



## Mallya makes confiscation plea

INDIA'S supreme court on Monday (29) agreed to hear the plea of businessman Vijay Mallya challenging the confiscation of properties belonging to companies owned by him and his family members.

A bench headed by chief justice Ranjan Gogoi took note of a submission by FS Nariman, appearing for Mallya, that the fresh plea be heard along with a pending one on the legality of the law and the action to confiscate the properties.

The senior lawyer sought adjournment of hearing on the petition questioning the confiscation of properties. The bench has now posted the matter for hearing on August 2.

Mallya, who is currently in the UK, has been charged by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) of defaulting on bank loans to the tune of ₹9,000 crore (£1 billion). He is also facing an extradition trial in Britain.

## Nirav Modi to stay in UK jail

FUGITIVE diamond merchant Nirav Modi, wanted in India in connection with the nearly \$2 billion Punjab National Bank (PNB) fraud and money laundering case, was last Thursday (25) further remanded to judicial custody until August 22.

During a short remand hearing at Westminster magistrates' court via video link from Wandsworth prison, the judge extended Modi's remand.

Modi, 48, has been lodged at Wandsworth prison in south-west London since his arrest in March in connection with the nearly \$2bn PNB fraud and money laundering case. He appeared for the first time since his bail appeal was rejected by the UK high court earlier last month.

## Minister wins court reprieve

A SOUTH AFRICAN court on Monday (29) suspended the public protector's orders for disciplinary action against public enterprises minister Pravin Gordhan, a relief for president Cyril Ramaphosa who is counting on Gordhan to revive struggling state firms.

Public protector Busisiwe Mkhwebane who investigates alleged wrongdoing by state officials, instructed Ramaphosa to take "appropriate disciplinary action" against Gordhan last month after finding Gordhan had violated the constitution and an executive ethics code. He has denied wrongdoing.

She also instructed the country's chief prosecutor and speaker of parliament to investigate Gordhan's actions.

Gordhan, who oversees efforts to fix struggling companies such as state power utility Eskom, applied for an urgent ruling to prevent action being taken against him while he sought a separate ruling setting aside the public protector's findings.

## Business chief warns of Brexit 'emergency'

THE head of Britain's big business lobby on Monday (29) urged companies to shift to "an emergency footing" as the prospect of a no-deal Brexit becomes more likely.

The Confederation of British Industry in a report also warned that the EU was less prepared than Britain for such an eventuality but said both sides were not ready.

CBI chief Carolyn Fairbairn wrote in *The Times* that a no-deal Brexit had become a "serious possibility".

"Now is the time to shift to an emergency footing. While it's not

possible to seal our economy from all the damage the floodwaters of no deal will cause, we can lay down the sandbags and protect as much as we can," she said.

The CBI's head of EU negotiations Nicole Sykes, however, tweeted that it was "like putting sandbags down for a flood. Your kitchen's still going to be underwater but MAYBE we can save the bedroom upstairs," she wrote.

The CBI report said: "The EU lags behind the UK in seeking to prevent the worst effects of a no-

deal scenario. Although businesses have already spent billions on contingency planning for no-deal, they remain hampered by unclear advice, timelines, cost and complexity," it said.

The report noted that larger companies in highly regulated areas such as financial services had prepared contingency plans but preparations in other sectors such as agriculture and manufacturing were lagging behind.

"There's a great deal more that the government, and firms, must

NO DEAL?  
The future is still unclear



do," Fairbairn said, calling in particular for a government information campaign to target smaller businesses that need the most help to prepare.

But she concluded that even with preparations in place "the shock of no deal can only be reduced, not removed. It's a shock that will reverberate for years to come".

# Beware the Indian visa con

## CONCERN AT RISE OF BRITONS FALLING FOUL TO FAKE WEBSITES



by NADEEM BADSHAH

VISITORS to India are being conned by the rise of websites offering fake e-visas to the country.

Britons have been duped after filling in a bogus visa application form on the websites and being charged up to £100.

An e-tourist visa fee for UK citizens is around £60 through the Indian government's website.

Companies have also sprung up offering to apply for a visa on a person's behalf in return for a fee. Experts say firms appear at the top of internet searches due to them paying search engines in some cases.

Victims of scams have contacted websites - including TripAdvisor - to raise awareness ahead of the school summer holidays.

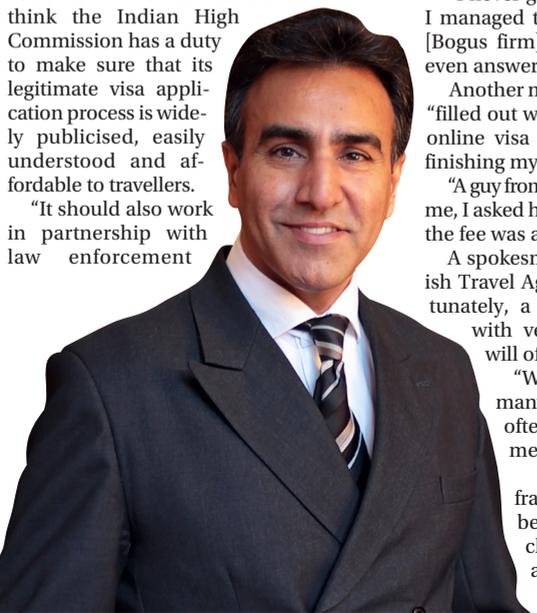
Jo Sidhu QC, a leading criminal and human rights barrister, told *Eastern Eye*: "Many of us remember the days when we had to queue for hours at the Indian High Commission to obtain a visa.

"Since then, application centres have been localised and now online forms are the norm. However, we have to be wary of unscrupulous visa providers who prey on people's anxieties by making promises of visas that are never delivered.

"Taking money from applicants and either failing to supply a visa or providing fake visas are criminal offences with severe penalties.

"It can amount to fraud or the creation of counterfeit travel documents. I think the Indian High Commission has a duty to make sure that its legitimate visa application process is widely publicised, easily understood and affordable to travellers.

"It should also work in partnership with law enforcement



SCAM: Britons' trips to India are being ruined by filling in bogus visa application forms on fake websites; and (inset) Jo Sidhu

agencies to identify and expose bogus visa providers to drive them out of the market. It's deeply unfair to anxious travellers, many of whom have limited means, to leave them vulnerable to exploitation by sharks."

The e-visa system was extended for British travellers in 2015, ending the need to book an appointment at the outsourced visa processing agency, or make a postal application. Holidaymakers can expect to receive entry documents via email within four days.

In 2017, the length of stay on an e-visa increased from 30 days to 60 days with double entry on tourist and business e-visa and triple entry on medical e-visas.

Several people used one bogus website and received nothing after paying a fee. One said he "used them by mistake".

"I never got any visa. In the last moment I managed to use the governmental page. [Bogus firm] still didn't made my visa or even answered my mails after one week."

Another man contacted by frauds said he "filled out what I thought was a real Indian online visa application and just as I was finishing my phone rang.

"A guy from with a UK number offers to help me, I asked how he got my number and what the fee was and he said 127 dollars [£104]"

A spokesman for the Association of British Travel Agents told *Eastern Eye*: "Unfortunately, a number of companies, often with very official seeming websites, will offer to get you a visa.

"When you use a search engine many will appear far up the page, often above the legitimate government website.

"Some of these sites may be fraudulent and no visa will ever be received, but many more will charge you much more than the actual government charge without adding any value to the process.

"The best way to access the official government website is to go to the relevant country's Travel Advice page on the Foreign Office website, which will direct you to the correct government website."

The Knowles family from Bedfordshire paid a company £310 for three e-visas for a trip to Goa and northern India. But their mother Pegg, 82, was put on a plane home after arriving at Delhi Airport due to a mistake in the application by the company.

As she was born in Ireland before 1948, she is a "British subject" rather than a British citizen and was not eligible for an e-visa.

She said: "He looked at my passport and said: 'You can't come in, you have the wrong visa, you have to go back! I was devastated, I thought this cannot be happening."

Pegg's daughter Roz said: "It completely tarnished the holiday. Everything we

planned we knew mum would have loved it. When I was in India, I questioned them [visa company]: 'There is a mistake, look at what you have done.'

"Their answer was pretty much: 'We have issued you the visas, what more do you want?'"

The UK Foreign Office said: "If you're applying for an e-visa, check you meet the eligibility criteria.

"If you do not hold a full 'British Citizen' passport, you may not be eligible for an e-visa. Beware of fake websites who are offering this service."

India's ministry of tourism has advised applicants to only apply for e-visas through the official government of India website at [www.indianvisaonline.gov.in](http://www.indianvisaonline.gov.in) following reports of fake websites and hackers.

It added it does not appoint any agents to apply for e-visas on behalf of any applicant.

## Students' application dismay

OVERSEAS students and staff at British universities are facing "unacceptable" difficulties and costs in applying for visas, it has been claimed.

Universities say that the system, run by the French IT services company Sopra Steria, is already struggling to cope with the numbers renewing their student visas within the UK and fear that it will be chaotic in September when more than 40,000 students are expected to use it.

Sopra is charging up to £200 to applicants for appointments. Alistair Jarvis, the chief executive of Universities UK, said: "Despite constructive engagement between the Home Office, UK Visas and Immigration and universities, the current capacity and level of service being offered by Sopra Steria remains unacceptable.

"Students and universities cannot be expected to pay to address Sopra Steria's broken system. We are calling on Sopra

Steria to fully address these concerns before the September surge of students so that students can start their courses with the visas they need."

A spokesperson for the company said: "Sopra Steria is working closely with the Home Office, universities and higher education institutions across the UK to deliver the tier 4 visa application service. This is tailored to each institution's needs to provide greater student convenience and choice."