

Crash sparks call for **tougher** bus rules

» Safety experts push for mandatory seatbelts, aviation-style data recorders and cameras to monitor driver fatigue and prevent deadly crashes

■ BY **HARITH KAMAL**
newsdesk@thesundaily.com

PETALING JAYA: The installation of in-cabin cameras to monitor bus drivers' behaviour in real time should be made mandatory and safety measures strictly enforced, said Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia traffic and road safety psychologist Prof Dr Rozmi Ismail.

The urgent call comes in the wake of the tragic crash at the Gerik-Jeli East-West Highway, which claimed 15 lives yesterday.

Rozmi also recommended installing black box-style recording systems in all heavy vehicles, a technology similar to what is used in the aviation industry.

"Given the long hours bus drivers endure on the road, fatigue could be a serious risk factor.

"Although we don't yet know the actual cause of the crash, mechanical failure is often assumed, but without video or data recordings, the driver's condition or actions right before the crash are rarely known."

Rozmi said in-cabin cameras could help investigators determine if a driver was distracted, chatting on a mobile phone, fatigued, unconscious or otherwise impaired at the time of an incident.

"More importantly, knowing that their actions are being monitored might encourage drivers to adopt safer and more responsible driving habits."

In addition, Rozmi called for seatbelts to be mandatory for every passenger, not just those in the front rows.

"Bus attendants must ensure all passengers are buckled up before departure. This simple step could greatly reduce injury and death in the event of a crash."

Rozmi also raised concerns about the current state of the Gerik-Jeli East-West Highway, which he described as unsafe and outdated.

"Built nearly four decades ago, the highway is still a predominantly single-lane road.

"Its narrow and deteriorating surface poses serious risks, especially during peak travel seasons like Hari Raya and Chinese New Year."

He called for the highway to be upgraded into a four-lane dual carriageway and suggested that safety personnel be stationed at critical points during festive periods to manage traffic and respond to emergencies.

He also criticised the inconsistent enforcement of roadblocks, saying it only happens during festive seasons, and urged regular enforcement to deter speeding and reckless driving.

Universiti Putra Malaysia Road Safety Research Centre head Associate Professor Dr Law Teik Hua stressed the need for a complete safety reassessment of the Gerik-Jeli stretch.

"The highway is notorious for its sharp



Injured victims of the crash receiving emergency treatment inside a Civil Defence Force ambulance following the collision along the East-West Highway near Banun, Gerik which claimed the lives of 15 Upsi students.

— **PIC COURTESY OF FIRE AND RESCUE DEPARTMENT**

turns, steep inclines and unexpected wildlife crossings.

"Its poor design, insufficient lighting and lack of clear signage make it particularly dangerous for large vehicles and chartered buses travelling at night."

Law called for an independent safety audit of the route to examine road geometry, guardrail placement, lighting, speed limits and emergency response readiness.

He also highlighted the dangers of overnight travel, noting that long-distance

night trips significantly increase the risk of crashes due to driver fatigue and reduced visibility.

"We need stricter rules for chartered buses, including required rest breaks, vehicle inspections and continuous driver monitoring."

Law pointed out that many older buses are still not equipped with seatbelts and urged authorities to make it mandatory for buses to have seatbelts, coupled with public education campaigns and strict enforcement.

He also suggested adding reflective signs, crash barriers on dangerous roads, stricter driving tests, alternative routes and continuous public education on road safety.