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Wake up and fight drug menace

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IT is shocking to hear the National Anti-Drugs Agency recorded a total of 127,606 drug addicts between 2013 and last year. The Malays recorded the highest number with 100,240 drug addicts from the total cases during the period.

The ugliest part of this issue, out of the total number of cases, 88,597 were new addicts, while 39,009 returned to their habit. This is called repeat offenders. One of the fundamental principles of criminology is that a small proportion of people commit a large proportion of crime. Data from Marvin Wolfgang's famous Philadelphia cohort study suggested that around five per cent of offenders account for 40 per cent of crimes.

There are two explanations for the high instance of such repeat offenders. First, impulsive individuals, with weak social attachments to others, tend to get into trouble more frequently than less impulsive and more attached individuals. Second, people exposed to more crime and disorder opportunities take advantage of such drug users.

Malaysian AIDS Council (MAC) policy manager Fifa Rahman recently stated the biggest obstacle to reducing drug dependency in Malaysia was the criminalising of users and the lack of support services to prevent relapse.

The government had allocated a total of RM7.9 million from 2013 until last year for the rehabilitation and treatment of drug addicts. The programme has not been effective.

Some have argued that jailing drug users is not the answer to drug problems. In most cases, the offenders released from prisons did not cease the drug habit and became repeat offenders. In fact, in the prison itself, the non or new drug addicts mix with other addicts and pushers and could develop worse habit. Many small-time drug users "upgrade" themselves to become drug pushers or dealers. Some even go to the extent of joining drug syndicates.

It is difficult to overcome addiction because of the stigma and label that society places on them.

Most recovering addicts put off treatment due to fear of social consequences and legal restrictions.

A study conducted by Tam Cai Lian



Penang narcotics CID chief Supt Guan Beng Kang (centre) and his officers show confiscated drugs at the Penang police headquarters. The writer says the war against drug addiction must be stepped up to prevent repeat offenders. — Picture by Sayuti Zainudin

and Foo Yie Chu indicated that in Malaysia peer influence and curiosity were contributing factors to drug abuse.

It can be due to socio-economic problems, demand and supply, weak enforcement, globalisation and technologies enable drug trafficking syndicate to smuggle drugs into our country. If demand keeps rising, there will be no end to drug trafficking.

Since drugs are a global problem, they involve transnational syndicates. These warlords have good contacts, networking and connections in Malaysia. According to the Malaysian police, from 2009 to 2015, the main drug rings are from Nigeria and China and they send drug mules to South American countries.

The billion ringgit industry involved some 30 syndicates from two dominant players — the Iranians and Nigerians. The Nigerians first recruited Malaysian

women as drug mules, with 185 being detained between 2012 and 2015.

To address this problem, Malaysia needs well-trained and high integrity law enforcement officers and good procurement of intelligence capabilities. However, gathering reliable information is no easy task.

We need to pay more attention to the local and international syndicates and bring them to justice. All relevant law enforcement agencies should work together and exchange information on drug trafficking.

In terms of rehabilitation, addicts need a greater role in society or family support in order to survive and kick the habit. Employers should avoid the misconception that employing people who have been through rehab is overly risky and dangerous.

The Work and Pensions Secretary in

United Kingdom stated that former drug users can make the best workers. He has outlined schemes dedicated to getting welfare claimants with drug and alcohol problems into employment.

A company in Houston, Venturetech, is using the Internet to advocate the hiring of those jobseekers typically avoided by employers, ex-offenders and those in recovery from substance abuse. This is a good move to prevent repeat offenders.

We need to find some light at the end of the tunnel for this great evil in our society or we will all suffer the national consequences. We need to wake up and fight.

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