



Target the crime lords

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A Concerned Citizen

THE public is getting sick and tired of serious crime and violence from syndicates involved in drugs, human trafficking, loan sharking, arms-trafficking, extortion and gangsterism. This massive problem is putting a huge toll on the country and, if not checked properly, can undermine the socio-economic growth and development of the country.

Therefore, the announcement by Home Minister Datuk Seri Ahmad Zahid Hamidi that the government is setting up two special squads of trained officers, bypassing the state and district police chiefs and reporting directly to Bukit Aman, is welcome news.

The public perception on the integrity of our law enforcement authorities, especially of the police, has not been positive. Hence, the government felt the need to set up these special squads and as explained by Ahmad Zahid: "It was created to manage perception ... that all cops are involved in bribery ..."

Perhaps, the government should also consider a more radical approach of dealing with this increasingly serious national problem.

If crime lords and their lieutenants are treated like terrorists and organised crime is deemed a national security threat (like how our government many years ago declared drug abuse a national security problem), it would be a significant step forward. These "crime terrorists" should be monitored, hunted down and eliminated like how the Americans have been doing (using the Patriot Act, intelligence agencies and drones) to target terrorists.

Many governments are having a hard time arresting and prosecuting the movers and leaders behind these syndicates as they are smart, have lots of dirty money at their disposal, can hire the best lawyers and use fair and often over-protective (civil rights) laws, to go free. These criminals often make sure there is no evidence to implicate them.

Before we can think of how to solve the root cause of this difficult problem, we must first accept that there is only one language these crime leaders understand – fear. Fear that their lives can be terminated and their ill-gotten assets frozen at any time. Whether they are caught with evidence or not should be immaterial like how a terrorist would be treated. As long as the authorities know for sure about their involvement in these syndicates, it should be good enough that they be targeted like how the US government targets the financial resources and uses drones to kill terrorists.

Unlike criminals, many terrorists, due to their ideological beliefs, are not afraid to die. So a ruthless approach would work even better with crime lords, who are more fearful of being killed than terrorists.

The police in the US do not hesitate to shoot to kill armed suspects deemed threatening, so why are we crying foul whenever our police shoot armed suspects? The problem seems to be possible abuse by the police and whether there is an effective system of check-and-balance.

We must take the threat of crime syndicates seriously or they can destroy the fabric of our society.

Drug cartels in Mexico have grown so powerful and rich that they seem to be holding the security of the country to ransom. Even the army and police do not seem to be able to rein in or neutralise the drug barons. The drug war between the cartels for the control of the lucrative trade, has taken more than 70,000 lives, mostly innocent people.

In some cases, the drug syndicates are even able to determine the outcome of the elections and appointments of local law enforcement officers by using threats, intimidation and murder. Tourism and investments are suffering and Mexico is wasting much of its time and productive resources on a social scourge it does not seem to be able find a way out.

Enough has been publicly written about the horrors and human sufferings of drug and human trafficking and the vile leaders of these syndicates must pay heavily for their crimes against humanity.

Organised loan sharking (as opposed to legitimate money lending using civil suits to deal with defaulters) in our country has also become rampant and vicious lately. These bullies tend to prey on the weak and from the almost daily news stories about the sufferings (including suicides) of the victims, the leaders of loan shark syndicates, who use violence to intimidate their victims, deserve more severe penalties including death if their victims are harmed.

To demonstrate that it means business, the government should consider an "inquisition" campaign against crime syndicates similar to what Thailand carried out in 2003 against drug dealers, but such a campaign should be done legally and transparently with effective checks in place.

While the authorities should be resolute and ruthless in dealing with the leaders and key players of these evil syndicates, some latitude and mercy should be given to their young and naïve followers, especially those who are social drop-outs and delinquents due to their poor background. The young followers, runners and small fry, unless they commit murders, should be given a chance to repent and turn over a new leaf.

Training, educational opportunities and financial support must be given to all the needy, so that the youths have a choice to lead an honest and gainful life. It's not fair to come down hard on people who have been deprived of basic needs all their life and are forced into criminal activities to survive.

We must address the bigger issues and the root cause of crime for the sake of many who have been neglected by society. Only then can justice be done if society comes down hard on criminals.

