

Bangladesh restarts visa services in India, signaling thaw in ties

- A Monitor Desk Report

Date: 22 February, 2026



Dhaka: Bangladesh has restarted visa operations at all of its missions across India, marking a fresh effort to ease tensions and restore normal diplomatic engagement between the two neighbors.

A diplomatic official in New Delhi said visa processing resumed on a limited scale from February 20, covering all categories. The services are expected to be gradually expanded starting next week.

The development comes shortly after the BNP-led administration assumed office on February 17, following a decisive victory in the February 12 national elections.

Relations between Dhaka and New Delhi had deteriorated after the removal of the Awami League government during a mass uprising on August 5, 2024. Former prime minister Sheikh Hasina subsequently left

the country and sought refuge in New Delhi. In the aftermath, India curtailed travel visas for Bangladeshi nationals and tightened certain visa categories and trade measures. Bangladesh also introduced some trade restrictions in response.

Visa operations were largely suspended in late December amid protests in several Indian cities — including New Delhi, Kolkata, Mumbai, Guwahati and Agartala — where demonstrations were held outside Bangladeshi missions.

However, recent diplomatic exchanges appear to have helped improve the atmosphere. India's External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar travelled to Dhaka on December 31 to attend the funeral of former prime minister Khaleda Zia. Shortly afterward, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi congratulated newly appointed Prime Minister Tarique Rahman in a letter delivered by Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla, who attended the swearing-in ceremony of the new cabinet.

On February 18, Aniruddha Das, Assistant High Commissioner at India's mission in Sylhet, indicated that India would also gradually restore normal processing for all categories of visas. He noted that medical and double-entry visas are currently being issued, with steps underway to resume tourist and other visa types.

The Indian High Commission in Dhaka has yet to make an official announcement regarding the full restoration of tourist visas. An official there said a formal statement would be issued once such services resume.

Officials at Bangladesh's foreign ministry described recent developments as positive signals from New Delhi and expressed hope that India would soon fully reinstate tourist visas.

According to data from India's Bureau of Immigration, around 2.12 million Bangladeshi travelers visited India in 2023. By August 2024, that figure had reached approximately 1.29 million before declining amid political unrest. Many Bangladeshis travel to India for medical treatment, while others go for tourism and business.

Since late December, Bangladeshi missions have continued issuing visas to Indian nationals on a case-by-case basis, particularly for Indian-funded development projects, students and business representatives.

With the latest move, Dhaka plans to broaden visa issuance across all categories in the coming days.

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