# Trouble at the immigration bureau

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There’s trouble yet again at the Bureau of Immigration (BI). A June 2 letter sent to President Marcos by BI employees has accused Commissioner Joel Anthony Viado of corruption and misconduct, particularly for allegedly colluding with now-banned Philippine offshore gaming operators in the entry and/or deportation of illegal foreign workers.

Among the allegations: Viado supposedly facilitated the release of foreign Pogo bosses and allowed the auction to the highest bidders of quota visas which are limited and regulated in number, with Chinese applicants paying as much as P5 million for a visa. The Bureau, the letter said, has also been complicit in the mistreatment of deported foreign nationals, and even in human trafficking.

Viado vehemently denied the allegations, saying these were in retaliation for the reforms that he had undertaken at the bureau. “For the record, we have been warned about the possible retaliation coming from vested interests whose erstwhile prolific underground operations at the BI have been thwarted and halted by our ongoing reforms,” Viado said on Monday.

This development still should be looked into by the President, given that recent scandals in the bureau such as the “pastillas” scandal and the Alice Guo controversy, indicate that the rot at its core apparently remains undiminished.

Just days before the complaint, Viado had just led a successful agency undertaking, when a raid by BI operatives on the headquarters of Dito Telecommunity Corp. in Bonifacio Global City in Taguig on May 29 netted 39 undocumented Chinese nationals. According to the BI’s initial investigation, the foreign workers possessed no valid travel documents and had working visas that were issued for a different company—a major violation of visa rules.

National security“Foreign nationals who wish to work in the Philippines must comply with all our laws and procedures. Those who enter under false pretenses or switch employers without proper authorization will face the full force of the law,” Viado had declared then. “This operation sends a strong message: the BI will not tolerate violations that threaten our national security and undermine our immigration system.”

The allegations now being leveled against him, however, are precisely the kind that poses threats to national security and undermines the immigration system. For one, the lingering presence of scores of undocumented Chinese nationals in many parts of the country is a plain indictment of the neglect, incompetence, and corruption that have continued to compromise the Bureau’s standing with the public.

## National security implications

Reports about illegal Chinese workers employed by Dito claim was partly validated by the arrest of the 39 Chinese nationals. But how, in the first place, were these foreigners able to overstay for so long undetected? And, if even a big-shot firm like Dito could brazenly employ them, how many more illegal Chinese nationals are out there embedding themselves in the country’s workplaces and society?

In the case of Dito, once again the national security implications couldn’t be clearer. Dito is 40-percent owned by China Telecommunications Corp., a Chinese government firm, while 60 percent is owned by Duterte crony Dennis Uy’s Dito CME Holdings Corp. As the country’s third largest telecom provider after Globe and Smart, Dito now holds the critical data of more than 14 million Filipino subscribers, individuals and corporate entities alike—data that the Chinese nationals with dubious backgrounds who occupied Dito’s executive offices and boardrooms presumably had access to.

## Critical piece of infrastructure

Dito, in other words, may turn out to be another troubling case of a critical piece of infrastructure somehow getting into the hands of foreign “experts” whose mother country just happens to be waging a campaign of harassment and aggression against the Philippines’ interests in the South China Sea. Recall the case of the National Grid Corporation of the Philippines, the operator of the country’s power grid no less, which has been the subject of Senate inquiries due to the State Grid Corporation of China’s 40-percent ownership of the utility, and the presence in it of Chinese executives in highly sensitive positions.

A legislative investigation may also be needed to get to the bottom of Dito’s case, the company’s existence being subject to a congressional franchise. But the larger issue of the continuing proliferation of illegal foreigners in the country, and the heedlessly corrupt ways at the Immigration Bureau that sustain and make possible such widespread misconduct at the expense of the country’s social order and national security, demands urgent and definitive action by the Marcos administration.

It can begin by forthwith (as in “immediately”) looking into the real situation at the immigration bureau, and getting rid of its corrupt employees and officials for good.