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IN THE NEWS
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TRAFFICKING TRENDS AND DEVELOPMENTS

CAMBODIA

- Cambodia’s Foreign Ministry confirmed that Indonesian authorities had rescued 17 Cambodian migrants enslaved aboard two Thai vessels illegally fishing the archipelago nation’s waters.
- Two young Cham women trafficked into the Malaysian sex trade were repatriated to Cambodia. The case made headlines after the opposition leader championed their case at the National Assembly. The women were returned to Cambodia four months after being lured to Malaysia by a job broker who promised garment factory work paying $500 a month.
- On the 28th of February, anti-human trafficking officials arrested a woman at the Phnom Penh International Airport who was allegedly in the process of trafficking five women – one of them underage – into sex slavery in Malaysia.
- Cambodian Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training organised a multi-stakeholder workshop entitled “Towards Increased Effectiveness of Regular Migration Channels between Cambodia and Thailand” in February. The objectives were to present findings and recommendations from
research, and for consultations on how the agreement between the two countries can be made more effective in meeting its objectives.

CHINA

- Chinese police rescued 177 Myanmar women and children after recently dismantling a large human trafficking organization. 37 suspects were arrested. Police in Dehong Prefecture in southwest China's Yunnan Province said they began investigating the case last August after receiving reports that a trafficking network was moving women from Myanmar to central China's Henan Province and east China's Shandong Province. The investigation found that most of the trafficked women had been promised work, but were forced into signing marriage agreements upon their arrival in China.

LAO PDR

- Following several human trafficking crackdowns in January and February, Lao and Thai immigration officials are increasing their scrutiny at the border checkpoint, and have introduced a ban on entry of unaccompanied under-aged Lao girls into Thailand.
- The drafting of the new human trafficking legislation continues - the Ministry of Public Security held a consultation meeting with representatives from a number of government ministries and representatives from the Lao National Youth Union and members of the Supreme Court.
- The International Labour Organization joined with the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare to conduct a workshop focused on pre-departure training for migrant workers leaving Laos for employment in other countries.

MYANMAR

- The Myanmar embassy in Bangkok is making preparations to handle 600,000 applications from workers and their dependents after the Myanmar government launched a scheme to issue regular passports to migrant workers living in Thailand.
- The National COMMIT Youth Forum was held in Yangon in February. Organized by World Vision Myanmar in collaboration with partner organisations and with support from UN-ACT, 20 youth from different parts of Myanmar attended. They discussed the situation of human trafficking in their communities, root causes and current prevention activities. Based on that, they developed advocacy messages through presentations, theatre and visual arts. 5 youth representatives were selected to attend the upcoming Regional COMMIT Youth Forum

THAILAND

- On 31 January, the government launched a press conference on Thailand’s TIP Country Report 2014. Key achievements, which were highlighted in the report, are integrated policies and coordination, registration of 1.6 million illegal migrant workers, amendment of laws and policies and 24-hour hotlines. Nevertheless, media and international NGOs gave some critical comments on the report, whether the real anti-trafficking progress has been made.
- In response to continued reports of human trafficking and smuggling of Rohingya in the southern part of Thailand, the Royal Thai Navy in Phuket has announced that it will lead five
other local government departments in cracking down on illegal activities, both onshore and offshore, especially the trafficking of foreigners arriving by boat.

- Bangladesh Ambassador to Thailand Saida Muna Tasneem has put emphasis on expediting the signing of a memorandum of understanding (MoU) between Bangladesh and Thailand at the earliest for recruitment of Bangladeshi fishery and construction workers in Thai industries.
- The Marine Department has expedited its implementation on the fishing boat registration and installation of GPS tracking devices in line with EU’s IUU regulations.

**VIETNAM**

- The annual UK-Vietnam Strategic Dialogue was held in Hanoi in February. The UK said that many foreigners, including a large number of Vietnamese young men and boys, have been trafficked into the UK and forced to work on illegal cannabis farms. The UK and Vietnam are working closely to break smuggling rings and raise awareness in rural communities about human trafficking. Both sides also discussed collaboration on measures to prevent modern slavery, cyber crime, money laundering, child exploitation, and human trafficking.
- In a joint investigation, the Metropolitan Police Department and the Chiba Police uncovered an operation run by 5 Vietnamese nationals trafficking Vietnamese people into Japan to work illegally on construction sites and in restaurants. Police are investigating allegations that the ring collected approximately 2.5 to 4 million yen from each of the illegal immigrants as “immigration fees,” netting over 100 million yen in total.
- Police in Ha Tinh Province in central Vietnam arrested four men who were caught trying to send 58 locals to work in China illegally. The men had charged the job seekers VND 6-8 million (US$280-380) each for transport and brokerage.

**IN THE NEWS**

**Reunions and ransoms: a day online in Myanmar’s Rohingya camps**
In this teeming camp for displaced Rohingya Muslims in western Myanmar, it’s easy to overlook the internet huts. The raw emotion they generate is much harder to ignore. The huts have bamboo walls, thatched roofs and - most importantly - dusty laptop computers that allow Rohingya to reestablish contact with relatives who have left on boats for Thailand and Malaysia. [Reuters](https://www.reuters.com/)

**Lao teens banned from entering Thailand**
Lao authorities have acknowledged Thailand’s decision to ban Lao youth below the age of 18 from entering the Kingdom alone. The move is aimed at combating transnational human trafficking. The tougher immigration stance by Thailand came after frequent reports in the Thai media of Lao girls, some under 18, caught in the sex industry. The Nation
'Human traffickers' nabbed
Provincial Police Region 8 yesterday announced the arrest of two suspected human traffickers in Surat Thani. Their gang reportedly had 121 bank accounts with money transactions worth Bt31 million. The men were wanted on charges of smuggling people from Myanmar into the Kingdom, harbouring these illegal workers, and human trafficking. The Nation

Crackdown in China targets parents who sell their kids
A father sold his three sons for 30,000 yuan ($$6,509) after contacting potential buyers before they were even born. The case in Zaoyang, Hubei province, was used by judges from the top court to highlight the increasing problem of parents who sell their children. The number of such cases has grown over the past few years, even though the total number of human trafficking offences has declined sharply, according to the judges. China Daily

Overfishing Driving Slavery on Thailand's Seafood Boats
Urine pools under a bed where an emaciated Burmese man lies wearing only a T-shirt and a diaper. As he struggles to sit up and steady himself, he tears at his thick, dark hair in agitation. He cannot walk and doesn't remember his family or even his own name. He speaks mostly gibberish in broken Indonesian — a language he learned while working in the country as a slave aboard a Thai fishing boat. The Irrawaddy

Indonesian police arrest suspected members of trafficking ring in Fiji
National Police investigators have arrested two suspects for allegedly running a human trafficking ring in Fiji. This marks the first recorded trafficking of Indonesian nationals to the south pacific island, said Adj Sr Comr Arie Dharmanto, the head of the human trafficking unit. The Straits Times

Human trafficking thrives where rule of law ends
Of the nearly 21 million victims of human trafficking worldwide, an estimated two-thirds are from Asia. Many factors contribute to the severity of the problem in Asia, but one stands out among the rest: the lack of rule of law. Poorly trained local law enforcement, inadequate legal protections, and corrupt judicial systems are at the root of human trafficking across Asia. Burmese Rohingya – an ethnic Muslim minority group – face extreme persecution from the government and military. The government does not recognize Rohingya as citizens of Burma. Because of their stateless status, Rohingya are excluded from the protections of the law, making them particularly vulnerable to trafficking. In 2013 alone, an estimated 40,000 Rohingya were victims of trafficking. The Diplomat
IPI World Congress in Burma Drops Human Trafficking, Rohingya Issue

The International Press Institute has quietly dropped human trafficking from the agenda at its World Congress in Burma (Myanmar) later this month, leaving the banned word "Rohingya" likely to remain unspoken by journalists in Yangon representing 120 countries. News of the change of heart by the highly-regarded Vienna-based organisation came a few days ago in an email to Phuketwan rescinding an invitation to reporter Chutima Sidasathian to speak. Phuketwan

US group to train police on human trafficking

A United States-based advisory group will today begin introducing a new victim-centred investigation approach to top brass in the police force’s anti-human trafficking unit, an official said. From March 10 to 13, the Warnath Group will lead a training workshop in Nay Pyi Taw as part of the United States-Myanmar Joint Plan on Trafficking in Persons. Myanmar Times

FEATURED PUBLICATION

Mekong trafficking report uncovers mental health, abuse issues

A study launched in Bangkok last month has revealed alarming levels of abuse and exploitation in a number of sectors in the Greater Mekong Sub-region, with nearly half of people in post-trafficking services having suffered physical and/or sexual abuse and one in six contemplating suicide within two weeks of entering care.

The study, commissioned and funded by the Anesvad Foundation with additional funding from the IOM Development Fund, and the UK Economic and Social Research Council, was carried out by the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine and the International Organization for Migration.

The study, which interviewed over 1,100 survivors, aims to fill critical gaps in the body of knowledge on the health risks and consequences of human trafficking, and improve protection and care services. To date, there has been very limited robust research on the health consequences of human trafficking, particularly for various forms of labour in the Greater Mekong Sub-region.
The ground-breaking report provides findings on health risks and physical and psychological consequences of men, women and children in post-trafficking services in Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam. Participants in the study included nationals from Cambodia, China, Lao PDR, Myanmar Thailand and Viet Nam.

Key findings include:

- Nearly half of trafficked persons experienced physical and/or sexual violence while trafficked
- Particularly high levels of physical and/or sexual violence were reported among those trafficked as brides, into the fishing industry, sex work and domestic servitude and begging;
- Hazardous working and living conditions were near universal;
- Over two-thirds of trafficked persons reported work seven days per week and an average of 13.8 hours per day. Fisherman reported an average of 18.8 hours, with some working up to 24 hours per day.
- Serious injuries were prevalent with one in five (21.9 per cent) of survivors reporting sustaining at least one serious work-related injury. Seven people reported losing a body part.
- Psychological distress and probable disorders were prevalent. Some 59.7 per cent of survivors had symptoms indicative of depression, 35.6 per cent exhibited systems of post-traumatic-stress disorder (PTSD) and 41.9 per cent

The report includes recommendations to national governments and regional bodies to improve health protection and response mechanisms for trafficked persons. It recommends provision of medical care should be an explicit component of all counter-trafficking policies and included in any package of care for trafficking survivors.

“Trafficking in human beings is a gross violation of human rights that often involves extreme exploitation and abuse,” said Jeff Labovitz, IOM Thailand’s Chief of Mission. “People are trafficked for various forms of exploitation, most frequently into low-skilled labour sectors and for forced labour and sexual exploitation. In these circumstances, trafficked persons are exposed to a multitude of health risks, including violence, deprivation and serious occupational hazards.”

To download the full report, click here.
Civil society prepares for the SOM IMM in April

The Civil Society Organisation Platform and the COMMIT Youth Forum are gearing up and preparing for participation in the COMMIT Senior Officials Meeting and Inter Ministerial Meeting at the end of April. Delegates for the Civil Society Platform are currently being selected by country consultations and youth representatives are being chosen by the votes of their peers at each National Youth Forum. The Youth Forums are taking place in the 6 Greater Mekong Subregion countries in the lead up to the Regional COMMIT Youth Forum, which will be held in Phnom Penh. 30 young people from Cambodia, China, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam will meet and share their experiences and achievements in preventing human trafficking and unsafe migration in their communities.

The delegates at the Youth Forum will work together to develop their own recommendations for anti-trafficking activities and will then have the opportunity to present their ideas to government officials and ministers during the COMMIT Senior Officials Meeting and the Inter-Ministerial Meeting, and make the case for government support for prevention activities carried out by young people.

The Civil Society Organisation Platform is a way for various anti-trafficking organisations to become more engaged with the COMMIT Process. Since 2004, UN agencies and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) have continued to support the COMMIT process, but up to this point CSOs have only had “observer” status and official participation has been limited. As the COMMIT process enters its second decade of implementation, there is recognition that CSOs have contributed significantly to anti-trafficking efforts, and that their engagement with the COMMIT process should be institutionalized. The fourth COMMIT Sub-regional Plan of Action commits to CSO will be engagement in implementation, and confirms that they will participate in COMMIT meetings at the national and regional levels going forward. The Platform seeks to convene anti-trafficking CSOs from the 6 countries and facilitate greater engagement with the COMMIT process.
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