(b) the proposed changes and the composition of new appointees in the Ministry's Policy Planning and Research Division?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS [GENERAL (RETD.) V. K. SINGH]: (a) As on April, 2016, there are 35 Consultants in the Ministry of External Affairs engaged for periods ranging from 3 months to 3 years and deployed in different Divisions of the Ministry to further strengthen existing capacities.

(b) The strength of the Policy Planning and Research Division has been enhanced through deployment of additional officials from within MEA, induction of specialists from other Ministries and recruitment of consultants with expertise in international relations through an open competitive selection process based on pre-defined tenure contracts. At present, the Division has five MEA officials, one Economic Service officer with one Armed Services officer (to join shortly) and four consultants.

**Delay in renewal of passports**

1303. SHRI SALIM ANSARI: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that it takes more than four months to get new or renewed passport in the National Capital Territory of Delhi (NCR);

(b) if so, the reasons for such delay and steps being taken to reduce the time for getting passport;

(c) whether there are separate counters for senior citizens at passport offices in Delhi; and

(d) if not, the steps being taken to open separate counter for senior citizens?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS [GENERAL (RETD.) V. K. SINGH]: (a) and (b) No. The Ministry endeavours to issue passports within the indicative time provided in the "Citizen's Charter of Central Passport Organisation of Ministry of External Affairs for Issuance and Delivery of Passport Services 2016" provided the application is complete in all respects and a clear police verification report, where required, has been received. Delay in issuance of passports, if any, is attributable to various factors such as non-receipt of police verification report, inability of the applicant in providing required document(s), verification of document submitted by the originator, if needed etc. The Ministry has been taking various steps to reduce the time for getting passports by continuously simplifying the process of passport issuance which include:

- 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.
- 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.
- The Electronic Queue Management System at the PSKs ensures 'first-in-first-out' principle in application processing.
- 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.
- An SMS/e-mail alert is sent to applicant as soon as passport is dispatched to the applicants by Speed Post. The mPassport Seva is also available for providing passport service related information. An optional Premium SMS Service has also been introduced.
- 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.
- First time applicants who furnish Aadhaar, Electoral Photo Identity Card (EPIC), PAN Card and an affidavit in the prescribed format declaring non-criminality will get faster service without any additional fees, subject to validation of Aadhaar and other documents, if required from their respective databases. The passports under this liberal dispensation will be issued on Post-Police Verification basis.
- Applicants are facilitated to choose any appointment date from the earliest five available working days for scheduling/rescheduling an appointment. Earlier, System used to offer only one available date to applicant for seeking appointment for Passport related services.
- The Ministry has also launched mPassport Police App for speedy submission of Police Verification Report. 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.
- Acceptance of Birth Certificate in respect of abandoned/orphaned children liberalized for providing passport services.

- Liberalization of the requirement of NOC by Government officials for passport applications.
- Acceptance of registered rent agreement as proof of address.
- Acceptance of self-attested documents instead of attestation by Gazetted officer.
- Doing away with ink signatures of PIAs to optimize use of manpower.
- Acceptance of 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.

(c) and (d) Although there are no separate counters for senior citizens in the Passport offices/Passport Seva Kendras in Delhi, senior citizens are always attended to with due courtesies. In the Passport Seva Kendras, the citizens are served on the basis of an electronic queue management system. There is a provision for a separate service queue for senior citizens who are provided with a special facilitatory token "S" which enables them to get priority and expeditious service at all counters. This special dispensation is also extended to sick, differently-abled, women with infants and other special-need applicants.

**US report on judicial killings and arbitrary arrests in India**

1304. SHRI T. RATHINAVEL: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that United States (US) Rights report slams India for extra judicial killings and arbitrary arrests, if so, the details thereof; and

(b) whether it is also a fact that Government has made any protest against such report, if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS [GENERAL (RETD.) V. K. SINGH]: (a) and (b) On 13 April, 2016, the US Department of State issued its 2015 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 199 countries and territories, including India. The country report on India makes allegations regarding certain instances of violation of human rights in India.

The Indian Constitution guarantees fundamental rights to all its citizens. Any instances of abuse of human rights are addressed by our internal processes which include independent judiciary, vibrant press, civil society and National Human Rights Commission. India does not take cognizance of internal reports of a foreign country.