

Migrant worker policy set to change: ministry

Sen David

THE Cambodian government has developed six prakases related to a controversial sub-decree that regulates the recruitment of migrant workers, but it cannot yet release the details, a Labour Ministry official said yesterday.

On the sidelines of an ASEAN meeting in Siem Reap aimed at curtailing migrant worker abuses, Seng Sakada, director general of the Ministry of Labour, said the prakases – appendixes to sub-decree 190 – would be issued “as soon as possible” but could not give an fixed date.

Sub-decree 190 was adopted late last year in response to the horrendous levels of exploitation in Cambodia’s migrant worker recruitment business and was issued shortly after the government placed a moratorium on sending maids to Malaysia because of such abuses.

Civil society groups criticised the legislation for lacking detail and in some cases even weakening existing protections such as limits on time workers could be contracted to work abroad, with rights group Licadho deeming it a “dismal failure”.

But at yesterday’s meeting,

which was also attended by NGOs, unions and the Cambodian Association of Recruitment Agencies, Sakada was optimistic that stakeholders could cooperate to better protect migrant workers.

“ASEAN countries, NGOs and unions seek challenges, negative and positive, and together are ready to develop an ASEAN declaration to prevent the exploitation of workers in ASEAN countries in the future,” he said.

Such a declaration, he added, would have to be adopted before 2015, when ASEAN countries plan to ease immigration restrictions under the “one community” initiative.

Nilim Baruah, chief technical adviser of an International Labor Organization sub-regional labour migration project, said the inadequacies of Cambodia’s memorandum of understanding with Thailand on migrant workers were also discussed.

“At the moment, the MoU is like a one-size-fits-all, and there needs to [be] other arrangements like a seasonal border pass,” he said, adding immigration processes were pushing Cambodians to enter Thailand through informal channels. ■