

by A Kadir Jasin

Simply Put, We Love To Pontificate

Talk, talk and more talk. Sometimes, it would seem that all Malaysians are capable of doing is this. From increasing road fatalities to the war on corruption, perhaps the time has come to face facts and take the bull by the horns.

ACCIDENTS happen. They happen when we least expect them. That is why we call them accidents. But there are instances when accidents are not accidents at all. They are actually deliberate.

Take, for instance, the many fatal accidents that occurred during the recent *Hari Raya Aidilfitri* celebrations. For the 15-day period covered by *Ops Sikap V*, 241 road users out of 12,165 who were involved in accidents died.

It wasn't that the *balik kampung* motorists and motorcyclists were deliberate in crashing their machines into the back of parked lorries, road dividers, trees and telephone poles. That would have been suicidal.

But when they drove their overloaded and poorly maintained cars late at night half asleep on very full post-*berbuka* (breakfasting) stomach, they invited trouble.

The situation was made worse when the authorities, with good intentions but poor

supervision, allowed school and factory buses to operate as express buses during the celebrations.

These buses could hardly make their normally short trips without breaking down, and their drivers barely managed to stay on course plying their normal, albeit limited, predetermined routes.

Yet, these poorly maintained buses and their half-past-six drivers were allowed to ply the entire length of the North-South Highway and other busy highways, obviously with not too many questions asked.

Then, there were those young drivers, who had neither the knowledge nor driving experience, charging down the road in their modified *Kancil* and *Kelisa*.

There is no need to waste more time debating why and how our roads became killing fields.

With literally every 18-year-old now in possession of a driving licence, and motor vehicle ownership made affordable by the *Saga*, *Wira*, *Kelisa*, *Kris* and *Jaguh*, road accidents are bound to happen.

Thirty or 40 years ago, an average Ma-

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laysian could not dream of owning a car or a motorcycle until he was in his mid-twenties or early thirties. Many could not even afford a bicycle.

Paying 30 sen to hire a Honda Cub for an hour was the high point in the life of every young person. Today, the *Kancil*, *Kelisa*, *Kris* and *Jaguh* are the standard rides of young adults.

Even schoolchildren in Pendang in Kedah and Lembah Bilut in Pahang ride motorcycles to school, mostly without a driving licence.

Go to any secondary school in the country and you will see how bad driving, disregard for the law and the total absence of civic consciousness have become the norm.

Go to any kampung in Kuala Lumpur and Petaling Jaya and you will see how bad habits picked up in school are carried into adult life.

STOPPING THE MADNESS ON OUR ROADS

ON a lighter note, do you sometimes wonder why motorcars bearing plate numbers of a certain state in the north of the Peninsula appear to be forever hogging the road?

Drivers of cars bearing the plate numbers of this particular state seem to have a liking for the extreme right lane, which happens to be the fast lane. It does not matter if they are driving at a snail's speed.

Of course, acknowledgement must be given to Johor drivers, assuming that a high percentage of cars bearing Johor plate numbers are driven by Johorians, for fast driving.

The Johorians seem to be forever competing with the *kiasu* Singaporeans to burn rubber on the North-South Highway.

And you know it is a Kedahan driving when you see someone who is unsure when taking a bend. Kedahans, by nature, like to drive or walk single file in a straight line. That's the only way you can drive a car, ride a motorcycle and even walk on the padi field bund.

With our collective disregard for traffic rules and our total lack of driving etiquette, it is surprising that not more people were killed and maimed.

Contrary to popular belief, speed is not

the killer. Bad driving is. Competent drivers driving well-maintained cars at high speed are less likely to cause accidents than bad drivers driving at slow speed.

Many fatal accidents are caused by slow drivers who hog the fast lane, and by heavy vehicles - lorries and express buses - changing lanes at 130km/h when their maximum highway speed is 90km/h.

Fast drivers are not the ones most likely to cause accidents. It is the chap doing 80km/h on the 110km/h stretch who is more likely to precipitate a pile-up.

We have become a nation of groaners and moaners. It may be debatable, but we seem to have perfected the art of *kaji* (examine), *siyasat* (investigate) and, more recently, *pantau* (monitor) as a way of avoiding the real issue. In most cases, it means not doing anything.

The enforcement of the speed limit should, therefore, not apply only to drivers exceeding the limit but equally to those driving below a certain speed. So, we should have minimum and maximum speed limits on our roads and highways.

And since we practise the *balik kampung* tradition and encourage our people to travel widely in the country, we have to accept that coupled with our general *tidak apa* attitude and our lack of civic-mindedness, people will continue to die on the road.

To save lives and regain our sanity on the road, we must go back to the days of the 'Shell Traffic Games' and when you were made to drive an aged manual transmission car up the hill with hand signal thrown in to pass your driving test.

Otherwise, our roads and highways will be our killing fields - Phnom Penh in the past and Baghdad in the present. No amount of *kesedihan* (sadness), *bahas* (debate) and *operasi* (operation) will help.

DON'T MAKE THE FIGHT AGAINST GRAFT ANY MORE DIFFICULT

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Let us not give any more credit to the quarreling ministers and civil servants by mentioning their names. We know who they are.

Suffice to say that if ministers feel that they are not getting justice from a government agency like the Anti-Corruption Agency (ACA), can we blame the *rakyat* for feeling worse?

If ministers can be openly threatened with arrest, can we blame the people if they are scared stiff of law enforcement agencies?

The ACA officials may be stating the obvious. Under the law, anybody who refuses to respond to its request for an interview can be issued with an arrest warrant.

But is there a necessity to issue such a warning when no ministers have refused to cooperate?

Sometimes, stating the obvious can be offensive when it carries an element of insinuation.

Unless the threats and counter-threats are stopped, this new round of attack on graft could end with a lot of smoke and very little fire as had been the case with similar attempts in the past.

Without ministers and high officials sensationalising the issue and stealing the headlines, the fight against graft is already a very difficult exercise.

DON'T JUST NAB THE BIG FISH, GET THE SMALL ONES TOO

FIGHTING corruption is not about drag-

ging a suspect screaming and yelling to court. In fact, no amount of enforcement will rid us of the scourge if our people are not truthful, our administrative system is bureaucratic and our civil servants are inefficient.

Conviction should, at best, be the last resort. When somebody is convicted of corruption, society has, in fact, been made to pay a price.

Getting a corruption conviction, as the ACA investigators and the Attorney-General Office's people would admit, is not an easy task.

Corruption and the abuse of power will worsen if economic growth is not accompanied by a parallel increase in the efficiency of the civil service.

In business, time means money. A businessman, pressed for time, may be willing to spend money to induce civil servants to speed up the processing of his application.

It is no longer a secret that some civil servants deliberately slow the processing of applications to extract bribes.

To justify their wrongdoing, they make an assumption that everybody up and down the chain of command, starting with politicians, are corrupt. So, it is all right for them to abuse their civil service power for personal gains.

Thus, not only the big fish - the *jerung* (sharks) - should be made to face the music. The small fries - the *ikan bilis* (anchovies) - must also be made to account for their wayward ways.

In fact, the small fries are more likely to cause misery to the ordinary people than high-ranking officials because they are the ones who deal with the average *rakyat* at the district and land offices, the police roadblocks, the Customs checkpoints and the immigration counters.

Then, there is the corruption of mind when more and more people in power, whether politicians, civil servants or corporate bigwigs, blame God and nature for every man-made disaster and misfortune.

Just a thought - are we, as a nation, no longer capable of facing up to the truth? **mb**

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