

Govt fast-tracks China visa approvals to step up manufacturing

Move to help companies investing in sectors covered by PLI schemes

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The Union government has introduced a streamlined, time-bound process for granting business visas to Chinese technicians involved in manufacturing projects, in response to complaints from the Indian industry.

The new guidelines from the Ministry of Home Affairs, effective from August 1, aim to expedite visa approvals for nationals from China and other countries sharing land borders with India, said a senior government official.

According to the new regulations, once a company applies for an e-visa, the application will be forwarded to relevant government departments, including the Ministry of External Affairs and security agencies, for approval. "The responses (whether approval or rejection) will have to be sent to the home ministry within 28 days," the official told *Business Standard*, noting that the visa will have a validity of six months.

This initiative is anticipated to ease challenges faced by firms investing in 14 strategic sectors covered under the production-linked

THE GUIDELINES



▶ New online visa framework effective from August 1

▶ Applies to nationals from neighbouring land border nations

▶ Provides relief to companies invested in 14 strategic sectors with PLI initiatives, even if they are not PLI beneficiaries

▶ Government departments must submit visa application feedback to the home ministry within 28 days

▶ Business e-visa valid for six months

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incentive (PLI) schemes, the government's flagship scheme designed to bolster manufacturing in India. The PLI scheme encompasses a wide range of sectors, such as mobile phones, drones, white goods, telecommunications, textiles, automobiles, and pharmaceutical drugs. Delays in visa-related matters have notably impacted sectors like solar photovoltaic modules, specialty steel, white goods, and electronics.

Earlier, the home ministry issued standard operating procedures to streamline the application process for Indian business visas under the PLI schemes.

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Guidelines aim for level playing field for firms

The latest guidelines aim to create a level playing field for companies establishing manufacturing units without seeking government subsidies under the PLI schemes.

“The rules should not differ for companies making investments and establishing manufacturing units in India but not claiming subsidies under the PLI scheme. Their business visa applications should not face uncertainty or extended approval timeframes,” the official emphasised.

Visa-related difficulties have been causing productivity issues for companies, particularly in critical production activities such as machine installation or repairs, due to delays in component manufacturers’ visa approvals. “With the new guidelines, the entire process should take about a month, or no more than 45 days,” the official added.

Until now, the visa issuance process was manual and time-consuming, often taking months for approvals. The introduction of a fully automated system will now enable easier tracking of applications, ensuring time-bound approvals. The strained ties between India and China, particularly following the Galwan Valley clash in June 2020, led India to issue Press Note 3 of the 2020 series, which placed Chinese investments under heightened scrutiny. This also resulted in delays in visa approvals for Chinese nationals.

