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Malaysia wins global recognition

Our environmental enforcers and cops walk away with two awards

By FARIK ZOLKEPLI
farik@thestar.com.my

PETALING JAYA: Malaysia's environment and wildlife enforcement officers have won international recognition at the Fifth Asia Environment Enforcement Awards.

The Operasi Bersepadu Khazanah (OBK) task force, a joint effort between police and the Wildlife and National Parks Department (Perhilitan), and the Environment Department (DOE) were two of the eight winners for the Fifth Asia Environmental Enforcement Awards.

The awards, which are given annually for achievement in combating transboundary environmental crime, are presented by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) in partnership with the UN Development Programme, the UN Office on Drugs and

Crime, Interpol, the secretariat of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, and the World Customs Organisation.

OBK won the award for the category under impact while the DOE won for collaboration.

"OBK led to the arrests of 87 wildlife criminals - 49 foreigners and 33 Malaysians - as well as the destruction of 460 wire snares and total seizures valued at RM2.7mil.

"OBK combined the forces of Perhilitan and the police, who also worked closely with state agencies and non-governmental organisations.

"With the operation's success, the task force has expanded geographical operations into Sabah and Sarawak to further protect wildlife from environmental crime," said UNEP on its website.

The task force was set up as part of the "Save Our Malaysian Tiger Campaign" launched to increase the protection of Malaysian Tigers.

In an immediate reaction, Inspector-General of Police Tan Sri Abdul Hamid Bador said he felt grateful to the Almighty that efforts to protect and care for His beautiful creations had gained UN recognition.

"The award certainly motivates my officers and men on the ground to strive harder and score more successes. The war against these plunderers should continue," he said.

The DOE, which was then under the Energy, Science, Technology, Environment and Climate Change Ministry, was cited for working closely with authorities in the United Kingdom to repatriate 42 containers of illegally shipped plastic waste in November 2019.

"As a result of the actions taken

by the Enforcement Division within the DOE, more than 200 containers of illegal plastic waste have been repatriated and multiple illegal plastic recycling facilities have been closed," said UNEP.

Other award winners include Nepal police's Central Investigation Bureau that took down a notorious online wildlife trader; a 92-man operation that dismantled a pangolin smuggling ring in Odisha, Eastern India, and a customs officer in the Philippines whose life was threatened for busting a multimillion-dollar syndicate handling 10,000 tonnes of illegal plastic waste.

All the winners, said UNEP, had worked across multiple countries, made dozens of arrests, and seized hundreds of endangered species and thousands of tonnes of illegal waste worth millions of dollars.

"Transboundary environmental crime threatens both planet and people.

"With Covid-19, the importance of preventing the illegal trade in wildlife and regulating plastic waste is becoming more and more apparent.

"Through the work of the UN and Interpol, we have improved the governance of transboundary environmental crime, but this means nothing without enforcement.

"That's why the work of this year's winners is vital. They are on the front lines of environmental protection" said Dechen Tsering, UNEP regional director and representative for Asia and the Pacific.

The awards encourage government officials and institutions or teams in the region to combat environmental crime, and rewards excellence in enforcement.