

Maid talk premature: ministry

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THE Ministry of Labour has played down reports it is close to sending domestic workers to Singapore, a country that has only recently granted foreign maids a weekly day off.

The two countries' governments had been in talks with Singapore's Association of Employment Agencies about placing the Kingdom on a list of countries from which it can source maids, *The Straits Times* reported at the weekend.

Talks had begun some years ago, association president K Jayaprema said, but had recently been revived, the paper reported.

But Om Mean, secretary of state at the Ministry of Labour, said yesterday Cambodia would not be sending domestic workers to Singapore – for now.

"Before we send workers anywhere, we must agree with the country and examine the labour conditions in that country first," he said. "We will not be sending workers to Singapore yet."

Mean said Cambodia's focus was Qatar, following the Senate's recent decision to allow workers to travel to the oil-rich Arab state.



Concerns have been raised about Singapore's treatment of migrant workers. REUTERS

Almost a year has passed since Cambodia banned maids from going to work in Malaysia following a spate of abuse.

The Cambodian embassy in Malaysia has already helped seven maids in Malaysia escape from abusive conditions this month, according to a Ministry of Foreign Affairs press release issued on Friday.

San Arun, secretary of state at the Ministry of Women's Affairs, said Cam-

bodia continued to work towards a memorandum of understanding with Malaysia designed to protect migrant workers.

After criticism from rights groups, Singapore announced in March it was introducing a weekly rest day for new foreign workers as of January 1.

"As Singapore is among the few . . . receiving countries with no provisions for weekly rest days, this regulation is ex-

pected to enhance Singapore's attractiveness as a destination for quality and experienced FDWs [foreign domestic workers]," Singapore's Ministry of Manpower said at the time.

Rights groups have expressed concerns about how well the city-state will monitor this law.

Indonesia, which supplies more than half Singapore's 200,000 foreign maids, has introduced tougher conditions to protect maids sent abroad. ■