

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS [GENERAL (RETD.) V. K. SINGH]: (a) to (c) High Commission of India (HCI) in London received a notification dated 24 March 2014 from the UK Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO) regarding levy of congestion charges of £3,324,700/-. Subsequently, an amount of £4,477,605/- is now shown as outstanding against the Office of the High Commissioner for India at serial number 5 in the list published by the Transport for London on its website. HCI London has been contesting the improper levy of 'Congestion Tax' and therefore, no payment has been made on this account. This Ministry is not aware of further course of action under consideration of Transport for London.

New process for availing passports

1458. SHRI AMAR SHANKAR SABLE: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

- (a) whether availing a passport has been made easy;
- (b) if so, the details thereof and the new process thereof;
- (c) whether the process ensures that unwanted people are not provided passports due to post issue verification; and
- (d) if so, the remedial measures and processes that have been put in place to guard against this?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS [GENERAL (RETD.) V. K. SINGH]: (a) to (d) The Ministry has been taking various steps to fast-track and simplify the process of passport issuance. These include:

- (i) Under the new Passport Seva Project system, citizens apply for passport services online through the Passport Portal and visit the PSK, headed by a Government officer, at the appointed date and time. Front-end activities, such as token issuance, initial scrutiny of the application forms and acceptance of fee where applicable, scanning of documents, taking biometrics and photos, are performed by the Service Provider's Staff. The sovereign functions of verification, granting, issuing, revocation and impounding of passports are performed by Government officials.
- (ii) The entire process including payment of passport fee through debit/credit card and State Bank of India net-banking and allotment of appointments is online.
- (iii) The Electronic Queue Management System at the PSKs ensures 'first-in-first-out' principle in application processing.

- (iv) The number of public dealing counters has been increased from the erstwhile 350 to 1610 in the new system and public dealing hours have gone up from 4 hours to 7 hours a day.
- (v) An SMS/e-mail alert is sent to applicant as soon as passport is dispatched to the applicants by Speed Post. The mPassport Seva mobile phone app is also available for providing passport service related information. An optional Premium SMS Service has also been introduced for intimating each step of the passport issuance process.
- (vi) For assistance one can call toll-free helpline 1800-258-1800. An e-mail based helpdesk facility and a 24x7 call centre have been set up to provide requisite information to citizens in 17 vernacular languages.

2. With a view to further fast-track and simplify passport application submission procedure, the following steps have been implemented during the last two years:

- (i) First time applicants who furnish Aadhar, Electoral Photo Identity Card (EPIC), PAN Card and an affidavit in the format of Annexure-I under normal Passport Application will get faster service without any additional fees, subject to validation of Aadhar and other documents, if required from their respective databases. The passports under this liberal dispensation will be issued on Post-Police Verification basis.
- (ii) Applicants are facilitated to choose any appointment date from the earliest five available working days for scheduling/rescheduling an appointment. Hitherto, System used to offer only one available date to applicant for seeking appointment for Passport related services.
- (iii) The Ministry has also launchedm Passport Police App for speedy submission of Police Verification Report by State Police authorities. The App would facilitate the field level verification officers to directly capture the PV report into the system digitally. With the launch of this App, the need to download and print the physical Personal Particular Form and Questionnaire would no longer be required resulting in paperless end-to-end digital flow of the PV process, further reducing the time required for completion of PVR, within the desired time limit of 21 days.
- (iv) Acceptance of Birth Certificate in respect of abandoned/orphaned children liberalized for providing passport services.
- (v) Liberalization of the requirement of NOC by Government officials for passport applications.

- (vi) Doing away with ink signatures of Passport Issuing Authorities to optimize use of manpower.
- (vii) Acceptance of registered rent agreement and photo passbooks issued by Scheduled Indian banks and Regional Rural banks in addition to the ones issued by Scheduled Public Sector banks, as proof of address and identity.
- (viii) Acceptance of self-attested documents instead of attestation by Gazetted officer.

3. Passports are issued on post police verification basis only to those applicants who already possess passports; those who apply under Tatkaal Scheme with Verification Certificates issued by Government/PSU officers of the rank of Under Secretary and above; and those who furnish Aadhaar card, PAN card and Voter ID card. The passports are dispatched by India Post to be delivered personally to the passport applicant at the given address, thus physically confirming correct address of the applicant. In case of issuance of passports on Post-Police Verification process, whenever 'adverse' verification reports are received from the Police, after giving adequate opportunity to the passport holders to explain their case, the passports are impounded or revoked under the Passports Act, 1967 and criminal proceedings are also initiated against the passport holders and anyone abetting them.

Passport Seva Kendra in Puducherry

1459. SHRI N. GOKULAKRISHNAN: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to State:

(a) whether the Passport Seva Kendra (PSK) set up in Puducherry has started functioning;

(b) if so, the number of passports so far issued by this PSK; and

(c) if not, by when it is likely to become functional and reasons for delay in making it functional?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS [GENERAL (RETD.) V. K. SINGH]: (a) Yes. The Passport Seva Kendra (PSK) in Puducherry was formally inaugurated by the Chief Minister of Puducherry on 22nd February, 2016.

(b) 208 applications have been received and processed by the PSK, Puducherry in February, 2016

(c) Does not arise.