

Riot won't do permanent harm to S'pore: Chuan-Jin

Republic remains compelling for investors; foreign workers still want to work here

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LAST Sunday's riot in Little India was bad news for Singapore, known to be a safe oasis for business, but it will not do permanent harm to the country's image, Acting Minister for Manpower Tan Chuan-Jin has said.

Singapore remains a compelling investment destination, foreign workers still want to work here, he said in a media interview.

"The economy continues to be relatively strong. Yes, we have tightened (the inflow of foreign workers), but the value proposition of Singapore goes beyond its workforce."

He said foreign investors are drawn here also because Singa-



pore is a financial hub, has a strong legal infrastructure, is well-connected with the world and offers a good living environment.

It also remains a safe place, he added.

The riot has to be seen in the proper context; talk that it was fanned by deeper resentments of

ill-treatment is overblown, he said, and referred to the feedback his ministry has received from workers and to the results of a recent survey it did.

Mr Tan said that the number of complaints his ministry has dealt with this year – 3,700, out of a foreign workforce of 1.1 million – was too small to suggest that

MR TAN

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PHOTO: ARTHUR LEE

discontent among foreign workers was widespread and deep-seated.

Most complaints are minor and settled within a month, he said.

The Ministry of Manpower (MOM) survey of 3,500 foreign workers – 3,000 work permit holders and 500 S Pass holders – found nine in 10 relatively happy with life here. Seven in 10 said they would still recommend their family and friends to come and work here, and 80 per cent of them said they would want to continue working here.

Mr Tan said many of Sunday's rioters were foreign workers from South Asia, but that there was no move to clamp down on hiring

from there. This was a concern raised during dialogue and outreach sessions organised since the riot.

The minister said many of the workers denounced last Sunday's violence, which was apparently sparked off by a fatal road accident involving an Indian worker.

"Many of them are shocked at what happened, and this is not an action that represents the community," he said. "I think it would be wrong for us to conclude that, and it would be inappropriate for us as a nation to look at it that way."

South Asian workers have contributed significantly to Singapore and have "made a difference to our lives" in their own ways, he said.

The riot was certainly very serious and should not be taken lightly, he said, adding: "But I don't believe that we should generalise and therefore label all South Asian foreign workers as being of the same ilk. It doesn't represent that at all."

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