

Pakistan reduces the validity of handwritten passports

It is part of the measures to convert all handwritten passports into MRPs, following the UAE's recent decision to stop issuing new visas to Pakistanis holding handwritten passports, according to the embassy

- By Binsal Abdul Kader, Staff Reporter
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Abu Dhabi: The Pakistani Embassy in Abu Dhabi has shortened the validity of handwritten passports, which are being issued in emergency situations only up to a few months.

"So that they [those who get emergency handwritten passports] have to come back soon to the embassy to apply for machine readable passports [MRPs]," the embassy told *Gulf News* yesterday.

It is part of the measures to convert all handwritten passports into MRPs, following the UAE's recent decision to stop issuing new visas to Pakistanis holding handwritten passports, according to the embassy.

Aiming to convert all Pakistani handwritten passports into MRPs within one year, the government will provide a mobile facility in remote areas in the UAE, A. Rehman Malek, the Pakistani Interior Minister, told *Gulf News* in an exclusive interview on Tuesday. He said that Pakistan requested the UAE to grant a one year grace period to convert all Pakistani handwritten passports into MRPs. Malek asked Pakistanis to do it sooner and not to wait for the expiry date.

As *Gulf News* reported on September 15, the UAE had stopped issuing new visas to Pakistanis holding handwritten passports, as part of the measures to control fake passports. The embassy said the change would not affect Pakistanis who renew their visa in the UAE, but no new visas would be issued to those who changed jobs or sponsorship. The new rule would also affect Pakistanis who wish to visit the UAE.

After the *Gulf News* report, the number of applicants for MRPs was increased by more than 100 per cent, Farhat Aisha, second secretary at the embassy's passports section, said. She said many of the handwritten passport holders have started coming to convert the passports.

The embassy is still issuing between five and seven handwritten passports daily to newborn babies and others in emergency situations, she said.

"But we give the validity based on the merit of the emergency situation, mostly we give a few months only, but maximum one year for adults," Ayesha said.

New born babies are given two years validity which is the mandatory requirement for attaining mandatory health insurance cover in Abu Dhabi, the official said.

Causes for delay

Illiterate Pakistani workers are those who land up in emergency situations and apply for [emergency] handwritten passports, according to Pakistani Embassy in Abu Dhabi.

"Asked about the delay, most of them said the passports were kept by the sponsors who did not check the expiry dates," Farhat Aisha said, adding that some businessmen come at the last minute to renew their licences.

Machine-readable passports in GCC countries

All Pakistani missions in GCC countries will start issuing machine readable passports (MRPs) within two months, A. Rehman Malek , the Pakistani Interior Minister told *Gulf News* on Tuesday.

"I have already instructed the embassy in Doha in Qatar to start issuing MRPs. Other embassies will follow the suit soon," he said. He added that Pakistan has issued about 11 million handwritten passports.

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