

Crash inquiry chief promises change

> Public cannot be blamed for being exasperated over setting up of another inquiry panel, says don

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PETALING JAYA: One cannot blame the public for being sceptical over the setting up of yet another panel of inquiry to investigate a major fatal accident. But Prof Datuk Radin Umar Radin Sohadi (pix) believed that the panel set up last week to probe the Dec 20 Simpang Pulai-Cameron Highlands express bus crash will be different.

Previous inquiries, said the University Putra Malaysia vice-chancellor who heads the panel, were only concerned about technical aspects of a crash, the panel has been tasked to look at the national public transport system as a whole and identify rooms for improvement.

Areas of concern for the panel include physical aspects of the express buses, road conditions at accident sites, as well as regulation of bus drivers by bus operators.

"I believe that the



comprehensiveness of this inquiry will lend it more credibility. The fact that it is done by an independent board is also a plus point," said the former Malaysian Institute for Road Safety Research (MIROS) director-general.

Panel members for the inquiry include representatives from Road Engineering Association Malaysia, Institution of Engineers Malaysia and Federation of Malaysian Consumers Association.

"Previous inquiries were led by mostly representatives from government agencies. This time, it will be able to provide a more professional perspective on the issues at hand," he said.

The bigger picture, however, will not detract panel members from also looking into what was dubbed as Malaysia's worst road accident, which killed 28 people including 25 Thai nationals.

"The first two months would be spent investigating the technical and legal aspects of the crash, and the remaining four months will be focusing on coming up with a structured report for all public transport and heavy vehicle operations in Malaysia," said Radin Umar on the panel's immediate plans.

Addressing public concerns on outcomes of past crash inquiry reports, Radin Umar noted that the government had since 2008 adopted several new guidelines and code of practice for bus drivers and operators.

"For instance, following the Bukit Gantang crash in 2007, the government soon made it necessary for the body of buses to be manufactured as a whole unit and not as sub-components which are welded to each other, better known as R66.

"However, the main problem lies in the fact that there are thousands of express buses registered prior to introduction of the new safety rulings," he said.

He stressed on the need for all government agencies to work together and "strike a balance" that will not only improve overall road safety standards, but also overcome potential cost and social constraints.