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## Cable thefts amount to economic sabotage

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THE rising number of cases of theft of copper and electrical cables is no longer just a nuisance, but a coordinated sabotage of our most critical infrastructure.

The statistics are sobering. Prasarana Malaysia Berhad reported staggering losses of RM20.6 million due to cable theft since 2023, with incidents surging by 68 per cent in 2025 alone.

Keretapi Tanah Melayu Berhad (KTMB) operations suffered a cumulative 1,300 hours of delays last year. The East Coast Rail Link (ECRL) has already lost RM2.9 million to thieves in Terengganu and Pahang.

In Selangor, stolen cables from flood mitigation pump houses are leaving vulnerable communities at the mercy of the monsoon seasons.

As state officials have rightly pointed out, if there is no electricity, the pumps don't work.

But why is this happening now, and why so frequently? The answer lies in the booming global demand for copper.

Driven by the explosive growth of artificial intelligence data centres, electric vehicles (EVs), and the transition to green energy, copper has become

incredibly lucrative. Syndicates know that 200 metres of stolen cable can easily fetch between RM5,000 and RM10,000 on the black market.

To the syndicates, the risks are heavily outweighed by the rewards, partly because current laws treat a critical infrastructural attack as a minor offence.

As proving the intent of "sabotage" carries a high burden of proof, perpetrators caught red-handed are frequently charged under Section 447 of the Penal Code for criminal trespass, or even the Minor Offences Act for possession of stolen goods.

A syndicate that makes RM50,000 in a single night of looting faces a maximum fine of a mere RM3,000 or a few months in jail.

For the criminals, a court fine is simply a minor business expense. Furthermore, this illicit trade exacts a grim human toll.

In March 2026, three men were found dead in Ipoh, electrocuted while attempting to strip cables from a Tenaga Nasional Berhad (TNB) pylon.

Desperation and the lure of quick cash are driving individuals to risk and lose their lives, often acting as disposable hands for the shadow syndicates

pulling the strings.

It is time to stop slapping these criminals on the wrist.

We urgently need legislative reform to introduce mandatory, severe penalties that reflect the gravity of the crime.

Equally important is tackling the unregulated scrap metal buyers who act as willing fences for stolen national assets.

Without a market to sell to, the thieves will stop. The authorities must aggressively monitor and audit the scrap metal industry, holding buyers criminally liable for receiving materials from public infrastructure.

Malaysia is racing forward toward a digital and green future, investing billions into modern transit, AI infrastructure, and renewable energy.

It is time to treat cable theft as a direct attack on the nation's progress and punish the perpetrators accordingly.

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Cable theft in Tambunan recently. (Pic - Gerry Lewis)