

# Harper's hometown paper attacks UAE visa policy

Opposition seeks diplomatic means to sort out spat.

- By Mick O'Reilly, Deputy Managing Editor
- Published: 00:00 January 3, 2011



Dubai: The *Calgary Herald*, the home-town newspaper for Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper, launched a bitter and vitriolic attack on the UAE for its decision to impose visit visa regulations on Canadians.

"Canada gets the message that you're mad," the paper said. "Now, act like adults, drop your petty, vindictive behaviour, and sit down in civilised fashion to talk about a resolution."

Trouble is, Canada's Minister for Foreign Affairs, Lawrence Cannon, isn't taking phone calls of the UAE's Ambassador to Ottawa, Mohommad Al Gafli. Since October, Al Gafli has been trying to talk directly to Cannon, published reports say, and he has been forced to talk to one of Cannon's political aides.

Now, leading Canadian opposition politicians are calling on the Conservative government of Harper to use diplomacy and negotiations to end its spat with the UAE.

Yesterday, mandatory visa regulations came into effect for Canadian visitors to the UAE, a move which business groups in Canada said will hurt business and diplomatic ties between the two nations.

At the centre of the dispute are long-standing requests from both Etihad and Emirates airlines to increase the permissible flights of three each per week — a move staunchly rejected by Ottawa and opposed by its subsidised national carrier, Air Canada — and to include flights to Calgary, Vancouver and Montreal, rather than just to Toronto as at present.

Tan McTeague, a Toronto-area Liberal Member of Parliament and former Canadian foreign affairs minister who was key in obtaining the release of Canadian citizens held hostage in Iraq, is calling on the Harper government to re-open negotiations.

"The government has allowed this to get out of hand," McTeague said, adding that the standoff was "highly embarrassing" for Canada.

## Retaliatory measures

The Calgary Herald, however, says that the UAE visa regulations are "utterly juvenile and unlikely to sway the Canadian government to change its mind."

"The UAE needs to learn that Canada does not give in to blackmail, bombast or retaliatory measures designed to coerce it into doing another nation's bidding."

The vitriolic tirade goes on to say that the UAE is acting "like a two-year-old in the grocery store cookie aisle" by acting within its sovereign rights to impose visa regulations on travellers.

The editorial, however, wrongly says that Emirates is offering visa refunds if air travellers from Canada use its online service to obtain visas.

If visitors to the UAE do not wish to avail of the UAE visa service at the Ottawa Embassy, both Etihad and Emirates have offered visa services online to facilitate air travellers.

"Canadian travellers can now apply for and purchase UAE visas online via [www.emirates.com](http://www.emirates.com)," an Emirates spokesman said.

"All ticketed Emirates customers, regardless of whether their ticket was purchased via a travel agent, online via [www.emirates.com](http://www.emirates.com), or directly from an Emirates call centre or retail shop, may log-in to 'Manage a Booking' on [www.emirates.com](http://www.emirates.com) and access the application tool.

"Both 96-hour and 30-day visas are available and these will be issued via email within 3-4 working days. 96 hour visas cost \$61.50 (Dh226.19) and 30-day visas cost \$74.50.

"Customers can apply for a visa a maximum of 60 days before travel and a minimum of four international working days before departure.

"To date, Emirates has received a significant number of visa applications from Canadian travellers."

©Gulf News 2011