

Thieves embrace globalisation

By LEE SHI-IAN

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Malaysian car thieves are now taking orders from car buyers in far-off countries, with the most sought-after vehicles being 4x4 pick-up trucks, writes LEE SHI-IAN A DECADE ago, Malaysian car theft syndicates sold stolen vehicles to local workshops, criminals and unsuspecting buyers.

Now, they are busy filling the orders of foreign buyers from as far away as Sierra Leone and South Africa.

Also involved are people who are not syndicate members, but brokers who match the suppliers to the buyers.

The process begins when a foreign buyer informs a broker in his country that he wants a specific make and model.

"Intelligence reports indicate that 4x4 pick-up trucks are in great demand abroad.

"These vehicles include the Mitsubishi Storm, Toyota Hilux and Ford Ranger," a police source told the New Sunday Times.

The source disclosed that stolen Malaysian vehicles have also "been exported" to the United Arab Emirates, Indonesia, Thailand, Pakistan, Afghanistan, China and Cambodia.

"Foreign buyers, no matter where they come from, have one thing in common.

"The vehicles they order are always the latest models with emphasis on performance and power."

Once a buyer makes an "order" with the broker, the latter will get in touch with his collaborators in Malaysia.

For example, if there is an order for a Honda Accord, the foreign broker will contact the Malaysia broker, who in turn will contact the car theft syndicate and place an order.

The syndicate usually gets between RM2,000 and RM3,000 for a vehicle.

The thieves will go out in pairs to their favourite hunting grounds such as car parks and quiet roads.

When the Honda Accord has been located, one member will disable the alarm system while his partner will break into the car.

The vehicle is transported to a pre arranged location, usually in a car park of a condominium.

The registration plate of the car is changed and a duplicate key is made before the stolen car reaches the car park.

"When the car is parked, the thieves will place the key on top of the car tyre or inside the glove

compartment," the source said.

"The car broker is informed that the Honda Accord is at the pre arranged location.

"But there will be no face-to-face contact between the two parties.

"The broker will then go to the car and place an envelope inside."

The envelope will contain between RM500 and RM1,000, depending on the destination of the car.

It is the fee for the runner who will drive the car to an exit point.

When the runner has reached the exit point, for example in Port Klang, the vehicle is placed inside a container and shipped.

All this happens within hours of the car being stolen.

Gone are the days when syndicates would store the vehicles in warehouses.

Foreign buyers normally pay between US\$2,700 (RM9,800) and US\$60,000 for a stolen vehicle.

A Mercedes-Benz S350L which costs nearly RM1 million in Malaysia is sold for a mere RM217,000.

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