

KOSOVO FOOTBALLER

GROUNDS FOR GRANTING CITIZENSHIP

I REFER to the granting of Malaysian citizenship to footballer Liridon Krasniqi of Kosovo. There have been mixed reactions to the move, from outright anger to celebration.

A large majority of concerned citizens seem to think that he was granted citizenship simply because he is a footballer. A group campaigning for equal citizenship has also brought it into question.

The question in my mind is — was it easier for him to procure citizenship because Krasniqi is favoured, known and somewhat revered? This as opposed to the thousands who were born here but whose cases never see the light of day.

The next question then becomes — why does it have to be one or the other?

The issue then is that there is a tendency to amalgamate separate conversations into one discourse.

This is to the ultimate detriment of the causes that are supposedly being championed or advocated. When separate issues are coalesced, it does not do justice to any of those issues.

According to a local

Sarawakian group, stateless children continue to suffer the plight of being stateless with years of legal battles and very few cases are granted citizenship.

These are valid concerns and speak volumes on the application of the Federal Constitution, namely, Article 15A (Special power to register children — which provides special powers to federal administrators to register a person under the age of 21 as a citizen) and Article 19 (Citizenship by naturalisation — that upon application made by any person of or over the age of 21 years who is not a citizen, grant a certificate of naturalisation to that person).

However, as is clear from the provisions themselves, the citizenship granted are on two very different grounds.

Article 15A applies to children below the age of 21 whereas Article 19 applies to any persons above the age of 21. Therefore, they are two distinct and separate occasions in which citizenship is granted.

This brings me back to the issue of discourse. Here, there are two separate occasions of granting citizenship which have been muddled together — when they

really should not have been — leading to a lack of coverage given to both concerns.

We are then not giving any of these concerns enough focus to be properly ventilated.

Granting citizenship on the basis of achievement, of contributions, is not an entirely new situation. Many countries grant citizenship to extraordinary contributors of arts, sports, sciences and more.

Article 19(2) of the Federal Constitution accounts for this: "the federal government may, in such special circumstances as it thinks fit, upon application made by any person of or over the age of 21 years who is not a citizen, grant a certificate of naturalisation to that person if satisfied...".

There is a level of discretion on the federal government here that exists and that should be noted.

Krasniqi has domiciled in Malaysia for the period required by Fifa (having lived in Malaysia for five years, thereby fulfilling Article 17 of the Fifa Eligibility Rules) and is playing football for Harimau Malaya. It is not a completely unworthy granting of citizenship.

That would be similar to saying that Mo Farah does not deserve



Liridon Krasniqi with his MyKad.

the dual citizenship that he has (Somalia and the United Kingdom) and that he should not have been knighted. Why is there a need to deprive one person in an attempt to advocate for other causes?

Among netizens, for instance, there are many assumptions being made as to how easy it was for him to acquire citizenship.

All this is merely speculation which appears to stem out of mis-conceived virtue signalling.

If there was a real concern over the rights of stateless children (in Sarawak or the rest of Malaysia), there needs to be a proper collective effort to bring the issue to

the forefront.

On this note, Lawyer Kamuk for Change (LK4C) raised important points on a new special committee being formed and on standard operating procedures (SOPs).

There is no denying that citizenship in Malaysia is murky waters and warrants criticism (when necessary) but that does not mean we have to criticise Krasniqi and it does not mean that we deprive him of a valid celebration. Is he not, at the end of the day, playing 'demi Malaysia'?

PARYEEN KAUR HARNAM
Kuala Lumpur