

Outrage after court acquits woman of killing maid
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A court has acquitted a woman accused of killing her Indonesian housemaid three years ago, triggering a new call by labour activists today for justice for migrant workers.

Housewife Chen Pei Ee, 32, was acquitted by the High Court yesterday after authorities failed to locate family members who were key witnesses in the trial, the official Bernama news agency said.

Chen was accused of killing 24-year-old Kunarsih, who died after being beaten on her chest and abdomen in August 2007.

Irene Fernandez, director of Tenaganita, a Kuala Lumpur-based workers' rights group, told AFP that she was appalled by the failure of the police to secure corroborating evidence from Chen's family members.

"This episode shows that maids do not have justice in Malaysia. The police knew from the start family members would provide crucial evidence and should have ensured they were made available to the court," she said.

"Domestic workers are treated like slaves in Malaysia. They work long hours and their passports are kept by their employers. They have no days off."

Temporary ban

Malaysia - one of Asia's largest importers of labour - depends heavily on domestic workers, who come mainly from Indonesia, but has no laws governing their working conditions.

Indonesia imposed a temporary ban on maids working in Malaysia in June last year after a string of cases of shocking mistreatment of domestic workers that has strained ties between the two neighbours.

The two countries are still in talks to agree on their working conditions.

Malaysian officials said last year that an average of 50 maid abuse cases were reported annually, with 300,000 Indonesian maids working in the country.

But Indonesia says 1,000 maids experience violence and mistreatment every year.

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