**Be aware of the Internet’s downside**

**Sherell Ann Jeffrey**

WITH strong competition among Internet service providers offering numerous high speed Internet packages at low prices, the population of Internet users in Malaysia has also grown by leaps and bounds.

Globally, Kuala Lumpur is ranked eighth among the top ten Facebook users this year, with 6,514,780 Facebook users in the national capital, which is more than half the total number of users in Malaysia.

Today getting connected with anyone, anywhere and at any time is just a click away.

**The Internet is the world’s biggest information exchange, by providing information about yourself and using blogs, chat rooms, email or instant messaging, you can communicate either within a limited community or with the world at large.**

But while sites can increase your circle of friends and access to useful information, it can also increase exposure to people with less than friendly intentions.

Hence there is a need to create awareness on the ups and downs of being connected in this borderless virtual world.

In this respect, Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) in collaboration with the Information, Communication and Culture Ministry, organised a Social Media Convention at UMS as a platform of discussion among academicians, government officials and social media practitioners in Kota Kinabalu recently.

According to 44-year-old blogger representative of Nadi Rakyat from Kuala Lumpur, Azmy Awang, unity among social media practitioners is very important especially in the virtual world, which has no borders.

“Hence, it is important to stay united and help each other by disseminating only the facts,” he stressed.

He pointed out that social media is always misused by certain parties particularly those in the opposition who muddle the people’s mind with misleading information.

“The wrong issues become right and the right issues become wrong, and when the wrong issue is being played over and over again through the social media, then people would eventually start believing the lies,” he said.

Towards this end, he called on social media practitioners to be aware of current issues and not be trapped in the lies posted by irresponsible people.

He also welcomed social media practitioners in Sabah to send, post or tweet correct information that is worth being shared with the rest of the world.

Speaking on behalf of social media practitioners in the peninsula he said: “We in Peninsular Malaysia hope our friendship and unity is strengthened and do send only correct information so togeth-
er we can disseminate correct information which will enhance our reputation as a reliable source of information," he said.

Meanwhile, Sabahan blogger, Maimunah Sidek said lack of awareness and knowledge on current issues is what makes it easy for some people to manipulate the minds of the community with misleading information.

She also stressed that nobody should be afraid of revealing the truth.

"There shouldn't be any feelings of fear...being scared to post the truth, in fact we should not hide the truth just because the person at fault happens to be our friend."

"It is our responsibility as social media practitioners to provide people with real and solid facts," she said.

"Just updating your status with 'I'm hungry' or 'Am going to cinema' is not the sort of information which could be deemed as useful information."

"We as social media practitioners should play our role not only to give the right information but also to answer questions from those who are blinded by misleading information," she said, adding that it was the responsibility of social media practitioners to impart the facts.

"We must create awareness, disseminate and portray the real facts and we have to keep in mind that it is not only the responsibility of the Ministry or other agencies but also us as social media practitioners in the State."

"We don’t want to be labelled as 'coffee shop information' because we are afraid to reveal the truth."

"We don’t have to be afraid or intimidated because we are only exposing the truth to the world," she said.

"Information is at the tip of our fingers so let’s work together and give correct facts and information to the rest of the world," she said.

Maimunah
(left) and
Azmy.