

## POLICIES NOT POLICE CAN ENSURE ROAD SAFETY: ArriveSAFE

Enforcement by police is an integral component that improves road safety but here in India we regard it to be the panacea. Every morning, headlines narrate tragedy visited on Indian families. Quite scary it is to state that over 106000 Indians died in 2006 due to road crashes i.e. one Indian every 5 minutes [Source World Health Organisation, National Crime Record Bureau]. As per planning commission of India for every fatality there are 15 serious life altering injuries. Thus, over one and half million Indians and their families suffered due to road traffic injuries in 2006 alone. This is of great significance as most of the times those who are involved are the only earning member of the family. Further, we are practically losing the most productive people as 80% of road crash victims are between the age group of 15 to 40 -a loss an emerging economic power house like India can ill afford.

India holds dubious distinction of having highest road crash fatalities in the world, with 1% of vehicular population it accounts for 10% of the fatalities. Since, accidents are causative in nature and are preventable thus all deaths and injuries are unacceptable. Road crashes not only strain the already burdened health infrastructure but also cause India to lose an estimated 3% of its GDP [Source – Ministry of Road Transport & Highways]. Over the past 5 years the annual increase in road traffic fatalities has been around 8% as compared to 5% earlier. This is the era when India witnessed highest rates of urbanisation and motorization. 2008 has been an exceptional year where accident rates fell and let it not delude us that road safety situation is improving .This fall was due to high fuel prices as a consequence of which people made fewer trips and were less exposed to the traffic. Research says that with increase of 10% in fuel prices, fatalities are reduced by 2.3%.

The enormity of the problem can be gauged for the fact that in a study conducted by ArriveSAFE in Chandigarh in March 2009, 56% of the respondents reported to have had an accident or near accident situation in the last 1 year. But, only 17% of them assumed responsibility for such situations and the rest blamed the other road users and infrastructure. Further, a whopping 48% of the respondents admitted to have indulged in an illegal or unsafe behaviour like drinking driving, speeding, jumping red light and mobile usage in the last six months exhibiting scant disregard for personal safety and that of others. Ironically, 27% of the respondents identified Drinking driving and another 26% regarded speeding as the leading causes behind fatalities. Even though 47% of the respondents believed that driver lack of skills or knowledge of road rules were responsible for crashes an unimaginable 47% of the respondent thought that heavier or government vehicle has 'Right of Way'.56% of city respondents believed that roads are unsafe for pedestrians and cyclist and this is worrisome for the city that defines urban planning in India and has footpaths and cycle and rickshaw tracks. In 2008 out of 148 fatalities 68 i.e. 46% were pedestrian, cyclist, rickshaw/rehri pullers [Figures by Road Safety Cell, Chandigarh Traffic Police] and many of them would have survived if

compulsory cycle and rickshaw tracks had lighting arrangement and pedestrian path had not been encroached by vehicle owners to park their vehicles.

Thus, trying to improve road safety through enforcement only would yield limited results. Instead this pandemic warrants a holistic approach. The leading causes identified by the respondents of the survey i.e. speeding, drinking driving, driver skills and disregard for road rules and regulations have time and again been highlighted by the media. To deal with speeding we need interventions by multiple agencies whereas, engineering department needs to introduce speed calming measures, incorporate them in future road designs and the police needs to enforce speed limits strictly. Drinking Driving needs to be tackled through ZERO tolerance but it would be unfair to expect police to ensure it, when faced by mushrooming of liquor vends and ahatts as a consequence of liberal excise policy. So we need a sensitive administration which otherwise doesn't allow any direct excess to V 3 road from any property or let any vendor be on these roads but has permitted vends and ahatts on V 3 in pursuance of revenue. It's too much for a city that prides itself to be first no smoking city of India. It takes years of being a passive smoker to suffer ill effects of smoking but one could suffer any moment due to a drunk driver on the road.

World over research has shown that new drivers have higher probability of being involved in an accident and almost all developed nations have strengthened their system by introduced 'graduating licensing system' where in it takes at least two years for driver to drive independently. Chandigarh Administration has strengthened its Licensing system by introducing computerized testing and smart licensing system but it needs to be made more stringent so as to ensure that drivers with certain acceptable skill level are allowed on the road. Best of the roads and safest of the cars won't reduce fatalities if we continue to have skill deficient drivers. Similarly, a certification system that ascertains vehicular health over and above the pollution checks should be introduced at the earliest for all the vehicles. Further, the onus to educate masses should be on an exclusive agency that employs emotive and appealing communication rather than ineffective slogans and also widely solicit the support of Police, NGO's, business community and other stakeholders to spread road safety education on a sustained basis. Campaigns regarding speeding, drunken driving, observance of road rules, helmet and seat belts should be undertaken regularly by the agency using appropriate media mix and thus reaching all sections of society. Traffic safety education should be introduced in the schools at the earliest as it not only would prepare the next generation of road users but would help reverse train the parents as well.

For policy and programme to succeed they need to be accepted by public and our study discovered an overwhelming support to the cause of road safety. This study was conducted along with the road safety campaign undertaken by us on behalf of Ministry of Road Transport and Highways with the support of Chandigarh Traffic police, RLA and CTU and an unbelievable 88.5% respondent thought that these campaigns benefit them rather than the police. Further, 36% of the respondents

believed that education campaigns are required to be undertaken regularly, 18% respondents were in favour of stricter licensing system and another 13% felt that enforcement drives should be reinforced .If India has to realize its dream of being a developed nation it has to have developed road system and road behaviour and what better city to lead other than Chandigarh. The place that redefined urban planning in independent India has the potential to emerge as role model for 21<sup>st</sup> century India. Come Chandigarh; lead India to lose the dubious distinction of having highest road traffic fatalities in the world.