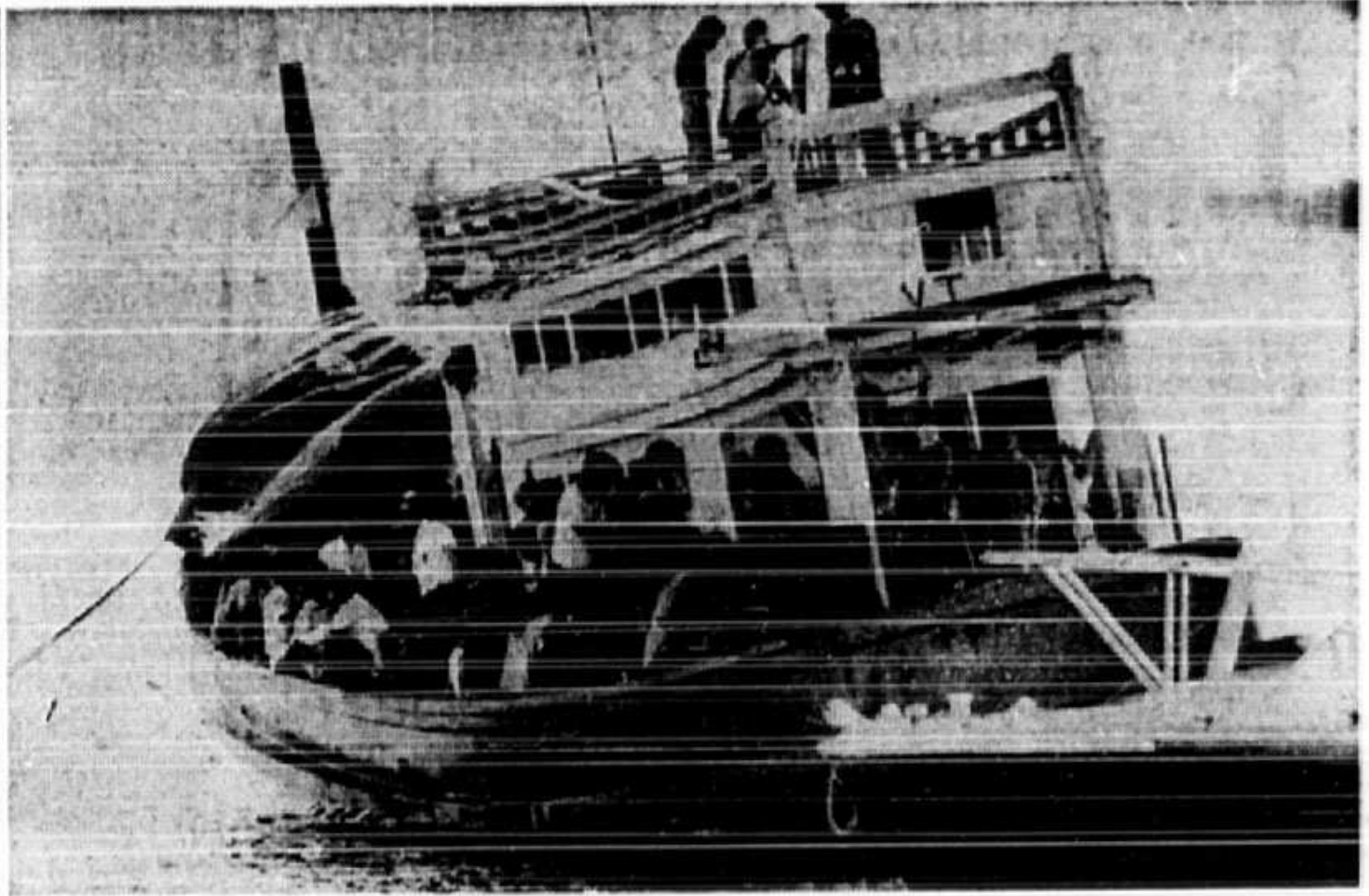


Tuesday October 6, 1981, page 14



Refugee boat in Darwin harbour yesterday.

More Vietnam refugees land

The first Vietnamese refugee boat in six months sailed into Darwin harbour yesterday afternoon with about 140 people on board.

The 20 metre vessel, powered by a small motor, is understood to have sailed from Vietnam.

It was intercepted by a patrol

boat, HMAS Assail, which escorted it the last 50km.

The commander of HMAS Assail, Lt John Collins, said last night that the people aboard the boat appeared in good health.

The boat tied up in Darwin har-

bour about 5 p.m. last night and the refugees spent last night on board.

They will be taken to a quarantine station today after they have been interviewed by police and health officials.

Mr Scott said they would be in quarantine for at least a day.

Wednesday, October 7, 1981, page 10

The Sydney Morning Herald, Wednesday, October 7, 1981

Officials check bona fides of new arrivals Suspicious on refugees

From RUSSELL BARTON

CANBERRA. — The Federal Government is suspicious of whether all the latest load of Vietnamese "boat people" who arrived in Darwin on Monday are bona fide refugees.

The Minister for Immigration and Ethnic Affairs, Mr Macphee, said yesterday that initial investigations indicated that at least some of the 146 Vietnamese people aboard the 25-metre wooden vessel may not have come directly from Vietnam.

There are reports that the vessel was sighted leaving the Malaysian refugee camp at Bidong on September 18.

Mr Macphee said that investigations were being carried out by a team of departmental officers

to establish the refugees' identity.

"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," he said.

The minister's statement gave credence to reports that the latest arrivals would be among the last to be accepted by Australia before the Government adopts new guidelines on refugees.

Sources from Mr Macphee's department said that it was likely that the 146 passengers on board the boat would be accepted as refugees.

DARWIN. — A Navy patrol boat escorted the "boat people" into Darwin harbour on Monday.

They came ashore yesterday.

Immigration, Health and Customs officials, who are used to processing Vietnamese refugees since they first arrived off Darwin in 1978, have been struck by the apparent robustness of the latest group.

Their bright red and green 25-metre fishing vessel, the VT838, seems far more seaworthy than some of the sinking wrecks which have previously arrived with their ill and malnourished passengers.

Officials, with the help of Vietnamese interpreters, were still questioning the boat people, including 60 children, at the quarantine station last night.

It is expected that it will be at least two days before the story of the journey and the identity of the new arrivals is established.

But an immigration official,

who did not want to be identified, said it had been confirmed that the vessel stopped off the east coast of Malaysia on the way to Australia.

It had been met by a Malaysian marine patrol and sent on its way. That had been about a fortnight ago.

It was not known, however, when or from where the vessel had left Vietnam.

Nor was it known whether its passengers were Chinese or Vietnamese.

The officials said the vessel was a Vietnamese-style fishing boat not Malay or Chinese.

About 16 such boats are now rotting in Darwin harbour after making the journey.

The official said the new arrivals seemed to know what procedures to expect in Australia.

The Sydney Morning Herald

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Thursday October 8, 1981, page 1

Two 'boat people' detained

From PATRICK WALTERS

CANBERRA. — Two Indo-Chinese who arrived in Darwin on Monday on a boat containing 146 people have been taken into custody for questioning.

The detention of the two men follows Immigration Department investigations into the backgrounds of the people on the 25-metre vessel VT838 who claim to be Vietnamese refugees.

The Minister for Immigration and Ethnic Affairs, Mr Macphee, revealed yesterday that in view of information obtained about the boat before it entered Australian territorial waters, the Government had proclaimed the Immigration (Unauthorised Arrivals) Act, 1980, last week, enabling it to take action against the unauthorised arrival of ships in Australia.

Mr Macphee said he had indicated last year when the bill was passed by Parliament that the legislation would only be proclaimed if it was thought there would be a strong reason in the public interest to do so.

"Whether action is taken under that Act will depend on the outcome of the investigations to which I have referred," Mr Macphee said.

Mr Macphee said on Tuesday that inquiries had cast doubts on the identity of some of the passengers.

Government sources believe that the people on board almost certainly did not come to Darwin direct from Vietnam.

Saturday October 10, 1981, page 1

Govt links Hong Kong gang to refugee racket

CANBERRA. — The Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs has uncovered evidence of a Hong Kong syndicate operation to move people illegally into Australia from Thailand.

This follows investigations into the backgrounds of 146 people who arrived in Darwin this week on a Thai fishing boat VT838, claiming to be Vietnamese refugees. It is now known that all of those on board did not come to Darwin directly from Vietnam.

Meanwhile, an official who has been processing boat people arriving in Darwin since soon after the fall of Saigon in 1975, and has met all but six of the estimated 46 vessels to have made the journey to northern Australia, said that passengers on only two of the vessels could be described as destitute.

The rest had been carrying gold, money of various currencies, or jade.

The official, who refused to be identified, said one of the passengers on VT838 was apparently carrying evidence of an earlier visit to Australia — the stub of a ticket to a national park.

Up to the end of 1980, 44,000 Indo-Chinese had been resettled in Australia. Of these, 41,000 had been selected from refugee

camps in South-East Asia and brought here by official means.

The Hong Kong refugee racket involves trafficking of ethnic Chinese, many of whom have been living in Taiwan, to Australia via Thailand.

Many of those on board the 25-metre VT838 were found to have large sums of money. One woman was carrying more than \$US17,000.

The Minister for Immigration and Ethnic Affairs, Mr Macphée, said yesterday that the passengers on VT838 may have come from Taiwan and Hong Kong and paid substantial sums of money for their passage.

"Investigations have confirmed that some of the people who arrived at Darwin on October 5 had not lived in Vietnam for some years," Mr Macphée said.

Mr Macphée said that detailed investigations were continuing into the case both in Australia and overseas. He confirmed that two officers from the Royal Hong Kong police were in Darwin to help in the investigations.

"There is a need for further investigations, particularly to establish the identity of those on board and this is likely to take at least several more days."

Government sources conceded yesterday that there may have been similar cases in the past of trafficking of people claiming to be refugees.

Wednesday October 14, 1981, *EDITORIAL*, page 6

The Sydney Morning Herald

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WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 14, 1981

Economic refugees

FEDERAL IMMIGRATION authorities are now closely investigating the 140 Vietnamese refugees who arrived in Darwin a week ago in a suspiciously seaworthy ship and in suspiciously good health. They may not be refugees. According to Canberra sources, in fact, while most were born in Vietnam they made their way some years ago to Taiwan and Hong Kong in search of a better life. When this failed to materialise, they made their way, in a preconcerted plan, to Bangkok. Once there, they then arranged purchase of a seaworthy vessel to take them to Australia.

Legal action is pending, and one of its results may well be their repatriation as prohibited immigrants. They are not immigrants. They are not refugees. This should not occasion us undue distress. Of the nearly 50,000 Vietnamese refugees to arrive in this country—60 per cent of them Vietnamese, the remainder ethnic Chinese—only a relative handful have for one reason or another come within the category of prohibited immigrant.

The Darwin episode, however, strengthens the case for looking more closely at some of the Vietnamese refug-

ees now making their way to South-East Asian camps and seeking to settle in Australia and other third countries. On closer examination, far too many prove to be economic refugees more interested in moving to greener pastures than in political asylum. Under the meaning of the UN Convention, they are certainly not political refugees in fear of their lives or driven from their homeland on racial, religious, social or political grounds.

Until now the Australian Government has been reasonably relaxed over applying convention criteria, but the Minister for Immigration, Mr Macphee, said recently that he sought a new policy which among other things will exclude from Australia young, single, male Vietnamese leaving their homeland either for purely economic reasons or because they wish to avoid conscription. In point of fact, far fewer Vietnamese seem to have left Vietnam this year than last. This may be a trend, or a halt before large-scale departures resume. But whether numbers increase or stabilise, there are good reasons for the Government to tighten up—not on entry requirements but on those seeking to exploit them.

Monday October 18, 1981, page 2

'Boat people' may be charged

By JOANNE FINLAY

The crew of the Thai fishing boat which arrived in Darwin with 146 people aboard on October 5 are expected to be prosecuted shortly under Australian immigration laws.

At least six people, including the vessel's master, face fines of up to \$100,000 and 10 years' jail under the Immigration (Unauthorised Arrivals) Act, 1980, if convicted.

The Act, enabling the Government to take action against unauthorised arrival of ships in Australia, was proclaimed earlier this month after information about the vessel was obtained before it entered Australian waters.

Most of the other 140 people on board, including 60 children, are likely to be charged with being prohibited immigrants and deported.

The passengers, who claimed to be Vietnamese refugees, are understood to have come from Hong Kong and Taiwan.

Investigations into their back-



The packed fishing boat in Darwin harbour.

grounds by Federal police. Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs officers and two Hong Kong policemen are understood to have been completed.

The Hong Kong officers arrived around the time the 25-metre vessel VT838 docked in Darwin.

The department has said that some of the people paid money for their passage to a Hong Kong syndicate which moves ethnic Chinese, many of whom have been

living in Taiwan, to Australia via Thailand.

According to a department spokesman, people who left Vietnam and found another country in which they could live could not then enter Australia and claim refugee status.

The Minister for Immigration and Ethnic Affairs, Mr Macpherson, will announce the investigation's outcome this week.

Wednesday October 21, 1981, page 3

'Refugees' paid up to \$US2,008 for passage

CANBERRA. — A group of 146 Indo-Chinese, most of whom came from Taiwan, paid up to \$US2,008 each for passages to Australia on board the Thai fishing boat VT838.

The cost of the journey under the illegal immigration racket was \$US2,008 per adult and from \$US1,000 to \$1,508 for children. There were 76 adults on board and 70 children.

The Minister for Immigration and Ethnic Affairs, Mr Macphée, said yesterday that the crew and passengers of VT838 would be deported within the next few

weeks. It is the biggest deportation case in Australia's history.

The Government is now faced with the difficult problem of getting the Taiwanese Government, which it does not recognise, to accept the illegal immigrants.

The Government must prove to the satisfaction of the Taiwanese Government that most of those on board were legally resident in Taiwan before they left for Australia.

Talks with Taiwanese officials have already begun and it is expected to be some weeks before the deportations will take place.

It is expected that the two principal organisers, a Taiwanese resident and his wife, and four crew members will be prosecuted

under the recently proclaimed Immigration (Unauthorised Arrivals) Act 1980 and also deported.

Mr Macphée told Parliament yesterday that the racket was centred in Taiwan with links in Thailand and Hong Kong.

The organisers advertised their plan by word of mouth among the ethnic Chinese community in Taiwan, where most of the passengers were recruited, apart from six people who came from Hong Kong, Mr Macphée said.

Although most of them had lived in Vietnam before taking up residence elsewhere, dates of departure from Vietnam varied from as long ago as 1954 to as recently as February this year.

By early September a crew and full complement of passengers had been recruited and arrangements were made to acquire a suitable boat in Taiwan and fly the passengers from Hong Kong and Taiwan to Bangkok, he said.

On September 11 three flights carried the passengers to Bangkok, where they were put up in hotels for two days. The group then travelled by train and bus to an isolated fishing village in southern Thailand, where they boarded a 25-metre fishing vessel.

The boat left Thailand for Australia on September 15 and after it had cleared Thai waters the identification numbers VT838 were painted on the bows to re-

semble registration markings on Vietnamese fishing vessels.

All on board VT838 jettisoned their identification documents and rehearsed a cover story that they were refugees from Vietnam who had left Vung Tau on September 9.

Although VT838 was intercepted by a Malaysian patrol craft at Pulau Bidong on September 17 on the east coast of Malaysia, they declined to disembark at the United Nations refugee camp and resumed the journey to Darwin. Two passengers jumped ship as the VT838 left Bidong.

The Australian Government first learned that VT838 was bound for Australia on September 18.

Saturday December 26, 1981, page 3

IN BRIEF

'Boat people' back to Taiwan

Qantas has confirmed that a Boeing 747 has been chartered by the Department of Immigration to fly 146 Asians who arrived in Darwin on a fishing boat in October to Taiwan tomorrow.

It is believed the Federal Government has been trying to keep the operation secret to get the illegal group out of Australia as quietly and quickly as possible.

Comment from Marion Le OAM (March 21, 2010):

"The VT means that the boat came from Vung Tau in South Vietnam - so how did they "prove" it came from Malaysia and were the crew Malaysians or Vietnamese I wonder?"