

18/02/1997

Death toll may exceed last year's

Leslie Andres

KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. - As the death toll hits 299 and is still climbing, all indications are that Ops Pacak II, the police operation to curb accidents during the double festive celebration launched 17 days ago, is likely to end up as yet another failed effort in reducing road fatalities.

With 48 hours to go before the operation officially ends, the death toll is set to end close to or exceed last year's 319 fatalities during the Chinese New Year and Hari Raya celebrations.

This is based on the average of 17.5 people killed daily since traffic policemen took up positions along highways and Federal and State roads to deter motorists from flouting traffic regulations.

In what was the biggest mobilisation of manpower, the Federal traffic police branch and its State units committed some 2,000 men to man 488 locations with high accident rates.

Despite the visible presence of the traffic policemen, the number of accidents recorded this year had by Thursday surpassed the number recorded last year.

Last year, 7,954 accidents occurred during the period under study by the police, while by Thursday, 8,024 accidents were recorded.

Last Friday, government leaders such as Transport Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik had described Ops Pacak II as a success, considering the low road fatalities and accidents.

Ling had based his optimism on the 3,678 accidents reported up to last Thursday in which 81 people had died.

However, the latest figures lend more weight to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's sense of exasperation over what to do to prevent deaths from road accidents.

Speaking to newsmen here on Feb 9, he had 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?"

He further said: "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."

As evidence that the visible presence of the traffic policemen did not instil fear among the traffic offenders, police issued a record 113,753 summonses up to yesterday.

The number of people injured up to yesterday was 1,645, which was close to the 2,190 that was recorded during last year's Chinese New Year and Hari Raya celebrations.

Meanwhile, 12 people died in 474 accidents yesterday, bringing the death toll to 299 and the total number of accidents reported to 9,555.

According to Federal police traffic control centre chief Deputy Superintendent Abdul Aziz Omar, eight of the 12 dead were motorcyclists and pillion riders.

Of the remainder, three were motorists and the other a pedestrian, he said.

Of the 474 accidents recorded yesterday, 30 occurred on highways and the rest on Federal and State roads.

Johor and Sarawak recorded four fatalities each, Selangor two and Kelantan and Sabah one each.

The number of injured in yesterday's accidents was 105.

Of this number, four were injured in accidents on highways and the rest

on Federal and State roads.

Police have issued 5,204 summonses to motorists for various traffic offences over the past 24 hours.

Unlike normal traffic operations, policemen deployed for Ops Pacak II will not stop traffic offenders but will jot down the registration number, colour and type of their vehicles before issuing the summonses via the post.

(END)