

Bombay HC relief for US teen stranded in Dubai after Indian mission refused visa

OMKAR GOKHALE
MUMBAI, MARCH 18

THE BOMBAY High Court on Tuesday directed the Union government to issue fresh visa to a 19-year-old US citizen stranded in Dubai, who was on way to Mumbai to be with her family.

The girl, who holds an Overseas Citizenship of India (OCI) card, was on a flight to Mumbai after her university in Boston, USA, asked students to vacate the campus and return home in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic.

A division bench of Justices S J Kathawalla and R I Chagla passed an order after granting an urgent hearing on Tuesday to a plea filed by the girl's mother.

The petitioner-mother, through senior counsel Dinyar D Madon, argued that the 19-year-old was refused permission to board her connecting flight to Mumbai by an airline due to a travel advisory issued by the Indian government last week to tackle the virus outbreak, and the Indian diplomatic mission in

Dubai "arbitrarily" and "wrongfully" refused her request for visa.

Her mother is an Indian citizen; the petitioner was born in the US and is an American citizen. The girl completed her graduation in Mumbai and is pursuing higher studies in the US.

It was submitted that the student, who was asked to vacate the campus at Tufts University as part of precautions, had advanced her travel plans and left Boston on March 12 to reach Dubai on March 13. She was supposed to board a connecting flight from Dubai at 11.20 pm the same day, but Emirates Airlines did not allow her to board the connecting flight to Mumbai, citing the travel advisory issued by India on March 11, imposing restrictions on foreigners travelling to India effective from March 13.

Airline officials told her that she was travelling past the deadline, the court was told. As per schedule, the girl would have landed in Mumbai early March 14 morning with transit in Dubai. About her port of departure (that is Boston), the

court noted, "This obviously is much before the deadline as per the travel advisories issued by the respondent (government)."

The government's advisory stated that foreigners intending to travel to India should apply to the nearest Indian mission for visa on compelling grounds.

With the teen stranded in Dubai, her mother approached the Indian mission there and requested them to grant her visa. But the authorities there refused, the counsel submitted.

Madon argued that she was boarding at Dubai only as a transit passage and it should not have been considered her 'port of departure'. He also submitted that the Indian Embassy in Istanbul had issued visa to OCI-holders stranded in Istanbul, their transit halt, who had not even taken a flight from their port of departure before the deadline on compelling grounds. "It would be arbitrary to treat the petitioner's daughter differently by another Indian diplomatic mission in Dubai, or the respondents by denying her a visa on compelling grounds despite

she having departed from United State before the deadline," Madon argued.

Representing the Centre, advocate Rui Rodrigues did not contradict the petitioner's claims regarding the advisory and said that the authorities were not at fault, as the airline did not permit her to board the transit flight from Dubai.

After hearing the submissions, the court held that the passenger in transit would not fall within the word 'port of departure', and that the Indian mission in Dubai could have acceded to the student's request, which "unfortunately" was refused.

Observing that compelling case has been made by the petitioner's mother, the bench directed the government through the immigration bureau or the diplomatic mission in Dubai to issue a fresh visa to 19-year-old to enable her to arrive in Mumbai and be with her family. The court also clarified that the relief has been granted based on peculiar facts of the case and cannot be treated as precedent in other matters.

Ensure uniform policy to provide nutritional food to kids, lactating mothers: SC

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, MARCH 18

THE SUPREME Court on Wednesday sought to know what was being done to provide nutritional meals to children and lactating mothers in view of the closure of schools and anganwadis to check the spread of COVID-19.

"While dealing with one crisis, the situation may not lead to creation of another crisis," a bench of Chief Justice of India S A Bobde and Justice B R Gavai said, adding that "in that view of the matter, it is necessary, that all the States should come out with a uniform policy so as to ensure, that while preventing spread of COVID-19, the schemes for providing nutritional food to the children and nursing and lactating mothers are not adversely affected".

Taking suo motu cognizance, the bench said many states had issued directions to close schools and anganwadis to deal with the crisis. It noted that the mid-day meal scheme, under which nutritional food is supplied to children, should be implemented through various schools, and that anganwadis, in addition to supplying nutritional food, should also implement the scheme to provide nutritional food to lactating and nursing mothers.

"Non-supply of nutritional food to the children as well as lactating and nursing mothers may lead to large-scale malnourishment... Such malnutrition may affect their immunity system and as such, such children and lactating and nursing mothers would be more prone to catch the infection," the bench said.

It issued a notice to the Secretary of Union Ministry of Women and Child Development, and Chief Secretaries/Chief Administrators/ Administrators of States and Union Territories and asked them to file their response in one week's time.

Govt asks CBSE, varsities to postpone exams for 10 days

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, MARCH 18

THE UNION government on Wednesday ordered the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE), National Institute of Open Learning (NIOS) and all institutions of higher education to postpone ongoing examinations for ten days following the COVID-19 outbreak in the country.

Following the order, CBSE has postponed board examinations scheduled between March 19 and 31. This includes re-examination for students in Northeast Delhi affected by the recent riots. The Board will announce a new exam schedule by the end of the month after a "re-assessment of the situation".

The National Testing Agency (NTA), too, put the JEE (Main), scheduled to be held on April 5, 7, 8 and 9, on hold. "We will announce fresh dates soon," NTA Chief Vineet Joshi told *The Indian Express*. The JEE (Main) is the entrance examination for admission to National Institutes of Technology.

According to a senior official in the HRD Ministry, the

Wednesday order is binding on all institutions of higher education, irrespective of whether they are run by private management, the Centre or state government. "UGC will issue an order tomorrow (March 19) to this effect," the officer said.

The HRD Ministry has also requested state governments to reschedule the ongoing state board examinations for Class X and XII students. "For now, Uttar Pradesh has put all examinations on hold till April 2. Other state governments will take a call on our request after approval from authorities concerned," the officer added.

However, the ICSE and ISC Board examinations will go on as per schedule. The Chief Executive and Secretary of the Council for the Indian School Certificate Examination (CISCE), Gerry Arathoon, told *The Indian Express*, "We haven't received any orders from the government yet. We have eight papers left for the Class XII students and six for the Class X students, which should finish by March 31 and 30, respectively."

Earlier in the day, CISCE had

announced that all examiners would evaluate answer scripts from their respective homes. CBSE, meanwhile, has suspended evaluation work till March 31.

The HRD Ministry's order comes in the wake of increasing cases of COVID-19 infection. The total number of reported cases has now crossed 150. There have been three COVID-19-related deaths.

The government has said that steps are being taken to ensure "safety and security" of students appearing for exams and their teachers and parents. The CBSE had already issued detailed instructions on precautions to be taken.

"Since JEE Mains may require travel by examinees to different towns and the dates may clash with rescheduled CBSE and other Board exams therefore, JEE Mains should be rescheduled and the new date of JEE Mains will be announced on 31.03.2020..." the ministry order states.

On Wednesday, the ministry also held a meeting with State Open Universities to plan for all higher education institutions to move classes online till they are closed.

Kashmir records first case, restrictions on public transport in Srinagar

ADIL AKHZER
SRINAGAR, MARCH 18

KASHMIR REPORTED its first COVID-19 case on Wednesday after a patient from Srinagar tested positive for the virus, officials said.

J&K government spokesperson Rohit Kansal confirmed the same in a late-night tweet. "Jammu & Kashmir First positive case in Kashmir- Khanyar, Srinagar. History of foreign travel. Arrived on 16/3/2020. Put in Isolation. Surveillance started in 300m area. Request all to cooperate. Also immediately self-report any symptoms," he posted.

Health Department sources said the patient is a woman who had a travelled to Saudi Arabia for pilgrimage.

Meanwhile, authorities in Srinagar have imposed restrictions on public transport in Srinagar from Thursday. Srinagar Deputy Commissioner Shahid Chaudhary tweeted, "There will be restrictions on public transport, assembly of people and some other measures, in #Srinagar from tomorrow. Steps are being taken in view of a positive case detected. Further updates to follow. #Coronavirus."

Srinagar Municipal Corporation (SMC) mayor Junaid Azim Mattoo asked all residents of Srinagar to stay at their homes from Thursday. "I request ALL Srinagarites to STAY at their homes from tomorrow morning and venture out ONLY when absolutely necessary. Those with ANY flu like symptoms should immediately home quarantine themselves. Report for screening/testing if symptoms," he said in a series of tweets.



PREVENTIVE MEASURES

A Srinagar Municipal Corporation employee fumigates houseboats and shikaras on the banks of Dal lake. *Shuaib Masoodi*

J&K bans inter-state buses, Vaishno Devi board shuts yatra

ARUN SHARMA
JAMMU, MARCH 18

TAKING MORE stringent measures to check the spread of COVID-19, the Jammu and Kashmir administration on Wednesday asked all "foreign tourists or visitors" to not visit the Union Territory and suspended movement of all inter-state buses to and from J&K.

The Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine Board has also closed the yatra to the shrine.

"All foreign tourists and visitors coming to J&K will be quarantined," said UT spokesperson Rohit Kansal. "Similarly, one hundred per cent quarantine will be imposed for all visitors from the Union Territory of Ladakh."

A total of 2,802 people are under observation in the UT, Kansal said, adding that 2,128 are under home quarantine and 28

in hospital quarantine.

A total of 145 samples have been sent for testing, and 118 of them have tested negative, while report in 24 cases is awaited. Only three cases have been reported positive in the UT so far, he added.

Earlier in the day, an order by Transport Commissioner Pardeep Kumar said that "no inter-state bus service shall ply on inter-state routes with immediate effect till further orders".

"The buses belonging to the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir, which are presently outside the UT, shall not carry any passenger from outside the UT while returning back," it added.

Meanwhile, the Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine Board asked pilgrims to "not plan their visit till the situation normalises completely". It said that the decision has been taken in view of the advisories issued by the Union Ministry of Health and

Family Welfare and the J&K government. "However, Pooja, Aarti and other rituals shall be held at the Holy Cave Shrine as usual," it said in a statement.

The management committee has also banned the entry of devotees at the Chandi Mata temple in Baderwah's Chinote area till April 4. On similar lines, other religious leaders are also advised to suspend all religious gatherings and functions, at least till March 31, said Kansal.

The J&K administration has also made self-declaration mandatory for all the people travelling in the train between Banihal and Qazigund. "Please ensure that all the inbound and outbound passengers coming through train up to Banihal and going back shall necessarily file the self-declaration form, with the details," read a letter written by Jammu Divisional Commissioner Sanjeev Verma to the Ramban District Magistrate.

60 % of train tickets cancelled in March: Rly chairman to Parliamentary panel

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, MARCH 18

OVER 60 per cent of train tickets were cancelled in March due to coronavirus, the Railways Board chairman informed a parliamentary panel, which came down hard on him for a "shoddy presentation" on the steps taken to tackle the outbreak, sources said.

The Standing Committee on Transport, Tourism and Culture had convened a special meeting with the railway and aviation ministries, seeking an update on the precautions taken by them in view of the virus.

Railway Board Chairman V K Yadav was pulled up by the panel for "shoddy presentation" on the preparedness of the national transporter in the wake of Covid-19 outbreak. Officials who attended the meeting, however, said the panel was not as critical



Union Railway Minister Piyush Goyal

as was being portrayed.

"The Railway Board chairman was unprepared and made a shoddy presentation at such a sensitive time," a member of the panel said. The meeting was attended by 20 MPs.

"While the aviation and tourism officials came with presentations with slides, the Railway Board Chairman did not. He just read out from some papers he was carrying," said an MP.

Sources said the panel members instructed Yadav to prepare a detailed report on the steps taken by the Railways to prevent the spread of the virus.

Meanwhile, Yadav informed the committee that over 60 per cent of tickets were cancelled this month due to coronavirus. He also said any non-essential travel should be avoided.

He also said that the railways has prepared pamphlets on dos and don'ts which are being given to passengers. But the panel asked him what he intended to do about illiterate passengers who cannot read such pamphlets. "Neither you nor the railways is prepared," a senior member reprimanded Yadav.

The railways has issued advisories to all zones to restrict gathering of crowds at platforms, sanitised coaches, issued set of guidelines for its catering staff and even cancelled 85 trains

across zones.

Railway Minister Piyush Goyal also held a high-level meeting on Tuesday and formed a response team comprising executive directors from the Railway Board.

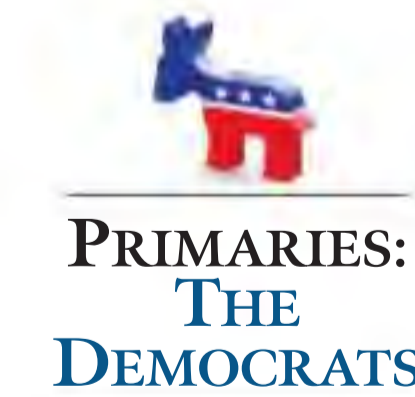
This team will coordinate all COVID-19 preparedness activities, monitor progress through online dashboard and other forums, resolve issues of railway zones/PUs, issue advisories and media briefs and prepare position for review meetings at various forums.

One nodal officer from each railway zone will serve as point of contact for all COVID-19 preparedness measures and will be in constant touch with the COVID Response team of Railway Board.

Online monitoring system has also been created to do real time monitoring of the efforts across the country.

THE WORLD

Democratic primaries: Biden sweeps 3 states, Sanders comeback 'unlikely'



NEW YORK TIMES
NEW YORK, MARCH 18

JOSEPH R Biden Jr easily defeated Senator Bernie Sanders in three major primaries on Tuesday, all but extinguishing Sanders's chances for a comeback, as anxious Americans turned out to vote amid a series of cascading disruptions from the coronavirus pandemic.

Biden, the former vice president, won by wide margins in Florida and Illinois and also carried Arizona, sweeping the night and achieving a nearly insurmountable delegate lead.

FLORIDA, ILLINOIS, ARIZONA: DELEGATE COUNT*		
	JOSEPH R. BIDEN JR.	BERNIE SANDERS
Votes	2,217,605	1,120,363
Delegates	266	135
Total delegates	1,165	880

*Source: NYT, counting in progress at time of report

The emphatic outcome could greatly intensify pressure on Sanders to end his campaign and allow Democrats to unify behind Biden as their presumptive nominee.

The routs in Florida and Illinois, two of the biggest prizes on the national map, represented both a vote of confidence in Biden from most Democrats, and a blunt rejection of Sanders's candidacy by the kind of large, diverse states he would have needed to capture to broaden his appeal beyond the ideological left.

Sanders has struggled since his first presidential campaign

in 2016 to win over black voters in larger numbers and to persuade voters who do not share his ethos of democratic socialism that he can be trusted to lead the party into the general election.

In a gesture to the gravity of the moment, Biden used much of his brief victory address — via a balky live stream from his home in Wilmington — to discuss the virus and to reassure the country.

"We'll get through this together," Biden said, trying to project a presidential bearing to a rattled nation. He only

fleetingly mentioned Tuesday's results, noting he had "a very good night," before directly speaking to Sanders's youthful supporters, a voting group he is trying to court.

"I hear you, I know what's at stake, I know what we have to do," Biden said. "Our goal as a campaign, and my goal as a candidate, is to unify this party and unify this nation."

Advisers to Senator Bernie Sanders said on Wednesday that he was reassessing his presidential campaign.

Faiz Shakir, Sanders's campaign manager, said the Vermont senator was considering his options but also suggested a decision on how to proceed was not imminent.

In a subsequent email to the campaign's supporters, Shakir gave a blunt appraisal of its recent performance and provided an update on its next steps.

"No sugarcoating it, last night did not go the way we wanted," Shakir wrote.

Trump named Republican nominee with little contest

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
WASHINGTON, MARCH 18

US PRESIDENT Donald Trump has won the Florida and Illinois Republican primaries, making him the party's presumptive nominee in the November presidential election.

"Congratulations to Donald J. Trump on officially becoming the presumptive Republican nominee for President!" Republican Party chairwoman Ronna McDaniel tweeted on Tuesday.

The 73-year-old White House incumbent did not face any meaningful competition for the Republican nomination, and the Florida and Illinois results were considered a foregone conclusion.

"Our party is united, our grassroots movement is fired up, and we are ready for FOUR MORE YEARS!" the Republican Party chairwoman said.