



FAMILY FRONTIERS

# Persatuan Kebajikan Sokongan Keluarga Selangor & KL (PPM-011-10-24072020)

Association of Family Support & Welfare Selangor & KL (Family Frontiers)

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Press Statement

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## **Malaysian Cycling Coach Secures PR: When Will Foreign Spouses of Malaysians Get Their Chance?**

The Foreign Spouses Support Group (FSSG) appreciates that the Malaysian Government has accorded Permanent Residence (PR) status to Malaysian cycling team coach John Beasley after over 18 years of dedicated service to the country. This is a testament to his immense efforts towards Malaysia's international success in track cycling, and we hope that his new PR status will continue to benefit both himself and the nation.

Just like Beasley, there are many individuals who have been waiting for their own PR applications to be approved, including eligible foreign spouses of Malaysian citizens. This country is home to approximately 164,000 binational families (marriages between Malaysians and non-citizens). However, without obtaining PR status, these foreign spouses will continue to face challenges with regards to employment and even opening bank accounts despite being a part of their Malaysian family. They are forced to remain fully dependent on their Malaysian spouses for their visas and their right to work. The employment prohibition statement on spouses' Long Term Social Visit Passes, that have to be regularly renewed, can be confusing especially to potential employers intent on hiring the candidate. This limits the foreign spouses' access to job opportunities despite the candidates' professional qualifications and authorities saying they will be allowed to work as long as there is an offer of employment by employers. They are also completely blocked from working in licensed professions such as engineering, law and medicine until they obtain PR.

An example of this is **Gulzhan**, a Kyrgyzstan national, who has been living in Malaysia since 2006 when she came as a student to study for a Bachelor of Finance degree. In 2009, she married her Malaysian classmate and has been on a Long-Term Social Visit Pass ever since. Both went on to complete their Masters degrees in Islamic Finance in Malaysia and now have two children. Gulzhan's decision to pursue a Master's in Islamic Finance was driven by her desire to work in a field where her earnings would be halal. Her choice was also influenced by Malaysia's ambition to become a global hub for Islamic finance. She later discovered that financial institutions required Bank Negara's approval before hiring foreigners, a permission not typically granted to fresh graduates or until Permanent Residence status is obtained. Gulzhan had applied for PR status in 2015 which was rejected in 2020 with no reason provided.

**Maya** (pseudonym to protect her identity) is another foreign spouse who could not apply for PR as a divorcee despite being married to a Malaysian for 17 years prior to her divorce. A mother to three young Malaysian children, fluent in Malay, and a public university contract

lecturer in the field of science for 10 years, her lack of PR status has remained an obstacle to her ability to stay in Malaysia securely. Due to her divorce, Maya can no longer rely on a spouse visa from her ex-husband and is now on an Employment Pass (EP). If her employer decides to not renew her contract, she will lose her EP, resulting in her having to leave Malaysia and her children behind. Having Malaysian PR would provide her with the security to support her Malaysian family without constant worry of separation and career loss.

It is vital for those who are divorced or widowed to remain in the country on a more certain basis when their Malaysian children are solely dependent on them. Beyond contributing to Malaysia economically, these foreign spouses are parents of Malaysian children; they are raising citizens who will contribute to the nation's future. The country's immigration policies must facilitate this and ensure that no child gets separated from their parents due to citizenship differences and visa status. However, the PR application process is ambiguous with extensive waiting times and low approval rates. Document requirements and guidelines lack transparency with unreasonable timelines of an average of two to five years without a guarantee of an approval.

As people who are within Malaysian families, with Malaysian children who have the huge potential to contribute not just towards their own family, but to society and to this nation, eligible foreign spouses applying for PR status must not be left hanging for years. It is of utmost importance that the Government expedites the processing of PR applications to ensure that their welfare, as well as their families', will be protected. Without the reassurance of a streamlined transparent PR process and better access to PR status, financial and employment uncertainty will remain a threat to them.

Just like national coaches like Beasley, Malaysian binational families play an equally vital role in the growth and development of this country. It is crucial for the government to prioritise building equitable systems and a society where everyone, regardless of class or ethnicity, can live with dignity.

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