**NATIONAL ASSEMBLY**

**QUESTION FOR WRITTEN REPLY**

**QUESTION NO. 2085**

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**INTERNAL QUESTION PAPER 21 – 2021**

**2085. Ms S A Buthelezi (IFP) to ask the Minister of Home Affairs:**

1) Whether, with regard to modern technologies that can be harnessed to make his department efficient and reduce direct inquiries from the public about the progress of their applications for various documents, his department has implemented an online verification platform in which members of the public can check the status of their national identity document applications; if not, what is the position in this regard; if so, is the system live and accessible to the public;

(2) what steps is his department taking to ensure that its systems across all of its service centres are always up and running to enhance service and reduce wastages of resources and time that manifest in long queues at its service centres? NW2365E

**Reply**

1. The DHA Online Verification System (OVS) was initially deployed and accessed by the Citizens for the online verification of; marital status, passport and ID application status, among others. The OVS gained popularity to the point whereby insurance companies were not using proper processes. However, insurance companies opted to use the same free service designed for individual citizens. International users were identified trying to access our National Population Register (NPR) system via the unsecured OVS.

This imposed a risk to NPR and security of Citizen’s data. Department was then advised to temporally close the OVS and work on a solution to address all identified risks. Security of Citizen’s data is the priority of the DHA, that’s why the Department opted to temporarily close the system, until OVS is secured and is solely accessed by the authorised users. Thereafter, DHA separated OVS processes for insurance companies and Citizens, into two phases. The former is already in commission, while the latter is being planned to be released as a second phase.

Efforts are underway to provide such services in a more secure fashion. Some of the related developments are described below.

DHA continuously invests in ICT innovations that improve internal operational efficiencies and effectiveness, while also improving Citizen’s digital experiencing through deployment of innovative technologies. DHA acknowledges the adoption of digital transformation and the implementation of ICT technologies that enhance service delivery channels. That’s why there are current e-modernisation projects in place and e-home affairs digital channel. The first phase of eHome Affairs digital channel was developed to allow Citizens with access to the Internet, to apply for Smart IDs and Passports.

This first phase was further rolled-out to the participating banks to provide application of Smart ID’s and Passports. The same eHome Affairs digital channel will soon be used to allow clients to book appointments; not just with the participating bank branches, but with participating Home Affairs front offices as well, but for various services not just Smart ID and Passports. This is one of the initiatives contributing to the War on Queues, as communicated to Parliament.

(2) Emanating from the above background, DHA has embarked on the following initiatives to improve system availability and connectivity:

* + **Go to Market Strategy for Access Link** – The implementation of a strategy wherein DHA has access to a localised pool of pre-approved service providers wherein a procurement of a connectivity service can be expedited without the onerous procurement processes has long been awaited by DHA. SITA’s promise to implement this strategy in early 2022/23.
  + Partnership with Connectivity Equipment Manufacturers in order to improve turnaround times to replace connectivity hardware infrastructure is in progress.
  + Improve management of generators in term of maintenance together with Department of Public Works to minimise issue of power outages that affects ICT infrastructure.
  + Implemented 100 DHA Mobile trucks with VSAT connectivity and Live-Capture system that are deployed in Rural areas and also planning to procure additional 10 Mobile trucks within the current financial year.
  + Implement DHA Self-service kiosk system for collections, reprint (of birth, marriage and death certificates and re-issue applications for Smart ID’s and Passports by 2024/25 financial year in order to reduce long queues and ease access to DHA services.
  + Increase rollout of DHA services such as ID and Passports to more banks in all Provinces.
  + Implement LTE internet routers to the most of DHA branches in all Provinces to minimise service interruptions, due to cable theft.
  + Closer cooperation with other state and private entities on improving access to the internet to the areas that do not have internet connectivity.
  + Upgraded most of DHA branches across the Country to a minimum of 2MB line or higher bandwidth.

**END**