Immigration and Foreigners (Exemption) (Amendment) Order, 2026

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Why in news?

The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) notified the Immigration and Foreigners (Exemption) (Amendment) Order, 2026, introducing specific amendments to the Immigration and Foreigners (Exemption) Order, 2025

- **New amendment** – The government has relaxed *passport and visa requirements for several categories of foreign nationals* residing in the country, including certain
  - Pakistani citizens,
  - minority refugees,
  - registered Sri Lankan Tamils and
  - Tibetans.
- **Inclusion of Visa Manual** – The amendment formally recognises the Visa Manual issued by the Central Government as the reference document for visa, immigration, and other related procedures.
  - **Visa manual** – The order defines the document as a manual issued by the central government from time to time, containing instructions on visas, immigration and related matters.
- **Travel between India, Nepal and Bhutan** – Under the revised provisions, Indian citizens travelling to Nepal or Bhutan by land or air will be exempt from the passport requirement, subject to producing any one of the identity documents specified in the Visa Manual before an Immigration Officer.
- They will also be required to provide any information sought by the officer.
- Similar provisions apply to citizens of Nepal and Bhutan entering or exiting India.
- However, this exemption will not apply to citizens of Nepal or Bhutan entering or leaving India from or to a country other than Nepal or Bhutan.
- The exemption will also not apply to those who have boarded a flight or transited through China, Macau, Hong Kong or Pakistan. In such cases, they must possess both a valid passport and a valid visa.
- In both cases, citizens of Nepal and Bhutan must possess a valid passport and a valid visa.
- **Exempted category** – According to the notification, registered Sri Lankan Tamil nationals who took shelter in India up to the 9th of January, 2015, have also been included in the exempted category.
- The exemptions further cover members of the Indian Navy, Army and Air Force

travelling on official duty, along with their family members accompanying them on Government transport.
- Foreign crew members of military vessels visiting India for repairs are also covered, provided they possess valid military identification documents and obtain Military Ship Repair Permits.
- **Relief for persecuted minority communities** – Members of the Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Parsi, and Christian communities from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and Pakistan who entered India on or before 31 December 2024 due to religious persecution or fear of persecution are exempt from certain passport and travel document requirements.
- However, they will be required to obtain an appropriate category of visa for their continued stay in India.
- **Pakistani nationals exemption** – Certain Pakistani nationals have also been exempted who entered India on or before the 31st of December, 2009, with the intention of residing permanently but unable to renew their passports due to the absence of a Computerised National Identity Card issued by Pakistan.
- The exemption also applies to certain Muslim men who were originally Indian citizens, migrated to Pakistan after Partition, and returned to India by 31 December 2009.
- **Person of Indian Origin** – It covers persons of Indian origin who acquired Malaysian or Singaporean citizenship and returned to India on or before the 31st of December, 2009, on passports issued by either country, which have since expired and cannot be renewed.

References

1. AIR | Govt relaxes passport & visa rules for several categories of foreign nationals residing in India
2. TOI | Govt relaxes passport and visa rules for several categories of foreign nationals residing in India

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