

# End visa woes to woo Indian tourists, govt urged

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KUALA LUMPUR: The Malaysian Associated Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (Maicci) wants the Government to speed up the processing of visas for Indian citizens to tap the huge tourist market in India.

Its vice-president Datuk Chandrakant A. Avalani said the chamber received numerous complaints from Indian citizens on the difficulty in obtaining visas to visit Malaysia for business or holidays.

He said visas were only processed at the Malaysian High Commission in New Delhi or the consul office in Chennai.

"The delay in processing visa

applications and the stringent requirements are forcing Indians to visit Singapore and other neighbouring countries for shopping and holidays.

"It cannot be denied that Indians are big spenders in branded consumer good," he said.

Singapore has been among the top destinations in Asia Pacific for Indians in the past decade, with arrivals growing by an annual average of 10.7% between 1996 and 2002.

Indian tourists were consistently in the lead with an average per capita expenditure of S\$1,574 (RM3,399) compared with S\$639

(RM1,380) of an average visitor in 2000.

Chandrakant, who is Maicci Malacca branch president, welcomed the Government's move to double the special tourism fund to RM400mil and allocate RM200mil for tourism infrastructure and loans to tourism-related businesses.

"We also support the call for promotional efforts to be intensified through the *Malaysia Truly Asia* campaign focusing on Europe, China, Australia, Japan, India, the Middle East and regional markets," he said.

Meanwhile, Maicci president

Datuk K. Ketheeswaran described the Budget as one of the best presented by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

"The budget has shown that Dr Mahathir has the pulse of what the people want.

"This is the first time that taxes had been reduced while no new taxes were introduced.

"It is also a first where the non-governmental organisations had been provided allocations," he added.

Ketheeswaran said the small and medium industries and entrepreneurs would benefit from the 8% reduction in corporate tax.