



SINGAPORE CREATES NEW OFFICE FOR FOREIGN WORKERS PROVIDES BETTER SERVICES

Singapore has set up a new unit - the Foreign Manpower Division (FMD) - at its Ministry of Manpower (MOM) to look after the welfare of foreign workers. The work of the FMD will be devoted to the following areas of concern: (1) protecting foreign workers (2) maintaining and improving the professionalism of employment agencies, and (3) strengthening employment enforcement including spot checks on employers.

In a related development, Singapore has sought to provide better services to foreign workers through its MOM. It has started using fax services since May 2004 in the issuance of work permits to foreign workers, and renewal and cancellation, as well. It has also introduced the new *S Pass*, a new work pass category that replaces the Q2 pass, to address the need of Singaporean industries for mid-level skilled workers such as associate professionals and technicians. Under the current work pass system, professionals managers and executives can come in on the P and Q passes (EP). Semi-skilled or unskilled workers can enter using the R pass (WP). The large gap between EP and WP has made it difficult for companies to bring in middle level manpower, resulting to an unfilled demand for middle level skills-sets.

Applicants for the new S pass will be assessed on a "points system" which will take into account multiple criteria, including salary, education qualifications, skills, work experience, job type such as associate professionals and technicians. A monthly levy pegged to the skilled levy for R pass holders will be imposed and there will be a cap on the number of S pass holders in each company based on a quota of 5% of the company's local and work permit workforce. S pass holders with \$2,500 basic monthly salary will be given dependent privileges.

To further improve the lot of foreign workers, Singapore has started looking into complaints of non-payment of salaries of foreign workers. The MOM is reportedly set to put in place remedial measures to induce Singaporean employers to pay foreign workers and pay them on time.