

**MPs barred entry to palace construction site**  
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Tempers flared at the gates of the construction site of the new royal palace in Kuala Lumpur this evening as a group of MPs and activists were barred entry this evening.

NONEThe group of 10, led by Batu parliamentarian Tian Chua (left, in photo) and Segambut MP Lim Lip Eng had intended to enter the construction site to meet with the workers who had complained of bad working conditions.

However, the group made up of NGOs Lawyers for Liberty, Tenaganita and the Malaysian Trades Union Congress, were not allowed to pass the locked entrance by security personnel who claimed that the workers are now "content" (bahagia).

NONEAlso present were six police officers who came in two patrol cars from the Travers police station, who claimed they were only patrolling the area as usual.

The personnel also refused to budge when told by the lawyers that they were representing some of the workers.

Neither did they accede to Chua's request for the security officers to call the workers to the gate.

"They are now watching the World Cup," the officer said, referring to the quarter-final match between Brazil and the Netherlands.

Workers become detainees?

When asked why they could not enter, the security personnel said that it was private property and they were guarding the interests of the contractors.

They also told them that no visitors were allowed at night time and that they would otherwise need to have a letter from the contractor to enter.

NONEHowever, according to Lim, he had freely entered the area prior to the expose on the palace project by The Star on Sunday.

About 30 minutes into the verbal altercation, the group was approached by several men who asked them why they were "creating trouble".

"Tian Chua, you want to cause problems here too? You can't even handle Batu," they jeered, but refused to reveal their identities when asked by the lawyers.

Malaysiakini was later told by a man who claimed to be their leader that he was a security contractor for the project and that the men are his workers.

hindraf probed by police 141008 latheefa koyaSpeaking to reporters later, lawyer Latheefa Koya (left) said that the group was invited by some of the workers to come tonight to speak to their workmates who are facing similar hardships.

"What is happening in there that they are trying to cover up? Are they turning these workers into detainees?" she asked.

She also expressed doubt that the workers have been paid the wages owed to them as alleged by the contractor.

"The amount that needs to be paid to all workers amount to up to RM7 million, so I wonder really if this payment has been made in the past few days since the news got out," she said.

She added that there is reason to believe that the police were hand in glove with the contractors as no charges have been made against them for allegedly hiring illegal migrant workers.

She said that the police are aware of this as their clients have complained of being raided sometimes up to five times a month.

"Our clients tell us that the police raid the site and take 50 to 100 of them, documented or otherwise, to the Travers police station.

"Then the police will contact their friends who were not detained, and ask them to fork out RM1,500 per head before the workers would be released," she said.

'Palace of Tears'

She added that the lawyers have lodged a police report against the contractors on behalf of the workers, and that they have been told that the matter will be brought to the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission.

snakes pc 210307 n surendranFellow lawyer N Surendran (right) added that the matter is of grave concern particularly as there are babies and young children who are currently living in poor conditions.

"One of our clients said he has a week-old baby and has had to borrow milk formula from others because he does not have enough money to buy some," he said, dubbing the project the 'Palace of Tears'.

Asked of their next course of action, the lawyers said that they will continue efforts to gain access to the workers, while Chua said that the matter will be raised again in Parliament.

"We will urge the works minister, human resources minister and home minister to make a site visit to see for themselves the situation here," he said.

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