

Russians keen to erase 'mafia' tint on visitors to Goa

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PANJIM: Media reports on the Russian mafia operating in Goa have finally got to Moscow. In an attempt to refurbish the image of the Russian State and its citizens, its Mumbai consulate has started whetting Russians living in Goa to separate the wheat from the chaff, so to speak.

The consulate is banking on data supplied to it by the State government which indicates that 103 Russian nationals are living in Goa

IMAGE MAKEOVER

on long-term visas.

Russian Consulate representative in Goa Advocate Vikram Varma asserted that Russia would like to ensure that no Russian citizen is involved in any criminal activity in India.

Since media reports emanating from Goa on the 'mafia' were alarming, the Consulate had requested the Goa Police Foreigners Registration Branch to give details on the number of Russians on long-term visa.

"The statistics confirm that there is no Russian mafia in Goa... The details have been provided to the Russian Consulate for scrutiny and appropriate action. We look forward to providing all assistance to Goa government for improving the quality and volume of Russian tourism in Goa," he told GT.

As per statistics by the FRO, 103 Russians are on long-term visa including 58 on business visa, 19 on employment visa and one on student visa. Three Russians were born in Goa.

Besides, 15 Russians of both genders have legally got into the relationship with respective locals, hence possess Person of Indian Origin (PIO) card. While, four Russians are presently facing prosecution - two were charged for overstay and remaining on drug related cases.

With these statistics in hand Verma said, the number of Russians settling in Goa or against whom criminal proceedings are pending 'are quite low'. Roughly, of the total non-tourist Russians, 60% have settled in North Goa while the rest in the South.

When contacted Goa police asserted they have no information on 'Russian mafia' operating in the state, so far. Asked whether Russians were involved in major offences, the response was negative.

Official spokesperson Superintendent of Police Atmaram Deshpande said: "So far, Russians have not been adversely noted in many cases. But that does not mean they can be excluded from the possibility of committing crime. Therefore, regular vigil over long-term visa holders is required."

North Goa Superintendent of Police Bosco George echoed the same view and remarked, "We have no problem with the tourists, as long as they are tourists. But if one indulges in illegal activities, they will be prosecuted."

Russians in Goa

- Long-term residents -- 103
- Criminal antecedents -- Nil