

## War on drugs needs re-think in new landscape, says Lee

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Tan Sri Lee Lam Thye

KUCHING: Despite stricter law enforcement on drugs and the successful arrests made during operations nationwide, the numbers could be just the tip of an iceberg as drugs continue to be a threat in Malaysian society.

Malaysia Crime Prevention Foundation senior vice-chairman Tan Sri Lee Lam Thye said drug abuse is still a major problem in the country even though the government has spent hundreds of millions over the years in tackling the menace, with no sight of it being eradicated.

“Over the past one year, a total of 26,660 drug addicts was registered of which 76.1 per cent were new addicts. This brings the number of registered drug addicts currently to more than 280,000.

“These are only cases that have been identified by the National Anti-Drug Agency (AADK). The actual number of drug addicts is said to be four times more, as most of them could be detected by the authorities but do not come forward to seek treatment,” he told a press conference at Pullman Hotel yesterday.

In 2014, there was a total of 21,777 drug addicts detected, with 13,605 new cases. This is an increase from 2013, where a total of 20,887 drug addicts was detected, with 13,481 new cases.

Lee noted that even though the police, especially the Narcotics Crimes Investigation Department, the Special Tactics and Intelligence Narcotics Group, as well as Customs and Immigration have worked hard and successfully uncovered, seized and nabbed suspects in drug trafficking and processing, there are no signs to indicate these criminal activities will slow down.

He believed there is need for a more intensified and concerted effort in combating drugs.

“It is worrying that many young people including school students are involved in drugs. Drug pushers easily tempt the young by giving them sweets laced with drugs. Designer drugs are also easily available.

“We cannot depend on law enforcement alone. Education is important. Schools need to do more in drugs education. There is need to intensify existing awareness programmes and to allocate more time for them.

“Families, parents also need to be aware and ensure that their children do not become victims of drug addiction. Should anyone in the family become addicted, the members must come forward and bring them to a drug rehabilitation centre. Put social stigma aside, what matters is that addicts are given early treatment and rehabilitation,” he opined.

He added that others in the society must play their roles too, especially NGOs and even employers. He further noted that the Home Ministry’s intention to develop and implement a national Strategic Plan to Fight Drugs is also very timely. In the plan, the government will adopt the National Blue Ocean Strategy that combines eight ministries, agencies and NGOs.

Lee also suggested the need to revise existing laws concerning drug abuse, as times have changed. “There may be a need to study the effectiveness of the laws, and review them from time to time. For instance, despite the mandatory death sentence for drug trafficking, there are still people who are willing to take the risk. It does not appear to be a deterrent to them.

“Some of the laws have been implemented for a long time, so there may be a need to update them to suit the different landscape these days,” he said.

Lee stressed on the need to combat drugs as a way to reduce the crime rate in the nation.

“Drug abuse and addiction are among the main causes of many crimes in the country. Last year, 51 per cent of the prisoners were those convicted of drug-related crimes.

“When we talk about wanting to reduce crime rates, we must get to the root cause of it. Many crimes of opportunity are committed by drug addicts because when under the influence of drugs, they become more aggressive and violent.

“I am confident that if we can tackle drugs effectively, we can also bring down crime rates significantly,” he said.