

# From Pi to Prejudice: What Taiwan's Indian Worker Debate Reveals

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Taiwan's plan to bring 1,000 Indian workers to the island on a trial basis has sparked a wave of racist remarks that, one longtime observer argues, sits uneasily with Taiwan's self-image as a progressive democracy. Can a society that rallied behind #BlackLivesMatter afford to let unfamiliarity with India curdle into xenophobia?

By [Manoj Kumar Panigrahi](#)

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When famed film director Ang Lee shot *Life of Pi* in the blue waters of Kenting beach in southern Taiwan, he might hardly have imagined how the film's main character would be received in the cultural landscape of Taiwan today.

Taiwan has always had foreigners throughout its history. I reference the movie because since early April, there have been several misconceptions surrounding the Ministry of Labor's decision to bring Indian workers to Taiwan on an experimental basis of 1,000 workers. They would add to the almost one million other Southeast Asian workers already here. Although small in number and experimental in nature, the decision was welcomed in many sectors, proving crucial for Taiwan's already super-aged society, which has seen declining birthrates and a serious shortage of workers.

While welcomed by many, some did not share the same enthusiasm — echoing a similar wave of displeasure seen in 2024 when India and Taiwan signed their labor mobility agreement.

In 2023, [I wrote on the same topic](#) — how racism and negative stereotyping can harm both countries. Through this piece, I want to spread greater awareness about India among my Taiwanese friends who may still hold misconceptions. Having lived in Taiwan for many years, studied here, visited more than 100 schools, [built my own "101,"](#) and spoken with thousands of students and locals, I can say this is my second home.

Some of the most jarring remarks I encountered were: "Indians are here, so Taiwanese women's safety is now in danger" and "Do they plan to bring Indian street food along with the workers?" Seeing such comments has caused displeasure to me and many others, including my Taiwanese friends.

I strongly believe that protesting or expressing disagreement with a government decision is fair — but making racial slurs based on someone's birthplace, eating habits, language, or religion is another matter entirely. This is especially disappointing at a time when Taiwan

is recognized as one of the world's most progressive nations in gender equality and democracy. It was not long ago that Taiwanese people came together in support of the #BlackLivesMatter movement. Conduct like this undermines that reputation.

## Indian Workers in Taiwan and the World

Regarding the arrival of Indian workers, the opposition party called for broader discussion on expanding the migrant worker program, citing a "management issue" — namely that more than 93,000 workers are absent without leave. This is an important concern that warrants serious discussion and solutions. In some cases, workers leave — or feel compelled to escape — due to poor living conditions in their dormitories, inadequate healthcare, and other unmet basic needs.

**From an Indian perspective, the 1,000 workers Taiwan's Ministry of Labor has approved represent a tiny fraction of India's roughly 35 million-strong global diaspora — less than one percent of that figure. Most Indian workers choose to go to Europe, West Asia, or Australia given the higher salaries available there. Once in Taiwan, where the average worker wage is 29,500 NTD, it is natural that they will compare their earnings with those of peers at similar skill levels working elsewhere.**

## Addressing the Taiwan Perspective

I believe Taiwanese concerns about "security" stem more from unfamiliarity with India than from racism. We must recognize that India is better described as a subcontinent than a single country. With hundreds of languages, diverse eating habits and religions, and a population of 1.4 billion, it is enormously complex. One of my professors once told me: "Those who say they know and understand India — they do not."

It is also unfair to assume that all workers arriving from India will be men (I say this because the racist remarks have been directed at Indian males specifically). According to Taiwan's National Immigration Agency data from March 2026, there are approximately 4,136 Indian males and 1,855 Indian females in Taiwan. Had Indian men posed any threat to the safety of Taiwanese women, it would have been documented long before now. Labeling Indian men as "rapists" is therefore not only offensive but unfounded.

**Some of my Taiwanese friends who have gone abroad for working holidays have themselves experienced severe racial discrimination — which is equally horrifying. Every time I meet someone who has been through that, they share the same pain: being mocked for their food or their appearance is deeply hurtful. It does not mean those countries are filled with racists — it is always a small handful of people who have yet to learn to appreciate differences.**

## Conclusion

India is a place where the Beatles came in 1968 to meditate and collaborate with Pandit Ravi Shankar, the renowned sitar player. Steve Jobs visited India before Apple became what it is today. Julia Roberts came and fell in love with the country. Many remarkable people have come to India searching for something. Nvidia chairman Jensen Huang has visited multiple times and spoken enthusiastically about India's potential. Indians who have gone abroad have also made their adopted countries proud — the current CEOs of Google and Microsoft are among them.

To those who have not visited India and hold negative assumptions about it: I sincerely invite you to go and experience it. I am not suggesting it will be just like Taiwan. You need to give the experience time to sink in — go beyond the cities, travel the roads, eat with locals, exchange views, and then you will begin to understand a small part of this civilization. I will close by reiterating what I said earlier: "[It is easy to criticize, but hard to bring change.](#)"

*(This piece reflects the author's opinion, and does not represent the opinion of Commonwealth Magazine.)*

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