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## Italy to grant legal status to over 40,000 Lankan expatriates

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by Saman Indrajith Foreign Minister Rohitha Bogollagama yesterday informed Parliament that the Italian government has agreed to grant legal status to over 40,000 Sri Lankan expatriate workers in Italy, making them eligible to apply for stay permits.

Making a special statement in Parliament, Bogollagama said that these Lankans have contributed significantly to the Sri Lankan economy and also enhanced people to people contact between the two countries. "This development will auger well for Sri Lanka's labour relations with Italy, a friendly country with which we have maintained close time tested and historic relations," he said. He said: The Italian Minister of Interior, Roberto Maroni and the Minister of Welfare Maurizio Sacconi, presented a Bill to Parliament which decreed that all foreigners who were illegally staying in Italy were committing a criminal offense. This permitted authorities to detain such overstayers for coming under those categories. The Italian government decided that the possibility of regularisation would not be extended to other categories. "There is a large number of Sri Lankans working as domestic aides and caregivers. It is understood that they are much sought after having earned the confidence of their Italian employers. The President of the Republic of Italy has on August 3 put his signature to the Bill to accept the overstayers and this would come into effect by the end of August, he said. The Bill will regularise illegal expatriate workers from Italy coming under the categories of caregivers and domestic aids and law will have a noteworthy impact on Sri Lankans who have over-stayed in Italy and holding their jobs over a long period, in order to assess their identity. "The Sri Lankan Embassy in Rome initially made representations to the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs expressing concern with regard to certain provisions of the Bill. This was on the basis of their possible incompatibility with the European Constitution," he said. There had been some opposition to this Bill from some Italian political parties on the grounds that it would have negative repercussions on the Italian economy, as the government would be required to find alternative methods of caring for the elderly and the disabled. Following this, the Italian government amended the original Bill to regularise the stay of thousands of domestic aides or caregivers from non EU countries, in Italy. The procedure for this purpose entails the application to be tendered to the Italian Ministry of Interior between 1st and 30th September 2009. The amendment also allows one stay permit per family unit, two stay permits for domestic aides or caregivers assisting individuals with serious disabilities or suffering from grave illnesses. In order to obtain a stay permit the employer must prove that the domestic aide has been employed before April 2009. "As a significant number of Sri Lankans domestic workers and caregivers will be in a position to apply for a stay permit to regularise their stay in Italy, it is expected that between 4,000 to 40,000 applications for new passports will be received by the Sri Lankan Embassy in Rome. To facilitate the applicants the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has requested that the Embassy in Rome remains open until 10 p.m. on working days," he said. He also said that the evolution of the "Anti Crisis Bill is a singular achievement for some of the Asian countries, which on their own clobbered the Italian authorities, the Catholic Church and the major Italian trade unions, who also supported the initiative of presenting the amendment. The Asian representatives that spearheaded this initiative were those of Sri Lanka, the Philippines, Pakistan and Bangladesh, he said. Courtesy: Island.lk