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We play a catalytic role in making travel easy and effortless: Shikhar Aggarwal, Joint MD, BLS

Synopsis

In an e-mail interview Shikhar Aggarwal, joint managing director, BLS discusses consular services outsourcing, impact of Covid-19 on outsourcing business and more.



The Covid-19 pandemic has been a learning experience in its own way, said Aggarwal.

New Delhi: Delhi based visa, consular outsourcing services provider BLS **NSE -3.33%** International won a five-year contract in December from the embassy of Brazil to manage its services in China. Among few vendors globally for outsourced consular services BLS provides such outsourced services to several countries. It plans to expand services around the world while also managing specific e-governance platforms in India and abroad. In an e-mail interview Shikhar Aggarwal, joint managing director, BLS discusses consular services outsourcing, impact of Covid-19 on outsourcing business and more. Edited excerpts:

What are some of the key trends that you have noticed during the pandemic?

The Covid-19 pandemic has been a learning experience in its own way. Especially for the outsourcing industry that had rarely faced such a set back before, but it would definitely be one of the fastest reviving industries as the situation seems to normalise now. We have also experienced that with safety as the utmost priority, travellers are shelling out extra money for ease of access, premium/ priority services or home/ mobile services.

Travel was impacted during the pandemic and is yet to be fully restored to pre-Covid levels. How has this impacted your business?

It was impacted during the pandemic but with vaccination started in few parts of the world it is starting to pick up from a visa outsourcing perspective.

Consular, citizen services and banking correspondent business have performed well during the year. We continue our focus on streamlining costs in line with level of operations.

What are the growth areas you see for 2021? What are your expansion plans?

BLS is amongst the top three players in government outsourcing services with its presence in visa/ passport/ consular/ citizen services in 62 countries and 36 government clients.

Growing cross-border tourism is anticipated to enhance the need for outsourced consular and visa services, resulting in more opportunities in the segment. Our existing contracts with Brazil, Hungary, Italy, USA, Spain, Canada, Estonia, Lebanon, Portugal, etc. continue to grow strong. We expect to win more contracts for visas, e-visas, e-governance (citizen) services globally.

Apart from that, we are also present in tech-enabled services, in which we provide Government to Citizen (G2C) and Government to Government (G2G) services. We offer such services for Punjab Sewa Kendras in India and global wins include Embassy of Afghanistan, UAE Ministry of External Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Egypt, & RCMP's Canadian Criminal Real Time Identification Services (CCRTIS). We expect substantial growth in the e-governance segment as well.

In addition to scouting for new business wins we are also pursuing inorganic growth opportunities that align with our business capabilities.

When do you expect visa processing to get to pre-Covid 19 levels?

It looks like a lot of people have started travelling although it will take another quarter or so to get to pre-Covid levels.

What value proposition do you offer to the diplomatic missions you work with? What have been some of your new engagements?

We are amongst the largest specialist services providers for outsourcing of visa, passport, attestation and citizen services to the governments and diplomatic missions globally. We serve diplomatic missions, embassies & consulates in managing all administrative and non-judgmental tasks related to the visa application process, enabling missions to focus entirely on the key aspect of assessment of the visa application. From pre-travel information processes, data processing and biometrics capture of applicants to acceptance of crucial travel documents, BLS plays the catalyst in making travel easy and effortless.

Do you plan to increase manpower in coming months? If so, how many do you plan to hire?

With new contracts in the vicinity of our domain, we are bound to increase hiring.

How is technology impacting your work?

Artificial Intelligence & Machine Learning is utilized for enhanced and faster services. We are using these in for online appointment booking, mobile biometric services, e-visa and allied contact centres. With the rise of global e-passports and e-visas technology use will only increase.

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