

CHAPTER-III

Citizen Services

The vision of the Passport Seva Project was to deliver passport services to Indian Citizens in a timely, convenient and transparent manner. As already explained in Chapter II, the time taken by an ordinary citizen to get a passport was inordinately long. In this chapter, Audit has examined whether the passport related services were being delivered in an accessible and comfortable environment to the citizen. Audit noticed that during visit to PSKs, a citizen has to deal with long waiting time, non-availability of family counters and absence of separate enquiry counters as discussed in the following paragraphs:

3.1 Non-formulation of Citizens Charter

A Citizen's Charter is the expression of an understanding between citizens and the provider of a public service with respect to the quantity and quality of services the former receive in exchange for their taxes. It is essentially about the rights of the public and the obligations of the public servants.

Clause 8.4 of RFP vol.-I stipulated preparation of Citizen Charter for informing all citizen-centric requirements relating to passport services to the citizens of India. Besides this, the Department of Administrative Reforms & Public Grievances, Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances & Pensions had also circulated Model Guidelines and General Structure Guidelines to all Ministries/Departments of Government of India to enable them to bring out focused and effective charters.

We noted that the citizen charter was not prepared in respect of PSP. As a consequence citizens were not aware of the service levels including the prescribed time frame for issue of passports.

The Ministry in its reply (June 2015) to audit observation confirmed that citizen charter had not yet been finalized. It further replied (February 2016) that Citizen Charter has now been approved.

3.2 Delay in getting appointment

A citizen during the online submission of application in the passport portal gets the next date of availability automatically displayed in the portal and applicant

selects that date to visit the PSK along with the Application Reference Number printed generated online.

As per the Ministry's published annual data 2014 of PSP, the appointment availability to visit a PSK as on 31 December 2014 varied from one day to 68 days (average 13 days). The objective of timely service and delivery of passport was not fulfilled, if a citizen had to wait for more than a month to get appointment to visit any PSK (as detailed in Para 2.1 of Chapter II of this Report).

3.3 Long waiting time at the PSKs in Delhi

As per Service Level Agreement (SLA) entered with the service provider, average time spent by a citizen, who had applied online, at the PSK during peak hours (10.00 am to 12.00 pm) should be less than 25 minutes (wait time + service time) and during non-peak hours (all other hours) it should be less than 18 minutes. A citizen has to visit three counters i.e. Counter A (manned by TCS staff), Counter B (Govt. staff for verification of documents) and Counter C (Govt. Staff for grant of passport) in the PSK. In order to calculate 25 minutes and 18 minutes, wait time and service time of all the counters were added.

In order to assess the performance of the PSKs against the laid down standards, data related to application processing for the year 2014 was called for from MEA, which was not provided to audit.

A test check of the fortnightly data trends of PSP prepared by the Service Provider for the period January 2015 to April 2015 in respect of four¹ PSKs under RPO Delhi was carried out. We observed that the average time taken by the citizens in the PSKs was on an average 78 minutes (Counter A-6.62 minutes waiting time, Counter B-36.71 minutes waiting time, Counter C-20.80 minutes waiting time + Service time-13.87 minutes) which was higher than the prescribed time of 25 minutes during peak hours. The detailed data is in **Annexe - I**. Analysis for the delay beyond the given standards of service is outlined below:

- In respect of Bhikaji Cama Place, Gurgaon and Shalimar Place PSKs, there was shortage of staff (as shown in **Annexe - I**) at all the counters. The shortage was more pronounced in case of Counter B and C, both manned by Government officials. It was clear from the **Annex -I** that the applicants had to wait for a long period at B & C counters.

¹ Bhikaji Cama Place, Gurgaon, Herald-House ITO and Shalimar Place.

- As per RFP, in a single day, more than 300 applications were to be processed in a large PSK. As per **Annexe-I**, in respect of PSK Herald House, 1000-1500 applications were being processed every day and as a result wait time in PSK, Herald House ranged from 1-2 hours. Since higher waiting time was due to receipt of large number of applications as compared to capacity, the Ministry was required to consider opening another PSK.
- Further, the average waiting time between the appointment time and the token issued time was about 1 hour 18 minutes in respect of PSKs under RPO Delhi. Thus, waiting time of more than one hour before entering into PSK was considerable which resulted in overcrowding outside the PSK causing inconvenience to public.

The Ministry accepted (November 2015) the shortage of staff and stated that shortage of staff was short term and likely to be resolved as Ministry has indented for recruitment of LDCs and Assistants. It further stated that the calculation of total time spent by citizen in PSK was not feasible as it was reckoned as per RFP. But, the fact remained that there was considerable wait time inside and outside the PSKs as the desired service level was not achieved. Further, in PSK Herald House there was no shortage of staff in the counters B and C as per RFP, still waiting time inside the PSK was very high.

Recommendation: The Ministry may examine the reasons for long waiting time in Delhi and take effective measures to reduce it. It may also depict correct waiting time by including the waiting time between appointment time and token issue time while calculating the total time spent by citizen in PSK.

3.4 Inconvenience to the Citizens in Passport Seva Kendras

The audit team visited PSKs located in Delhi & Gurgaon and following was observed:

(i) As per clause 7.2 (d) of RFP, vol.-I, Reception counters were to be set up at each PSK to provide general enquiry and application form distribution service. However, it was noticed that no separate counter for enquiry existed in the PSK. The reception staff, who generated file themselves, was the person who attended to the task of enquiry too. Hence a citizen had to stand in a long queue to collect/make even a small piece of information/enquiry.



Picture-1 : Rush at enquiry counters in Herald House PSK

The Ministry replied that all counters in the Pre Verification area were single window counters for optimum utilization of citizen's time. However, according to RFP, enquiry counters were to be setup at the PSKs. Deviation from RFP resulted in inconvenience to the citizens, as the time taken in enquiry would be much shorter.

(ii) As per clause 7.3.2 of RFP, vol-I, "To serve those applicants who do not apply online, the application forms together with information booklet (in three languages i.e. English, Hindi and one local language) will be distributed through PSK's reception/ enquiry counter." The SP was required to print an adequate no. of application forms & information booklets (minimum 500 on any given day) for sale to public at a fee of ` 10 only. However, it was observed that manual applications with information booklets in physical form were not available with the counters.

The Ministry replied (May 2015) that manual application with information booklets in physical form were available at the PSK and provided to citizens on demand. However, citizens file their applications online, generate the ARNs and visit the PSK for processing. The reply is not acceptable as there were no instructions displayed in four PSKs of Delhi about availability of information booklet on demand.

(iii) There was a kiosk facility in PSKs in Delhi but no indication of purpose or method of using it was found written anywhere.



Picture-2 : Kiosk facility in Herald House PSK

The Ministry replied (May 2015) that signage “Information Kiosk” had been affixed near the facility provided in PSK. Kiosks were being used by citizens. A citizen could access the Passport Seva portal from the kiosk for various purposes i.e. enquiry regarding documents required – fees payable, appointment availability, and also to fill the application, pay the fees, check the status etc.

The reply is not convincing as there were no instructions displayed in PSKs at Delhi about their usage.

(iv) In two PSKs (Herald house and Gurgaon), the waiting area before the ‘C’ counter was insufficient and most of the citizens had to stand in a cramped space.

The Ministry replied (May 2015) that the capacity in the waiting area had been planned based on process flow and volumes. However, if at any point of time it got overcrowded for some reasons, citizens were advised to wait in the ‘A’ waiting lounge.

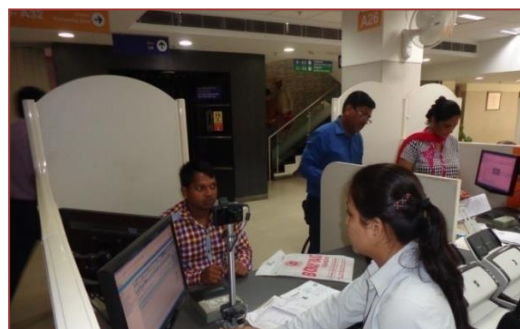
The reply of the Ministry is not convincing as in Herald House, the waiting area for the Government counters ‘B’ and ‘C’ is at the first floor and that of the ‘A’ counter is at the ground floor. The possibility of citizen to wait in ‘A’ lounge is not feasible as there is a considerable distance between the waiting area of ‘A’ counter and that of waiting area of ‘B’ and ‘C’ counters.

(v) If a whole family had to apply for a passport, there was no facility available in the appointment system of PSP to avail same appointment slot for all members of the family so as to pass through the formalities at one go together.

The Ministry replied (May 2015) that in such cases, members of the family were allowed to get their applications processed together irrespective of the appointment time.

However, system (passport portal) had not provided any facility to avail same appointment slot for all members of the family. In the absence of any laid down or displayed guidelines, it totally depended upon the officers of respective PSK whether to entertain such requests.

(vi) At counter 'A', the applicant signed the application after viewing and verifying entries on screen. As a copy of the signed application form was not provided to the applicant, in case of a dispute, it could not be verified whether the data was changed.



Picture-3 : Counter-A staff in Herald House PSK

The Ministry clarified that applicant signed copy is kept in the system as part of digital file of the applicant, which can be produced in case post-facto dispute. Hence providing an additional copy to the applicant would not add any value.

However, since one of the main objectives of PSP was to deliver passports to citizens in a transparent atmosphere, a copy of the verified information had to be provided to the applicant for future reference. The Ministry may rectify the procedure by providing signed copy of the document to the applicant.

(vii) In terms of Ministry's letter dated 11 June 2013, SP was required to display that Value Added Service (SMS facility)² charges were purely optional and not a part of passport fee. However, it was noticed that in PSKs situated in Delhi no such display was shown by the SP inside the PSK. Therefore, publicity in this regard was required to be made by the Service Provider.

The Ministry stated (November 2015) that optional SMS service had been displayed at the passport seva portal but now the Service Provider had been instructed to put requisite information on display in PSK also.

Recommendation: The Ministry may ensure that minimum facilities as envisaged in RFP are available at all PSKs.

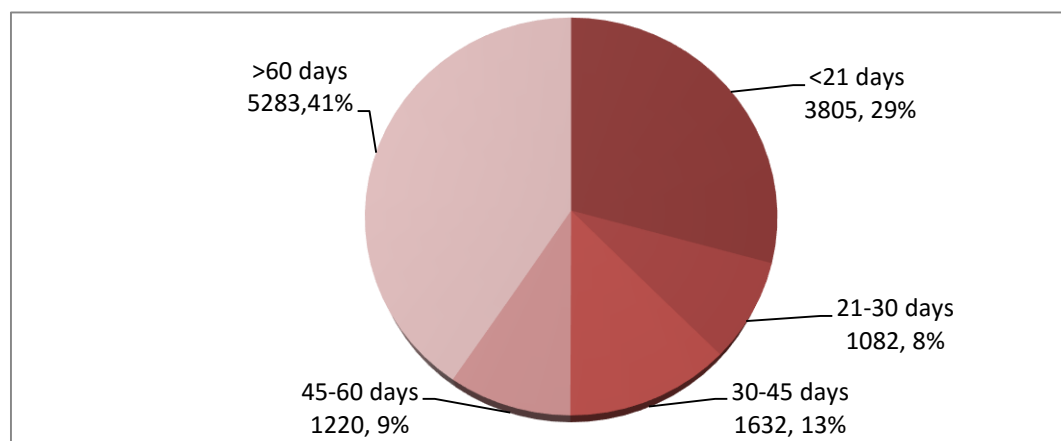
² The optional Value Added Service (VAS) of SMS facility was an additional facility charged by the Service Provider and the applicant had to pay the charge for the VAS at the PSK. This additional charge paid to the Service Provider by the citizen was apart from the passport fee and goes into the Service Provider's account.

3.5 Pendency in Grievance Redressal System

As per clause 7.3.3 (d) of RFP (vol.-I), any citizen who was either unsatisfied with the passport related services or was facing issues after submission of passport application could raise a grievance against individual RPO/PSK and/or the CPV division of the MEA. As per data provided by the Ministry, total 8348212 applications were received in 37 RPOs during the calendar year 2014, out of which 84647 grievances (1.03 per cent of total application) were received. 63831 grievances were addressed by the concerned RPOs, and balance, 20816 grievances (25 per cent of total grievances) remained unattended till the end of the year. Audit further, noticed that in six RPOs, the pendency of grievances was very high as compared to total number of grievances received in the RPOs like RPO Jaipur (48 per cent), RPO Pune (44 per cent), RPO Thane (42 per cent), RPO Ahmedabad (41 per cent), RPO Jalandhar (40 per cent) and RPO Lucknow (39 per cent) during the year 2014.

The actual time taken in redressal of grievances was not provided to audit. Therefore, analysis of pendency was carried out by taking the pendency status of grievances as on 24 June 2015 from the dashboard of the Ministry. The pendency status of grievances upto 24 June 2015 showed that out of total 35,311 grievances received during the period, 13,022 grievances were to be resolved by the passport authorities. The pendency is depicted below:

Chart 3.1: Pendency Status of Grievances



The Ministry stated (November 2015) that public grievances logged in passport seva portal before December 2013 had been reviewed and only 530 grievances relating to different RPOs were pending for closure as on 31 October 2015. Similarly, out of 84,647 grievances logged in calendar year 2014, the numbers of

grievances pending were 7,132 as on 31 October 2015. Further, out of 62,678 grievances logged in calendar year 2015, the numbers of grievances pending were 13,061 as on 31 October 2015. This shows that on being pointed out by Audit, the Ministry had taken remedial measures to reduce the number of grievances.

Recommendation: The Ministry may strengthen the mechanism of grievance redressal in a time bound manner.

3.6 Absence of refund mechanism in PSP

As per clause 10.10 of RFP Vol-I, refunds wherever applicable should be provided for. The refund process shall take into account constraint imposed by commercial practices such as card and fund transfer through bank account. However, it was noticed that if any applicant wants to withdraw his/her passport application after payment of passport fee due to shortage of any document or any other reason, there was no refund option provided to the applicants in the PSP.

Test check of data pertaining to period from 1 October 2013 to 31 December 2014 revealed that during this period 5,42,168³ applicants had applied online for passport related services and had made online payment for those services. However, these applicants did not turn up at PSK after taking appointment for availing services. Since no refund mechanism is provided in the PSP for refund of online payments, the application money paid by these online applicants remained with the Government. We observed that during this period, ` 78.46 crore were retained by Government due to absence of refund mechanism in PSP. The applicants could not apply for the refund of fees paid as this mechanism was neither in built in the PSP nor any information related to refund procedure was provided to the online applicants.

The Ministry stated (November 2015) that statutory provisions with regard to refund of fee paid by the applicant were provided under Rule 10 of the Passport Rules 1980. Reply of the Ministry is not acceptable as under the present system though the passport fees is paid online and passport related services are provided at PSKs, the refund procedure is still manual and is processed at RPOs only which makes it difficult for the online applicant to obtain refund. Moreover, the present procedure of refund is not publicised by the Ministry on the website for information of applicants.

³ Data provided by the National Operations Centre from the database of PSP

Recommendation: The Ministry may streamline the procedure related to refunds and publicise the same to all applicants.

Conclusion

Analysis of published data of PSP revealed that waiting time for applicants seeking issue of passport was more than one hour as against the prescribed time limit of 25 minutes (From token issue time to Exit time) in four PSKs under RPO Delhi leading to overcrowding inside the PSKs. Enquiry counters were not setup at the PSKs in accordance with RFP conditions, which resulted in inconvenience to the citizens. There were no instructions about availability of information booklet on demand and usage of kiosk facilities. Provisions for refund were also not incorporated in the web-based portal in contravention of RFP.