

## Protest against Filipinos rekindles anti-foreign anger in Singapore

26 April 2014

Middle East North Africa Financial Network (MENAFN)

(MENAFN - Khaleej Times) The philippine embassy in singapore was moved to post an advisory on its website urging filipino residents to exercise caution.

an abusive campaign by singaporeans opposing a planned philippine independence celebration has shone a light on anti-foreigner sentiment in the city-state home to large numbers of guest workers accused of taking jobs from locals and causing overcrowding.

the philippines marks its 116th year of independence on june 12 and a group of filipino residents in singapore is planning an event on june 8 at a shopping complex along busy orchard road.

it became a hotly debated topic after commentators on anonymously-run local websites and facebook pages heaped racial abuse on filipinos and attacked the choice of venue saying it should be held in the philippine embassy grounds instead of the public orchard road area.

prime minister lee hsien loong who attended a "singapore day" celebration in london on march 29 attended by 9000 people condemned the "thuggish behaviour" of people who harassed the organisers of the philippine event calling them a "disgrace to singapore".

blaming "a few trolls" for the online attacks he wrote on his facebook page: "how would we have felt if british netizens had spammed our website and abused singaporeans living in britain?"

a spokeswoman for organisers pilipino independence day council singapore (pidcs) referred to a previous statement which said they were "heartened grateful and happy to receive support from singaporeans."

she declined to comment on whether the event would go ahead as planned on june 8. police say they have not yet received a permit application for it.

the philippine embassy in singapore was moved to post an advisory on its website urging filipino residents to exercise caution.

"participating in these online debates will only inflame the situation and may result in untoward incidents possible loss of employment and investigation by authorities" it said.

eugene tan an associate law professor at the singapore management university said the online backlash is a "visceral over-reaction and it does not reflect the sentiments of the average singaporean.

"the anger probably stems from unhappiness with the government's immigration policy" tan a social commentator and appointed lawmaker told afp.

singapore's low birth rate prompted the government to grant an average of 18500 new citizenships every year between 2008 to 2012 — helping the population surge by 30 percent since 2004 to 5.4 million last year.

out of a foreign population of 1.55 million from china india the philippines thailand and elsewhere about 700000 are work-permit holders employed in construction and other sectors shunned by singaporeans. more than 200000 others work as domestic helpers.

about 172700 filipinos work in singapore according to the latest publicly available philippine government data. recent arrivals are largely professionals and service-sector workers.

many singapore citizens — who now make up barely over 60 percent of the population — see the overseas arrivals as competition for housing schools and space in a city-state whose per capita income of \$54500 masks one of the biggest income gaps in the world.

critics posting on ultra-nationalist blog the real singapore as well as on various facebook pages say the filipino event is illustrative of foreigners overstepping their welcome in singapore.

“the government has sold us out by bringing in foreigners to replace us at the job front and new homes are specially build to house them. we can't allow them any ground any more else we become second-class citizens in our own country” wrote gilbert goh in a piece that was published on the real singapore.

goh an employment counsellor is regarded as the most vocal critic of the government's immigration policies and has led rallies at a designated protest park. another is scheduled for may 1.

singaporeans must continue to “speak up for our future and keep our children and future generations reminded that this is our soil this is our land” wrote the administrators of a facebook page called “say ‘no’ to an overpopulated singapore”.

hundreds of facebook users have posted messages in support of the group many laced with anti-foreigner and anti-government vitriol.

kirsten han a singaporean civil activist and blogger said opponents of the event are blind to their own double standards given the lack of rancour when the city-state's irish community annually celebrates st.patrick's day in the main nightlife district.

“state policy could feed resentment and anger but it certainly does not have the power to make a person use words like ‘scum’ or ‘undesirable underlings’ against others” she wrote in a blog.

law professor tan said the government is concerned that rising anti-foreigner sentiment could affect the city-state's international reputation for being one of the world's most open economies.

a large-scale social survey by singapore's institute of policy studies released this year showed that over 30 percent of the resident population felt that nationality-based prejudice had risen over the past five years.

**Publication: Middle East North Africa Financial Network**

**Date: 26 April 2014**

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“for a country where openness to trade investments ideas and people is its life-blood such conduct if it persists and grows will harm singapore's long-term interests” tan said.