

# TIME TO MAKE ROADS SAFER

**T**HE surge in traffic volume on roads and expressways comes with an increased risk of road crashes and fatalities, as is the case every year.

There are many factors contributing to this unfortunate trend but a major contributor is unsafe road behaviour, such as driving dangerously and exceeding the speed limit, disregarding road signs and signals, and driving while tired or sleepy.

Malaysia's road crash statistics, in general, are among the highest in South-east Asia, with the numbers creeping up during festive periods.

According to police data, a total of 12,407 accidents were recorded during the Op Selamat operation conducted during the Hari Raya Aidilfitri holiday period last year.

## OFTEN IGNORING SAFETY

Universiti Putra Malaysia's Putra Injury Prevention and Safety Promotion Research Group head Prof Dr Kulanthayan KC Mani said bad road behaviour remained the primary cause of road crashes that lead to fatalities.

He said road safety science showed that collision at high speeds more often resulted in severe injuries and even fatalities.

For example, pedestrians and cyclists hit by a vehicle travelling at 30kph have a high chance of surviving the crash.

But if the vehicle were to travel at 70kph before the crash, the victims were more likely to suffer serious injuries or get killed, he said.

"The impact is equivalent to falling from the sixth floor (of a building), while a car hitting someone at 90kph is equal to the person falling from the 10th floor."

"Hence, reducing speed is the most promising intervention to prevent injuries and fatalities, and drivers should always adhere to the speed limit."

He also advised drivers to maintain a safe distance between their vehicles and the one in front so that, in the event they needed to brake suddenly, they would have ample time and space to avoid a collision.

"Two main things need attention: response time and brake time. Response time refers to the time the driver takes to step on the brake pedal before a collision occurs, while brake time is the time taken by the vehicle to come to a complete stop once the brakes are applied."

"A vehicle travelling at a speed of 50kph needs to move about 26m to come to a complete stop, while a car travelling at 70kph needs 37m before stopping," he added.

## REST WELL BEFORE DRIVING

Getting adequate rest is also crucial for those undertaking long-distance drives.

Kulanthayan said they should get six to eight hours of sleep daily over three to four days before going on long drives.



Unsafe road behaviours contribute to increased risk of road crashes and fatalities.

"Simply resting a day before driving is not enough as sleep debt, which accumulates from the lack of sleep over the last two to three days, cannot be cleared off with just one night of sleep. The quality of sleep is also important."

He added that a clear-cut sign of drowsiness was when a driver could not maintain the vehicle in their lane or when they eat into another vehicle's lane. Other signs include missing or forgetting an exit.

He urged drivers to use a sleep detection app that would alert them when they felt sleepy.

"They must then find the nearest safe place where they can park and take a nap before continuing their journey."

Kulanthayan, who is also a permanent member of the Selangor State Road Safety Council, said the use of seat belts by all car passengers could reduce

the probability of fatality due to a road crash by 40 to 50 per cent.

"For example, bus operators must also encourage their passengers to use seat belts," he said, adding that an often overlooked safety feature was the installation of child restraint seats in vehicles.

"These seats can reduce the probability of death by 70 per cent for infants, 54 per cent for children aged 1 to 4, and 59 per cent for children aged 4 to 7," said the road safety expert.

## INCREASE SURVEILLANCE

Kulanthayan said a collaborative approach was needed to revolutionise road safety and prevent crashes.

He urged the police and Road Transport Department to step up efforts to detect violations, including using drones and increasing the number of speed trap cameras and red light cameras.

"The concept is simple, as more surveillance can help control the behaviour of road users and make it easier to enforce traffic laws. The public will be more cautious and are less likely to break any traffic rule when they are aware they are being watched by the authorities," he said.

He also suggested the use public transport as it was the safest option available, according to police data.

In 2022, motorcyclists accounted for the highest number of road fatalities at 67.45 per cent, followed by car drivers and passengers at 17.91 per cent, and bus drivers and passengers at 0.44 per cent.

"[Given these statistics], public transport such as buses and trains should offer affordably-priced tickets (during festive seasons) to encourage more users," he added. **Bernama**



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