

**GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
LOK SABHA**

UNSTARRED QUESTION NO:2996
ANSWERED ON:18.08.2004
REOPENING PASSPORT OFFICE IN AMRITSAR
Sidhu Shri Navjot Singh

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

- (a) whether any representation has been received about reopening of passport office in Amritsar;
- (b) if so, the details thereof; and
- (c) the reaction of the Government thereto?

Answer

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI E. AHAMED)

(a) & (b) Yes. The representations have been received from Shri Navjot Singh Sidhu, Hon'ble Member of Parliament and Shri Avtar Henry, Minister in Punjab Government for the reopening of Passport Application Collection Centre at Amritsar.

(c) Although the Passport Application Collection Centre has been closed, the District Passport Cell in Amritsar is fully functional. The details are given in the Annexure.

ANNEXURE

Details with regard to part (c) of Lok Sabha Unstarred Question No. 2996 to be answered on 18.08.2004

There is no Passport Office in Amritsar. However, a Passport Application Collection Centre (PACC), which is manned by staff deputed from the Passport Office, Jalandhar, was functioning in Amritsar for the past nine years. The PACC in Amritsar was opened in June 1995. However, it was closed in July 2004 since the District Passport Cell (DPC) had already been set up at Amritsar as part of the decentralisation scheme for the receipt of passport applications at the District level introduced in various States in 2002 as per the recommendations made by the Committee for Review of the Passport Issuance System in 2001. Under the Decentralisation Scheme, passport applications are received at district headquarters in the DPCs set up in the office of the District Magistrate or Superintendent of Police as per discretion/decision of the State Government. The idea behind decentralisation scheme was to take the passport services closer to the doorsteps of passport seeking public who do not have to travel long distances to visit the Passport Offices to deposit their applications. Instead the applicants can deposit their applications in their own districts.

2. The PACCs were set up several years back with a view to providing some passport services to cover the areas from where a substantial number of Passport applications were received yet they did not merit opening a full-fledged Passport Office. There are 15 PACCs all over India compared more than 400 DPCs which have been set up since 2002 covering more than 50% districts all over India.

3. The PACCs receive the passport applications and forward the same to the Passport Offices concerned under whose jurisdiction they function. The Passport Offices send the requests for police verification in respect of the applicant and after receipt of the same they process the application and issue the passports. As against this, the DPCs receive the passport applications and after scrutinizing them and having the police verification in respect of applicant carried out, forward the applications to the concerned Passport Office for further processing and issuance of passports. Thus, in case of DPCs, the time in sending the requests for police verification and their receipt is eliminated which would lead to speedier issuance of passports.

4. As regards staffing of PACC and DPC, the PACC at Amritsar was functioning with only one staff member who was deputed from Passport Office, Jalandhar. Compared to this, five staff members have been deputed by the district authorities to work in the DPC at Amritsar.

5. The closure of the PACCs was done on the recommendations of the Deputy Commissioner, Amritsar. This was due to the reason that the DPC and PACC at Amritsar were functioning in the same premises in the office of Deputy Commissioner and consequently the district authorities were not able to popularise the DPC scheme.

6. The DPC scheme has been quite successful in Punjab and almost 21% applications have been received through DPCs in 2003.

7. With the popularization of the District Passport Cells, PACCs have become redundant. The decision to close a PACC is not a sudden decision. It is carried out only in those cases where the DPC is fully functional as an alternative option. Infact, in most cases where the PACCs were closed, they were done so only after the DPC was operational and well-established. The PACCs at three

other locations have also been closed in pursuance of the above policy.

8. The Standing Committee of Parliament on External Affairs has emphasised that the Decentralisation Scheme should be encouraged and enough publicity should be given to the DPCs. The Deputy Commissioner Amritsar has given wide publicity to increase awareness of the DPC among the public. Necessary instructions have been given to PO, Jalandhar to closely monitor the working of the DPC, Amritsar.

9. As part of Decentralisation Scheme, the Government disburses an amount of Rs 200 to State Governments for each application received, processed and forwarded along with Police Verification Reports (PVRs) to Passport Offices through District Passport Cells.