

'No. of passport issuance in city likely to cross 6L in 2023'

'Demand to rises exponentially in May & Durga Puja'

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KOLKATA: In 2023, the total number of Indian passports issued from the regional passport office, Kolkata, might cross six lakh. "In 2022, we had issued a little less than six lakh passports from our regional passport office in Kolkata but this time, there's a possibility that the number will cross six lakh," Ashish Middha, regional passport officer (RPO), Kolkata, who looks after passport issuance in West Bengal, Sikkim, Tripura, and Andaman and Nicobar Islands told Millennium Post.

Middha said there was a dip in passport issuance during the Covid, but now, nearly 3,000 passports are printed every day at the regional passport office in Kolkata. With the summer holidays coming up in May, the demand for passports will rise exponentially in Kolkata, he stated. "In May and Durga Puja, there's a significant rise in the number of passport issuance



Regional passport officer Ashish Middha MPOST

with several Indians looking to go overseas to spend holidays," he said at the Calcutta Chamber of Commerce programme at a city hotel.

Middha added that the government and the passport offices in recent times have taken several actions to address issues of escalating demand, technical glitches, streamlining the application procedure, strengthening background checks, growing its network of PSKs, and working with law enforcement organisations.

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Happy with the introduction of a paperless system and the popularity of Digilocker, an online document wallet to store passport information, Middha said soon the Ministry of External Affairs will start the issuance of e-passports. Though he didn't have a timeline, he said, "In 2008, a few e-passports were issued through pilot projects to check the feasibility. But before the entire population is issued e-passports, it's mandatory to have a mechanism, which is fool-proof and unhackable. E-passports will happen soon," he said.

Before becoming RPO, Kolkata, Middha served as the direc-

tor in the Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi, and as a nodal point for India's Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav celebrations through Indian missions and posts across the globe. From 2013-2017, he served as the deputy RPO in the Kolkata.

Earlier, the Passport Seva Kendra (PSK) in Kolkata used to accept 150 applications every day. But recently, Middha has written to the Ministry of External Affairs to increase the number to 200.

Urging Indians to opt for normal passports over tatkaal, he said: "The general idea is that tatkaal passport issuance is like railway tatkaal. A tatkaal application would be processed under post-police verification. But after checking the documents, if the passport offices find anything adverse, then passports will be granted on pre-police verification. So, there's no guarantee that with tatkaal application, you will be ensured post police verification."