

EU eases rules, Indians can now get 5-yr validity Schengen visas

Newly Adopted Visa 'Cascade' Regime Allows Multiple Entry

Photo: iStock

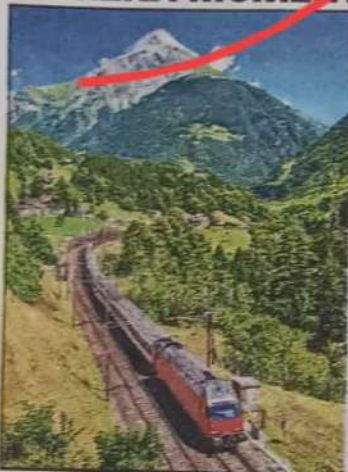
Saurabh Sinha
@timesgroup.com

New Delhi: Frequent Indian travellers to Europe will no longer need to go through the hassle of repeatedly applying for Schengen visas. European Union last week adopted a "more favourable" visa regime for Indians "with an established travel history, if (their) passport validity allows." They will now get up to five-year validity Schengen visas.

Though less than America's 10-year visitor visas and UK's option of getting a visa valid for up to the same period by paying over Rs 1 lakh as fees, EU officials told **TOI** five years is also "a big step".

"According to the newly adopted visa 'cascade' regime

EU-REKA MOMENT FOR TRAVELLERS



> The Schengen area comprises **29 European countries**, with 25 being EU states

> Schengen visas allow **90 days of travel within a 180-day period**, without the right to work

> EU approved longer-term visas on April 18 due to **'enhanced EU-India relations'** on migration and mobility

> Previously, Schengen countries mostly **issued short-term visas**, even for frequent Indian travellers

for India, Indian nationals can now be issued long-term, multi-entry Schengen visas valid for two years after having obtained and lawfully used two visas within the previous three years. The two-

year visa will normally be followed by a five-year visa, if the passport has sufficient validity remaining. During the validity period of these visas, holders enjoy travel rights equivalent to visa-free

nationals," EU said.

The decision was taken on April 18, because of "strengthened relations under the EU-India common agenda on migration and mobility, which seeks comprehensive cooperation on migration policy between the EU and India, with facilitation of people-to-people contacts being of key aspect due to the importance of India as a partner for the EU."

Before this change, Schengen countries granted short term visas even to frequent travellers to Europe. Six-month, two and five-year visas have been a rarity in India. And it's not the visa fees that has to be paid time and again that frequent flyers frown at. The hassle of arranging paperwork for submission is what they find most irksome.

China eyes deeper ties with Maldives after Muizzu party's poll win

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

After the Maldives' pro-China party-in-office People's National Congress (PNC) won a decisive majority in parliamentary elections, Beijing said it fully respected the choice made by the Maldivian people and aimed to further deepen China's strategic partnership with the archipelago nation.

Prez Mohamed Muizzu's party secured a super-majority in parliament by winning over 60 seats in what is seen as an endorsement of his foreign policy, which has been marked by a pro-China tilt and a shift away from the previous govt's India First policy.

The Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson congratulated the Maldives on the successful elections. "China stands ready to work with the Maldives to carry forward traditional friendship, expand exchanges and cooperation in various fields, deepen China-Maldives comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership and speed up the building of a China-Maldives community with a shared fu-

Reuters



Muizzu's party PNC won a record 68 seats in People's Majlis, while the pro-India MDP was restricted to only 10 seats. Muizzu said on Monday the poll outcome has shown the world that Maldivians want 'autonomy' in choosing their future, and do not want 'foreign coercion'

ture to deliver greater benefits to our two peoples."

Muizzu's govt had denied that the election agenda was dominated by geopolitical rivalry but the fact that he will now have a pro-govt parliament is seen as a boost also for China, which became the Maldives' partner of choice after the pro-China politician took over as prez last year by defeating his pro-India predecessor. The PNC won a record 68 seats in People's Majlis, while the pro-India MDP, which won 65 seats in 2019, suffered a humiliating loss as it was restricted to only 10 seats.

Israel's military intel chief to quit for failing to prevent Oct 7 attack

Maj Gen Aharon Haliva's Decision Could Set Stage For More Resignations

Tel Aviv: The head of Israeli military intelligence said Monday he would resign because of Hamas' Oct 7 attack, becoming the first senior figure to step down over his role in the failure to anticipate or quickly respond to the deadliest assault



in Israel's history. Maj Gen Aharon Haliva's decision could set the stage for more resignations among

top Israeli security officials.

Hamas militants blasted through Israel's border defences on Oct 7, rampaging through communities unchallenged for hours and killing 1,200 people, most of them civilians, while taking roughly 250 hostages into Gaza. The attack set off the war against Hamas in Gaza, now in its seventh month.

"The intelligence directorate under my command did not live up to the task we were entrusted with. I carry that black day with me ever since, day after day, night after night. I will carry the horrible pain of the war with me forever," Haliva wrote in his resignation letter, which was provided by the military. Haliva said he would remain in his position until a replacement is found. He said he had intended to resign immediately after Oct 7, but stayed on through the initial part



A 2017 photo of Russian-made S-300 air defence system in Tehran

Israeli strike hit Iran's S-300 radar in Isfahan, suggest satellite photos

Jerusalem: Satellite photos taken on Monday suggest an apparent Israeli retaliatory strike targeting Iran's central city of Isfahan hit a radar system for a Russian-made air defence battery, contradicting repeated denials by officials in Tehran of any damage in the assault.

The strike on an S-300 radar in what appears to have been a limited strike by the Israelis would represent far more damage done than in the massive drone-and-missile attack Iran unleashed against Israel on April 13. That may be why Iranian officials have been trying to dismiss discussing what the attack actually did on Iranian soil.

The satellite images by Planet Labs PBC taken Monday

near Isfahan's dual-use airport and air base showed an area nearby that served as a deployment point for the air defence system. Burn marks sit around what analysts including Chris Biggers, a consultant former govt imagery analyst, previously had identified as a "flap-lid" radar system used for the S-300. Less-detailed satellite images taken after Friday showed similar burn marks around the area, though it wasn't clear what was at the site. Biggers said other components of the missile system appeared to have been removed from the site before the attack — even though they provide defensive cover for Iran's underground Natanz nuclear enrichment facility. REUTERS

of the war and was resigning as the army's internal investigations gather pace.

His announcement came at the start of Passover, a major Jewish holiday, and as military operations in Gaza have slowed in recent weeks.

The timing of any resignations by security and military officials has been complicated by the ongoing war in Gaza and battles with the Lebanese militant group Hezbollah along Israel's northern border. Tensions with Iran are also at a high following attacks between the two enemies. Some military experts have said resignations at a time when Israel is engaged on multiple fronts is irresponsible and could be interpreted as a sign of weakness.

Shortly after the attack, Haliva and others had publicly said that they shouldered blame for not preventing the Oct 7 assault. Other leaders have stepped short, most notably PM Benjamin Netanyahu. He has said he will answer tough questions about his role but has not outright acknowledged direct responsibility for allowing the attack to unfold. He has also refused to step down. Israeli opposition leader Yair Lapid welcomed Haliva's resignation, saying it was "justified and dignified." "It would be appropriate for PM Netanyahu to do the same," he wrote on X. AP

At \$84bn, India 4th in def spend, China 2nd with \$296bn: SIPRI

US Leads; 6.8% Rise In Global Expenditure

Rajat Pandit@timesgroup.com

New Delhi: Global military expenditure registered the steepest year-on-year increase in well over a decade to reach a record \$2,443 billion in 2023, with India remaining the world's fourth largest defence spender after US, China and Russia.

India, of course, does not get the biggest bang for its buck. The country's military modernisation continues to be hobbled by the huge salary and pension bills of its 1.4-million armed forces, a weak defence-industrial base and the relative absence of concrete long-term plans to systematically build military capabilities with proper inter-Service prioritisation.

As per the latest data released by Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) on Monday, the total global military expenditure increased by 6.8% in real terms in 2023. The 10 largest military spenders were the US (\$916 billion), China (\$296 billion), Russia (\$109 billion), India (\$84 billion), Saudi Arabia (\$76 billion), the UK (\$75 billion), Germany (\$67 billion), Ukraine (\$65 billion), France (\$61 billion) and Japan (\$50 bil-



Defence minister Rajnath Singh at Siachen base camp on Monday

Siachen is India's capital of grit: Rajnath

Defence minister Rajnath Singh on Monday reviewed the operational situation and military preparedness in the Siachen Glacier-Saltoro Ridge region, dubbing it "India's capital of courage, grit and determination" just as Delhi is the national capital and Mumbai the financial one. "We are leading a peaceful life as we have an assurance that our brave soldiers stand steadfast at the borders. In the times to come, when the history of national security is written, the acts of bravery and iron-clad will of our soldiers in the icy cold glacier will be remembered with pride," Singh said. The minister, accompanied by Army chief General Manoj Pande, visited Siachen after India marked the 40th anniversary of Operation Meghdoot on April 13. TNN

lion). Pakistan was placed at the 30th spot with \$8.5 billion.

SIPRI said it is the first time since 2009 that military expenditure went up in all five geographical regions: the Americas, Europe, the Middle East, Africa and Asia-Oceania. "The unprecedented rise in military spending is a direct response to the global deterioration in peace and security," said SIPRI senior re-

searcher Nan Tian.

The Indian armed forces, on their part, continue to grapple with major operational shortages in several areas. The Rs 6.2 lakh crore defence budget for 2024-25, for instance, allocates just 28% for military modernisation. The defence outlay works out to just 1.9% of projected GDP if the Rs 1.4 lakh crore pension allocation is considered.