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Fishy news creates false alarm

Check first before sharing video of so-called fish deaths linked to radiation water from Fukushima flowing to Penang

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Pinang points

WHEN not sure about certain information, don't share, or as the local lingo goes, "tidak pasti, jangan kongsi".

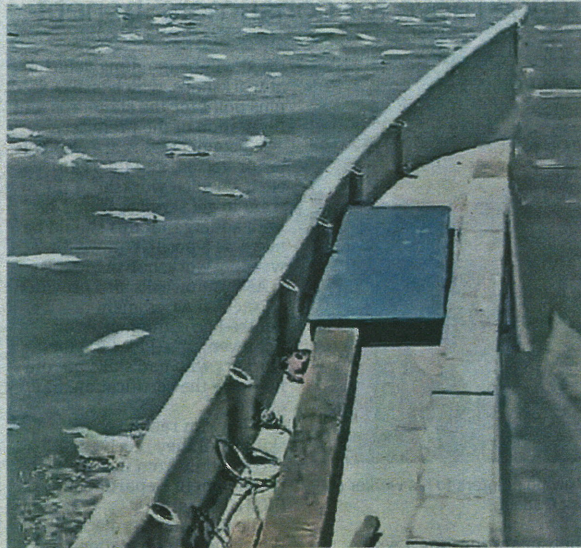
But so many Malaysians don't care about the hazards of alarmism, the idiocy of being fooled by social media and not using one's powers of deduction and critical thinking.

By now, tens of thousands of people, if not more, since last week would have received the 40-second audio recording of an unknown man saying: "Hey good evening, bro. Just sharing with you ah."

"Better don't eat sea fish ah. This is happening in the beaches in Penang ah. Just be careful. This could be the radiation water... from Fukushima la what have you."

"This one you have to wait until our Veterinary Department or our Chemical Department from Malaysia or our Fisheries Department to give notice."

"People are just only sharing all this. This is around Penang ah. Okay. Just only sharing, bro. Take care," the man said.



Screen grab of an old video footage believed to be taken in 2019 of dead fish from a floating fish farm at sea.

Accompanying that audio clip is a 15-second low resolution video, obviously taken by a boatman at sea while speaking in thick Teochew dialect:

"See for yourself! See for yourself! All white! All white! Heartache, heartache," lamented

the boatman while recording a scene showing thousands of dead fish floating in the sea.

Tens of friends from Penang, Ipoh and the Klang Valley sent me the same video and audio files, a few of them earnestly advising me to abstain

from seafood.

Fukushima is 5,420km north-east from George Town in a straight line on Google Earth Pro.

It is now the south-west monsoon, with sea currents flowing broadly from the west in the Indian Ocean to the north-east.

How can the treated radioactive water, released two weeks ago in Fukushima somewhere in the east, flow 5,420km to George Town against the ocean's monsoonal current roughly from the west?

As for the video, it does take some degree of domain knowledge to deduce that it is just social media bombast.

First off, the Chinese community of "Penang lang" speak Hokkien.

He is a rare "Penang lang" who instinctively utters in Teochew when encountering a rare sight.

Even in Balik Pulau, on the rustic west of the island where there are more fishermen, they are a thriving Hakka community.

Secondly, the land far in the horizon on the video is as flat as a runway for tens of kilometres with only a single faraway peak, whereas much of the view of Penang and Kedah from the sea is hilly. (You just have to be someone who regularly takes to the sea off Penang to know this.)

Thirdly, all the dead fish shown in the video look similar and are of the same size, indicating that they are fish from a floating farm that died due to some calamity.

When marine wildlife die en masse, there will be millions of dead fish mere centimetres long and the shapes will be so varied, from the kite shapes of stingrays to the bulbous puffer fish, bloated like balls with gases due to putrefaction.

Universiti Sains Malaysia marine biologist Prof Datuk Dr Aileen Tan said: "I was upset too because many friends shared those video and audio files and asked if they were true."

"I was visiting many floating aquaculture sites but didn't see any (fish deaths). I called fishermen around Penang and Kedah and they also didn't know about it," she said.

Prof Tan suspected that it was an old video clip, possibly taken in 2019 when Typhoon Lekima in August of that year caused fish in many floating farms to die on the east and west coast of Peninsular Malaysia.

Today, with the sharing of alarming fake news being rampant, it is good to remember the cautionary tale of the boy who cried wolf too many times with dire consequences.