

'EXERCISE CAUTION ON THE ROAD THIS RAYA'

Experts urge patience as traffic is expected to be heavy following two years of restrictions

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THE traffic movement this Hari Raya Aidilfitri will arguably be the largest since the Covid-19 pandemic began.

After two years of movement restrictions, many Malaysians are eager to return to their hometowns and celebrate Aidilfitri with their families and friends.

Global Alliance of NGOs for Road Safety board of directors chair Professor Dr Kulanthayan K.C. Mani said highways and federal, state and municipal roads would be choked with vehicles and advised motorists to exercise caution at all times.

"Many people will take the opportunity to hold *kenduri* as many relatives will be able to attend them during the holidays. So we can only imagine the traffic volume that would lead to congestions in many places.

"Being stuck in a traffic jam means no one is speeding. If we look at it that way, it means the risk of road crashes caused by speed and related injuries are lowered. So please bear with it and remain patient on the road," said the child injury prevention expert from Universiti Putra Malaysia.

He said to prevent road crashes and injuries, drivers and passengers should always remember the two simple rules of "no speeding and seatbelt on", while motorcyclists



Road Transport Department officers conducting a check at the Juru toll plaza in Bukit Mertajam recently. PIC BY DANIAL SAAD

should make themselves visible to others by wearing light-coloured clothes and ensuring their lights are on.

He advised the public to exercise four layers of enforcement for road safety — within self, among family members, in the community and among colleagues.

"Rather than relying on the authorities, we should enforce (and advocate) road safety among ourselves.

"For instance, parents should ensure their children wear a helmet when riding a motorcycle and reprimand them if they fail to do so, instead of keeping quiet.

"As for enforcement officers, they should look beyond issuing summonses when dealing with errant road users. Officers have the authority to stop vehicles on

the road. If they can delay travel even for a bit and correct motorists before they continue with the journey, they may end up saving someone's life."

Road safety expert Professor Dr Rozmi Ismail from Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia said due to the long public holiday, people would have ample time to prepare for their journey.

"Before Raya, we have Labour Day on May 1. So some people may leave for their hometowns earlier than others.

"It may not be as bad as we anticipate, although traffic congestions are definitely foreseen.

"It is simple mathematics that an increase of vehicles on the road would lead to increased traffic accidents. How about we all take it as a challenge to keep the figures

low, like the record we held during the MCO (Movement Control Order) period?"

In 2020, 418,237 road crashes and 4,634 fatalities were reported in the country. The figures went down further last year to 370,286 road crashes and 4,539 fatalities.

Malaysia saw more than 6,000 road fatalities in 2019 before the pandemic hit and the MCO was enforced.

Rozmi said six to seven out of 10 road deaths yearly involved motorcyclists, so habits like wearing helmets properly could lower the risks of serious injuries and fatalities in addition to avoiding weaving through traffic.

He suggested that the authorities use the days leading up to Hari Raya to carry out campaigns to remind the public to be wise in

enjoying their freedom after enduring movement restrictions.

He said enforcement agencies should increase their presence along highways as a deterrent for would-be traffic offenders.

"Everyone is excited to return to their hometown this holiday. It is important that we remain cautious and manage our trip properly to avoid any tragedy.

"For instance, avoid driving at late hours if you have night vision problems.

"We should also check our vehicles and ensure that everything, from engine, signals, lights to tyres, is in good condition before the journey.

"We don't want to get stranded by the roadside due to a breakdown and add to the traffic congestion."