

Headline	Sabah power theft now serious		
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Journalist	jason santos	AdValue	RM 2,473
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Sabah power theft now serious

Jason Santos

KOTA KINABALU: Power theft has been in the public glare since the 1980s in Sabah and the Energy Commission said the problem has now reached a serious level – causing losses running into millions for the utility provider.

The power regulator said it is common for these activities to happen in the squatter areas in the East Coast areas where a crackdown on electricity theft was held last year.

The crackdown was part of an Integrated Operation held together with the Eastern Sabah Security Command (Esscom) and other authorities, including local governments in the region.

The commission's regional West Coast Director, Nazlin Ab Salim Sidiki said the issue in Sabah is unique compared to the peninsula where most cases involved non-domestic consumers.

"Many of the power thefts here are domestic consumers largely in squatter areas across Sabah. Be it in the East Coast or the West Coast, often involving communities of a mix of illegal immigrants and locals," she said, Monday.

Under the Electricity Supply Act, carrying out an illegal connection and electricity theft is an offence for which one can be fined up to RM50,000 or jailed up to one year for offences involving domestic consumers and up to RM1 million or five years jail for non-domestic consumers.

SESB estimates that there are more than 10,000 houses with illegal power connections in 111 squatter colonies across the State despite enforcement being carried out from time to time. Previously, losses from power thefts were reportedly costing SESB upwards of RM15million yearly.

Nazlin noted that while many of the cases involved foreign migrants, locals are also involved, perhaps enticed by the prospect of making money through illegal connection by charging their consumers from the power bills they receive from Sabah Electricity Sdn Bhd.

See Page 2, Col. 4

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Safety, security serious concern

From Page One

“During the Integration Operation launched by the Eastern Sabah Security Command in 2015, we were able to file in six reports.

“Our headquarters just confirmed two of the cases were dropped believed due to the offenders having been deported.” The remaining four are awaiting instruction from the Putrajaya Public Prosecutor’s Office, said Nazlin who had been assigned in the East Coast district previously.

The challenges include raising enough witnesses from a community inhabited by those with MyKads and illegal immigrants to charge the offenders as they had found them to be non-cooperative.

Nazlin also said security and safety had become a serious concern especially when dealing with squatter areas.

“I visited a water village during one of the operations and police warned me not to walk close to the houses...as residents were hiding weapons behind their backs.”

Such situation suggests that the residents were prepared to retaliate over the presence of the security personnel during the operations, they also exposed the lives of public services officers to dangers.

She said to deal with the issue, the community, the authorities, especially the local government must come together with the commission to curb the problem.

Citing a viral photo of an electricity

pole with wires hooked on the main power cable, Nazlin said SESB may have already removed the wires but the re-wiring happened in just less than 24 hours.

The photo in question had gone viral last week with the SESB confirming the incident being in Tawau.

“This was why we need the help of the communities to report to us about such happenings in their areas and the authorities to come along with us to solve the problem once and for all,” she said.

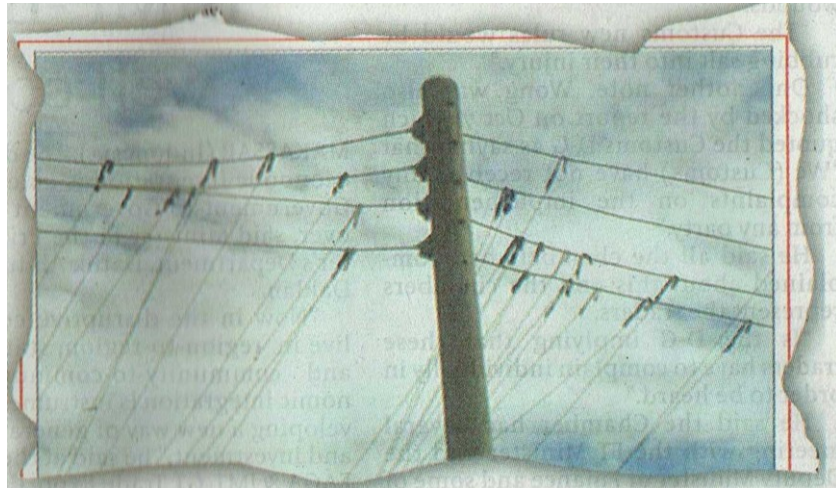
The electricity pole was located near a teachers’ quarters there and the wiring was allegedly done or how to do an illegal connection done was shared with the foreign migrants by a teacher who taught Life Skills at a nearby school.

Daily Express also understands that local politicians had also been involved in protecting those who had resorted to electricity theft in the past.

In July last year, a fireman was killed when he tripped on a live wire while putting out a fire near a squatter colony in Sandakan and in 2011, a policeman chasing a drug pusher at an illegal settlement in Tawau was electrocuted when he ran into a web of makeshift illegal connections.

Nazlin believed there may also be unreported cases involving fatalities, especially among migrants who make up the majority of the occupants at the many illegal settlements.

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Flashback: *Daily Express* report on Tawau power theft on Oct 15.