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**Title** : Human trafficking a big concern for the region: expert

**By** :

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SINGAPORE: Human trafficking is a big concern in Southeast Asia; and Singapore, despite its tight security, proved unexempt in the recent case of two auxiliary police officers who were jailed for their role in human trafficking.

Two former auxiliary police allowed travellers with fake passports, to board flights out of Singapore late last year.

The mastermind was a Sri Lankan "travel agent", who is said to be part of a wider human smuggling network.

A security expert has warned that human trafficking is big business for organised crime networks in Southeast Asia.

Agents can earn up to US\$40,000 for each illegal migrant who uses this region as a transit point to go to western countries.

Observers said thousands of migrants, use the region as the transit point to Australia, Europe and Canada.

Most traffickers are believed to come from South Asia, who are looking for a better life in another country.

However, such economic migrants are not the only ones involved in human trafficking.

"They have also smuggled terrorists, people who have conducted human rights violations, bombings, killings, assassinations. And we have seen a number of terrorists who have used these human smuggling routes to travel to Canada, Europe and Australia," said Professor Rohan Gunaratna, head of Security Studies at Rajaratnam School of International Studies.

The solution calls for a joint effort by different governments.

"It is very important for courts to give very severe punishments for human smuggling. Unfortunately that is not the case, and unfortunately southeast asian police agencies they have not taken human smuggling seriously," said Professor Gunaratna.

Professor Gunaratna added that while most economic migrants travel by air, a small percentage would try to use sea routes as well.

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