

NORTHERN TERRITORY The News

Phone 816582

Darwin

Price 25c*

Monday, October 5, 1981, page 1

140 REFUGEES HERE TODAY



Picture: PETER BENNETT

A Vietnamese refugee boat believed to be carrying 140 people was expected to be escorted into Darwin Harbor this afternoon.

The boat was sighted about 10.30am today about 8km north of Quail Island and heading for Charles Point, 10km from Darwin.

The Navy patrol boat HMAS Assail later intercepted the boat after being guided to the spot by a coastal surveillance aircraft.

At last reports the refugee vessel was under Navy escort and headed towards Darwin.

Eyewitnesses who flew over the boat early this afternoon said it appeared to be fairly old, but was brightly painted in red and green.

The vessel appeared to have a double-storey bank of cabins.

The witnesses said the refugees, who appeared to be living in fairly crowded conditions aboard the boat, had

Officials gear up for Viet boat's arrival

waved as the aircraft circled overhead.

Local immigration, health and quarantine officials, who have not been required to process a Vietnamese refugee boat since the last arrived in April, were geared up today for the arrival of the large group of Indo-Chinese.

Officials have no details yet about the condition of the boat or the refugees.

If there are 140 on board, as officials believe, this will be

one of the largest groups of refugees to arrive in Darwin since the unofficial Vietnamese boat procession began in 1978.

The large number is not expected to pose any particular problems for officials in Darwin.

As with all arrivals in the past, the refugees are expected to undergo preliminary health checks aboard their vessel before being bussed out to Darwin's

quarantine station at East Arm.

Here they will undergo more detailed health checks and be processed by immigration officials before probably being flown interstate.

The boat is believed to be that which was sighted about two weeks ago after leaving Malaysia and reported to be heading for Darwin.

It is among the scores of often dilapidated Vietnamese vessels which have used Darwin and other northern and north west coastal ports for unofficial entry of many hundreds of Vietnamese into Australia.

For the many who have arrived safely after the hazardous open sea crossing from their troubled country, many thousands more are said to have lost their lives while undertaking the journey.

More than 54,000 Indo-Chinese refugees, most of them by official legal methods, have gained entry to Australia since Saigon and Phnom Penh fell in the Vietnam war six years ago.

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Officials stand by as the first of the 146 people make their way down the ladder from the packed boat today.

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Tuesday, October 6, 1981, page 1

DOUBTS OVER REFUGEES



One family group makes its way up the quarantine ramp to a waiting bus.

Most of the 146 boat people who arrived in Darwin yesterday claiming to be Vietnamese refugees could be imposters.

It has been disclosed unofficially that federal authorities now believe most, if not all, who arrived on the 10-metre VT8 38 came from Malaysia.

Federal Immigration Minister, Mr Ian McPhee, revealed today an initial inquiry had cast doubts on the identity of some of the refugees.

Mr McPhee said an intensive investigation was underway by a team of officers from the department's refugee centre in Canberra to establish true identity of the people.

The team flew into Darwin late yesterday.

Attention

Healthy young men were predominant among the passengers brought ashore at Darwin's East Arm quarantine ramp at first light and bussed to the nearby quarantine station.

Officials paid abnormally strict attention to security for the ramp landing operation.

Up to a dozen police officers, from arms of the law not normally so closely associated with refugee landings here, were among about 30 officials at the ramp at first light.

Media representatives were kept behind a rope barricade about 18 metres from the closest point of the

Story: Kerry sharp
Pictures: Peter Bennett

ramp and outside respectable shouting range of the procession of people who hurried their way to waiting buses.

Police made it clear any movement by press people outside the roped area would result in the offenders being removed.

Head of the Police Task Force, Chief Inspector Robin Chalker, who was at the ramp, said the large contingent of police was necessary "for security purposes."

Mr McPhee said he would decide what action would be taken once he had received a full report of the investigation.

This was expected to take at least two days.

"I am concerned to ensure that claims to protection and assistance by any who may in fact be refugees, are given full and sympathetic consideration," Mr McPhee said.

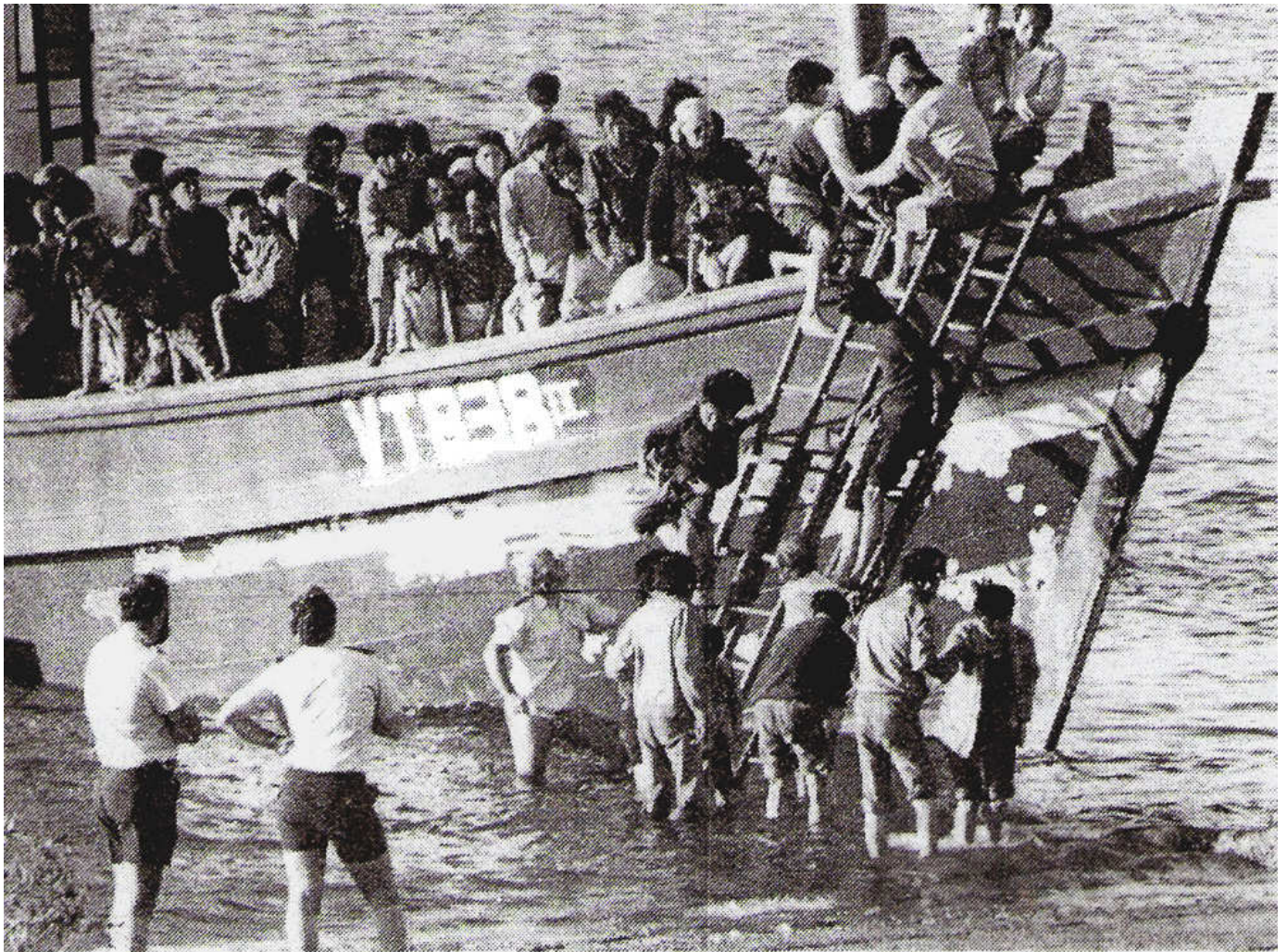
A local official today described the task ahead of the investigation team as "a very difficult grinding process."

The 146 people, including 60 young children, spent last night aboard their vessel, anchored at the quarantine buoy off Stokes Hill wharf.

Health, immigration, quarantine and customs officers earlier had boarded the vessel to conduct preliminary checks before its entry into Darwin Harbor.

Thursday, October 8, 1981, page 1

MONEY FOUND ON 'REFUGEES'



● Refugees landing in Darwin this week.

Thursday, October 8, 1981, page 1

Two detained in police cells

Authorities have found vast amounts of money on passengers off the Indo-Chinese "refugee" vessel which arrived in Darwin this week.

Informed sources have disclosed two of the first passengers searched were carrying about \$US24,000 between them.

Huge amounts more, in a number of currencies including British sterling, have been found among the seemingly meagre possessions of the 146 people off the motor vessel, VT 383.

One man is said to have been carrying about \$US12,000 in the pockets of his clothing.

His wife carried a similar amount in a money purse.

A man and woman are being detained in cells at the Darwin Police Station on behalf of immigration officials.

But it is not known at this stage if they are the same couple

found carrying the American money.

The detainees were moved to Darwin from the Casuarina Police Station yesterday after being separated from fellow passengers, now being checked out at the East Arm Quarantine Station.

Though unconfirmed, it is understood the couple may be facing deportation for being illegal immigrants.

Federal Immigration Minister, Mr Ian Macphree has confirmed two are in custody but has refused to comment further on the reason.

He is expected to throw light on their position at a special press conference in Canberra later this week.

Mr Macphree sent a special investigation team to Darwin from his department's refugee centre in Canberra after initial inquiries revealed the 146 late boat people

might not have come direct from Vietnam as claimed.

"Investigations are continuing and I expect they will have made sufficient progress for me to hold a media conference on the matter before the end of the week," he said.

"In fairness to all persons on board the vessel, and in public interest generally, I will not make any further comment prior to my proposed media conference."

Mr Macphree stressed the latest investigation was quite separate from his review of refugee policy.

The policy review had been initiated long before anyone had contemplated that the VT 383 would arrive in Australia.

Mr Macphree said the Immigration (Unauthorised Arrivals) Bill 1980 had been passed in Parliament last year.

He had said then it would only be proclaimed if it was thought there was strong enough reason in the public interest to do so.

"In view of the information obtained about vessel VT 383 prior to its entering Australian territorial waters, the Bill was proclaimed as an Act on September 30 1981," he said.

Friday, October 9, 1981, page 2

'Refugees' may be deported

It could now be at least Monday before it is officially known what the future holds for the 146 Indo-Chinese boat people in Darwin's quarantine station.

Immigration Minister, Mr Ian MacPhee, had hoped to hold a special press conference today to discuss the latest situation.

But a spokesman for his office said late this morning, Mr MacPhee had not received enough "concrete" information from an investigating team in Darwin to warrant such a conference at this stage.

The team, from the Immigration Department's refugee centre in Canberra, has been questioning the passengers from the vessel, VT 838, since they were brought ashore early Tuesday.

Authorities believe they may not be direct from Vietnam as claimed.

A man and woman are being detained in Darwin Police Station cells on behalf of immigration authorities.

They are Tho Tu, Knanh, 47 and Hugna Duc Tai, 45.

Immigration officials are understood to be taking steps to have the two deported as illegal immigrants.

Mr MacPhee is expected to make a statement on their fate at his impending press conference.

Meanwhile two senior detectives from the Hong Kong Royal Police, said to have wide experience in investigating illegal boat landings in their own country are helping local authorities with their Darwin investigation.

Saturday, October 10, 1981, page 1

Illegal migrant racket: Macphee

From our Canberra Bureau

A significant proportion of the 146 Vietnamese boat people who landed in Darwin earlier this week arrived as the result of a well-planned illegal immigration racket.

The Minister for Immigration and Ethnic Affairs, Mr Macphee, said yesterday investigations by his department and Hong Kong police revealed some of the "refugees" who arrived in Darwin on Tuesday had paid large sums of money for their passage to Australia.

Mr Macphee said: "Indications are that the arrival of vessel VT 838 is the result of a syndicate operation to move people illegally to Australia.

"It appears they are of ethnic Chinese origin (and many of these people) have not lived in Vietnam for some years," he said.

DIRECTLY

"On arrival they said they were Vietnamese refugees who had come directly from Vietnam hoping they would be allowed to stay.

"Detailed investigations are continuing in Australia and overseas and when these are completed I will decide what action is to be taken."

Mr Macphee revealed two officers from the Hong Kong police were in Darwin to assist in investigations.

Their arrival followed that of a team of investigators from his department in Canberra late on Tuesday.

Mr Macphee said it would take "several days" for the identity of those on board the VT 838 to be determined.

The department decided to investigate the people aboard the "refugee boat" because of the large proportion of healthy young men on board, which was unusual in such cases.

There has been a long-standing liaison between Australian and Hong Kong authorities in monitoring the activities of the illegal immigrant syndicate.

"The Hong Kong police have great experience with the problem of refugees and illegal immigration and responded promptly to Australia's request for assistance," Mr Macphee said.

QUESTIONED

This is the first time the origins of such boat arrivals in Australia have been questioned by the authorities.

Mr Macphee emphasised that these investigations "have nothing to do with the review of refugee policy."

"That review covers refugees from Poland and other parts of the world as well as Indo-China and has no relevance to people already accepted in Australia as refugees," he said.

Monday, October 12, 1981, page 1

Wait likely for fate of boat people

It could be several days before the fate of the 146 boat people in Darwin's Quarantine Station is known.

Immigration Minister, Mr Ian Macphee, still has not received sufficient information from his investigation team in Darwin to make a decision on their future.

A member of his staff said today Mr Macphee was unlikely to hold a promised press conference on the issue until the investigation was over.

This could take until the end of the week.

The investigation, by a team from the Im-



● Mr Macphee

migration Department's refugee centre in Canberra, being helped by two Hong Kong detectives, began last Tuesday when the boat people were brought ashore from their vessel, VT 838.

At first officials estimated it probably would take only a few days for the true identity of the people to be confirmed.

But the task, not helped by a serious communication problem, is obviously more difficult than at first thought.

Friday, October 16, 1981, page 3

Charges face illegal boat people

By **KERRY SHARP**

Federal Immigration Minister, Mr Ian McPhee, has confirmed that some of the 146 boat people being held at Darwin's East Arm Quarantine Station, will be prosecuted.

He has also confirmed definitely for the first time that the vessel which brought them here, VT 838, did not come direct from Vietnam.

Speaking in Parliament yesterday, Mr McPhee said initial investigations into the status of the people appeared to have exposed an extremely serious immigration racket.



● **Mr Macphee**

The investigations were continuing and he expected to make a statement early next week, he said.

Mr McPhee stressed the Government was anxious not to impugn the status of Vietnamese people who

were unquestionably genuine refugees, many of them now Australian citizens.

The 146 people now in Darwin are reported to have paid for their passage in an illegal scheme devised by a group of Asian businessmen.

Interrogated

They are being interrogated by a team from the Immigration Department's refugee centre in Canberra who flew into Darwin the same day the boat people were escorted into the harbor on October 5.

The group includes 60 children. The majority of adults are young men.

Friday, October 16, 1981, page 6

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Refugees no risk

SIR, I would like to clarify some points raised during 8DN's talk-back program on Thursday morning, October 8 in relation to the health risk posed by the Vietnamese boat people who arrived recently.

While I can understand the views expressed on the program, I feel people should be aware that such views are ill-conceived and not borne out by the facts.

Firstly, the people themselves pose no more threat to the general health of our community than other travellers who arrive here each week from Indonesia and other parts of South-East Asia.

(It could be argued that they pose less threat as they have generally been at sea for long enough for most of the diseases we are concerned about to be clearly in evidence by the time they arrive here.)

Secondly, they are accommodated at the old quarantine station, primarily for security reasons until their residential status is established by the Immigration and Ethnic Affairs Department and

because it is possibly the only place in Darwin where 140 people can be accommodated at short notice.

Opinions were expressed on the program that the buses in which the refugees were transported should have been fumigated before being used for other purposes. This is unnecessary as experience has shown the refugees do not carry communicable diseases which may be spread by brief contact with objects such as bus seats or fittings.

It should be pointed out that spraying of overseas aircraft is to destroy possibly harmful insects that may be carried on board, not to control disease germs as such. **F.H.Stewart,**

**Director
Commonwealth
Health Department.**

Monday, October 19, 1981, page 2

'Refugees' to be deported

The Federal Government is certain to take court action against the ringleaders of a suspected immigration racket involving Vietnamese refugees.

And most of the 146 Asians who sailed into Darwin harbor under naval escort on October 5 will be deported.

This tough line is expected to be announced at a press conference

tomorrow by Immigration Minister, Mr Macphee.

It will be the first time the Government has sent back a boatload of people claiming to be Vietnamese refugees.

Mr Macphee has

described their arrival as a pointer to an extremely serious racket.

The refugees, including 60 children, are being held in Darwin while painstaking interviews are conducted with everyone on board.

Mr Macphee said inquiries had confirmed the boat had not come from Vietnam but had passed through Hong Kong and other ports.

Police investigations into its movements are expected to confirm that many of the passengers paid large amounts to travel to Australia on the assurance they would be allowed to stay as refugees.

Mr Macphee told the Age newspaper on Saturday authorities had found some of the ringleaders on the vessel.

"The racket is based in Hong Kong and that's probably more than I should say," he said.

Innocent

"We have a pretty shrewd suspicion who the overseas racketeers are."

Mr Macphee said the law had to be upheld even at the cost of deporting the 60 innocent children.

Proposals being considered under present laws include sending the passengers back to camps in South-East



● Mr Macphee

Asia, prosecuting the ring leaders and confiscating the vessel.

Mr Macphee said "We are most anxious that we deter any racketeers from coming to Australia under the guise of being refugees.

Example

"It's the first case we know of and we intend to make an example of them to make sure it's the last case."

It's understood the people who paid money to the racketeers will not be prosecuted.

"They have suffered enough," Mr Macphee said.

Under the Immigration (Unauthorised Arrivals) Act proclaimed five days before the VT838 put into Darwin, operators of ships or planes bringing more than five illegal immigrants into the country may be fined \$100,000 or jailed for 10 years or both.

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Wednesday, October 21, 1981, page 2

Boat people ordered out

CANBERRA. — The 146 ethnic Chinese who arrived in Darwin earlier this month aboard a fishing vessel and claimed to be Vietnamese refugees are to be deported.

Immigration and Ethnic Affairs Minister, Mr Ian Macphree announced the deportation late yesterday after outlining an illegal immigration racket centred in Taiwan with links in Hong Kong and Thailand.

The 146 people, including 70 children, arrived in Darwin on October 5.

Mr Macphree said the immigration racket had been outlined by adults in the group interviewed by immigration officers and Federal Police.

The two principal organisers of the voyage, a Taiwanese resident and his wife, travelled to Australia with the group and were assisted by four crew members also living in Taiwan.

"The organisers advertised their plan by word of mouth among the ethnic Chinese-Vietnamese community in Taiwan.

"Most of the passengers were recruited there though six came from Hong Kong," Mr Macphree said.

It was believed most of the people had lived in Vietnam before taking up residence legally in third countries.

Macphree outlines refugees racket

The adult passengers were charged \$U.S.2000 and minors paid between \$U.S.1000 and \$U.S.1500.

"The families of crew members were charged special discount rates.

"By early September a crew and full complement of passengers had been recruited.

"One of the organisers then travelled to Thailand where arrangements were made with Thai contacts to acquire and provision a suitable boat," Mr Macphree said.

Transited

Arrangements were then made to fly the passengers from Taiwan and Hong Kong to Bangkok.

On September 11 the Taiwanese passengers travelled on three regular international air services to Bangkok.

One of these flights transited in Hong Kong where the six Hong Kong passengers were picked up.

On arrival in Bangkok the entire group were taken to hotels where they stayed for two days.

The group then travelled, by train

to Hat Yai in southern Thailand where they were accommodated in hotels over night before being taken in two chartered buses, to an isolated fishing village near Songkhla.

They boarded a Thai fishing boat which departed the same day.

Mr Macphree said that once the boat had cleared Thai waters the identification "VT 828" was painted on the bow to resemble registration markings on Vietnamese fishing vessels.

The group was ordered to jettison all identification documents and remove labels from clothing.

"They then rehearsed a cover story that they were refugees from Vietnam who had left Vung Tau on September 9."

The vessel was intercepted by a Malaysian patrol boat on September 17 and escorted to Pulau Bidong where there is a United Nations refugee camp.

Mr Macphree said the group refused United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees encouragement to disembark.

Two passengers jumped ship as "VT 838" left Bidong.

Mr Macphree said none of the group had any claim in Australia to protection under the UN convention relating to the status of refugees.

"Their situation is no different to anyone who enters Australia illegally.

"Nor should they be advantaged over the thousand of genuine refugees from Indo China and other areas who, unlike this group, have not yet been granted the opportunity to settle permanently in a country of resettlement."

Mr Macphree said no member of the group was continuing to claim refugee status.

"They sought to gain entry to Australia by a carefully contrived, large scale plan to mislead and put Australia's migration controls at risk."

His ultimate responsibility in deciding the fate of the group was to discourage similar attempts at illegal entry.

Deportation procedures are expected to take several weeks to complete.

Prosecution cases against the organisers and crew currently are being prepared.

Mr Macphree said the arrival of "VT 838" appeared to be an isolated case as inquiries had not linked the organisation behind it to any other arrivals.

Wednesday, December 16, 1981, page 4



● Flashback . . . the arrival of the 146 boat people in October.

Bogus boat people on their way

Some of the 146 boat people who arrived in Darwin on October 5 could leave the country before Christmas.

An Immigration and Ethnic Affairs Department spokesman in Canberra said yesterday officials were waiting only on travel documents from Hong Kong before six of the boat people were flown out.

The department's secretary in charge of the patrol branch, Mr Peter Judd, said the department preferred to deport the 146 together rather than in separate groups.

However he said if travel documents from Taiwan did not arrive soon the six Hong Kong boat people could be flown out separately.

He said if all the group could be deported together a plane would be chartered to take the group.

But if they were flown separately passages at the expense of the Federal Government, would have to be booked on commercial flights.

Mr Judd said all but six of the boat people were Taiwanese.

He also revealed that a notice of determination had been served on the organiser of the boat load of bogus refugees.

Mr Judd said the organiser had been ordered to repay \$165 000 to the Government to cover the costs incurred by the Commonwealth in the first two weeks the boat people were in Australia.

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Monday, December 21, 1981, page 1

9 flee quarantine station

Mystery surrounds the escape last night of nine boat people from the East Arm quarantine station.

It is understood two of the escapees since have been captured.

Another two still at large could be the ringleaders.

A total of 146 people are being held at the station at Commonwealth expense and security is provided by the Australian Police.

The federal department responsible for the

people, Immigration and Ethnic Affairs, has refused to comment on the escape other than to say that federal police are investigating the matter and will prepare a report.

Federal police investigating the escape have refused to comment and the Territory police know only that the escape occurred and two

people have since been returned to custody.

The 146 ethnic Chinese pretending to be Vietnamese arrived in Darwin on a Thai boat, VT838, on October 5.

All the people will be deported except six of them who are to be

charged with illegal entry and face large fines or imprisonment.

The principal organisers of the racket are believed to be a married couple in their late forties, known as Mr and Mrs Lau.

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Monday, December 28, 1981, page 3

'Boat people' fly home



Three bus loads of bogus boat people were deported yesterday. They were flown out by a specially chartered Qantas 747 about 7am.

Govt 'cuts its losses'

All but 19 of the 146 Taiwanese boat people being held at East Arm Quarantine Station were deported yesterday.

They were flown out amid the tightest security ever seen at Darwin Airport.

The 146 people, claiming to be refugees came to Australia after paying money to an illegal immigration syndicate.

Decided

The Government decided not to press charges against any of the boat people because of the high cost of keeping them in Australia.

A spokesman for the

Immigration Minister, Mr Ian Macphree said last week the Government had decided to "cut its losses and get rid of them."

The remaining 19 bogus refugees have been taken to Sydney's Villawood Detention Centre where they are awaiting deportation.

The boat people were flown out about 7 am yesterday in a specially chartered Qantas 747.

All but six were taken to Taiwan.

No Chance

The others were taken to Hong Kong.

When boarding the plane buses were driven right up to the aerobridge one at a time so there would be no chance of any of the boat people escaping.

In a statement released yesterday afternoon, Mr Macphree said he was grateful for the

assistance of Asian officials in tracing the illegal immigration racket.

Keep

Mr Macphree said it was also likely the boat people would be allowed to keep large sums of money found on them when they arrived in Darwin.

He said as legal action was not planned and a court order would be required to have them surrender the money those involved would be allowed to keep it.

Wednesday, December 30, 1981, page 2

Illegal immigrant treated for leprosy

One of the 121 illegal immigrants who were deported to Taiwan on Sunday is being treated for leprosy.

Hong Kong journalist, Mr Vincent Hoh, said yesterday that one of the men showed early symptoms of leprosy and was being given medical treatment in the Taiwanese capital, Taipei.

Mr Hoh said the other 120 people were being detained by the Taiwanese authorities.

He said the reason given for their detention was that they had lied to the authorities when

120 detained in Taiwan

they left the country in the first place and their stories were now being investigated.

The six bogus boat people who were deported to Hong Kong on the same flight have been released without any charges being laid, Mr Hoh said.

Shortly after the 146 ethnic Chinese arrived in Darwin disguised as Vietnamese refugees in October it was discovered that one man had leprosy.

He was taken to the East Arm leprosy hospital for treatment.

A spokesman for the hospital said today the man had been cured and there was no danger of the disease spreading.

A spokesman for the Immigration and Ethnic Affairs Minister, Mr Ian MacPhee, said this morning the man being

treated in Taipei was the same man who had been treated at East Arm.

He said the man had been cleared by health officials before leaving Darwin and the Taiwanese authorities had been informed of his condition.

The man had been given medicine to continue his course of treatment before he left for Taiwan.

The spokesman said he was not aware of any action being taken by Taiwan with regard to the returned people and said if any action was being taken it was a matter for the Taiwanese authorities.