

Passports for the rich

The rich and the arrogant class of Pakistan never stands in a queue – unless it happens to be a foreign country. For a state to reinforce this 'VIP' attitude by designing special systems for this class is totally incomprehensible. The recent announcement of the Passport Department to build special passport executive centres is a step to further demean and discriminate the ordinary citizens of Pakistan.

In a recent interaction with the Director General Passports, it was emphasised that instead of creating comfort zones for a few, there was a need to improve the passport making process for all ordinary citizens. Five specific actions were suggested to make this happen. These are (a) removal of all touts from outside the passport office (b) complete elimination of queuing up for payment and replacing the process by mobile phone money transfer schemes (c) doubling the picture taking and document verification counters which account for the largest component of the cycle time (d) eliminating the numerous visits that customers make to collect their passports and instead making the delivery of passport an integral part of the passport process. (e) describing the new process, the fee structure and the documents needed in Urdu and English on internet as well as newspapers.

Sadly, as expected from an outdated bureaucracy, one finds little progress on what ought to have been done and a lot on what ought to have been avoided. Can we request the passport department to please rethink and redesign an efficient system that every Pakistani is proud of.

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