

Safety Priorities

The Auto Magazine speaks to Prof. Dinesh Mohan, head of the Transport Research and Injury Prevention Programme (TRIPP) of IIT Delhi, defines issues about India's road safety.



TRIPP, the foremost organisation concerned with road safety in India, is associated with the safety programmes of various state governments aimed at creating awareness about road safety problems and advising them on practical solutions. It is also associated with many national and international organisations that share the same objectives.

Q. If the direct and indirect cost of road crashes is calculated at Rs. 55,000 crores per year, why are government agencies so casual about measures to check and reduce this grave menace?

A. Most federal and state governments are not aware of the magnitude of the problem. Although 80,000 road deaths annually is roughly equivalent to an Airbus crashing every day, few people are aware of how grave and huge the problem is. And as it is a state subject, it will take time before measures can be implemented.

Q. What do you think should be the main priorities?

A. There are several priorities. The first is an urgent need for an independent high level government agency to energise an effective programme. In the USA, there is a National Highway Transport Safety Agency (NHTSA) appointed by the President of USA with a rank equal to the head of the Federal Highway Agency that builds roads. **India must similarly have a high level authority reporting directly to the Minister of Transport or even the Deputy Prime Minister.**

Secondly there are very few people with any training in road safety issues in any government body. There is urgent need for a national act to co-ordinate federal and state authorities and integrate the activities of the police, the RTOs and many other local authorities.

Thirdly, there are some simple steps that can be immediately implemented, such as:

- Pedestrians suffer the highest casualty, so there needs to be 10 cm high-speed breakers at 100 m distances in all residential and shopping areas where there are most pedestrians.
- All bicycles should be painted white or yellow to be easily visible and also fitted with reflectors on the rear as well the wheels and pedals.
- Motorcycle and scooter casualties are very high and the compulsory helmet law for men and women must be notified and enforced in all states.
- Daytime running lights have been proven to reduce deaths by 10 to 20 per cent in many countries. It is very easy to implement.
- Seat belts are an effective measure and need to be universally notified and enforced. Rear seat belts are equally important. Many people wrongly think that the rear seat is enough to save them. In serious crashes, the heads of the rear seat passengers hit front seat occupants and their weight contributes to further injury to front seat occupants.
- Children must never be allowed on the

front seats. A crash at even 30 kmph will multiply the G's of a 15 kg child to the force of 300 kg which is too much for a mother's strength to hold, inflicting terrible damage when the child hits the dashboard.

- It will be a slow process to check the overloading and maintenance of trucks and buses but proper taillights can be easily checked.
- Free left turns cause many fatalities. There should be stoplights at all intersections.

Q. Any other major suggestion?

A. Yes. Many roundabouts are being converted into red lights. Internationally, the reverse is happening and wide traffic circles with a curved divider forces incoming traffic to keep to the outer lane of the circle, giving priority to traffic on the circle. So there is easy traffic management with minimal cost or effort. ☺

