

SAFETY MATTERS

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Come 2020, the government will make it mandatory for all private cars to be fitted with seats for children

TOWARDS the end of last month, Transport Minister Anthony Loke announced something which many had been waiting for. In fact, this column has several times pushed for it, and his announcement was welcome, indeed.

By 2020, said Loke, child car seats will be made compulsory for all private cars. Before then, he said, the ministry will conduct awareness programmes to educate the public on the importance of these seats. He went on to explain that another reason implementation would only be in 2020 was that at the moment, there were not enough suppliers, not enough stock.

Loke also wanted car seats to be sales and service tax exempt so as to make them cheaper. Malaysians, it must be said, are becoming more and more safety conscious. More and more, these



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days, you see couples with young children using such car seats. Kudos to them. Studies have shown that children in car seats have a better chance of surviving crashes.

But there are still those who refuse to take safety, of their children no less, into account when getting behind the wheel. Of course, when Loke's announcement came out, there was a little bit of a hue and cry.

The most common argument against it was that it would cost a lot of money, especially for the poor and those with many children. To be fair, the prices of such items are terribly high.

In 2007, a couple expecting their first child noticed the price of such items here. It just so happened the couple flew to the United States soon after and found the same item for a third of the price in Malaysia.

Of course, not everyone can go to the US to shop, and heading there would cost more anyway. But since then, perhaps because Malaysians are becoming more safety conscious, there are more

such items available and prices have come down somewhat, though they are still high. And, that is exactly what Loke and the ministry are trying to avoid.

The reason why he mentioned that there were not enough suppliers and stock is because, right now, these items are expensive.

Having more suppliers, and local manufacturers, mind you, will allow for prices to come down, at least a little. Will they be cheap enough for the poor to afford? That remains to be seen.

But the more pertinent and infinitely more important question would be this: What price your children's safety?

Parents, generally, will risk it all for their children. They would sacrifice their lives for them. Yet there are many — perhaps through lack of knowledge or perhaps because they do not quite understand or just have not thought things through — who put their children's lives at risk every day on Malaysian roads.

We are not talking here about the car seats, per se, but about parents who have their children

on motorcycles, minus helmets. We are talking about the parents who, while their kids are jumping around in the rear, ironically sit buckled up, safe and sound.

Having child seats is an extra precaution, but one which is completely necessary. And mandatory in many countries. So it is an extra expense, but so what? Again, what price your children's safety? Is your child's life worth so little? Just a few hundred ringgit, perhaps?

That aside, there are other things that the government needs to ensure before such a plan is implemented. The first is quality control. There must be certain standards which need to be followed right from the materials used in the manufacture of the seats. Then there are the proper guidelines. This is easy enough to do.

There are many countries which have such laws. Just look at these countries to determine what needs to be done here. For instance, when do babies outgrow baby seats? When can they use car seats, when do kids "grad-

uate" to booster seats? Do they face forwards or backwards? Can seats be in the front seat? These are just some of the questions which need to be answered.

And then there is also what needs to be done after car seats are made mandatory. This cannot be stressed enough in Malaysia. Enforcement is the key to making any law successful, yet sadly, enforcement always seems to be lacking in the country.

Whatever it is, the ministry is taking a step in the right direction. What needs to be done now is to ensure the move is successful. It is not just about implementing it. It is about researching best practices, coming up with solutions and proactive measures after 2020.

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