

## **Prioritizing Road Safety in India**

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The UN General Assembly has adopted 2011-2020 as the Decade of Action for Road Safety and set a goal for reducing fatalities from road accidents by 50 percent during the period recognizing the severe impact of road accidents on global health. Every year about 1.2 million people die and 50 million get affected in road accidents globally losing 1.2 trillion US Dollars in these accidents, says Mr. K K Kapila, Chairman, International Road Federation. According to the World Health Organization unless concerted action is taken, road traffic injuries are predicted to become the fifth leading cause of death in the world by 2030.

With the growing urbanization and vehicular traffic, the issue of safety on roads also keep growing in terms of concerns and solutions. The concern becomes all the more relevant in view of the fact that number of persons killed in road accidents in India is the highest in the world. More than 4.97 lakh road accidents in 2011 are reported to have claimed over 1.42 lakh lives. These numbers translate into roughly one road accident per minute and one road accident death every four minutes for India.

Though the data for the year 2012 shows a declining trend with over 4.90 lakh accidents claiming 1.38 lakh lives, still the number is too high to give reason to breathe easy. The analysis of road accidents in terms of causal factor's reveals that drivers' fault accounts for 78.7 per cent (3,85,934 accidents) of total road accidents. The reason behind fault may vary from alcohol/drugs to mobile addiction, overloading/overcrowding of vehicles, exceeding lawful speed and tiredness etc. Since drivers' fault has been found responsible for about 80% road accidents, it is important to make them aware and realize that they are the killers on roads when they violate the laws/measures.

Road Safety is being prioritized at Political Level. The focus is shifting from ad-hoc Road Safety Activities to Sustainable Programmes. A systematic state capacity review of the existing road safety management system has been recommended while formulating long term goals, interim targets, strategies and programmes. This includes a high-level multi-sectoral strategic examination of a range of activities and involves senior management from the key governmental agencies - Transport, Police, Health, Justice and Education, who may not all be actively engaged as yet- as well as all other stakeholders who are able and should contribute to the delivery of road safety results.

The Ministry of RTH has taken steps to minimize road accidents in the country. The Government has approved a National Road Safety Policy. This Policy outlines various policy measures such as promoting awareness, establishing road safety information data base, encouraging safer road infrastructure including application of intelligent transport, enforcement of safety laws etc. The Government has constituted National Road Safety Council as the apex body to take policy decisions in matters of road safety. The Ministry has requested all States/UTs for setting up of State Road Safety Council and District Road Safety Committees.

The Ministry has adopted a multi-pronged strategy to address the issue of road safety based on four E's of Road Safety that is Education, Enforcement, Engineering (roads as well as vehicles) and Emergency care. Road safety has been made an integral part of road design at the planning stage. Road Safety Audit of selected stretches of National Highways/Expressways adopted. Driving training institutes being established, Tightening of safety standards of vehicles like helmets, seat belts, power-steering, rear view mirror and Publicity campaigns on road safety awareness.

Besides observing Road Safety Week, media campaigns through Doordarshan and Radio networks, Printing and distribution of Road Safety material, advertisements in newspapers and organizing conferences/seminars/ workshops on Road Safety, the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways continues to undertake new initiatives to ensure road safety.

These include efforts for inclusion of a chapter on road safety in the

- Text books of Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) syllabus in Class VI to Class XII. State Governments have also been advised to include Road Safety education in the curriculum of the schools administered by the State Education Board.
- Providing cashless treatment to road accident victims for 48 hours at expenditure up to a limit of Rs. 30,000/-a pilot project launched on Gurgaon-Jaipur section of NH 8.
- Identification of top 25 black spots in 13 States which account for 90% of road accidents in India. The short term remedial measures have been completed for most of the black spots identified.
- Finalisation of National Ambulance Code based on the recommendations of the Working Group on Emergency care. This 'Code' puts in place minimum standards and guidelines regarding the constructional and functional requirements of road ambulances in India.
- Notifying Consignments protruding beyond the body of goods carrier as illegal.

The strategy for ensuring road safety being multi-pronged, many government departments share responsibility for road safety. Special arrangements are required to put in place to ensure close co-ordination and accountability. For ensuring better coordination among key Government agencies concerned with road safety including local government, all the State Governments have been advised to constitute High Level Committees headed by the Chief Secretary to take stock of the road safety scenario in their States and the measures required to be instituted at the State level to reduce road accident fatalities. The States have been advised to prepare action plan on road safety for their States. The States' annual action plan on road safety needs to set ambitious but realistic targets for at least five years. It should have measurable outcomes and sufficient funding to develop, implement, manage, monitor and evaluate actions. All the States/UTs have been asked to identify a lead agency in the State and also set up Road Safety Fund at the State level by earmarking 50% of the funds generated from fines on account of violation of traffic rules.

Though UN decade of action plan to reduce road fatalities by 50% started in 2011, after three years much needs to be done. In India, budget for Road Safety needs to be enhanced and proper road safety plans/mechanism to be in place in all the States. It needs to be ensured that orders relating to Road Safety that exist are followed strictly and violation punished. Parliamentarians and corporate world may be engaged by way of diverting a part of funds from MPLAD and CSR and contributing for the cause of Road Safety. The collective efforts of all stakeholders are bound to make significant impact on making roads safer, arresting human suffering due to road related mishaps and achieving goals set by UN.

*(Source: PIB)*