

Zooming ahead on road safety

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STOCKHOLM: The Malaysia Road Safety Institute will be set up by the end of this year to study and plan road safety programmes, said Transport Minister Datuk Seri Chan Kong Choy.

The institute, to be set up in Universiti Putra Malaysia, would be the first to be established in Asean, he added.

Chan said the Government would give a launching grant of RM50mil and continue funding the institute for 30 years.

"It will be money well spent as life is precious. We want to see a decrease in the fatality rate due to road accidents in the country. Loss of lives is a loss to the country," he told Malaysian reporters after visiting the Swedish National Road and Transport Research Institute (VIT) on Tuesday.

He said the Malaysian institute would carry out various types of research, including engineering, road design, vehicle design, human behavioural patterns and legislation.

"We will use the institute's findings as a reference to help us to formulate more effective road safety programmes and policies in education, engineering, environment and enforcement," he said, adding that the setting up of the institute was provided for under the Malaysia Road Safety Plan 2006 - 2010.

He said the Government would appoint a suitable candidate to be the institute's director-general.

"The candidate must be very experienced in road safety and recognised internationally. We already have someone in mind and the name will be announced," he said.

"Once the director-general is

appointed, we will immediately look into the structure of the institute. An appropriate number of researchers will also be based in the institute."

Earlier, Chan said a VIT study on drivers using the handsfree mobile phone kit drew his attention. Initial findings showed that such drivers were causing more danger than those not using handsfree kits.

"I will keep a close watch on the study for further development and a more conclusive finding," said Chan, who was briefed by VIT researcher Dr Lena Nilsson.

Dr Nilsson had said drivers using the kits had a tendency to unintentionally speed as they tended to pay less attention to driving.

"On the other hand, drivers who do not use such kits tend to slow down their vehicles as they are aware that they are talking over the mobile phone while driving," she said.

Dr Nilsson, however, said the finding was inconclusive, adding that a further study on the issue would be carried out.