



Persatuan Pengguna Pulau Pinang Consumers Association of Penang

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Letter to the Editor

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Participate in extreme sports at own peril

On 27 September 2020, a woman broke her back after the rope snapped during a rope swing activity in Kuala Kubu Bharu. This is not the first case involving extreme sports neither will it be the last as long as the authorities are lackadaisical.

The Consumers' Association of Penang (CAP) is shocked to learn on 11 October 2020 that the Hulu Selangor district council may allow the operator to resume business after the operator nonchalantly defied the Hulu Selangor district council's order to cease its activities several times since 2017. It stated that the decision was decided upon after a "technical review and policy study".

It said that "the extreme activity will be allowed to resume only when a policy related to its implementation is issued and all technical affairs are in order". Such a statement can be released in less than two weeks after the accident because of the "novelty" of the bridge rope swing. It is simply unbelievable how this decision can be derived within such a short time.

Even before the accident, the district council was claimed to have told the operator to cease conducting the activity several times but the operator defied the council's orders. In fact, the operator had operated without a permit since 2017.

Moreover, how did the operator manage to conduct its business (consider that illegal) for more than two years with the district council's knowledge while there are no extreme sports guidelines available? Would the operator continue to flout the law if the accident had not happened on 27 September?

Apparently, PWD officials had told the operator to "find another structure" as the bridge where the incident happened is under PWD jurisdiction. If this is true then we are utterly shocked by the recommendation given by the PWD because the illegality of the business makes no difference where the activity takes place. It is like telling someone taking drugs to move from your property to somewhere else.

Did the operator insure the people who participated in its extreme sports activities? We seriously doubt that any insurance company would sell any policy to illegal extreme sports operators and if it so, the participants of such extreme sports were taking risks at their own expense.

We are also perplexed by what the operator described of the contributing factor to the accident: the rope snapped but did not break. Perhaps the authorities should lift the gag order on the operator so that he can explain how a rope can snap without breaking, yet the woman can smash against the rock before plummeting into the river.

According to a report, the Department of Occupational Safety and Health (DOSHS) said that guidelines on the activities were not under its jurisdiction as the "rope swing" activity was neither motor-driven nor used a hoisting machine. Hence, we call upon DOSHS to formulate guidelines to include activities that are currently outside its jurisdiction.

The authorities are aware of the activities since 2017 and the operator, according to news report, has been operating without a license since that year. The authorities, in fact, had in the past received complaints about the operator allowing participants to jump off the bridge while holding their children with harness.

We hold the authorities accountable for their failure to stop such extreme sports activities without formulating and implementing proper guidelines first. It is an obvious case of putting the cart before the horse. In the meantime we urge the government to ban all extreme sports activities until they have all the relevant government agencies such as the local councils, Youth and Sports Ministry, and DOSH to formulate comprehensive guidelines for extreme sports operators country-wide to follow.



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