

Pakistan's Federal Investigation Agency continued to make arrests on Tuesday [24 July] in the Olympic visa and fake passport scandal. FIA officials conducted a raid at NADRA's [National Database and Registration Authority] Baghban office and arrested six individuals including five women. The arrested women were later released on bail. Prior to this, two NADRA employees and four travel agents were arrested.

The interior ministry suspended five employees of the passport office in Garden Town including the Deputy Director and later arrested them. Meanwhile the central character of the scandal, Abid Chaudhry has gone into hiding. His family told Geo News, a private TV channel, that Abid feared for his life but he would appear before the court if summoned.

Meanwhile, The Sun is to be sued for libel over a related "sting", says the Pakistan News Service (more below)

I SLAMABAD: The federal cabinet has directed NADRA to immediately file a libel suit against Britain's The Sun newspaper in consultation with the Ministry of Law and Justice, as the authority on Wednesday claimed there was no fraud or illegality in issuing ID card and passport to The Sun's undercover agent, Muhammad Ali s/o Muhammad Anwer Siddique.

The NADRA spokesman said they had documentary and video evidence that proves Muhammad Ali was himself present for the renewal of his expired CNIC. She also termed The Sun story a despicable attempt to undermine the strength of Pakistan's CNIC and passport issuance system.

"Investigation conducted by NADRA has unearthed the facts in the fake scam orchestrated by The Sun in its story titled 'Olympic terror visa racket'," she added further.

According to NADRA database, the spokeswoman added, Muhammad Ali obtained an ID card, number 35202-2660630-5, from NADRA on February 6, 2002. He later immigrated to the UK and had been living there for around 10 years. His UK passport, number 506486804, was issued on October 24, 2011, and has the same name and photograph as in the NADRA record. The passport bears a fake place and date of birth.

She said Muhammad Ali was picked by The Sun as undercover agent, and he travelled to Pakistan on July 8, 2012, stayed at a top hotel in Lahore and booked a room from July 8-31, 2012 at Rs 18,000 per day. He went to NADRA office in Baghbanpura, Lahore, to get his photo updated against his own CNIC on July 10, 2012, rather than getting someone else's identity as claimed by The Sun's story. His CNIC was updated after matching with his previous record in the database. After getting his CNIC modified, he applied for his MRP on July 13, 2012, which was delivered to him on July 18, 2012. Since the same person applied to renew his own ID card and for provision of a passport, nothing was illegal.

Meanwhile, Information and Broadcasting Minister Qamar Zaman Kaira, accompanied by NADRA Chairman Tariq Malik, told the media that the federal cabinet had taken cognizance of media reports regarding the alleged passport scam of NADRA.

The immigration and passport director general and NADRA chairman gave a detailed briefing to the cabinet about the alleged scandal. The cabinet was informed that the investigation team did not find any evidence pertaining to the passport scandal as the British tabloid had claimed. The NADRA chairman said The Sun story was totally incorrect, false and malicious. He said the story seemed to have been crafted to defame Pakistan. Kaira said "dirty propaganda was unleashed against Pakistan". He also took a swipe at the paper, saying it "does not have a good reputation".