

Hands off the phone on the road

Bentong - There will be extra eyes on the road to monitor drivers who have their hands and eyes glued to their smartphone, Dato' Sri Liow Tiong Lai said.

The Transport Minister said the Road Transport Department (JPJ) would come down hard on errant drivers who used their handphones behind the wheel.

Enforcement personnel and two types of cameras - static and mobile- would be deployed, and those caught red-handed would be slapped with a RM300 fine, he said.

"We prohibit drivers from using their handphones on the road. We have given them a lot of advise, yet there are many who still do so. "Focus on the road and not your handphones when you are driving," Liow said. Strict action was necessary to reduce the number of accidents caused by using handphones while driving, he added.

Liow was speaking to reporters after officiating at the closing ceremony of Satu Komuniti Satu JPJ (SKSJ) here yesterday. He added that using navigation apps such as Waze was permitted, but the mobile phone should be mounted on a phone holder. Liow said the usage of handphones by drivers is one of the 20 offences that would soon be included into the Automated Awareness Safety System, a combination of the Automated Enforcement System and demerit points system.

"The accident rates are very high. There were 5,310 fatalities from January to September this year while for the whole of last year, there were 7,152 deaths. "We want to reduce these figures by 10% every year and it is really challenging" he said during a visit to his constituency here.

Liow said the main aim of executing strict enforcement was to save lives and not to penalise road users. "If none of us break the rules, the road will be safer for everyone," he said. On a separate matter, Liow urged Malaysians considering a career as freight or express bus drivers to seize the driving licence subsidy offered by the Human Resources Development Fund, an initiative by the Human Resources Ministry.

He said the fees to obtain the Goods Driving Licence (GDL) and bus driving Licence (GDL) and bus driving licence had been slashed by over 50\$ to encourage more locals to take up this job. The GDL for example, is now RM1,600 compared to the usual fee of RM3,800. "We do not have enough lorry drivers, as well as express and factory bus drivers. We want to train 1,000 of them.

"These are all high skilled jobs and there are a lot of vacancies. The salary range is between RM3,000 to RM5,000, which is a good offer," said Liow. Those interested to obtain the licences can head to any JPJ office. The offer will end after the quota of 1,000 is filled. Later at the closing ceremony of the World Chinese Basketball Invitational Tournament in Seri Kembangan, Liow said sports could foster greater synergies among the global Chinese communities.

The four day event saw the participant of 250 teams from all around the world. The tournament will be held in Hefei, Anhui province in China next year.