

A total of 63 Burmese illegal immigrants were arrested at sea near an island in Ranong province on Tuesday, said a senior naval officer said.

A patrol vessel of the Third Fleet, HTMS Khamron Sinthu, stopped a long-tail boat entering Thai waters near Koh Phayam in southern Ranong province early Tuesday.

The boat carried 63 Burmese - 48 men, 14 women and one child. They were arrested after they could not proper documents when asked.

The ship's commander, Capt Kongkrit Khongying, said his vessel took them all to a multipurpose pier in Ranong where they were handed over to local police and immigration officials.

Capt Kongkrit said human trafficking gangs had switched to smuggling illegal foreign workers via Koh Phayam after a military checkpoint was set up on Koh Saranee, locally known as Koh Pee, in the same province.

Long-tail boats were used to transport alien workers to Koh Khangkhao, which is a deserted island. The smugglers then sent fast boats to collect them and take them to Khura Buri district of Phangnga province.

They were then put in pick-up trucks and sent to work in big cities such as Bangkok, Samut Sakhon, Phuket and Songkhla's Hat Yai district, he said.

This month, the Third Fleet had arrested a total of 164 Burmese illegal immigrants in three separate operations off Ranong province, he said.

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