

format, will get faster service, without payment of additional fees, subject to successful online validation of Aadhaar, EPIC and PAN cards from the respective databases. The passports under this liberal dispensation will be issued on Post-Police Verification basis.

Securing online Appointments for submission of passport applications at PSKs has been made easier and convenient. The new provision is allowing applicants to choose any appointment date from the earliest five available dates (working days) for scheduling/rescheduling an appointment for passport related services. Earlier, the System used to offer only one available date to the applicant for seeking appointment for passport related services.

These measures have simplified the process of passport issuance and reduced the difficulties faced by the applicants.

(b) The process of issuance of passports has been made foolproof under the new system which is capable of leaving no scope for misuse by anti-national elements. Before granting any passport, in-person appearance is mandatory avoiding chances of impersonation. Background check is carried out from the entire Passport database for duplication and criminality status. Capture of Biometric data and photograph on the spot and matching of biometric data with Aadhar database (fully integrated since August 2015) also ensure issuance of the passport to the right person. Police Verification of personal particulars and antecedents of applicants including address, where required, is very critical for the issue of passports. All these measures and precautions available in the system have made the passport issuance process foolproof.

(c) and (d) Very few cases of such fake passports have come to the notice of the Ministry. In one such case, through Writ Petition WP (C) No. 1699/2015 filed as PIL before the Hon'ble High Court of Delhi, the attention of the Ministry of External Affairs was drawn to the issuance of five passports by the Passport Office in Delhi with non-existent addresses on the basis of incorrect police verification report. The passports were revoked by the Passport Office in Delhi in April 2016 following the due procedure.

The involvement of any racket, however, has not been identified in the recent past.

Prisoners of war in jails of Pakistan

†1812. SHRI MAHENDRA SINGH MAHRA:

SHRI SANJAY SETH:

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) the number of soldiers who were made prisoners of war during the Indo-Pak war of 1965 and 1971 who are still languishing in jails of Pakistan; and

†Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.

(b) the details of discussions/decisions taken by both the countries for release of prisoners and to ensure humane treatment to them in jails?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS [GENERAL (RETD.) V. K. SINGH]: (a) As per available information there are 74 Missing Defence Personnel (MDP) that are believed to be in Pakistan's custody but whose presence has not been acknowledged so far by Pakistan. The Government has raised the matter with the Government of Pakistan on numerous occasions, including at high levels. A Committee of kin of the MDP visited jails in Pakistan in 2007 but could not find evidence of their presence. However, Government continues to raise this matter with Government of Pakistan.

(b) Government regularly takes up with the Government of Pakistan the matter of early release and repatriation of all Indian civil prisoners and fishermen, who have completed their sentences. In the recent past, a total of 438 Indian fishermen were released from Pakistan jails. There are at present 208 individuals - 61 civil prisoners and 147 fishermen - who are Indian or believed to be Indian in Pakistani jails.

The High Commission of India in Islamabad, on a continuing basis, provides humanitarian and legal assistance to Indian nationals imprisoned in Pakistan and also regularly undertakes distribution of items of daily necessity to them through Pakistani jail authorities.

In addition, an India-Pakistan Judicial Committee on Prisoners, consisting of retired judges from the higher judiciary of both countries, was constituted in 2008 to look into humanitarian aspects of the matter and recommend measures to ensure humane treatment and expeditious release of fishermen and prisoners, who have completed their prison term. The last visit of the Committee was to India in 2013. The next visit was to be hosted by Pakistan.

Opening of diplomatic missions abroad

813. SHRIMATI VIJILA SATHYANANTH: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that despite India's ambitious global plans, Government has failed to set up diplomatic missions in small countries and island nations;

(b) if so, the countries and island nations where India does not have its own diplomatic missions;