

COVID-19 and the importance of human security issues

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BEFORE the cold war, a national security consideration usually takes into account the security of a nation or ruler. The government played a crucial role in safeguarding the security of a nation.

This implies that if the government is secured the people's lives are also secured and safe.

The central aspect of security threat is more of a physical in nature, such as a military threat in times of war.

This influences the government's decision to allocate a large sum of money on military arsenals for security reason.

Nonetheless, national security understanding has undergone through an evolutionary ever-changing process as it encompasses a wider branches of human existence.

It is not only pivoted on a security of the nation only but also to human survival and quality of life. In one of the sections in the United Nation Development Report (1994), published by the United Nation Development Programme (UNDP) highlights this concept in Redefining Security: The Human Dimension.

In this report, the identifiable indicators that contribute to the security threat of human lives include economic, health, surrounding area, personality, environment, community and politics.

With regards to health matters it draws on the elements that can lead to the spread of contagious diseases particularly at pandemic scale that can have a disastrous effects on human lives.

Numerous academic books by international and local scholars have delved extensively on issues of human security.

Notable among them are Non-Traditional Security Issues in Southeast Asia, edited by Andrew T.H. Tan and J.D. Kenneth Boutin in 2001. While in 2012, Profesor Dr. Kamarulnizam Abdullah edited National Security in Malaysia (Keselamatan Nasional Malaysia) which explores the security issues within a Malaysian context.

These scholars argued that the aspects of human security traversed through the needs of military might but towards the survival of humanity.

If the safety of the people is not assured, the existence of the nation itself is of no significant.

This can be clearly seen in the pandemic outbreak of COVID-19 virus throughout the world. To overcome this outbreak requires extraordinary management skills on the parts of the governments.

It indicates that we cannot take for granted and compromise on the security needs of the people.

This outbreak, which began in Wuhan China on December 2019 has spread globally up to Europe and the Middle East. Italy is the most affected in Europe, while in the Middle East, Iran suffers the main brunt.

In Malaysia, up to this point of writing, has witnessed 57 deaths due to COVID-19.

His excellency, the Prime Minister of Malaysia, Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yasin, on the 25th March 2020 had announced the implementation of Movement Control Order (MCO), for the whole of Malaysia for 4 weeks from 18th March 2020 to 14th April 2020.

Initially it was for two weeks but was extended for another two weeks. It was strategized mainly to control and eliminate the spread of the contagious virus COVID-19 among the community by enforcing certain restrictions on the movement of people.

At the beginning of the implementation there were some teething conflicting issues of communication and coordination in its implementation.

However, these were overcome and the MCO could be the precedent in the future course of actions in confronting a virus outbreak crisis.

There are enormous invaluable lessons we can acquire in our attempts to contain the spread of this COVID-19 virus.

Firstly, the war against the virus is not only a physical military matter in protecting our border but on the contrary, the threat to the national security is in the form of maintaining our survival as a human race.

Secondly, our society is now more exposed to a more comprehensive and complex factors involving human security.

Although Malaysia is a fully independent country, it is still susceptible to non-physical threats, such as a pandemic virus outbreak.

Thirdly, as the issues of security encompass many areas, they are no longer the responsibility of the government alone in combatting them.

On the other hand, the society as a whole should be knowledgeable and have a keen sense of awareness about the multiple aspects that can threaten national security.

There should be a close symbiotic cooperation between the people and the government in facing these concerns.

Formerly, the Total Defense approach or HANRUH (Pertahanan Menyeluruh) was introduced by the government in handling the matters of national security holistically.

It involves the participation of the various entities of the government which includes the Malaysian Armed Forces or ATM (Angkatan Tentera Malaysia) and the Royal Malaysia Police Force or PDRM (Polis Diraja Malaysia).

Various other countries too, have Military Operation Other Than War or MOOTW initiatives which were to promote peace and to look at aspects of security other than physically and non-military in nature.

Undoubtedly, some countries face the threats of national security in military terms, but presently the threats of non-military forms are more prevalent in terms of preserving lives and improving living standard of society.

Countries, like Malaysia is also at risk in facing non-military threats such as the spread of COVID-19 virus pandemic.

As a whole, the current definition of human security should be instilled in our society mindset.

Public debates about the issues should be encouraged so that the society would be regularly vigilant of probable incoming threats and no longer be in a state of unpreparedness as we are experiencing now.

COVID- 19 has shown that our society is quite fragile and can be thrown asunder if we do not remain united and shed our differences for the well beings of society, particularly in this trying time.

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