

Three Burmese migrant workers who were held for ransom by human traffickers after being sold on to them by two Thai policemen were rescued by police from the same station in Thailand's capital, Bangkok yesterday afternoon.

The three; Byauk Owe, 18, Ko Kyaw, 30 and Maung Owe, 19, who worked at a canned fish factory in Bang Bon district, were arrested by two policemen while having stroll on Sunday evening. They were taken to the police station where they were asked to show identification.

May Thazin Oo, elder sister of Byauk Owe said they were sold by the police to two human traffickers for 8000 Baht [US \$260] each after they failed to show legal documents.

"The two policemen came on a bike – one of them was in uniform and the other in civilian clothing. They asked them to show their work permits but [the three] could only show them receipts for a medical check-up [part of the procedure in acquiring the legal migrant work permits] but the police tore them up and took them to Tha Kham police station," May Thazin Oo told *DVB*.

"When they arrived at the station, the policemen told them to contact their relatives but the three didn't have any phone numbers with them. The police then called two Burmese nationals they had connections with, who came and 'bailed' them out,"

The two Burmese who turned up were believed to have done police translating work before and have a broad local knowledge and had allegedly acted as middle men or informants for the police. As a result they were able to contact a family member.

Thazin Oo continues; "Then the two Burmese called us and told us to give ransom of 5000 Baht [US \$162] for each of them. We went and waited at the place they indicated but they didn't show up."

Meanwhile the three detainees were sold again to a Burmese national from the Mon ethnic

group, a human trafficker who again contacted the family and asked again for ransom, this time of 16,000 Baht [US \$520] for each person. The traffickers threatened to sell them to [sea fishing boats](#) if the family failed to give the ransom.

The family then contacted the police who followed with them to the appointment with the Mon traffickers and then arrested them and rescued the three detainees.

It turned out that the policemen who initially handed the three Burmese migrants to the two Burmese nationals were from the same police station who rescued them. May Thazin Oo said the police are showing photos of officials in the station to the three to identify the two policemen.

Such cases are believed to be widespread with the New York based Human Rights Watch recently telling the UN that; “Thai government officials and police, and private employers, enjoy widespread impunity in abusing the rights of Burmese.”

Migrant workers are estimated to make up 5% of the Thai workforce whilst accounting for some 7% of GDP, taking as they do some of the toughest and least desirable jobs. Their subjugation is a boon for employers but the Thai government has been attempting to put in place legislation to regularise migrant labour. This resulted in a [proposed plan](#) to force employers to buy private health insurance for migrants whilst Thai nationals enjoy the far superior government care. Rights groups were keen to point out that such discrimination in the work place is illegal under Thailand’s treaty obligations.

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