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Bangladesh: Prevalence of fraudulent, forged or fake documents and genuine documents obtained by fraudulent means, including the degree of difficulty involved in obtaining such documents or through such means; the challenges and level of difficulty involved in verifying the authenticity of documents (August 2003 - August 2005)

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board, Ottawa

The following information was provided to the Research Directorate in 24 July 2005 correspondence sent by the Immigration Program of the High Commission of Canada in Dhaka:

The ... economic situation [in Bangladesh] is far from encouraging: its unemployment rate is 36%, its per capita income is CAN\$370 per year, it holds the dubious title of being the most corrupt country in the world, its industries are struggling, and so on.

...T]he country is exposed to natural disasters each year: flooding (two thirds of the country), cyclones, tornadoes and earthquakes.

The people are prepared to go to any lengths to obtain a better economic future elsewhere, in so-called "rich" countries, for themselves and for their children; they have access to all sorts of means, which are often unscrupulous, to support a claim that would allow them to go somewhere else.

Many false documents exist; it is relatively easy to verify these documents, but verification takes a long time when it is done outside the capital.

The content of genuine documents is often questionable. The rampant corruption in various levels of the government weakens the integrity and the credibility of officially issued documents.

In addition, the majority of members of political parties are not card-holding members; instead, they are regarded as supporters. It is common for membership confirmation letters to be issued to facilitate verification procedures, even if the information is incorrect. This phenomenon is also seen among employers, friends, family and even individuals who can be paid to do so; for instance, confirmation letters are issued for jobs that do not exist.

We often hear people saying that it is normal to provide incorrect information for a third party, because it is considered a duty to help

"co-nationals/brothers" to immigrate to a so-called "rich" country.

Similarly, genuine medical certificates containing incorrect information can also be issued. The person who signed the document sometimes admits to having done so under certain pressure from the family of the person trying to immigrate.

Educational institutions usually keep fairly accurate records because of their value at the time; they are very useful for verifying identity, parents' names and date of birth.

Birth certificates are not usually issued in the period immediately following the event. These certificates are often issued several years later to meet a need for identification and as a proof of age. It is relatively easy to verify civil registries for these purposes. However, birth certificates are issued upon verbal or written request, and no proof of the person's date of birth, identity or age is required; these certificates have the same value as the information provided by the applicant. Little weight is given to the integrity of the information found on a recently issued birth certificate. Similarly, it is relatively easy to obtain a passport under a false identity.

Registers of bank statements can usually be easily verified. Forged or bogus bank statements exist. These erroneous documents are often issued by the bank after an arrangement is made with a friend or a family member who works for that bank.

During meetings held in the course of verifications, people often tell us the truth, but more often than we would like, people, especially lawyers and politicians, do not tell the truth across the board.

The distances across the country create undue delays affecting the efficiency of the verification process

Information on fraudulently obtained documents is also contained in the October 2004 report by the United Kingdom's Immigration and Nationality Directorate (IND), which states that according to 2003 correspondence from the British High Commission in Dhaka,

"Forged and fraudulently obtained documents are readily available in Bangladesh and are frequently submitted in support of entry clearance applications. Such documents include forged passports, birth, death and marriage certificates, bank statements (local and British), business plus employment related documents and educational certificates. Maintenance of official records in Bangladesh tends to be haphazard. Most records are kept in hand written logs, with very little in the way of computerised records. There is no local equivalent of the UK Police National Computer system. Instead, records are kept at local police stations with no national link. With regard to birth and death certificates, and marriage and divorce certificates, local municipal corporations or union councils, and local registrars issue these respectively. As with police records, there is no national link up between any of these records. Most banks have similar poor maintenance of accounts, and most rural branches lack computers or even telephones" (UK Oct. 2004, para. 6.102).

There were a few reports in 2004 and 2005 of incidents involving the issuance of forged documents or the unauthorized issuance of genuine documents (AKI 11 Aug. 2004; *The Daily Star* 5 Mar. 2005; *Bangladeshi News* 2 May 2005). In April 2005, one

news article reported that three individuals had been arrested for participating in an inter-district land records forgery ring involved in "grabbing lands by making fake documents and deeds in Gazipur, Dhaka and surrounding districts" (UNB 27 April 2005). One of the individuals arrested was an employee of the Dhaka Deputy Commissioner's office (ibid.).

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of additional sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

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