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ICFTU seeks clarification on foreign workers

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THE International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU), which has had several run-ins with Malaysia in recent years, seems to have taken an interest in the state of affairs of foreign workers in the country.

The Malaysian Trades Union Congress (MTUC) said it has received a despatch recently from the Brussels-based body seeking clarification on "alarming reports" on foreign workers in Malaysia.

Mr G. Rajasegaran, the MTUC secretary-general, said the ICFTU had "heard" of reports that illegal immigrants were tortured and killed in detention by Malaysian authorities.

The MTUC has responded to the ICFTU, in which it explained that those in the detention camps were illegal immigrants and were not refugees as they had called themselves or as some reports may have indicated.

"(We told the ICFTU that) it is not true that they were tortured or killed," Rajasegaran told Business Times when contacted yesterday.

The MTUC, however, does agree with the fact that the detention camps were overcrowded, he added.

The ICFTU query came in the wake of rioting in the detention camps in March to protest repatriation of the illegal immigrants.

Last week, the incident was reported in the British media in such a way that it suggested that the immigrants had been mass-poisoned by the Malaysian authorities.

The Observer was said to have published a report earlier this week that Malaysian authorities had mass-poisoned Indonesian immigrants in the detention camps, while The Independent said the country's deportation plan placed thousands of people at the risk of illnesses, injury and persecution.

The reports in The Observer was reportedly aired by the British Broadcasting Corp (BBC) last Saturday night.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad had said that the Government is studying the possibility of taking actions against both UK publications and a local non-governmental organisation for feeding false information to them.

The ICFTU has criticised Malaysia in the past over the electronic workers' union issue and three years back, through its annual survey, it had alleged Malaysia's Trade Union Act 1959 and Industrial Relations Act 1967 as "placing extensive restrictions on the right to organise and allow interference in the trade union affairs".

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