

"Illegal immigrants now a threat to national security"

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There are some one lakh foreigners residing in Bangladesh illegally for a long time and intelligence agencies consider many of them as threats to national security.

A large number of these illegal immigrants are staying in and around the capital, intelligence sources said.

Among the illegal foreigners around 25,000 who have entered the country through the Zia International Airport are enlisted in the official records. Others have entered Bangladesh using the 13 land ports, according to the Department of Immigration and Passports (DIP).

"After the serial bomb blasts across the country on August 17, we are now considering these people as threats to our national security," said an intelligence official.

Most illegal immigrants have been living in the capital and in the port city of Chittagong for more than three years using false addresses after their visas had expired.

"Many had written the names of Pan Pacific Sonargaon Hotel and Hotel Sheraton as their addresses while in Bangladesh but when we went to those

hotels, we never found any trace of them," said an official of the Special Branch (SB).

Sources said as the land ports lack data recording systems, that is why the gov-

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ernment remains in the dark about the whereabouts of these illegal immigrants. Intelligence agencies suspect that some of these people might be involved in sub-

versive activities.

The intelligence agencies have recently come up with a 624-page index of listed illegal immigrants, which will be submitted to the Ministry of Home Affairs soon. Sources said the list mentions some 19,000 Indians, 2800 Pakistanis and 2682 Chinese nationals. There are people from other countries also. The illegal Pakistani immigrants have been staying in Bangladesh for the longest period, the index observed.

Among the listed illegal immigrants, many are working in the Information Technology (IT) sector, English medium schools, private universities and different corporate houses.

"They live and work here without any legal work permit. The government is being deprived of revenues, as they do not pay taxes. Their free movement is also a huge security concern," said a senior official of the Special Branch. Officials of the immigration and passport department believe that many illegal immigrants are managing to stay in the country without extending their visas as they have developed good understanding with a section of dishonest officials of the visa cell of the department.

Government plans to ensure transparency in BRTA

Testing of fitness of vehicles and drivers' skill may go to the private sector

CITY CORRESPONDENT

The government is planning to modernise the Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA) in a bid to bring transparency in its function.

According to the communications minister and the BRTA chairman, the government would outsource some jobs of the BRTA. But the minister quashed rumors that that the BRTA could be privatised saying a government regulatory body for the control and management of the road transport system and road safety related activities would never be handed over to the private sector.

"We are planning to hand over responsibilities like testing fitness of vehicles, testing of drivers skill to the private sector," said Minister for Communications Barrister Nazmul Huda.

"Privatisation can not be the solution and that is why the government is planning to modernise the BRTA so that there is transparency in its work," said M A Momen, chairman of BRTA. He said that the BRTA is developing a website where there will be database for all genuine driving licence holders in the country.

"Whenever anyone gets a driver's licence he or she can immediately check with our website whether it is original or fake," said Momen who added that employers could also test the authenticity of the licences of drivers they hire. "If they do not employ fake licence holders then it will discourage the drivers from perusing false licences," hoped the chairman.

He also informed that the BRTA would launch a drive against fake licences soon.

The chairman conceded that the main problem in implementing the BRTA's rules was lack of authority.



BRTA office in Mirpur, according to the officials, is facing acute shortage of staff.

"I admit that there are many fake driving licences and route permits in the country but we are not authorised to take action. We need our own law enforcing power. Only then we can effectively reduce the number of illegal vehicles and fake drivers."

"We all know that there are more than 25 thousand CNG-run three wheelers in the city. But the BRTA has permitted only 13 thousand. The rest are running under fake licence and we are being blamed for that. The government should give us the power to

identify and punish those at fault," said Momen.

He also blamed lack of manpower for corruption in the BRTA.

"We are atleast 291 personnel short and that is an obstacle to our efficiency."

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