

Lenggeng detainees in a state of tension
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Overcrowding in the Lenggeng immigration depot - scene of a riot last weekend - is causing the foreign detainees held there to be in a 'state of tension', said Suhakam commissioner N Sivasubramaniam today.

suhakam lenggeng camp visit 240408 03At the time of the riot, the facility was bursting at its seams with 1,090 detainees from 14 countries and suffered from chronic disruptions of water supply - two to three times a month - each disruption lasting for up to three days.

The human rights commissioner came to these preliminary findings following a visit to the detention centre this morning.

The riot occurred last Sunday in which about 60 detainees reportedly tried to pull down the perimeter fence and afterwards torched an administration building.

"Too many detainees, their accommodation, their food, management of these detainees, water supply. These are the root issues," Siva told a press conference at the depot after the visit.

Inexperienced personnel

Citing newspaper reports, Siva conceded that a number of the 17 depots, including Lenggeng, were veritable 'time bombs'.

On the dire lack of personnel to manage and guard the facility, Siva said out of a total of 208 positions that are supposed to be filled by Immigration Department personnel, only 40 posts have been taken.

lenggeng detention camp myanmar burmese detainees incarcerated 220408Of these, many of them were fresh from their recruitment interviews, he said.

"They recently came from their (respective) villages or city homes and posted here, without enough training to manage certain situations (when they arise)," said Siva.

While the detainees did indeed hold a hunger strike on April 3, Siva said Suhakam has yet to be presented with evidence of any physical abuse of the detainees by voluntary law enforcement corps Rela personnel who are guarding the depot.

"There was a hunger strike, (but it was) generally because of their living conditions," he said.

"At this time, there is no evidence (of beatings). But if we can be given evidence, we will investigate," he said.

He also said there was no evidence to suggest any such beatings led to Sunday's riot.

"We don't want to make assumptions about this case because it is currently being investigated by the police," he added.

suhakam lenggeng camp visit 240408 04(Siva later told Malaysiakini that Suhakam was "taking the claim (of assaults) seriously" and called for any parties with information on the matter to come forward.)

He noted, however, that there was a lot of "suspicions" on the part of the detainees towards Rela personnel guarding the depot because the former felt the Rela guards were "the same people who caught them in the first place".

"Rela personnel are good intentioned when carrying out their tasks. It is the perception towards them (that needs to be redressed)," he said.

Make drastic changes

Since the riot, said Siva, the authorities have moved the male detainees to several other depots and this has alleviated the immediate stresses on the facility.

The incident, nevertheless, accords the opportunity for all quarters responsible to come together to address the overall issues and problems that have plagued immigration depots, he said.

suhakam lenggeng camp visit 240408 01"We can only overcome this situation by getting assistance and support from all parties involved. This is incident opportunity to make drastic changes," said Siva.

For this purpose, Suhakam hopes to have a roundtable discussion with representatives from the Home Ministry, Rela, Immigration Department as well as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

Negeri Sembilan police had earlier suggested that among the reasons for Monday's riot was that the detainees were angry at the authorities after their application for resettlement to a third country had been denied.

Met after the press conference, depot commandant Abdul Aziz Mansur denied the detainees are violently treated by either Rela personnel or immigration officers.

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