TOWARDS
SAFER NEIGHBOURHOODS

In 2011, the Global Peace Index ranked Malaysia as the most peaceful country in Southeast Asia and the fourth safest in the Asia Pacific region. Even with those accolades, Malaysia is not one to rest on its laurels as it ramps up its efforts further towards building safer neighbourhoods in the country. Report: Clarice Africa.

Under Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Bin Abdul Razak's Government Transformation Programme, the Federal Department of Town and Country Planning (FDTCP) of the Ministry of Housing and Local Government will expand the Safe City Programme to reduce crime and promote a culture of crime prevention.

The Safe City Programme encapsulates the public safety initiatives under the Government Transformation Programme's National Key Results Area, and at the centre of this effort is the Safe City Monitoring System which integrates crime data from the Police Reporting System with land use information from the FDTCP and the Ministry of Housing and Local Government, using the Geographical Information System (GIS) platform.

According to Peter Valentine Amandus, Town Planner and GIS Manager at the FDTCP, the SCMS is considered as a huge milestone for the Department as it has never been attempted before. While several jurisdictions have only started using GIS for their crime mapping initiatives, he says it is not as sophisticated and as well-integrated as the SCMS.

"The SCMS allows the Royal Malaysian Police (RMP) to monitor the effectiveness of crime prevention efforts in areas under the jurisdiction of the local authorities and also enable existing and potential crime hotspots to be identified and closely monitored."

The system is currently being used by 51 police stations and 12 municipal councils. By end of 2012, the system is expected to be used by 254 police stations.

Its main objective is to create a collaborative platform where agencies can work together to reduce crime by way of sharing information through a user friendly web portal. In addition, since the system helps translate crime data into digital maps, the police are able to shift away from using pin maps to help them visualise crime information.

"Pin maps, most of the time, are not permanent and have the tendency to be discarded and changed over time which makes doing a trend analysis of crime quite a tedious task. This situation also encourages local authorities to develop their own GIS crime mapping tools which are often very expensive to develop," he says.

In order to address this concern, the FDTCP integrated the SCMS with the RMP's Police
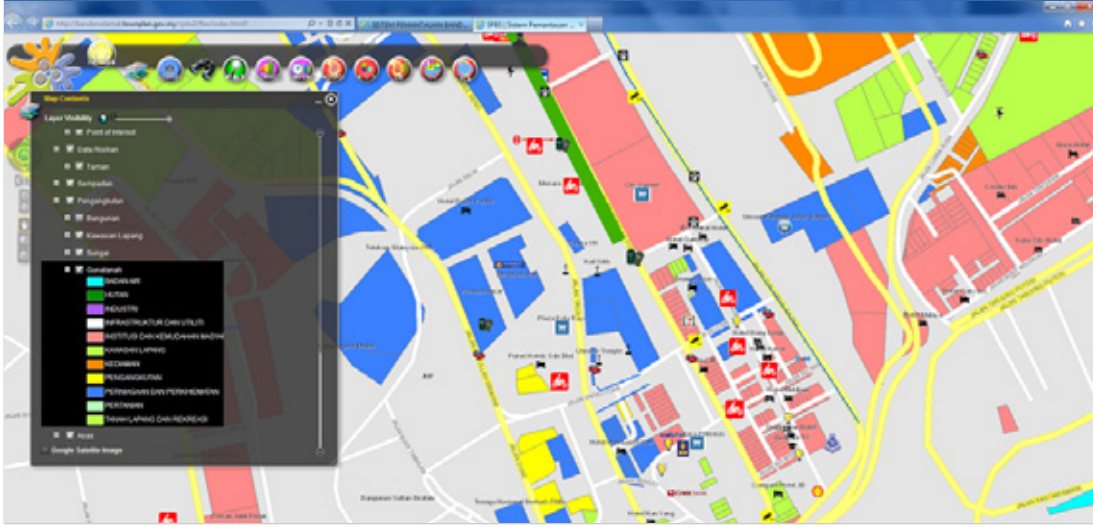

Peter Valentine Amandus
Town Planner and GIS Manager, Federal Department of Town and Country Planning

Dato Zainal Abidin Bin Kasim
Senior Assistant Commissioner, Royal Malaysian Police

> Mapping crime hotspots onto Esri's ArcGIS system.

Reporting System, an online crime reporting tool which records crimes documented by police stations across the whole country. By integrating the two systems, crime can be located on the map which will then be registered in standard coordinates and used for data storage and analysis.

Since the SCMS provides geo-processing analysis real-time to users, the core processing server is segregated to meet high demand in a web-based environment. Thus, FDTCP is able to be less dependent on a physical server, thereby substantially reducing costs in utilities by nearly 50 per cent.

With the new system in place, FTDCP is able to equip the police force with the capability to not only identify crime hot spots, but also study different reasons for possible causes of crimes. Furthermore, the government is able to save an estimated RM15 million (US$ 4.8 million) by using a single system for all of its crime-mapping activities.

"Oftentimes, we see agencies working in silos and doing their own activities to combat crime. This system allows us to orchestrate our efforts towards

determining how we can best allocate funds for resources such as CCTVs and how the RMP can strategically mobilise the network of the police force," says Amandus.

Meanwhile Senior Assistant Commissioner of the Royal Malaysian Police, Dato' Zainal Abidin Bin Kasim, highlights the "aoristic, "timeline" and "hotspot" feature in the SCMS as crucial tools for the RMP as it enables them to holistically plan how they can optimise their resources and respond to certain crimes and hotspot areas.

"Vehicle theft, for example, is one of the most common crimes recorded in our system. Since we have the data on where vehicle theft incidents occur, we are able to identify key hot spot areas and plan how we will be mobilising our team. By doing so, we are also able to curb other vehicle-theft-related incidents such as underhanded activities by illegal workshops," says Dato Zainal.

"Using the SCMS for planning, organising and implementing our crime prevention efforts has helped us expand the scope of our 'omnipresence programme' and engage communities in

raising awareness on issues concerning public safety."

He adds that because of well-informed planning, the RMP was able to make significant progress in reducing crime rates in about 50 local authorities. Furthermore, public perception towards the performance of the Police Force and the safety of their community has greatly improved.

"This inter-agency collaboration is achieving its goals of providing citizens with the 'peace of mind' that we are keeping neighbourhoods safe by taking smarter approaches to public safety and security, allowing the police force to better respond and anticipate events, and if possible, prevent untoward incidents from happening."

Dato Zainal shares that because of the benefits derived from using the SCMS in crime response and analysis, the government is looking into extending this capability to the Narcotics and Traffic Divisions soon to further improve their efforts in tracking locations and activities of drug dealers and to improve the police force's response during road emergencies.‹

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Since the Police Force is now able to meticulously identify where crime hotspots are, the government was able to provide over 8,000 enhanced lighting posts, 1300 safety mirrors and 100km of railings and curbs nationwide.