The Contribution of the Malaysian Diaspora in the United Arab Emirates (UAE)

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ABSTRACT

Gulf countries are members of the Gulf cooperative Council (GCC). Among them are United Arab Emirates (UAE), Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and others. The rapid development in Gulf countries has attracted many Malaysians to work or follow their families there. They live there for quite a long period of time, more than 2 or 3 years. In Jeddah, for example, there are 400 Malaysians among whom are working in Malaysian companies which opened businesses there while others work in Saudi companies or foreign companies. And in Qatar there are more than 1000 Malaysians who work there, part of them are on duty. Malaysian contractors are also involved in construction projects. According to Madam Sariah Abd Khalib, Senior Director, International Division, more than 20 contractors are involved in various construction projects in the Gulf states. These projects certainly attract many Malaysians there in order to successfully complete them. The presence of these Malaysians in the region gives an opportunity for Malaysia to forge a two-way relationship for development in Malaysia. The contribution of Malaysians in these countries not only act as the catalyst for dakwah development in Malaysia, but Malaysians act as ambassadors to promote Malaysian tourism and introduce Malaysia culture and traditions there.

Key words: Contribution, Malaysian Diaspora, the United Arab Emirates (UAE)

Introduction

According to history, the term diaspora is associated with the Jewish people who were forced out of Israel in the year 587 BCE by the Babylonians, and from Judea in the year 70 CE by the Roman rulers (Kantor, 1992). According to the Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary (2010), the term diaspora means the relocation or movement of a people or group from one country to another country. In the context of sociological and anthropological studies, the concept of diaspora is the same as migration (Safran, 1991). Migration is the relocation of a people from one country to another for economic reasons (Kamus Dewan, 1994). According to Todaro’s theory (Mahroum, 1999), migration is a process which influences a person very much in terms of economic, social, education and demographic characteristics. A decision to migrate frequently depends on the wish of a person to improve an aspect of his life in search of better opportunities at the same time to improve his standard of living. And according to Everett S. Lee’s theory there are four factors which need attention in a study on the migration of a people: factors of place of origin, place of destination, obstacles and personal factors. From an Islamic perspective, the relocation or migration concept is taken from the Prophet’s (pbuh) concept of Hijrah from Mecca to Medina for a more peaceful life and to spread Islamic teachings (Haekal, 1987). In the context of this research, diaspora means the migration and residing of Malaysians in Gulf states for a period of 3 years or more based on various factors such as economic and education.

The History of United Arab Emirates (UAE):

UAE states are among the richest Arab countries in the Gulf region. It comprises of seven small emirates, headed by a several groups known as Shaykhdoms. These emirates, with British interference, had signed a treaty to form a union. At the end of the year 1971, UAE was finally formed and headed by a President with support...

from seven members of the Supreme Council, representing the seven emirates of Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, ‘Ajman, Unm al-Qaywain, Ras al-Khaimah and Fujairah. The President of UAE today is Khalifah b. Zayed al-Nahyan, who has ruled since the year 2004 when he replaced his father, Zayed b. Sultan al-Nahyan (Hj. Tibek, Mujani et al., 2011).

The UAE economy developed as a result of petroleum mining in the land and waters of the state. Petroleum is regarded as the main resource for UAE in its efforts to develop the infrastructure of its cities. The rulers of UAE have emulated several Eastern countries as models for its progress, such as Japan, South Korea, Taiwan and Singapore. In fact, the Dubai development model is said to emulate the development model of Singapore and Hong Kong because these cities have similar characteristics, as small city-states with entrepot ports. Probably, the rulers of UAE do not wish to be tied to the Western model of progress and development while several developed countries in the Asian continent have stable economic attraction and better economic achievement than countries in the West (Hj. Tibek, Mujani et al., 2011).

Confidence in its own strength and the inclination to emulate other Asian countries’ national development have made UAE one of the richest countries in the world. Although UAE experienced a severe financial crisis in the years 2007 to 2010, this did not set back development in UAE. Various facilities were built, such as Burj Khalifa in Dubai, to boost economic expansion at the same time providing opportunities to every group, including Malaysians, to seek a better livelihood in this Gulf state.

Theoretical Framework of Research on the Contribution of the Malaysian Diaspora in the United Arab Emirates:

Research Methodology:

This research is a study survey of the diaspora in UAE (Dubai and Abu Dhabi). This state is selected as research location because of many Malaysians there, about 6,500 workers (Ma’mur, 2010). The economic situation in UAE is quite good and the fine environment there attracts many Malaysians to live there as a diaspora.

Respondents:

There are 105 research respondents, comprising of 86 males and 19 females. Out of this 105, 76 (72.38%) are in Abu Dhabi, 21 in Dubai (20%), 1 in Karama (0.95%), 2 in Sharjah (1.90%), 1 in Mecca (0.95%) and 4 did not reply (3.81%). The common purpose of 100 persons for their migration to UAE is to work (95.2%), 4 persons follow their spouse (3.8%) and only 1 has other reasons (0.95%).

Data Collection:

Data and information is obtained through questionnaire and interview. The questionnaire consists of 2 sections. Section A is related to the demography of respondents. Section B is related to experience overseas comprising of factors motivating migration, challenges of adapting themselves and contribution to relations between Malaysia and UAE. Each item uses a Likert scale with answer options ranging from 1= Strongly Disagree to 5= Strongly Agree.

A pilot test was conducted on 25 Malaysians of the diaspora in Saudi Arabia (17 persons), Qatar (5 persons) and UAE (3 persons). The purpose of the pilot test is to test the questionnaire’s suitability for selected respondents. The outcome of the pilot test shows a high Alpha Cronbach value of 0.796. This shows the reliability of the questionnaire constructed is high and valid for use in this research.

Interview was also conducted to gather information required. They were 10 persons comprising of representatives of the Malaysian Embassy in Abu Dhabi and Dubai, of companies and of Malaysian Club, MyUAE.

Research Outcome:

This discussion is based on outcome of research analysis in terms of the contribution of respondents to the two-way relations between Malaysia and UAE. The researcher provides 11 items in the questionnaire related to this aspect. The contribution is divided into 5 categories: promotion of Malaysia, Malaysian economy, culture, welfare and investment opportunities. Table 1 shows the classification according to the said categories:
Table 1: Category of Contribution

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Contribution</th>
<th>Category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>I am proud to introduce myself as a Malaysian.</td>
<td>Promotion of Malaysia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>I am able to introduce Malaysian cuisine to the local society.</td>
<td>Promotion of Malaysia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>I am able to introduce Malaysia as a tourist destination.</td>
<td>Promotion of Malaysia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>I frequently give financial assistance to my family in Malaysia.</td>
<td>Economy of Malaysia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>I frequently donate to the needy in Malaysia.</td>
<td>Economy of Malaysia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>I love to introduce the multiculture in Malaysia.</td>
<td>Culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>I help Malaysians who have dealings here.</td>
<td>Welfare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>I am able to help increase foreign investment in Malaysia.</td>
<td>Investment in Malaysia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>I cooperate in programmes organised by the government and embassy of Malaysia.</td>
<td>Identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>I return to Malaysia for annual holidays.</td>
<td>Identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>I always refer to the Malaysian embassy when problems arise.</td>
<td>Identity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Research outcome is analysed based on the mean scores obtained. Based on Table 2 and Graph 1, the lowest mean score for UAE respondents is to help in improving investment in Malaysia (3.80), whereas the highest mean score is the pride of respondents in introducing themselves as Malaysians (4.74). All means obtained score high at once showing that Malaysians contribute very much to the two-way relations between Malaysia and UAE. Thus, based on the mean scores, it can be concluded that Malaysians in UAE have a national identity, always care for the welfare of other Malaysians, promote Malaysia in terms of business and investment opportunities, economic cooperation and culture. Due to their Malaysian identity and religious principles, Malaysians in UAE always take care in any dealings, conduct and speech in UAE because they are considered as ‘small ambassadors’. Anything they do reflects on the true Malaysian image to outsiders. Thus, the Malaysian name is a trust for Malaysians in UAE to safeguard the good image of the country and for them to contribute positively to the two-way relation between Malaysia and UAE.

Table 2: Contribution of the Malaysian Diaspora In UAE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Contribution</th>
<th>Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>I am proud to introduce myself as a Malaysian.</td>
<td>4.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>I am able to introduce Malaysian cuisine to the local society.</td>
<td>4.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>I love to introduce Malaysian multiculture.</td>
<td>4.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>I am able to introduce Malaysia as a tourist destination.</td>
<td>4.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>I help Malaysians who have dealings here.</td>
<td>4.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>I frequently give financial assistance to my family in Malaysia.</td>
<td>4.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>I am able to help increase foreign investment in Malaysia.</td>
<td>3.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>I frequently give donations to the needy in Malaysia.</td>
<td>3.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>I cooperate in programmes organised by the Malaysian government and embassy.</td>
<td>4.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>I return to Malaysia for annual holidays.</td>
<td>4.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>I always refer to the Malaysian embassy when problems arise.</td>
<td>3.94</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Qualitative data from interviews conducted in Dubai and Abu Dhabi show several types of contribution by Malaysians to the two-way relations between Malaysia and UAE. They have contributed in the form of expertise and skills, technology transfer, products, investment and promoting of Malaysia.

Expertise:

Malaysians in Gulf states contribute their expertise in the medical field (nurses and doctors), economy (business networking), construction, services, health and Islamic banking. All these opinions are supported in interviews with Dr. Mastura Muhammad (2010), Madam Fuziah Ahmad (2010), Mr. Zulkifli Mahmud (2010) and Mr. Abdullah Ma’mur (2010), and Mr. Allan Tan Shyne Chong (2010).
They are of the opinion that Malaysians train the locals based on their experience, expertise and skills. At the same time, Malaysian companies based there carry out business activities and bring technology from Malaysia, indirectly transferring technology. This is because research outcome shows most Malaysians who work in UAE are professionals and highly skilled personnel. Highly skilled personnel refer to individual professions such as medical practitioners, bankers, scientist and academics, and industrial workers. According to OECD Canberra Manual on the Measurement of Human Resources Devoted to Science and Technology, there are four ways to classify science and technology workers, by qualification, activity, sector and occupation. Studies related to the international job market find that increased demand for skilled workers causes international mobility schemes for researchers (Mahroum, 1999).

Promoting Malaysia:

Most of the Malaysians there will promote Malaysia to their colleagues. They give information on Malaysia, particularly regarding tourism, education, health services and investment opportunities found in Malaysia. This has been asserted in interviews with Dr. Mastura Muhammad (2010), Mr. Abdul Hakim Asmaun (2010), Mr. Shushilil Azam Shuib (2010), Mr. Rusli Leman (2010) and Mr. Abdul Nasir Ibrahim (2010). Malaysians there are considered as small ambassadors in promoting Malaysia to the locals and non-locals who work and live there.

There has been some success in promoting Malaysia in terms of business investment, as for example, the company Prestariang Berhad lately acquired the first contract in West Asia to implement the UAE Cyber Etika Program.

According to a MATRADE Report in the Arab Economic Unity Council in Malaysia for the Malaysian Global Business Forum “Strategic Partners: Malaysia and the Arab World”, Arab states are beginning to examine transferring their funds to a safer economy such as Malaysia following the economic crisis in Europe and United States. And in the aspect of health tourism, the Arab delegation representative is very impressed with the development of health tourism in Malaysia and will implement a similar model in their country.

This statement is consistent with study findings which show that the diaspora contributes in promoting Malaysia as a good economy for investment. According to Mr. Zulkifli Mahmud (2010), MATRADE representative in UAE, Malaysian workers in UAE bring Malaysia’s good name by giving very satisfactory performance for their employers. Most of the employers interviewed say that Malaysian employees are very diligent and reliable in their daily duties. Moreover, Malaysian work results receive commendations and are made as examples for the locals.

Outcome of interview with the locals there show much respect for Malaysians and high esteem for the former Prime Ministers Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad and Tun Abdullah Haji Ahmad Badawi because they both have shown contribution to the country particularly, to Muslim countries and the third world generally, at once making them well-known there. The KLCC and KLIA structures impress the UAE people very much, leading them to take Malaysian expertise to construct an airport and other buildings in UAE. This has stepped up cooperation between Malaysia and UAE.

Interview data state that most of local companies which have employed Malaysians would offer job opportunities to Malaysian friends of these employees who reside there whenever there are vacancies. This shows that the society there is confident in the ability, competency, expertise, skills and experience of Malaysians. They love to cooperate with Malaysians who themselves give a positive image of themselves in carrying out tasks entrusted to them by their employers.
Welfare:

In addition, contribution from the Malaysian Society there in terms of looking out for the welfare of Malaysian employees, among other matters, in helping with necessities on arrival in UAE, in helping them to adapt to the place, in dealings with the Malaysian embassy and UAE embassy as well as in financial problems. This society is important because being the middle party with a wider networking, whether with local companies and Malaysian companies there as well as important people in UAE, dealings through the Society become much easier and well organised.

Conclusion:

The total number of Malaysian diaspora in Gulf countries is increasing. Among the factors attracting migration are economic and education factors. Research outcome shows that the contribution of the diaspora in the Gulf states, particularly in UAE are in various categories, such as expertise and skills, investment and economics, technology transfer and tourism industry as well as education.

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