

Good Governance in Passport Services: Challenges and Way Forward

(Executive Summary)

August 2017

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Acknowledgements

The study has been enriched by insightful suggestions from the concerned officials of Immigration and Passport Directorate. We are grateful to them. Md. Waheed Alam and Shahzada M. Akram, and A S M Jewel, Senior Program Managers, Research and Policy Division, TIB have extended guidance, support and given comments at different phases of the study. Mohammad Nure Alam and Farhana Rahman supported to review the survey data for the report. The study has been improved by valuable suggestions from the colleagues of Research and Policy and other divisions of TIB. We are grateful to all of them.

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Report Release: August 2017

Good Governance in Passport Services: Challenges and Way Forward

Executive Summary¹

1. Background and Rationale

Passport is considered as an important public service. This service is regarded invaluable for exporting manpower, expansion of trade and commerce, treatment and foreign travel of citizens. The demand for passport has increased many-fold in the recent years, thanks to exports of manpower to the Middle East, and Southeast Asian countries, expansion of trade and commerce, migration to the developed countries, education, treatment and travelling. The applicants seeking passport service need to pay certain amount as fee; thus the government earns a notable amount of revenue from this service. During fiscal years 2010-11 to 2015-16, the government on average had earned revenue amounting to Tk 1100 crore (or Tk 11 billion) in a year from passport service². Apart from paying certain amount of fee, the applicants are allegedly compelled to endure some additional costs due to various forms of irregularities, harassment and corruption. Transparency International Bangladesh's (TIB) research on passport service conducted in 2006 identified a number of limitations in the passport service. They include procedural complexities, low quality services, problems of infrastructure and manpower, dominance of dalals (brokers) and irregularities and corruption in the police investigation³. Besides, in the "Corruption in the Service Sectors: National Household Survey-2015" conducted by TIB, the passport service was identified as the most corrupt service. According to the survey, 77.7 percent among passport service applicants were victim of irregularities, harassment and corruption and 76.1 percent applicants were compelled to pay bribe or money beyond the official fee.

During 2010-15, the policy makers had taken a number of steps to make the passport service people friendly and easy. They include decentralization of passport offices through establishing offices in 64 districts, introduction of Machine Readable Passport (MRP), introduction of online application system, inclusion of private banks to receive passport fees along with government banks etc. In spite of these reform measures, passport service is replete with numerous problems and challenges that have been published/broadcast in the mass media. Against this backdrop, TIB conducted this study as part of its efforts to promote transparency and accountability at different institutions in the face of local and national demands. It is to be noted that a meeting was held between TIB and Department of Immigration and Passport after passport service had been identified as the most corrupt sector in TIB's National Household Survey 2015. At the meeting, both parties agreed to conduct a comprehensive study to unearth prevailing limitations and governance challenges in this service and come up with remedial measures based on study findings. TIB hopes that this research will help to improve level of services, make reforms programmes sustainable and prevent corruption.

¹ This is the summary of the study titled 'Good Governance in Passport Services: Challenges & Way forward' released through a press conference on 21st August, 2017 at TIB Conference Hall, MIDAS centre, Dhanmondi, Dhaka

² Directorate of Immigration and Passport, Dhaka, 2017

³ Passport Delivery Service: A Diagnostic Study, Transparency International Bangladesh, 2006, Dhaka

2. Objectives and Scope of Research

The main objective of this study is to identify prevailing challenges in passport services and make recommendations to overcome them. Its specific objectives are :

1. To identify limitations at different stages of passport service and institutional limitations and challenges that influence them;
2. To identify types and extent of corruption of irregularities and corruption in the passport service.

This study dealt with roles of Immigration and Passport Directorate, banks, SB Police and dalal (brokers) in different stages of passport delivery process. They include collection of application forms, filling up of the application forms, submission of fee to the banks, submission of application, pre-enrolment, bio-enrollment, scanning of documents, police investigation report, scrutiny of the application, , approval of the application, printing of the passport and send it to regional offices and delivery of of passports to clients. Information was collected and analyzed on the basis of different indicators of good governance such as capacity, transparency, accountability, sensitivity and integrity while discussing the issue of good governance in passport service. It may be mentioned that the information on irregularities and corruption available found in this research are not equally applicable to all officials and employees of the Immigration and Passport Directorate and other stakeholders. However, it offers an impression on the state of existing problems in the passport service, limitations, and irregularities and corruption.

1.3 Research Methodology

The research used both qualitative and quantitative research tools and technique. Information was collected from direct and indirect sources in line with the objectives of the research. Client survey, Key Informant Interviews, in-depth interviews, group discussions, case studies and observations were used as direct sources of information. The sources of direct information were clients, officials and employees concerned at the Passport Directorate (Central, Divisional and Regional), the concerned official of MRP project, police officers-employees (Special Branch), journalists, commission agents/dalals, and security guards/Ansars. Different research papers, news published/broadcast in mass media and review of relevant documents are indirect sources of information. This research was carried out between September 2016 and May 2017. The client survey was conducted from October 8 to 15 December 2016.

A Multi-Stage Sampling Technique was followed for conducting the client survey. At first stage, as many as 26 passport offices out of 67 passport offices were selected randomly in proportion to divisional weight. Then, out of 20 working days, five days were randomly selected. On those five selected days, 40-70 clients were interviewed through Exit Poll method depending on the location of offices at district and divisional level. Through this process, finally a total of 1453 clients were interviewed for the client survey. A structured questionnaire was used for the survey.

Findings of the Research

2. Limitations and challenges at different levels of passport service

There are a number of steps in processing of a passport. They are receipt of application form, filling in of form, submission of fee at bank, submission of application form and pre-enrolment, bio-

enrolment, document scanning, police investigation report, scrutiny of application fee, approval of application, printing of passports and sending of passports to regional offices and distribution of passports. Passport offices, banks and SB Police have distinct roles at different stages of passport service. Problems, limitations and challenges in processing passports are discussed below:

2.1 Collection of Application Form

Fifty four percent (54%) of the clients covered in the survey collected forms from formal sources (such as 36% from passport offices, 10% from website, and 8% from Union Digital Centres). On the other hand, 46 percent collected forms from informal sources (such as 25% from photocopy shops, 19% from dalals, and 2% from friends and relatives). As per rules, the passport seekers are supposed to get two copies of application forms from the passport office free of cost. But the passport offices usually provide the clients with one copy of form and ask them to photocopy the other. As a result, clients who collect forms from informal sources come into the contact of dalals. On the other hands, website and Union Digital Centres are yet to be popular sources of collecting application forms as reported in the survey results.

2.2 Submission of Passport Fee at Banks and Scrutiny of Bank Fees

Reluctance of passport applicants to pay fee at banks and their lack of awareness in this regard are indentified as problems in passport service. There is a tendency among a section of applicants to submit fees with the help of dalals. And when the applicants themselves do not submit the fee to banks, anomalies in the spelling of names appear between the application form and bank receipt. The passport offices then face difficulties in checking bank scroll. Again, when bank scroll from some branches of the Sonali Bank do not reach to respective passport office within the stipulated timeframe, the processing of passport is delayed. Applicants have lack of awareness about the facility of paying passport fees at branches of five private commercial banks alongside Sonali Bank. As a result, huge crowds are observed at the branches of Sonali Bank near the passport offices.

2.3 Filling in Application Form

There are problems and limitations in filling up of the application form online. Accordingly, for a section of the applicants the application form available online is not user-friendly. In this area, the experiences of the applications include: Sometimes., the links of the application form does not work properly, the relevant information are kept in a several links and places, some sections of the guidelines are written in Bangla and others in English; the space for writing profession is not working for certain profession. After filling up the application form, it may be photocopied, but there is no guideline on this in the hard copy. On the other hands, despite filling up of the form online, the provision for submission of printed copy to the passport office with attestation and submission of two copies of the form with attestation in case of hand written application are posing difficulties to passport applicants. The survey found that majority of the clients (86%) submitted hand-written filled in forms and 14 per cent fill in forms online. The respondents came up with more than one answer when asked why they did not submit application online. In this case, 47 per cent of the applicants did not know that there is a provision for online submission of application; 31 per cent applicants felt the online system to be cumbersome; 30 per cent are not aware of how online application needs to be submitted; and six percent did not have internet facility; and two per cent wanted to avoid additional costs.

2.4 Attestation and Certification of Application Form

The provision of attestation of application by a gazetted officer appears to be source of harassment for the applicants. The system of attestation encourages corruption and irregularities. Mostly applicants coming from rural areas do not have known persons in urban areas to attest their forms. So, they have to depend on dalals for attestation of their application. On the other hand, those who have attestation authority use this power commercially taking advantage of the dependency of the applicants on the dalals.

2.5 Submission of Application Forms and Scrutiny by Passport Offices

Long queue during submission of application forms and involvement of a section of officers and employees of the passport offices hinder a fair process of submission of forms. The problem is more serious at the offices where there are longer queues. There are allegations that a section of officers of the passport offices responsible for scrutiny of the applications for passports harass applicants. The types harassment include: pretext of identifying different errors and omissions by officials at receiving counters, returning of forms to applicants without telling them the types of errors, and identifying errors once again after new forms are filled in.

2.6 Pre-enrolment and Bio-enrolment

Long waiting time for pre-enrolment and bio-enrolment of applicants of the passports was identified as a problem. Lack of adequate work stations and required number of operators at some of the passport offices is responsible for such situation. According to ICAO guidelines, an operator is supposed to deal with the highest 40 pre-enrolment and bio-enrolment of applications in a day. But due to pressure of work in certain sections of the passport offices, an operator has to handle double or even triple pre-enrolment and bio-enrolment of application a day. Such a situation hampered the quality of work done by an operator and it is not possible to properly scrutinise the information shown in pre-enrolment.

2.7 Document Scanning

Problems and limitations in document scanning in some passport offices are noticeable. There are shortages of operators and scanners at the scanning section of the passport offices where additional applications are submitted. As a result, uploading of documents into the system on time after scanning cannot be possible.

2.8 Police Investigation Report

The requirement of police investigation report for getting passport services particularly new passports has been one of the key means of making passport applicants victims of harassment and corruption. According to the survey, 76.2 per cent of the new passport applicants faced corruption and irregularities in securing police reports and 75.3 per cent of them had to pay bribe or money. On the other hand, there are complaints of harassment of the applicants by SB police in the name of preparing police reports. Such complaints include: attempts to identify unjust errors in the application forms, intimidation of the applicants by implicating them as militants or for their political involvement, calling the applicants to tea stall or police station instead of visiting the house, demanding bribe or money, and in cases asking the applicants to send the money through BKash service. There are problems of coordination in exchanging information police reports between the passport offices and SB office. In this case, although a section of the passport offices sends the reports online, there are discrepancies in the SB office in sending reports online. Some

reports are sent online but they are sent much later. As a result, the processing of passport is delayed. On the other hand, according to SB police officers, they faced certain technical difficulties in sending the reports online. Such problems include the online links do not remain functional always; non-operational machines means for online sending of reports under the MRP project; and lack of timely response from the passport offices in servicing machines and equipments. On the other hand, the local police administration and passport offices are supposed to hold quarterly meeting to address problems relating to issuance of police reports but that does not happen in reality.

2.9 Sending of Printed Passports to Regional Offices

Delay happens in the sending of printed copies of passports to some of the regional offices. For example, 4-5 passports are there to print on a day for some regional offices where demand for passports is low. Although these passports are supposed to be sent on that day, they are sent after a few days with a considerable consignment to save costs. According to officials, they only transport printed passports if there are 100 copies of passports in a consignment. Thus, sending of passports to remote places is delayed due to delivery complexities of postal department.

2.10 Distribution of Passports

According to the survey, 27 per cent of the applicants experienced delay in receiving passports and they had to wait on average up to 12 days from the designated date of delivery. An analysis of their delay shows 44.8 per cent had to wait up to 7 days, 35.4 per cent from 8-14 days, 14.5 per cent 15-21 days, 10.9 per cent 22-30 days and 4.4 per cent 31 and higher number of days. As reasons for the delay, 37.3 per cent said authorities told them that the copies of the passports had not come from Dhaka; 13.7 per cent said police investigation reports were not available; 2.3 per cent referred to problems in the server; and 57 per cent could not mention the reasons for the delay.

3. Dominance of Dalals in Passport Service

According to the survey, 41.7 per cent applicants said they received services from dalals and others helpers and 80 per cent of them took help from dalals. There are variations in taking assistance from dalals, however. While taking services from the dalals, 82 per cent made contract for the entire process while 18 per cent took their partial services. Also reasons for taking services from dalas vary from one applicant to another, who took such services. Of those who took such services, 61 per cent did received it in order to avoid hassles and harassment such as standing on long queue, and coming to the passport office more than once; 51.3 per cent took their services for lack of their knowledge on rules and regulation of passport; 21.6 per cent could not submit the application forms without the mediation of the dalals; 6.1 per cent for getting the copies of the passport before the designated time; 5.7 per cent to avoid harassment of police investigation; and 5.9 per cent do not have time to go to the office frequently to receive the copy of the passport. The dalals claimed that they could play the role of catalyst in handing over copies of passport to the clients in due time; but this research found that there was no significant correlation between timely delivery of passports and services provided by the dalals. In the sampling survey, it was found that 75.1 per cent of those who took services from the dalals, got passport in due time, whereas 72.2 per cent of those who did not take the services from dalals got the passport in due time. So, it cannot be concluded that the support from the dalals would accelerate the process of getting the passports. Still, a significant section of the applicants takes services from the dalals.

4. Irregularities, Harassment and Corruption in Passport Service

Among the respondents of passport applicants, 55.2 per cent have fallen victim of irregularities, harassment and corruption while availing of passport services (such as collection of application forms, submission of application forms and pre-enrolment, bio-enrolment, distribution of copies of passport and contract with the dalals). Analysis of types of harassment and corruption show, 35.3 per cent had to pay bribe, 27 per cent experienced inordinate delay, 2.3 per cent faced negligence in duties, and 0.1 per cent faced deception. The average bribe mount transactions at passport offices through illegal means is estimated at Tk 2,221. Besides, 76.2 per cent of the applicants of new passports faced irregularities and corruption during police investigation, and 75.3 per cent of them had to pay bribe amounting Tk 797 on average.

5. Institutional Limitations and Challenges of the Passport Offices

5.1 Workload and Shortage of Manpower

Inadequacy of manpower is noticeable in comparison to increasing work-load at passport offices. The pressure of works has increased as passport offices have been decentralised to the district level and MRP system has been introduced but required manpower has not been deployed commensurate with the pressure. In the current organogram, the size of manpower is 1184 but the passport offices need an additional 4748 persons to be hired for coping with the pressure. An organogram was proposed to the ministry concerned in 2016, and it is being scrutinised. Even in the current organogram, the shortage of manpower is 9 per cent. In some case, the vacant posts could not be fulfilled by giving promotion due to administrative bottlenecks, although there is provision for giving 50-100 per cent promotion. Due to shortage of manpower, the vacant post of the Director in four offices (Dhaka, Chittagong, Sylhet and Khulna) could not be filled up. Currently, only one Director is posted in Dhaka division. Maintenance activities at different sections including support centre, data centre, networking centre and CI centre are being hampered due to shortage of manpower in technical posts (sub-assistance maintenance engineer, sub-assistant engineer, computer operator etc.).

5.2 Shortage of Infrastructures and Logistics Supports

It has been difficult for some of the passport offices (especially Dhaka, Comilla, Chittagong, Sylhet and Mymensingh) to serve clients at desired level due to lack of adequate number of offices and sub-offices. Due to crowd pressure, long queues are often created and clients face nuisance and harassment. Some passport offices are plagued with infrastructural deficiency. As many as 34 regional passport offices are housed in rented houses. A few of these offices (such as Jatrabari office) was set up in congested house and that is why providing proper service to clients is difficult. On the other hands, there are shortages of vehicles at the central and divisional offices to monitor operations of regional offices. Out of 10 vehicles at the Passport Directorate, 4 remained idle. The directorate has provided a corporate mobile phone number at each of the regional offices but there is no allocation for their bills. The concerned official has to bear the costs.

5.3 Deficiency in Monitoring Offices

There is noticeable deficiency in monitoring of regional passport offices. According to organogram of the directorate, regional offices at the district level are supposed to be regulated by divisional passport and visa offices but that cannot be implemented due to shortage of manpower. On the other hands, there is lapse in monitoring of regional offices by the central office. A Director or Deputy Director at the central office is supposed to visit at least one office a week but that cannot be carried

out due of pressure of work. As a result, it becomes difficult for the directorate to ascertain if different guidelines on passport services given from time to time are implemented at the regional offices. Overall, the monitoring and accountability system at the regional offices thus become weak.

5.4 Deficiency in Skills and Training of Officials and Employees

Apart from administrative knowledge, a section of official and employees lack adequate knowledge and skills on ICT technologies. That is why it is essential for the officials of Passport services to attain professional knowledge and skills. It was noticed that a section of the manpower engaged in passport service has lack of professional knowledge and skills. A section of high officials at the regional offices have lack of professional knowledge and adequate experience. An Assistant Director recruited for the regional office generally joined the directorate as a junior officer. After joining, there is no arrangement for foundation training for the new Assistant Directors. As a result, they face difficulties in giving services professionally while dealing with legal issues and public functions.

5.5 Limitations in Providing Information on Service and Deficiency in Enforcement of Policies

For providing information on passport service and redress of complaints, most of the office have installed information and inquiry centres, name of the persons responsible and medium of communications in providing information have been made, receiving of complaints and making comments through facebook page have been introduced and conduction of public hearing to address complaints of the clients has been introduced. However, a section passport officials have been found not to practice them properly. It is noted that registers for tracking information dissemination and receiving complaints are not maintained. A section of employees are found not sensitive and forthcoming enough at regional offices. Some of them have demonstrated a lack of willingness to implementation of public hearing.

6. Overall Observations

After TIB's "Corruption in the Services Sector: National Household Survey-2015" that had identified passport service as the most corrupt service, a number of steps have been taken by the Directorate of Passport in the last one year (2016-17) to make the passport service people friendly and easy. They holding public hearings in order to address clients' complaints and improve service delivery, inclusion of five private banks for receiving of passport fees online, introduction of courier service for faster delivery of passports to the Bangladesh missions abroad, introduction of awards to the best performing officials and employees to inspire them for providing better service, observance of passport service delivery week to create awareness about passport service, introduction of client satisfaction register to record clients' complaints and satisfaction etc.

On the other hand, regional passport offices have taken some initiatives to improve service provisions:

- Installation of help desks for applicants,
- Setting up of complaint boxes at regional passport offices
- Separate service points for bio-enrollment of old, disable, sick, female and children applicants
- Opening of facebook page by some offices

- Introduction of breast feeding corner
- Introduction of wheel-chairs for old, disable and sick applicants
- Different notices and directives regarding service provisions, room numbers, aware applicants to do away from dalals

Because of these measures, incidence of corruption and irregularities has come down compared to earlier status. The 2015 survey found that among passport service recipients, 77.7 per cent of the applicants had fallen victim of irregularities, harassment and corruption and 76.1 per cent applicants were compelled to pay bribe. According to the latest survey, 55.2 per cent clients have fallen victim of irregularities, harassment and corruption and 35.3 per cent applicants were compelled to pay bribe. Despite the progress, there are a number of problems, limitations and challenges at different tiers of the passport service. For example, no easy and user-friendly system of filling in application forms is available online, provision of attestation of application form exist, and harassment and corruption faced by applicants from SB police prepare report are still prevalent. The survey found that 76.2 per cent of passport applicants faced corruption and irregularities for getting police reports and 75.3 per cent had to pay bribe. Some of the passport offices have deficiency in practicing different guidelines given by the directorate to make the passport service easy and user-friendly. It was noticed that there is deficiency in providing the information on passport service although such arrangement is there in almost all passport offices. Since there are a number of complexities and challenges in collecting and filling in application form online, the system has not been popular yet and there is a lack of publicity in this regard. As a result, a section of clients have the tendency of taking help from dalals. Corruption and irregularities are being committed due to nexus between the dalals and a section of passport service employees and some SB police officials. The system of police reports for securing passports is one of the major reasons of corruption and this situation has damaged the image of this service. Apart from different problems and limitations at different stage of issuance of passports, the passport offices are handicapped by some institutional challenges and limitations such as shortage of manpower, infrastructures and logistics compared increased demand for passport, deficiency in coordination with relevant stakeholders, lack of monitoring at the regional offices, deficiency in skills and training of officials and employees, and deficiency in infrastructure and logistic support. Due to these institutional problems and limitations, the passport offices fail to provide desired services.

In analysing good governance in passport service, different governance indicators like, capacity, transparency, sensitivity and integrity have been taken into considerations. Causes, results and impacts of deficiency in good governance in passport service, in the light of aforementioned indicators are shown below:

Figure 1: Causes, results and impacts of deficiency in good governance in passport service

Causes	Results	Impacts
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deficiency in necessary manpower, infrastructure and logistics • Deficiency in skills and training of employees • Not user-friendly application form and provision for 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discourage filing of online application • Harassment of clients -- huge crowd and long queues at passport offices • Delay in delivery of passports 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monetary losses of clients • Lack of confidence in the passport service • Risk of facing cancellation of travel for migration,

attestation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deficiency in information on services • Deficiency in monitoring regional offices • Deficiency in coordination with partners • Lack of an accountable system taking into account corruption and irregularities committed by a section of officials and employees • Harassment and corruption in police verification 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dependency of applicants on dalals • Involvement of a section of officials and employees in irregularities and corruption, in collaboration with dalals 	treatment, trade and commerce and tour abroad
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7. Recommendations

Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) is making following recommendations in order to improve standard of services of the Passport and Immigration Directorate, make it sustainable and prevent corruption and irregularities:

Short-term Recommendations:

1. Application form for passport must be made easy, and submission of application online be made user-friendly. Mobile banking should be introduced alongside using state-owned and private banks for submission of fees.
2. Rules of filling in application forms for passport and information directory on different services and frequently asked questions with answers must be published on the website of the directorate and they should be distributed among interested people free of cost. Publicity on passport service must be enhanced at UDCs.
3. The provision for attestation must be cancelled.
4. Holding of coordination meeting with the local police administration every month in order to remove complexities relating to police report must be ensured.
5. Applicants must be informed before given time by sending SMS in case of failure to deliver passports in time.
6. Dishonest officials and employees of the passport offices and SB police who are engaged in corrupt practices in collaboration with the dalals must be brought under accountability mechanism. There should be publicity for not taking service from dalals.
7. The passport offices must ensure officials and employees wear of designated uniform during the office hours and use of identity cards be made mandatory.
8. A periodic evaluation to examine standard of service must be introduced in order to improve the service. In this regard, civil society organizations can be engaged.

Long-term Recommendations

10. Supply of manpower, infrastructures and logistics and their proper management must be ensured in view of needs of passport offices across the country. Branch offices of passport offices should be increased where there are higher demands for passports.
11. The system of police verification in issuance of passports must be cancelled. Apart from making biometric databank for all citizens, making and distribution of smart cards must be completed soon and 'criminal database' containing information about criminals should be made available to passport department and immigration check posts.
12. In using pre-enrolment and bio-enrolment information in passport application, the information contained in the national identity card (smart card) should be allowed to use in phases.
13. Validity of passport must be made 10 years instead of current practice of 5 years