

Passport Officers' Conference in Chennai  
on 22 December, 2006

Welcome Remarks by Shri E. Ahamed,  
Hon'ble Minister of State for External Affairs

Respected Shri Pranab Mukherjee, Minister for External  
Affairs,

Esteemed members of the Media,

Dear Friends & Colleagues,

Ladies & Gentlemen,

2. It gives me immense pleasure to be present here this morning on the occasion of the Annual Passport Officers' Conference 2006. We are also very fortunate and privileged to have in our midst the Hon'ble Minister for External Affairs, who has spared his valuable time to grace this occasion. We last met for the Passport Officers' Conference at Kolkata on 1<sup>st</sup> September 2005, and we are meeting here today in Chennai. Let me take this opportunity to welcome all of you and convey my very best wishes for your continued success in your respective Passport Offices. This Conference provides us an

opportunity to deliberate on a host of issues including issuance of passports, functioning of Passport Offices and measures taken by the Government to streamline the passport issuance system for the benefit and convenience of the passport seeking public. This is also an important forum to consider your suggestions and feedback with a view to improving the system in the future.

3. We attach utmost importance to the Passport Offices as they are the public face of the Ministry of External Affairs. The functioning of the Passport Offices is monitored within the Government as also in the Parliament. Some of my colleagues have also been raising with me various matters concerning issuance of passports. We should make concerted efforts to reduce the delays in issuance of passports, thereby providing more efficient services to the passport seeking public. There is no denying that there has been an unprecedented rise in the demand for passports in recent years, thereby putting additional burden on our existing resources. Notwithstanding the increasing workload, coupled with shortage of staff in

certain Passports Offices, over 35 lakh passports are issued annually by all 31 Passport Offices all over India. It is heartening to note that we have already issued more than 38 lakh passports this year. This is not a small achievement and the credit for it goes to the personnel working in Passport Offices, who have made it possible by dint of their hard work, commitment and dedication.

4. I have taken note of the special efforts made by some Passport Offices during this year to bring down the pendency, leading to reduction of delays and speedier issuance of passports. I commend the concerned officers and staff for their extra efforts. I would request other Passport Officers to carry out similar pendency clearance drives in the days ahead.

5. I would like to mention that our initiative to decentralize the submission of passport applications by setting up District Passport Cells (DPC) and designated Speed Post Centres (SPCs) for collection of passport applications has indeed taken the passport services closer to the doorsteps of the public.

Passport applicants can now submit their applications at the 463 District Passport Cells and 1095 Speed Post Centres all over the country. Applicants do not have to travel long distances to deposit their applications. The Ministry for Information & Communications Technology and Ministry of External Affairs have worked together to widen the network of Speed Post Centres from 220 to 1095 in September this year. Under the new scheme, passport applicants will no longer be required to pay the processing fee of Rs. 100/- per application to the Post Office as required earlier.

6. In the last Passport Officers' Conference, I had emphasized to you all the need for strengthening the system of internal vigilance in the Passport Offices to root out corrupt practices. I am happy to learn that vigilance inspections of Passport Offices are periodically taking place and that 16 such inspections were carried out since September last year and appropriate action was taken.

7. Last but not the least, I would urge passport officers and staff to ensure that passport applicants are invariably extended due courtesies, consideration and assistance. Any case of misbehaviour or ill treatment to the public would be dealt with firmly. We should continually make efforts to extend passport and related services to the public expeditiously and efficiently.

8. Before I conclude my remarks, I would like to ask the Passport Officers to make use of the Working Sessions this afternoon to focus on all relevant issues concerning their respective Passport Offices, keeping in mind the interests of the applicants and also our commitment to provide prompt and better services to the passport seeking public.

9. I would now request the Hon'ble Minister for External Affairs to kindly deliver his keynote address.

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