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Foreign Workers

Singaporeans want Fewer Foreign Workers

A poll conducted by government-controlled television Channel News Asia found that more than 70% of Singaporeans want the number of foreigners entering the city-state for work to be restricted. Seventy-eight percent of those polled said fewer foreign workers should be allowed into the country as the population continues to grow.

The poll asked Singaporeans what they would be most concerned about when the population reaches 5.5 million, which according to the government, will occur in 2040. Apart from the lack of space, those polled said there wouldn't be enough jobs to go around. The 500 surveyed said the government should focus its resources on employment, followed by housing and health. One percent said the government should concentrate on the water supply. No margin of error was given.

Singapore has a population of 3.5 million, with foreigners numbering about 700,000. The topic of foreign workers in the tiny city-state is a controversial issue for many Singaporeans. The government has continually insisted that foreign talent was necessary in order for the economy to thrive.

Courtesy: AP, May 30, 2000.

Brunei

New Tricks to Escape Raids

Foreigners who illegally seek lucrative jobs in the Sultanate are now employing new 'tricks' in a bid to outwit the raiding Immigration officers. But the authorities are not fooled by these tactics.

Front doors were made to appear as if they were locked from the outside, suggesting that the occupants were not in the houses being raided.

In the latest operation by officers from the Enforcement Section of the Immigration and National Registration late Tuesday evening, the majority of the raided houses appeared

to be locked from the outside, indicating that the occupants were not in.

The raid led by Awang Hj Juma'at bin Hj Burut, Senior Chief Immigration Officer, and codenamed Operation Ular in conjunction with the Year of the Snake, targetted several sites in Brunei-Muara district in an effort to nab immigration offenders.

Awang Hj Raya bin Hj Dollah, Chief Immigration Offender at the Enforcement Section, revealed that three Bangladeshis and three Indonesians were brought to the Enforcement Section for investigation after they failed to produce proper immigration documents.

One of the Bangladeshis tried to escape as the officers knocked on his door. It was upon hearing the sound of broken glass that the officers ran after him. He was eventually caught.

Meanwhile, one of the Bangladeshis was released as computer records showed that his immigration papers were in order, while one of the Indonesian men was awaiting "removal" procedure from the Sultanate.

Meanwhile, two Bangladeshis and two Indonesians will be charged with overstaying in the Sultanate as computer records showed that they have overstayed in the country for more than a year, with the maximum being almost three years. All of the suspects were in their 20s and 30s.

The Emergency (Immigration Act) (Amendment) Order, 1998 states that a foreigner "overstaying in the Sultanate for not more than 90 days shall be liable upon conviction to a fine not exceeding \$4,000 or imprisonment not exceeding six months".

While a foreigner overstaying in the country for more than 90 days but not exceeding a period of two years shall be liable upon conviction to a fine not exceeding \$6,000 or an imprisonment sentence not less than three months and not more than two years.

Overstaying, an offence under Section 15 (1) Immigration Act, formed the majority of Immigration cases heard in court between January 1 and November 30 last year, amounting to 127 cases.

Courtesy: Borneo Bulletin, February 1, 2001

Ottawa speeds process

The Canadian Press, January 31, 2001

OTTAWA (CP) -- Canada is expediting some immigrant applications from

India's earthquake zone in an effort to reunite families affected by the

disaster.

Officials are working to speed up processing of existing applications from

India's western Gujarat state, where the devastation has been worst,

Citizenship and Immigration Minister Elinor Caplan announced yesterday.

The measures will affect some 1,000 applicants seeking consideration under

the family and assisted relative class.

They also apply to those seeking to come to Canada as student visitors.

Immigration officials also plan to visit Ahmedabad, Gujarat's commercial

centre, during the week of Feb. 19 to assess the situation more closely and

assist the immigration process.

More than 3,600 applications were received last year in New Delhi from

Gujarat, about one quarter of them were under the family class.

About five to 10% of the Indo-Canadian community has connections to the troubled state.

Government officials have counted more than 7,000 bodies so far in the regions affected by the earthquake.

Canada initially promised \$1 million for emergency relief supplies. On Sunday, it increased that to \$3 million.

Swiss government aims to simplify naturalization process
Bloomberg, January 31, 2001

BERN, Switzerland (Bloomberg) -- The Swiss government, trying to heighten the attraction of Switzerland as a country in which to live and work, wants to lower the hurdles for naturalization of foreigners who grew up in Switzerland.

The government is asking regional governments, political parties and interest groups for proposals to streamline requirements for naturalization of the so-called second-generation, it said in a statement handed out in

parliament. Each canton currently has its own regulations.

Swiss voters last September rejected a citizens' proposal to cap the share of foreigners living in Switzerland at 18 percent, heeding calls by businesses and the government. They warned that Switzerland, which has the lowest unemployment rate in Europe, needs its foreign workers to help stimulate economic growth.

According to one of the proposals set out by the government today, second-generation foreigners would be able to acquire the Swiss passport following a simple declaration, while third-generation foreigners would receive the passport automatically.

Foreigners make up more than 19 percent of the Swiss population. Swiss companies, faced with a comparatively low birthrate among natives, increasingly look abroad to fill their vacancies.

Still, while businesses welcome immigrants, some voters oppose naturalization. In Emmen, a town in central Switzerland, voters last year adopted a proposal forcing the council to put all applications for naturalization before the citizens. In several votes since, citizens

rejected dozens of applications.

The government also wants to allow candidates for naturalization to appeal

a refusal on grounds of a violation of constitutional rights.

The consultation process will last until May 15, after which the Justice

and Police Department will draft a new law.

Hong Kong hires more expatriates to fill hi-tech void

Agence France Presse, January 30, 2001

HONG KONG (AFP) -- The number of visas granted to professional expatriates

soared 22 percent last year as Hong Kong looked abroad for foreign talent

to meet local demand for hi-tech skills, a report said Tuesday.

The South China Morning Post reported that around 18,000 professional work

visas were issued for the territory last year, 4,000 more than the previous

year.

The majority of expatriates came from Britain, Japan, the United States and

Australia.

However, Mak Ping-on, president of the Hong Kong Institute of Human

Resource Management, said the influx of foreign professionals was not necessarily an indication the local economy was recovering.

Foreign workers were generally employed in industries where there was insufficient local talent, in particular hi-tech sectors including telecommunications, e-commerce and the dotcom industries, he said.

Mak, cited by the Post, said: "Although there has been consolidation in the dotcom sector, for example, in general the sector still requires many professionals.

"Hong Kong has not enough such expertise and has to rely on expatriates."

The influx of overseas professionals may be a sign some companies "have started to beef up their teams in Hong kong in order to get to know the mainland better," ahead of China's expected accession into the World Trade Organisation later this year, he added.

\$1.6 billion bid to boost brain power

By Grant Holloway

CNN, January 29, 2001

SYDNEY, Australia (CNN) -- Australia will skew its immigration policy to

increase the number of migrants with information technology skills, prime

minister John Howard said Monday.

Announcing a \$1.6 billion (Australian \$2.9 billion) innovation incentive

package, Howard said in the future information and communications

specialists will make up a larger proportion of the skilled workers

entering Australia.

Australia would also "streamline immigration arrangements" to keep

non-Australian students with technology qualifications working in Australia.

The thrust of the package is to more effectively retain the commercial

benefits of creative and innovative developments within Australia.

While many strong ideas have their genesis in the island continent, the

commercial development of those ideas more often than not occurs overseas.

"In an extremely competitive world of highly mobile capital and labor, it

is all the more important that Australia has the right incentives and

opportunities to translate Australian ideas into income and jobs at home

for Australians," the prime minister said.

As part of the package, the government pledged to create the equivalent of

21,000 full-time university places, with a priority given to mathematics

and science students.

Howard said there was a desperate shortage of qualified mathematicians and

scientists in Australia.

"We need more scientists, and if we can provide more university places

which are earmarked for mathematics and science I think we can help produce

more and fill some of the gaps particularly for school teaching," Howard

told radio listeners before the release of the package details.

Apart from education, another key part of the new policy is a 175 per cent

tax concession for companies undertaking additional research and

development work. Australia currently offers a 125 per cent R&D concession,

which will be retained for existing research work.

The \$1.6 billion package will be spread over five years with a number of

existing government innovation programs getting increased funding.

"What we're essentially trying to do is to back the abilities that this country has. We've always been very good at ideas and the tragedy is that in the past good ideas have sprung up in Australia and they've gone overseas," Howard said.

Sri Lankans and Iraqis top the list of applications

By Richard Ford

The Times (UK), January 26, 2001

A huge increase in the numbers of Iraqis and Iranians seeking refuge in the United Kingdom caused last year's surge in asylum applications.

Iraqis topped the list with a rise of almost 300 per cent to 7,080 compared

with figures for 1999. The number of Iranians also rose by almost 300 per

cent to 5,170, putting them in fifth place.

Three other countries in which there is unrest are in the top five: Sri

Lanka, the former Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and Afghanistan. The

number of Sri Lankans rose by 18 per cent to 6,040 and Afghans by 32 per

cent to 4,170. Asylum-seekers from the former Republic of Yugoslavia were

3,670 and China 2,650.

The figures show that a total of 110,065 asylum decisions were taken in

2000, more than three times the 33,720 decisions in 1999. A total of about

23 per cent were granted asylum, exceptional leave to remain or had an

appeal against refusal upheld.

Only 4,870 asylum-seekers were removed from the UK between March and

September. In an attempt to increase the number of removals 500 places for

failed asylum seekers have been made available at eight jails. The places

are being provided while the 900 places in immigration detention centres is

tripled by the building of new accommodation at Aldington in Kent,

Thurleigh in Bedfordshire and at Heathrow airport.

The figures released by the Home Office yesterday show that in December

Iraqis topped the list of nationalities for the sixth month in

succession. Ten nationalities accounted for most applications.

All but nine

showed a decrease on the figures for November.

In December applications from Iraqis were 665, a fall of 42 per cent on the

previous month, Sri Lankans 585, a fall of 10 per cent, Iranians 525, a

fall of 29 per cent and Afghans 490, a fall of 6 per cent. Asylum seekers from Somalia numbered 410, a fall of 5 per cent, Turkey 385, a fall of 10 per cent, Federal Republic of Yugoslavia 255, a fall of 35 per cent, and Pakistan 200, a fall of 11 per cent.

Zimbabwe provided 145, an increase of 10 per cent and China 135, a fall of 28 per cent. The overall increase in asylum-seekers in the UK reflects the pressure felt by European Union. More than 310,000 people sought asylum in the EU last year, an overall rise of 6 per cent. The annual increase in applications to the UK was 7 per cent.

Barbara Roche, the Immigration Minister, said that the numbers arriving in the EU threatened to damage the concept of asylum. "What we are seeing in the EU is unfortunately the concept of asylum being undermined by these people using it as a backdoor route to migration," she said.

"There are clear issues of people smuggling involved here not only by individuals but organisations who are facilitating it".

The Home Office recognises that there are factors that attract people to the UK when they should seek asylum in the first safe country in which they

arrive. Among them are the international reputation for fair play, the universality of the English language and the small number of people who are removed from the country.

Indian IT centre boosts skilled immigration drive

By Caroline Daniel and Khozem Merchant

The Financial Times (UK), January 26, 2001

BOMBAY and LONDON -- Government efforts to allow more overseas IT

professionals into the country were boosted yesterday when India's biggest

IT company opened its first European development centre in south-east England.

Patricia Hewitt, minister for e-business, said the decision by

Bangalore-based computer services company Wipro to set up the centre in

Reading, 70km west of London, was "an excellent piece of inward investment.

It is the type of high-tech investment we expect to see more of in the

future".

Ms Hewitt said there "had been pressure on us to modernise our work permit

system. Now employers can get work permits within a week.

It means Wipro

can move their staff more easily between countries".

The decision to open the development centre, which will start with about 50 employees, comes as Indian IT companies are seeking to increase their presence in Europe, and reduce their exposure to the currently volatile US market.

Wipro derives about 30 per cent of its revenues from Europe. Of this about half comes from the UK.

For Britain, closer ties with Indian companies are seen as an important way to benefit from their skilled IT workforce. Ms Hewitt, who visited India last November, said there were lessons the UK's IT sector could learn.

"We need to get ourselves out of mentally thinking of India as a third world country or a poor country. What struck me is the strength of their engineers and technical training, and their world-class IT institutes."

The UK currently accounts for about one-third of Indian investment overseas.

Pakistan government makes reinforcements to stop influx of refugees

Xinhua News Agency, January 26, 2001

PESHAWAR, Pakistan (XINHUA) -- Hundreds of Afghans had been seized and deported back to Afghanistan by the Pakistani government in an attempt to stop growing influx of refugees, a media report said on Friday.

The report cited senior government officials in the Northwest Frontier province (NWFP) as saying "the government wants to send out clear message: enough is enough."

At the same time, headcount and verification of newly arrived Afghan refugees also underwent from Thursday, organizers of the operation told Xinhua on Friday at Jallozai near Peshawar, the capital of NWFP, where up to 80 percent of Afghan refugees entering Pakistan.

According to a latest figure provided by the U.N. High Commission for Refugees, 120,000 Afghans have reached Pakistan since last September, while about half a million more are heading to the country due to conflicts in the north and northeast of Afghanistan.

Economics drives global immigration flows

By Caroline Lambert

ECountries.com, January 23, 2001

After years of declining immigration flows, most industrialized countries are opening their doors to foreign workers again. The idea is to address labor shortages, while keeping an eye on the problems arising from population aging. Immigration, however, is unlikely to provide a long-term solution.

As confirmed by a recent OECD report, migration to most rich countries - especially Europe and Japan - is picking up. Japan's foreign population has increased by 17% between 1996 and 1998, while 82% more immigrants settled in France in 1998 than in 1996. Although foreign nationals make up less than 10% of the population in most OECD countries, the proportion is much higher in Luxembourg (35.6%), Australia (23.4%), Switzerland (19%) and Canada (17.4%).

The upswing, which started in some countries in 1997, comes after years of immigration belt tightening. Compared to 1991, 75% fewer immigrants made it to the US in 1998, while in the EU, numbers went down by one-third.

Following rising waves of incomers during the second half of the 1980s, industrialized countries began closing their doors in the early 1990s.

Immigration to a handful of countries, including Germany and the US, is

still on the downward slope. Despite decreasing flows, however, Germany and

the US remain the two favorite countries of destination, with 605,000 and

660,000 new immigrants in 1998.

Although reuniting with their family remains the main reason for people to

pack their bags, asylum seekers are on the rise. The number of asylum

requests in countries such as the UK, Belgium and Ireland has skyrocketed -

growing by close to 60% in 1998 - and over 40% of people migrating to

Sweden are now refugees. The political crisis in the Balkans, coupled with

more relaxed refugee rules, stand behind these numbers.

Humanitarian crises, however, are not the only reasons for rising

immigration. A rosy economic picture - going hand in hand with labor

shortages - lies at the heart of more dynamic immigration flows. Together

with refugees, the inflow of work migrants has picked up. Renewed economic

prosperity has been a powerful magnet, and although Europe's unemployment

levels remain hefty, many countries are suffering from a rising shortage of

skilled labor. As a result, specific programs have been crafted to attract

targeted professionals - such as computers technicians in Germany - or, as done in the UK, eligibility criteria relaxed. Economic euphoria may open the doors to more foreign labor, but once in the country, immigrants are also the first ones to feel the downturns. In most OECD countries, foreign workers are more likely than their local colleagues to find themselves without a job. In Denmark and the Netherlands, unemployment among immigrants is three times higher than the national average.

In addition to fulfilling the unenviable role of temporary economic buffers, immigrants could also have longer-term economic benefits. Most industrialized countries are facing a future of aging populations - and in some cases, population decline - as their citizens tend to live longer while having fewer children. This trend is unlikely to improve the labor shortage situation, which, according to the OECD, will be particularly acute in Europe and Japan over the next 25 years. This is also bad news for most public social protection programs, based on a shrinking future work force having to foot the retirement and medical bills of a ballooning retired population. This gloomy future explains why, in addition to

immediate shortage of skilled labor, demographic considerations have entered the immigration debate.

Immigration, however, is unlikely to provide a perfect solution to the industrialized countries' demographic headache. Although immigrants tend to contribute proportionally more babies than their share in the total population, this is hardly enough to reverse the natural aging trend. In addition, as their own workers are retiring, host countries are unlikely to be able to tap into the immigration well at will: opening the doors to foreign workers remains a sensitive political issue in many European countries. So immigration is likely to remain closely linked to the caprices of short-term economic swings for the foreseeable future.

EDITOR'S NOTE: For more information on the OECD report:

<http://www.oecd.org/media/publish/pb01-01a.htm>

Malaysia detains more than 4,000 illegal workers
Radio Australia, January 24, 2001

Malaysian immigration officials have detained nearly 4,000 illegal foreign

workers and almost 500 employers who hired them in raids across the country over the past two weeks.

Most of the immigrants are from Indonesia and India who worked as helpers in restaurants and shopping outlets without valid permits.

National immigration chief Aseh Che Mat says more than 600 policemen and immigration officials conducted checks in Kuala Lumpur and several states in a two-week operation.

Authorities estimate at least 5,000 employers across the country are hiring illegal workers, mainly as construction and factory workers and restaurant help.

More than 60,000 illegal workers were deported in 1999 and another 97,251 were sent back last year.

The Immigration Department expects deportation figures to surpass 100,000 this year.

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