

Not just a \$70 fine, law allows offenders to be prosecuted for worse

Letter from **RAJIV NAIR**

I REFER to the letters on Oct 11 concerning the inadequacy of a \$70 fine for a parking offence.

There are two instances involved: The driver whose Mercedes obstructed traffic (including a tourist coach) for about an hour near Empress Place, and another driver who parked his Mercedes illegally near Boat Quay even after being "advised" by a police officer that parking was not allowed there.

Criminal law statutes are enacted to address and redress various social harms.

In the ordinary scheme of things, a "\$70 fine" is deemed to be an adequate sanction for the "harm" created by the parking offences in question.

But in these two cases, other "harms" arose from the actions of the two drivers.

In the former case, traffic was obstructed. In the latter, the "advice" of a police officer not to violate traffic regulations was ignored.

It is for the police and the prosecutorial authorities to determine the appropriate criminal sanctions.

For example, a driver who obstructs traffic could be charged under Section 13(1)(d) of the Miscellaneous Offences

(Public Order and Nuisance) Act, in addition to any penalty for illegal parking.

The Section provides that any person who "causes or permits any ... vehicle to stand on any public road so as to create or likely to create obstruction or inconvenience to the passage of the public in that public road" is liable, on conviction, to a fine not exceeding \$5,000.

Section 122 of the Road Traffic Act likewise makes an offence of causing or permitting a vehicle to remain at rest on any road in such a position as to be likely to cause obstruction or undue inconvenience to other road users.

If the officer who "advised" the driver not to park illegally had firmly told the driver not to park there, but the driver had nevertheless left his car there, the driver may have committed an offence of obstructing a public servant in the discharge of his public functions, under Section 186 of the Penal Code.

If the police officer was in uniform and was engaged in the regulation of traffic at the time, the driver's failure to comply may amount to an offence under Section 120 of the Road Traffic Act.

In both cases, the apparent grievance of the letter-writers that the cars in question were Mercedes is irrelevant.



MISSION: JOY TO THE WORLD
Japanese clowns Rone (left)
and Gigi hope to be borderless
ambassadors of happiness.

Clowning achievement

In a society where the word 'clown' does not exist, two women teach Japanese children how to laugh — and live



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"clown" is "Pierrot", which is a French clown said to hide a sad heart behind the painted happy face. That's why the two insist their countrymen call them "clowns" instead — even if the resulting pronunciation, "crown", causes comical confusion.

Asked if they were discriminated against as women in Japan's entertainment field, Rone, 47, who was born into a Kabuki (Japanese art of theatre) family, said no.

But there are only about 30 female clowns out of the country's grand total of 100 professional clowns.

When TODAY suggested that those who clown around for a living are not usually academic successes, the two guffaw.

Gigi explains: "In Japan, we don't have this hang-up. They emphasise professionalism — as long as you do your best, you are accepted. Of course, people still prefer their children to be lawyers and doctors."

Rone adds: "In our culture, to discriminate openly is very rude. If you condemn others, people will look down on you. A lot of people in our circus schools think it's easy to look stupid. But in the end, half of the class ends up quitting."

Rone & Gigi run a clown school called Open Sesame, where they conduct workshops. They draw their inspiration from acts such as Charlie Chaplin, Laurel and Hardy and Tom and Jerry.

Their big ears came from the movie *ET*. Their current mission is to teach the next generation of Japanese children to open up. Says Rone: "Every country has a different culture of teaching. In Russia and the United States, they praise their children when they do well. But in Japan, parents demoralise them in the hope of pushing them to strive for excellence."

Rone & Gigi hope that through their clown school, Japanese children will learn how to relate and talk about their feelings.

Says Rone: "As long as I'm alive, I hope to be able to bring happiness to the whole world. I'm Japanese, but I hope to be a borderless ambassador of happiness."

IT IS a little-known fact that the word "clown" does not exist in the Japanese vocabulary. Which is a sad thing because, as Gigi — one-half of the Japanese clown duo Rone & Gigi — says, "(Japanese) need clowns — they are always under a lot of stress, the pressure is high and there are many suicides."

This is where these two Japanese female professional clowns come in. Their mission: To break down the old cultural barriers and win their countrymen's love for those madcap, slapstick entertainers with the funny costumes.

Rone & Gigi have been performing together since they met at the 1989 Ringling Brothers Barnum & Bailey Clown College programme in Japan. Unmarried, they travel the world training, winning awards and performing. They performed at Raffles Hotel's Jubilee Hall over the weekend.

So immersed in their stage personas are they that they refuse to publicise their real names. Gigi, in her late 30s, said one hurdle when they started out 16 years ago was that "people in Japan think that clowning or slapstick is not a skill. So, finding work or gigs was almost impossible".

Then there are the clueless who hire the two for private functions without knowing what their act entails.

Gigi says laughingly: "Once they set the stage for a concert, when what we needed was just space to perform. They even set up barbecue pits below the stage and as we performed, people were barbecuing!"

In their language, the closest term to

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