CRIME LEVELS AND TRENDS IN THE NEXT DECADE

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INTRODUCTION

In the last few years, the local media, especially the press, have been replete with reports of crime and violence in Malaysia. There have been many reports of snatch thefts, rapes and other sexual crimes, assaults and murders, child abuse and ill-treatment of foreign maids, hold-ups and thefts, kidnappings, not to mention numerous fatal road accidents. With this barrage of media reporting, there is an air of anxiety and fear as to what the future will hold for our Malaysian society and subsequent quality of life. This black cloud is further removed of any silver lining when police statistics on these crimes indicate that they are indeed on the rise.

The current crime situation is worrisome and is a constant source of discussion and debate along the corridors of the managerial ranks within the police leadership as it is not only a major statistical element in the Criminal Justice System but more importantly so, it directly affects public confidence in the police. The Royal Commission set up in 2004 thus went further to quantify the perception of the general public on crime as a whole and PDRM specifically. The results were dismal and the Royal Commission considered the above predicament a matter of grave concern. The “victims of crime survey” and the “worries about occurrence of crime survey” showed the following:-

- Of the respondents surveyed 17.6% reported that they had been victims of crime in the year 2004 alone (Victims of crimes in the last 5 years would be thus much greater!)
- The survey also found that 89% of the respondents were “worried” to “extremely worried” about the occurrence of crime in their

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1 The Malaysian Quality of Life Report 2004 report issued by the Economic Planning Unit, Prime Minister’s Dept. Malaysia, states that though the Malaysian Quality of Life Index (MQLI) had improved during the period from 1990 to 2002, it had recorded a downward trend in its public safety index. The Public Safety Index is measured by two sub indices i.e. crime per thousand population and road accidents per thousand vehicles. The 2004 Report further states that the crime rate has increased from 3.8 in the year 1990 to 6.2 in the year 2002.

2 The Report Of The Royal Commission To Enhance The Operation And Management Of The Royal Malaysia Police 2005, had stated that “public confidence in the police had also declined due to the increasing incidence of violent crime and the growing audacity of criminal elements although crime rates had declined overall”.

3 Report of the Royal Commission to Enhance the Operation and Management of the Royal Malaysia Police 2005, at page 60. They went further in extrapolating the statistics: “Assuming an adult population of 5 million in urban areas, this translates into a total of 878,000 persons who had fallen victim to crime in urban areas in 2004!”

4 The problem could be even more serious. Based on a survey which was conducted by a Chinese media daily, Nanyang Siang Pau (6 July 2004), reported that 50% of the respondents had been victims of robbery, snatch thefts and sexual harassment. Significantly, only about half of the victims (50.3%) had lodged police reports. Among the reasons offered for not reporting to the police were: “Police unable to help” (45.2%); “no evidence” (29%); and “procedure for lodging report was troublesome” (11%). Nanyang surmised that there was a “lack of confidence in the Police”. Michael Chong, who heads the Malaysian Chinese Association’s Complaints and Services Bureau, similarly remarked that many victims of snatch thefts did not lodge police reports (The Star, 6 June 2004).
neighborhood. Only 11% or a ratio of one in ten of the respondents were not worried.

It is this high level of worry that is a cause for deep concern and which is in itself disruptive towards the police image. With this in view, the objective of this paper is to identify and examine:-

i) **Why police should be interested in the future?** The future is currently receiving a great deal of media, academic and public attention as we emerge into the new Millennium. The turn of the century has prompted many to consider what life will be here in Malaysia in the next few decades.

ii) **Predicting crime rates.** This article further discusses whether crime can be predicted by presenting an overview of the method used in crime prediction and presenting predicted crime figures.

iii) **Anticipating future crime trends.** By identifying the new and emerging trends in crime, the police can gain a better understanding of future crimes and plan strategies to manage them.

**Why should the police be interested in the future?**

Anticipating future crime levels and trends will provide us a better assessment and thus a better understanding of future crime risks whilst identifying new and emerging trends in crime. This analysis can be used as a means to anticipate future crime trends so that the scope and impact of crime can be lessened and even prevented in coming years. There is currently a lack of research in this field and thus one of the purposes of this study is to make a modest contribution to addressing this void.

Crime predictions can be developed through both qualitative and quantitative methods, and a distinction should be made between predicting trends in crime and forecasting future crime levels.

- Quantitative methods are used to predict the future crime rates. A forecast of future crime levels would require a model that takes account of all relevant social, demographic and economic factors that are the causes of crime, as well as the likely effect of current and future policy initiatives likely to impact crime. As such, it must be noted that it is conceptually and practically impossible to provide forecasts with any degree of accuracy more so if the period in question is decades away.

- On the other hand, qualitative approaches to forecasting crime are useful in identifying the future nature of criminal activity. Predictions in future crime trends indicate the likely effect of specific factors that have been shown to have a relationship with crime. Technological advancement is one such factor. By identifying the new and emerging trends in science and technology, the police can gain a better
understanding of future crimes and plan strategies to manage them. Moreover, changes in the socio-economic structure and demography in Malaysia in the future will also be an important factor in defining particular groups and areas at increased risk.

**Predicting crime rates**

Crime analysts are often asked to predict whether crime will increase or decrease. As stated above, it is conceptually and practically impossible to provide forecasts with any degree of accuracy as it depends on so many factors that are not easily quantifiable such as social, demographic and economic factors. While there is no magic formula that can be used to divulge future crime trends, knowledge of the past reported crime incidents, for example, can enable one to estimate the number of reported crime incidents in the future. This information of forecasting how many crimes will be committed is a valuable tool to policy makers and can be integrated into crime prevention programmes.

Crime predictions rely on certain assumptions since many factors can affect crime rates, and forecasts are therefore tentative. Factors other than an increase in population growth which would cause an increase in the reported crime rate include, among others:

- **Macro-Economic Factors** (i.e. strength of economy, unemployment rates, and consumer spending levels).

  Unemployment and crime are very closely interlinked. Studies\(^5\) in the West have shown that the economic situation in a country is closely linked to crime trends, especially property crimes. Similarly local studies\(^6\) have concluded that there is a significant correlation between unemployment and property crime. When the economy is strong and consumption of consumer goods and services is growing, property crime growth tends to slow down or reverse. The opposite is true during periods of economic recession. The correlation between the economy and crime rates in Malaysia was illustrated during the economic downturns that hit our country during the periods of 1986 and 1997 which saw an influx of cases\(^7\).

- **Political instability**


The political situation of a country would definitely be a factor in determining its social stability which in turn affects the crime situation. The more unstable the political environment the more volatile the crime situation caused by crimes of violence and at times even terrorism.

- **Demographic variables and urbanization patterns**

  Demographic variables have been cited as the strongest determinants of crime rates and hence have been central to predictions about the future of crime. In particular, the demographic variable that appears to most influence crime is the size of the male population within the crime prone years of 15 – 25. Further urbanization and population density also affect crime rates. This can be seen by comparing the crime rates between the states of Kuala Lumpur and Pulau Pinang with the comparatively more populous states of Sabah, Sarawak, Perak and Kedah. The former group displayed a higher index crime per 100,000 than the latter states\(^8\). This goes to show that urbanization\(^9\) and population density affect crime rate, rather than population *per se*.

- **Criminal Justice Responses**

  There is then the mixed debate over the ability and efficiency of law enforcement agencies especially the police to influence crime rates. Some have argued that such factors as criminal justice expenditures allocated for the enforcement (the police) and the adjudicating authority responsible for clearing up the backlog of cases, the use of technology by law enforcement agencies, more effective policing and correctional facilities, and a greater role of the public and private sector in crime prevention, will definitely have an impact on crime growth. Therefore predictions about the future scope and nature of crime should take into consideration the factor of the responses by these elements of the criminal justice system. As an example, successful implementation of a crime prevention campaigns which calls on people to report crime, like the “Rakan Cop” has been shown to have an impact on crime.

Since the data on the above are not always available or reliable, predictions based predominantly on population growth provide for a simpler, if not entirely fail-safe, method of forecasting crime rates. Thus with the underlying assumption that when population growth occurs, a similar increase in the reported crime rate will follow is used for the following analysis in determining crime in the next decade.

**Determination of Crime Rate based on population growth**

\(^8\) *Ibid*
\(^9\) Miura, A. A researcher has found that crime is rising in the suburbs of provincial cities in Japan and made a finding that urbanization spurs crime rate. [http://www.japantoday.com/e/?content=kuchikomi](http://www.japantoday.com/e/?content=kuchikomi)
In the determination of the crime rate for the next decade, there were certain assumptions that were made to extrapolate these results. They are:

1. **Choosing the base point for our extrapolation**

   In choosing the base point from which to extrapolate our growth of crime, it was deemed that for it to be relevant it should be one which is recent and is less affected by external macro-economic factors which grossly affect the crime rate. It would thus be prudent to first refer to the index crime chart for the past 20 years. As can be seen, the total index crime in Malaysia has shown a close link to the economic situation of the country. There are two peaks in the crime index chart during these periods between 1980 and 2004. These peaks occurred during the two economic downturns affecting the country. The first peak occurred in the mid 80's whilst the second peak occurred in 1997, both of which coincide with the economic downturn that hit Malaysia during these times.

   The most recent time period where the economic downturn effect has somewhat watered down but one which is more inclined towards the actual crime situation of the country can be seen by a stabilization of the crime rate, which if translated in the crime chart is the valley in the graph. The base point of our tabulation is thus taken from the year 2002 as this is when the external economic effect on the crime rate has stabilized.

2. **Other factors affecting crime rate**

   As stated above, there are other factors affecting the growth of crime rates in a country e.g. macro-economic factors, political stability etc. It is thus assumed for our projection that these factors remain unchanged and the only factor affecting crime rate is population growth. This is done as the other factors cannot be determined to an acceptable degree of certainty whilst population statistics show that this index grows at a consistent rate.

3. **Population growth rate**

   The population in Malaysia grows at a rate of 2.6% annually. Thus taking that the population growth is proportionate to index crime it is assumed that crime rate will grow at this same rate of 2.6%.

   The chart below shows the crime rate for the years from 1980 to 2004. The projected crime rate which starts from 2002 is then tabulated based on a growth rate of 2.6%.

11 The tabulated index crime growth rate is as per Appendix I
There are a few indicators that we can get from the above chart, and they are:

**For the years 1980 to 2004**

The total index crime in Malaysia showed an increase in the last 20 years with the following observations regarding property and violent crimes.

1. Crimes related to property accounted for about 90% of all crimes reported every year. Violent crimes, although attracting the greatest attention of the public and the media, contributed to only 10% of all crimes reported.\(^{12}\)

2. Violent crime has generally remained along the same gradual growth path. It shows neither an alarming increase of violent crime nor was it affected by the economic situation of the country.

3. On the other hand, property crime had shown a rather volatile growth pattern and it can be seen to be the main contributor of the total index crime in our country. It was also very closely linked to the total index crime situation in the country.

**For the years 2005 to 2015**

The tabulated crime index is shown as per the chart above, growing at a rate of 2.6% per annum.

1. The total index crime in the year 2015 would have reached the 200,000 mark. Below is a summary of the crime rates.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>PROJECTED INDEX CRIME</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>160,972</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>183,015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>208,076</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. Following previous crime trends, the trend for property crime would make up 90% of the crimes reported, whilst the rest would be made up of violent crime.

**Commercial Crime Rates for the next decade**

As commercial crime cases are not represented by the index crime indices, it would also be interesting to see the growth of such cases in the future. As such the following graph shows the total commercial crime cases for the years between 1973 and 2004.

Even though the number of commercial crime cases has slowly increased since the 1980s in tandem with the increase of economic activity, there was a sudden jump of more than 700 percent in 1998 as compared to the figures of 1997, the major portion of it being cheating cases. This was due to the external economic factors that affected the country.

Though in later years, the economy expanded with more corporations being formed and multi-national companies setting up bases in Malaysia, the number of cases tapered off since 2003 which had 11714 cases to 9899 cases in 2004. Among others, the main reasons were a drop in the Film Censorship Act and fraudulent ATM withdrawal cases. Nevertheless there was an increase in conventional fraud cases such as Cheating and CBT which eventually brought the amount of losses for 2004 to more than RM836 million.

In our ascertainment for the growth pattern of commercial crime for the next decade, our projection growth would, unlike that for the index crime statistics above, depend more on the economy rather than population per se. Unfortunately there is a caveat in this line of projection, i.e. the economic performance of the country as projected by the GDP can only be charted for the next two years by the Economic Planning Unit, Malaysia, as this index has so many variables.
Thus in this instance, the growth of commercial crime cases for the next decade is tabulated along a mean and gradual extrapolation based on previous years. Below is the tabulated chart showing the growth of commercial crime rates from 1973 to 2004, and also showing the projected growth rates.

The projection shows that within the next five years we would have approx. 12,000 commercial crime cases whilst in the year 2015 it would be in the region of 14,000 cases.

**Anticipating future crime trends**

**Developments till the present**

There has been a development of crime trends from the pre-Independence period to that of the present date. It has developed from its humble beginnings of its simple theft, physical injuries caused by direct confrontation and simple wayside robbery, to that of syndicated crimes and now the more complex borderless crimes. Crimes now have become more complex and sometimes impossible to detect. White collar crime has taken a new turn in that it has become trans-border with its transactions taking place thousands of miles away and thus causing jurisdiction problems. Criminal have taken a progressive road to enhance themselves with investigative knowledge thus making the work of the police forensic investigator more arduous and difficult.
CRIME TRENDS

TRADITIONAL CRIMES  SYNDICATED CRIMES  BORDERLESS CRIMES (GLOBAL)

PRE INDEPENDENCE  PRESENT

Developments of crime trends in Malaysia

Future developments

As noted down by Foresight Directorate\(^\text{13}\), which predicted the nature of property crime in the future for the United Kingdom (it is also applicable for Malaysia), that crime in the future is likely to occur on two levels: (a) the continuation of traditional age-old physical crime and (b) the new form of electronic crime. The report also indicated that the factor that will most influence the complexion of crime in the future is technology. Traditional crimes, such as theft and fraud will continue but with new electronic targets and facilitated by advanced technological tools. ICT will facilitate such electronic crimes such as credit card fraud, network hacking, money laundering etc. There will be several crime trends that will grow in the future and some of them are:

Computer-based crimes

Computers, especially when used as information communication devices, will increasingly be central to a vast array of electronic crimes. The internet in particular will be a popular vehicle through which traditional and new forms of computer-based crimes will be perpetrated. The scope and impact of Internet-based crimes are likely to continue to grow in the future.

The Internet will provide computer-literate offenders with new opportunities to commit crimes directly related to networked systems. E-mail abuse,

viruses, and hacking are expected to grow in prominence in the future. Companies are likely to face Internet attack from both within as well as externally.

While offenders find new areas of value to pursue in the electrical, digital, and computerized world, many old forms of crime will be translated to the electronic world and increasingly conducted through new electronic mediums. The Internet will enable criminals to perpetrate traditional crimes such as fraud, theft, embezzlement, gambling, drug trafficking, and pornography on a much wider scale. The Internet will not invent new forms of frauds; however, “electronic variations of traditional frauds will be carried out with greater efficiency and effectiveness, will have potentially greater impact and will be more difficult to investigate.” The Internet will help to feed the growth of fraud and theft, especially in relation to credit and debit cards, telemarketing, multi-level marketing, on-line auctions, personal identity, intellectual property, and stock markets.

Telemarketing fraud and stock market manipulation through the Internet are also expected to increase. There is a growing fear that well-organized criminals will launder their ill-gotten gains through e-commerce transactions, sending electronic cash to cyber-accounts located all over the world. With vast wealth at their disposal, criminal organizations can buy almost any kind of technological resource or expertise.

**Knowledge and Information Crimes**

The theft of information and intellectual property will increase as the importance of the knowledge-based economy grows. Intellectual property offences – including copyright infringement, product counterfeiting, and breach of confidence – are already some of the fastest growing categories of crime and a matter of international concern. Copyright fraud is expected to greatly increase in the future.

**Identity Theft**

The large amount of information that companies now maintain on consumers, combined with increased access to such information through commercial services or the Internet, will contribute to an increase in identity-related crimes in the future.

**Increased Organization of Crime**

As crime becomes more sophisticated, international, and technological, it will also become more organized. In addition, many of the crimes that will be highly profitable in the future, such as illegal waste disposal, trafficking in

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arms and nuclear materials, migrant smuggling, and trafficking in humans, will demand some form of organization\textsuperscript{17}. Certain economic crimes, such as telemarketing fraud, counterfeiting, and credit card fraud, are already highly organized. Corporate crime, which historically has been committed by employees acting alone, will increasingly be perpetrated by groups external to companies. This includes both traditional crime groups, which are organized around common ethnic or cultural ties, and the emerging non-traditional economic crime groups or networks, which have, as their sole common bond, the profit motive.

Organized crime groups will continue to explore the possibilities of new technology and will reach out to individuals with specific technological skills\textsuperscript{18}.

\textbf{Growing Transnational Nature of Crime}

The future of crime will increasingly be one without boundaries. The role that telecommunications technology, and the Internet in particular, will play in globalization, will ensure that crimes become more transnational in scope\textsuperscript{19}. Sophisticated criminals have capitalized on the global integration of commerce and communications, while taking advantage of the limitations of local and national regulatory and enforcement regimes. Through the use of technology such as the Internet, offenders can be located in one country while the victims reside in countries scattered all over the globe.

\textbf{Future Offenders and Victims}

What are the characteristics of future offenders and victims of crime and how these characteristics may diverge from the past? What is constant among most crime predictions is the assumption that the largest offending demographic group will continue to be young males between 15 and 25 years of age. The young offenders of the future can be divided into two groups: (a) those who rely on traditional property crimes, and (b) those that commit more advanced electronic and computer-based crimes.

The first group will not be very different from traditional young offenders. They will largely be of lower socio-economic status, the product of dysfunctional environments, with learning disabilities and a history of crime and delinquency. This group will largely be responsible for rudimentary property crimes, such as break and enter, theft from autos, and theft of autos.

The second category of young offenders will be dominated by educated, middle-class youth, who are technologically-astute and use their knowledge


\textsuperscript{18} Criminal Intelligence Service Canada. (2000) \textit{Annual organized crime report}. Ottawa: Criminal Intelligence Service Canada. \url{http://www.cisc.gc.ca}

of computers and networked systems to steal electronic signals, counterfeit
digital products, or hack into networks for vandalism or profit. In future
years, analysts predict that the average individual will know more and more
how to use technology, but understand less and less about how it works.
As such, society may one day be at the mercy of a small, technologically-
knowledgeable elite of computer experts who fall within the crime-prone
years. With greater access to information, including sensitive information,
low level agents may be capable of creating crime and havoc of a severity
previously limited to organized or career criminals20.

Further demographic trends point to a significant rise in the aging
population over the next 20 years, which will produce a senior citizen
population that may be at greater risk to criminal attack. While the
victimization rate of the elderly is low relative to their population size, the
sizeable and vocal baby boom population that is entering their advanced
years will ensure that crime against the elderly will remain a central public
policy issue21.

Conclusion

We have seen from the above that there will be a growth in both the statistical index
and also the nature of crime in the future. This will definitely have an impact on the
criminal justice response especially so with the police which is entrusted with the
investigation of cases. With this unsettling crime rate and trends at present it is
bound to become worse in the future as crime is gradually increasing. It will thus be
prudent for the policy makers to invest in the police now so as to ensure that this
predicament does not become a reality in years to come. The often mentioned
reasons by the police for the rise of crime like manpower shortage, lack of
technically advanced equipment, development resources cut-back are some of the
points that can be pondered upon. On the same note the police must strive to be
more professional and corruption free, so that we can be on the road to a safe
society with an exemplary police force.

Department of Trade and Technology.
Appendix I

Chart showing population growth in Malaysia as per Statistics Department, Malaysia.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Index Crime</th>
<th>Projected Index Crime</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>23,494.9</td>
<td>167,173</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>24,012.9</td>
<td>156,469</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>24,526.5</td>
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<td>149,042</td>
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<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>25,048.3</td>
<td>156,315</td>
<td>152,917</td>
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<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>25,580.9</td>
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<td>156,893</td>
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<td>26.25</td>
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<td>2012</td>
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