

## **Better assimilation**

### **Work on bonding upon arrival, not later**

**Goh Chin Lian & Leonard Lim**  
***The Straits Times***, 11 August 2012

ONE immigrant from China, afraid of being scolded, quickly makes way for a Singaporean woman in the library when there are not enough seats.

Another prefers to keep a low profile whenever she shops at the supermarket or visits other public places.

Such anecdotes, related by MPs and other Singaporeans, reflect the fears that new citizens face.

Political leaders and observers say better assimilation of foreigners before they are granted permanent residency (PR) or citizenship will help improve the level of integration in society.

Bishan-Toa Payoh GRC MP Hri Kumar Nair suggests requiring immigrants to perform community service for a meaningful period in the neighbourhoods they live in, before they get the pink IC or PR status.

"This will allow their community to get to know them and vice versa," he says, and such a requirement would be better than just making them recite the National Pledge, answering a few questions and participating in orientation programmes.

He adds: "Their applications should also be supported by a good number of community leaders and Singaporeans, who will testify to their contribution and good conduct."

Chua Chu Kang GRC MP Zaqy Mohamad, meanwhile, wants more programmes at the national level to ensure that these immigrants understand Singapore's culture, social graces and history.

Rules governing national service can also be tweaked.

Dr Leong Chan-Hoong, an Institute of Policy Studies research fellow, suggests doing away with the choice that second-generation PRs have to renounce their residency when they turn 18, if they want to avoid conscription. To ensure that they understand the importance of NS, he adds, parents who want to apply for PR for their children should also be made to put up a security bond.

If their children do not want to serve NS eventually, parents forfeit the bond and their children must give up their residency status.

The bottom line is that well before foreigners decide to become PRs or citizens, there must be substantive programmes to ensure they fit in. Right now, such efforts come only at the tail-end of the process.