Western Nations support Bangladesh’s Human Trafficking Ordinance

In an effort to address the root causes of fraudulent visa applications from Bangladesh, the Interim Government has passed The Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking and Smuggling of Migrants Ordinance 2025. Envoys from Italy, Germany, the United Kingdom and the Netherlands expressed support for the ordinance, which criminalises the smuggling of migrants, including facilitation through document fraud, at a meeting held on Wednesday, 28 January at the office of the Chief Advisor’s Special Envoy, Lutfey Siddiqi. on Thursday.

Senior officials from the Special Branch and the Criminal Investigation Department attended the meeting, along with representatives from National Security Intelligence, the Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

During the discussion, it was noted that until recently there was a perception that Bangladesh was not sufficiently serious about curbing the use of fraudulent documents in visa applications. This has eroded trust and negatively affected visa processing. Unethical brokers operate both within Bangladesh and from abroad, often through social media, while prosecutions have historically been low.

Several cases were highlighted. One embassy reported receiving more than 600 applications supported by fake job offer letters. Another received 300 tourist visa applications from the same area, all accompanied by fake statements from the same bank. In a separate case, a Facebook page collected several hundred thousand taka from 70 victims before being shut down. Law enforcement agencies are now pursuing

prosecution in all cases. It was also noted that immigration police offloaded more than 40 individuals per day on average last year.

Participants discussed the misuse of visa-on-arrival airports as transit points for illegal onward travel to third countries. One country reported receiving over 6,000 asylum applications last year from Bangladeshi nationals who had originally entered on student or work visas.

Concerns were raised that declining trust in Bangladeshi documents has significantly increased visa processing times in some countries. Another country has temporarily suspended visa applications pending the completion of an ongoing investigation in Bangladesh.

On a positive note, United Commercial Bank was commended for introducing QR codes on bank statements to improve verification, with encouragement for wider adoption across the banking sector.

Recent progress on intelligence-sharing agreements was acknowledged, enabling better coordination against transnational crime. Technical assistance and systems such as the EU Returnee Case Management System are being used more effectively, although it was observed that officers trained in immigration matters are often transferred soon after receiving specialist training.

The Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training reported that most of its processes are now fully automated and linked with immigration police systems, allowing exits and re-entry of BMET card holders to be monitored for the first time.

It was also noted that while primary recruiting agents are registered and regulated, sub-agents operating at the local level remain largely unregulated. Participants stressed the need for proactive public awareness campaigns on broker-related abuses.

Bangladesh’s accession to The Hague Apostille Convention was discussed, with emphasis on the need to ensure that apostilles issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs are fully genuine in both source and content.

The meeting concluded with all parties recognising the strong focus and commitment of the Interim Government to addressing these issues transparently. The envoys commended the level of cooperation now being extended by Bangladesh, describing it as unprecedented.