

Six arrested for blackmailing victims with obscene videos

Jeremy Veno

KUCHING: The police arrested six men, aged between 30 and 40, for their alleged involvement in extorting individuals in exchange for keeping indecent pictures or videos of the victims from being shared online.

Sarawak Deputy Police Commissioner Datuk Mancha Ata said the suspects were locals who acted as mule account holders for a syndicate.

"With their arrest, we believe we have solved four out of the six cases that we have received this year.

"The six cases involve a total loss of RM22,200 to the victims," Mancha told a press conference at the Sarawak Police Contingent headquarters here yesterday.

During the arrest of the suspects in Kuching and Serian, police seized four smartphones which are believed to be used in committing the crime.

Mancha said the syndicate would employ women to make random calls to their victims to form some kind of friendship via applications such as MiChat, Facebook, WeChat and WhatsApp.

As the friendship develops, the women would then seduce their victims to perform indecent acts which were then recorded for blackmail purposes, he said.

"Background checks on the



Mancha (left) and Lukas show printouts of the items seized from the suspects. — Bernama photo

suspects revealed that two of them have previous records for drug-related offences."

The case is being investigated under Section 384 of the Penal Code for extortion and Section 424 of the Penal Code for dishonest concealment of money.

According to Mancha, police had recorded 29 such cases in 2012, most involving men aged between 18 and 47, with total loss of RM114,730.

He added the police were still hunting down the mastermind of the syndicate – believed to be operating either locally or

overseas.

"We would like to advise the public to be more aware of new friend requests on social media or chat applications. They must also be wary of unknown numbers calling or texting them," said Mancha.

He also warned individuals not to 'rent' their bank account to any other person or syndicates for them to carry out illegal activities.

Sarawak Criminal Investigation Department head SAC Lukas Aket was also present at the press conference.

PBDSB questions relevance of introducing Jawi script to primary school syllabus

KUCHING: The Ministry of Education (MoE) should not add extra burden on primary school students by introducing Jawi script to its school syllabus, said Parti Bansa Dayak Sarawak Baru (PBDSB) president Bobby William.

Commenting on recent news reports on the issue, Bobby believed that if the move was to proceed, it could affect a child's focus and learning ability in other important core subjects like Science, Mathematics and English.

According to Bobby, PBDSB is adamant that the study of Jawi should be made optional and not compulsory for pupils if they want to acquire another skill.

"PBDSB also opines that the MoE should instead focus on how to uplift the quality of education, especially among rural schools," he said in a statement.

Stressing that such a move by the MoE should not be forced upon students, Bobby also questioned the benefit of



Bobby William

studying Jawi if its use in other fields is restricted.

"Today, the command of English amongst Malaysian students is already rather low. The government should instead focus on future human resources in giving priority to English, Maths and Science subjects.

"Isn't it more practical to concentrate on science technology subjects, like coding as for an example, in order to acquire necessary skills in a technology driven world?"

Bobby said, expressing his doubt on the relevance of the study of Jawi in helping shape the younger generations for their future careers.

Creating a sustainable bio-economy in Borneo

Goh Chun Sheng

BORNEO is rapidly losing its 'comparative advantage' in the land-based sectors, i.e., large tracts of cheap land due to growing concerns over sustainability and the proximity to cheap labourers from neighbouring islands.

The risk from over-reliance on primary products like palm oil and timber was also exemplified alongside the booms and busts of commodity prices in the past two decades.

Realising the bottleneck, the Bornean territories have demonstrated their determination in reconstructing their unsustainable and exploitative land-based development trajectory. Such ambition entails not only the conventional strategies of boosting primary production but also bolder moves in driving structural changes.

One way to move forward is to develop and upgrade the bio-based downstream activities.

The idea is to create and keep added value in the territories. It is hoped that the reallocation of economic activities and the diversification of income sources will allow Borneo to pull out of the vicious cycle of unsustainable land exploitation. The term 'bio-economy' has been widely used to describe such a transformation.

The concept evolves around the substitution of fossil-based materials with biological resources using cutting-edge biological knowledge and technological innovation.

The spectrum of bio-economy strategies is wide, covering the different components from upstream, e.g., intensifying primary production to downstream, e.g., creating new bio-based products and markets.

A natural step for Borneo to boost its economic resilience would be growing a local palm-based oleochemical industry. Globally, almost one-half of the global vegetable oil was used for technical purposes, with about a quarter coming from palm oil and palm kernel oil.

Particularly, the nonfood use in Indonesia has increased substantially. Most were consumed in the chemical industry, with a relatively small amount devoted to biofuel production. Some of the major oleochemicals produced are fatty acids, fatty alcohols, methyl esters, glycerine, and soap noodles.

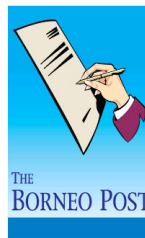
Other potential markets include highly-priced specialty oleochemicals that can be used in pharmaceutical, cosmetic, and food industries, such as amino acid esters and α -carotene.

Both Sabah and Sarawak have achieved a refining capacity of 11.2 million tonne by 2019.

However, neither has advanced oleochemical plant, despite the peninsula reaching a capacity of 2.7 million tonne according to MPOB. The situation in Kalimantan is not clearly known, but at the country level, the development has been reported to be substantial in the past ten years.

About 74% of palm oil exported by the country in 2019, or about 20 million tonne, was refined palm oil.

Indonesia also sees a fast-



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growing oleochemical industry with an annual capacity of 11.3 million tonnes, though the majority is outside of Kalimantan. This may be attributed to its incentive policies like palm oil levy, tax allowance, tax holidays, and lower energy costs.

Another line of development is probably the valorisation of low-value bio-resources generated from the land-based sectors. These include palm kernel shells, empty fruit bunches, forestry residues, etc., that are collectively called 'biomass'.

Roughly, the island generates about 75 million dry tonnes of biomass per year, with close to half coming from Sabah and Sarawak. These have not yet included several million tonnes of oil palm trunks generated from replanting.

Interests in biomass and a broader concept of biorefinery emerged in Borneo in the 2010s, with growing demand in Japan and Korea.

Both countries have implemented policies to partly substitute coal with biomass in their power plants. Further explorations have also been made to convert biomass into second-generation biofuels, packaging materials, bioplastics, drop-in chemicals, and novel chemicals.

In Sabah and Sarawak, state-specific strategies were rolled out in 2016 under Malaysia's National Biomass Strategy (NBS) 2020 to develop domestic high value-added biomass-based industries by valorising the agricultural and forestry residues. Initially, plans were made for energy pellet production, driven by the Feed-in-Tariff schemes for bioenergy in both Malaysia and overseas markets.

Interestingly, Indonesia has recently started to explore co-firing biomass for power generation to reduce its coal consumption. However, it is unclear if incentives will be made by the government in the near future, especially given the fact that East Kalimantan is a key coal producer.

Apart from the solid residues, the valorisation of palm oil mill effluents (POME) is also something worth exploring. POME must be treated carefully to avoid serious pollution of Borneo's water resources as well as reduce the release of methane, a major greenhouse gas, into the atmosphere.

Two interesting options are being explored. One is capturing the methane for biogas production.

Another one is to extract and convert the oil content from POME to liquid biofuels, potentially including aviation fuels.

To date, large-scale mobilisation of oil palm residues has not been realised. Logistics cost is often cited as the key

problem. Meanwhile, the deployment of advanced POME and MSW treatment systems was also slow due to financial constraints.

However, the potential role of advanced biorefineries may stretch beyond just profits, especially in tackling the issues of waste management and building a foundation for innovation in the biotechnology industries. Considering its long term strategic importance, the idea of developing advanced biorefineries in Borneo should not be simply discarded.

It is a no-brainer for Borneo to pursue a structural shift in growth to achieve its aspirations for sustainable development. A sustainable bio-economy does not only reduce considerable pressure on the island's nature but also protect the economies from the wax and wane of primary commodities. Hopefully, it may also provide remunerative employment for local people and cultivate and reserve local talents.

Indeed, time is needed for Borneo to develop its own version of 'bio-economy'. The pre-requisite would be a more vibrant ecosystem of industrial development with cross-sectorial and synergistic collaboration between agriculture, forestry, energy, chemical, and food sectors.

The vision of creating a digital economy in Sarawak may lay the foundation to materialise such collaboration and potentially integration. While Sarawak and Sabah also enjoy more advantages than their Indonesian counterparts due to more developed infrastructure, the construction of Nusantara in East Kalimantan is likely to direct much investment to the province in the near future.

In this context, forging collaboration among the Bornean territories will be an important aspect to look at. This may be built upon existing programmes, i.e., 'Sabah-North Kalimantan Border Economic Area Programme' and 'Malindo Socio-Economic Cooperation' between West Kalimantan and Sarawak.

It is worth further exploring how the Bornean territories can form a larger 'bio-economy' ecosystem and regional value chains to support each other's aspirations in transforming their economies.

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Datuk Wee Hong Seng

Mayor proposes night-time shelter for homeless

KUCHING: Kuching South mayor Datuk Wee Hong Seng has suggested that a temporary shelter be created for the homeless to rest, clean up and sleep at night.

He explained that it is not easy to remove vagrants from the streets as they would often leave homes they were brought to as they love their freedom and enjoy roaming about.

"This is one of the issues that has been happening around. We have joint inspections (with the Welfare Department) and we bring them to homes, the next day they will escape it.

"So we'll look into it and see the cause why they want to come out," he said when met at the Kuching Clean Toilet Campaign certificate presentation ceremony at Kuching South City Council (MBKS) headquarters lobby yesterday.

The mayor suggested that authorities should not control all the movement of such vagrants.

"Put them at a home to stay and they want to go out, let them go out as long as at night they will come back to sleep," he said.

When asked if the council can take them in by giving them jobs, Wee said MBKS, like public services, cannot directly engage people but only on temporary basis.

On another matter, Wee said MBKS is encouraging and creating an environment so that people will set up businesses which will also create more job opportunities.

With the implementation of the new minimum wage of RM1,500, he does not see why employers cannot hire local people.

This can help more locals to find work and still be with family and assist the country at the same time, he added.

KUCHING: Kuching South mayor Datuk Wee Hong Seng has urged rumour mongers to use their free time to help those in need instead of spoiling the harmony and unity amongst Sarawakians.

He was responding to rumours that Chinese participants in the coming Kuching Festival do not have to pay stall rental while those of other races have to.

"I don't understand why people want to create rumours around. Like I said, we don't want people to miss out.

"We treat everyone the same," he said when met at the Kuching Clean Toilet Campaign certificate presentation ceremony at the lobby of Kuching South City Council (MBKS) headquarters yesterday.

He also pointed to a similar rumour about the MBKS Ramadan bazaar that Malay



Wee (left) presents the certificate to a Pandan Thai Delight representative at the event. — Photo by Chimon Upon

operators did not have to pay stall rental.

"If you remember, during the Ramadan bazaar last month, there were eight corporate bodies that came out to sponsor

the rental, so I can't go and charge again can I?"

He remarked that rental charge of RM500 over 20 days for the Kuching Festival is a reasonable amount.

"We still maintain the price as before. We try to cut down unnecessary expenses, and we are also talking to vendors to keep the food price quite reasonable," the mayor added.

He then wondered why MBKS is being targeted by such rumours.

"Spreading rumours will not help you (rumour mongers) win. The council treats everyone the same. Some areas that are not under MBKS jurisdiction, we still come in and see if we can assist," he said.

"I don't know if they (rumour mongers) do it intentionally or not, but for God's sake, don't spoil the harmony in our Sarawak. If you really have the free time, let's help people who need help. That is more meaningful."

Meanwhile, 58 food operators received the Kuching Clean Toilet Campaign certificates at

the event.

The city council realises the significance of providing safe and hygienic toilet to ensure user awareness of toilet etiquettes because having proper toilet facilities and good user behaviours will improve the cleanliness, sanitation, well being and health of the environment and community or society at large," he explained.

Wee noted that Kuching City has been designated as City of Gastronomy which attracts visitors and tourists.

"Most people, if not all, can get very uptight about cleanliness. A true gastro connoisseur would probably agree with this.

"Cleanliness is closely related to health, comfort, beauty, and pride of the people of a city. And a dirty city reflects the state of mind and the attitude of its people towards hygiene and cleanliness," the mayor said.

