

## British-Kashmiri Community activist calls for quick withdrawal of unjust additional visa charges by BHC in Islamabad:



Published on March 12, 2025

Document Date: Tue, Jun 16 2026 10:56:55 am

Category: ,English,Kashmir -

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Altaf Hamid Rao.

MIRPUR (AJK): March 12: Faisal Manzoor

former President Mirpur-AJK Chamber of Commerce has MCCI has expressed grave concern over alleged unfair additional charges being received by local Visa Facilitation Service (VFS) in lieu of security charges for the UK visa applicants besides, what he called, unjust visa decisions impacting applicants in Mirpur, Azad Jammu Kashmir, Pakistan.

In an open letter addressed to the British High Commissioner in Pakistan, the veteran trade union leader of the local business fraternity besides a social and rights activist requested to the top British envoy to Islamabad to look into the concerns inked in his letter taking immediate appropriate action to address the matter.

“It is essential that the VFS fees, online booking system, and refund processes be reviewed to ensure fairness and transparency. Furthermore, I urge the British High Commission to address the issue of unjust visa refusals by providing clear guidance to ECOs on how they should assess applications in accordance with UK immigration policies, particularly in relation to cultural norms around financial transactions in Pakistan, the ex President of MCCI urged in his letter,

dated 11th of March, 2025, the text of which is as under:

Excellency

Jane Marriott

The British High Commissioner,

British High Commission,

PO Box 1122, Diplomatic Enclave, Ramna 5

Islamabad

Subject: Unfair Additional Charges by VFS and Unjust Visa Decisions Impacting Applicants in

Mirpur

Excellency,

I hope this letter finds you well. My name is Faisal Manzoor, and I am a former President Mirpur Chamber of Commerce & Industry. I am also a community worker and social activities organizer in Mirpur. I have been approached by several local councillors and members of the community who have expressed their concerns regarding the recent developments and difficulties faced by applicants submitting visa applications for the United Kingdom. I am writing to bring to your attention several issues regarding the visa application process that have created frustration and

financial hardship for many individuals in the region. These concerns include the unfair additional charges being imposed by VFS Mirpur, difficulties with online appointment bookings, the handling of refunds, and the unjust refusals of visa applications by Entry Clearance Officers (ECOs).

#### 1. Unfair Additional Charges by VFS:

Applicants in Mirpur are being subjected to an additional £150 charge by VFS, labelled to cover the cost of security concerns in AJ&K which is disputed territory. This is concerning, particularly as Mirpur has a lower crime rate compared to larger cities like Lahore, Karachi, and Rawalpindi/Islamabad. The additional fee appears to be an unfair burden on applicants, especially when the security situation in Mirpur is comparatively stable as well as comparatively less rent area as compared to larger cities of Pakistan. It is for your kind attention that no security issue neither has been raised nor has been reported by the VFS VFS officials since they have established their office in Mirpur.

#### 2. Problems with Online Appointment Booking and Refunds:

The VFS online appointment booking system is frequently failing, despite payments being successfully deducted from applicants' bank cards. As a result, applicants are forced to reapply for both UKVI application & appointments and request refunds from both UKVI for the application has

been submitted and VFS for the payment deducted but VFS online system failed to generate appointment. Unfortunately, both organizations refund only the actual payment amounts and not the 14% tax fees levied by bank authorities on each online transaction, resulting in significant financial losses for applicants. This issue is adding to the frustration and increasing the financial burden on individuals seeking to apply for UK visas.

### 3. Unjust Visa Refusals Due to Misinterpretation of Evidence:

Applicants have reported that their visa applications are being unfairly rejected, with ECOs citing a lack of evidence regarding the origin of funds in the applicants' bank statements. Despite applicants providing credible evidence of their sources of income—such as business income tax returns for self-employed individuals or employment letters and salary slips for employed persons—ECOs are refusing applications on the grounds that cash deposits, which are a common practice in Pakistan, are not being accepted. It is important to note that cash transactions are a culturally accepted norm in Pakistan, recognized by all government departments, including the Federal Board of Revenue. However, the ECOs' refusal to accept such deposits is resulting in unjust visa denials, which is causing considerable distress and loss to applicants.

### 4. Unfair Visa Decision-Making and Community Discontent:

The applicants are paying the visa fee in the hope of receiving a fair decision from the ECOs, on

behalf of the UK government. However, many individuals are being rejected without clear or justifiable reasons. This has resulted in growing discontent within the community, and many are beginning to perceive these actions as discriminatory and unjust. As the ECOs are aware that there is no right of appeal and that applicants are unlikely to take the matter to court, there is a growing concern that this situation is being misused by some officers. The result is a deterioration in public opinion towards the British government and its policies, which could have long-term consequences.

#### Request for Action:

In light of the above issues, I respectfully request that your office must look into these concerns and take appropriate action. It is essential that the VFS fees, online booking system, and refund processes be reviewed to ensure fairness and transparency. Furthermore, I urge the British High Commission to address the issue of unjust visa refusals by providing clear guidance to ECOs on how they should assess applications in accordance with UK immigration policies, particularly in relation to cultural norms around financial transactions in Pakistan.

I am confident that with your intervention, these matters can be resolved in a manner that upholds the reputation of the United Kingdom and ensures fair treatment for all applicants.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. I look forward to your response.

Best Regards

Faisal Manzoor

Former President MCCI.