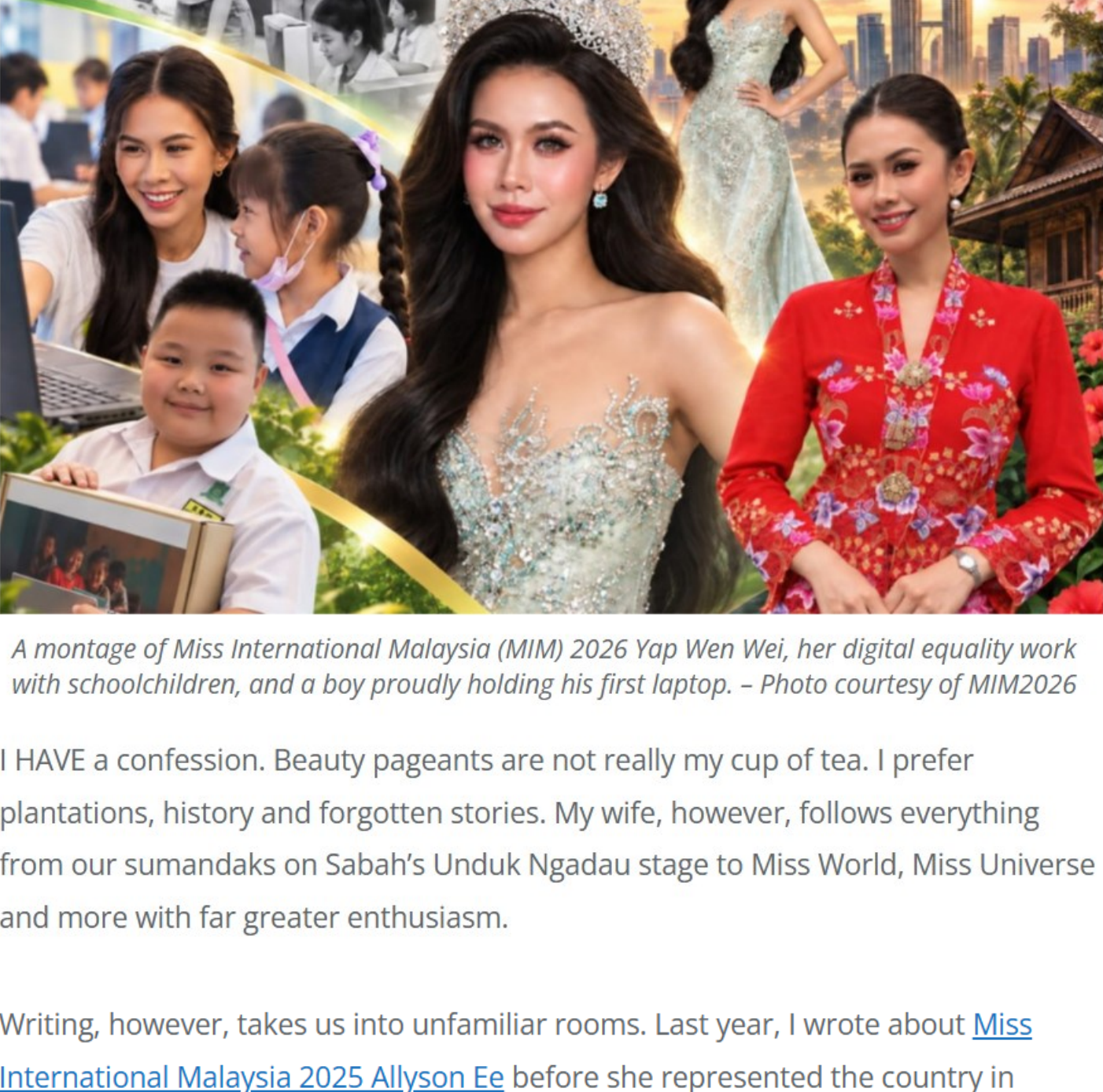




A montage of Miss International Malaysia (MIM) 2026 Yap Wen Wei, her digital equality work with schoolchildren, and a boy proudly holding his first laptop. – Photo courtesy of MIM2026

I HAVE a confession. Beauty pageants are not really my cup of tea. I prefer plantations, history and forgotten stories. My wife, however, follows everything from our sumadaks on Sabah's Unduk Ngadau stage to Miss World, Miss Universe and more with far greater enthusiasm.

Writing, however, takes us into unfamiliar rooms. Last year, I wrote about [Miss International Malaysia 2025 Allyson Ee](#) before she represented the country in Tokyo.

What interested me was not her crown but the young chemical engineer beneath it, hoping to use a temporary spotlight for something enduring.

That changed how I viewed pageantry. Not enough to make me an expert on gowns or the final five. My wife can handle that. But enough to make me listen.

Over dinner in Bangsar, I met Yap Wen Wei, Miss International Malaysia 2026, as she prepared for Tokyo on Nov 25. I was less interested in the gown than in what she hopes to do when the lights go out. Our conversation soon moved from crowns to the first laptop a child might ever hold.

Wen Wei had something to say, and I listened.

Wen Wei completed her final year at Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) online during Covid-19 and graduated in 2022. She saw how dependent learning had become on internet access, and how little that access means without a computer. The pandemic sent lectures, assignments and conversations onto screens almost overnight. For a family with several devices, that was disruptive; for one sharing a telephone, it could determine whether a student joined the lesson at all. A digital classroom means little to the child standing outside its door.

Her campaign for digital equality aims to put laptops in the hands of students who might otherwise watch opportunity pass by on somebody else's screen.

A crown brings cameras, invitations and a brief spell in the public eye. Wen Wei is asking what that attention can do for a child the cameras may never see. What good is being seen if it cannot help somebody else find a way forward?

For Wen Wei, the answer is clear: turn attention into access.

The girl who questioned the measuring tape

By 2022, she was 24 and ready to compete in Miss International Malaysia in Kota Kinabalu. She had wanted to enter pageantry since her teens, but conventional expectations presented a problem.

"I'm not in the ideal height to join pageant. I'm only 165cm (5' 5") tall." Rather than hide the perceived limitation, she made it part of her message. Why should beauty require conformity? Why should centimetres decide whether a dream is legitimate?

Even then, she spoke about women overcoming limiting beliefs and resisting fixed beauty standards. She worried about the supposedly perfect faces and bodies circulating online and the expectations they created. Her advocacy already had a name: Beauty Beyond Labels.

The phrase was not invented in 2026 to accompany a crown. It existed four years earlier in her own words. The crown came later.

Her journey was not a straight walk. Wen Wei reached the Top Eight of Miss Malaysia Globe International in 2018. Her 2022 attempt became another chapter, not the destination. In 2025, she finished first runner-up. Then came 2026, and this time she carried the title.

Sometimes perseverance does not make a dramatic entrance. It simply keeps showing up.

The woman who once wondered whether 165 centimetres was tall enough will soon walk onto an international stage wearing Malaysia across her sash.

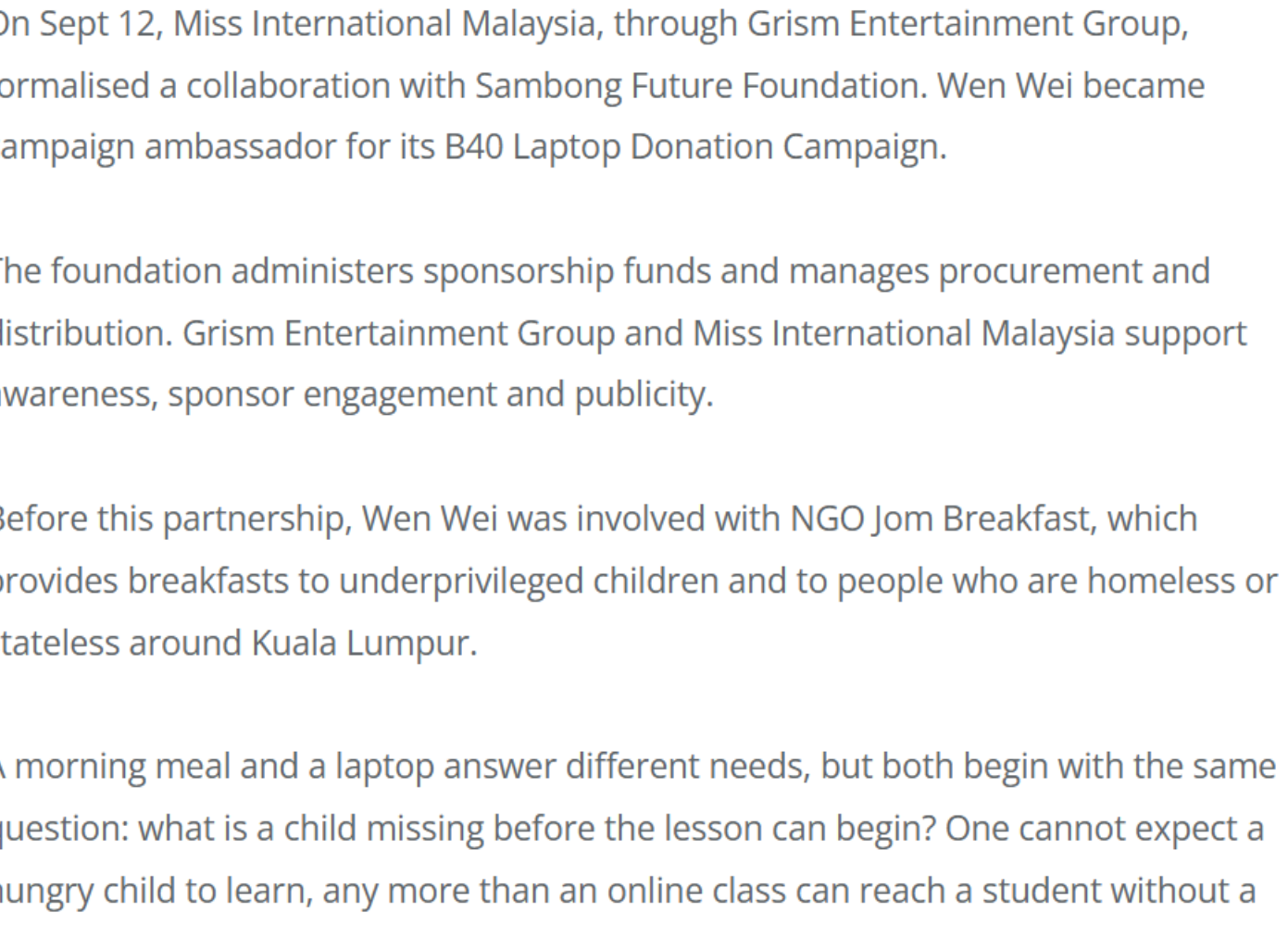
Sometimes the world measures us before it knows us.

The wiser response may be to keep growing in ways a measuring tape cannot record.

A Malaysian journey

Born in Kelantan and raised in Kuala Lumpur, Wen Wei came east to UMS's Labuan campus, close to the beach. She earned a Bachelor of Science with Honours in Multimedia Technology and remembers how tanned she became there. Today she is a marketing manager, model, commercial talent and digital content creator.

Her close-knit family speaks Malay at home, switching between the Kelantanese dialect and standard Bahasa Malaysia. Her paternal grandmother was Thai. Sabah added another layer to that Malaysian story, including its food: Wen Wei enjoys butod, the Kadazan-Dusun sago grub, whose taste she likened, unexpectedly, to a cherry tomato. That is quite a declaration of affection for Sabah.



Miss International Malaysia 2026 Yap Wen Wei in a portrait montage ahead of her journey to Tokyo. – Photo courtesy of MIM2026

Her conversation moved easily from Kelantan to Labuan, from her Thai grandmother to a Sabah delicacy. Universities give us certificates; Labuan gave her a tan and an attachment to Borneo that has lasted rather longer than the tan.

Her studies included coding, a skill she now draws on when helping children explore computers. Multimedia, marketing, modelling, social media and pageantry may seem like separate worlds, but all involve communication, images and audiences. Her advocacy asks whether everyone has a fair chance to enter them.

Wen Wei understands the power of being seen. Her present cause is partly about those who risk becoming unseen.

Beauty Beyond Labels and digital equality

What interests me most is how Beauty Beyond Labels has matured with her. The younger Wen Wei challenged labels about appearance: too short, not the conventional look, not pageant material.

The woman heading to Tokyo confronts another category: poor, B40, disadvantaged, no computer and limited opportunity.

Such labels can shape a child's future before the child understands inequality. Wen Wei's personal tagline, Beauty Beyond Labels. It supports SDG 4 on quality education and SDG 10 on reduced inequalities and fits Miss International's official advocacy, Beauties for SDGs.

On Sept 12, Miss International Malaysia, through Grism Entertainment Group, formalised a collaboration with Sambong Future Foundation. Wen Wei became campaign ambassador for its B40 Laptop Donation Campaign.

The foundation administers sponsorship funds and manages procurement and distribution. Grism Entertainment Group and Miss International Malaysia support awareness, sponsor engagement and publicity.

Before this partnership, Wen Wei was involved with NGO Jom Breakfast, which provides breakfasts to underprivileged children and to people who are homeless or stateless around Kuala Lumpur.

A morning meal and a laptop answer different needs, but both begin with the same question: what is a child missing before the lesson can begin? One cannot expect a hungry child to learn, any more than an online class can reach a student without a device.

Jenny Ngu, Miss International Malaysia's national director, shares that supporting B40 students is an investment in Malaysia's future. By giving them access to technology and digital learning today, we are preparing them for tomorrow.

There is continuity here. In 2022, Wen Wei's question was why somebody else's definition of beauty should determine her possibilities. In 2026, another follows naturally: why should somebody else's economic circumstances determine a child's?

Different label, same underlying philosophy.

One hundred laptops and what comes after

The campaign's aspirational target is refreshingly concrete: 100 laptops for 100 B40 students. Each RM1,044 sponsorship covers a laptop with two years of complimentary repair coverage. Reaching 100 students requires RM104,400.

At Sambong Future handovers, Wen Wei does more than pass laptops across a table. She shows children how to switch one on, search with Google and try Canva. Some had never used a computer before.

She remembers one boy holding his first laptop close, delighted that it was finally his own. She has watched children learn to switch on a computer and make their first online search. For Wen Wei, digital equality comes alive in those small discoveries.

With distribution under the current campaign expected to finish by mid-October 2026, before she heads to Japan, Wen Wei is seeking sponsors. They can also join the handovers and meet the children their support reaches.

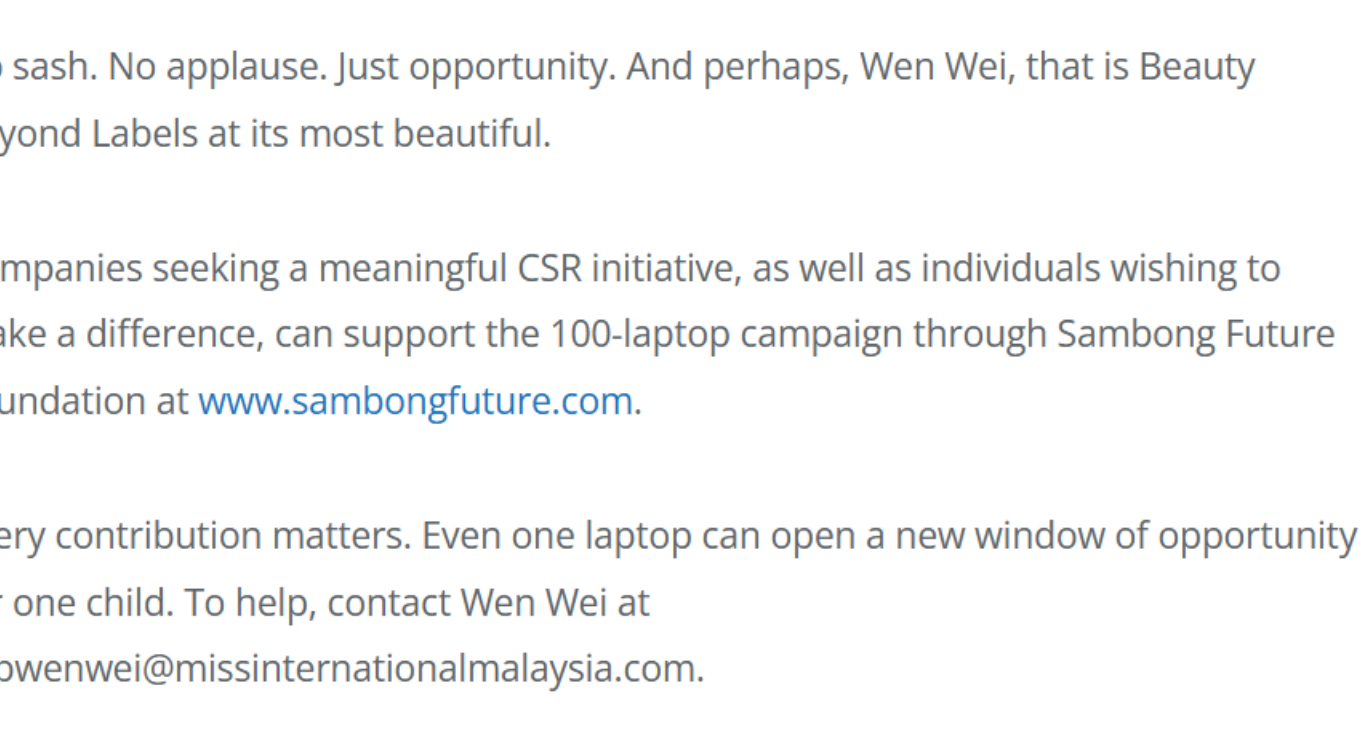
A device is a beginning. Meaningful digital inclusion also needs connectivity, guidance and responsible use. Two years of complimentary repair coverage matter when a computer stops cooperating; access should last longer than a handover photograph.

That practical thinking appeals to me. Purpose sounds wonderful beneath stage lights, but what happens when a laptop refuses to start on Monday morning? Who repairs it? There is little point building a digital bridge if it collapses the first time Windows refuses to cooperate.

Those of us who have used computers for decades can forget what one represents. To many adults, a laptop is another object on the desk. We complain when it starts slowly or updates at the worst moment.

For a student without one, it can be a classroom, library, dictionary, laboratory, design studio, writing desk and window to the world.

Of course, a laptop does not guarantee an education. It cannot replace teachers or parents, manufacture curiosity or solve poverty by sitting on a desk. But its absence can place another obstacle before a child who already has enough.



The writer with Miss International Malaysia 2026 Yap Wen Wei in Bangsar, where she shared the story behind her campaign for digital equality.

The screen and the mirror

There is a contradiction in Wen Wei's journey. As a younger contestant, she challenged the false perfection promoted online. Today, she campaigns to give children access to that same digital world. That is not inconsistency, but reality.

A screen can diminish or empower. It can tell a girl she is not beautiful enough or teach her mathematics; spread envy or deliver a lesson, scholarship application or job opportunity. Technology is neither angel nor villain. It amplifies what we put into it.

Access must therefore come with digital literacy: the judgment to recognise misinformation, scams, cyberbullying and unhealthy comparison, and the confidence to seek help.

With her multimedia background, Wen Wei understands screens as communication. Now she asks us to see them as access.

The character behind the crown

Jenny Ngu describes Wen Wei as kind, dependable and generous with opportunities, having referred a Sony production team to Allyson Ee and introduced tailors to previous queens.

Sponsors value that she "can deliver", an essential quality for someone representing the pageant, its partners and Malaysia, on and off camera.

That is why humility, integrity and discipline are more important than appearance alone. At dinner, Wen Wei also spoke about joining a Power of Pink fundraising walk for breast cancer awareness and survivor support. She understands a crown is both recognition and responsibility.

Place a crown and a laptop side by side. One is ceremonial, the other practical. One catches light, the other creates its own. One symbolises achievement, the other enables it. A crown sits upon one head; a laptop can open a hundred windows.

Perhaps one can help provide the other. Use the crown, photographs, interviews and invitations, then redirect some light towards somebody the cameras might never find. That is when pageantry becomes considerably more interesting.

One detail about Wen Wei particularly appeals to me. She loves free-diving. She once described descending until outside sounds disappeared and only her heartbeat remained. She called it flying underwater.

What a wonderfully contradictory image. To feel as though you are flying, you first dive down.

Perhaps that is a metaphor for life. People see the title, photograph, crown and applause above water. They rarely see the doubts, defeats and decision to return beneath the surface.

Wen Wei knew what it felt like not to win, and she came back. Sometimes courage is noisy. Sometimes it is simply entering again.

What Malaysia sends to Tokyo

When Yap Wen Wei walks onto the Miss International stage in Tokyo on Nov 25, the cameras will naturally see the gown first. That is television. Look a little longer.

Behind the sash is a Kelantan-born Malaysian shaped partly in Sabah, a UMS graduate, multimedia professional and woman who once questioned whether 165 centimetres was tall enough for pageantry. Behind the crown is something more enduring: a campaign trying to put laptops onto students' desks.

After writing about Allyson Ee last year and following Wen Wei's journey this year, I have begun to appreciate pageantry differently. Do not merely watch the women. Listen to what they hope to do with the attention while it lasts.

For Wen Wei, the journey has moved from beauty beyond physical labels to opportunity beyond social labels. That is Beauties for SDGs in practice: using visibility to help somebody else be seen.

On Nov 25, the lights in Tokyo will be bright. I may be thinking instead of the boy she remembered, holding his first laptop. Somewhere back in Malaysia, a smaller light will come on: a lesson loading, a possibility appearing.

No sash. No applause. Just opportunity. And perhaps, Wen Wei, that is Beauty Beyond Labels at its most beautiful.

Companies seeking a meaningful CSR initiative, as well as individuals wishing to make a difference, can support the 100-laptop campaign through Sambong Future Foundation at www.sambongfuture.com.

Every contribution matters. Even one laptop can open a new window of opportunity for one child. To help, contact Wen Wei at yapwenwei@missinternationalmalaysia.com.