

Greedy foreign fishermen plundering our seas

KOTA KINABALU: Greedy – this is the most appropriate word to describe foreign fishermen who plunder the nation's resources in Sabah and Labuan waters.

Fish of various species and sizes – from grouper, red snapper, golden snapper, mackerel to yellowstripe scad – have been harvested by these fishermen.

They are also netting octopuses, shrimps, prawns, lobsters, and oysters, as well as sea snakes.

The New Straits Times Press reporter, who went with Sabah and Labuan Malaysia Maritime Enforcement Agency (MMEA) personnel in a special operation recently, saw the fishermen using joint trawling, an illegal method in Malaysia, to bring in their catch.

The four-day operation saw two Vietnamese fishing boats using this method detained in waters off Pulau Mengalum, 60 nautical

miles from here.

On the second day, 10 MMEA officers and staff received a tip-off that foreign fishermen were fishing illegally near the island.

The authorities approached two foreign vessels, and when they were 50m away, introduced themselves and asked the skippers to stop what they were doing.

The order was ignored, and the skippers tried to flee.

At the same time, a crew member cut off the trawl rope at the back of the boat, so that action cannot be taken against them for joint trawling.

The authorities went nearer and gave another warning to both skippers, and they finally stopped their vessels.

Both boats were from Vietnam, with 27 crew members in total.

The modus operandi was catch-



Vietnamese boat crew detained in an operation recently were believed to have used the illegal joint trawling method off Pulau Mengalum, near Kota Kinabalu. PIC BY JUNAIDI LADJANA

ing fish in two boats moving simultaneously, with a joint trawl about 1.5km in length tied between the boats.

It was banned by the government not only because such a method caused all sea resources to be harvested along the way, but also affected the ecosystem and damaged coral reefs.

The boats had been trawling for

a while, as there was a huge harvest on board.

Checks at the front deck saw hundreds of plastic bags filled with fish and octopuses, ready to be delivered to bigger vessels at the nation's border.

On the other boat were supplies, such as rice, sugar, oil, and cigarettes, as well as snacks in huge quantities able to accom-

modate the needs of the crew for about a month.

The vessels were escorted by MMEA to the jetty in Sepanggar here.

All the foreign fishermen, aged 15 to 48, were charged in court under Sections 14(3)(b) and 15(1) of the Fisheries Act 1985 (Act 317) for fishing in Malaysian waters without a permit.