

No change in decision for temple priests, musicians
Malaysiakini.com
Sept 3, 2008
S Pathmawathy

Human Resources Minister Dr S Subramaniam today reiterated the cabinet has not changed its decision to

grant visas and three-year work permits to Hindu and Sikh priests, musicians and artisans.

dr s subramaniam interview 210308 01"The decision was that the visas and permits for the priests, musicians and artisans from India amongst fresh applicants will be valid for a maximum period of three years and based on a set of strict guidelines," Subramaniam said in a statement.

The government had in January sparked an outcry within the Hindu and Sikh communities when it clamped down on foreign workers in a bid to downsize the country's growing reliance on overseas labour.

Local Hindu temples and Sikh gurdwaras were particularly affected as they rely hugely on skilled workers from India to be priests, temple musicians and sculptors.

Although authorities later agreed to relax the ruling, temple officials and builders say they still face great difficulty in obtaining visas and permits extensions.

Currently temple workers are only able to renew their visas for one month, whereas fresh applications can take up to months to process and more often than not, these are frequently rejected.

Weaknesses being rectified

Subramaniam, who is also the MIC secretary general, said immigration processes would be supervised and monitored to ensure that officials followed through with the cabinet promise.

"If there are any weaknesses at the state level or immigration department on the implementation of the cabinet decision, it will be rectified," he said.

Subramaniam said Home Affairs Minister Syed Hamid Albar had already agreed to approve more fresh visa applications beginning Aug 1.

"We will monitor the implementation of this decision and should there be any weaknesses, we will take step to correct them," he said.

Meanwhile, a senior officer at the Human Resources Ministry explained to Malaysiakini that although surety has already been given at the policy level, the immigration department had yet to implement the directive.

He said there were still minor adjustments being made to the visa and work permit guidelines.

"The immigration department is finalising the implementation system very soon and it will

send the new guidelines to the departments at the state level," said the senior official, adding that the glitches might be resolved in a week or two..

Copyright © 1999-2007 Mkini Dotcom Sdn. Bhd.
Source : <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/89024>