

Ordeal of foreign spouses in Malaysia
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I refer to the letter
MCPX
Sabah BN won due to foreigners.

It was with deep shock and horror I read the above letter on the Project M MyKads being fraudulently issued to foreigners merely to garner votes. Who would allow such deception when there are so many who legally qualify to be Malaysians and until today without ICs?

It is almost unimaginable the daily trauma that is faced by them, some of them are born overseas but were unable to get registered at the Malaysian high commission or embassy within the stipulated time. They are faced with daily trauma, which includes inability to attend local schools, universities, long waits at immigration to get a visa, when in actual fact they are Malaysians.

I, for one, am a spouse of a Malaysian citizen and 15 years down the line, I am accorded worse treatment than an illegal for at least illegals, after a while, do get amnesty, not spouses. There are many of us here, for 12-20 years still on a dependent pass or on an employment pass and still waiting for years and even decades, not for citizenship but for a mere Permanent Resident status.

Foreign spouses find life in Malaysia really difficult because of inadequate measures for good governance. The laws, if any, are so grey that it varies in interpretation from immigration officer to officer.

Many of us even have to resort to merely doing volunteer service, though it is a necessity to be an income earner. Some of us lucky ones manage to get an employment pass on the spouse visa but not many employers are prepared to employ a foreign spouse due to the tedious paperwork. Only employers with a paid up capital of over RM200K can employ us. Many even exploit us and pay some measly sum as token salary. When we wish to change jobs, there is a cooling off period to cool our heels for six months. Life in Malaysia is near traumatic for us and here's more..

This is not 'Ripley's Believe it or Not' but it is faster to get an employment pass for a domestic maid than for a foreign spouse in Malaysia! Similar is the case for extensions of our visa, long waits that stretch from hours to days though yes, we are the spouses of Malaysian citizens.

We have to pay double charges at government hospitals even when we are delivering Malaysian citizens. We have to pay fees as foreigners to study in a public university. Even a visit to KLCC's Aquaria would require us to pay tourist rates while the rest of our family pays differently even though we are more Malaysian than most Malaysians.

We have to carry our passports wherever we go but students, foreign workers and (if I am not mistaken) even domestic maids get an I-card. A foreign spouse housewife cannot even open an account in some of the Malaysian banks, we cannot deposit money through the ATM because our bank account is called an external account – such is the poor treatment for foreign spouses of Malaysian citizens

Oh wait, we forgot to mention the yearly visits to the Immigration Department – in fact, it is a joke of sorts amongst spouses, that the 'Immigration Department is our Second Home programme'! Long waits, irrespective of infants in our hands and some have to travel from various states to Putrajaya just to get a spouse visa.

By the way, we have to be accompanied by our spouses to the Immigration Department when the submission is being done and this process can take up to 6-7 hours. More often for submission and approval, it takes several visits, never mind that the spouse has just given a declaration that we are still married in front of a commissioner for oaths.

Why are we so neglected? We take care of our Malaysian families, the future Malaysian generations, yet we are a forgotten segment of Malaysian society.

Husbands of Malaysian women have it even worse and we understand that Chinese spouses from China are not even allowed to apply for PR status. Many Malaysians with foreign spouses have left the country in sheer frustration. Many of us are highly-educated and are professionals, and we cannot even get jobs here, so why would we undergo so much hardship for so many years? Only for our families. So stop treating us like criminals.

The home affairs minister is the only approving authority for PR, and only a few approvals are given per month - is this a fair deal when there are a few thousand still waiting? Something is very wrong in the system then. We also know that priority is given for those applying for the more lucrative 'Malaysia My Second Home' programme.

So now it boils down to the fact that only money talks. If in Sabah and Sarawak, foreigners have easily been given MyKads, why can't this be done for foreign spouses?

In this is a global environment, where travel is so much easier and national boundaries are getting more seamless, the Home Ministry and Immigration should be looking into its policies and engage themselves with practises that reflect good governance. It is only appropriate that spouses of Malaysians should be given fair status and that there be rational rules and regulations.

I have not touched on what happens in cases where there is separation or divorce. Do the children have to relocate to the non-Malaysian parent's home country because that parent's visa in Malaysia will not get extended?

What needs immediate attention is the immigration law itself for foreign spouses of Malaysian citizens. Today in countries such as UK, the US, Australia and nearer home in Singapore, no more than two years of living together is required to secure PR status - marriage is not even a necessity in these countries.

What you have just read is not a work of fiction but the reality of life faced by foreign spouses of Malaysian citizens.

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