## Illegal Money Transfers continue to thrive

While the end of the war may have taken away the conditions and incentives for illegal money transfers from the UK, a new investigation by UKLanka Times has revealed that the business of illegal, unregulated money remittances to Sri Lanka is thriving and is today conducted by segments of the community that were previously not ordinarily associated with the practise.
Illegal money transfers have long been associated with criminal activity and a large part of the community has continued to utilize illegal money transfer agents, lured by exchange rates that may be two or three rupees more than the official Sri Lankan Rupee exchange rate against the British pound, but ignorant of the dangers that these transfers pose. Illegal money remittances are not regulated by any recognized financial authority such as HM Revenue and Customs or the Financial Services Authority nor are they governed by Anti-Money Laundering Regulations.
The modus operandi of the average illegal money transfer goes something like this; he or she will invite the customer to deposit money into a personal bank account and not a business bank account which in itself is a hugely risky, not to mention illegal practise.

The customer is then told that those funds will be remitted to the beneficiary in Sri Lanka. In practise, the customer's funds remain in the United Kingdom and the beneficiary's bank account is credited by a pool of money that already exists in Sri Lanka; the consequence of this is of course, that a transfer does not take place through the banking system, a situation not only detrimental to Sri Lanka's already depleted banking system but prevents much needed inflow of new cash from overseas into Sri Lanka's battered economy which depends on remittances to survive.
Legal money transfer agents are required to buy what are called dealer purchases and deposit funds into a banking organization such as Commercial Bank or Hatton National Bank or Bank of Ceylon as collateral of sorts for remittance payouts. Those funds are then in turn used for investments in Sri Lanka. Those banks also pay taxes on the business they do, taxes which are used for public development projects.

Most importantly, there is what the financial industry likes to call an 'audit trail'; minimizing the conditions required for criminal and illegal activity. This lack of an audit trail means that an illegal money transfer system is fertile ground for
money laundering activities; money earned through illegal activities can merely disappear into the system.

The pool of funds in Sri Lanka may have been built up through criminal activity in Sri Lanka. Unable to deposit the funds in a bank or invest it in a legal manner, a criminal might offer an illegal transfer agent in London to become a payout agent in Sri Lanka. Your unwitting friend or relative might be the beneficiary of drugs money for what all he or she knows.

Illegal money transfer agents also recruit over-stayers and visa regulation breakers on commission earning basis, allowing illegal immigrants to remain in the UK undetected and without the need to seek recourse in public funds or seek a legitimate job.
The underlying factor is that illegal money transfer services are not transparent; in an age when the opaque practises of financial institutions has brought the world to the brink of economic collapse, transparency should be of paramount importance, not only to service providers but also the average customer.

We as a community then have a responsibility to be mindful of the services that we utilize. Courtesy UK Lanka Times

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