

# Deadly crashes **expose** systemic road safety failures

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**PETALING JAYA:** As Malaysia enters 2026, the deadly crashes and transport incidents of 2025 were not isolated tragedies but signs of systemic failures that remain largely unaddressed, a road safety expert said.

Analysing last year's trends, Universiti Putra Malaysia Road Safety Research Centre head Assoc Prof Dr Law Teik Hua said the country is grappling with a "software problem" in managing road risks, pointing to weak coordination, poor communication and fragmented enforcement.

"Serious incidents in 2025 exposed communication gaps between government departments, road contractors and operators.

"These shortcomings were evident in inadequate signage at road works and the failure to properly alert road users to potential hazards," he said.

While mortality rates for some categories of road users have stabilised, Law said heavy vehicles remain a persistent and serious threat.

"Lorry-related crashes occurring, on average, every 36 hours raise serious doubts about whether heavy vehicle safety is

► Heavy vehicles remain major threat with collisions every 36 hours, pointing to poor coordination and weak enforcement as M'sia enters the new year: Expert

being adequately managed on national roads," he said.

He added that enforcement and monitoring mechanisms for commercial transport are weak, allowing high-risk operators to continue operating with limited accountability.

"Although bodies such as the Commercial Vehicle Licensing Board, along with vehicle inspection codes and safety frameworks, exist on paper, enforcement is inconsistent. This weakens regulatory oversight and enables transport operators to flout safety standards with little fear of consequences."

Law said Malaysia's continued reliance on checkpoint-style enforcement reflects a reactive, rather than preventive, approach to road safety.

"The emphasis remains on intermittent vehicle stops instead of continuous, technology-driven monitoring," he said, adding that

data from 2025 underscores the scale of the problem, with only about 32% of commercial vehicle operators complying with safety procedures.

"Regulatory gaps allow drivers with repeated violations to remain on the road, while vehicles with defective brakes or tyres continue operating due to fragmented inspection regimes.

"A system without real-time tracking or an overarching compliance framework shifts the risks entirely onto other road users," he said, adding that enforcement suffers from a "diffusion of responsibility, a lack of deterrence and weak accountability".

Law said Malaysia has become overly reliant on reactive measures such as short-term enforcement drives and temporary safety campaigns, rather than embedding long-term preventive policies.

"This pattern persists because of politically driven crisis

management, bureaucratic silos and an over-reliance on blaming 'driver error'. A truly systemic approach – including mandatory advanced braking systems, fatigue monitoring and safer road design – requires sustained funding and long-term coordination, which often wanes once public attention fades."

Looking ahead to 2026, Law outlined three key priorities: continuous safety compliance for commercial vehicles through telematics and regulated driving hours; intelligence-led enforcement targeting high-risk operators and corridors; and adoption of a 'safe system' approach that shifts accountability from drivers to companies and system designers.

"If reforms continue at the current pace, Malaysia risks serious safety and economic consequences," he said, citing the annual cost of road crashes and the statistical value of a life at RM3.12 million.

Poor safety performance could also undermine national initiatives such as Visit Malaysia 2026, as tourists increasingly prioritise safe and reliable transport, he said, adding that without decisive structural reforms, Malaysia risks entering yet another year in which tragedy – rather than prevention – drives road safety policy.