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Safe City Monitoring System: A Malaysia First in Crime Prevention

PUTRAJAYA: Despite seeing street crime and the overall index crime dropped by 35percent and 15percent respectively in 2010, efforts are still on-going to ensure that crime prevention initiatives under the Government Transformation Programme (GTP)'s National Key Results Area (NKRA) are on track and sustainable.

To do this, the government through the Federal Department of Town and Country Planning of the Ministry of Housing and Local Government has received an allocation of RM36 million in 2010 from the Ministry of Home Affairs to reactivate and expand the Safe City Programme or SCP (identified as one of the enablers in street crime prevention which was introduced in 2004) in 12 local authorities to reduce street crime.

The twelve local councils have been selected based on the crime rate by area (hotspots) provided by the police (Polis DiRajaMalaysia). The councils are: Dewan Bandaraya Kuala Lumpur (DBKL), Majlis Bandaraya Shah Alam (MBSA), Majlis Bandaraya Petaling Jaya (MBPJ), Majlis Perbandaran Subang Jaya (MPSJ), Majlis Perbandaran Ampang Jaya (MPAJ), Majlis Perbandaran Selayang (MPS), Majlis Perbandaran Klang (MPK), Majlis Bandaraya Johor Bahru (MBJB), Majlis Perbandaran Johor Bahru Tengah (MPJBT), Majlis Perbandaran Pasir Gudang (MPPG), Majlis Perbandaran Pulau Pinang (MPPP) and Majlis Perbandaran Seberang Perai (MPSP).

Another RM72 million has been set aside for 151 local authorities this year.

"This clearly shows that we are very serious about ensuring that our cities are safe and free from all physical, social and mental threats," said Kamalruddin Shamsudin, deputy director-general (planning) of the Federal Department of Town and Country Planning Peninsular Malaysia.

"The SCP is aimed at addressing urban insecurity and promote the culture of crime prevention," Kamalruddin said. "Local authorities can play an extremely vital role in the development of community-wide approaches for crime prevention as they are in a strategic position to initiate, coordinate and implement these programmes. These strategies include bolstering the capacity to address and reduce crime, advocating crime prevention initiatives as well as planning and effecting capacity building programmes."

Participating local authorities have been directed to ensure that the SCP is a compulsory agenda to be discussed at their monthly meetings and the results and updates of these crime prevention measures are regularly submitted to the ministry.

"The key to crime prevention is by having strong and effective partnerships between local governments and other stakeholders (including the public) as this will help to eliminate violence, crime and insecurity," Kamalruddin, who is also the coordinator of the NKRA SCP said.

Among the initiatives that have already been put in place under the GTP's NKRA to fight crime in addition to heightened police patrols and the close monitoring of crime hotspots are separation of pedestrian walkways with railings, improved lightings, mirrors, safety alarms, GIS-based (geographic information system) crime mapping and closed-circuit televisions or CCTVs (implemented separately under the supervision of the Ministry of Housing and Local Government).

And at the centre of this crime prevention effort is the Safe City Monitoring System (SCMS) which basically integrates crime data from the police reporting system (PRS) with the SCP and land use information under the custody of the Federal Department of

Town and Country Planning, Ministry of Housing and Local Government, using the geographical information system (GIS) platform.

"While other jurisdictions abroad have only started GIS-based crime mapping, Malaysia has gone a step further with SCMS which has never been attempted before," Kamalruddin said. "The primary objective of the SCMS, in our context, is to create an environment of joint cooperation among the many agencies working together on crime reduction initiatives through the sharing of information and monitoring within a digital environment. This is done in collaboration with the police.

"Our SCMS allows monitoring of the implementation effectiveness of safe city measures in street crime prevention in areas under the jurisdiction of the local authorities. It also enables existing and potential crime hotspots to be identified and monitored as well as assists the police and public to report crime online.

"Using the GIS platform, the SCMS helps to translate the PRS crime data into digital maps. Prior to this, visualisation of crime information is done in the form of pin maps.These maps are not permanent and discarded and changed with time. Tracking the historical crime data to establish crime trend is a gruelling task without GIS mapping.The SCMS-PRS integration is invaluable to the police as it not only helps them identify high crime areas, but also studies variables on possible causes of crime and patterns. This is especially useful for the police to monitor crime occurrence and plan the deployment of manpower more efficiently."

This system offers a degree of sophistication that will change the way law enforcement agencies look at crime data. For example, crime analysts previously spend the majority of their time researching, collecting, and formatting information while only a fraction of the time is spent analysing the data. "We are hopeful the cycle will be reversed where the analysts spend more time analysing and solving problems, with the new technology implemented today," Kamalruddin said.

The SCMS is already operational at 42 hot spots police stations since 1st January 2011. As for the safe city implementation this year, the findings generated by the SCMS have provided excellent basis for quick and accurate decisions on the choice of locations for implementing safe city crime prevention measures. "This will hopefully help to eliminate public perception that the safe city initiative is tailor-made for a certain area or community group," Kamalruddin expressed.

The SCMS is also connected to the Internet which enables the local authorities and related agencies involved in crime prevention to have access to crime hotspot information. The respective local authorities can update the status of their implementation progress (such as installation of bollards, lightings, CCTVs, separation of roads and pedestrian walk, etc.) under its jurisdictions online and the Ministry of Housing and Local Government and Ministry of Home Affairs can monitor the implementation progress of these projects to ensure that efforts to significantly reduce crime under the GTP's NKRA achieve the desired results.

"This is in line with the spirit of the GTP," Kamalruddin pointed out. "Crime reduction is a joint effort and no government agency should tackle it alone. We are doing away with the silo mentality in this regard. Also with the various stakeholders working closely together, it would also promote the 'green effort' by eliminating a large amount of paperwork."

In 2009, Malaysia was the third safest country in Asia after Japan and Singapore on the Global Peace Index (GPI) and placed 26th among 144 countries globally. In the 2010 GPI report, it ranked 22nd in the world, overtaking Singapore as the safest country in Southeast Asia and coming in second behind Japan among Asian countries.

"The country has done well on the GPI in 2010," Kamalruddin said. "We are optimistic it will get better this year. But there is no time to take a breather as yet. The efforts of the crime reduction NKRA are commendable and will continue to be implemented on a sustainable basis. And hopefully in the long-term, we can successfully keep street crime at bay."