



Thailand arrests trafficker suspected of enslaving hundreds

A team of Thai police and investigators arrested a suspected human trafficker from Myanmar last week who allegedly sold hundreds of migrants from his country into modern-day slavery in Thailand's **fishing industry** and murdered several others. Police are seeking cooperation from their counterparts in Myanmar and said more arrests may soon be made.



The alleged trafficker, 42-year-old KoMyo, had been running a notorious people smuggling ring in Thailand for a decade before his arrest, according to police. He was apprehended in a raid in southern SuratThani province. Police General ChavalitSawangpuech said KoMyo would be charged with human trafficking and an investigation is underway into his suspected involvement in the rape and murder of an ethnic Karen woman from Myanmar in Trang province in March.

Thailand's government and security forces have been stepping up efforts to combat human trafficking after accusations by human rights groups that the Kingdom is a regional hub for this particular transnational crime. Thailand has long porous borders with Myanmar, Laos and Cambodia, all of which are economically less developed, and so the Kingdom is a magnet for migrants who often fall victim to trafficking gangs.

A report by the London-based Environmental Justice Foundation, in which more than a dozen trafficking victims in Trang province were interviewed, identified KoMyo as the area's primary trafficker responsible for the torture and murder of individuals who attempted to escape from captivity.

An official with the Myanmar Association of Thailand said that KoMyo had been operating with impunity in Thailand for more than a decade. Myanmar Embassy officials had similar information.

"KoMyo's ring trafficked an **estimated 700** people from Burma into Thailand and sold them to fishing boats and he apparently killed those who refused to be sold. The murders were committed at his home and on the boats. He kept the blood stains of his victims on his house's wall as well as the ropes he used to hang them with dangling from the ceiling to show as example for the newcomers," NaingHtun, a labor attaché with the Myanmar embassy in Bangkok told the Democratic Voice of Burma (DVB), **a website and radio station** based in Norway.

The DVB reported thatKoMyo and his gang are suspected of involvement in at least 40 murders. His arrest came after two of his lieutenants were captured in Thailand over the past month.