

The politics of sheltering Rohingyas

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COMMENT Our Inspector-General of Police (IGP) Khalid Abu Bakar is known for speaking or tweeting without thinking!

Since Indonesia and Malaysia have accepted to temporarily shelter about 7,000 Rohingyas and Bangladeshi migrants still out in the sea, Khalid suggested, without consultation, that Penang in the north might be an ideal choice for the location of the boat people.

However, Penang Chief Minister Lim Guan Eng felt that, given the high population density in the state, the federal government should look elsewhere to place the migrants.

Moreover, according to Lim, Penang is already having thousands of Rohingyas and other migrants, who are imposing a heavy economic toll on the state.

Hospital and welfare services have been somewhat stretched in the state as result of these illegal immigrants. For the matter, even Kedah Menteri Besar Mukhriz Mahathir said Kedah is also not suitable to house the migrants on the grounds of lack of resources.

Do not harass the Pakatan states

I think that the federal government should not play politics with migrants by harassing the Pakatan states like Penang.

Penang, given its limited financial resources, cannot absorb the migrants as many of them are considered economic migrants, rather those fleeing ,harassment and discrimination by the regime in Myanmar.

One wonders why the Bangladeshi migrants are also tagging with the Rohingyas?

Malaysia and other countries should play their role in averting this catastrophic human rights crisis as its fast unfolds.

The governments of both Bangladesh and Myanmar should be roped in to solve the emerging problem. The United Nations High Commission for Refugees is there, but it is powerless without the support of the countries concerned.

It is indeed ironic that Myanmar was brought in to Asean on the suggestion of Malaysia some years ago. Malaysia argued that by bringing in Myanmar, Asean members could constructively engage with it to resolve regional problems.

Now, I wonder whatever has happened to this 'constructive engagement'?

This is not the time to play politics. The federal government should not just impose a solution by by-passing the state government of Penang.

Remember Project IC?

Some quarters are concerned that the federal government might have an ulterior motive in locating these boat people in Penang.

Some have even gone to argue that, given the nefarious Project IC in Sabah some years back, some unscrupulous leaders in Malaysia might be prone to start a similar project in Penang just to unseat the Penang government.

Penangnites cannot forget how Parti Bersatu Sabah (PBS) lost in the elections because of the sudden increase in Muslim population in Sabah.

Royingyas, whether they are Muslims or not, are ultimately human beings that badly need shelter, food and clothing.

Perhaps Malaysia, Thailand and Indonesia might not give them a hope for the future, but surely they can be temporarily kept until they can be either sent back to their country of origin or elsewhere.

Malaysia is well-known for its contradictory stand on refugees. Years back, when Dr Mahathir Mohamad was in power, there was unwritten policy to welcome Bosnians affected by the civil war in Eastern Europe.

The Bosnians were welcomed, given shelter and other benefits. But eventually, many of them left for their country when peace returned. However, when it comes to migrants from non-European countries, Malaysia can be very tough and cruel!

I urge the federal government not to impose a unilateral solution in placing the migrants in either Kedah or Penang.

As it is, these two states are stretched beyond their economic and social capacity. Most importantly, the federal government should not use the boat people for its own political and security interests.

Penang people are concerned that one day these illegal immigrants might be used as "fifth column" to seat their popularly-elected government!