

OPINION

More packing up and leaving Malaysia

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It's the dawn of 2016 and at least another 10,000 Malaysians of various ethnic background can be expected to take the emotional, life-changing step to uproot and move to Australia in the course of the new year.

They will join the rapidly expanding Malaysian diaspora who are now either permanent residents or have become citizens down under.

In the 2011 census, the number of Malaysia-born in the country was about 116,000 but the annual increase has been considerable since then.

The data for June 30, 2014 put the number at approximately 154,000 – a sharp jump of about 38,000 from the last count.

The migrant flow from Malaysia to Australia has thus been more than 10,000 a year within that short period – the highest ever recorded.

In comparison, the number of arrivals from Malaysia from 2006 to 2011 was about 32,000. It's not just the Chinese and Indians but the Malays as well who have been heading south.



The 2011 census also show that among the Malaysia-born in Australia 7,224 gave their religious affiliation as Islam.

Ahmad Zaharuddin Sani, a Malaysian academic, highlighted the emerging Malay population in his research “Malay In Victoria: Past, Present and Future”.

Most have settled in the state of Victoria and a great number of them are professionals. There is also an extensive Malay network for both residents and students, and an initiative to build the first Malay mosque in Melbourne.

In spite of the current rise in resentment against Muslims among some sections of the local community, it has been envisaged that the number of Malays in Australia will continue to increase.

The recent ruling by the courts in favour of allowing the building of a mosque in the township of Bendigo can be read as the triumph of the rule of law over prejudice and bigotry.

Only about 300 of the 110,000 Bendigo’s population are Muslims but the local council’s policies are non-discriminatory and it consequently approved the application for the A\$3 million (RM9.3 million) mosque construction.

This was in the face of vocal opposition by various groups, including those harbouring strong ethno-religious sentiments. Appeal after appeal against the council ruling were thrown out by the courts at every stage of the legal process.

Another development that will add to the influx of Malaysians is the relaxation of residency and work requirements for foreign students once they graduate from Australian education institutions.

Canberra in a move to encourage these new graduates to stay back has introduced a Temporary Graduate Visa that enables them to work, travel and study for a further two years or more.

It’s a pretty transparent and straight-forward online application process without the necessity of having to go through an agent or third party. Of course Canberra welcomes these graduates and other professionals. The country needs new taxpayers to support its swelling ageing population.

The Malaysian student population in Australia has been estimated at 30,000 and thousands of them graduate every year.

If the conversation with the fresh graduates and their parents at a convocation last month is any indication, the new visa has indeed been a “hot topic” among them and many are opting to take up the

offer.

Unlike in the past, these young Malaysians are no longer dissuaded by their parents who believe that “there is no future for them in Malaysia” and support them to go abroad and seek a new life.

Their pessimism stems from the country’s transformation into a less inclusive society with the structures for a democratic, fair and just society being hacked away over the years.

The push and pull factors have been debated long and hard yet there is no sign of a slowdown in the brain drain let alone a reversal. TalentCorp has little to show for the millions it has spent to lure Malaysian abroad home.

Youth and sports minister Khairy Jamaluddin recently tried to put a positive spin to the perennial problem saying that it need not be a “bad thing”. Citing India, he sees Malaysians overseas as assets and networks who will be of benefit to Malaysia.

I wonder why he left out mentioning neighbouring Philippines which has millions of its citizens working abroad too and many of them have been success stories in their adopted countries.

How has this assisted and “added value” to the Philippines other than the billions of US dollars from remittances the 10 million Filipinos send home every year?

Manila has become reliant on these remittances and the country remains mired in poverty, incompetence and corruption under the rule of the oligarchs.

Which country is Malaysia emulating – India or the Philippines? – January 14, 2016.

** This is the personal opinion of the writer or publication and does not necessarily represent the views of The Malaysian Insider.*

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