

Road safety in India: In the right lane

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Introduction:

Each year, 3 lakh people are estimated to be killed on the road in India, according to the World Health Organization (WHO). The number of people suffering life altering injuries in road crashes is exponentially higher even than that.

World Day of Remembrance:

1. As the planet commemorated the World Day of Remembrance for Road Traffic Victims on November 19 to provide a platform for road traffic victims and their families to remember, support and act, such figures should serve as a wakeup call to all of us. We need immediate, coordinated and evidence based interventions to boost road safety and drastically reduce the daily human tragedies behind the alarming statistics.
2. This will require strategic investments in road safety measures, concerted political will at the national, State and local levels, and a change of collective mindset — after all, every one of us is a road user in some way — to understand and tackle the scale and importance of the challenge.

Focus areas for better safety:

1. Priority areas must include enforcing the use of seatbelts not just for drivers but also for their passengers. Wearing a seatbelt reduces the risk of death among drivers and front seat occupants by upto 50%, and among rear seat occupants by 25%.
2. Similarly, helmet use must be enforced among motorcyclists as well as their pillion passengers. Correct helmet use can lead to a 42% reduction in the risk of fatal injuries. Indeed, vulnerable road users, who include pedestrians, cyclists and the riders of two wheelers, account for almost three quarters of road deaths in India. And passengers unbelted in the back seat are not only risks to themselves upon impact but also to those in the front seat.
3. Speeding must be reduced and there can be no tolerance for drink driving; a recent report by the Government revealed that speeding led to 70% of India's road crash deaths.
4. Road infrastructure should be enhanced — too many roads are not in a safe condition, although government programmes in recent years have led to rapid improvements.
5. Large scale public awareness campaigns such as the new UN global campaign for road safety #MakeASafetyStatement, involving international celebrities, must be undertaken to secure behavioural changes.
6. The call to action is not new. The Sustainable Development Goals, created in 2015, include a target (SDG 3.6) to halve the number of global deaths and injuries from road crashes and a call (SDG 11.2) to make public transport safer, more affordable and more accessible to all. The good news is that we are already seeing steps in the right direction in India.
7. The national government's implementation of the Motor Vehicles (Amendment) Act, 2019, and enhanced data collection from road crashes, are impactful measures that will help

experts better understand where and why crashes are occurring, and, therefore, how to reduce them.

The UN helmet:

1. Police in the major cities, such as the capital, New Delhi, are adopting modern technologies such as intelligent traffic management systems to effectively regulate traffic flows in a much better way and minimise the potential for collision.
2. To help increase access to safe helmets, the Special Envoy has worked with helmet producers to produce a low cost ventilated United Nations standard helmet, for under \$20, including here in India.
3. Your chances of surviving a road crash can vary enormously depending on what State you live in and what access you have to high quality emergency care services and proper aftercare.
4. We also need to look increasingly at international best practices and successes and then adapt them to India's specific needs and circumstances.
5. Road safety is a complex and multidimensional challenge, but the benefits that come with addressing it can be equally profound. What we need is a comprehensive safe system approach as envisaged in the UN's Second Decade of Action for Road Safety 2021-2030, and full implementation of the MVA (Amendment) Act 2019.

Conclusion:

Ending the silent pandemic of road injuries will not only save lives but also strengthen the economy and improve the quality of life for everyone.



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