

Comparative Analysis of Passport Facilitation Among Pakistan, India, Bangladesh and Philippines: Policy Options for Pakistan

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KJPP

Citation:

Bhatti, F. A. (2022). *Comparative analysis of passport facilitation among Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, and Philippines: Policy options for Pakistan*. Khyber Journal of Public Policy, 1(1), Winter

Article Info:

Received: 20/06/2022

Revised: 26/07/2022

Accepted: 2/09/2022


Published: 31/12/2022

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Abstract:

Passport facilitation is integral to global mobility and economic resilience, particularly for countries like Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, and the Philippines, reliant on overseas employment and remittances. This study explores Pakistan's passport policies since the 1970s, examining efforts to balance facilitation with security amid geopolitical shifts. Proposed policy options include granting the Directorate General of Immigration & Passports (DGIP) greater financial autonomy, harnessing technology for streamlined services, and fostering bilateral agreements to bolster passport rankings globally. Emphasizing efficient processes, robust security measures, and professional management is crucial to overcoming operational challenges and enhancing international passport acceptance. By implementing these strategies, Pakistan and comparable nations can optimize passport issuance, benefiting citizens and strengthening their global diplomatic standing. This research contributes insights into public governance and policy management in the context of passport facilitation, offering pathways for enhancing service delivery and international engagement.

Key words:

Passport facilitation, public governance, policy management, security protocols, global competitiveness

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Introduction

Every government aspires to win the confidence and support of its citizens by providing efficient public services. To achieve this goal, governments take steps to modify their current administrative structures. Theoretical and practical aspects of public governance are increasingly influenced by market-based principles, ideas, and institutions. Public policy management emphasizes professional management, defined standards, performance measures, and value for money, all aimed at improving citizen welfare. Responding to citizens' needs is the final and most significant objective.

A passport is a legal document issued in the name of the Head of State, intended to ensure the holder's security and facilitate safe transit through foreign countries. In today's globalized world shaped by Information Technology, passports have become a fundamental requirement for citizens. Therefore, every country aims to streamline the process of obtaining or renewing passports to facilitate its citizens while preventing misuse. Governments introduce passport laws, rules, and standard operating procedures to achieve this goal. Passport facilitation is evaluated based on factors such as application submission time, simplicity of the application process, passport production time, delivery time, security features, prevention of impersonation and forgery, and the ease of use abroad.

Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, and the Philippines share a common colonial background. These countries are major sources of manpower exported to the developed world, with economies reliant on remittances from expatriates. They compete for shares in overseas job markets and continuously strive to improve passport facilitation.

In the 1970s, Pakistan began easing passport issuance to facilitate the export of manpower, responding to internal economic crises following the Fall of Dhaka and the international financial recession triggered by the Arab-Israeli war. The establishment of new rules in the Business 1973 framework included transferring the Department of Immigration & Passports from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the Ministry of Interior, eliminating the previous requirement for police verification at local police stations. Since then, Pakistan has continuously improved passport facilitation, although its politico-economic status has hindered the international acceptance of Pakistani passports.

Facilitation efforts must balance with passport security and credibility to prevent misuse. Recent incidents, such as Afghan refugees obtaining Pakistani passports, have prompted increased security checks and adjustments in the facilitation process.

Problem Statement

Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, and the Philippines are listed as developing countries in the South and Southeast Asian region. These nations are significant exporters of human resources globally, with remittances from their expatriates playing a crucial role in their respective economies. Consequently, these countries have been striving to offer the best possible passport facilities to their citizens.

Every country issues policy guidelines for passport issuance to safeguard credibility, prevent forgeries, and facilitate applicants. An analytical study of the passport policies of these countries provides insights into the current and projected facilitation scenarios for their citizens.

Passport facilitation is assessed using various parameters, including delivery duration, processing time, and the time required for passport verification during international travel. These internal factors depend on technological use and state policies concerning travel. Conversely, external factors such as economic and political standing among the world's nations impact the international acceptance of a country's passport.

The aforementioned circumstances highlight Pakistan's competition with these three regional countries in providing facilitation while maintaining security standards. However, expatriate Pakistanis frequently express dissatisfaction with the quality of services when comparing the facilitation level of Pakistan's passport system with that of other countries.

Therefore, this study will focus on examining available policy choices for Pakistan as short-term measures to facilitate the issuance of secure e-passports. It will also consider long-term strategies to improve global rankings, aiming to enhance the acceptance of Pakistani passports internationally.

Significance and Scope of Study

Considering time and resource limitations, this research study critically evaluates the comparative analysis of passport facilitation among Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, and the Philippines. The positive aspects and shortcomings of passport policies will be discussed from an applicant's point of view. There is concern that relaxing policies for facilitation could also impact passport security and the national interests of each country. Therefore, facilitation aspects will also be analyzed from this perspective.

Salient features of the current passport policy of Pakistan will be analyzed from a facilitation standpoint, and possible prospects that could improve citizen satisfaction levels and trust in the Pakistani passport will be

explored. Shortcomings and policy loopholes will be highlighted, along with tangible policy solutions.

Review of Literature

Passport facilitation measures are derived from national policies. Passports are issued under prevailing passport rules. Therefore, for this study, the passport laws of Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, and the Philippines, including Acts, Rules, and Standard Operating Procedures (SOP), are being examined in depth. The procedures mentioned on the official websites of these countries have been consulted to gain insight into the facilitation process. The review of literature reveals that the basic rules of these countries are more or less the same due to their British colonial background.

Additionally, all countries are required to follow standards provided by the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) in the guidelines mentioned within Document 9303 (ICAO9303, 2021). Consequently, passport processes have become electronic and database-based.

Policy documents related to a country's passport matters are classified in government archives. Due to lack of access to core policy documents from India and Bangladesh, sufficient research material is not readily available. Therefore, the author relied on institutional knowledge of Pakistan's passport policy and process to infer the policies underlying the facilitation approaches of the other three countries under study.

Research methodology

The present study is descriptive as well as comparative in nature. A qualitative document analysis approach has been utilized to review and compare selected policy and legal documents that guide passport and immigration rules in South Asian countries. Pakistan is presented as a case study, and various indicators have been identified to compare the success stories or alternative approaches of South Asian countries.

The comparative analysis provides insight into the innovativeness of existing approaches, highlights individual achievements, and underscores areas requiring further intervention. The document analysis guides the identification of different themes through codification and categorization, which are compared and presented in the relevant section of the study.

In what ways can Pakistan's response to flood-related disasters improve?

Organization of the Paper

This paper has been divided into three sections. In Section I, Pakistan's passport policy and its implications on facilitations in terms of innovations, advancements, issues, and challenges faced in the past and present will be discussed, along with highlights of prevalent rules and regulations.

In Section II, passport policies and facilitations of India, Bangladesh, and the Philippines will be compared for an analysis with the situation in Pakistan as a case study.

Section III will focus on the lessons learned from the comparative analysis in Section II and the potential futuristic pathway for improving passport facilitation for Pakistanis at home and abroad.

Background

The passport is one of the most important travel documents. It was invented during WWI to monitor possible espionage activities of citizens from enemy countries within host nations. Over time, international travel increased significantly due to the air travel industry, thereby increasing the importance of passports manifold.

Initially, passports were handwritten manuals. Subsequently, countries transitioned from manual to machine-readable passports. Today, the world has adopted the e-passport structure. Nowadays, passports are used for various purposes such as visits, study, official duties, immigration, sports, business, religious tourism, etc.

The Henley Index provides a reliable grading of global passports based on the number of destinations that can be accessed without a prior visa. This index relies on data exclusively obtained from the International Air Transport Association (IATA) (Henley, 2022). Passports allowing entry to more countries visa-free are ranked higher than others. Passports equipped with modern technology security features are crucial in preventing illegal migration.

Passport Policy of Pakistan

The Directorate General of Immigration & Passports, on behalf of the Government of Pakistan, issues passports to its citizens to facilitate their journeys and provide them protection while traveling in foreign countries through the good offices of Pakistan's Diplomatic Missions. Accordingly, in a foreign country, the holder of a valid Pakistani passport is entitled to the protection of the diplomatic and consular representatives of Pakistan in that country (DGIP, 2022).

While living or traveling abroad, a passport is the only document that confirms the identity of a citizen as Pakistani, and also enables the exercise of the right to exit from and re-enter the country (DGIP, 2022).

1. Pakistan issues three types of passports:
2. Ordinary (Green) for the general public,
3. Official (Blue) for government officers/officials and parliamentarians visiting abroad,

Diplomatic (Red) for career diplomats and other entitled persons.

Past, Present & Future

After Independence in 1947, British Indian Passports were used for a few months until Pakistan started printing its own passport booklets. The Bangla script was expunged after the fall of Dhaka. Since then, the designs of handwritten passport booklets have been changed from time to time.

In the wake of the 9/11 incident in the USA, travel precautions were increased throughout the world, and the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) was assigned the task by the United Nations to standardize travel documents. ICAO emphasized the digitization of travel documents and introduced Machine Readable Travel Documents (MRTD). ICAO has provided guidelines and standards from time to time for issuing digital passports (ICAO9303, 2021). Therefore, the international community started shifting from handwritten manual passports to MRP. Pakistan started issuing MRPs in 2004, being one of the foremost countries to do so according to ICAO standards. Subsequently, manual passports were discontinued and cancelled.

With the introduction of micro-electronic smart technological advancements such as Optical Scanning, Micro, and Nano chips, the world of traveling is shifting to electronic solutions. Similarly, payment modules are also transitioning to digital transactions. Therefore, the world is switching to chip-based Electronic Passports (E-passport). Pakistan has also started issuing official and diplomatic E-Passports as a pilot project, with plans to start issuing ordinary e-passports in February 2022.

The Passport Act of 1974 and Passport Rules of 1974 & 2022

The Passport Act of 1974 is the parent law governing Pakistani passports. Under the provisions of this Act, the passport rules were established in 1974. The Passport Rules of 1974 were updated in 2021 as the Passport Rules 2021. In addition to these laws, from time to time, the DGIP issues SOPs and policy circulars that regulate the passport process in and outside Pakistan.

Digitization: Journey from Manual to Machine Readable Passport

Manual handwritten passports were in vogue until 2005. Pakistan initiated MRP in 2005, complying with ICAO standards and deadlines. MRP is linked to the national database of the National Database Registration Authority (NADRA). Through multiple biometric verifications, a central server, and centralized production for all of the nation's machine-readable passports, NADRA ensures the legitimacy and integrity of the data. After phasing out manual passports, Pakistan issued more than 30 million machine-readable passports (NADRA, 2021). Generally known as a computerized passport, MRP is issued after biometric and facial feature verification from NADRA's database. Passport applications include fingerprints of index fingers and thumbs of both hands, matched by the Automated Fingerprints Identification System (AFIS) with prints stored in the national database given at the time of applying for a CNIC. Similarly, facial features in the passport photograph are matched in a facial server using the picture from the CNIC. These steps are incorporated to minimize the chances of forgery and impersonation. Data theft for impersonation was a common practice before MRP, which has been reduced but not completely eradicated. Negative elements still attempt and sometimes succeed in breaching the security features using smart techniques. It is pertinent to mention that while the passport issuance system is highly secure, attempts to breach its security are made with proper planning, and necessary modifications and deliberations are carried out based on NADRA data.

Role of NADRA

It is estimated that NADRA has issued more than one million Pakistani national ID cards, out of which 200,000 have been cancelled upon identification (DAWN, 2021). The former Interior Minister told the media on January 2, 2021, that Afghan nationals had obtained these IDs based on forged paperwork, including fraudulent birth certificates (Tribune, Tribune Story, 2018). Moreover, the former Chairman of NADRA admitted to the media that the authority has a weak verification system because some Afghan citizens pretended to be the brothers and sisters of Pakistani citizens to obtain CNICs.

These flaws in the NADRA system make Pakistani passports vulnerable to misuse. This fact has led DGIP to authorize passport issuing officers, under discretionary powers granted by passport rules, to request a national status confirmation report from the police and Intelligence Bureau if there is doubt about national status. Sometimes, local citizens are inadvertently referred for national status verification, creating resentment among Pakistani Pakhtoons.

The Future: E-Passport & E-Gates

The e-passport is the latest version equipped with state-of-the-art technology. This passport is also known as a biometric or digital passport. It is vital to mention that this is the era of nanotechnology, smart chips, and a paperless environment. An e-passport is equipped with an embedded chip on the cover page or an e-data page which keeps personal data of passport holders very safe. E-passports are already in use by more than 150 countries worldwide. Most countries have shifted to e-passports due to the increasing need for efficient and better border security. Moreover, the next revolution in international travel will be the installation of operator-less automated immigration counters, where a passenger can pass by simply scanning their e-passport.

Effect of Economic, Political & Social Factors on Passport Ranking

There are variables that influence a country's passport strength. Countries with reasonable GDP per capita enjoy more visa-free destinations. Two connected elements help explain this: "First, because it is likely to result in larger economic benefits such as commerce, tourism, and investment, countries are more eager to welcome citizens from wealthy countries. Second, people from wealthy countries are less likely to strain the social and economic systems of the host country, such as through the expense of undocumented migration" (Henley, 2022). On the other hand, those from nations with high rates of poverty and economic instability are seen as posing a higher risk of overstaying their visas.

The current economic condition of Pakistan and trends in human migration are not favorable for improving global passport strength. Besides lacking visa-free access, most Pakistanis have a lower likelihood of obtaining visas for developed countries due to economic and political instability at home. Pakistan also does not enjoy good diplomatic relations with its neighbors except China, and there is no visa abolition regime in the region akin to the Schengen visa of the European Union.

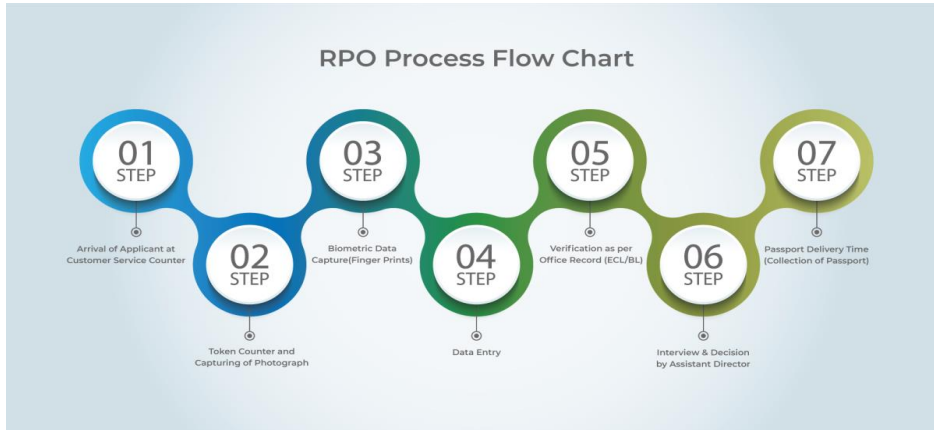
Human traffickers use illegal means to smuggle people from one country to another, charging high prices. According to reports, residents of the region have been using such unlawful methods to reach Europe for many years. An estimated 30,000 to 40,000 Pakistanis use land routes through Iran and Turkey to access Greece in an effort to reach Europe illegally. However, the Pakistani government has historically failed to take decisive action to stop this crime, which has caused disgrace and tarnished the nation's global reputation (FrontierPost, 2021). These incidents of human smuggling raise suspicions about Pakistani passports, leading to a decline in international reputation.

According to the UNODC, Pakistan is the source of about 300,000 human trafficking cases each year. This has resulted in Pakistan being ranked Tier 2 in the US State Department's ranking on human trafficking. Generally,

organized crime and people smuggling are motivated by economic concerns and the desire for a better life (NIAOC, 2021). Therefore, human trafficking is also a serious issue for Pakistan that directly affects the credibility and ranking of its passport.

Facilitation towards Applying Passport

The Directorate General of Immigration & Passport has launched MRP in 2004 which is an automated process. The flow diagram for processing a passport is as under.



Source: Official website of DGIP

The delivery time for normal fee is 11 working days and 4 working days for passports applied with urgent fee. Recently, DGIP introduced a FAST TRACK service to deliver passport on next working day.

After submission of application applicants are intimated through RABTA service about every step from printing to delivery through SMS and email.

Fee schedule of passports applied within Pakistan is given as under:

Passport Fee (Regional Passport Offices)						
New / Renew	36 Pages		72 Pages		100 Pages	
	Normal	Urgent	Normal	Urgent	Normal	Urgent
5 Years	3000	5000	5500	9000	6000	12000
10 Years	4500	7500	8250	13500	9000	18000
First Time Lost						
5 Years	6000	10000	11000	18000	12000	24000
10 Years	9000	15000	16500	27000	18000	36000
Second Time Lost						
5 Years	12000	20000	22000	36000	24000	48000
10 Years	18000	30000	33000	54000	36000	72000
Third Time Lost (& afterwards), case will be referred to DGIP Headquarter for further action.						
5 Years	24000	40000	44000	72000	48000	96000
10 Years	36000	60000	66000	108000	72000	144000

Source: DGIP

Facilitation to Apply for Passport within Pakistan

In Pakistan, 180 Regional and Executive Passport Offices are operational, including a few special counters for specific purposes. This number includes 13 EPOs established in collaboration with NADRA, with NADRA charging an additional Rs 3000 over the prescribed passport fee. The jurisdictions of these offices have been assigned according to the following policy, aimed at facilitating citizens and curbing the issuance of passports to non-nationals (DGIP, 2022).

Facilitation to Apply for Passport from Abroad

Worldwide, DGIP has established MRP processing facilities in 60 Pakistani missions abroad. Some of these offices are staffed with DGIP personnel, while operations of others have been handed over to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. However, major issues pertaining to passport seekers in foreign countries include:

- Asylum Seekers
- Dual Nationality Holders
- Illegal Immigrants
- Security Verification Process
- Issuance of Online Passports to Newly Born Babies

In the case of asylum seekers, the government has devised a policy of police verification before issuance of passports because many economic migrants pretend to be politically victimized based on ethnicity or religion. Their false claims contribute significantly to misconceptions about Pakistan in the Western world. Many individuals smuggled to Europe live illegally and move from one country to another in search of legal status. When intercepted by local authorities, they are deported back to Pakistan. The Ministry of Interior has established a Migration Management Cell (MMC) to handle their verification, deportation, and rehabilitation in collaboration with the International Organization for Migration (IOM). This illegal movement across borders without valid travel documents and the resulting deportations have worsened the image of Pakistan's passport and the country as a whole.

Online Issuance of Passport for Expatriates

MRP facilities were established at Pakistani diplomatic missions, but many overseas Pakistanis live in far-flung areas of these countries, resulting in time-consuming and expensive long-distance travels for the passport application process at missions. Therefore, with the help of NADRA, DGIP developed a mechanism for online passport application. Now, overseas Pakistanis can apply or renew passports from their homes by simply filling out an online application form. Passports printed at the

central printing facility in Islamabad are directly delivered to their desired address through courier. This step has been widely appreciated by Pakistanis living abroad.

On the other hand, there are some loopholes in this online process. Negative elements upload Photoshop-forged supportive documents to conceal facts in their favor because personal appearance of the applicant is not mandatory in the online process. Therefore, along with facilitation come challenges of data security and other risks of misuse.

It is pertinent to mention that the majority of Pakistanis living abroad are blue-collar workers who, due to IT illiteracy, are unable to benefit from this facility and ultimately fall into the hands of brokers or agents.

Passport Facilitation in India, Bangladesh, and Philippines

The passport policies, laws, and facilitation of each country mentioned above are discussed in detail hereunder

Passport Policy of India

The Central Passport Organization (CPO) and its network of Passport Offices, Passport Seva Kendras (PSKs), and Post Office Passport Seva Kendras (POPSKs) form the Passport Seva Programme (PSP) Division of the Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, offering passport services. The PSP Division provides consular, passport, and visa services to overseas Indians and foreign citizens through Indian Missions abroad.

Indian passports are issued by a network of 36 Passport Offices. As extended arms of these offices, 93 PSKs and 428 POPSKs have been added to this network. The 190 Indian Missions/Posts overseas provide passport and other associated services to Indian citizens living abroad. In compliance with rules established by the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), all Passport Offices issue machine-readable passports.

India is the leading recipient of remittances, accounting for more than 12% of global remittances in FY 2020–2021, which helped 32.1 million expats contribute US\$87.00 billion to the Indian economy.

As per Indian passport policy, a passport is a vital document; therefore, police verification is mandatory to confirm the information provided by the application, ensuring it does not fall into the wrong hands (India, 1980). There are two modes of police verification: prior to issuing the passport or after issuance. The Passport Office (PO) determines whether police verification is necessary before issuing a passport or later, depending on whether it is a new passport or a passport renewal. Pre-police verification is often required, with exceptions for government

employees. The police verification reporting system is well-organized, typically providing reports to the passport office within three days.

India has also introduced the Tatkal passport scheme, which caters to individuals needing urgent passports for reasons such as travel abroad or official identification (PSP, 2022). Passports can be obtained within three working days under this scheme.

Passport Laws & Rules in India

The Passport Act 1967 and Passport Rules 1980 govern India's passport policy. Section 6 of the Passport Act 1967 empowers the passport issuing authority to refuse passports or travel documents for visiting any foreign country on grounds of national interest or involvement in a criminal case (INDIAPASSPORTACT, 1967).

Facilitation: At Home and Abroad

Case Study 1: Passport Seva Mobile App

The Indian Ministry of External Affairs maintains an online application gateway for passports and has recently made passport-related services available on mobile devices for smartphone users. With the mPassport Seva mobile app, available on Android and iPhone app stores, users can access services such as registration, application submission, payment, and appointment scheduling. The app's fee calculator helps users determine charges based on the service and submission method. Using their file number and birth date, individuals can check the status of their passport applications and track the delivery status of dispatched passports (PSP, 2022).

It is pertinent to mention that in India, police verification is mandatory for new passports, though the passport officer handling subsequent passport applications has discretion to refer for verification as well. These police verification reports are typically completed within three working days (PSP, 2022).

The Tatkal passport scheme, mentioned earlier, is designed for individuals requiring passports urgently. Applicants pay an additional fee of Rs 2000/- along with the standard passport fee. Unlike normal passports, police verification for Tatkal passports occurs after issuance (PSP, 2022).

Case Study 2: Outsourcing of Passport Services for Expats in GCC Countries

In GCC countries, the Indian Foreign Office has engaged the services of the private third-party vendor BLS International (Pvt) Ltd to manage the application process and capture biometrics for an additional fee. Applicants must schedule an online appointment through their website. On the appointment day, BLS International acts as a data collection center similar to Gerry's International Service for UK visa applications in

Pakistan. After data collection, forms are scrutinized and forwarded to the Indian mission for decision. Once cleared by the mission, data is transferred to a passport printing facility in New Delhi. Printed passports are then delivered to GLS Intl office for onward delivery to applicants. This facilitation saves applicants from long queues, thereby saving time, and minimizes corruption risks due to limited personal contact with mission staff.

India has announced a rollout strategy for e-Passports in 2022, assigning the project to the Indian IT giant Tata Consultancy Services. Together with the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), Tata Consultancy Services will establish a new command and control center and a data center to cover the project's backend requirements (BusinessStandard, 2022).

Passport Policy of Bangladesh

Bangladeshi passport holders can only travel to 40 of the world's 227 places without a prior visa, making it the ninth weakest passport in the world (Henley, 2022).

In Bangladesh, passport issuance falls under the authority of the Department of Immigration and Passports, under the Ministry of Home Affairs. Additionally, Bangladesh issues passports with five- and ten-year validity. Bangladesh was the first country in South Asia to issue an e-passport to its citizens. There are three types of passports: diplomatic (red cover), official (blue cover), and ordinary (green cover). Bangladesh introduced e-passports in 2007. A study conducted in the same year identified system flaws and aimed to enhance passport seeker facilitation services. According to the study, 61% of applicants faced multiple issues related to passports. However, the introduction of e-passports has significantly reduced corruption in this department. It is worth noting that before 2007, Bangladesh, like Pakistan, restricted travel to Israel on its passports. However, this restriction was subsequently lifted by the government.

Bangladesh is the fourth largest exporter of manpower in the world. There are 13 million Bangladeshis living abroad, and the country received \$24.78 billion in remittances in the last fiscal year (Hassan, 2022).

Passport Laws & Rules in Bangladesh

Bangladesh's passport laws are derived from British Indian laws and have some roots from the Pakistani background. The following laws, rules, and regulations are currently in effect to regulate Immigration and Passports (BIP, 2022):

- The Bangladesh Passport Order, 1973
- Bangladesh Passport Rules, 1974
- The Emigration Ordinance, 1982

- The Emigration Rules 2002
- Recruiting Agent's Conduct and License Rules 2002

Facilitation: At Home and Abroad

Express delivery and standard delivery of passports at the Department of Immigration & Passport in Dhaka typically take 15 days and 30 days to process, respectively. In other Bangladeshi cities, processing times may be extended by up to two additional days. For missions abroad, the express delivery of MRP may take 21–28 days, and ordinary delivery may take 40–45 days, depending on the Diplomatic Bag's schedule.

Case Study 3: Hybrid of Online & In-House Passport Application

The application process involves filling and submitting the application online by the applicant, followed by the submission of a complete set of documents for a decision by the passport issuing authority at the biometric data capture appointment. The application steps are outlined below:

- Apply online at the following link: <http://passport.gov.bd>
- Print the online application once submitted.
- Have the printed copy of the application attested by an authorized official.
- Make the payment online or through an authorized bank.
- Book an appointment for biometric data entry (fingerprint, signature, and photograph).
- Submit documents during the biometric data entry appointment.

Passport Policy of the Philippines

The Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) performs its consular function of issuing passports and travel documents to Philippine nationals and foreign nationals under relevant local laws such as the Philippine Passport Act of 1966 and the Foreign Service Act (Republic of the Philippines, 1996). Only Filipino citizens are eligible to acquire a Philippine passport.

The Philippines has been issuing e-Passports since 2009. A consolidated compendium in the form of the Citizen's Charter 2022 provides a set of rules and information (Citizen's Charter, 2022).

Facilitation: At Home and Abroad

Applicants for passports need to schedule an appointment at www.passport.gov.ph and appear physically on the appointed date with a complete set of required documents. Passport application forms can be downloaded from the following link: <https://consular.dfa.gov.ph/>.

Case Study 4: Courtesy Lane

At the Courtesy Lane, walk-in requests for exceptional and urgent instances are accepted; otherwise, all applicants must schedule an online appointment. The following classes of applicants may avail of the Courtesy Lane facility, where they do not have to wait in queue:

1. Senior citizens
2. Persons with disabilities (PWD Card Holder)
3. Pregnant applicants and solo parents
4. Minors aged seven (7) years and below
5. Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs)
6. Exceptional and emergency cases

Case Study 5: Passport on Wheels

The DFA offers the Passport on Wheels service as part of an endeavor to better serve the public, based on the name of the vehicle. It was a nationwide initiative with the goal of aiding thousands of Filipinos daily (AP, 2022). Teams from the Passport on Wheels service visit schools, towns, and government buildings to assist people in obtaining passports. This service is an excellent way to help communities achieve goals that are otherwise challenging due to the distance of some offices from remote provinces. With Passport on Wheels, anyone can apply for new passports or renew existing ones without having to travel far.

Facilitation for Overseas Filipino Workers

The predicted total number of overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) in 2020 was 1.77 million, while the sum of remittances sent by OFWs from April to September 2020 was \$2,450 million (PSA, 2022), playing an important role in the economy of this Southeast Asian country. Therefore, the Philippine government has made special arrangements for the facilitation of OFWs. The Philippines Overseas Labor Office (POLO) is an overseas office established in missions abroad under the supervision of the Department of Labor & Employment (DOLE). Currently, there are 34 POLOs operating worldwide: 11 in Asia, 13 in the Middle East, 7 in the EU, and 3 in North America.

Case Study 6: Outsourcing Consular Services at Mission Abroad

The Republic of the Philippines Department of Foreign Affairs and VFS Global signed a contract on August 6, 2021, to offer e-Passport Renewal services through Filipino missions abroad, aiming to simplify the e-Passport renewal procedure for Filipino nationals living abroad (VFS, 2022).

The main advantages of the VFS Global outsourced Philippine e-Passport Renewal Centers are:

- Better passport and consular services for Filipino citizens abroad
- Reduced congestion at consulates and embassy offices, and enhanced convenience for clients using VFS Global to submit their applications
- Strictly verified procedures to ensure the accuracy of collecting biometric data
- Services available during evening shifts to accommodate work outside of regular business hours
- Application tracking facility



Passport Laws & Rules in the Philippines

The Philippine Passport Act of 1996, also known as Republic Act No. 8239, governs the passport regime in the Republic of the Philippines (Philippines, Republic of the, 1996). Moreover, the DFA has issued the Citizen's Charter 2022 as a compendium of passport and other consular services (Citizen's Charter, 2022).

The Philippine Passport Act of 1996 was repealed by Bill No. 8513, which was adopted by the House of Representatives in February 2021. According to important legislation and current ICAO standards, the bill aims to streamline passport documentation requirements. The bill will allow older individuals to



renew their passports using current technology without having to attend in person.

Moreover, a 50% discount is also provided for senior citizens and people with disabilities (Galvez, 2021).

Ranking & Strength of the Philippine Passport

According to the Henley Passport Index, Philippine passport holders are entitled to visa-free or on-arrival visa access to 66 countries and territories as of 31 January 2022, placing the Philippine passport at 77th overall in travel flexibility. The Philippines rose from position 82 in the same period last year to position 67 in the third quarter of 2022 of the Henley Passport Index, with access to 66 destinations (Henley, 2022).

Comparative Analysis of Passport Facilitation

Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, and the Philippines share a common British colonial background. Therefore, the laws pertaining to passports are, more or less, similar in nature. All these countries are major exporters of manpower, and their respective economies heavily rely on remittances from overseas. Currently, the internal and external economic and security challenges differ for each country. These nations have large populations, and the number of people living in poverty is substantial. Consequently, the trend of emigrating abroad for better living conditions has been prominent for decades. According to a United Nations research on migration trends, India has the largest expatriate population in the world with an estimated 17.5 million people (IOM-WMR, 2018). The top five nations that received remittances in 2016 were China, India, the Philippines, Mexico, and Pakistan, with China and India leading by a significant margin. Bangladesh ranks 6th, the Philippines 9th, and Pakistan 7th in terms of expatriates living abroad. Therefore, these countries tend to facilitate their overseas diaspora through consular services, with obtaining a passport being the most important service. While facilitation is a basic aim, internal and external geopolitical and socioeconomic factors play an imperative role in the formulation of respective passport policies.

In conducting a comparative analysis of facilitation among Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, and the Philippines, certain variables and non-variables are discussed. Passport policies are considered non-variables settled on the basis of variables such as socioeconomic and geopolitical factors.

Comparison Of Different Factors

The comparative analysis of passport facilitation at home and abroad is illustrated in following table:

S.N	Facility	Pakistan	India	Bangladesh	Philippines
1.	Controlling Ministry	Interior	External	Interior	Foreign Affairs
2.	Validity	10 Years	10 Years	10 Years	10 Years
3.	Delivery Time (Working days)	12-14			12
4.	Fee of 10 Years Passport in USD in Normal Urgency	20	19	52	17
5.	Police Verification	Not Mandatory	Mandatory	Mandatory	Not Mandatory
6.	Categories	3 (Ordinary/ Official / Diplomatic)	3 (Ordinary/ Official / Diplomatic)	3 (Ordinary/ Official / Diplomatic)	3 (Ordinary/ Official / Diplomatic)
7.	Fast Track/ Express Service	Available	Available	Available in Dhaka only	Available
8.	Ranking	109	87	104	80
9.	Visa Free Entry Destinations	32	60	41	67
10.	Number of Offices at Home	177	92	70	30
11.	Passport Offices Abroad	60	180	80	89
12.	Outsourcing of Services	No	Yes	No	Yes
13.	Delivery by Post/Courier	Yes	Yes	No	Yes

14.	Total Missions Abroad	80	180	80	93
15.	Start of MRP	2004	2001	2010	2006
16.	Start of E-Passport	2021 (Only Official & Diplomatic)	Planned to Launch in 2022	2020	2009
17.	Online Renewal Without Physical Appearance	Available	Not Available	Not Available	Not Available
18.	Online Form Filling	Not Available	Available	Available	Available
19.	Prior Appointment	Not Available	Available	Available	Available
20.	Express Delivery/ Fast Track	Available	Available	Available	Available
21.	ICAO Compliant	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
22.	Expats (Estimated) In Millions	10	18	13	11
23.	Blacklisting	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
24.	Police Report required for Lost passport	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
25.	Punishment for passport related crime	6m to 2 Years and/or fine	1-5 years Imprisonment and/or fine	1 year and fine	6 years to 15 years and fine

Above table furnish an overview of passport facilitation of Pakistan, India, Bangladesh and Philippines. ICAO plays an important role in driving

national passport facilitation steps along with increasing security features to secure international travel. Each country has its own internal dynamic which drive the passport facility.

SWOT Analysis of Pakistani Passport

The Strength, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats to passport policy are different and facilitation is linked with these aspects. Therefore, separate SWOT analysis of Pakistani passport is required to sum up comparative analysis.

<p>STRENGTHS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Large Expats Community • Consolidated NADRA Database • Large Number of Passport Offices in Pakistan • Skilled Technical HR in DGIP 	<p>WEAKNESSES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4th Lowest Ranking • Economic Condition of Pakistan • Regional & Internal Political Instability • Overburdened & Discourteous Staff at Missions • Lack of Funds in DGIP causing financial constraints to purchase new Technology • Bureaucratic & Budgetary hurdles in recruitment
<p>OPPURTUNITIES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High Remittances • IT Companies able to handle outsourced services 	<p>THREATS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Issuance of CNIC to Afghans by NADRA • Multiple CNIC issued by NADRA to Single Person • Illegal Immigrants through Human Smuggling • Asylum Seekers • FATF Gray List • NADRA’s monopoly on National Database hurdling outsourcing of services • Lack of Administrative autonomy by DGIP • Political Pressures to establish non-feasible RPOs

The Pakistani missions are facing a shortage of manpower, and the number of passport applicants is very high, thereby causing an adverse personnel-to-applications ratio. Consequently, long queues have been observed in front of Pakistani missions in GCC countries. It is pertinent to mention that 10% of the consular fee is deposited into the Community Welfare Fund (CWF), and another 10% into FIGOP (Fund for the maintenance and meeting expenses of mission buildings). However, the state of affairs is pitiable because neither the CWF is used for the welfare of the community nor FIGOP is used for establishing facilities for consular service applicants. Instead, these applicants

are made to stand in long queues under the scorching sun of the Middle East.

On the other hand, India and the Philippines have outsourced their passport services to high-tech private consular services handling companies. Passport seekers do not need to visit embassies and consulates and stand in long queues; rather, they book appointments at a time slot of their choice and visit front offices for data entry and biometric capture by paying a few extra amounts over the passport fee.

Moreover, while going through passport-related complaints on the Prime Minister's Performance Delivery Unit (PMDU) Citizen's portal during the last two years, it has been observed that most of the complaints were from overseas Pakistanis about the discourteous and non-professional behavior of staff posted at Pakistan's missions abroad. These complaints from Pakistani expatriates also include some related to policy decisions, such as requests to waive police verification required for doubtful national status and asylum seekers. Some complaints were also launched by persons who willfully concealed their original identity and obtained another CNIC from NADRA, leading to the blockage of both CNICs due to being caught in the passport Automated Fingerprint Identification System (AFIS).

Conclusion

A passport is a basic identity document for international travel, and its importance is multiplied for a country like Pakistan, as the economy heavily relies on foreign remittances from overseas workers. India, Bangladesh, and the Philippines are major competitors of Pakistan in securing a share of overseas employment, particularly in GCC countries. Presently, the international political scenario favors these countries, enabling their governments to easily sign visa abolition agreements with other countries, thereby enhancing their passport rankings globally.

These countries provide excellent services to passport seekers both domestically and abroad. The research reveals that the laws and policies pertaining to passports in Pakistan and these three countries are more or less the same, but significant differences arise due to the implementation of good practices and the lack of professional attitude among personnel involved in passport issuance. Moreover, there are some shortcomings in the passport application process that could be overcome by strict checks and balances on staff and the wise utilization of modern technologies.

Policy Options for Pakistan: A Way Forward

Pakistan faces numerous challenges including rising external deficits, a depreciating currency, and depleting foreign exchange reserves, making it difficult for the government to allocate generous funds for passport facilitation. This situation has resulted in a low politico-diplomatic ranking globally, impacting Pakistan's passport ranking. Additionally, amidst

ongoing economic constraints, investing in capacity building for state institutions remains challenging.

The Directorate General of Immigration & Passports (DGIP) oversees passport issuance and policy formulation. Despite collecting substantial passport fees deposited directly into the national treasury, the department relies on limited funds approved by the Finance division. This funding shortfall affects departmental performance, hindering recruitment efforts and the acquisition of modern equipment. Furthermore, inflationary pressures on meager staff salaries increase the risk of corruption within the department.

To address these issues, it is proposed that DGIP be allowed to charge an additional 20% on passport fees to establish new passport offices, maintain existing ones, and enhance facilities for passport seekers.

Policy options within existing resources include improving NADRA's ID card issuance process to prevent non-nationals from obtaining passports through fraudulent means. Implementing a zero-tolerance policy for staff involved in malpractice is essential. Additionally, streamlining police verification processes to ensure reports are furnished within a maximum of 10 days, similar to practices in India and Bangladesh, could expedite passport issuance.

To reduce wait times and improve efficiency, DGIP plans to introduce one-window desks and an online appointment system. Allowing fee payments through multiple banking channels and authorizing all commercial banks to collect passport fees would further facilitate applicants.

Outsourcing token issuance, data entry, and biometric capture to reputable service providers for overseas Pakistanis, especially in GCC countries, would streamline services and reduce corruption risks. Moreover, implementing mobile passport services akin to the Philippines' Passport on Wheels could extend passport services to remote areas domestically and internationally.

Despite the online passport facility introduced by DGIP in collaboration with NADRA, challenges remain for IT-literate blue-collar workers. Addressing these challenges through simplified interfaces and enhanced verification processes is crucial.

Granting DGIP financial and administrative autonomy would empower it to innovate and improve service delivery. Enhancing Pakistan's passport strength and global ranking through bilateral visa abolition agreements, particularly with Middle Eastern, Far Eastern Asian, and African countries, is another viable strategy.

Lastly, transferring DGIP to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs could leverage its digitization capabilities and IT-trained workforce to enhance consular services nationwide.

In conclusion, Pakistan should adopt a phased approach to implement best

global practices in passport facilitation, requiring strong commitment from its leadership and stakeholders.

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