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Raising the bar for wildlife protection

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THE Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) Malaysia Program congratulates the Royal Malaysia Police, Wildlife and National Parks Department (Perhilitan), Royal Malaysian Customs Department and other enforcement agencies for the arrest of 350 individuals, making RM36.11mil worth of seizures and destroying 1,425 animal traps under Operasi Bersepadu Khazanah carried out nationwide since September 2019.

This success was announced by Perhilitan's director-general Datuk Abdul Kadir Abu Hashim at a press conference, "Watch out, poachers! Wildlife crime bureau to start ops next year" (*The Star*, Nov 30; online at https://bit.ly/3rv5OWy).

During the same press conference, Deputy Inspector-General of Police Datuk Seri Mazlan Lazim announced that the police will set up a Wildlife Crime Bureau to investigate crimes related to wildlife.

Mazlan also said that they had requested for 50 personnel under this unit, which will be placed under the Bukit Aman Internal Security and Public Order Department.

This unit is expected to assist Perhilitan in investigating syndicates involved in wildlife smuggling and trade.

WCS Malaysia highly commends the move to set up a Wildlife Crime Bureau under the purview of the police, an initiative that has been advocated for some years now and was well received and supported during the tenure of the previous IGP Tan Sri Abdul Hamid Bador.

This has continued to gain traction under the leadership of the new IGP, Tan Sri Acryl Sani Abdullah Sani.

Wildlife crime bureaus have been set up to good effect in several countries that are serious in combating wildlife trafficking. These include the United Kingdom, Thailand, Nepal and India.

It is envisioned that Malaysia's Wildlife Crime Bureau will enhance intelligence gathering and coordinate investigations among multiple agencies, leading to arrests of poachers who are plundering our natural heritage.

It can be anticipated that crime syndicates in and outside of Malaysia would also be more hesitant to operate, as effective use of instruments like the Anti-Money Laundering Act 2001 could lead to the arrest of the ring leaders.

It is critical that efforts from the proposed Wildlife Crime Bureau continue to gather intelligence on illegal wildlife trade network chains until they slowly lose their grip.

WCS Malaysia congratulates the Energy and Natural Resources Ministry, Home Ministry, police and Perhilitan for coming this far in making the establishment of the Wildlife Crime Bureau almost possible, and we hope the Finance Ministry, Public Service Department and other relevant agencies can facilitate the formation of this bureau.

Should this initiative transpire, a new dawn of hope can be expected for our dwindling wildlife populations, particularly big cat species such as our Malayan tiger. It is heartening to know that as a nation, we are trying to give our wildlife a fighting chance to survive.

However, sustained funds for existing initiatives such as Operasi Bersepadu Khazanah and new ones such as the Wildlife Crime Bureau need to be provided in tandem with political support so that aspirations to save our wildlife can be truly realised in the near future.

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