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Statistics don't tell the whole story on road crashes and deaths

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IT is generally perceived that numbers do not lie. But do numbers actually tell the whole story?

Going by the statistics provided by the Federal traffic police headquarters in Bukit Aman, the recently ended Ops Statik II was a success in terms of the reduction in the number of road crashes, deaths and injuries.

Federal traffic police chief Datuk Supian Amat, in reviewing the latest operation, said a total of 9,500 crashes were recorded with 203 deaths and 2,000 injured, including 635 seriously.

This was a reduction from last year's Ops Statik I, which recorded 9,901 crashes, 274 deaths and 2,213 injured, including 795 seriously.

However, these statistics probably have to be taken with a pinch of salt as there are a number of pertinent factors to be considered.

First and foremost, Ops Statik I was carried out when the two biggest groups of Malaysians were busy celebrating festivals almost simultaneously - the Muslims during Hari Raya Aidilfitri, and the Chinese during the Lunar New Year - whereas Ops Statik II corresponded with only Hari Raya this year.

Traffic was a little heavier last year, as conceded by Supian the day after Ops Statik II ended, with traffic volume on expressways during Ops Statik I at 10.9 million vehicles, while there were 10.3 million vehicles this year.

Secondly, the statistics were calculated on a daily basis, thus the number of deaths would be higher should any of those seriously injured have died in the days following the crashes.

Thirdly, can we take comfort from these statistics as a sign of success, bearing in mind an average of 627 crashes and 13.5 deaths occurred each day?

As National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health chairman Datuk Lee Lam Thye said after Ops Statik II began, the numbers may have decreased, but there is still a long way to go to reduce the staggering number of crashes and deaths.

Supian's deputy, Assistant Commissioner Azizan Mohd Aras, believes the operation this year was a success, comparatively speaking.

He said despite Ops Statik II being held during a single festive celebration, the traffic volume statistics showed only a slight decrease of 600,000 vehicles plying the various expressways during the period.

"Despite the traffic volume being only marginally less, there was a 25 per cent decrease in crashes nationwide.

"This shows the operation has made a difference and motorists are changing their attitudes.

"This is largely due to the various safety campaigns being carried out by the relevant government agencies, organisations and even the media," he said.

But what lessons have the police gleaned from Ops Statik II which they may find useful during such operations in future, such as the upcoming Ops Statik III to be held this month during the Chinese New Year festivities?

Supian had said 84 per cent of the crashes which occurred during Ops Statik II were on Federal and State trunk roads, a point which prompted Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad to express his concern over the high number of accidents and fatalities on the trunk roads as compared

to highways.

Supian added that operations would be intensified along these roads.

Towards this end, Supian and his team at the Federal police headquarters in Bukit Aman will be meeting district traffic police chiefs to discuss more stringent measures in an effort to curb the number of road crashes and deaths.

Azizan reiterated Supian's stand, adding that a more visible police presence on trunk roads could help bring down road crash statistics.

According to a police source, a major crackdown on dangerous driving practices is in the pipeline during Ops Statik III.

Intensified crackdowns on reckless driving, speeding, road hogging and overtaking on double lines are expected to be discussed during the meeting between Supian and the district traffic police chiefs.

More stringent measures were adopted this year as compared to the previous operation, which meant more errant motorists were slapped with hefty fines.

Police issued 82,455 summonses to motorists during Ops Statik I, but during Ops Statik II, 101,735 summonses were issued.

In the final analysis, the police may have little choice but to come down even harder on maniacs behind the wheel if the country's shameful record of road crashes is not to get any worse.

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