

Thais Sympathise With Plight Of Rohingya Refugees

Bernama

May 29, 2015

By Nik Nurfaqih Nik Wil & Samantha Tan Chiew Ting

KANGAR, May 29 (Bernama) -- "My father and mother have been killed, help me."

Despite the language barrier, a Thai trader who only wanted to be known as Sharifah, in her 40s, could understand the plight of a Rohingya man who went to her sundry shop in Wang Kelian about a year ago.

Sharifah said the man, in his late 20s, was believed to be a human trafficking victims who had climbed down the hills behind her shop, looking dishevelled, wearing worn-out clothes and limping, making the hand signal indicating a slit throat, and saying what sounded like 'Ma' and 'Pa'.

"At that time, my shop was at the border next to Malaysia, in Wang Kelian, near the hilly area (where graves of suspected human trafficking victims were found).

"He came, just looking for a place to perform his prayers. After that, I did not know where he went," Sharifah told Bernama when met in Wang Pratchan, Thailand, at the Malaysia-Thai border, near here today.

Sharifah who spoke fluent Malay said that was not the first time a Rohingya was seen in her area.

"Before Ramadan last year, they came down the hills across from where the graves were found. They came looking for banana leaves, he said to be made into food," she said.

In fact, Sharifah said hesitantly, about a month ago, a Rohingya family of five were found in a mosque in her village in Thailand, about 20 kilometres from the border.

Asked why she was nervous giving the information, Sharifah said she was worried if it would cause problems to her or her family.

"I do not know what will happen, I am worried....worried about talking, worried about helping them because we know what happened to the family of the Rohingya man I met last year. They are also Muslims, like our own brothers," she said.

On Monday, Inspector-General of Police Tan Sri Khalid Abu Bakar announced the discovery of 139 graves and transit camps abandoned by a human trafficking syndicate in Wang Kelian near the Malaysia-Thai border.

Meanwhile, another Thai trader who only wanted to be known as Murad, 55, also shared similar sentiments.

A trader in the same area as Sharifah since the last 20 years, Murad said they were also wondering what really happened to the Rohingya migrants who often turned up in their area.

"We guessed something was not right, but could not do anything. Most of us traders sympathised with those in the jungle. They had to live in the hills without food and clean water for months," he said.

Murad added that based on what he heard, most of the Rohingya migrants had been tricked by employment agents.

He claimed those in the Thai-Malaysia border area in Wang Prachan and Wang Kelian had been brought via the Andaman Sea, about 47 km away," he said.

"This is the nearest to the Thai-Malaysia border, after passing through Kawthaung (Myanmar) to Ranong (Thailand)-Phuket-Phang Nga-Krabi-Trang-Satun," he said.

He added that the boats which brought the human trafficking victims would often survey the sea conditions, choosing the months of November to May when the waters were calmer.

"As soon as they reached the waters off Satun, the victims would be brought in through jungle routes in order to escape checks by the authorities.

"The journey starts at Wang Park (Thai jungle), head to Wang Prachan and Wang Kelian for about 40 km. I think they had to spend about three months in the jungles," Murad added.

-- BERNAMA

Copyright © 2015 BERNAMA

Source : <http://www.bernama.com/bernama/v8/newsindex.php?id=1139521>