

Heavier fines among several measures being considered

# Move to cut accident rate by 30pc

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By Sulochini Nair

**KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. — The Government, concerned over the high rate of road accidents, has set itself the target of reducing it by 30 per cent by the year 2000.**

To achieve this, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today announced various measures now being considered by the Government, including heavier fines for traffic offences.

The target effectively means reducing the current accident fatality rate of 7.22 per 10,000 vehicles to 3.4 over the next 10 years. There were 75,626 accidents last year in which 3,090 people were killed.

Dr Mahathir told a Press conference after chairing the first meeting of the Cabinet Committee on Road Safety here that the target was "realistic" considering that other countries showed difficulty in reducing accidents.

He said that if heavier fines did not have the desired effect, the Government might impose a mandatory fine.

"Heavier fines are needed to discourage offenders from going to court," he said, adding that there were 88,000 accident cases pending in the courts and it would take years before a case was heard.

Sentences by the courts were also light, he said, citing an example of a motorist involved in a fatal accident being fined only \$1,000.

Dr Mahathir said that in some cases, the cost incurred by the Government in taking the case to court was more than the fine imposed subsequently for the offence.

"Court fines must be more than compound fines

to make errant motorists feel punished," he said. The maximum compound fine is \$300.

Dr Mahathir urged the people to support the measures to be taken by the Government even though some of them would be unpopular and a burden to certain groups.

"If we are not willing to make any sacrifices, we will not succeed in reducing the high accident rate."

He said there would be certain groups who would definitely have adverse comments on the Government's actions in their bid to gain political mileage.

He hoped the public would welcome the measures in the interest of road safety.

He said attention would be focused on drivers of public service vehicles like buses, taxis and lorries because although their actual numbers were not big, the accident rate among them was high.

Of the 4.5 million vehicles on the roads, he said 62 per cent were motorcycles, 31 per cent cars, six per cent lorries, 0.52 per cent taxis and 0.48 per cent buses.

In the case of taxis, he said that although their number was small they formed three per cent of all accidents and 32 per cent of taxis were involved in accidents.

Buses, he said, accounted for four per cent of all accidents and 24 per cent of buses were involved in accidents.

Another six per cent of accidents or 12 per cent of such vehicles involved lorries and vans.

Today's 150-minute meeting also agreed to:

- study whether offenders who give false addresses can be charged for the offence;
- beef up or re-deploy enforcement personnel of the police, Road Transport Department and the Public Enterprises Ministry;
- increase highway patrols and put up more

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# Errant motorists to lose licences

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signboards and cameras to monitor traffic offences;

- introduce tamper-proof speed warning devices or flashing lights for lorries and weighbridges to check the problem of overloading;

- stricter implementation of withdrawal of driving licences of offenders;

- abolish import duty on tachometers (a device similar to the black box in aircraft) to encourage transport companies to monitor trips made by their drivers;

- study the payment of toll in other countries to see whether the local collection was adequate as road users who expect good facilities must be willing to

pay; and,

- look into problems caused by the practice of renting or "pajak" by holders of public vehicle licences.

Also present at the meeting were Transport Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik, Public Enterprises Minister Datuk Napsiah Omar, Information Minister Datuk Mohamed Rahmat and Federal Traffic Police chief Assistant Commissioner Haji Kamaruddin Hamzah.

The Cabinet committee was set up earlier this month with an annual budget of \$20 million to educate road users, carry out research and take steps to reduce accidents.