

CRIME: Implement 'three strikes' law
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PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak has called for increased efforts to improve public safety. He has noted that crime rates have fallen but more needs to be done to make people secure.

There is a solution to this problem, which can be learned from studying the legal systems of the United States and New Zealand.

Quite simply, Malaysia needs to implement a habitual offender law, sometimes known as the "three strikes law".

The concept is straightforward: should a criminal be found guilty of three consecutive qualifying crimes, they would then be given a life sentence.

There are a number of possible variations to this policy: the life sentences could be with or without the possibility of parole, though the deterrent effect would be enhanced if there were no possibility of release in the offender's lifetime.

Also, there could be a minimum sentence served requirement -- 25 years is typical -- even if there is the possibility of parole.

Some criminals have been simultaneously charged with two three strikes (that is a third strike and a fourth strike). They have received life sentences with a minimum of 50 years to be served.

There are suggestions that the three strikes law is effective in reducing crime.

Violent crime has fallen dramatically in Los Angeles since this law was instituted.

In 2010, there were just 297 murders compared with 1,000 in 1992. It should be noted that violent crime has also fallen in other areas in California that do not have this law, but the extreme result is still suggestive of an effect on crime.

However Malaysia might choose to structure such law and its punishments, it is clear that the logic of the habitual offender law is promising.

Should a criminal be a lifelong one, with a tendency to repeat offences in a habitual manner, then there is no benefit to society and, indeed, much harm, in allowing them their freedom.

Society benefits if the habitual offender is removed permanently from circulation. By removing habitual offenders -- those who would commit more crimes than any other category of criminal in their lifetimes -- Malaysian crime rates will be reduced considerably.

In the US, the three strikes law applies to serious crimes such as rape, murder, robbery with a weapon, or burglary with a weapon, though some states categorise lesser crimes as qualifying, too.

The Malaysian government should consider implementing this law and should weigh which crimes to include under the three strikes law.

Given the fear that street crime engenders, I would urge the authorities to include such crimes, including use of a weapon, attempted kidnapping and robbery with any kind of violence.

Malaysian public safety could be improved immeasurably by a three strikes law.

Let us, as a nation, make a stand against the habitual criminals among us, and take them off the streets forever.

Valentine Cawley, Kuala Lumpur.

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