

Only a strong safety culture among motorcyclists will make roads safer

November 22, 2024 @ 8:13am



We need to re-look the broader issue of road safety and legal compliance to address high rates of motorcycle-related accidents. NSTP/ASWADI ALIAS

LETTERS: On January 4, 2024, at around 10pm, I was crossing a two-lane road in the town of Sungai Petani, Kedah.

Unfortunately, I was struck by a speeding motorcyclist while crossing the street.

The impact caused extensive injuries: I suffered compound fractures to the tibia and fibula of my left leg, received more than 60 stitches to my lips and mouth, and lost four teeth.

Witnesses reported that the motorcyclist fell after the collision but quickly got back on his feet and fled the scene on his motorcycle.

It is clear why he chose to leave without offering any assistance. Thankfully, several kind-hearted Malaysians came to my aid and provided help until I received medical attention.

The recent press statement by the Road Transport Department (RTD) director-general regarding the most common offenses committed by motorcyclists (lack of a driver's license and road tax) highlights a critical issue in road safety in Malaysia.

These violations are not just legal infractions but are deeply linked to the higher incidence of road fatalities and serious injuries involving motorcyclists in the country.

Motorcyclists without valid licenses are likely to lack proper training and knowledge of road safety rules.

This can lead to reckless driving, inadequate understanding of traffic regulations, and poor decision-making on the road.

Inexperienced riders are more prone to accidents, especially in challenging road conditions or when faced with sudden traffic changes.

Studies worldwide show that unlicensed riders are at a higher risk of being involved in accidents.

Furthermore, motorcycles without valid road tax or registration often have compromised safety standards. Such vehicles may be poorly maintained, leading to mechanical failures that increase the risk of accidents.

Moreover, riders using unregistered motorcycles evade insurance coverage, making it difficult for victims of accidents involving such motorcycles to receive compensation or medical care.

The absence of registration also complicates law enforcement, as it becomes difficult to track repeat offenders or owners of unsafe vehicles.

Malaysia has one of the highest rates of motorcycle-related fatalities in the world. The majority of road fatalities involved motorcyclists, which points to several systemic and safety issues.

Thus, with a high population of motorcycles on the road, particularly in urban areas, traffic congestion and competition for space between vehicles increase, making accidents more likely.

Many motorcyclists engage in risky behaviour, such as speeding, weaving through traffic, ignoring road signs or involved in 'Mat Rempit' activities. These actions increase the likelihood of severe crashes, particularly in urban areas with dense traffic.

Moreover, motorcyclists, unlike car drivers, are more exposed to injury in the event of a crash. Without proper safety gear such as helmets, they are at an even greater risk.

Nevertheless, despite traffic laws and regulations in place, enforcement can be inconsistent.

Corruption, lack of resources, or insufficient roadside checks may mean that offenders, particularly those riding without licenses or road tax, often go undetected.

Additionally, there is a need for greater road safety education targeted at motorcyclists, emphasising the importance of legal compliance, wearing protective gear, and adopting safe riding practices.

It is critical that law enforcement authorities need to step up enforcement efforts, particularly with spot checks and surveillance of motorcyclists.

Fines, penalties, and more consistent checks could deter illegal riding and encourage better compliance with road regulations.

More importantly, improving access to motorcycle training and licensing programmes would ensure that riders are better prepared for the road.

It could also include mandatory refresher courses for experienced riders to reinforce safe riding practices. The process could involve more comprehensive road safety education and skills testing, particularly for new riders.

Public awareness campaigns targeting motorcyclists could educate them about the importance of road tax, licensing, and vehicle maintenance.

This would also promote safer riding habits, the importance of using helmets, and the risks of speeding and reckless driving.

Investment in better road infrastructure, such as dedicated motorcycle lanes and improved signage, could help reduce accidents.

Additionally, regular road maintenance to remove hazards can play a critical role in ensuring the safety of all road users.

Thus, enforcing stricter penalties for unregistered vehicles and promoting the importance of motorcycle insurance can mitigate the financial and health risks for accident victims.

This will also help in improving the quality of vehicles on the road by ensuring they meet safety standards.

In summary, the lack of proper licensing and registration among motorcyclists in Malaysia reflects a broader issue of road safety and legal compliance, contributing to the high rates of motorcycle-related accidents.

Given the vulnerability of motorcyclists and their disproportionate involvement in fatalities and injuries, tackling this problem requires a multi-faceted approach involving better enforcement, rider education, infrastructure development, and public awareness campaigns.

By addressing these underlying issues, Malaysia Madani can reduce motorcycle-related road fatalities and improve overall road safety.

DR P. SUNDRAMOORTHY

Criminologist

Centre for Policy Research

Universiti Sains Malaysia