

## **MIGRATION: A THREAT TO HUMAN SECURITY, MALAYSIA**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Migration to Malaysia dated well back to few centuries ago, that is during the British colonization of the then the state of Malaya or Malay Land. The Chinese migrants from China and Indians from India were brought to work in the tin mines and as hard labours and estate workers respectively for better opportunities. With the independence of Malaya and now Malaysia, the migrants were accepted as citizen of the country, thus making today's migrants into Malaysia easily to blend with the locals. Although, personal betterment was a primary factor driving these moves, it would be more accurate to consider human security issues as the dominant factor influencing individual decision-making considerations with respect to migration. In light of above realities, this study will only discuss on SOFT SECURITY (human security: political, social and economy) and not HARD SECURITY (military force and application of coercive power) according to definition of UNDP Human Development Report (1994).

### **Definition**

While it is no doubt that people have always "migrated" in the broadest sense of the word, from one settlement to another, from village to village, and from town to town, it would be a mistake to assume that migration as it is practiced or experienced today is the same as it has been in the past. According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM); "Migration" is a term the movement of a person or persons or group of persons, either across an international border, or within a State. It is a population movement, encompassing any kind of movement of people, whatever its length, composition and caused; it includes migration of refugees, displaced persons, economic migrants, and persons moving for other purposes, including family reunification. It could be for Economic (like commercial, environment, developmental), Demographic (like family unification, changes in young workforce and ageing population) or Political (like conflict, minority persecution) reasons.

All countries are exposed to threat and require a high level of security in accordance with their respective concepts. According to Barry Buzan (1991), "in order to have a proper understanding of the national security problem, one must first understand the concept of security".<sup>1</sup> Multi-dimensional of security also covers the military, political, economy, social and environment. The simplest definition of security is "absence of insecurity and threats". To be *secured* is to be free from both *fear* (of physical, sexual or psychological abuse, violence, persecution, or death) and from *want* (of gainful

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1. Buzan, Barry: People, State and Fear, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Wheatsheaf, Hertfordshire, 1991, p 1.

employment, food, and health). Human security therefore deals with the capacity to identify threats, to avoid them when possible, and to mitigate their effects when they do occur.

### **Migration Statistics**

Asia is home of more than half of the world's people; it is also the world's main source for international migrants – those leaving home in search of a better life through temporary employments or permanent residence in another country. According to IOM World Migration Report 2010, the number of international migrants was estimated at 214 million in 2010 and 26 million are South Asian, including 45% women. It is estimated that 8.5 million Bangladeshis work abroad, and about 200,000 are women. If this number continues to grow at the same pace as during the last 20 years, it could reach 400 million by 2040. Malaysia is hosting an estimated 3 million migrant workers and out of that about 500,000 are Bangladeshis.

### **Type of Migration in Malaysia**

The impact of significant changes in political and rapid growth in Malaysian economic has forced the Malaysian government to import foreign migrant labour to fill the gap of labour shortages in its multi-sectoral economic development programmes. The importation of foreign labours into the country was followed with the inflow of an equal number of illegal foreign migrant labours especially Indonesians and Filipinos into Malaysia in search of better economic, social and political opportunities. In understanding the issue pertaining migrants to Malaysia, it is important to know the type and correct definition for migrants in Malaysia.

There are two categories of migrant, namely the legal or documented and the illegal or undocumented migrants. Pertaining to migrants, there are three types mainly: permanent, temporary migrants and labour migrants. Firstly, permanent migrant are those non citizen that being issued with entry permit to reside in this country. The issuance of entry permit is governed by the Migration Acts 1959/63. These migrants are skilled workers recruited as professionals. Their skills are in great demand and who earn high salary. They may be from United States, Europe, Australia, Japan, India or Hong Kong is at the high-end of the labour market. In this category includes managers, engineers, and other technicians who work for multinational corporations. They are closely associated with the expanding international trade in services, including financial services and communications.

The second type is the temporary migrants who consist of tourists, students, business people and foreign workers who contribute to the development of international relations such as diplomatic personnel and participants in exchange program. Lastly, the third type of migrant<sup>2</sup> is the labour migrant which happened when people searching for livelihood abroad for economic reasons. Labour migration can be beneficial to both individual and economy of the host<sup>3</sup> country (Amarjit & Metcalfe 2006). Malaysia is one of the countries where labour migrants are popular to migrate. Labour migrant are reflected of the economic situation of the country. The more prosperous a country, the more labour migrants are attracted into that country (Steven Hoadley & Jurgen Ruland 2006). These workers (unskilled and semi-skilled) are employed primarily in the agricultural and fisheries sector and in the tertiary sector in manual (construction) and service employment, with little direct of foreign capital involvement. Domestic workers are recruited under a system of sponsorship and the sponsor is normally a national citizen. As 'guest workers', they are not allowed to remain in the host country on completion of their contract, though most return on new contracts.

Among the labour migrants are the unauthorized or illegal migrants which consist of unregistered or undocumented migrant workers; those who had breached the terms and conditions of employment; overstaying in Malaysia and entry to the country illegally. Better living condition and job opportunities as well as lack of effective border control in Malaysia has become a 'pull factor' for illegal foreign migration, and the economic disparity and poor living conditions in their country has become a 'push factor' for their migration.

### **Push Factor**

- a. **Geographical Location Factor.** Firstly, Malaysia's geographical location shares common borders with five Asian neighbouring countries namely Indonesia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam. Malaysia is a peninsular; and the most favourite way of entering this country is through the sea. As a maritime nation, the country areas constitute 60% of sea and another 40% of land mass. In 2004, it is estimated 382,082 migrants travel via sea to Malaysia and 70% of total entrance visa is via sea (Ibrahim and Anwar, 2008). On land, the large tropical rain forest makes it even more difficult to detect the migrant's routes.

2. The term "economic migrant" is sometimes used as an equivalent to the term labour migrant or migrant worker. However, the two concepts may cover different categories. The term "labour migrant" can be used restrictively to only cover movement for the purpose of employment, while "economic migrant" can be used either in a narrow sense, which includes only movement for the purpose of employment, or in a broader sense that includes persons entering a State to perform other types of economic activities such as investors or business travelers. Classification of labour migration is usually based on the duration of activities, as well as on the distinctions made by receiving countries in their regulatory framework where conditions of admission and stay are established.
3. The government has collected more than RM1.5 billion a year in term of levy and other fees from the migrant workers. Home Ministry parliament secretary said that the amount was collected in forms of levy, temporary working pass and visa.

These routes are not used by the majority. The Sabah and Sarawak land borders with Indonesia provide a large unprotected entry routes for the illegal's.

- b. Historical Factor.** The historical factors focused on the long standing dispute between Philippines with the Malaysia over the state of Sabah. The Philippines (ethnic of Sulu, Mindanao) for decades claimed that Sabah was theirs since the days of Sulu Sultanate. Therefore, the people of Philippines felt a sense of belonging towards Sabah. The establishment of clearer border by the colonial powers led the citizens to discover that the movement within traditional economic areas entailed crossing international borders. The relationship between people of Mindanao support for the Muslim separatist movement in Mindanao has made Sabah a safe haven for the militants to seek refuge and protections.
- c. Economic Factor.** Generally, migrant workers in Malaysia can be regarded as economic migrant. Comparatively, Malaysian employers' pay higher wages to migrant workers for a similar job back home in their home country. The labour shortage is not due to lack of local workers but more towards the reluctant of locals to work on physical demanding jobs such as plantations and constructions. Thus, it opens the job opportunities to migrant workers. Most migrant workers in Malaysia came from her neighbouring countries; Indonesia, the Philippines and Thailand (Abdullah and Shawaluddin 2002). However, in early 90's, migrant workers from Bangladesh, Myanmar, Nepal and few other countries started to dominate the Malaysia's labour workforce.

Bangladesh is a small country with a large population and belongs to Least Developed Countries. Bangladesh push factor is the lack<sup>4</sup> of employment opportunity due to lack of industrialization in Bangladesh (Deshpande 2004). The high rates of poverty and political instability of the country have influenced the citizen to look for better opportunities in other countries. Furthermore, Bangladesh is one of the countries in the world that depended on remittance because it represents an important source of fund for development. Total remittance income for the country in year 1999 is about USD 4.8 billion (Kenneth and Jeng 2006). Some states use the promise of future remittances to secure international loans (Samuel and Ratha 2005).

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4. The present study highlights push-pull factors of illegal Bangladeshi migration based on perceptions of respondents obtained from a qualitative survey done on the basis of purposive sampling in Kolkata and 24 parganas and 2 districts of West Bengal (WB), an Indian State. The economic push factors that motivate people to leave Bangladesh are instability and economic depression, poverty, lack of employment opportunity, struggle for livelihood, forced grabbing of landed property from minority group, and lack of industrialization in Bangladesh. About 56 % of the respondents expressed that lack of industrialization/lack of employment/economic insecurity would be the probable cause of this migration. Among the demographic factors, population explosion in Bangladesh and lowest human development index may be the most important cause of illegal migration from Bangladesh to West Bengal.

## **Pull Factors**

The paramount pull factor for the migrants coming into Malaysia as a host country is because of its economy. Malaysia's industrialisation program became heavily dependent on labour-intensive manufacturing production, consistent with the global reorganisation of industry and redistribution of production tasks. There are many other reasons which may act as a pull factor for people to migrate such as job opportunities, better living conditions, political and/or religious freedom, enjoyment, education, life security, family links and lack of effective border control. The impossibility to effectively control the border to cover the entire coast may have given an advantage to migrants especially the illegal migrants.

- a. Economic Factor.** Malaysia's economic growth has become the main "pull-factor" for migration to Malaysia. For example, country such as Bangladesh where the income per capita is only USD 599.00<sup>5</sup> compared to Malaysia is about USD 2470.00<sup>6</sup>, surely attract people to migrate (*Economic Times*, India 2008). Starting January 1<sup>st</sup> 2014, Malaysia would implement minimum wage of USD 3600.00 that would increase the attractiveness further. Malaysia has been the most favourite destination for migrant workers and Indonesian migrant workers have constituted majority of foreign migrant workers as illustrated in Table 1 below. In general, the disparities of labour market and economy with close borders and well established migration networks between these two countries, combined with improved transportation and information flows are the major determinants that cause the flow and pattern of labour migration from Indonesia to Malaysia.

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5. The per capita income in Bangladesh has shot up to \$599 in the fiscal year (July 1, 2007 – June 30, 2008) from \$523 last year, mainly due to remittances from its citizens working abroad.

6. Gross national income per capita 2007, Atlas method and PPP, World Development indicators database, World Bank, 1 July 2008.

<b>Table 1. Migrants into Malaysia from 2008 until 2012</b>					
Country	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Indonesia	52.63%	51.07%	43.61%	45.87%	47.58%
Bangladesh	15.38%	14.39%	17.57%	18.73%	17.15%
Thailand	1.02%	0.84%	0.57%	0.5%	0.71%
Philippine	1.29%	1.35%	3.77%	2.49%	1.8%
Pakistan	1.03%	1.07%	1.49%	1.37%	1.27%
Myanmar	4.48%	6.4%	8.82%	10.61%	7.85%
India	1.6%	3.24%	5.23%	4.37%	3.65%
Nepal	0.89%	6.83%	13.83%	11.71%	8.5%
Cambodia	0.82%	0.94%	1.11%	2.59%	1.05%
Vietnam	0.45%	1.09%	1.86%	2.4%	1.53%
Sri Lanka	0.12%	0.15%	0.2%	0.27%	0.19%
China	0.05%	0.18%	0.34%	0.29%	0.22%
Others	20.23%	18.66%	3.72%	0.13%	8.45%
Total	2,062,596	1,975,073	1,817,817	1,877,978	1,919,464
Source: Immigration Department of Malaysia, 2013					

- b. Lack Effective Border Control.** Enforcement effectiveness is mainly due to lack of interoperability and sharing of intelligence networks among the security forces. Inefficiency, mistrust, personal departmental ego, uncoordinated effort and to lesser extent corruption (the former Director General of Immigration is on trial for corruption as the paper being written). The government has implemented “Ops Nasihat (Advise Operation)” and “Ops Nyah (Evict Operation)”. Illegal’s arrested by the authorities during the operations were advised to return to their home countries in a week time, failing which if rearrested would be deported (Special Amnesty Report Program 2005). Statistic on Amnesty programmed 2004 and ‘Ops Nasihat’ arrested from 23 nationalities as shown in Table 2 below.

**Table 2:** Statistics on Amnesty Program 2004 and Ops Nasihat Arrested from 23 Nationalities.

Ser	Country	Amnesty 2004	Ops Nasihat	%
1.	Indonesia	334,930	13,115	87.28%
2.	India	17,465	525	4.51%
3.	Bangladesh	7,890	597	2.12%
4.	Nepal	3,114	104	0.8%
5.	Myanmar	1,917	51	0.49%
6.	Vietnam	1,843	96	0.48%
7.	Cambodia	507	1,184	0.42%
8.	China	3,251	71	0.83%
9.	Sri Lanka	810	28	0.21%
10.	Pakistan	2,821	79	0.72%
11.	Philippines	7,125	453	1.9%
12.	Thailand	296	349	0.16%
13.	Singapore	10	1	0.002%
14.	Ghana	13	1	0.003%
15.	Uzbekistan	14	1	0.003%
16.	Australia	13	1	0.003%
17.	Nigeria	46	5	0.012%
18.	Iran	12	1	0.003%
19.	Sudan	6	0	0.001%
20.	Belarus	3	-	0.0007%
21.	Afghanistan	7	-	0.0017%
22.	Russia	1	-	0.0002%
23.	Sweden	2	-	0.0005%
	Total	382,096	16,662	398,758

Source: Special Amnesty Program Report 2004 – 2005, Immigration Malaysia, 2005.

The willingness of Malaysia to accept foreign workers is in line with its Foreign Policy ‘Prosper Thy Neighbour’, i.e. provide assistance for neighbour countries to prosper together with Malaysia. However, the present influx of foreign workers in recent years, legal and illegal, has created major issues and implications on the local scenes; social, economical as well as political. Though undeniably, contribution of these workers to rapid economic growth and development of the country is significant. Current figures by



the Malaysian Immigration Department, until December 2012, shows an estimated of about 2 million legal migrants and about 0.5 million to 1.2 million illegal migrants are in the country and it cause for concern. The continued arrivals of foreign labour have posed some negatives impacts and implications on the local population, thus in turn creates an immense pressure on the political stability and security of the country.

### **Threat to Human Security**

Depending too much on migrant workers could be a threat to national security. In 2010, Indonesia froze the flow of export of their citizen in order to disrupt Malaysian economic growth. The huge number of Indonesian migrants which Malaysia had depended upon had allowed Indonesia to dictate terms of employment to Malaysia; that provide better terms or no workers. Thus, the country diversifies of migrant source towards Bangladesh. Malaysia's security policy is officially based on the view of comprehensive security, which emphasizes on the importance of securing the state and government from non-conventional threats (William 1999). Ethnic high tolerance if not harmony, of each other ethnic existence is the Centre of Gravity (COG) of societal well-being in Malaysia. To tilt this COG is considered a threat to human security in Malaysia. As opposed to external military threats, the real threats facing Malaysia are seen in the form of ethnic tensions and violence, religious fighting and as well as extremism. Malaysia's security has always been conducted along 'non-traditional' (non-military) lines which emphasized political, societal and economic security and huge migrant's existence could be a source to tilt it.

- a. Political Security.** In the recent concluded 13<sup>th</sup> General Election on the 5<sup>th</sup> of May 2013, the matter was raised by the opposition party. The opposition accused an estimated 40,000 Bangladesh migrants were flown-in and given Malaysian Identity Cards in-order for them to vote. The issue is still being raised (as this paper being written) by the opposition party as part of their post-election campaign that the government applied fraud to win the election. The Bangladeshi High Commissioner to Malaysia had mentioned and published denying the allegation (The Daily Star, Dhaka June 5, 2013). It is believed that the opposition wishes to instigate the people to conduct riot which they refer to as 'Malaysian-Spring' similar to Arab-Spring conducted in West Asia, to topple the newly elected legitimate government.

The second instant, whom had already linked to politic security, is when more or less 375 migrants turn militancy. In February 2013, the migrants from Southern Philippine (of Sulu ethnic) that are in Malaysia's state of Sabah turned to militant (armed) activities to gain control of the state government. In the armed skirmishes, Malaysian security forces suffered, 10 killed and the militant/migrant approximate casualty was 70 killed. It is not logical for 375 militants to



defeat the Malaysian Armed Forces. The whole idea behind this militancy was to create anger of the Sulu ethnic already residing in Malaysia to vote against the ruling political party during the 13<sup>th</sup> General Election. Thus, awarding the electoral win to the opposition in return the opposition, who upon taking-over power would award autonomy to the Sulu ethnic to government the state of Sabah. Many militant/migrants were captured and are now being arraigned in Malaysia's court for treasons. Military operations in Sabah are still in progress to address the problem of militancy as the paper being written.

Another aspect to political security is the issue of deportation of migrants of Indonesian origin in Malaysia has been continuously causing friction in Malaysia-Indonesia political relations. Tensions have been exaggerated by the securitization of the illegal Indonesian migrant workers problem by the Malaysian media. In 2002, Malaysia organized a large scale deportation. The issue of deportation exercise following rising crime and disorder mostly blamed on illegal migrants also became sore spot in Malaysia-Indonesia relations (Immigration Department Amnesty Special Report, March 1, 2005). The Indonesian government and political leader came under domestic criticism for failing to provide support and protection for its deported nationals. The Malaysians enforcement effort over the migrants has affected the cordial relationship of both nations. Every attempt to deport the migrants has been portrayed by the Indonesian media as an attempt by Malaysia to ill treat their citizens. This situation clearly affects the political relationship between both countries.

- b. Social Security.** Unpublished police records at the police headquarters in Bukit Aman noted that crimes in Malaysia are getting more violent and rampant every each day (ACP Amar Singh Sidhu, 2005). On cases of rape and molestations, foreigners are bound to commit that they are away from their homeland and therefore sex-starved, whilst when it comes to robberies and brutal murders, they have no qualms or hesitations. The statistics in year 2012 as illustrated at Table 3, states that crimes involving migrants are quite serious if left unchecked. Last year, 1698 foreigners were involved in crimes. Studies conducted locally by Maasari have shown that statistically the presence of foreign workers in the state of Johor although has not affected the rise in index crime but the number of crimes committed by foreigners were violent and brutal (Masaari, 2004). Similar studies in Sarawak by Bakar also showed that though foreigners contributed little to the total index crime, they nevertheless (especially the Indonesians illegal's) have a tendency to commit violent crime (Bakar 2002). It is thus submitted that foreign migrant workers though statistically contributing to only 2 percent of the total index crime, they are more prone to committing violent crimes.

**Table 3.** Crimes Involved Migrants in Malaysia From 2008-2012

Country	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Indonesia	43.83%	35.28%	33.45%	37.59%	42.57%
Bangladesh	2.29%	3.57 %	5.35%	6.96%	10.3%
Thailand	0.88%	1.63%	1.98%	2.53%	1.11%
Philippine	35.61%	24.73%	35.69%	1.05%	10.48%
Pakistan	0.72%	1.1%	0.92%	3.16%	3.12%
Myanmar	4.02%	3.44%	6.17%	14.46%	15.6%
India	1.52%	1.93%	1.44%	4.54%	0.58%
Nepal	0.72%	1.4%	1.44%	2.74%	2.94%
Cambodia	0.15%	0.09%	0.84%	0.84%	0.23%
Vietnam	3.94%	4.37%	2.57%	3.16%	2.0%
Sri Lanka	0.19%	0.33%	0.12%	0.52%	0.35%
China	0.29%	0.36%	0.59%	0.84%	0.11%
Others	5.76%	7.54%	8.69%	21.54%	10.54%
Total	5,099	3,248	3,886	947	1,698

Source: Police Head Quarter, 2012.

- c. Economic Security.** The influx of foreign labour may be beneficial in the short term (when acute shortage of labour arises) but it may be regarded as undesirable at a later stage when there is high unemployment. The presence of foreign workers had impacts on the economy e.g.: out flow of remittance, labour market, competition with locals, and provide training and skill. Thus, over-dependence on foreign workforce has created various economic problems to the country as illustrated below:

- (i) Outflow of Remittance.** One immediate impact is the outflow of remittance (Stahl 1989) stated that the magnitude of remittance depends on the number of migrants, their earnings, saving rate, and the proportion of the savings remitted. The amount and effect of remittance on Malaysia is difficult to quantify accurately without a more detailed study. However, we can attempt an approximation that about US\$1 billion is remitted to home country annually. Thus it is a significant capital outflow, comprising about 10 percent of the services account imbalance, estimated at RM 10.2 billion in 1992 (Pillai, 1992). Many would argued that this loss of revenue is not a major problem as the migrants' contributions for Malaysia's development outweighs their collective cost.

(ii) **Competition with Locals.** It can be considered as a threat to local livelihood when these foreign migrants participated in trading which were once dominated by locals. Undeniably, these foreign workers are aggressive and persistent in taking up economic opportunities in this country. It was recorded that tensions started to build as early as 1993 and had escalated between locals and migrants. This has been the case in a number of major cities across the country such as Kuala Lumpur. It is also mentioned that the local businessmen are partly to be blamed for such scenarios. Badly managed stalls and outlets had these local traders sold or sublet their leases for the stalls to migrants, taking a small percentage of the profits made and redirecting their entrepreneurial efforts. The presence of these traders has created stiff competition and tension among the local traders which is a threat to their livelihood.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The country has benefited from the contribution from foreign workers; therefore they should be treated wisely and justly. Whilst, there is a need to take firm and stern action on those that break the regulations, the migrants' workers should be given the opportunity to legalize or extend their stay in Malaysia. Based on the above discussions, some of the steps could be taken by the Malaysian's government to manage and control the existence of migrants in order to gain positive impact to the country. If manage and control properly the impact could be in multiple fold, i.e. reduction in employing of resources to administer migrant workers and an increase of productivities by government institutions and also migrant workers in industries concern. Some of the long term recommended strategies are:

- a. **Registration and Identification of Migrant Workers.** Migrant workers should be registered and identified by the compulsory issuance of Identification Card. The Identification Card will be used to manage and control of migrant workers existence in host country. Registration and identification of migrant workers with the cooperation of home countries authorities could be done as early as at home countries. This could also enhance good bilateral cooperation between countries. The identification cards, other than to show personal data of migrant workers, it would also display employment and employers data. This is also to engage employers to be more responsible of their foreign employees. Costs for those identification cards could be borne by the employers which could be incorporated as part of administrative fees.
- b. **Provide Training and Skills to Migrant Workers.** Whilst the migrant workers are in the host country, they should be given proper training and skills for them to perform the jobs. Towards the end of their tenure, the workers would go back to

home country with better prospect to gain and secure job. The reason why migrant workers remain in host countries illegally is due to the feeling of insecurity of employment in home countries. Governments of both home and host countries should coordinate their decisions and actions in order to maximize rather than optimize the sacrifice of their citizens to leave home country to foreign land to seek employments. Employment in host country should be regarded as a place for training by home countries and migrant workers. Skills and experience gained whilst in foreign land should be capitalized by home countries to further develop and advance their respective industries in home country accordingly. This action by Malaysia is in line with its Foreign Policy of 'Prosper Thy Neighbour', i.e. to provide assistance to friendly neighbour countries to develop their economy together in order to create good relations between sovereign states. If migrant workers accept and understand the concept, then they would mostly likely to appreciate more their chance of employment in Malaysia and return to their motherland voluntarily.

- c. **Coordination by Enforcement Agencies.** As it had been mentioned in earlier discussion that the degree of successfully illegal entry or stay in Malaysia is greater is also another PULL factor for migrants attract to this country. Most of the enforcement agencies in Malaysia i.e. the Police Department, Immigration Department, Maritime Enforcement Agency except the Armed Forces are under the supervision of the Ministry of Home Affairs. Thus, it is only logical and rightful legally for the ministry to provide the guidance initiatives to address the problem of threats to the citizen of Malaysia. Coordination Centres would be established at national, state and district level to coordinate the employment and deployment of resources to address situations. Currently, this Coordination Centre is non-existence. Coordination efforts would optimise the limited resources the country to address this problem.

## CONCLUSION

The presences of migrant workers are still needed by the country for its continuous developments. However, Malaysia, as a sovereign state, needs to manage and control the existence of these migrants to ensure their activities can be easily monitored by the authority in order to avoid it poses threat to the citizen of Malaysia.

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