

Indon VP may visit Malaysia to discuss issue

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INDONESIAN Vice President Hamzah Haz is considering visiting Malaysia to persuade it to reverse a temporary ban on the intake on new Indonesian workers, a labour unionist said yesterday.

"The vice president is considering going to Malaysia to meet Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, together with the manpower minister," Jumhur Hidayat, the chairman of the Association of Free Indonesian Workers' Unions, told reporters after meeting Haz in Jakarta.

Malaysian Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi announced on Wednesday a temporary halt to the intake of Indonesian workers following a riot last week.

Dr Mahathir had earlier said the Government would review recruitment of foreign workers and give priority to those from countries other than neighbouring Indonesia.

Hidayat, quoted by the Kompas online news service, said a visit by Haz would indicate the importance of the issue.

Apart from the foreign exchange they generate, sending workers abroad reduces social pressures in Indonesia where tens of millions are unem-

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ployed or underemployed.

"The one making the statements is Dr Mahathir himself... this visit is certainly important and there should be a result when the President or the vice president goes there," Hidayat said.

Jakarta has already sent two officials to Malaysia to try to help solve the problem.

Malaysia is home to some 700,000 legal foreign workers, mainly from Indonesia, as well as hundreds of thousands of illegals.

In December more than 2,000 illegal immigrants, including 1,560 Indonesians, rioted at a detention centre and torched a section of their quarters to escape deportation.

Foreign Minister Hassan Wirayuda said he agreed with Malaysia's penalising of migrant workers involved in the riots. But he told a Parliamentary committee on foreign affairs that he hoped Malaysia would deal with the problem "proportionately".

"Not all migrant workers behave poorly because they also respect the law of the land," he said. — AFP