

King of money games dethroned

Entrepreneur, philanthropist, get-rich-quick 'hero' wanted in M'sia and China

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GEORGE TOWN: He once lorded over much of Penang as the "King of money games". But how the mighty has fallen.

Tedy Teow, the founder of MBI – Mobility Beyond Imagination – can now start imagining himself being restricted in prison cells in three different countries, all of which want him for questioning over several money-laundering cases.

It's a far cry from his glory days. Then, he ruled over an "Mpire" that had pretty much everything – housing development, malls, a chain of hotels, an e-hailing service and even its own brand of smartphones.

Not bad for a kid who had started out selling pencils, exercise books and combs.

His MBI was also on top of the money game world.

It was during a time when there were plenty of get-rich-quick schemes in Penang which promised high returns – JJ Poor To Rich (JJPTR), Richway Global Venture, Mama Captain, and Change Your Life (CYL) – but MBI was the darling of them all.

Teow had a large following here particularly with the hawkers, self-employed professionals and ordinary folk who wanted to make a fast buck.

Fast-forward to today, Teow is now in custody in Thailand and awaiting deportation after he was arrested in Songkhla last Friday. And both Malaysia and China want him in their hands.

The Malaysian police are applying for a repatriation exercise for Teow to return to the country to assist in investigations under Section 420 for cheating.

Beijing police also reportedly want him for questioning. This is after a suit filed end of last year by about 400 investors from China to recover investments worth some RM100mil.

In 2019, about 100 Chinese nationals staged a peaceful protest outside the Chinese embassy in Kuala Lumpur to complain that they had been cheated by an online pyramid scheme operated by MBI.

Coincidentally, it was in China that Teow got his "second shot at life" according to a YouTube video released in 2013.

Titled *The Story of MBI International's Boss*, the video was a biography of Teow as an enterprising schoolboy in the 1970s, bringing pencils, exercise books, combs and assorted items to sell in his school.

The video also described Teow's view of great potential in the franchising industry, which led him to start his beverage company called "Island Red Cafe" in 2008.

International Bhd and MBI Marketing Sdn Bhd, two companies under the MBI group.

The company set up M Mall 020 in Jalan Datuk Keramat as its headquarters. The mall had several convenience stores which sold its own brand of body lotions, shampoo products and general trading.

Members could use digital currency called Mcoin to buy and redeem stuff from M Mall.

The company even launched its own line of MBI International smartphones then.

MBI also had a chain of hotels including one in Jalan Sultan Ahmad Shah and a Chinese restaurant in Jelutong. It also operated an e-hailing service called MULA car.

MBI's popularity skyrocketed and there was a huge development project next to the Penang International Airport called Mpire Residences being proposed. It never materialised.

The company spread its wings to Kedah with a housing project in Kulim called MBI Desaku.

Teow turned philanthropist when he set up MBI Charity 100, a social responsibility effort by MBI Group to help the poor and the needy. The objective was to hold 999 charity events each year.

But in 2017, Teow's world came crashing down. M Mall was raided by police, while 91 bank accounts linked



TIMELINE FOR TEDY TEOW AND MBI

- 1990s - Set up CTI Mobile World
- 2008 - Launched the Island Red Cafe Franchise
- 2009 - Founded MBI Group with a capital of RM1mil
- 2009 - Set up MBI Group International
- 2011 - Teow sentenced to a day's jail and fined RM160,000 for two counts of cheating more than RM1mil in the Island Red Cafe investment scheme
- 2017 - MBI Desaku housing project launched in Kulim

"He was my hero. I made a few thousand ringgit monthly from my investment in MBI then. But eventually, I lost it all after I doubled my investment, only to see the company collapsing later on," said hawker BK Khor, 58.

While many heaped praise on the big man, some also nearly lost their life savings when MBI was red-flagged by authorities in 2019.

A technician at a factory in Bayan Lepas free-trade zone, who wanted to be known only as James, said he learnt about the scheme through one of his friends.

"This was about four years ago. After earning a profit each month for about one year, I put in everything I had. I was lucky to break even in the end," he said.

The company boasted having the best and trendiest coffee culture in the country but it was actually little more than just a chain of coffee shops.

Anyone interested could invest in the company. A year later, many shareholders stopped getting their returns. And police reports were lodged.

In 2011, Teow and his son Chee Chow were sentenced to a day's jail and fined RM160,000 after admitting to two counts of cheating and misleading investors of more than RM1mil in the Island Red Cafe scheme in 2010.

Not long after came MBI. It took Penang by storm with offers of "lucrative" returns and was big news in 2015.

Teow was then director of Mface

to MBI International. The accounts held RM177mil.

Teow would later face two charges of issuing unrecognised payment instruments. In 2018, he was fined RM2.5mil and RM3mil by Bank Negara for financial irregularities.

Last year, police said Teow and his two sons were also involved in a Macau scam totalling up to RM336mil.

Teow's family has not been spared, too. His son was held at knifepoint after three Chinese nationals broke into the family's house looking for him for a refund.

The intruders fled but not before dropping two fake bombs in the house.

But now, the real bombshell has fallen. Teow is under police custody. But his story has surely not ended yet.

2017 - MBI Charity 100 carried out 99 events to help the less fortunate

2017 - M Mall (MBI headquarters) was raided with 91 bank accounts linked to MBI International frozen.

2018 - MBI and Teow were fined a total of RM5.5mil by a Sessions Court for issuing a payment instrument without Bank Negara's approval.

2021 - Some 400 China nationals filed a suit to recover investments worth RM100mil from MBI International Holdings

2021 - Police looking for Teow and his two sons for being involved in a Macau scam

2022 - Arrested in Songkhla, Thailand

TheStar graphics

Teow faces harsh reality after fairy-tale plans crumble

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GEORGE TOWN: Taman MBI Desaku in Padang Meha, Kulim, was a housing estate with a difference. The gated community had beautiful landscaping, plenty of recreational activities and an agro park.

It even had a theme park of its own, a fun place for the 2,000 residences and commercial lots in the 100.362ha area.

The park featured 30 figurines and sculptures of characters like 'Optimus Prime' from the *Transformers*, *Spiderman* and *Snow White* movies.

Now, the fairy-tale is over and it's falling apart. The area has been in a state of neglect for the past four years since the collapse of MBI Group.

Residents believe this could be due to the controversy over MBI Group owner Teow Wooi Huat also known as Tedy, who is now being held in Bangkok awaiting deportation.

The mixed housing development project by MBI Group is located

along the Butterworth-Kulim Expressway in the state of Kedah.

Civil servant Zaidi Harun, in his late 30s, said he had bought his house in 2017, but saw the place fall into disrepair soon after.

"I am not sure what happened but I heard the owner of the company was involved in money laundering," he said.

Zaidi said that when he first moved in there, the residential area was beautiful, with wide open spaces.

He said while normal housing estates would be filled with houses, shoplots and gardens, Taman MBI Desaku was more like a fun fair park with recreational activities and attractions for the locals.

Another resident, who requested anonymity, echoed his views but expressed disappointment over the lack of upkeep.

"When we bought the place, we had high hopes due to the promotions by the developer.

"But now, it's the other way round," she said, adding that no matter what problem the developer faces, the promises to the house buyers must be fulfilled.

The development also consists of a 4.8ha agro park, as well as a convention centre on a 1.61ha plot.

The housing park also sparked controversy when in August 2017, the Kulim district office ordered its closure and removal of two female, winged statues following complaints lodged by netizens over the display of "God-like" figures there.

The Star visited another building owned by MBI Group in Penang – the M Mall in Jalan Datuk Keramat and found the place deserted, almost like an abandoned building.

There was eerie silence at the building with no one at the mall complex.

A janitor who cleans the area around the mall said the place had been deserted since the start of the pandemic.

"It has been left like this. We only clean the surrounding areas but are not allowed to enter the mall at all," she said.

The shops that are still there remain shuttered but some workers were waiting to remove branded mattresses displayed on the ground floor.

The Star was told the place will be operated by a company named Wave City Mall, while the owner of the complex remains MBI Group.

During the height of its expansion, MBI and its associates not only ran housing development, malls and hotels, Teow even talked of plans to turn Kulim into a vegetable paradise like Cameron Highlands.

He planned to plant some 30,000 acres (12,140ha) of undeveloped land into farms to "ensure food security" for the country.

Now, he is in the hands of Thai security forces with Malaysian police wanting him repatriated.

PDRM secretary Datuk Noorsiah Mohd Saaduddin said Teow was being investigated under Section 420 for cheating and is currently under the custody of Thai authorities.

In Thailand, Teow has been accused of money laundering over the proceeds from an online gambling venture he had set up in the border township of Danok.

MBI has assets in Danok, a once fast-growing township, whose economic fortunes turned turtle during the height of the

Covid-19 pandemic.

Thai media have reported that the authorities there raided two MBI hotels in Danok before summoning Teow to the district police headquarters for questioning.

It remains unverifiable if Teow remains under remand or if he was allowed police bail.

The *Bangkok Post* quoted Surachate Hakparn, assistant to the national police chief, as saying that Teow was charged with laundering money in connection with online gambling in southern Thailand.

The arrest came after investigators reviewed evidence from crack-downs on online gambling dens in Songkhla, Nakhon Si Thammarat and other southern provinces.

It noted that the Penang-born entrepreneur built a business empire from elaborate investment schemes with nationals from China, Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia and Macau.

MBI Group operates an entertainment complex, including a resort, on a sprawling site at Danok, almost replicating his deeds in Penang and Kulim.