

Can we plug the brain drain?

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Tiger's last skilled migration visa application didn't pan out (she may have taken a bite out of the immigration officer who interviewed her). Tiger thinks if she can rein in her appetite for homo sapiens, there's a good chance she can apply for a skilled migration visa in a neighbouring island nation — apparently immigration officers there taste vile, which should pave the way for Tiger's ascent in that country's corporate world.

Moving to another country is a big step, but then Tiger is downright discontented with the policies in her home country that are not very Tiger-friendly. One little mostly-vegetarian Tiger migrating to greener shores to pursue her tigeriffic dreams couldn't hurt...or could it? After all, there are around a million humans that make up the Malaysian diaspora, so why can't Tiger pioneer a Malaysian tiger diaspora?

The possibilities are endless for a Malaysian tiger abroad, and no doubt many Malaysian humans feel that way too. This is why the cream of the human crop migrate to developed countries, resulting in brain drain.

To be sure, the brain drain is an affliction that has long plagued Malaysia. It even was a theme in the World Bank's Malaysia Economic Monitor back in 2011, which noted that key factors that motivate Malaysians to move abroad include differences in earnings potential, career prospects, quality of education and quality of life.

Clearly, what Malaysia needs to do is boost productivity, and that can only be done by revamping the education system and raising wages to create a pool of top talent. Boosting productivity is going to be an uphill task, as some quarters estimate that as much as 70% of the Malaysian workforce is made up of unskilled workers.

Last year the Malaysian Trades Union Congress said that foreign workers make up 30% of the local workforce, most of whom are employed in labour-intensive industries. This does not even include the large number of illegal immigrants in the country who are also in the workforce. Prioritising cheap foreign labour over higher-paid skilled labour is the norm and if this doesn't change, neither will productivity nor salary levels.

Tell me, if you were a skilled worker in Malaysia faced with low salary and few career prospects, wouldn't you want to move too? Unless salaries and quality of life improve, Malaysian talent is just going to continue leaving for greener shores. And these will also lead to skilled foreign talent being somewhat reluctant to work in Malaysia long-term.

Tiger also wonders why there is no skilled migration programme aimed at the thousands of international students studying in Malaysian institutions of higher learning. Tiger is not a policy-maker, but if she were, she'd offer permanent resident status to highly skilled international students pursuing advance degrees in technology and the sciences, fields which are sorely lacking talent. Australia and the United States have been doing this for years and it is working for them.

In fact, in 2012, the United States introduced the STAR Act, which pledged to offer green cards to international students studying technology, mathematics and the sciences in American universities. Although this bill was introduced in May 2012, it was never enacted.

That shouldn't stop Malaysian policy makers from introducing something similar in Malaysia. Despite various initiatives, talent is still leaving our shores and instead of desperately trying to stem the flow, it is time they throw in the towel and move on. Talent will continue leaving until and unless policies are changed and meritocracy is implemented.

Not a pretty situation for Malaysia now, is it? It can't seem to keep the local talent from leaving or attracting foreign talent to stay here either. No wonder the humans are leaving in droves!

GRRRRR!

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