

Bangladesh steps up crackdown on visa fraud as Western nations back anti-trafficking ordinance

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Dhaka: Bangladesh has intensified efforts to curb visa fraud and document manipulation with the enactment of the Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking and Smuggling of Migrants Ordinance 2025, drawing strong support from several Western nations.

Envoy from Italy, Germany, the United Kingdom, and the Netherlands welcomed the ordinance at a high-level meeting held on Wednesday, January 28, at the office of the Chief Adviser's Special Envoy, Lutfey Siddiqi, read a press release of the press wing of CA.

The new law criminalizes migrant smuggling, including facilitation through forged or fraudulent documents—one of the key drivers of irregular migration and visa abuse.

Senior officials from the Special Branch, Criminal Investigation Department (CID), National Security Intelligence (NSI), the Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training (BMET), and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs attended the meeting, reflecting a coordinated whole-of-government approach.

During the discussions, participants acknowledged that in the past there had been a perception among destination countries that Bangladesh was not sufficiently proactive in tackling fraudulent documentation used in visa applications. This erosion of trust has contributed to longer visa processing times and, in some cases, temporary suspension of visa services.

Several embassies shared alarming examples of organized document fraud. One mission reported receiving more than 600 applications supported by fake job offer letters, while another identified 300 tourist visa applications originating from the same locality, all backed by forged bank statements from a single bank. In another case, a fraudulent Facebook page collected several hundred thousand taka from 70 victims before being shut down. Law enforcement agencies confirmed that prosecutions are now underway in all reported cases.

Officials also highlighted that immigration police offloaded an average of more than 40 passengers per day last year due to suspected irregular travel, underscoring the scale of the problem. Concerns were raised about the misuse of visa-on-arrival airports as transit hubs for illegal onward travel to third countries. One European country reported receiving over 6,000 asylum applications last year from Bangladeshi nationals who had originally entered on student or work visas.

To counter document fraud, positive steps were noted within the banking sector. United Commercial Bank was commended for introducing QR codes on bank statements to improve verification, with diplomats encouraging broader adoption of similar measures across all banks.

Progress in intelligence-sharing agreements was also acknowledged, enabling closer cooperation against transnational crime networks. The use of technical tools such as the EU Returnee Case Management System has improved, although participants noted the need to retain trained immigration officers in relevant postings for longer periods.

BMET officials reported that most recruitment-related processes are now fully automated and integrated with immigration police systems, allowing authorities—for the first time—to track exits and re-entries of BMET cardholders. However, while registered recruiting agents are regulated, concerns remain over largely unregulated sub-agents operating at the local level. Participants stressed the importance of public awareness campaigns to protect prospective migrants from broker-related fraud.

Bangladesh's accession to the Hague Apostille Convention was also discussed, with emphasis on ensuring that apostilles issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs remain fully authentic in both origin and content.

The meeting concluded with envoys recognizing the interim government's strong political will and transparent approach to addressing visa fraud and irregular migration. Describing the current level of cooperation as "unprecedented," diplomats expressed confidence that sustained enforcement and reforms would help restore trust in Bangladeshi documents and visa processes.

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