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FOREIGN WORKERS

WIN-WIN LEVY FOR LABOUR

EVER talked to a foreign worker? If you do, ask them why they leave their home to work in a foreign country, leaving their loved ones and the assured comfort of their own place of birth.

Many will say, that given a choice, they would not want to undertake a journey to a foreign country, often times even risking their lives.

There are many such foreign workers here. They are mainly from our neighbouring countries. They come because they have no choice in their homeland. Jobs are hard to come by there.

If there are, the wages are too low for their families to survive on. They look to Malaysia as a place which offers many lucrative jobs, compared to where they come from.

We often take this for granted. Yes, we do offer many so-called 3D jobs — dangerous, dirty and difficult — which locals shun. Yet all such jobs form a critical element of our economic jigsaw.

Our construction projects may

even grind to a halt without the foreign workers.

In oil palm plantations, we rely on harvesters from Indonesia to bring the fruits on time to the mills.

The palm fruits have to be processed within 24 hours in order to obtain the maximum oil yield. Rotting fruits would drastically reduce productivity.

For years now, plantations have experienced high losses because of unharvested fruits because of a lack of foreign workers.

Millions have been lost in revenue. As Indonesia expands its oil palm plantations, wages there are fast catching up with ours. Once they are on a par, we stand to lose more Indonesian harvesters, potentially reducing further the nation's income from palm oil.

This is worrying for the oil palm investors.

The reality is that most economies of the world need the services of foreign workers to move their economy.

In the United Kingdom, the

buses in London would cease to run efficiently if foreign workers are not allowed in. In fact the hotels in the UK are mostly serviced by workers from other parts of the EU, especially the poorer nations of Romania and Bulgaria.

The irony of this is that many Britons are against such migration. In fact the root cause of the UK deciding to leave the EU is about immigration. The support for Brexit is largely motivated by concern over migrant labour.

A similar story is playing out in the US, the world's leading economic powerhouse.

There, the proposed answer is to build a wall to keep out workers coming from Latin America. Yet, many jobs in the US rely on migrant labour.

For that matter, the US itself owes its success to immigrants. Even the thriving tech businesses there will have trouble prospering without the ICT talents from countries like India.

Truth is, literally all the citizens of the US are descendents of immigrants.

Since all the nations of the world rely one way or another on the services of migrant workers, it is only proper that we should put in place an immigration scheme that would benefit both parties.

It is understandable that foreign migrant workers will have to pay some amount of levy for the services that they will enjoy as temporary citizens of the country.

These include such services as health, security, education for their children, etc.

But the levy should not be too prohibitive.

The recent announcement by the government to revise the rates of the levy downward are welcomed.

Whatever the scheme, it would be retrogressive if we allow the scheme of bringing in migrant workers to be exploited.

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