

## **PM pledges to hunt down culprits behind Perlis mass graves**

**Malay Mail Online**

**May 25, 2015**

KUALA LUMPUR, May 25 — Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak vowed today to find those responsible for the mass graves in Perlis where hundreds of dead Bangladeshi and Rohingya immigrants were found buried by the police earlier this month.

The leader took to his Twitter account to express concern over the discovery.

“I am deeply concerned with graves found on Malaysian soil purportedly connected to people smuggling. We will find those responsible,” he wrote via his Twitter handle @najibrazak.

After the Home Ministry denied the existence of human trafficking camps in Malaysia, police found about 30 graves believed to contain hundreds of Rohingya and Bangladeshi corpses earlier this month, according to *Utusan Malaysia* yesterday.

The paper’s Sunday edition, *Mingguan Malaysia*, reported that the graves were found in forests in Padang Besar and Wang Kelian, and are believed to be linked to the mass graves found previously in Songkhla, Thailand, from which Thai authorities had exhumed 26 bodies likely to be of migrants from Myanmar and Bangladesh.

The newspaper also reported that several foreigners and local villagers were arrested under the Anti-Trafficking in Persons and Anti-Smuggling of Migrants Act 2007 on suspicion of bringing in the migrants.

A source told *Mingguan Malaysia* that some among the villagers arrested comprised businessmen from Wang Kelian who were desperate to find a source of income following a drop in tourism because of the enforcement of passport controls for border crossings.

After the report, Home Minister Datuk Seri Ahmad Zahid Hamidi was quoted in Bernama as confirming the find and that police were still identifying the bodies.

He added that each grave could contain up to four bodies.

Home Ministry secretary-general Datuk Alwi Ibrahim was reported on May 11 as saying that investigations have not shown any human trafficking camps or graves of the Rohingya located in Malaysia.

US news channel CNN reported on May 6 advocacy group Human Rights Watch as saying that according to police reports, the victims who were found in the graves in southern Thailand had starved to death or died of disease while being held by traffickers awaiting payment of ransoms.

Bangladesh-based newspaper *The Daily Star* reported earlier this month that at least 250,000 Bangladeshis have been held in the jungles of Thailand for ransom over the past eight years, squeezing their families of anything between TK200,000 (RM33,153) to TK350,000 Bangladeshi Taka for each captive.

A Thai crackdown on trafficking following the discovery of the graves in southern Thailand have led traffickers to abandon ship, leaving thousands of Rohingya refugees fleeing persecution in Myanmar and Bangladeshi migrants stranded in the Andaman Sea.

Malaysia and Indonesia agreed last Wednesday to provide humanitarian assistance to the 7,000 migrants still adrift at sea, including offering temporary shelter, provided that the international community takes steps to repatriate them within a year.

Human trafficking activity also put Malaysia on a US watchlist for slavery last year.

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