

# Labour shortage as migrant workers quit jobs to avoid nationality ID

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Migrant workers in Samut Sakhon are quitting their jobs to avoid nationality identification, resulting in labour shortages in the province.

Somsuk Kongkachane, secretary-general of the Federation of Thai Industries, Samut Sakhon chapter, said about 2% of the 160,000 registered migrant workers in the province, or about 3,200 people, have quit their jobs over the issue. Samut Sakhon is home to Thailand's largest number of migrant workers.

More than 60% of migrant workers in the province are Mon and Karen ethnic minorities from Burma.

Their work permits are due to expire, mostly this month, and they must submit applications for nationality verification and temporary work permits by February's end. If they fail to do so, they would be regarded as illegal workers.

If caught, they could be arrested and deported. Observers say the nationality verification process by Lao and Cambodian officials has proceeded smoothly.

However, in the case of Burma, the verification process has been slow.

The government initially set Feb 28 as the deadline for migrants to complete verification process, but the cabinet on Tuesday decided to extend the deadline to Feb 28, 2012.

However, the Labour Ministry still requires migrants to apply for the verification by Feb 28 this year.

"The workers want to continue to work, but rumours about legal punishment and extortion make them afraid," said Mrs Somsuk.

She said the workers, who are ethnic minorities from Burma, did not want to go through the verification process in which they have to give information about themselves and their locations in Burma to the Burmese authorities. They fear this information could put them and their families back home at risk.

They insisted on leaving their jobs and returning to their homes, which had led to sudden labour shortages in the province.

Mrs Somsuk called on the Burmese government and Burmese embassy to quash rumours and calm things down to restore confidence.

Migrant labour results in mutual economic benefits to Thailand and Burma, she added.

Wandee Sribua-iam, head of an association of employers hiring migrant workers, said that between October and December last year, about 1,500 migrant workers had quit their jobs to avoid entering the nationality verification process and applied for new jobs.

They left their old jobs and opted for smaller workplaces which are not the target of checks. Some decided to return to their home in Burma, said Ms Wandee.