

MP shows proof of minors at new palace building site
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Segambut parliamentarian Lim Lip Eng has produced evidence that children are living at the new palace construction site directly contradicting the claim by the Malaysian Human Rights Commission (Suhakam) that there are no minors at the work site.

Showing photos taken during his visit to the site on June 21 and 24 with journalists, Lim (below, facing camera) said he had seen two NONEinfants and a toddler aged around two years living there with their Indonesian parents who worked on site.

"But the workers told us that there are about 10 more babies of a few months age living there too," he told a press conference at his service centre this morning.

"Now that the matter is public, I hope Suhakam will contact me immediately to assist them in further investigations," Lim added.

Later this evening, Lim tweeted that he had received a call from Suhakam but could not attend to them then as he was in a meeting with the Kuala Lumpur mayor.

The new evidence refutes Suhakam's earlier claim that they found no children during their official on-site inspection on July 15. The inspection was held to investigate claims that workers at the new palace site were not being paid by the sub-contractors.

Commissioner Muhammad Sha'ani Abdullah, after conducting the inspection on Tuesday, had said the commission did not see any children on site.

Security lapse

Lim charged that the unreliable findings by the human rights watchdog only went to prove its 'redundancy'.

"Their findings were delayed because they were barred, showing that they do not have much powers.

"I suggest that the commissioners resign en bloc and Suhakam be closed down and their office be used to provide childcare facilities or housing for the workers," he said.

NONELim's assistant - Khairuddin Karim (right) - who accompanied him on the site visit said the children lived in cramped conditions with several adults sharing a container cabin measuring about 48 square feet.

He said the cabins had no ventilation and were located close piling rubbish. "Children should not be allowed into construction sites, let alone live there," he said.

Lim said that prior to media reports on the workers' plight, the back entrance to the site was completely unsecured while his 'entourage of a lorry and cars' passed through the front gate with just a cursory wave from the guards.

This, he said, was reason enough for the government to stop the new palace project as security during construction was one of the main concerns so much so of the contract was awarded through direct negotiations.

"The government has every right to terminate the contract as there has a been a breach of the fundamental clause," he said.

Suhakam initially barred

Security today, however, had been tightened with the back entrance completely sealed and several visitors stopped.

NONE "I have tried to go back a few times but I have been stopped by police, guards and 'gangster-looking' people," Lim claimed.

The controversy over the workers came to light when English-language daily The Star reported on June 27 that about 1,000 Indonesian workers hired to build the RM800 million Istana Negara have yet to receive their wages from some sub-contractors.

Main contractor Maya Maju Sdn Bhd had claimed earlier that it was the responsibility of the sub-contractors to pay their workers.

Following a public outcry, Suhakam visited the site on July 5 to look into the workers' plight as well as claims that children were living there in cramped and dirty conditions, deprived of basic nutrition.

new istana palace They were, however, barred from entering and had to return on July 15 when they were allowed in. It was later reported that they found no evidence of abuse against the migrant workers.

However, the commission did not discount the possibility that abuses could have occurred, as their inspection was not conducted immediately.

"We went to investigate the report of non-payment of salary, but were unable to actually get reliable information because the inspection was so delayed.

"We will write to the relevant agencies to facilitate such future inspections without delays," said commissioner Muhammad Sha'ani Abdullah.

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