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## Everyone's a soldier in war against drugs



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# Everyone's a soldier in war against drugs

MALAYSIA declared war on drugs since 1983 and until now, it is still the country's number one enemy.

Instead of seeing the drug scourge relenting, it has gone worse in the past 33 years where the number of drug addicts has risen and drug trafficking activities do not show any signs of slowing down.

Children as young as seven were found to be hooked on drugs after initially being given free drug-laced sweets.

When the children eventually became addicted, they were not only made to pay for the drugs but also turned into pushers for their peers.

National Anti-Drugs Agency records show more and more students in primary and secondary schools as well as at institutions of higher learning are abusing drugs.

According to the agency's National Drug Information System, between January 2010 and February this year, there were 131,841 registered drug addicts in Malaysia. Of the total, 127,797 were men and 4,044 women.

About three-quarters, or 93,044, of drug addicts were those aged between 20 and 39 — the most productive age in any nation and family.

The statistics also revealed last year, 41 per cent, or 1,973, of 4,838 drug abusers who were in treatment returned to their old habit.

The actual number of drug addicts is said to be four times greater as most of them could not be detected by the authorities and the addicts do not come forward to seek treatment.

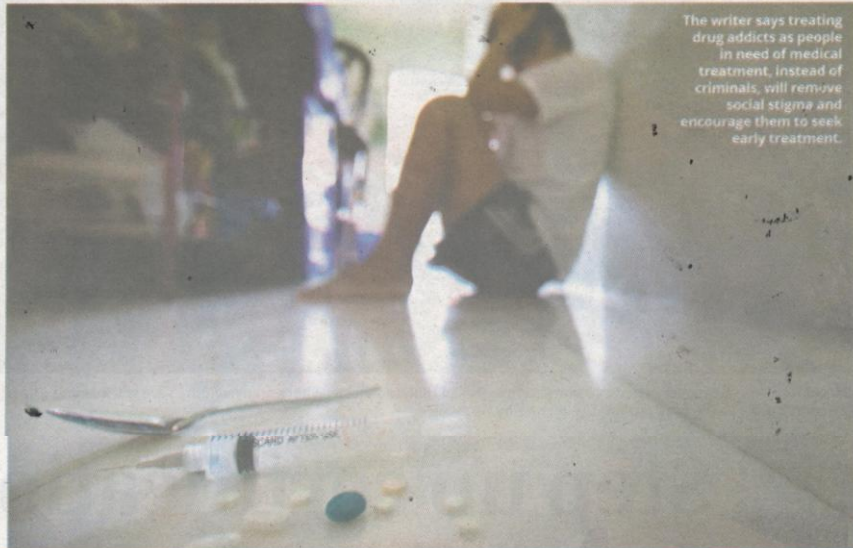
Malaysia has several laws to deal with illegal drugs, which carry heavy penalties such as the mandatory death sentence, but drug trafficking and abuse continue unabated. The mandatory death sentence for those convicted of drug trafficking is provided under Section 39B of the Dangerous Drugs Act 1952 but it still fails to deter drug traffickers.

So, what could have gone wrong? Does Malaysia need an overhaul of its current policies, laws and programmes regarding substance abuse and drug trafficking?

Looking at the situation today, it is apparent the drug problem is very alarming, especially judging from the raids and drug seizures made by the authorities over the years and now almost on a weekly basis.

This year has been declared as the year to wage war against drugs. To do this, we have to ensure the involvement and commitment from all segments of society. War on drugs must begin at home, supported by schools, workplaces and the community.

At home, parents play an important role in monitoring their children and educating them to stay away from drugs. In school, teachers must be alert and intervene if they notice their students are involved in illegal substances. Drug prevention education in schools must also be intensified.



The writer says treating drug addicts as people in need of medical treatment, instead of criminals, will remove social stigma and encourage them to seek early treatment.

At the workplace, drug abuse is considered an occupational safety and health issue. Machine operators, bus drivers, lorry drivers and other types of workers can be harmful to themselves or other people if they are on drugs.

We need greater engagement from the public in the fight against drugs. Community-based associations must implement more programmes to create awareness on the dangers of drug addiction and consequences of the drug trade. Prevention starts from awareness.

Enforcement activities must also be strengthened. All relevant enforcement agencies including police, Customs and the National Anti-Drugs Agency must coordinate their drug eradication efforts and act with integrity.

I would like to congratulate local enforcement agencies such as the police and the Customs Department for their efforts in busting drug trafficking syndicates. The National Anti-Drugs Agency must also be recognised for their cure, care and rehabilitation efforts. But much more needs to be done as victory in the war against drugs is nowhere in sight.

Beefing up the criminal justice system is also important for this cause. There is an urgent need to set up a special court dedicated to hear drug cases. Currently, normal courts take a long time to hear and adjudicate such cases. Justice delayed is justice denied.

Law enforcement officers must enforce the

law on drugs with the highest integrity and execute their duties responsibly and without fear or favour.

The government has spent hundreds of millions to tackle the drug menace in the country but the problem is far from being eradicated. The government must have the political will, especially when it missed its pledge to make Malaysia a drug-free nation by last year.

Enforcement measures taken to bust drug rings and weaken the supply chain must be implemented hand in hand with efforts to eliminate demand for drugs such as campaigns to ensure everyone is aware of the repercussions of illicit drugs, effective rehabilitation programmes and moves to prevent relapse among former addicts.

Cooperation from all sectors of society including NGOs, community associations, the corporate sector, parents, teachers and employers, is needed to ensure the effectiveness of such initiatives. All of us have the responsibility to save the nation, especially the younger generation, from the scourge of drugs.

It is time we stop treating drug addicts like criminals but instead as people in need of medical treatment. This way, the social stigma will be removed and drug addicts will be encouraged to seek early treatment for their addiction.

As for reformed addicts, society has to remove its stigma on them while providing them with job opportunities. Employers

should place more trust on them and family members should interact with them and not isolate them. With support from family and the community, the rehabilitated addicts will be able to live independently and survive. There will then be less chances of them relapsing to their old destructive habits.

The war on drugs will only be effective if we have an efficient justice system, enforcement measures and policies that are comprehensive, preventive and educational combined with access to treatment and rehabilitation as well as the fullest commitment from schools, employers, family institutions and the community as a whole.

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