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## Labour shortage may put Indian traders in trouble

KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. - Indian businesses are facing a shortage of manpower due to difficulties in hiring foreign labour and this may eventually jeopardise their growth potential.

Works Minister Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu said that Indians were still relatively weak in the economic sector, thus such a setback would hamper their equity standing.

Describing this as a big challenge to the Indian business community, he said that goldsmiths, Muslim mini markets, provision stores, as well as those in the textile and metalworks industries were facing shortages in manpower due to the red tape involved in hiring labour from India.

Samy Vellu said he had brought the matter to the attention of Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi and the Immigration Department.

He said based on negotiations, the Government agreed to approve the recruitment of about 20,000 Indian nationals.

To date 12,000 permits have been approved while 6,000 are still being finalised.

Samy Vellu said he had also highlighted the matter to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad at yesterday's cabinet meeting. In the meantime he urged the businessmen to be patient and find other alternatives to remain competitive.

He was speaking at the opening ceremony of the Malaysian Indian Restaurant Owners' Association held at the Putra World Trade Centre yesterday.

According to him Indian restaurant owners contributed about RM4 billion annually to the economy, mainly in the form of taxes.

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