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FOREWORD BY THE CHIEF EDITOR

Statisticians are said to be the unsung heroes behind policy-makers. Although users hold them in high regard for the breadth of information they provide, statisticians are anonymous faces behind the numbers, not unlike other data providers.

Unless the relevance of the statistical profession and the wider scope in which statisticians have much to offer are effectively communicated, due recognition will remain elusive. The journal is intended to provide an avenue for statisticians, particularly those in the public service, to develop and demonstrate their potentials, possibly beyond the limited scope of what they are currently engaged in.

This issue contains three articles. The first article entitled 'The Development of the Automobile Industry and the Road Ahead' examines the development of the automobile industry in Malaysia in terms of production and sales of motor vehicles. While acknowledging Malaysia's dominant position in the ASEAN motor vehicle market for the period 1997 to 2002, the paper however expresses concern over Malaysia's declining market share after the period.

The second article, 'Re-basing of the Consumer Price Index: Issues and Challenges' presents the approach to be adopted in re-basing the Consumer Price Index (CPI) in Malaysia and highlights the steps taken to address the issues of representativeness of the selected set of items, reclassification of items according to the Classification of Individual Consumption According to Purpose (COICOP), and the need to come up with sub-national indices.

The article on 'Improving Data Quality: Application of Computer Assisted Coding (CAC) and Automatic Coding (AC)' attempts to study the application of CAC and AC for assigning occupation and industry codes based on textual descriptions. The paper describes the development of a prototype stand-alone CAC system and suggests that in future, when no code could be directly matched with a description, the system should be able to provide a hint in terms of weighting of candidate codes as in the Automatic Coding by Text Recognition (ACTR) tool.

A common thread that runs through the second and third articles is the issue of compliance to international guidelines on concepts, definitions, classification schemes and methodologies. Statisticians often face a trade-off between the requirement to adhere to international standards that allow for better comparability across countries and the need to provide data that best fit the specification of policy-makers based on the particular structure and circumstances of the country.

The demands on our national statistical agencies keep growing. Statisticians painstakingly ensure that data of the highest quality are provided. However, policy decisions are often made on real time and often not under the best of circumstances. Pragmatic considerations usually prevail and decision-makers would rather have imperfect data rather than no data at all.

What is needed then is the best available data within the time and resource constraints, together with a professional assessment of their quality and vulnerability. However, at least for some, the cautionary note is seldom of primary concern, and if at all included in any of their reports, is either confined to the small print of a footnote or simply relegated to one of the appendices.

Considering that statistics is still a relatively ill-understood discipline in our society, a real challenge is in getting more people to pay greater attention to what statisticians have to say.

AZIZ @ FIKRY MOHAMMAD

CHIEF EDITOR

Statistics Malaysia

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