

## **Keynote Address by the External Affairs Minister on Passport Seva Divas 2020**

June 24, 2020

**Hon'ble Minister of State Shri Muralidharanji,  
Secretary (CPV & OIA) Shri Sanjay Bhattacharyya,  
Additional Secretary (PSP) Shri Arun Chatterjee,  
Colleagues,  
Passport officers who have joined in the virtual mode,**

**Ladies and gentlemen, very good afternoon.**

And, let me begin by saying how happy I am to address all of you on the occasion of the Passport Seva Divas which marks the enactment of the passport act. I would like to felicitate all our passport issuing authorities in India and abroad on this occasion, and I'm sure you will all appreciate that we are meeting under very unique circumstances this year and let me therefore start really by acknowledging how well all of you have responded to the changing public requirements, amidst the Corona virus and it goes to your credit today that we are able to keep up our services, even under this very difficult circumstances. The Passport Seva program is a ambitious mission mode program of our government which is being successfully operated as a public-private partnership. It is part of the national e-governance plan and what we have really seen is a complete transformation in the passport delivery service, especially over the last six years.

Our passport issuing authorities in India and abroad have worked very hard over this time period to ensure an efficient and transparent passport delivery system for services in the country and abroad. The success of any project obviously depends on positive attitudes which are backed by supportive policies, that is what we in the Ministry have been trying to do and I would say today on the occasion of the Passport Seva Divas, we must commit ourselves to further improving our delivery systems.

**Friends,**

To achieve this objective, our first focus will be to further strengthen our outreach efforts, as we take passports to the doorstep of every citizen of our country. You all know that in collaboration with the Department of Posts, we embarked on really a very transformational initiative which has allowed us in the last three years to open 424 Post Office Passport Seva Kendras. Out of these, 12 were actually inaugurated in the first hundred days of this government and I myself, like Muralidharan ji, had the privilege of inaugurating one of the POPSs, in my case it was at Rajpipla in Gujarat.

Now, you know that we intend to open up our POPS in every Lok Sabha constituency where no PSK exist today, and we have so far been able to provide for 488 Lok Sabha constituencies. Now, obviously that process which we were going forward very ambitiously has stopped momentarily on account of the COVID-19 pandemic, but both our ministries are completing the formalities for early inauguration of POPSs which have already been announced and I'm sure we will go forward as the lockdown eases up. And again, I would like to acknowledge the Department of Posts as an exemplary partner and I'm very confident that the kind of partnership that we have forged would be an example to a lot of other parts of the government as well.

Now, where our global outreach is concerned, we have again everybody spoken about it, looked at the process of integrating Indian Missions and Posts abroad into the Passport Seva program, I want to emphasize here that we must have definitive timelines to complete this inauguration of all the Missions and Posts, so that we have actually a centralized passport issuance system and Indian citizens living abroad, traveling abroad, are benefited by a seamless system, which we will operate.

Now, we also need to leverage the use of technology in a bigger and better way for the delivery of passport and related services. We should make full use of the all the tools that are much more digital, that government is today willing to place at our disposal, the "mPassportSeva" mobile app, the

"mPassport Police" mobile app and the "Applying for Passports Anywhere" scheme, actually shows us all how well technology can be used in this domain of passport delivery. I think most of it, I mean, I don't have to tell you, you are the people who actually get this done, but it is important for people to really appreciate today that "mPassportSeva" mobile app, for example, can make a huge difference in terms of how to apply for passports, pay the fees, schedule an appointment, and we have started the process of sending information on appointments through SMSs and emails to applicant, and you know, a lot of people I've met who really find that this makes it so much more convenient for them to follow up on their passport application. Also the electronic token issuance upon arrival and the electronic exit letter after completion of service, are also examples of providing paperless service, protecting the environment, and in a sense of you know, while implementing Digital India doing so really in a very green manner. Certainly, such seamless processes have not only helped service delivery, but they have reduced public grievances, and I share MoS's point that where there are grievances and there will always be grievances when it comes to public services, it is again incumbent on us to respond to it more efficiently, I think that is very much the expectation that the public has particularly of this government.

The "Applying for Passports from Anywhere" scheme has helped applicants to obviously go to any Passport Seva Kendra, even if they are not in that jurisdiction and that again has, I think been very very widely appreciated by the public. We have taken important initiatives in the last few years for the simplification of passport rules, and I think really, probably the most notable reform that we have brought about is that those applying for a passport under the 'atkal scheme' are no longer required to submit a verification certificate from a gazetted officer, and of course self-attested documents are accepted. We have reduced the number of documents and we have eased the passport issuance process for minors, for minors with single parents and for people, for applicants who are separated or divorced.

And here the point, I wish to emphasize is that, real reform, I mean reform can be about big things, but real reform actually on the ground is about small things, it is about detail, it is about making a difference, sometimes it can be something very small, but what I want to emphasize today is for the recipient, it means much more than we can ever imagine. Now, we have now commenced sending SMSs to passport holders before the expiry of their passport and this is again a citizen friendly initiative and a proactive service delivery measure. These initiatives have been made to benefit citizens, I think citizens know it, they appreciate it, and our focus must be particularly, I think, I would like all of you to think about it, how do we keep simplifying the rules and processes without compromising the legitimate security concerns, I think this is at the heart of the reforms that we have done, and I think there are still reforms that need to be done, in the domain of passport issuance. Now, I really don't need to emphasize the important role that state police authorities play in the timely delivery of passports.

I, today would like to take the opportunity again to thank them because this is again without their partnership, this process will not move as efficiently as it has and I would repeat the congratulations, I would add my voice to the congratulations that MoS extended to states like Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, and Haryana who have done very well in this regard. I congratulate the police authorities of these states in particular, and we would be conferring a certificate of recognition for that outstanding performance last year.

Now, the focus of our government has been to increase the use of technology and digitization and one important step here is the introduction of chip-enabled e-Passports, which will with advanced security features for our nationals. We are working with Indian Security Press Nashik in this regard and with NIC to implement this project. I am very confident that the introduction of e-Passports will greatly strengthen the security of our travel documents and I understand that the procurement process for its production is currently underway. And again, I would emphasize the need to hasten that, as much as possible. In that context, I would also like to compliment India Security Press Nashik. They have been continuously taking innovative steps to improve the quality and security features of our passport booklet and it is, I emphasize it is necessary to roll out the manufacture of e-Passports on a priority basis. Let me also compliment especially the officials of the Central Passport Organization, all our Passport Officers, our Missions and Posts abroad, because it is their collective efforts which have today ensured that we've been issuing 1 crore plus passports, year after year, in the last few years. And, I know that you know, you have your own challenges at work, sometimes challenges are personal, challenges of resources, but I do want today to recognize and comment your diligence, your dedication, your commitment towards public service and I would say it is really to you know, there are many examples of it, but

certainly how you responded to the reopening challenge after the corona virus, is just one more proof of how well all of you have worked together.

I must add that in this endeavor, we have received, you know, I've recognized already the police authorities, the Department of Posts and the security press in Nashik, but I would also like to acknowledge and applaud the cooperation we've received from our service provider, Tata Consultancy Services. They made a very big difference to the issue of passports and in making it a success story.

In this connection, I would also like to congratulate the winners of the Passport Seva Puraskars and hope that their performance, their example would serve to generate greater enthusiasm and commitment and encouragement to others and I look forward to personally handing over the awards at a suitable date, which hopefully we should be able to do.

So, let me conclude actually by reiterating a point which Secretary (CPV & OIA) made, there is today widespread recognition in the country and within the government that the passport delivery program is one of the services of the government which has improved beyond recognition, which is today very much appreciated by the average citizen. It is in many ways held out as a model example. So I thank you for all your efforts in making that happen.

I congratulate today the Team MEA and Team CPO in this regard. I'm sure all of you will continue to improve on your performance to meet the higher and higher expectations that people have of us. And once again, I congratulate you on Passport Seva Divas.

**Thank you very much!**

**New Delhi**

**June 24, 2020**