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## Over 200,000 illegal migrant workers in Sri Lanka now 10,000 visas issued per year to import labour -Former Central Banker

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By **CT** 2017-10-11

By **Mario Andree**

Highlighting that there was a severe skilled labour shortage as well as irrational thinking among Sri Lankan workers, a former Central Banker said there was more than 200,000 illegal migrant workers in Sri Lanka at present. Addressing the launch of the Institute of Policy Studies' flagship publication, 'State of the Economy', former Central Bank Deputy Governor, W A Wijewardena said according to recent findings, Sri Lanka had more than 200,000 illegal migrant workers in the country.

He said the Department of Immigration and Emigration were issuing up to 10,000 visas to import labour to the country. According to him there were several instances of Indians arriving in the county on three-month tourist visas and working in farming land in the Anuradhapura district before leaving for their country.

Further, he also said that Sri Lankan construction workers had a fear of climbing more than 15 floors, hence making it a necessity to import Nepalese workers who were fond of climbing.

However, he said, "Ironically the same Sri Lankan worker does not fear heights when they migrate for employment elsewhere and Sri Lanka needs to understand why." The Corporate sector has been calling on the Government to permit the import of labour to address the severe dearth of skilled workers faced by many industries.

Recently, a senior construction industrialist highlighting that the sector was facing severe challenges due to the scarcity of skilled labour in the country, said the sector had resorted to engaging foreign labour in some large scale projects. Minister of Tourism and Christian Affairs, John Amaratunga recently invited expatriate workers to return to the country to pursue employment existing in the country as fears of a possible labour shortage looms across the hospitality sector.

The Asian Development Bank last year highlighted the country was facing a dearth of workers to facilitate the growing private sector and foreign direct investment due to public sector hiring, and the demand for state employment.

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