenuating circumstances of the individual cases.

#### **VISA POLICY ON RUSSIAN NATIONALS**

10. Russian nationals currently require a visa to visit Hong Kong. ImmD is exploring with the Cathay Pacific Airways (CPA) on the feasibility of putting in place a system for transmitting visa applications from Russian nationals travelling on CPA flights through electronic means and providing a fast track service for the issue of visas to them.

#### **CONCLUSION**

11. The Administration is committed to facilitating the travel convenience of bona fide visitors and businessmen. When formulating the visa policy on foreign visitors, the Administration will ensure that a proper balance is maintained between facilitation of genuine visitors and the need to safeguard the integrity of immigration control of Hong Kong. The visa regime is subject to constant review and changes will be introduced where the circumstances so warrant.

**List of Countries Requiring Visa for Hong Kong  
(as at February 2006)**

<b>S/N</b>	<b>Country Name</b>	<b>S/N</b>	<b>Country Name</b>
1	AFGHANISTAN	25	LIBERIA
2	ALBANIA	26	LIBYA
3	ANGOLA	27	MOLDOVA (REPUBLIC OF)
4	ARMENIA	28	MYANMAR
5	AZERBAIJAN	29	NEPAL
6	BELARUS	30	NICARAGUA
7	BURUNDI	31	NIGERIA
8	CAMBODIA	32	PAKISTAN
9	CAMEROON	33	PALESTINE (STATES OF)
10	CONGO (DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF)	34	PANAMA
11	CONGO (REPUBLIC OF)	35	RUSSIAN FEDERATION
12	COTE D'IVOIRE (REPUBLIC OF)	36	SENEGAL
13	CUBA	37	SERBIA AND MONTENEGRO
14	ERITREA	38	SIERRA LEONE
15	ETHIOPIA	39	SOLOMON ISLANDS
16	GEORGIA	40	SOMALIA
17	GRENADA	41	SRI LANKA
18	IRAN	42	SUDAN
19	IRAQ	43	SYRIA
20	KAZAKHSTAN	44	TAJIKISTAN
21	KOREA (DEMOCRATIC PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF)	45	TURKMENISTAN
22	KYRGYZSTAN	46	UKRAINE
23	LAOS	47	UZBEKISTAN
24	LEBANON	48	VIETNAM