

## **Jails readied for hundreds of migrants; Tamils Nearing B.C.; Unclear where boat children will be housed**

National Post  
Wed Aug 11 2010  
Page: A4  
Section: Canada  
Byline: Kathryn Blaze Carlson  
Source: National Post

Upward of 250 male and female Tamil migrants will likely spend several months in a pair of overcrowded jails in Metro Vancouver, according to municipal and corrections sources who have been briefed on the imminent arrival of a vessel bound for British Columbia.

Wardens at the Alouette Correctional Centre for Women and the Fraser Regional Correctional Centre -- which for three months last fall hosted 76 Tamil migrants who arrived in Canada aboard the Ocean Lady--told the District of Maple Ridge late last week that "somewhere in the order of 80 females and 100

males" would soon arrive at the facilities, a spokesperson for the district said.

Union officials said yesterday children may be aboard the vessel as well, but it was unclear where they would be housed.

"Basically, we were told that the RCMP and Canadian Border Services would be boarding the vessel somewhere offshore either [yesterday] or [today], and that the vessel would end up in Victoria," said Maple Ridge spokesman John Leeburn. "It's a goodneighbour policy -- prisons are in our town, so the prison wardens just give us the heads up that we'll have some guests coming to stay, so to speak."

Mr. Leeburn said the district was told the prospective asylum seekers would likely be housed at the two facilities for somewhere between two and four months.

Dean Purdy, chairman of corrections for the B.C. Government and Service Employees Union, said it is a "real possibility" that the prospective male refugees will be absorbed into Maple Ridge's Fraser centre, which has living units that each hold 18 to 28 men.

"It wouldn't be unrealistic to have them processed again at the Vancouver Island Regional Correctional Centre and then moved to the Fraser Regional Correctional Centre," Mr. Purdy said, referring to the migrants reportedly aboard the MV Sun Sea, a suspected people-smuggling cargo ship that was last spotted off the coast of Guatemala.

Mr. Purdy said the union has heard that, unlike the Ocean Lady which carried only men, there is likely a mix of men, women, and "even children" aboard the MV Sun Sea. The possibility of children marks an "unprecedented" twist that could prove tricky for officials, he said.

"I suppose children could be placed in a youth detention centre or social services, but we just don't know at this point," he said. "I guess the big question is that, if there are families involved, would they be separated from their parents?... I don't think this is something we've been up against before."

Due to privacy and security concerns, and because of so many variables, a spokesman for B.C. Corrections said he could not confirm where the migrants will be processed and then housed while they are vetted by immigration authorities.

However, Jess Gunnarson did say the department is "really quite confident that it can ramp up" to accommodate those reportedly aboard the 59-metre Thai vessel, which Canadian authorities have been monitoring throughout the summer and which may be carrying members of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam -- a terrorist group outlawed in Canada.

"Everything will be dependent on the numbers of people we're dealing with and the backgrounds of those people, but of course we'll ensure that the security of the centres is maintained," Mr. Gunnarson said. "And we'll take care of all health needs, and make sure they have food and are appropriately clothed."

But Mr. Purdy said the union is "concerned about overcrowding no matter where [the migrants] end up" because all nine of the province's correctional facilities are "operating at close to 200% above capacity" -- including the Alouette facility, the Fraser centre and the Vancouver Island centre, where Ocean Lady migrants were first processed before being bused to the Fraser facility last fall.

The Fraser centre was built for 254 people but averages roughly double that number, Mr. Purdy said, adding that corrections officials have most likely considered adding portables or trailers within secure areas of the institutions.

"Hosting an additional 250 or more people when the prisons are already bursting at their seams is unrealistic," he said. "We'll be monitoring the situation to ensure the safety of our members and the refugees."

kcarlson@nationalpost.com