

Captain arrested on boat believed to contain slave-caught fish

By Fakhruddin Gade, Margie Mason, and Robin McDowell
The Associated Press

SABANG, Indonesia — The Thai captain of a seized cargo ship carrying an estimated \$2 million worth of seafood has been arrested in Indonesia on suspicion of illegal fishing, in the latest development linked to an Associated Press investigation that uncovered a slave island earlier this year. At least one other crew member is still under scrutiny.

The massive Thai-owned *Silver Sea 2* was first identified by The AP in July through a high-resolution photo taken from space, showing slave-caught fish being loaded onto the refrigerated vessel in Papua New Guinea's waters. The AP then tracked the ship through its satellite beacon and informed Indonesian authorities when it crossed into their waters on its way home to Thailand.

The arrest is one of 10 made in Indonesia and Thailand since the investigation tied the catch of migrant workers forced to fish to the supply chains of major U.S. food sellers and pet food companies six months ago. As a result, more than 2,000 men from Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia, and Laos have been identified or sent home, a multi-million dollar Thai-Indonesian fishing business has been shut down, class action lawsuits have been filed, and new laws have been introduced.

While touring the *Silver Sea 2*, Indonesian fisheries minister Susi Pudjiastuti said she believed the frozen



fish filling up its holds came from eastern Indonesia's Arafura Sea, where foreign fishing vessels are banned. She also said authorities are looking further into evidence that suggests the ship may be linked to the human trafficking ring described by The AP. The *Silver Sea 2* is accused of receiving illegally-caught fish at sea and turning off its satellite beacon, and the remaining 16 crew members will be deported.

Pudjiastuti said she hoped anyone found guilty would face harsh punishment as a deterrent, and the vessel may be destroyed. Indonesia has already blown up dozens of smaller foreign boats accused of illegal fishing. The 2,285-ton ship is now at

a naval base in Sabang in the country's far northwestern tip.

"If the court decides it should be confiscated, then we will sink it," she said.

Silver Sea Reefer Co., which owns the *Silver Sea 2*, maintains it has done nothing wrong.

Thailand's fishing industry, worth \$7 billion a year in exports, relies on tens of thousands of poor migrant laborers who come seeking jobs mainly from neighboring countries. They often are tricked, sold, or kidnapped and put onto boats sent to distant foreign waters to poach fish. Refrigerated cargo ships are used to pick up seafood and sometimes transport new slaves, although no victims of trafficking were found on the *Silver Sea 2*.

Late last year, AP journalists saw slave-caught fish being loaded onto another reefer owned by Silver Sea in the Indonesian island village of Benjina,

CRIMINALS CAUGHT. *Silver Sea 2*, a Thai-owned cargo ship that was seized by Indonesian authorities, is seen docked at the port of Sabang, Aceh province, Indonesia. The Thai captain of the ship was arrested in Indonesia following allegations of illegal fishing, an official said. It is the latest development linked to an Associated Press investigation that uncovered a slave island earlier this year. (AP Photo/Heri Juanda)

where men were found locked in a cage asking to go home. In written surveys conducted with nearly 400 slaves who later were rescued, several also told The AP they were trafficked to Indonesia from Thailand aboard *Silver Sea* ships, including the *Silver Sea 2*.

The high-resolution photo taken from space for AP by U.S.-based commercial satellite imagery company DigitalGlobe showed the *Silver Sea 2* in Papua New Guinea with its holds open and a trawler tethered to each side, loading fish. Analysts identified the smaller boats as among those that fled Benjina earlier this year, crewed by enslaved men who said they were routinely beaten and forced to work nearly nonstop with little or no pay. Another Thai cargo ship was also impounded in Papua New Guinea after eight trafficking victims were found on board.

The AP's work was entered into the U.S. congressional record for a hearing, after links were made to the supply chains of American companies such as Wal-Mart, Sysco, Kroger, Fancy Feast, Meow Mix, and Iams. The businesses have all said they strongly condemn labor abuse and have taken steps to prevent it.

Mason reported from Jakarta, Indonesia and McDowell from Singapore. Associated Press videographer Vasapa Wanichwethin contributed to this report from Bangkok.

Serenity Now: Despite language barriers, kindness in Myanmar

By Kristi Eaton
The Associated Press

PINDAYA, Myanmar — The 77-year-old man didn't speak a word of English and my Burmese vocabulary was limited to thank you. Somehow, though, we were able to connect over an open fire in his tiny home in the mountains outside Pindaya, Myanmar.

I'd just finished trekking through the nearby jungle when my local guide told me we were stopping to eat lunch at the man's home. Wearing the traditional Burmese sarong known as a *longyi*, he asked me — or, more accurately, gestured to me — to write my name and nationality in his paper notebook beside the previous European visitors. He in turn wrote down his name in beautiful Burmese script on a torn sheet of paper for me. I asked my guide, who knew limited English, to help me translate it, but even my guide couldn't help. Instead, I had the man repeat his name over and over until I phonetically spelled it out in English. U Kah Poh.

The experience might have been frustrating for some people, but I enjoyed every minute of it. Just a few days before this encounter, I'd left a network of friends in Cambodia I had made over the previous six months in order to travel on my own



BEAUTY & KINDNESS. The view of Pindaya, Myanmar (also known as Burma) is seen from Shwe Oo Min Pagoda. Pindaya is known for its limestone caves that include more than 8,000 carvings and images of Buddha. Big, small, cracked, shiny, every imaginable type of statue is crammed into the cave, which is open to the public. (Kristi Eaton via AP)

for a few weeks before returning to the U.S. I was exhausted, second-guessing my life decisions and wondering if I had it in me to travel on my own for several weeks.

Then I arrived in Myanmar, a country I had wanted to visit since a nominally civilian government came into power a few years ago after decades of military rule. After flying into the largest city of Yangon, I took another flight up to the airport in Heho and then made the one-hour drive to Pindaya, a town located in Myanmar's Shan State, which is known for its limestone caves that include more than 8,000 carvings and images of Buddha. Big, small, cracked, shiny, every imaginable type of statue is crammed into the cave that is open to the public. Visitors take an elevator up to the Shwe Oo Min Pagoda and navigate

the cave like a maze, making sure not to get stuck in a dead end.

Earlier, I had taken in Pindaya's local market, which runs every five days. There, vendors sell a variety of food, handicrafts, electronics, and more. Though the language barrier was a constant issue, I found everyone friendly and helpful. When I ran into a mobile phone shop to seek out help with my SIM card, it only took a few hand gestures before the store employees understood that I needed help connecting to the internet.

I later hopped back on my bicycle and rode throughout town before heading to Pone Taloke Lake, where I sat and reflected on the fact that despite the challenges of navigating a new place and an unknown language, the people I met in Pindaya were friendly, accommodating, and eager to help.

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