

Amritsar to get passport office

The Sikh holy city of Amritsar will have its own new passport office functional by this month-end with the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) setting up a new facility here.

This will be the third passport office in Punjab after the existing ones in state capital Chandigarh and Jalandhar city.

External Affairs Minister Pranab Mukherjee is likely to inaugurate the new passport office here June 28 in the presence of Punjab Chief Minister Parkash Singh Badal.

The new passport office is located in this city's upscale business and residential Ranjit Avenue area.

Thousands of Punjabis, especially those from the Doaba belt comprising the districts of Jalandhar, Hoshiarpur, Nawan Shahr and Kapurthala - all located between the Sutlej and Beas rivers, have migrated abroad, especially to the US, Britain, Canada and European countries in the last nearly seven decades.

The new passport office is being opened here to take part of the work load off from the regional passport office in Jalandhar. Over 100,000 passports will be issued annually from here, MEA officials said.

With Amritsar's Rajasansi international airport getting over a dozen international flights daily, the number of people seeking passports in the border districts of Amritsar, Gurdaspur, Ferozepore, Faridkot and Tarn Taran has also gone up. The new passport office will cater to these districts and also Muktsar district of Punjab.

The demand for passports has also gone up in this area of Punjab after relaxation in rules for people wanting to visit shrines in Pakistan and going for other work in the neighbouring country. Lahore city in Pakistan is just 50 km from here.

There has been a demand for opening a Pakistani visa office here to facilitate movement of people to Pakistan.

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, who did his schooling and college in this city, had promised a passport office here some time back.

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