

Experts want tougher punishment on errant drivers

KUALA LUMPUR: The death of a 22-year-old woman after a van allegedly ran a red light and rammed into her motorcycle in Napoh, Jitra, has reignited calls for far harsher penalties against reckless drivers.

Experts warn that Malaysia's road death toll reflects deep systemic failures rather than a lack of awareness.

A witness to Thursday night's crash, Arib Ibrahim Mat Zuki, 28, said he was left shaken after seeing the van just metres ahead of his vehicle speed through the traffic light before slamming into the motorcyclist.

Senior criminologist Datuk Dr P. Sundramoorthy said the Kedah tragedy was not an isolated incident but a stark example of how weak enforcement and insufficient accountability had normalised dangerous behaviour on Malaysian roads.

"Those who cause death due to reckless driving should be charged with vehicular manslaughter and they must be imposed with a few years of imprisonment.

"Malaysia's persistent crisis of

road accidents, especially those involving reckless driving that result in death, reflects a systemic failure rather than a shortage of awareness.

"Despite years of campaigns and warnings, fatal crashes continue because daily experience tells drivers that rules can be broken with impunity," he told the *New Straits Times*.

Sundramoorthy said while laws against reckless and dangerous driving exist, enforcement remained inconsistent, particularly outside major urban centres and during off-peak hours.

This, he said, undermined deterrence.

"In criminological terms, deterrence fails not because penalties are too light on paper, but because the probability of punishment is perceived to be minimal.

"Road safety cannot rely on persuasion alone. It must be anchored in the certainty of enforcement.

"A driving licence must be treated as a privilege, not a right, and repeat offenders who show disregard for human life should

be permanently removed from the roads.

"Those who consistently endanger others have forfeited any moral or legal claim to share public roads. Permanent bans must be imposed decisively in serious cases," he added.

Universiti Putra Malaysia Road Safety Research Centre head Associate Professor Dr Law Teik Hua echoed the call for tougher punishment, describing the Napoh crash as "extremely concerning and unacceptable".

He said existing penalties for offences such as speeding and running red lights were insufficient to deter dangerous behaviour.

"The penalties we have now do not have much of a deterrent effect. When punishment is not severe, people will take chances.

"Tougher penalties, whether in the form of higher fines or jail time, may make motorists realise that violating traffic rules is a serious crime with severe consequences," he said.

He suggested that more serious criminal charges should be considered when reckless driving re-

sults in death.

"It could be argued that charges such as manslaughter are warranted in cases involving overtly reckless behaviour like running a red light.

"This is not an accident but a choice. When that choice leads to death, the punishment must measure up to the crime."

"When people speed or run red lights, they are not simply flouting the law, but they are also risking people's lives.

"The fact that this happened at a known accident black spot also points to a failure in attitude and possibly road design," he said.

Both experts also highlighted weaknesses in driver education, saying the current system prioritised passing tests over cultivating responsible, risk-aware drivers.

Combined with weak enforcement, this created conditions where reckless driving thrived, they said.

Motorcyclists who form a large and vulnerable group of road users continue to bear the brunt of these failures.

Sundramoorthy said deaths in-

volving riders should no longer be dismissed as "accidents".

"When a motorcyclist is killed because another driver ignores a traffic signal, it is preventable harm enabled by systemic neglect," he said.