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Law enforcers must act swiftly without coming under the spotlight

Tony Emmanuel

OVER the weekend, chief police officers nationwide arrived to attend a grand bersanding ceremony in Shah Alam. Some were expected to remain for another grand reception, to be held at the Sheraton Subang later this week.

But the parties were not the main aim of their visit to the Klang Valley.

Tomorrow, Inspector-General of Police Tan Sri Norian Mai is scheduled to meet the CPOs at the Federal police headquarters in Bukit Aman, Kuala Lumpur, where he will be briefed on the crackdown on pirated and pornographic VCDs, illegal electronic gaming machines and vice.

Datuk Seri Salleh Mat Som (Criminal Investigation Department director), Datuk Hairuddin Mohamed (Commercial Crimes director) and Datuk Sidek Ali (Internal Security and Public Order director) are expected to be present.

If whispers about what transpired on May 24 (when Norian laid down the two-week deadline that expired yesterday) are anything to go by, then CPOs had better come prepared with their "report cards".

Norian will then be in a position to update Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi on police efforts to curb these activities.

While the responsibility for this had fallen on the police, it was, in recent months, other enforcement agencies that had repeatedly clamoured for more firepower.

Citing reasons such as "tontos" (lookouts) getting bolder and officers being assaulted, the Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs Ministry, local councils and Road Transport Department felt that the solution to their woes was guns.

It cannot be denied that underworld elements have become bolder. One need only recollect the death threat against the former president of Petaling Jaya Municipal Council, Datuk Emran Kadir.

Those who trade in pornography and operate illegal video gaming machines are ruthless enough to go to great lengths to thwart enforcement efforts.

The latest crackdown was long overdue and welcomed by all, especially parents.

In recent weeks, police and enforcement officers from the ministry focused on outlets, distributors and producers.

But one can only wonder how and why these illegal activities had been allowed to mushroom to the extent that even Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad was angry.

(His displeasure came across loud and clear when he summoned a meeting of enforcement chiefs recently.)

In October 2000, the Cabinet banned video arcades, which were then identified as a source of various illegal activities and social ills.

The local authorities were to stop issuing new permits from 2001.

If that ban had been properly enforced, then there would have been no need for the recent crackdown.

This is something local councils, like the muchdiscussed Ampang Jaya Municipal Council, would be able to shed some light on.

It cannot be denied that enforcement agencies and local authorities have to shoulder some blame for what is happening today. Local councils are the licensing authorities but when it comes to enforcement, that job is left to the police.

To be fair, police have on numerous occasions carried out raids and made seizures. But their efforts come to nought when they find operators resuming business the very same day or the next.

Only the local councils can provide answers to this.

The key to controlling such activities is continuous enforcement, but enforcement is only zealously pursued when it comes under the spotlight.

Worse still, it has become apparent that some of those empowered to uphold the law are actually working in cahoots with the underworld - for a fee, of course. Here is where the Anti-Corruption Agency should step in.

When the October 2000 crackdown was under way, the ACA had said that it was compiling information on local authority officials linked to underworld elements.

Three years later, with another crackdown under way and allegations of RM70,000 monthly payoffs to an enforcement chief, maybe the ACA should get involved in the crackdown.

Police have said the crackdown would continue until August. This has been echoed by the ministry and local councils. Well, when they are under the spotlight, what else can they be expected to say?