

Suhakam barred from entering new palace site
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The Human Rights Commission (Suhakam) was barred from entering the construction site of the new palace last night, when it attempted to investigate reports about the deplorable living conditions of migrant workers.

new istana palaceAccording to commissioner Muhammad Sha'ani Abdullah, the party of four - including two Suhakam officers and commissioner James Nayagam - was stopped by security guards.

The team was told it had to get permission from the contractors to enter the site at night.

"We have (since) called (contractor) Maya Maju Sdn Bhd and were told to write in to the chairperson. We sent a letter to him this morning to say that we will be visiting tonight at 9pm but have yet to receive a reply," he said when contacted.

He added that the commission had decided to inspect the site following a public outcry on the working and living conditions of the workers, as reported by Star on June 27.

Chief among Suhakam's concerns are reports that children are living in cramped and dirty conditions, and that they are deprived of basic nutrition, he said.

"Even if no formal complaint has been lodged, we are mandated and duty-bound to make sure that no human rights abuses are taking place," he said.

He added that they are also concerned over contradictory reports over the number of workers living on site, with some reports saying up to a thousand people.

Permission needed

Muhammad Sha'ani also slammed Works Minister Shaziman Abu Mansor for giving a "too simplistic" answer on the matter yesterday.

"We cannot just accept his answer that the matter is resolved, we have to go see it for ourselves," he said.

Contacted later, Muhammad Sha'ani said that the contractor had replied to say that they will not be allowed entry to the site tonight.

"They said that our applications is too rushed, and that they require permission from the Works Ministry and the Royal Palace because it is a restricted security area.

"We will fax a letter to the Works Ministry tomorrow to allow us access and to request for CIDB's report," he said.

Shaziman had yesterday said that all foreign labourers involved in the palace construction have been paid their back wages.

He also said the Construction Industry Development Board (CIDB) has submitted a report to the government on the matter, and all things appear to be in order.

Suhakam's visit follows a likewise unsuccessful attempt by parliamentarians and NGOs last Friday.

Media reports on the issue has received a backlash from Senator Ezam Mohd Nor and Malay rights NGO Perkasa, who claim that the reports undermined the royal institution.

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