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Explained | Can Indians get a second passport, what about dual citizenship and other questions answered

Do you know your passport from your OCI card? As more Indians, especially the rich, look for an alternative residence or citizenship, we break down the basic immigration concepts

PARESH KARIA | AUGUST 24, 2021 / 09:34 AM IST



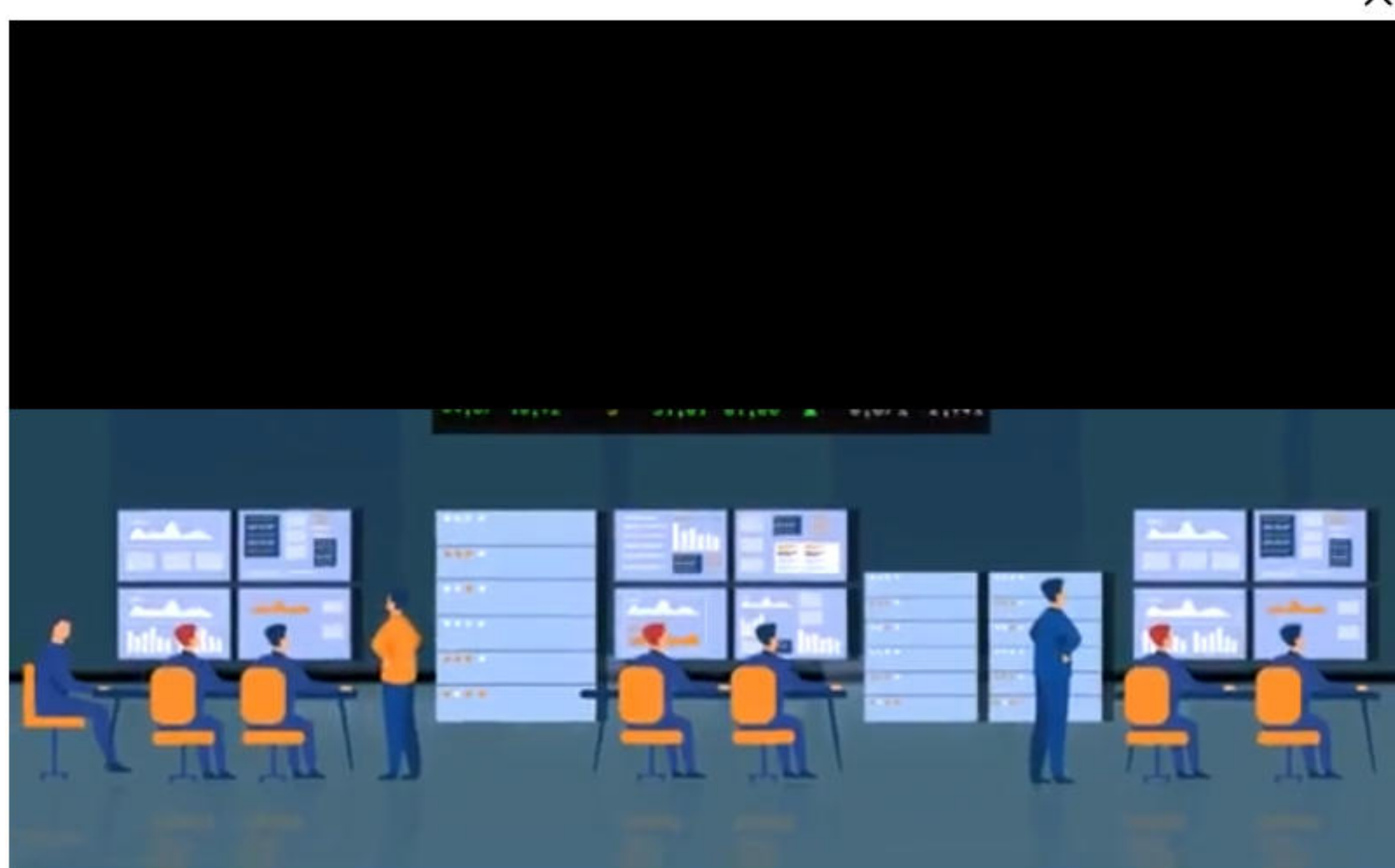
Indian passport allows visa-free travel to 84 countries (Image: Shutterstock).

These are uncertain times and Indians, at least high net-worth individuals (HNIs), are on the move. Rich Indians are looking to move abroad and the coronavirus outbreak has only added to the urgency among HNIs to migrate or at least have an alternative option overseas.

Immigration queries are not restricted to metro cities anymore but are coming in from all corners of India. And the most common question: can an Indian hold a “second passport”?

While they are keen to move to a foreign country, would-be immigrants are confused about concepts like residency, citizenship and a second passport.

In this article, we will explain these terms and also answer the million-dollar question: “can an Indian citizen have more than one passport?”



What is the difference between citizenship and a passport?

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Citizenship is the legal status of a person belonging to a particular country, recognised by the laws of that nation. A citizen is entitled to certain rights and has obligations as laid out in the constitution of that country.

A passport, on the other hand, is a document that a government issues to its citizens. The primary purpose is to enable citizens to travel internationally. It also serves as proof of citizenship.

All passport-holders must be citizens of that country but all citizens don't need to have a passport.

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In India, the passport is issued by the external affairs ministry. It's not a “powerful passport”, as it ranks low on the global passport ranking. It allows visa-free travel to just about 60 countries, primarily in Asia, Africa and the Caribbean. Japanese passport that topped the index in 2021 allows visa-free travel to 191 countries.

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What is dual or multiple citizenship? And what about a second passport?

Dual or multiple citizenship means that a person is the citizen of more than one country (say the US and Canada and/or the UK). It gives the person rights and benefits in these countries. You can live, work and study in any of these and get benefits like healthcare, education, social security, etc.

The biggest advantage of multiple citizenship, however, is that you can hold multiple passports. It makes global travel smoother as you get to travel visa-free to all the countries these passport-holders are entitled to.

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Can Indians get dual citizenship?

No. The Indian constitution does not have a provision of dual or multiple citizenship. If an Indian acquires a second passport, they automatically lose their Indian citizenship.

As per the Passports Act, 1967, it is mandatory for all Indian passport holders to surrender their passports to the nearest Indian mission or post immediately after acquiring the nationality of another country.

However, such persons can get Overseas Citizens of India (OCI) status after acquiring foreign citizenship.

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What is OCI status and how does work?

OCI is a legal status given to a person of Indian origin who has given up Indian citizenship. It is similar to permanent residency and offers several benefits. The government of India issues a document called OCI card to all people who have been given this status.

How to get an OCI card?

Make an online application, upload photographs and documents, pay the fee and you will get your OCI card in a short time.

What are the benefits available to OCIs?

An OCI can enjoy many of the benefits available to a citizen of India such as:

- >> Multiple entry life-long visa to India
 - >> Live, work, carry on business in India indefinitely
 - >> Own assets and properties
 - >> Apply for Indian citizenship again after surrendering foreign citizenship, subject to certain conditions
- OCIs don't get to do this:**
- >> Since you are not a citizen, you cannot vote
 - >> You cannot run for a public office or contest an election
 - >> You cannot buy agricultural land or plantations in India. However, you may continue to hold such property you had before giving up Indian citizenship and also inherit it

To conclude, Indian citizens cannot hold multiple citizenship or passports. They can, however, enjoy many of the benefits that an Indian citizen is entitled to by being an Overseas Citizen of India when they give up their citizenship.

PARESH KARIA is a Chartered Accountant with over 15 years' experience in Banking, Investment Advisory, Immigration and Real Estate. In the past, he has worked with renowned banks like HDFC Bank, ICICI Bank and ABN Amro Private Banking

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