

135
Thais
remain
held in
Burma

THERE are 135 Thai fishermen now imprisoned in Burma, but the Foreign Ministry is arranging for their return, Deputy Foreign Minister Prapass Limpabandhu told Parliament yesterday.

Answering a question by a Ruam Thai MP about Thai fishermen imprisoned in neighbouring countries for fishing violations, Mr Prapass said the Foreign Ministry negotiated the release of the 135 Thais prior to the current uprising in Burma.

The men are safe and the ministry is working with the fishermen's association to send vessels for their return, he said.

Mr Prapass said there are also 257 Thai fishermen imprisoned in Vietnam, and the Government has paid fines to get 244 of them back. The ministry is negotiating with Hanoi to have the rest released, he said.

The Government must pay \$1,000 for each fisherman, plus expenses for each day they are jailed in Vietnam, he said.

The Government has paid Vietnam \$233,000 in fines for the release of Thai fishermen caught poaching in Vietnam's territorial waters, Foreign Ministry spokesman Saroj Chavanaviraj said yesterday.

Vietnam arrested 233 Thai fishermen and seized their boats in November and December last year, he told the Associated Press.

Vietnam last month said the fishermen would be freed from Kien Giang and Minh Hai provinces, on the southernmost tip of Vietnam facing the Gulf of Thailand.

There are also 47 Thai fishermen in Malaysian jails and efforts are underway to secure their return, Mr Prapass said.

To avoid future problems, he said Thailand has been negotiating on renewing fishing investment projects with Indonesia and Burma.

The previous administration signed a fishing agreement with Malaysia, he said.

The Government is also negotiating fishing agreements with India, Pakistan and Oman, Mr Prapass said.

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24