

**Suhakam palace probe: PWD to decide**  
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The ball is now in the Public Works Department's court as Malaysian Human Rights Commission (Suhakam) awaits permission to enter the new palace construction to probe alleged abuse of migrant workers.

"We sent the letter to the Public Works Department Director General (Judin Abdul Karim) this morning, and are awaiting a response," said commissioner Muhammad Sha'ani Abdullah when contacted.

The department has confirmed receipt and told Malaysiakini that it will respond "hopefully within one week, or as soon as possible".

new istana palace This follows Works Minister Shaziman Abu Mansor statement yesterday, saying that he will instruct the department to cooperate with the human rights body.

"My ministry has no problems where this matter is concerned. It will be beneficial to all parties," he reportedly told Bernama after opening Bachok Umno's annual general meeting.

He, however, said that the commission must first formally notify the ministry of its intention to investigate.

Suhakam had yesterday morning faxed a letter to the Works Ministry to win approval to enter the site, following the rejection of a similar request to the contractor Maya Maju Sdn Bhd.

The commission was barred entry to the site on Monday night.

In their reply, Maya Maju claimed that Suhakam's request was rejected as it was "rushed", and that prior approval must be sought from the relevant ministries and palace officials for security reasons.

Suhakam had intended to inspect the site after allegations of unpaid wages and deplorable working living conditions surfaced.

Shaziman had on Monday said that everything was in order as all backdated wages had been paid.

The issue caught public attention after a report by the Star on June 27, provoked Senator Ezam Mohd Noor's ire, who claimed that the expose undermined the royal institution.

A similar claim was made by Malay rights group, NGO Perkasa , which lodged a police report against the daily and Malaysiakini for reporting on the matter.