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SATURDAY, DECEMBER 1, 2007

## RECRUITING in non-traditional venues

Western countries turn to India to help fill the labour shortages

DEREK SANKEY  
FOR THE CALGARY HERALD

The growing need for labour in Alberta is turning many business development trade shows around the world into recruitment fairs as much as investment missions for government and industry leaders, say officials.

"We're targeting more countries than ever before," says Terry Jorden, a spokesman for Alberta Employment, Immigration and Industry. "In the past, we were focused a lot on Europe. Now I'm hearing immigration marketing activities in Venezuela, Mexico, Korea, the Philippines, the U.S. and throughout Europe."

The latest example came last month when a team of government and industry leaders went on its GO-India trade mission, which ended up being a recruitment drive as much as a trade mission.

"We're working with our colleagues... to see where it makes sense to have immigration an issue that's undertaken at the same time (as trade promotion)," says John Cotton, executive director of Alberta International, Inter-governmental and Aboriginal Relations, who went to India last month as part of GO-India. The rea-

son countries such as India, in particular, are being targeted for recruitment is the large, highly skilled and educated population base that is mostly English-speaking.

Jorden says the government will be releasing an "action plan" soon that will detail specific ways agencies will work with all stakeholders to make the immigration process easier, whether

it's acquiring work visas or temporary foreign worker status.

Recognition of credentials is another huge obstacle being addressed with various labour organizations.

"That's definitely one of the hurdles we're trying to at least lower," Jorden says.

It illustrates the increasingly global nature of today's workforce as agencies, industry and post-secondary institutions work together to develop clearer standards and better mechanisms for providing immigrants with the upgrading and Canadian skills necessary to integrate into the workforce here.

Deepak Brahmabhatt, a project manager with Edmonton's Northern Alberta Institute of Technology, has been stationed in India on behalf of NAIT for the past year.

NAIT's newly established office in New Delhi acts as a co-ordination centre to recruit, train and assist in the immigration of qualified candidates to Canada from the local market.

"Canada has not been really actively recruiting students from India, and India seems to be one of the largest mar-

kets in the world," says Brahmabhatt, adding 300,000 to 400,000 students leave India for overseas countries each year.

Countries such as Australia, the U.K. and the U.S. have been actively competing for India's highly skilled workforce for several years, he says.

Catherine Brownlee, president of Calgary-based staffing firm Prominent Personnel, was part of the GO-India mission and says the experience was eye-opening.

"The ideal spot (to recruit from) is India because they have excellent communication skills (and) their education system is very good," says Brownlee. "Usually, they have a master's degree or several other degrees."

Recognition of foreign credentials has been an ongoing obstacle for eager Indians — and many others — looking to immigrate to Canada.

In many cases, it requires some skills upgrading or re-certification and development of language skills.

"The Alberta government is trying to bridge that gap, which is why there was such a huge presence (at the GO-India pavilion)," Brownlee says.

The immigration system lacks clear standards for who gets awarded entry, and fails

to recognize the contributions these workers can make to a labour-starved economy in Alberta, says Brahmabhatt.

"Canadian visas are very hard to come by," he says. "I have one case who has enough money, is well-qualified with a degree in (NAIT's) program that's the same as in Canada, and the (immigration) officer didn't even look at the case."

While Australia recruited about 35,000 students from India last year, Canada recruited only about 5,000, according to Brahmabhatt.

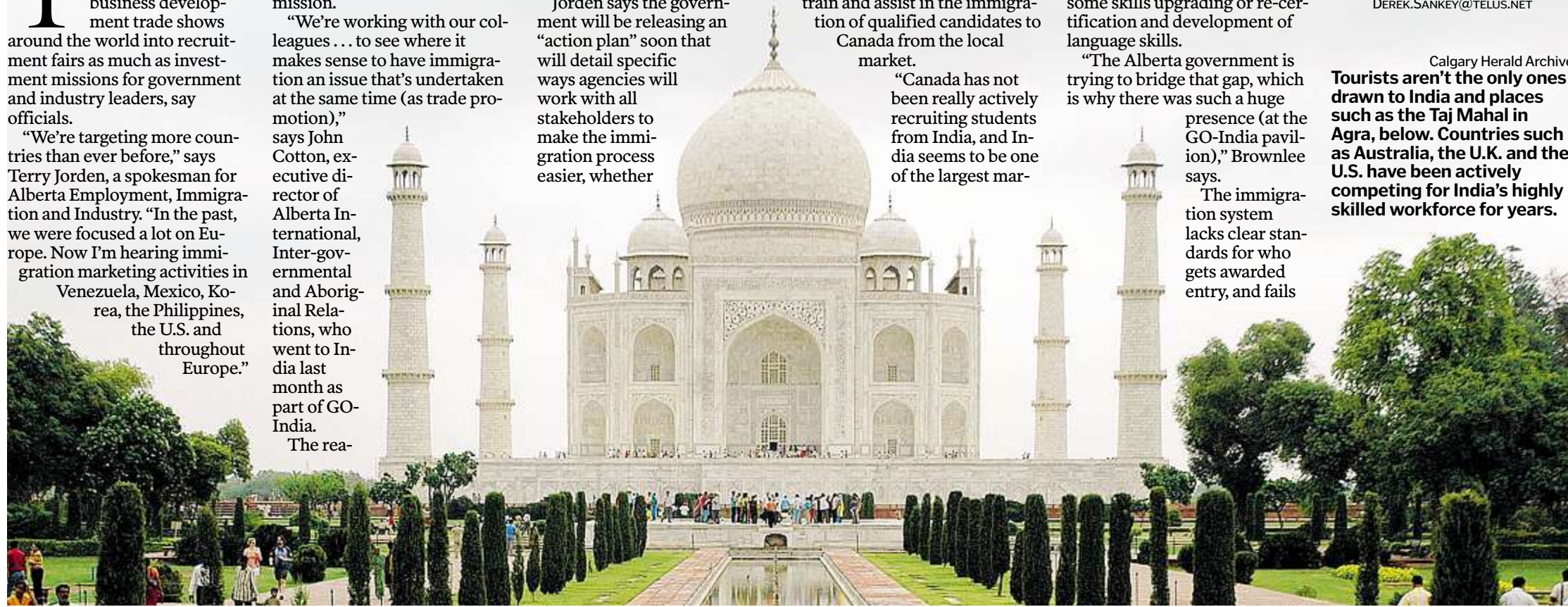
Immigration from India isn't a magic bullet for the country's labour woes, but it is one of the most critical.

"Immigration and temporary foreign workers are one part of addressing our labour shortage," says Jorden.

However, it's becoming a much higher priority. "We're certainly becoming more aggressive," he says.

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**Tourists aren't the only ones drawn to India and places such as the Taj Mahal in Agra, below. Countries such as Australia, the U.K. and the U.S. have been actively competing for India's highly skilled workforce for years.**



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