

Mr. Jean Todt, UN Secretary General Envoy for Road Safety and President FIA; Prince Michael of Kent, Founder of Prince Michael International Award of Road Safety; Ms. LucinoLorro, Chair, Road Safety Committee, United Nations; Mr. Bill Halkias, President, IRF Geneva; Dr. S. Gangopadhyay, Chairman, IRF India Chapter; Mr. K.K. Kapila, President (Emeritus), IRF; Mr. T.K. Amla, Secretary, IRF India Chapter; Prof. P.K. Sikdar, Advisor, Road Safety, IRF; Prof. Sewa Ram, Head, School of Planning and Architecture; Dr. K. Ravinder, Chief Scientist, CRR; all distinguished Speakers, Guests, Invitees from India and abroad and all my dear friends, Ladies and Gentleman.

I am pleased to be here with you all for the inauguration of the Webinar series being launched by the IRF India Chapter on the very vital theme of "Road Safety Challenges in India and Preparation of an Action Plan". Road Safety is a public health issue across the world and it is truly a challenge for the entire developing world as well as for India, where we have maximum fatalities and limited resources. In India, 1.5 lakh people die and more than 4.5 lakh are injured in 4.5 lakh road accidents every year, resulting in social economic losses from accidental deaths equivalent to 3.14% of national GDP. 70% of the deaths are in the working age group of 18-45 years. There are 415 deaths per day in road accidents in India. Actually, when we compare with the present problem which we are facing because of Covid 19, compared with deaths due to Covid also, our death percentage is very high. It is very unfortunate that we have so very many deaths every day, every year.

I would say this scenario is far more serious than the Covid 19 pandemic and it is becoming an alarming situation for us year on year. Unfortunately, we stand at the position number one in roads accidents in the world, ahead of US and China. Being a Transport Minister, I am sensitiveto this and seriously concerned about this.

Since the last 31 years, we were observing annually a Road Safety Week.However, in the 32nd year of this activity, we have planned it as a Road Safety Month from 18th January to 17th February 2021. I hope that the month long period will give enough time to undertake many activities for promoting road safety across the country.

I have been told about the total content of the 12 Webinar series to be undertaken through 2021 by IRF India Chapter. I am pleased that they have planned to cover all aspects of road safety as outlined in the United Nations Decade of Action for Road Safety 2011-2020 to be achieved by 2030. I wish with the cooperation of all stakeholders, we shall achieve the goal of reduction of 50% of road accident deaths by 2025 in the country. My Ministry has taken several measures to contain road accidents by strengthening the 4Es of road safety,which are very important as far as road safety is concerned.

Engineering i.e. safe road, safe vehicle; Education, where it is very important for schools to train our small children who can understand the importance of road safety; and Enforcement, which is the response from the Government and it is equally important because of the Road Safety Bill, which has been passed by the Parliament, making it possible to implement some strict laws by which we can prevent road accidents; Emergency Care services are equally important, but if we don't have accidents, if we can reduce the percentage, naturally we would not need to develop more emergency care services.However, presently because of road accidents, we do need emergency care services by which we can save lives by and large.

In the country, Tamil Nadu state government is carrying out effective and quality work in the road safety field. They have reduced road accidents by 38% and deaths by 54%. This is one of the successful

examples of an Indian state and I am giving this example to all State governments. If they can work in the direction, it is 100% feasible and possible that we can reduce road deaths and accidents. The Tamil Nadu model is very important, where the Tamil Nadu government has taken help from the World Bank and in cooperation with the World Bank, they achieved this goal. If Tamil Nadu is in position to achieve this goal, why not the other States, this is really a million dollar question for me and this is the time for all of us now to take it very seriously and to be active about all road accident issues. I urge all States and concerned stakeholders from the core of my heart to study and follow the success model of Tamil Nadu in reducing road accidents.

Road Accident Data Collection & Recording system should be qualitative, comprehensive and uniform across the country. Digital technologies, Drones, App based platforms should be developed.

As per the accident statistics, more than 60% of the accidents occur at road junctions, which clearly indicates that there are deficiencies in the design and construction, which itself creates accident blackspots. Can we find alternate solutions for junctions by designing them into round ____ rotaries, grade separators, flyovers or channelized diversions? We have finalised the guidelines and standard operating procedures to identify and correct accident blackspots in the country. My Ministry is working on more than 5,000 blackspots identified on highway networks.

Road Safety Audit during different stages of development appears to be the most suitable way to correct all deficiencies causing accidents. More than 40,000 km length of road is under auditing. I urge professionals and authorities that prevention is always better than cure. I will request all the dignitaries and particularly to Mr. Kapila that it is possible for us to take the help of Engineering colleges, IITs and Polytechnic colleges for road audit. I am interested to start such a scheme by which these institutions can undertake audit of the road, following some given criteria so that they can give us an idea about which are the blackspots and also the problems. A third party audit by educational institutions for which the students can work can be a good beginning. I am 100% certain about this point that taking the cooperation of Engineering colleges for auditing at least 300-500 km of road would by their suggestions, help to improve things.

Many DPRs are in very bad shape. I again request Mr. Kapila to suggest defects in DPR, which are already prepared by the private agencies and if there is any methodology by which people like you can research and study, using the different types of new electronic systems, which we already have. On the basis of that, is there any system, where we can collaborate with people like you, that whenever the DPR is submitted to NHAI, we will give it to you for 15-20 days, where you can study all DPR and identify and suggest the problems and make recommendations to our people. My feeling is that the attitude/approach of the people working outside the system, is different from that of the people within the system.

So, if there any institutions like engineering college, IITs, and if before submitting their report, because it is difficult for me. Is there any possibility to get some approval from your side. We can bear some cost for that. Third Party Auditing of DPR and auditing of the road will give us an idea as to where the fault lies and I feel this is very important. The DPR preparing persons are the basic culprits responsible for road accidents.

We are now introducing Project Management Consultancy by which we are planning to make DPRs where there will be involvement of expert people and not only for road accidents, but I am also

seriously concerned and sensitivity about cutting of trees also. I am constantly pursuing that plantation is very important and if we need to cut trees, we should also have transplantation. We have now decided to make the e-tag for every tree and we are starting to make drone video shooting by which we can understand what are the exact number of plantation and what needs to be done. Here also, if there are expert people in your institution who are ready to cooperate us, we can take their help. It is important for us to have all types of suggestions by which we can save the life of people.

The government has proposed a State support program to incentivise the states with Rs. 14,000 crores funds, of which Rs. 7,000 crores could be from Asian Development Bank and World Bank and balance of Rs. 7,000 crores from the Central Government for road safety improvement work in India. In India, 78% of road accident deaths are of two-wheelers riders, bicyclists and pedestrians. The objective of protecting this vulnerable road user group is the foremost priority of the government.

Issuing revised guidelines for automatic headlights on the two-wheelers, use of BIS standards helmet, ABS in two-wheelers are a few other measures. Further, we need to think of dedicated facilities like footpaths, proper road crossing arrangement, bicycle tracks, lane and parking for two-wheelers. It will help to save the life of this category of road user by and large.

70% of accident deaths in India are due to over-speeding of vehicles. Speed Management study is very important right from expressways to city roads. Adequate signages, proper road markings, speed control measures, fixation of speed limit norms, crash barriers etc. should be ensured on roads. Adoption of best advanced technologies and automated tools is the need of the time for effectively monitoring, managing and enforcing road traffic movement. Fitness check of all vehicles has been mandated to be done through automatic vehicle inspection and certification centers. Motor Vehicles Act has strengthened vehicle regulation by introduction of the provision for recall of vehicles and vehicle components in case of any defects. Our vehicles are quite advanced in their safety requirements, but earlier sold vehicles need to be retrofitted appreciatively, which is a big concern.

The government has recently announced a Scrapping Policy to deal with old unfit vehicles and their safety concerns. It is expected that more than 1 crore such vehicles would be removed. However, we have a plan to change the vehicles on alternate fuel and energy sources like Ethanol, Methanol, CNG, LNG and electricity and even we are trying for hydrogen fuel cell. We are also trying to develop alternatives for Lithium ion battery by which the pollution is also big concern. The road accidents are undoubtedly a big concern but equally so is pollution. It is very important therefore to reduce the dependence on imported conventional fossil fuels.

It has been seen that road safety is mostly a behavioural issue. It requires cooperative federalism to boost coordination, right from block to taluka level, and this can be achieved to an extent by enforcement of the traffic rules through imposing higher penalties on traffic rule violators. There has to be a systematic education and campaign starting from school curriculum by which children can be educated and trained by inculcating in their mind safer behavior on roads. Our large youth population needs to be sensitised and educated by creating in them awareness and sense of responsibility and driving manners.

Post crash scientific study of damaged vehicles and road environment at locations is very important. Such practice is mandatory in many countries, we should also think of it.

One of the most important requirements of road safety activities is Emergency Care through an appropriate network of rescue system. This has improved over the last one decade through deployment of advanced ambulances and set up of trauma care centers at different levels.

The Good Samaritan guidelines have been already issued to protect persons helping accident victims on spot from any form of harassment. I believe that this Webinar series will be beneficial for all the officers of various agencies to tackle their road safety problems successfully.

The government is positively looking for your suggestions, recommendations and concrete roadmap for adopting a self system approach to improve the road safety scenario in the decade 2021-2030.

Although as far as the agreement is concerned, we have committed for reducing road accidents and deaths by 50% upto 2030, I am trying my level best that we will achieve this goal before 2025, with the cooperation of all the stakeholders and people like you, who are constantly working for this cause. Because social consciousness, social responsibility and social sensitiveness is very important and I know Mr. Kapila from the last many years, as well as a lot of people in India are taking all this work as a mission for this. It is exactly a good indication for the society. But we need to have more people like this, more institutions like these, more talented people like this. Unfortunately, I am not very much satisfied about the programs/functions, which are executed by my Ministry where we need lot of new changes and development.

Within 8 days, I am going to appoint a Chairman of the Road Safety Council and he is a very good, dynamic and sensitive person. I am confident that under his leadership, we will give him all the rights, and he will plan for the next year for which we need cooperation from the masses. Presently, this is the activity of some classes. We need to penetrate into the masses for which we need cooperation from the Universities, Colleges, Schools and all type of educational departments, NGOs, social organisations and even Political organisations. We can take help from anybody because this is a noble cause, where we need cooperation from everybody. Even, in NHAI, every toll naka, we are taking a lot of initiative for checking of eyes etc. and other things.

So, I feel that our Road Safety Council will immediately plan for the Road Safety Month next year and we will involve many celebrities, good players, all different stakeholders from the society and I expect from all of you that you organize the programs and we need to increase the number of programs as far as the cause is concerned to create awareness in the mind of the people and make it a mass movement, a social movement.

As a Minister, I don't have any hesitation to accept that presently whatever we are doing it's a good thing but reports are not really comfortable, it is not adequate. This is the time for all us to save lives and we need to work more for that. For this, we need the cooperation, coordination and communication between all stakeholders. I believe that the role of government is very important but it is limited. We need to have cooperation from the NGOs, social organisations, institutions and Mr. Kapila Ji I will request you in that line, if you can make an organisation/institution, where you have cooperation, coordination and 100% communication between the stakeholders, because on government level there are lot of things which we need to improve. I don't wish to criticize the system but I am presently not very much satisfied about whatever we are doing. So, we shall take the cooperation of the social organisations, the people who are working on a mission and 100% we will achieve our goal and save the lives of people in road accidents.

Once again, I am sending all my best wishes for all your work, recognize it, respect it and giving special thanks to you from the society and from the people of the country.

Thank you very much. Namaskar.