

# On Long-distance Bus Travel



by Ir. Chin Mee Poon

**THE** tragedy that happened just 11 days before the year 2010 ended, when a tour bus which made its way down from Cameron Highlands lost control, rammed into the central divider, got deflected towards the mountainside and eventually landed in a roadside drain, and killed 26 Thai tourists and the driver in the process, shocked and saddened the whole nation.

It was not the first time such serious accidents involving long-distance buses had taken place, and it is unlikely to be the last. As a matter of fact, such accidents happen so often in our country that many people have developed a fear of travelling by long-distance buses. They would rather opt for train travel which is by far much safer.

Most of the accidents involving long-distance buses, I reckon, are the result of human error, especially on the part of the bus drivers whose aptitude and attitude more often than not leave much room for improvement. I have personally witnessed a long-distance bus weaving in and out of heavy traffic along the Kajang-Sungai Besi section of the Kuala Lumpur-Seremban Highway at more than 110kph when the speed limit was clearly indicated as only 90kph.

My experience travelling by bus from one city to another throughout Turkey over a period of one month has convinced me that bus drivers need not be daredevil speed fiends.

It was mid-October last year when my wife and I had just completed a 3-week tour of Iran with two friends. We decided to hop over to neighbouring Turkey to continue on our tour after our friends had gone home. I would have preferred to go by train to cover the vast territory of Turkey, but the country's railroad network was not that extensive and going by bus turned out to be a much more convenient alternative.

I soon found out that Turkey's highways and major roads were excellent. What was even more impressive was the way the intercity transportation systems, namely, bus services, were operated. Even between small towns, there were at least two or three operators providing bus services. Major cities were linked by more than half a dozen bus companies.

And the buses were almost invariably large, new, clean and very comfortable Mercedes Benz models with ample legroom. There were usually two attendants in the bus, one of which would serve coffee, tea or soft drinks, and biscuits or cake to the passengers during the journey. It was almost like flying.

The best part was, the drivers were so well trained that they were absolutely law-abiding. In all the buses we travelled in, the driver never went beyond 95kph. He would slow down substantially when negotiating a curve or going over a rough patch. On the few occasions when we travelled at night, the driver would stop at road intersections in town even though there was no traffic coming from the other directions.

We felt so safe and relaxed travelling by bus in Turkey. I am sure something can be done to revamp the whole transportation system in our country so that local bus drivers become more law-abiding and safety conscious. If Turkey can do it, Malaysia certainly can! ■

