AN INSIGHT INTO THE PASSPORT SEVA PROJECT IN INDIA

NOORA MOHAMED KUTTY
Assistant Professor
Department of Commerce & Centre of Research
PSMO College, Tirurangadi
Affiliated to the University of Calicut - 676306

Abstract

In recent years, the issuance of passport has emerged as the most noticeable statutory citizen service rendered by Ministry of External Affairs. For improving the delivery of this service, MEA has come up with many quantitative and qualitative improvements. A network of 37 passport offices have been working in the country for rendering this service which has been expanded by adding 77 passport sevakendras in PPP(Public Private Partnership) mode in the recent past. This study intends to have an insight into the passport issuance system in the country.

Keyword: Passport, Passport SevaKendras, Public Private Partnership, Mission Mode Project.

I. INTRODUCTION

In this modern era, when the world has been transformed into a global village, people travel to different parts of the world for many purposes like medical treatment, business, education, pilgrimage, tourism, family visits, etc. A person travelling outside his country cannot do so without possessing a document called passport. It is an inevitable travel document for all those who travel abroad irrespective of the purpose. Hence, the importance of passports are on a rise and the demand for passports is increasing by around 10% annually from different parts of the country which demands wider reach and availability. To accelerate the delivery of passport services, the Ministry of External Affairs launched the Passport SevaProject(PSP) in May 2010. This study intends to have an insight into the operation of Passport Sevakendras in the country.

Objectives

1. To throw light on the history of passport issuance in India
2. To study the formation of Passport SevaKendras in India
3. To uncover the reasons for the initiation of Passport Seva Project in India
4. To analyse the special features enabled through Passport SevaKendras

Passport Issuance in India

It was only after the First World War that India began to issue passports to its citizens. During the war, the Government of India enacted Defence of India Actin 1914 and promulgated rules thereunder, which made it compulsory to possess a passport for egress from and ingress into India. The Act expired after the end of the war. It was then felt the need for the Government of India to possess the power to continue with the system in whole or in part so as to bring the Indian practice into line with that of the other parts of the erstwhile British Empire and other countries. The Indian Passports Act, 1920 came into force to retain the earlier provisions. The Act was renamed “ The Passport (Entry into India) Act, 1920”. Later on, the Government of India Act was passed in 1935 which retained ‘emigration’ as a matter to be handled by the Central Government. The power to issue passports was later on delegated by the Central Government to the State Government and
certain states opened up regular passport offices for the same and continued until 1954.

Subsequently, the issuance of passports to the citizens was considered as a central subject under the Constitution of India and was entrusted to the Ministry of External Affairs. In 1954, the first five Regional Passport Offices at Mumbai, Kolkata, Delhi, Nagpur and Chennai were opened. There arose the necessity to set up a separate organization for dealing with these matters and the Subordinate Office of the Ministry named The Central Passport Organization was set up in 1959.

The issuance of passports was regulated through administrative instructions until 1966. Later on the Government promulgated the Passports Ordinance, 1967 and after six months replaced it with the present Passports Act, 1967. Under this Act, the powers to frame rules regarding the passports issuance was vested with the Central Government after which the Passport Rules, 1967 was constituted. These rules were further modified in the future of which the Passport Rules, 1980 is the latest one.

During January-December 2014, the Ministry processed an astounding number of approximately 1.01 crores passport and related services applications compared to 86.88 lakhs in 2013, thereby registering an increase of approximately 16% (inclusive of Passport Offices in India and Indian Missions/Posts abroad). Fig. 1 shows the increase in the number of Passport Servicing Centres in India since Independence.

**Passport Seva Project**

In the modern world, with the advancement of science and technology, all kinds of services blossomed up with wonderful feathers to delight the users for which the computerization paved the way. The services provided by the Government to the citizens also came forward with its new digitalized face called e-governance to enhance the delivery of public services. The National e-governance Plan (NeGP) is a combination of many such initiatives by the Government to commence an era of e-governance. NeGP includes various high impact e-governance projects called Mission Mode Projects (MMP).

The Mission Mode projects on Passports named, Passport Seva Project came into force to look into the matters related with passport issuance with many innovative features. The project has been implemented in a Public Private Partnership (PPP) mode with Tata Consultancy Services (TCS). TCS was selected through a public competitive procurement process. But the strategic functions like verification of documents, granting and issuing of passport are still under the control of MEA. The ownership and control of the core assets including information is with MEA.

Passport Seva ensures simplicity, efficiency and transparency in the delivery of services regarding issuance of passport to the citizens of India. It is working as an all India network of passport services in order to serve the citizens of every nook and corner of the country. It has integrated with the State Police for Physical verification of the details of those persons applying to the PSKs for the issue or renewal of passports. PSK has also integrated with the Indian Postal Service for the delivery of the issued passports.

In order to meet the increased demand for passport services, a number of passport melas had been organised from time to time in the weekends/holidays by the Passport Offices in the country.
Fig.2. Hierarchy of passport offices

Reasons for the initiation of Passport Seva Project

As a first step in designing the MMP, MEA engaged the National Institute for Smart Government (NISG) for studying the existing system of Passport issuance in India and the best practices existing in other countries and for making suitable recommendations on redesigning the existing system that can fulfill the objectives of MEA. Following are key recommendations of the study conducted by NISG:

- Establishing Passport Facilitation Centres (PFC) for delivering all front-end citizen services
- Converting existing Passport Offices into Passport Back Offices (PBO) for all back-end processing
- Creation of on-line Passport Portal for offering Passport services
- Providing links to designated points in Police department
- Establishing a Central Passport Printing Facility (CPPF) for handling extra load
- Outsourcing of Dispatch process to Postal Department
- Introduction of a multi-modal Information and Grievance handling system
- Creating a centralized IT system linking all PFC’s, PBO’s, Police and Postal Departments
- Introducing productivity linked incentive scheme for Government employees

Establishing a proper Program Governance Structure for managing the implementation and operation of all the above

To implement the above recommendations, MEA engaged a professional agency that implemented the proposed system to operate & maintain on a PPP basis. The Tata Consultancy services was selected for this implementation process.

Innovative Features of Passport SevaKendras

The Passport Seva Project has modified the passport and related services in India to make it more reliable and transparent so as to ensure a better experience to the citizens of India. Some of the innovative features of the Project includes:

1. **Ease of Access**

   Indian citizens can apply for the primary issue or reissue of a passport online from anywhere through the website provided by them. The website makes it convenient for the citizens to obtain all the latest information related to the passport services. The citizens then have to visit the PSK in the area where they live at the prescribed time allotted for their visit. Scheduled appointments reduce the inconvenience of the people due to rushes and long queues.

2. **Wide Scattered Network**

   MEA renders passport services to the citizens through 37 passport offices spread across the country. Under these passport offices, operate 77 Passport SevaKendras (PSKs) and 16 Passport SevaLaghuKendras (PSLKs)

3. **Modern Amenities**

   The wonderful ambience is the main attraction of PSK. Trained citizen support executives, photocopying, self-service kiosks, food and beverage facilities, baby care, newspapers, journals, air conditioned waiting lounge etc. make the waiting time less irritating and more convenient to the applicants. The first in first out principle is applied to manage the queue using electronic queue management system.
4. **Integration with State Police and Postal Service**

The physical verification of the details provided by the applicants is done by the State Police for the PSK. For this the details are sent electronically for police verification. The delivery of issued passports is done by the postal services.

5. **Call Centre & Helpdesk**

A 24 hour Multi lingual national call centre is made to operate in 17 Indian languages to make information easily available to the people who are in need of it.

6. **Other Facilities**

Capturing of photographs and biometrics of the applicants at PSKs is yet another feature of this system. All the documents including their applications are stored in the system in electronic form.

II. **CONCLUSION**

The Indian government has launched the Passport Seva Project to improve the quality of services provided to its citizens by increasing the speed of processing and delivery of passports. The Passport Seva Project has made the system more transparent to the citizens so that it is easy for them to track their own passports conveniently from their homes. The Mission Mode Project on Passports named Passport Seva Project enables this through the 77 Passport Seva Kendras set up all over the country. NISG worked closely with the MEA in finalising the process, documents and guidelines related to setting up of such centres and are also trying to assess the needs of the citizens for launching more PSKs in the future.

III. **REFERENCE**

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