

9 human traffickers nabbed

Friday, 31 July 2009

9 human traffickers nabbed By pekwan Created Tuesday, July 21st Tuesday, July 21st, 2009 07:38:00 [1]

RAH MAN: Unaware of the arrests POLICE have arrested nine people for alleged involvement in an international human trafficking ring. Five senior Johor Immigration Department officers were among those arrested. The suspects were believed to have received payment for the 'sale' of Rohingya refugees, as forced labour in the fisheries industry. Contacted by Malay Mail yesterday, Immigration Department director-general, Abdul Rahman Othman said he was unaware of the arrests. He maintained that the Immigration Department had set up internal investigations into the alleged involvement of its officers

"We have always been cooperating with police to curb this problem. We have had our sights on officers at the Malaysian-Thailand border as we don't want this kind of act tarnishing our image," he said. Bukit Aman CID director Datuk Seri Mohd Bakri Mohd Zinin told the media yesterday that the arrests came about after police received a report in March about the possible involvement of immigration officers in human trafficking. Bakri said the suspects - aged between 25 and 40 - were arrested last Friday at various locations in Johor Bahru. "Besides the five senior immigration enforcement officers, police also detained four others who were working as drivers for the department." These suspects have allegedly been aiding a syndicate transporting immigrants - mostly Rohingyas from Myanmar - to the northern States of Peninsular Malaysia. "The syndicate has been active for about a year," Bakri said. He said that an immigrant would usually pay between RM300 and RM2,000 to the local syndicate to manage his entry via Perlis or Kelantan. "If the immigrants cannot pay the fees, they are forced into labour at some fishery operations." The suspects are under police remand until July 24 and police are also pursuing other syndicate members. "We have not ruled out the possibility that the suspects could also be involved in document forgery," Bakri said. The crackdown against human trafficking was triggered by a stinging report by the US earlier this year that Malaysia was not doing enough to address human trafficking in the country. The US State Department had, in its annual Trafficking in Persons (TIP) report, placed Malaysia with Zimbabwe, Cuba and North Korea, among others, on the list of worst offenders for human trafficking. The TIP report also referred to another report by the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee three months ago, which accused Malaysian Immigration officers of selling Myanmar refugees for about US\$200 (RM700) a person to traffickers operating along Thailand's southern border. The Prosecution Unit head at the Attorney-General's Chambers, Tun Abdul Majid Tun Hamzah, had then said errant immigration officers, in various locations in Peninsular Malaysia, face prosecution for their role in the activity. He had said investigations into their activities were ongoing and "it was just a matter of time" before they were hauled up.