Chapter IV. Trafficking for Sexual Exploitation into Sungai Kolok District, Narathiwat Province

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DOI: 10.4000/books.irasec.450
Publisher: Institut de recherche sur l’Asie du Sud-Est contemporaine
Place of publication: Institut de recherche sur l’Asie du Sud-Est contemporaine
Year of publication: 2007
Published on OpenEdition Books: 3 July 2018
Serie: Carnets de l’Irasec
Electronic ISBN: 9782956447030

Electronic reference
Chapter IV

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1. Introduction

This study was carried out during June-November 2007. It relied mainly on archival research of existing official documents and literature on the relevant issues. Supporting information was obtained from media reports and key informants at the expert level from governmental, non-governmental and academic sectors to increase the reliability of the information and the validity of the information interpretations.

2. Geographic and Socio-Economic Background of Sungai Kolok

Sungai Kolok is a district of Narathiwat province (Figure 15). Narathiwat is the southern most coastal province facing the gulf of Thailand. The provincial capital is 1,149 kilometers from Bangkok by road and 1,116 kilometers by rail. The province covers a 4,475 square kilometers area, two-thirds of which are forested mountains. Farm agriculture, plantations and fisheries are the main economic force in the province. In recent years, some processing industries based on local produce (e.g. rubber, fruits and fishes) have developed.

Figure 15: Map of Narathiwat Province


* By Supaphan Tangtrongpairoj, Institute of Asian Studies, Chulalongkorn University.

18 www.pocnara.go.th/provnara/nara/history_2.asp.
There are 13 districts in the province. Tak Bai is famous for fisheries and related industries while Sungai Kolok, the target area of this study, is a popular tourist destination, especially from Malaysia. Of the 709,044 total inhabitants, 82% are Muslims, 17% Buddhist and the remaining one percent belong to other religious groups. Most of the muslims speak local Melayu, a variant of the Malay language, although Thai is widely used in official and urban communications.

Narathiwat has 171 kilometers long border with Malaysia and two immigration check points; one at Sungai Kolok and another smaller one at Tak Bai. Moreover, there is an informal channel at Bukaeta in Waeng district. Because of a close religious and cultural relationship with Malaysia, the people from both countries travel across border rather easily.

Sungai Kolok district is about 66 kilometers south-west of the Provincial city and 1,210 kilometers from Bangkok. Of the 139,439 square kilometers area, a large part of the district is covered by forests and plantations. There are four sub-districts, namely Sungai Kolok, Pasemat, Moono, Poyo. Sungai Kolok is a border town of Thailand, just north of the Malaysian border. The town on the Malaysian side of the border is Rantau Panjang, which is in the state of Kelantan. Sungai Kolok is separated from the Kelantan state of Malaysia by a small river and local people cross it by small boats. There is no serious restriction for the local people to cross over the border.

Sungai Kolok is popular among Malaysians for its shopping and grey-area entertainment delights. Tourism, however, has taken a knocking since 2005 as several bombs, blamed on southern Thai Muslim separatists, have rocked the town.

3. Situation of Migration and Trafficking into Sungai Kolok

As of February, 2006, the total population of the district was 62,737, of which 30,715 are male and 32,022 are female. About 75% of Sungai Kolok population is Muslim, 20% Buddhists and the remaining 5% are Christians and other religion. Like a vast majority of the southern population, many Muslims in this district had relatives in Malaysia and share close cultural relations with them. As a result, many Thai Muslims went to work in Malaysia seeking better economic conditions brought on by an existing shortage of labour there.

There was an active labour office at Sungai Kolok border crossing where the migrant labour registers their destinations and occupations. But there were also other migrants who went as visitors and worked there for various durations.

The Sungai Kolok border crossing opened at 5:00 a.m. and closed at 9:00 p.m. This late closing hours allowed enough time to clear up a heavy traffic between the two countries. Malaysians entering Thailand at Sungai Kolok followed one of the following immigration procedures:

1) Border pass: Malaysians from the border state of Kelantan can obtain a border pass that was valid for a week. During which time they could visit Sungai Kolok as well as Narathiwat, Pattani, Yala and Songkhla provinces. It should be noted that many of the above destinations were beyond the 25 kilometers from the border as stipulated in the original

22. Op Cit.
24. South Checkpoints Center, Immigration Bureau Office.
25. Op Cit.
agreement. This signifies flexibility in dealing with the population movement between the
two countries. Only a small proportion of Malaysian visitors used border pass.

2) Passport: Malaysians from outside Kelantan State used passport and receive one
month valid tourist permit. Some Kelantan residents also used a passport which was
convenient when crossing the border. A very large number of visitors fall into this group.

Similar immigration procedures applied for the Thais who visited Malaysia. Thais and
foreigners can go to the duty-free shop on the other side of the border but still require
standard immigration checks. All foreigners entering and leaving Thailand were subjected
to comply with standard immigration procedures required for their country of origin. 26

Table 1 : Thais Exit and Foreigners Entry at Sungai Kolok Check Point by Passport

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2005</th>
<th>2004</th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Foreigners Entry</td>
<td>63,876</td>
<td>65,618</td>
<td>88,498</td>
<td>86,201</td>
<td>304,193</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thais Exit</td>
<td>111,182</td>
<td>133,497</td>
<td>114,865</td>
<td>140,502</td>
<td>500,046</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source : South Checkpoints Center, Immigration Bureau Office.

Route of migration/trafficking

Sex workers in Sungai Kolok were mostly of Tai Yai ethnic group. They migrated from
Chiang Rai, a northernmost province of Thailand for a job. They had mostly known what kind
of work they would be engaging in before migrating to Sungai Kolok. Most sex workers were
in indirect sex services i.e. restaurants, karaoke, pub, etc. 27

Before working in Sungai Kolok, they had engaged in similar kind of work in other hot spots of
sex industry in southern Thailand, i.e. Hat Yai, Sadao, for about two years or six months at
least. Their pattern of migration started from talking with friends who had earned so much
money from sex service in the South. In order to get the job like that, they just caught a bus
from Chiang Rai in the North to Morchit bus terminal in Bangkok Metropolitan Area, and took
a bus there heading southwardly to Hat Yai. Some worked in Hat Yai for some times before
moving to Sungai Kolok, while others went there directly by van.

4. Area and Form of Sex Industry

Sex industry in Sungai Kolok could be divided into three major categories: Direct,
indirect, and services in the guise of minor wives. Among them, indirect sex services
prevailed. Direct and indirect sexual services were available in hotels throughout Sungai
Kolok.

There were about 53 hotels in the town of Sungai Kolok 28. The main customers were Chinese
- Malaysians. Thai and other foreign customers were only a few. Most of the Malaysian
customers came to Sungai Kolok for rest and recreation, including drinking and sex
entertainment. They came because these activities were not quite available in Malaysia,
especially in Kelantan and Terregannu States where alcohol drinking and night entertainment
was rigidly controlled by the Muslim dominated state governments. The number of Malaysian
tourists increased during weekends, i.e. Friday through Sunday and holidays, such as New
Year, Hari Raya, Songkran, Chinese New Year, Loy Kratong festivals, etc.

Sex trade in Sungai Kolok was mostly in the guise of entertainment services, rather than the
direct form of brothel services. Traditional massage was the most popular service in hotels

26 Ibid.
27 According to an informal interview with a Public Health official and a young women living in Sungai
28 District Community Development Office, Ibid.

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there. Usually no sex service was given in the massage room but some masseurs may provide semi-sexual services for an extra payment. Massage was often provided in the comfort of the private guest room and it may be combined with sexual services. This could be found in almost all large hotels in the town. The number of masseurs in a hotel varies from 7 to 40, depending on the actual size of the hotel and clients’ demand. There were also several traditional massage parlors outside the hotels that offer similar services. In Sungai Kolok, traditional massage became a replacement for the Turkish massage that is available in Bangkok and other large cities where direct sex service was available. There was no Turkish massage in Sungai Kolok. Most of the hotels also had a coffee shop, a karaoke and some had discos. In all of these venues, especially the karaoke, there were female service workers to accompany clients to their hotel rooms at will.

For direct services, girls and women could be made available in all hotels as well. This could be done by asking a hotel boy to bring in a girl or accompanying him to a large number of bars, karaoke shops and restaurants in the town.

From the Asian economic crisis until early 2007, all Sungai Kolok hotels were suffering from declining room occupancy for over the past few years. However, the room occupancy rate may have reached as low as 20% during weekdays and increase up to 60-70% over the weekend. This resulted in a fierce competition among hotel owners and a very good bargaining price for the clients. A five-star hotel room ranged from TB 450 to TB 900 comparing to a three-to-four star hotel room at only TB 300-600 baht. This was perhaps the lowest hotel room rate anywhere in Thailand.

There was no serious promotion of tourism in Sungai Kolok, for which no clear reasons could be ascertained. It was probably because of the fact that Hat Yai was taking away a lot of Malaysian tourists as it has all first-class tourist facilities, including sight-seeing locations in and around Songkhla province. Similar attempts to promote tourist sights in Narathiwat province were not very successful.

In addition, political violence and daily killings in the 3 Muslim-dominated provinces i.e. Pattani, Yala and Narathiwat since January 2004 was a key factor behind the decreasing of tourist number. In 2007, Kelantan was considered to have turned into “New Kolok”. Many sex and entertainment establishments owners moved their business to kelantan since Malaysian tourist fear of violence situation in Thai side.

Based on an NGO’s information, women migrant workers, particular in indirect sex services, were mostly Tai Yai (Tai Lue). This was also the case for those providing such services in the guise of a minor wife to Chinese-Malaysian clients.

Chinese-Malaysians from the Kelantan State maintained at the majority of the clients in Sungai Kolok. They were mostly rich and paid a lot for a girl who made them satisfied.

Problems Encountered by Migrants/Victims

Among few published literatures on risk behaviour of commercial sex workers in southern provinces, a study by Bhassorn L. (1998) provides an important source of information. Aimed to reduce the transmission of HIV and STD among female sex workers and their clients, and to improve their negotiation skills in Sungai Kolok, Thailand, the study...
found the rate of condom use with the private partners to increase among women in its experimental group.

A relevant study after 1998 was not available. Table 2 suggests that, as in other areas of Narathiwat province, Sungai Kolok was still an area of HIV/AIDS prevalence, albeit of a declining trend. Despite the lack of previous research is provided detailed information or analysis of the linkage between the border situation of tourists in Southern areas and their HIV/AIDS vulnerability, one may expect the risk to be associated with commercial sex workers and the tourists. The declining prevalence rate in 2001-2006 was probably contributed by the above-mentioned declining trend of the sex service tourism during that time.

A further investigation is needed to identify if the number of AIDS patients and deaths will arise in response to the upturn swing of the sex service tourism from 2007 onward.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>2001</th>
<th>2002</th>
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<th>2004</th>
<th>2005</th>
<th>2006</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Affected (No. of cases)</td>
<td>Death (No. of cases)</td>
<td>Affected (No. of cases)</td>
<td>Death (No. of cases)</td>
<td>Affected (No. of cases)</td>
<td>Death (No. of cases)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Muang</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Takbai</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Bajau</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Ngingor</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Ra-ngae</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Ruesau</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Srisakorn</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Wang</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Sukirin</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Sungai Kolok</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Sungai Padi</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Janae</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Jau-ia-rong</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>234</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>162</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>178</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There was no NGO in Sungai Kolok to provide information on either HIV/AIDS knowledge or self – prevention from human trafficking.