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At wits' end over deaths on road (HL)

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KUALA LUMPUR, Sun. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has said the Government is at a loss as to what else can be done to prevent deaths resulting from road accidents.

Reflecting the Government's exasperation, Dr Mahathir said: "We don't know what else we can do. We ask people not to rush but to drive slowly. What is wrong if they arrive at their destinations 15 minutes late?"

The Prime Minister, when met by reporters at his Hari Raya open house at Sri Perdana, was asked to comment on the high number of road deaths during the current festive season despite the various steps taken by the Government.

"We have advised motorists and carried out enforcement. We just do not know what there is left to do, short of stopping everyone from driving," he said.

Singling out motorcyclists, Dr Mahathir said: "They weave in and out of traffic as if they are immune to death. But in actual fact, they face the highest risk of death."

Yesterday, Federal Traffic Police operations room officer Deputy Superintendent Abdul Aziz Omar said motorcyclists and pillion riders accounted for the highest number of fatalities with 18 deaths representing 81.8 per cent.

The daily average death toll is now 22, exceeding last year's by one.

Of the 560 accidents reported on Friday, Kuala Lumpur recorded the highest number with 94 cases, followed by Perak with 83, Selangor with 79 and Johor with 64.

Operasi Pacak II, a special police operation to curb fatal accidents enters its 10th day today.

The operation, the second to be introduced after last December's school holidays, was aimed at creating road safety awareness among motorists by stationing traffic policemen along the 488 accident stretches of highways and roads.

The Prime Minister was also asked to comment on the traffic jams in the city, in particular whether the bus lanes were going to be effective in reducing the congestion.

Dr Mahathir said: "We will not know yet as we are just about to implement it.

"We have to see first. But the public should comply with the bus lane ruling - otherwise it will be difficult.

"Given time, when the buses start moving smoothly, more people will switch to public transport.

"What we want now is for people not to use their own vehicles but to use the Light Rail Transit, buses and the commuter train service. We are providing various public transportation facilities to make travel easy but people do not want to opt for this convenience."

The Prime Minister said the high incidence of people travelling alone in their vehicles was another factor which caused the congestion.

Asked why the Government's car pooling campaign was not effective, Dr Mahathir said the people were not supportive.

"If everyone follows rules such as travelling in high occupancy vehicles, giving way to buses, observing the yellow box regulation, there will not be any problems."

Most of the problems were caused by the drivers themselves, he added.

City Hall is currently implementing a 16-day trial project along a two-kilometre stretch from Jalan Raja Laut, outside the City Hall building to Jalan Sultan Ismail, in which the left lane is reserved for buses and taxis.

After the trial period, the ruling will be gazetted on Feb 15 for implementation effective 8am.

Motorists other than bus and taxi drivers caught using the special lanes will then be penalised.

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