

Special Agents 'Probably' Behind Masked Kidnapping of Pastor

A Shi'ite Muslim activist and a Christian pastor who have been missing in Malaysia for more than two years were probably abducted by the police intelligence unit, the country's human rights commission said on April 3.

Amri Che Mat, who worked with the poor, disappeared in November 2016 in the northern state of Perlis, his family has said.

Pastor Raymond Koh, who ran a charity that helped the underprivileged, including Muslims, was kidnapped by masked men in February 2017 in Kuala Lumpur, the capital, according to his family and CCTV footage of the abduction.

The two cases were investigated by the National Human Rights Commission, which delivered its findings on Wednesday.

"The direct and circumstantial evidence in Amri's case proves, on a balance of probabilities, that he was abducted by state agents, namely the Special Branch," the panel said.

It also concluded that Koh had been abducted by agents of Special Branch, the intelligence arm of the police.

Police in the past have denied any involvement in the disappearances.

A police spokeswoman directed Reuters to media reports citing police chief Mohamad Fuzi Harun who said he would respond after reviewing the panel's report.

The rights panel has little legal authority and its burden of proof is less than that required in Malaysian courts.

The abductions bore “uncanny similarities” and both men were targeted by religious authorities and police over allegations that “they were involved in matters against Islam in Malaysia,” the panel said.

Malaysia is a majority Muslim country with large Christian, Hindu and Buddhist communities.

Apostasy is generally considered a sin or a crime by Islamic authorities and proselytizing Muslims is outlawed in most states. Shi’ites are also persecuted by religious authorities, human rights groups say.

“The panel also found there was direct surveillance on the activities by both pastor Koh and Amri in their respective organizations before their disappearances,” the commission said.

The families of the missing men on April 3 urged the government to set up an impartial and independent taskforce to look into the abductions, media said. {eoa}

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