



KEMENTERIAN TENAGA DAN SUMBER ASLI

KERATAN SURAT KHBAR

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HUMAN-WILDLIFE CLASH

SABAH VILLAGERS LIVE IN FEAR OF DARING CROCS

Three people killed this year by the reptiles, which are losing their shyness towards humans, says village chief

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As a boy, Sidik Tudin used to swim in Sungai Kinabatangan with his friends after school. "Other villagers used to wash their clothes by the river and some people used to earn a living from it. "That was 50 years ago when there was no fear of being attacked or eaten by crocodiles, which have been living in the river since ancient times," said Sidik, 55, the village chief of Mukim Paris here. Crocodiles used to be a shy species as they moved away whenever they saw humans, he added. Sidik said the reptiles were more often seen at night when villagers went fishing. "But over the last two years, the crocodiles have changed. They can be seen during the day and night. "Unlike before, they are now becoming more daring by exposing themselves and coming close-

er when they see people." He said the crocodile population could be bigger than believed, based on the sightings of the reptiles. Some of them measure up to 1.5m in length, he said. Sidik, who oversees seven villages of 6,000 people, said there were 50 people who relied on the river for their livelihoods. He added that three people in Kinabatangan had died from crocodile attacks this year. The latest, on July 30, involved a woman who had gone fishing at a riverbank in Kampung Tanjung Bulat Sinar Jaya, Kota Kinabatangan, near here. The case prompted Kinabatangan member of parliament Datuk Seri Bung Moktar Radin, who is deputy chief minister, to urge the authorities to tackle the issue, including auditing the crocodile population and looking into issuing permits to hunt crocodiles. Danau Girang Field Centre director Professor Benoit Goossens said over the past 50 years, there had been a lack of habitats for crocodiles. "I can't say that the crocodiles



A crocodile lunging out of Sungai Kinabatangan in this still taken from video footage shot recently. PIC COURTESY OF READER

have become more aggressive. "To me, the crocodiles would be more aggressive if they were attacking boats, for example. "But attacking someone swim- ming in the river or someone who is fishing next to the river cannot be called aggressive because this is normal crocodile behaviour. "For the past two years, the lack of large prey, like pigs following the African Swine Fever outbreak, could have compelled large crocodiles to prey on people," he said.