

Over 100 students flee in fishing boats

Bp 880920

Ranong — Two fishing boats carrying more than 100 Burmese students seeking political asylum arrived in this southern coastal province yesterday morning.

Meanwhile, some 150 Burmese who took part in anti-government demonstrations fled the Burmese border township of Myawaddy to Mae Sot town in Tak yesterday morning.

A boat with 33 people landed in Ranong's Tambon Pak Nam at about 7 a.m. yesterday.

All carried identity cards saying they were students of Rangoon University.

Their leader, Win Ryowt Hmoo, 23, said Burmese students left Rangoon on September 7 in four boats to join forces with anti-government demonstrators in Kawthaung or Victoria Point opposite Ranong.

However, he said, they arrived at Kawthaung on Sunday only to learn that the military had staged a coup and prohibited all public rallies and demonstrations, so they fled to Thailand.

He said the students had taken temporary refuge at Koh Sorani, an island about 15 minutes by boat from Ranong that belongs to Thailand.

The student leader said 72 students still remained on Koh Sorani.

At about 10.30 a.m. yesterday, another boat brought the remaining students to Ranong.

The second group was led by Maung Muang Thein, 25, who also said he was a Rangoon University student.

Nineteen of the 72 students did not have ID cards.

The refugees said they wanted asylum in Thailand and asked to get in touch with the Burmese embassy in Bangkok.

All were detained by immigration authorities for illegal entry.

Deputy Permanent Secretary for Interior Somporn Klinpongsa said yesterday Burmese soldiers had regained control of Victoria Point and that Ranong authorities had closed the border.

In Mae Sot some 150 Burmese who took part in anti-government demonstrations in Rangoon and the border township of Myawaddy fled across the river to the district town here yesterday morning.

According to district police chief Watchara Sirirattana, the Burmese began crossing the Moei River to Mae Sot town at 9 a.m., and by 4 p.m., their number had reached 150.

The students, civilians and Buddhist monks asked the local authorities for political asylum.

Lt-Col Watchara said the asylum seekers were sent to a temporary holding camp at Wat Tha Sai Toralek in Tambon Tha Sai Luad.

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