Putting out the welcome mat

When it comes to foreigners, it's a case of 'can't live with them, can't live without them'.

A new, different wave

WHILE I have no qualms about foreigners coming to Singapore, I think there is something fundamentally different about the current immigration trend that justifies Singaporeans' worries.

It is interesting that the argument for foreigners is premised on history, given Singapore's non-resident population has increased greatly since the 1990s, suggesting Singaporeans' recent fear of immigration is understandable.

The migrants themselves are part of the issue.

While earlier migrants appear to have worked towards integration, this seems lacking among recent ones.

Many Chinese immigrants still speak as much and Chinese do and remain in their own migrant clusters without a clear desire to integrate or stay. This creates problems down the line.

One may argue fairly that if talented immigrants have proven successful in the multicultural race-blind society, it would be beneficial to retain them. Yet fear does not consider economy in its contemplation.

I thus implore the Government to take active steps to protect the concept of the Singaporean and citizenship, so the balance of desirable immigration with protection of locals achieves a net benefit for society.

TRI, Vincent, 23, is a second-year law undergraduate at NUS

Welcome them, but...

WHILE Singapore's immigration policy has a relatively unblemished record, it does not validate this proposition; that our multicultural fabric is likely to be devoid of negativity in future.

Recently, The Straits Times conducted a survey on corporate locals' attitude towards the growing influx of foreigners.

On average, nine out of 10 people said they felt threatened by the inverse relationship between talented expatriates and work opportunities.

Although this sentiment remains true to the principle that meritocracy strengthens our status as a top Asian financial hub, it also shows that local workers view their foreign counterparts with uncertainty and apprehension.

While I am not a staunch opponent of immigration, an increased rate of newcomers will upset the balance of our cultural prism and reneg the idea of multicultural cohesion.

Why will ties be strained?

Because a more liberal policy unveils a plethora of future scenarios - transport constraints, burgeoning education costs and encroached personal space, among others. These issues make locals, especially those in the lower strata, very insecure.

A liberal agenda is welcome, but more foreigners now will heap an extra burden on our resources, with the spin-offs fuelling undercurrents of tension between the host and visitors.

Berton Lim, 19, in an incoming business administration undergraduate at NUS

Education is key

PROFESSOR Dani Rodrick of Harvard University wrote: "In promoting globalisation, it is imperative to ensure that international economic integration does not contribute to domestic social disintegration."

This is timely advice, as Singapore's acclaimed standard of multiracialism will be put to the test with the purported increase of the influx of foreigners, an inevitable consequence of globalisation.

Singapore's social cohesion will be undermined if the liberalisation of its immigration policy by the Government is not accompanied by an increase in awareness and reception by the local population of the cultural quirks of people around the world.

It calls into question if Singaporeans are truly tolerant of differing cultures or religions, instead of just adopting a make-believe attitude that conforms to Singapore's strict laws against "sedition" behaviour.

There is a case, therefore, for broader education in schools to teach the young to appreciate their future neighbours or colleagues.

Expose students more to news overseas, provide opportunities for them to interact with foreign students, bring back religious education in secondary schools.

Only then can we continue to uphold our cherished value of multiracialism, which is the foundation of our many successes.

Kee Zhi Juan, 20, will join the NUS faculty of law and economics this year

ARRIVALS: Singapore's immigrant roots are well known, but is there too much cultural baggage in the way for newbies?

How ready are we?

IN RECENT years, the Singaporean Government has actively promoted Singapore as a "hub" for various activities. This has led to an influx of foreigners, who arrive here for work or pleasure.

For pragmatic reasons, most Singaporeans appreciate the need for cultural diversity. For instance, openness towards other cultures enables Singaporean businessmen to gain access to foreign markets.

Fear and distrust towards foreigners are largely absent in Singapore. This is the result of social integration. Nevertheless, some Singaporeans wrongly perceive that their way of life is threatened by values introduced by foreigners.

For instance, the image of the "Sarong Party Girl" as a figure that panders to foreign men contradicts the traditional role of the woman as a caregiver in an Asian home.

Some Singaporeans also believe the workplace is biased towards foreign talent. They point out that the "cosmopolitan perspectives" of foreign employees are overrated.

Ultimately, Singaporeans must understand that true equality does not mean judging foreigners by the same standards Singaporeans are judged by.

True equality implies embracing differences in culture and celebrating each culture's uniqueness.

Nicholas Sim, 22, is a business administration and law student at NUS

Give immigrants a voice

IN THIS globalised world, it is inevitable that Singapore's population will include more foreigners, as some of the best and brightest from around the world come to call Singapore home.

Certainly, some Singaporeans may voice doubts that these immigrants may not embrace a common sense of nationhood and integrate properly into our multiethnic culture, despite policies to foster social cohesion.

In fact, the general exclusion of foreigners in most local policy debates reflects this sentiment - and we should address this problem in the long run.

Immigrants pay taxes and contributing to Singapore's economic and social growth too. They, and their children, will also be affected by government policies. As time passes, they will want to play a greater role in policy discussions and legislation that will affect them.

Singapore should give these immigrants a greater voice via more representation in Parliament and the Government.

Through this, we can impart to them a better sense of nationhood and enhance diversity in policy debates.

This will ultimately benefit Singaporeans in general and allow foreigners to feel more at home here.

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