



Long queues of passport seekers at the passport office at Agargaon.

A DAY AT AGARGAON PASSPORT OFFICE

One-stop service opens but hassles, long queues remain

RIZANUZZAMAN LASKAR

As many as two thousand people, all sweaty and weary, have been standing under the sweltering heat of the unyielding sun since morning till noon in queues that zigzagged on the premises of Department of Immigration and Passport (DIP) at Agargaon in the capital.

That was the scene at DIP last Monday -- sixth day following the introduction of a simplified one-stop service at the passport office.

The one-stop service centre, introduced to ensure swift passport services, is not yet showing any signs of impact to reduce the hassles people go through at the passport office everyday, observed passport applicants.

While the new service centre promises applicants to provide various passport related services in a day, the ordeal of waiting in long queues is still there.

Launched on August 29, the one-stop service allows applicants to complete endorsement-related adjustments such as updating occupation, date of birth, name or address within a day's time for a fee of Tk 500.

Though it was named "One Stop Service", to get service from here, applicants will first need to collect form 'Kha' from counter 1 and then go to 'Receiving Desk' with the filled-out

form only to wait a few hours in long queues.

Despite the DIP's claim that any applicant would get back the endorsed passport within two hours of submission of the form to 'Seal Desk', actual time one needs to spend during the whole process including standing in the long lines is much longer.

"I stood in about a half-kilometre-long queue on the

old ones.

A disappointed Hasan, waiting in the queue outside the one-stop service centre, said he might be lucky enough to get the passport that same day. Even if he received it that day, he was not sure if he would be able to apply for a New Zealand visa in time since the deadline for the visa application was only a few days later.

"I applied for an urgent pass-

[passport officials] could not get the job done during one visit. But this new service would allow us to get the job done in one day," said Jahangir Alam from Uttara.

Nazrul Islam, the official in charge of the one-stop passport service, could not be reached for his comments despite repeated attempts.

A number of one-stop service officials blamed inadequate manpower for the situation. They assured that things would improve with time.

"Since the one-stop service has just been introduced, you cannot expect an instant progress. Things will only get better from now on," said an official at the one-stop service of DIP.

One of the main reasons behind the terrible state of service delivery in this vital department is that only 65 DIP officers are there to serve around 2,000 people that throng the office everyday.

The passport building, which is usually crawling with passport brokers, was found almost broker-free with around 20 policemen and Ansar personnel keeping a strict vigil.

Despite the vigilance of the law enforcers, two brokers approached this correspondent offering their services. Two others were also seen roaming around with forms in their hands on the road outside the entrance of the passport office.

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road outside since 10:00am in the morning," said Mahmud Islam who arrived at the passport office at 8:00am and managed to step inside the DIP compound after zigzagging his way through the queue.

"The heat is just unbearable. I feel like collapsing," added a visibly exhausted Islam trying to defy the midday sun.

The exhausted and exasperated faces described the excruciating sufferings people are having to face at the passport office -- for submitting new passport applications or for collecting those, and for renewing or getting attachments to

port, but I did not get it in two months," said another applicant, Harun. "Who will compensate for the loss if I cannot apply for my visa for Italy this year? I will have to wait for another year if I fail," he added.

However, a good number of people expressed their optimism about the one-stop service because under the new system, they would have to bear the hassle of getting attachments to their passports for only a day.

"Previously, just to make a small change on our passports, we had to go through the same ordeal for several days as they

Walkways along canals to stave off encroachers

RAIHAN SABUKTAGIN

The Dhaka Water and Sewerage Authority (Wasa) is going to construct walkways along the banks of the city canals from next January to protect them from encroachments and maintain smooth water flow of the canals.

The walkways are to be constructed under Dhaka Sanitation Project phase 2 and 3, which would cost more than \$100 million. In the second phase of the project, Wasa will construct walkways along seven canals.

A spokesman of the drainage wing of Wasa said construction of the walkways would take two years from the start. Wasa is now demarcating and digging the canals according to the master plan for city's drainage system.

Besides, Wasa is regularly conducting drives and demolishing both makeshift and permanent structures built on the canals to evict illegal occupiers.

The spokesman said Katusur canal, Ramchandrapur canal, Abdullahpur canal, Ibrahimpur canal, Khilgaon canal, Basha bo canal and Shahjadpur canal will get priority in constructing the 5 feet wide walkways.

Sources in Wasa said the designs of the walkways and other infrastructures under the phase 2 and 3 of the project are now under



Ibrahimpur canal: Badly in need of urgent 'rescue'.

Project Policy Formulation stage. Consultant engineers are now designing the walkways.

Before next January, finalisation of the design, floating of tender for the construction and giving work order would be completed, the sources added.

Wasa engineers expressed the hope that proper implementation of the

second phase of the project would protect the canals from encroachment and ensure smooth water flow of the canals that would help tackle waterlogging.

But some of the engineers expressed doubt about the implementation of the project properly. A top drainage official said though Wasa was conducting eviction drives to remove all obstacles to the

canals, it failed to clean the canals totally because of legal suits and lack of administrative decisions over land rights.

"The government has not acquired land needed for widening some canals and in some cases it failed to remove illegal structures. So it might not be possible to construct walkways at that points," the official said.

PRECIOUS WATER

Children collecting water in polythene sheet put in a hole of the deck of their boat from a Wasa supply line at Trimohini in Khilgaon. Severe water crisis has gripped the area for a long time.

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Leaves Dhaka at 11:00 pm
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Leaves Dhaka at 12:45 pm
- Upaban Express**
Leaves Dhaka at 9:45 pm
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Leaves Dhaka at 7:00 am
- Ekata Express**
Leaves Dhaka at 5:00 pm
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Leaves Dhaka at 8:00 pm
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Leaves Dhaka at 9:20 pm
- Reaches Chittagong at 10:35 pm
- Reaches Chittagong at 1:55 pm
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- Reaches Sylhet at 2:30 pm
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