

About 4,000 fishermen stranded on Indonesian islands

Associated Press

JAKARTA, Indonesia — The number of foreign fishermen stranded on several remote eastern Indonesian islands has spiraled to 4,000, including some revealed in an Associated Press investigation to have been enslaved.

Many are migrant workers abandoned by their boat captains after the Indonesian government passed a moratorium on foreign fishing five months ago, according to the International Organization for Migration in Indonesia, which released the number Friday. However, others have been trapped on the islands for years, after being dumped by fishing boats or escaping into the jungle.

“This is the worst moment in our life right now,” one former slave told the AP, which is not releasing the names of the men for their safety. “It is even worse than being in hell. We have to work every day to survive. ... There is no hope for us anymore.”

The AP reported earlier this week that slaves — some of them beaten and locked in



AP Photo/APTN, Esther Htusan

This Nov 2014 image shows Ngwe Thein, 42, who has been living on an island near Benjina, Indonesia for three years, after being forced to work on a fishing trawler with inadequate food and little or no pay, he said.

cages — are forced to fish, and their catch ends up in the supply chains of American supermarkets and restaurants. The IOM said Friday that the report follows several years of close work with Indonesian authorities to rescue hundreds of fisherman identified as victims of trafficking in Indonesia.

However, for every man they’ve rescued, many more now need help. With the fishing ban, boats have docked or fled, ditching their crews.

“It is reasonable to expect

many are victims of trafficking, if not outright slavery,” said Steve Hamilton, IOM’s deputy chief of mission in Indonesia. “But for the first time in possibly several years their feet are touching dry land and there is a real possibility for them to go home, once we and the authorities locate and process them.”

About a quarter of the men are in Benjina, a town that straddles two islands in the Maluku chain, according to an Indonesian official who recently visited the area. These

men, some abandoned five, 10, even 20 years ago, load and unload fish off boats for food and pocket money, or cut and sell logs in the forest.

“We want to go back home,” one dockworker chimed in. “Our body is here but our mind is at home. If there is the possible way to walk back home, we would do it right away.”

Another wiped away tears as he spoke, his voice quivering.

“If someone died here, they don’t even value people’s life as a dog,” he said.

The moratorium was declared by Indonesia’s new Fisheries Minister, Susi Pudjiastuti, to determine which ships are not properly licensed and crack down on illegal foreign boats. Illegal fishing drains billions of dollars from the country, and Pudjiastuti said Friday that stamping it out is key to addressing labor abuses.

“We are not letting this happen,” she said. “In the past, it’s been a normal practice. Not now. I’m not allowing it.”

The Indonesian government has pledged to take le-

gal measures to address what is happening on Benjina and other islands. Thai Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha also acknowledged the AP story and said his government was stepping up efforts to prosecute those responsible.

“If they still continue to exploit their fellow human beings, they should not be given any licenses to operate businesses in Thailand, and they must receive the punishment they deserve,” Prayuth said in a written response to

questions submitted by the Bangkok Post.

However, earlier this week, Prayuth urged journalists not to report on human trafficking without considering how the news would affect the country’s seafood industry and reputation abroad. He also sarcastically suggested that journalists who ignored him might be executed; State Department spokesman Jeff Rathke said from Washington that the U.S. was troubled by the comment.

Italy’s highest court overturns Knox murder conviction

ROME (AP) — Italy’s highest court overturned the murder conviction against Amanda Knox and her ex-boyfriend Friday, bringing to a definitive end the high-profile case that captivated people on both sides of the Atlantic.

“Finished!” Knox’s lawyer Carlo Dalla Vedova exulted after the decision was read out. “It couldn’t be better than this.”

The decision by the supreme Court of Cassation is the final ruling in the case, ending the long legal battle waged by Knox and Italian co-defendant Raffaele Sollecito. Both Knox, who was awaiting the verdict in her hometown of Seattle, and Sollecito have long maintained their innocence in the death of British student Meredith Kercher.

The supreme Court of Cassation overturned last year’s convictions by a Florence appeals court, and declined to order another trial. The decision means the judges, after thoroughly examining the case, concluded that a conviction could not be supported by

the evidence.

Their reasoning will be released within 90 days.

Airline could face ‘unlimited’ damages for crash

STOCKHOLM (AP) — Lufthansa could face “unlimited” compensation claims for the crash that killed 150 people in the French alps and it would be difficult, even counterproductive, for the German carrier to try to avoid liability, experts said Friday.

Under a treaty governing deaths and injuries aboard international flights, airlines are required to compensate relatives of victims for proven damages of up to a limit currently set at about \$157,000 — regardless of what caused the crash.

But higher compensation is possible if a carrier is held liable.

“So more or less you will have unlimited financial damage,” said Marco Abate, a German aviation lawyer.

To avoid liability, a carrier has to prove that the crash wasn’t due to “negligence or other wrongful act” by its employees, according to Article 21 of the 1999 Montreal Convention.

Egyptian warships move into key strait off Yemen

SANAA, Yemen (AP) — As airstrikes in Yemen intensified on their second day Friday, Egypt and Saudi Arabia were considering an intervention on the ground, aimed at giving the president a secure foothold to return to the country, while backing Sunni tribesmen to fight against Shiite rebels and their allies, military officials said.

A likely entry point for troops from the Saudi-led Arab coalition was the southern port of Aden, the Yemeni and Egyptian military officials told The Associated Press. But that could be a tough prospect: The city is already a battleground, and on Friday forces loyal to the rebels’ top ally, former President

Ali Abdullah Saleh, were advancing toward it.

The officials’ comments to the AP draw broad outlines for the likely strategy for the ambitious campaign launched Thursday, led by Saudi Arabia with a major role by its ally Egypt. The aim, they said, was to carve out enough room for President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi, who was forced to flee the country from Aden, to return. Longer-term, the campaign aims to wear down the Shiite rebels, known as Houthis, and Saleh’s forces, enough to reach a power-sharing accord. The officials spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the plans.

“The credibility and legitimacy of President Hadi erode with every day he spends outside the country,” said one Yemeni military official.

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Holy Week Schedule

Holy Thursday: April 2 at 7:00 pm
Mass followed by adoration until Midnight

Good Friday: April 3 Day of Fasting at 2:30 pm Stations of the Cross, Veneration of the Cross and Communion,

Holy Saturday: April 4 Confessions from 7-7:30 pm Easter Vigil at 8:00 pm

Easter Sunday: April 5 - Mass at St. Helen's Pilot Rock at 8:00 am
Mass at St. Mary's Pendleton at 10:00 am More details: www.stmaryspendleton.org

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