

Malaysian Officers Held over Burmese Migrant Sale

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KUALA LUMPUR — Malaysian authorities have arrested five immigration officers suspected of selling illegal immigrants from Burma to human traffickers, police said Tuesday. It is the first time Malaysia has found evidence that government officials were involved in the forced labor exploitation of Burmese migrants at its border with Thailand—an accusation that prompted the US State Department to put Malaysia on a list of top trafficking offenders last month.

Police federal crimes investigation head Mohamad Bakri Zinin said authorities have arrested five Immigration Department officers and four bus drivers over the past five days. Investigations showed the officers brought Burmese migrants—who lived in Malaysia without valid travel documents—to Malaysia's northern border with Thailand and handed them to human traffickers in exchange for up to 600 ringgit (\$170) for each. The traffickers took the migrants into Thailand and told them to pay 2,000 ringgit (\$570) each for their freedom or they would be forced to work in the fishing industry, Mohamad Bakri said. "These things really happen," Mohamad Bakri said. All nine arrested could be charged for profiting from the exploitation of trafficked persons, he said. The bus drivers allegedly helped transport the migrants to the border.

If convicted, they face up to 15 years in prison. The officers arrested were reportedly senior state-level personnel. Immigration officials could not immediately be reached for comment. In April, a report by the US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations said illegal Burmese migrants deported from Malaysia have been forced to work in brothels, fishing boats and restaurants across the border in Thailand if they had no money to buy their freedom. The US State Department recommended that Malaysia fully implement and enforce its anti-trafficking laws—which have been in place for several years—and increase prosecutions, convictions and sentences for trafficking. The United Nations refugee agency has registered more than 48,000 refugees in Malaysia, most from Burma. But community leaders estimate the number of people from military-ruled Burma living in Malaysia is about twice that.