

ADDRESSING PROBLEM FACED BY RAKYAT STRUGGLING TO MAKE ENDS MEET IS THE WAY TO REDUCE CRIMES — AMANDA YEO

JULY 5 — Despite the current administration having introduced numerous stimulus packages to ease the financial burden of Malaysians for over a year, the rising cost of living and loss of jobs are expected to make more individuals struggling to make ends meet.

According to the Economic Action Council (EAC) secretariat, more than 600,000 households who were initially in the middle 40 per cent (M40) income group have slipped into the bottom 40 per cent (B40) category.

With the ongoing financial distress arising from the prolonged lockdown, there is an increasing worry that more Malaysians would choose to either commit crimes to survive or suicide to end their problems.

EMIR Research has written an article on how the pandemic has created a lot of worries that has resulted in mental illness that had led many to take the tragic step of committing suicide.

In this article, the focus is on crime. Such a phenomenon is not new in Malaysia. There is a rising number of housebreaking cases between May 4 to June 10, the period when the conditional movement control order (CMCO) was implemented last year.

There were 1,167 housebreaking cases during that period, compared to 1,063 for the same period before the MCO.

With another record-high of 6,982 new Covid-19 patients yesterday (July 2) and the prognosis is the country will hit more than 7,000 daily cases if non-compliance of SOP were still the case and the infection rate (RO) rises to 1.2, there will definitely an increase in unemployment from May onwards (the month where MCO 3.0 was introduced), which in turn, could result in a higher crime rate.

Almost 65 per cent (3,572 suspects) of the 5,518 suspected burglars arrested were found to have no permanent employment between March 18, 2020 till June 27, 2021, according to the Bukit Aman Criminal Investigations Department (CID) director Datuk Seri Abd Jalil Hassan.

When the MCO was re-introduced in mid-January this year, a mother of three attempted to shoplift food items and fever relief pads from a hypermarket to feed her children.

Despite a decrease of 0.1 per cent in the unemployment rate in Malaysia to 4.6 per cent in April compared to 4.7 per cent in March, the latest figure from the Department of Statistics Malaysia (DOSM) shows a total of 742,700 individuals remained unemployed in April.

When more individuals are unable to feed themselves, committing crimes for survival is the likelihood outcome, even though they aware that crime is a harmful act not only to themselves but also to their immediate family, friends and the community. If an individual continues to feel that stealing is more profitable than washing dishes, the affected individual would be inclined to involve in crime, which will be harmful to society and the nation in the long run.

According to the Malaysia 2020 Crime & Safety Report by the US Embassy in Kuala Lumpur, the most common crimes are petty theft (particularly purse-snatching and pickpocketing), smash-and-grab thefts from vehicles and residential burglaries.

Most purse-snatching incidents comprise thieves on motorcycles who stalk victims from behind before grabbing their purse, phone or other valuables. Such incidents often happen along the side streets with limited lighting.

Smash-and-grab thefts from vehicles most often target motorists stuck in traffic. Typically, a pair of thieves on a motorcycle identifies a lone passenger whose valuables are in plain sight. The thieves smash the window of the car with a crowbar, grab the bag and speed off.

For residential break-ins, single-family or middle to upper-income neighbourhoods are the most commonly targeted. Thieves often target residential housing while tenants are away or they may know in advance a certain house may have more valuables.

Cybercrime, including digital transaction fraud, has become one of the new forms of crime in Malaysia in recent years. It has shown an upward trend since 2019.

According to the police statistics, the number of cybercrimes reported was at 11,875 cases in 2019, with RM498 million losses. When the Covid-19 pandemic emerged in early 2020, the cases increased to 14,229, with total losses of RM413 mil.

The number of cybercrimes is expected to increase further this year as there were 4,327 cases reported in the first quarter of 2021. The losses involved were RM77 mil.

Hence, to reduce and control crime effectively, the current administration should carry out a detailed investigation and understand the causes of crimes.

According to the mid-term review of the 11th Malaysia Plan (2016-2020; the 12th Malaysia Plan will begin this year), the current administration perhaps could implement some of the initiatives below with immediate effect:

1. Provide more systematic training and advanced specialised courses such as crime analysis and investigation to the Malaysian Armed Forces (ATM) and Royal Malaysian Police (PDRM);
2. Foster international cooperation through bilateral and multilateral arrangements with other countries and international policing bodies to mitigate cybercrime and organised crime. These arrangements include smart partnerships, attachment of officers and sharing of information and intelligence as well as the best practices; and
3. Intensify crime prevention by redeploying more security personnel, installing crime hotspots with a closed-circuit monitoring system and organising awareness programmes to educate the public with personal safety information.

These efforts would improve the overall effectiveness of enforcement, while the public would have a greater awareness of safety precautions. The private sector will also be motivated to support crime prevention as part of their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) strategy, creating a safer environment.

In addition, the crime prevention programmes could be expanded through social media, with a focus on high-risk groups such as children and youth. In turn, they will understand the importance of installing

burglar alarms at home, using locks to keep their valuables in a safe space, leaving lights on when away from home.

When they are always alert of their neighbourhood surroundings, they could contact the police immediately when discovering suspicious individuals around their area.

Although the current administration has introduced an additional RM150 billion worth of Pemulih (People's Protection and Economic Recovery Package) on June 28, low-income groups continue to be concerned on the prolonged lockdown in the country because they only will receive cash assistance from the Pemulih package from August onwards.



Local residents unload boxes of food aid at PPR Sri Sarawak, Kuala Lumpur on June 1, 2021. — Picture by Shafwan Zaidon

Such a scenario resonates especially among the hardcore poor and B40 households, who cannot afford to put food on the table. Many of them who purely rely on daily wages have no idea how to survive during the next two weeks of the EMCO in the Klang Valley area as they could not go out to make a living.

Although the existing food basket programme has expanded by including all opposition parliamentarians with an additional RM300,000 allocation for needy recipients in their respective constituency, the Malaysian government has to emphasise the right to food by including nutritious food in the food aid. Thereby, underprivileged communities could receive adequate access to fresh, nutritious and local food.

When the government works closely with the soup kitchens, non-governmental organisations and Social Welfare Department Malaysia (JKMM) for meal distribution, the individuals who could not afford to put food on the table do not need to commit any crime.

The White Flag initiative by the rakyat is another good effort to help those in need and could not make ends meet.

To reiterate, the government should continue assisting the rakyat during this health crisis, which minimises the rakyat chance of committing crimes to make ends meet.

** Amanda Yeo is Research Analyst at EMIR Research, an independent think tank focused on strategic policy recommendations based on rigorous research.*

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