

**KARACHI:** Interior Minister Rehman Malik said on Monday that foreign directors on the board of companies operating in Pakistan will be issued security clearance certificates for travelling to Pakistan after scrutiny that will be valid for the next five years instead of acquiring such certificates each time before they visit here.

Foreign directors will be issued security clearance certificates for a period of five years after scrutiny, Malik said, adding, The initiative will help attract more foreign investment in the country.

One cannot avoid the process of scrutiny that is a must to check criminal activities and to avoid terror financing and money laundering from foreign sources, he said. Pakistan has registered around 50 cases in the past in which foreigners have travelled to the country in the name of doing business but were found involved in unlawful activities and were deported, Malik said while, speaking at a meeting with corporate sector and legal experts.

The meeting was organised by the Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan (SECP). Earlier, a participant highlighted that it takes a foreign investor eight to 12 months to acquire security clearance and other relevant certificates from the ministry of interior and other authorities concerned before he / she visits Pakistan.

They should be issued such certificates in 15 days time, Malik said.

The minister said that the local partners will have to take the responsibility of their foreign partners as if they (foreigners) are found involved in any unlawful activities then they (locals) will be held responsible.

To a question that who will take the responsibility for those foreign visitors who are having no local partners and having 100 percent shareholding in a company operating in Pakistan, the minister said: The matter is needed to be discussed and looked at.

The interior minister also announced to make the process of obtaining clearance certificates for foreign businessmen easier and said that such changes will be notified within a week's time.

He asked the SECP to revive the application form for foreign visitors in consultation with the ministry of interior and the Board of Investment and send it to the ministry of interior with the recommendations within the next two days. The proforma should also be made available on the website of the commission within the next seven days, he said.

The proforma should include a declaration from foreign visitors that he / she is not involved in money laundering and criminal activities.

The minister also directed the SECP to submit the list of those countries, which are regular investors, adding that he will direct the National Database Registration Authority (Nadra) to constitute a separate desk for registering companies in the country.

Moreover, the ministry is increasing the number of pages of passport to facilitate businessmen to make more visits to foreign countries and attract as much investment as they can. Currently, all foreign companies setting businesses in Pakistan and foreign nationals interested in investing in the local companies are required to obtain a security clearance from agencies, which is a prerequisite before registration and acceptance of the statutory returns.

Under the 1973 Rules of Business, the ministry of interior is primarily responsible for regulating entry and exit of foreigners; therefore, the commission, as a matter of policy, forwards the cases to the ministry of interior for security clearance. Besides, it is also incumbent on the foreign companies to obtain a prior no objection certificate (NOC) from the Board of Investment before starting their business activities.

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