

# People-trade syndicates make millions

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□ Jakarta correspondent

TWO main crime syndicates are dominating the people-smuggling trade from Indonesia to Australia, reaping personal fortunes of tens of millions of dollars for a handful of bosses, according to Indonesian and Australian investigators.

The syndicates have effectively divided the people trade to Australia into two regions and have developed elaborate organisations to counter heightened police operations run in co-operation between Indonesian and Australian police.

Indonesian police believe the racket has been especially lucrative for some. In just a few years in the business, one principal smuggler is estimated to have amassed \$40 million by arranging illegal entry to Australia by boat for people from the Middle East, Pakistan and Afghanistan.

The Indonesian Interpol branch has compiled a list of 22 leading figures involved in the trade, including about five key bosses. But senior police admit arrests are hindered by the absence of anti-people smuggling laws, poor internal co-ordination and protection being offered by some corrupt government officials.

Evidence collected through surveillance operations and interviews with people who have used the smugglers' services indicates two main rings have tried to divide the east and west of the Indonesian archipelago between them and are acting in concert with some corrupt officials to squeeze out competitors.

The smugglers are going to considerable lengths to protect their interests, including improved methods of forging travel documents to pass off illegal immigrants as tourists. In one incident, an Australian immigration official returned to Australia after receiving death threats from a group connected to people-smugglers.

Indonesian police, co-operating with the Australian Federal Police, have intensified operations against the smuggling syndicates with some success in the past year. It estimated more than 1000 people were stopped from departing in boats to Australia since the start of the year. In the past week alone, Indonesian police have detained 395 people en route to Australia.

But the head of the Indonesian Interpol office, Brigadier Dadang Garnida, told *The Australian* that Indonesian police were struggling to live up to the undertakings in a memorandum of understanding signed three years ago with the AFP.

"I feel ashamed because we have made an agreement with the AFP and we have not dealt with this in an optimal way," he said.