

MIGRANTS PREFER ASIAN CITIES TO THOSE IN THE WEST

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MIGRANTS NOW CHOOSING ASIAN CITIES

Many workers turn their back on the West, heading to big metropolises amid economic surge in the region

TURNING TO GREENER PASTURES

Migrant population explosion in East Asia over last decade

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 THE NATION

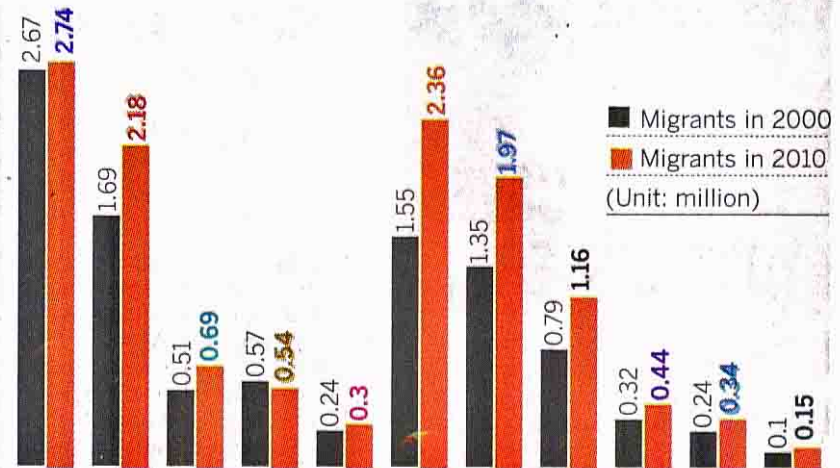
The West was a major migration destination for Asian professional workers in the past but over the past decade cities in Asian countries have become popular, research has recently revealed.

Economic growth has boosted the popularity of Asia and China in particular. More workers are migrating to metropolis with large businesses, including Bangkok, Shanghai, Singapore and Hong Kong, said Dr Sakkarin Niyomsilpa, a researcher at the Institute for Population and Social Research (IPSR), Mahidol University.

His research shows that in Thailand the number of foreign professional workers is likely to rise rapidly due to economic growth driven by the Asean Economic Community (AEC). More Chinese workers are also travelling outside the country for work with support from the Chinese government.

From 1980-2000, 150,000 Chinese moved to Thailand, according to the research entitled "Change of Migration Patterns in Asia: Towards Regional Economic Integration". It was presented at IPSR's recent conference on "Thailand Population in Transition: A Turning Point for Thai Society" in Bangkok.

Around 5.3 million people migrated internally within Asean in 2008. Thailand has not only increased its labour exports but also



Source: World Migration Report

NATION GRAPHICS

needs to import more migrant workers.

"After the AEC takes effect in 2015, labour flow is likely to be more complicated as the economies of Cambodia, Laos, Burma and Vietnam are rapidly growing and infrastructure development in these countries will bring about more foreign investment," Sakkarin said.

"Employment and income of people in these countries will also grow sharply. Free investment and business collaboration will attract industry from Thailand and East Asian countries to expand in those

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countries. This may cause illegal migrant workers in Thailand to move back home," he said.

He added that the free flow of workers between Asean countries could cause a brain drain.

The study said Thailand was ranked fifth in terms of number of migrants in East Asia. It had 1.16 million migrants last year. Hong Kong had the most, with 2.74 million, followed by Malaysia, Japan and Singapore, according to the recent World Migration Report.

"The ageing society is challenging the labour force in Thailand.

The size of the Thai working-age population will be constant from 2015 and 2020 and will decrease after this period," said Sakkarin.

"Therefore, there will be a population turning point in Asia from 2015, which will probably lead to labour imports in many countries. Japan is expected to need 6.7 million migrant workers in 2025," he said.

Meanwhile, the working-age population in Indonesia, the Philippines and Vietnam is increasing, he said.

"The Philippines and Indonesia have promoted labour exports. They said they would produce labour for Asia," Sakkarin said.

He urged Thailand to adjust educational curricula to create industrial professionals to address the country's workforce shortage, increase foreign language skills and understand the different cultures of neighbouring countries.

"If we don't reform education, we will only be a labour importer that is unable to export," he said.

Sakkarin urged the country to analyse the structure of demand and supply of labour in Asean to understand employment and labour migration trends.

This would help Thailand to make educational and employment plans and provide labour training that fit the changing trends. Migrant labour laws and regulations should be amended and the social welfare system improved to meet international standards, he said.