

Crime: Public Perception vs Doctrine
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The Malaysian public's perception of levels of crime is at odds with the two Cabinet ministers who tell us that crime is decreasing. The positive view taken by the ministers does not reflect the grim realities being reported in the papers, including the mainstream media.

The ministers may be comforted by the high levels of protection accorded them by police and security personnel, but what about ordinary citizens? Not all of us live in gated communities or employ security men to guard our family and property. Shopping malls are now going to be rated for their security levels rather than their convenience. This must be one of the first signs of a failing society.

The media, Opposition and NGOs continue to highlight incidents of crime, but it is what our friends, relatives, neighbours and the people like sundry shopkeepers and traders, with whom we have daily interactions, which help shape our view, that crime is increasing.

The Opposition alleges that the government has spent 71% of the total Crime Reduction NKRA budget on public relations, but our opinions on whether the efforts to tackle crime are successful or otherwise, are shaped to a great extent, by our own personal experiences.

Idris Jala, the CEO of Pemandu and Minister in the Prime Minister's Department said last April, that the government's success in reducing the crime rate, resulted in a 40% drop in street crime in 2011, compared with 2009. Jala claimed that in 2009 there were 38,030 incidents of street crime, 24,837 incidents in 2010 and a low of 22,929 in 2011.

His views were supported by the Home Minister, Hishammuddin Hussein, who last week denied that Malaysia was experiencing an increase in crime. He claimed that allegations of a surge in crime were not supported by police records and said that in the past two and half years, the police force had introduced more policemen onto the streets and installed more CCTVs.

In 2010, a study conducted at crime hot spots in Selangor, Kuala Lumpur, Penang and Johor by the world's largest custom market research specialist TNS Research International (TNS), concluded that 'Malaysians feel safer'. What would be the results of a survey done today?

A snapshot over the four days since the Home Minister made his announcement that crime levels are down is not encouraging.

On Friday, the police detained a man who was allegedly in possession of several rounds of 7.62 ammunition for a general purpose machine gun (GPMG), and component parts of four dismantled fake pistols during a house-raid.

The next day, in a raid on a house in Ulu Gombak, the police arrested four men, who were alleged members of a secret society, and seized four pistols, 700 bullets and drugs.

Crime also happens on the high seas. On Sunday, six pirates, believed to be foreigners, robbed 13 crew members of a Petronas Carigali tug boat, just off the Miri coast. Over in Kuantan, three men armed with knives entered the home of a family and took a

nine-year-old boy "hostage" before robbing his family of cash and jewellery.

At dawn on Monday, random shots were fired at the house of a corporate figure in SS19, Subang Jaya, whilst in Petaling Jaya, heavy downpour washed-up the decomposing torso of a man. A man and woman wielding samurai swords, in Putrajaya, were shot by police.

Yesterday, Johor Baru police rescued a KL based businesswoman who had been abducted by someone wielding a gun. An online newspaper received an e-mail from an elderly lady who said that she was afraid to go to her local market in Petaling Jaya for fear of being mugged or raped. The carpark and the staircase to the wet market are unlit and unsafe.

Are those with criminal intent sensing a lack of police activity and control on our streets? Is our education lacking and our morality diminished? Is the upbringing of our children at fault? Our young men seem unperturbed about breaking the law and are getting bolder.

Last Thursday, a bus driver in Ipoh ferrying students to school, was attacked and robbed when he stopped at the traffic lights. Four young men drove off with his bus and it crashed when they lost control of the vehicle. Fortunately, only the bus driver sustained injuries. What if there had been children on the bus? What if innocent bystanders or other motorists had been injured or killed?

Sadly, it was also announced last Sunday, that the victim of a snatch thief, from Malacca, had fallen off her motorbike and died. She was on her way to work along a "quiet" stretch of road when she was attacked by another motorcyclist.

Reports of snatch thefts, muggings, rapes, burglaries, online scams, kidnappings and violent assaults appear daily in the newspapers, radio and television.

How effective is Rela in assisting the policemen in law enforcement? Where are the police? Is much of their time spent on paperwork in the office and publicity drives to improve their profile?

Many people refrain from making police reports when they become victims of crime because they feel intimidated or are put off by the lengthy procedures. Others allege that the police refuse to make police reports. So crimes go unreported and give the impression that crime has fallen.

The competency of security guards in shopping malls is another source of complaint. Shoppers allege that when they report crimes or the presence of suspicious characters, the usual responses received are "It's normal," or "It always happens." Others worry about the physical ability or professionalism of some guards, who appear unfit or are dozing on the job.

If the government maintains that crime has been reduced, then they should do a better job at inspiring our confidence. Many remain convinced that police action is concentrated against political opposition members whilst others allege that the police are involved in crime syndicates and that corruption within the police force is not being addressed.

Not all policemen are tainted, but the rot must be stopped. Sadly, a policeman friend confided that he has dissuaded his son and nephew from joining the force despite generations of their family being former policemen. He said, "The police force is a shadow of its former self."

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