

letter

letters@thesundaily.com

The high price of cheap labour

I REFER to the problem of thousands of visitors from China and India who go missing on expiry of their visas.

These economic migrants are either part of human trafficking syndicates using Malaysia as a transit point, or illegal workers hired on slave wages.

Not only low-salary jobs, employers now prefer to employ, legally or illegally, foreign engineers, etc, similarly for the same reason of low wages with maximum productivity.

And this problem is also due to the government's policy of projecting Malaysia as a low-cost country. But foreign investors are beginning to shun Malaysia because however low our cost, we have now lost to Vietnam, Cambodia, Indonesia and Thailand, whose costs are lower.

The problem can only be solved with new government policy and the sincerity and loyalty of our employers starting from the *nasi kandar* and *kopitiam* joints who must start employing only Malaysians and make it attractive for them to work.

The government should work out some sort of top-up scheme because these employers would find it difficult to pay higher wages.

As for the construction sector, more training centres should be set up to enable Malaysians to learn the various skills for this sector.

**Saad Hashim
Ampang**

Circumstances of pomp

PERHAPS we're so used to the media coverage of investiture ceremonies that we no longer delve into the reason behind their grand splendour. They're just series of lists and congratulatory messages in the newspapers.

However, these official occasions are full of symbolism, tradition and meaning, integral to the rulers' role as heads of state. Honours are granted to deserving people from every section of the community, from teachers, charity workers, leaders of industry, soldiers and emergency service workers for merit, service or bravery. It may be that you are an exemplar in your industry; or that you proudly represent your country at either a national or international

level; you may have worked in gaining recognition or awareness of your country overseas. An honour, decoration or medal is an effective way to

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publicly illustrate that the recipient has done something worthy of recognition. It's also an inexpensive way for the state to recognise talent and achievement and inspire others.

The UK famously holds this time-honoured tradition by publishing its Honours Lists awarded by the Queen on the occasions of her birthday and every New Year, when celebrities, athletes, and business

leaders are bestowed honours including OBEs and knighthoods. Republics have their honours too: the US, like Malaysia, has state and federal awards, led by the Presidential Medal of Freedom. Equally, in France, Napoleon Bonaparte established in 1802 the *Légion d'honneur*; which remains a highly prestigious decoration ranging from *Chevalier* (Datuk Michelle Yeoh) to the highest *Grand-croix* (President Nicolas Sarkozy). Each class has a numerical limit: 125,000 *Chevalier*, 10,000 *Officier*, 1,250 *Commandeur*, 250 *Grand Officier* and 75 *Grand-croix*. In this way, France controls the number

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tains of honour for centuries, the practice of bestowing awards in the modern sense dates back to 1886, when Johor instituted its *Darjah Kerabat* (DK) together with the *Seri Dato' Paduka Mahkota Johor* (SPMJ and DPMJ). Other states then formalised their own honours systems, and Tunku Abdul Rahman (our only former prime minister not made a "Tun") ensured that there

Abiding Times

by **Tunku 'Abidin
Muhriz** and
Tengku Zatashah

were federal honours too. Some awards, like those bestowing “Tun” and “Tan Sri”, have numerical limits. In recent years, some states have instituted annual limits as well.

Such measures are welcome in an age when people snigger that there are too many Datuks. Fortunately many rulers have in recent times tightened the criteria for awards. The Sultan of Selangor has not only limited the number of recipients, but has also instituted a committee to vet each candidate from five months before the investiture. Every year, over 1,000 nominations are submitted, but only 25 to 35 Datuks are created each year. Their names are published on a website which also contains statistics of awards bestowed since 1963. Sultan Sharafuddin has further announced that the recipients of state titles must be exemplary citizens, and should they flout the law, they will be stripped of their title. In 2003, Selangor stripped four Datuks of their titles; in 2004, six Datuks had their titles suspended while on trial.

The Raja Muda of Perak, Raja Nazrin Shah, said: "Sometimes, I think we give away too many Datukships ... it dilutes and devalues the award." This year in Negri Sembilan, there are fewer honours overall than in 2008, despite the fact that there were no investitures in

conjunction with either the birthday or the installation last year. Yesterday, the ruler reminded recipients to be people of exemplary honesty and integrity, and work is under way to compile and publish honours statistics online.

These investitures are occasions when the ruler invites the deserving and their families to the palace for what is in reality a day of giving thanks to the recipients. For those who have deserved the honours, it is indeed a shame for the institution to be debased by those who irresponsibly tarnish it. These include not only those Datuks who misbehave, but also scoundrels who falsely claim to be able to “arrange” Datukships for others upon payment of fees.

Yet, while the past few days have shown that there are those willing to resort to arson to destroy our country, our peace and our institutions, the pinnacle of our honours system – the *Seri Pahlawan Gagah Perkasa*, awarded for “supreme courage and bravery in extraordinary and highly dangerous situations” – has been awarded to true Malaysians of many ethnic backgrounds and faiths. Long may this tradition continue.

Tengku Zatashah is the youngest daughter of the Sultan of Selangor. Tunku 'Abidin Muhriz is the second son of the Yang di-Pertuan Besar of Negri Sembilan whose 62nd birthday fell yesterday. Comments: letters@thesundaily.com.

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