



Bangalore Chamber of Industry and Commerce

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Report on the Interactive Session on U.S. Visa Guidance Programme with the Senior Officials of the U.S. Consulate General, Chennai on September 28, 2011

Bangalore Chamber of Industry and Commerce (BCIC) organized an Interactive Session on U.S. Visa Guidance Programme with the Senior Consular Officials from the U.S. Consulate General, Chennai on Wednesday, September 28, 2011.

In his welcome address, Mr. H V Harish, Vice President, BCIC said that the main objective of the above Interactive Session was to keep abreast BCIC members with the various administrative and procedural issues relating to issuance of US Visa. He said that Trade and Commerce form a crucial component of the rapidly expanding and multi-faceted relations between India and US and with the modest US\$ 6 billion in 1990, the bilateral trade in merchandise goods has increased to \$45.75 billion in 2010 representing an impressive 760% growth in a span of 20 years.

He then brought to the attention of the Officials over the increasing rejections of H1B Visas by the US Government which are required for execution of temporary onsite contracts. He appealed to the Officials that with the burgeoning Indo-US Trade relationships, the US Government should take a holistic view while issuing Business Visas and more particularly on the issuance of H1B visas which otherwise will jeopardize the economic relationships between the two countries.

Mr. P. Varadan, Member of the Tourism Expert Committee, BCIC and Managing Director of Comfort Leisure Pvt. Ltd in his address briefly put forth on the industry perspectives on the above issue. Congratulating the Officials of the U.S. Consulate General, Chennai for their seamless services on issuing visas, he then outlined some pointers on how and what to be done to improve the services of issuance of visas. Following are some of the suggestions placed by Mr. Varadan for the consideration of the US Officials:-

- a) People above the age of 70 as against the present rule of 80 years should be exempted to appear for personal interviews;
- b) Date of interviews should be released two months in advance as against the present system of two weeks;
- c) Processing of finger print scanning and verification of Passports should be made as a onetime affair and to be done away with incase of frequent visitors;
- d) Visa application forms to be made available in “pdf” format for easy downloading; and
- e) The entire visa process guidelines shall be provided so that the same could be circulated for the benefit of Chamber members.

Mr. Nicholas Manring, Consular Section Chief and Mr. Michael Cathey, Visa Chief from the US Consulate General, Chennai addressing on U.S. Visa Guidance Programme thanked the Chamber for organizing this Interactive Session in such a short notice and they were overwhelmed with the huge turnout.

Mr. Nicholas Manring, Chief of Consular Services said that there has been a 15 per cent increase in the applications for Non-Immigrant Visas (i.e. 2,00,000) as compared to the previous year.

He also spoke in detail on the different type of Visas being issued from the US Consulate and mentioned 49 per cent of the total H1B visas are being issued from India. He then discounted the reports that most of the H1B visas are getting rejected. He said that refusal of applications has come down to merely 10 per cent which is very good considering the business between both the countries which presently is at its very best.

He also highlighted on some of the changes that have been brought out to streamline the process of issuing visas. He said that the applicant shall apply for an appointment for visa online and he can choose the place of interview as per his convenience. He also mentioned that the US Consul will be centralizing the process of issuing visa to ensure that the same standards are used for all the applicants. He also said that in future all blanket L visas will be issued from Chennai Consulate.

Mr. Michael Cathey, Non-Immigrant Chief at the US Consulate said that one of the major reasons for rejection of Visas is due to lack of articulation by the candidate while appearing for the interview. The applicant should be able to convince the Official on the purpose of his visit and his special skill more specifically and that too without any ambiguity. He also suggested that an e-mail prior to the application to the Consulate would help the Officials at the Consulate to understand the urgency of the situation so that the needful could be done. Both Mr. Nicholas and Mr. Cathey answered to all the questions that were raised during the session and dispelled most of the misconceptions. They assured that each application will be dealt with on merit and they were thankful to the participants for some of the valuable suggestions put forth by them.

The Interactive Session was attended by more than 95 delegates and was well covered by the media.

In his vote of thanks, Mr. T S Sampath Kumar, Secretary General, BCIC said that the interaction provided a good opportunity for exchange of views between the US Consulate Officials and BCIC members. He also mentioned that BCIC in association with US Commercial Service, Bangalore had jointly organized several events with the visiting dignitaries/delegations from US over the years and has been playing a pivotal role in facilitating Indian and US businessmen on a common platform to promote bilateral trade between the two nations. He thanked all the participants for their overwhelming response and also thanked the media for their huge presence.
