

Chapter - 13

HOW TO DECONGEST CITIES [PART II]: MEASURES FOR ROAD INFRASTRUCTURE

A proper road infrastructure is extremely essential for an uninterrupted and a smooth traffic. The various measures that are helpful are as follows:

[I] DE-ENCROACHMENT

Various types and causes of encroachments have already been discussed in the chapter of 'Biography of Urban Roads in India'. Now the question is how to get the public space back? The solution to this problem is really not easy. This is the only measure that does not require any money but a very strong political and bureaucratic will. The probable solutions and those who can really help in this regards are;

(1) The public: The people are the beneficiaries as well as sufferers of this complex problem and at present, there is no campaign against the malady.

(2) The District Authorities: They can really change the look of a city provided they have a bureaucratic will. At present they are only detached spectators of the drama of encroachments. Whenever there is an increased pressure from the public and the media, they make a half-hearted attempt to tinker with encroachments. Though there is a provision for penalty of Rs 2,000 and/or six months' imprisonment for the encroacher, I am not aware of one single example of such punishment in the city of Agra. Unless these authorities have a determination to curb this, no law, regulation or punishment to curb it would be successful. I believe that even the most recent method for keeping vigilance on unauthorized constructions by 'google earth' i.e. keeping a regular record through satellite-operated photographs of the colonies and the city would fail miserably.

Gone are the days when officers among the district authorities used to be strict and refused to yield under pressure. They used to take the decision in the larger interests of the public. Their bags and baggage were kept ready to wait for transfer and were hardly ever discouraged by these 'transfer punishment' for a good cause. But now throughout in their posting period, they avoid intervening in controversial problems. You may frequently spot them in other kinds of 'non-controversial social work

like cutting ribbons, flagging off a cross country race, annual function of some school or presiding over a kavi sammelan, and the like. I can only say that many officers come and go in a city but only those who really do something for the betterment of the city especially who remain firm and strict against all odds are really remembered by the people of the city for a very very long time.

(3) The local politicians: It is true that local politicians usually take keen interest in the common public problems especially related to essential civic amenities. Since the common public seriously suffers from illegal constructions and encroachments, we expect their active intervention. But, in spite of the fact that the politicians have a good cause to support, they seem to be least interested. Why? Politicians also have their own guidelines for such interventions. Had it been a matter between the public on one hand, and the local government authorities or opposition party on the other, they would have felt greatly delighted to intervene. However, the matter of illegal encroachment is mostly between two groups of the public only. On one side, there is a group of influential people responsible for illegal encroachment, while on the other there are the common citizens who are the real sufferers. Politicians would always avoid intervention because their consideration of 'political gains vs losses' is what guides them in such matters. Whatever side they take, it is certain that they will certainly displease one of the groups. They can't dare go against even a small group of the public. If at all they intervene, they would prefer to join the defaulters' group because this group is powerful, influential, and rich and would help the politician at the time of election. Secondly, most of the politicians are themselves responsible for many such illegal encroachments and illegal constructions which may also be one of the reasons to suppress their voice against encroachments.

(4) The Ruling Government: The government is nothing but a group of seasoned politicians. Their strategy is in no way different from what has been described above. At present the concerned ministries are not able to take a firm decision or action in this regard. The reason is the same. The government in all controversial issues between two groups of 'general public' whether of demolition order for illegal construction or reservation issues or Mandir-Masjid dispute, etc, cleverly passes the ball into the court to decide.

The strategy of Delhi Government in MCD's (Municipal Corporation of Delhi) sealing drive against the unauthorized business establishment is a typical example. When the government approached the court to get an order against illegal constructions, it did not realize that it was opening a Pandora's Box, or that it could boomerang on it. However, once there

was politicization of this issue, it softened its stand. In India, unity for wrong reasons occurs quickly. The message to the masses is that while doing illegal work like encroachments, always do in large numbers that make it semi-legal. For the rest you can manage by making a louder voice or protest in a big number whenever any drive against encroachments is initiated. Any way, it will be a milestone judgment in the MCD case whenever it comes as it may decide the fate of illegal constructions all over India.

(5) The court: In present circumstances, the judiciary appears to be the only body which takes decisions purely in the larger interests of the general public. We cannot expect this from politicians and administrative authorities. Probably this is the reason why more and more suffering people are going for PILs for their city problems. One may call it a judicial activism. I believe this could be the view of the politicians while majority of the people in India welcome the intervention of the judiciary.

(6) The public: I come to the public again. Ultimately, it has to do something. Gentlemen, if you have made a house in some residential area it would mean you are going to spend the rest of your life here peacefully and safely. So it is a matter of suffering for years if something goes wrong with this area. Why should the majority suffer owing to the illegal acts of some people? Besides the traffic-related problems, these illegal commercial activities affect the safety of your family and house. It is true that for a single person it is difficult to fight against the law-breakers as it causes lot of tension and enmity. Then what to do?

Step I: First of all you get united by making a local welfare society or association in your area.

Step II: Through this society inform in writing or serve a notice to all shopkeepers or persons causing encroachment in that area about inconvenience that the residents are facing. A clear message should be given to all shopkeepers, stating that you are not against their business, but it is the collective duty of shopkeepers not to cause traffic inconvenience to the people of the locality. These shopkeepers can be suggested for jointly keeping a man who can manage traffic and parking there. Through the same letter they may warn that if the shopkeepers do not take necessary action, a complaint will be lodged with the concerned authority. Since a majority of small local shopkeepers thrives on the local population in that area, so in most cases we would get a positive response. However, there would remain a class of big showrooms that may not care for your suggestion or may not consider your problems seriously. They need to be tackled in a different way.

Step III: There already exist guidelines and laws that are in our favour. The only thing is that you have to do is to have a copy of all such rules and regulations with you and to register the complaint or protest in time in front of the proper authority. Instead of single-handedly, you should make this complaint in a group. If we meet the authorities in a group, it would not be easy for them to favour the encroachers and those running commercial activities. Always send a copy to the higher authorities of the concerned department. It has been seen that local media help a lot in this regard. However, the media alone cannot solve the problem unless we come forward to solve our problems.

Step IV: Use 'Right to Information Act' : This is a boon for the public or a good weapon given to the people. For example, we have a right to know from the district development authorities about the number of illegal construction cases pending for actions and records about such complaints in the last few years. We can also know what action has been taken so far or why action is pending and the names of officers responsible for action and the remarks made by senior officers, etc.

Step V: Take help of Court : It is not always easy for the public to go to court, especially for small matters and also not easy to get the verdict in time. This option should be used for some major issues when other methods have not yielded any results or when there is utter hostility among the district authorities.

[II] ROAD WIDENING

Although de-encroachment can solve the problem of traffic congestion to a great extent, with the increased traffic load, a time comes when you feel that existing roads need to be widened and there are some areas in the city that need an actual road widening by land acquisition, officially. To get extra road space from the residents is a big hurdle. In this regard the powers conferred to the authorities in the metro are greater as compared to smaller cities. Whatever procedure the government adopts, compensation should be adequate and quick so that fewer people go to court for a stay order. If people are not getting adequate compensation and go to court, then the project might be delayed and the cost will go up. If we consider this hike in the project cost due to delay, it would be much more than the actual compensation. In such cases, despite road widening, a small scattered leftover area owing to 'pending under court' reasons, acts as a bottleneck and defeats the very purpose of road-widening and people continue to suffer. We should be practical rather than going by old and lengthy procedures.

[III] PROPER PARKING SPACE

It is made available by the Municipal Corporation, Development authority or by owners of the commercial complexes. Every city in India is now facing an acute shortage of parking space. A few important points that need consideration in this regard are:

(1) No Roadside Parking: For parking vehicles an extra land space other than roadside should be made available by the government. This is only possible when the government leaves enough space at the time of town planning. Instead, it is frequently seen that the actual road side space is used for parking lots. This severely compromises the smooth traffic through that area. Intentions behind roadside parking appear to be more of revenue collection than solving the problem of traffic congestion. The policy of the of the local development authorities is that it tries to sell out as much road side space as possible. Even some leftover lands belonging to nazul, etc in cities are being legally captured by the land mafia with the help of local administration. This may not be true of the capitals but this certainly happens in smaller cities.

(2) Whether to charge or not: Parking space is costly as the prices of land are rising. An average-sized car occupies about 23-sq.m. of parking space. If you go for a shop or commercial space of similar dimensions on rent in the same locality, it would be much costlier as compared to parking fee. So it seems quite justified that a parking fee should be charged provided an extra space other than the roadside is made available to it. A higher parking fee may be allowed to the areas that are more frequently visited [like railway stations] or more congested or having a high local land cost or multi-level automated parking lots. This is a common policy in some congested cities of USA, Europe and in Asia, like Tokyo.

Although from the business point of view it sounds correct to charge a parking fee, there is one point that I would like to mention here. It has been seen that while developing an area, the developer or the authority already increases the actual land cost to compensate for the land loss due to bye-laws i.e. lands for roads, parks, parking space and community services. In other words, whatever loss that occurs to the developing agency owing to parking space, is adequately compensated for when fixing the final land price. Thus the authorities should keep this fact in mind while fixing parking charges.

(3) One-time Parking Tax vs Spot parking fee [by contractor]: One time parking tax is an alternative suggestion for the parking fee. The government should charge an appropriate amount from vehicle owners

at the time of registration of vehicle in the name of parking tax and can make parking free of cost later on. This would probably be more acceptable to the people and the revenue also, not through contractors, will directly go to the government. It is a fact that money earned by the government through letting out the parking contracts is much less as compared to money that is earned by parking contractors and the government officials who help the contractors to get the contract at a very low price. For an example, the contract for one of the parking spaces in Delhi for one year was given for Rs 5 lakhs only while the contractor made Rs 2 crore out of it in the year 2006-07. Not only this, a large proportion of the contract fee remains unrecovered from these contractors as they frequently disappear after producing false papers regarding security.

In addition to increased revenue, this one-time parking fee will also check nuisance by parking contractors and the parking mafia. In spite of the agreement with the government, these parking contractors are free to fix any parking fee and with the help of their muscle men they use all means to get higher parking fee. Sometimes even rich people show their resentment against this not because of money but because of harassment or annoyance over the wrong trend. Thinking from the people's angle, if one has to go for three or four places for some small jobs, one loses a lot of money from one's pocket. This amount could be big for a person with an average daily earning. This one-time parking tax will also eliminate the tendency of the public not to park at a proposed space, thereby reducing the chances of haphazard parking.

(4) Parking space for commercial complexes: Regarding the parking space in commercial complexes, you find enough space as far as the sanctioned layout plan is concerned. However on actual site, you do not find that much space. In fact these complexes need more parking spaces because in addition to customers, a significant parking space is also required for their own employees. One should realize that to become successful, parking space is the key requirement and more important than the location of the mall or the commercial complexes. There are several examples where big malls or commercial complexes have failed either due to the narrow approach road or due to lack of parking spaces. So don't go only by the calculation of cost of parking space in terms of its return, instead, go by the overall sale or total turnover that would increase due to proper parking space. Just because of the parking problem, many popular established showrooms in old city are now being shifted from congested markets to the newer open areas in the same city.

[IV] FUTURISTIC TOWN PLANNING AND CONTROLLED URBANIZATION

The road infrastructure should be planned on a long-term basis, keeping in mind their future utility. The question is how to define a long-term planning and what length of time is enough to be called a long-term planning. The answer depends mainly on two factors viz: what is the present population or size of the city and how fast the city is growing. The problems of small and big cities are different from each other. So the long-term planning is different for small city from that of a big or metro city. A city having a population of 10 lakhs may require a different kind of solutions as compared to those having a population of 1 crore. For example, metro rail or more flyovers is the need for the bigger city.

Regarding the rate of growth, cities which are State capitals or become the hub of industrial, business or commercial activities, grow much faster. These activities generate more employment and prosperity in that area thereby increasing the purchasing power of the people. Owing to better living conditions more and more people get attracted to settle there. However, every good thing has its side effect and perhaps the most important side effect and cost of any developing city that we face is the traffic-related problems. If we do the town planning keeping in mind the above points, the long-term results would be much better. The measures that are sufficient for 20 years for a slow growing city may not be sufficient for even 10 years for a rapidly growing city.

Traffic conditions are better in metropolitan cities than in smaller cities, but I am sure that people of these metro cities may not agree. But certainly I can say that they are privileged to have better funds for infrastructure, better law enforcement authorities, and bigger in manpower in all the concerned departments. The majority of metro cities are basically State capitals so problems directly attract the attention of the highest authorities of the State. It is the disproportionately rapid rate of rise in number of vehicles in metro rather than the infrastructure that responsible for traffic congestion. In smaller cities infrastructure and bad town planning are the main reasons. Those who are not satisfied with the traffic situation in their metro city, I would suggest to them to visit smaller cities of India. Only then they would realize the difference.

Good town planning is as important as the layout plan of a new house being constructed. Proper town planning not only ensures a smooth traffic for a very long time but also saves many unnecessary expenses made for short-term solutions. It is always better to make revisions and corrections on paper instead of regretting later on. Following are some of the points that need to be considered for planning:

(1) A good number of parallel roads with adequate width and inter-connections, at least two ring roads, adequate by-passes are the basic requirement for the smooth flow of traffic. Besides, properly-spaced industrial, commercial and residential areas are necessary for reducing traffic congestion and accidents.

(2) Various facts related to vehicles are to be taken into account e.g. total number of registered vehicles in that city, rate of rise in vehicles every year, vehicles entering the city in the day time for the purpose of some commercial activity. Besides daily visitor vehicles, there are a significant number of migrant vehicles which, after being registered in one city, have shifted to another city. Although it is mandatory to register new vehicles within one year after migration under M.V. Act, people are reluctant about it. Thus, it is very necessary to know the actual number of vehicles for proper town planning.

(3) Whenever space permits, it is better to distribute the population density evenly in developing areas. A vertically growing city does not favour a smooth traffic as there is a sudden load on roads during the peak hours. Another important fact that is not related to traffic and yet is equally and rather more important is that an increased density over a particular area is responsible for a rapid fall in the water level of that area.

(4) Modernization of infrastructure and traffic reforms should benefit all types of commuters on roads. After all, it is public money and all commuters on the road contribute to infrastructure. However, the present equation is that in India only 10% population has motorized vehicles, but the cost of the total infrastructure, the air pollution and the risk of road accidents are shared by the whole society. Any enhanced facilities for the motorized vehicles adversely affect the safety of non-motorized vehicle-owners or pedestrians. So in town planning the government should properly consider the requirements for the non-motorized vehicles and pedestrians also [like separate track for cyclist, footpaths or pavements].

(5) When the city acquires a big size, it is better to start satellite townships around this city. Development authorities should develop relatively a large area as a satellite township that is independent for requirements like schooling, markets, entertainments and other commercial and official activities. This will minimize the unnecessary commutation of the people from the satellite towns to the main city.

(6) Long-term planning saves many trees from being cut. Besides the cost, the other thing that pains us most while going for frequent road widening is the young trees that have just started providing shelter to commuters are sacrificed.

[V] MAJOR REVISION PLANS FOR OLD CITY AREAS

It is very difficult to find a satisfactory solution to traffic problems in the old congested areas of the cities. These areas would need a major revision for town planning. With one example I may probably explain what I mean for a 'major revision'. Nowadays, while making some highway, in addition to widening of previously made roads, new highways are being made through the areas where previously no road existed, e.g. Noida Express Highway. Similarly, many new link roads are being made through totally new areas just to connect some important highways like that of Suez Canal. This may provide a better solution and also meet the demand of time. Similarly, if we want to have a permanent solution to congested old city areas and to an already established unplanned city area, some new roads and connecting roads through the virgin areas have to be made.

Busy spots like bulk or whole sale markets, bus and railway stations and big offices may require shifting to peripheral location in the city. This is especially necessary for the whole sale markets as they attract a significant heavy traffic inside the city. Right from the beginning we should not allow a single market area to develop disproportionately to an extent that it starts enjoying very high reputation in and around the city. Instead, we should ensure that many such market areas are developed simultaneously in all important corners of the city.

[VI] LOCAL OR COMMUNITY MARKET

In residential areas, there should be separate and fixed place for commercial activity. It should not be that any one can open a shop of any kind, any where, any time.

(1) The market and shops should not open directly on the road, instead into by-lanes or service lanes.

(2) There should be a separate plot or plazas for local vendors of vegetables, fruits, snacks, etc. We really need them and if we don't give them adequate space, they will start mushrooming on every corner and crossing, causing great inconvenience. You can't remove these small vendors or suppliers of the essential items from the urban landscape. You can live without malls in your area, but cannot without a `subziwalla`.

(3) Some space should be left for liberal parking and for any further use of land if the area develops beyond expectation.

[VII] MANAGE SCHOOL TIME CHAOS

Besides morning and evening rush hours, there is a third peak hour in the afternoon that is caused when schools get over. Nowadays there is an increasing tendency among parents to drop their children by

their own vehicles. The reason could be either the safety of the child or that the school does not provide transportation. There is a sudden temporary increase in personal vehicles, autos and buses that cause a great chaos on roads. The schools are mushrooming very fast and are being opened in residential areas where narrow roads are prone to traffic congestion. A significant number of children die or are injured during their trip to school. No comprehensive data is available as to how many children are killed or are injured on their trip back from school. Sometimes children are packed in cycle rickshaws, auto-rickshaw and vans worse than animals or chicken. This problem can be reduced by:

(1) Keeping a closure time difference among the schools belonging to one particular area [not necessarily of the whole city]. In spite of the fact that this congestion can be reduced to some extent by keeping a difference of 15-20 minutes in school timing, school authorities quite often fail to have an understanding for this, may be because of ego in choosing the time. Sometimes they listen only when compelled by district authorities.

(2) Schools should have some parking space to accommodate vehicles at peak hours.

(3) School buses are much safer and will also reduce the traffic burden. Regular maintenance of school buses is also necessary.

(4) Making a pool of personal vehicles like that for offices.

(5) Admissions in schools may be restricted to areas of residences of children.

(6) Some laws have to be made to fix the maximum number of children in an auto or van, otherwise these auto-drivers will continue to make new attachments or modification to accommodate more and more children in them. Every time, if any accident takes place involving such an auto, we make a big hue and cry for it. However, we should also consider the other aspects of this problem. The most important well-wishers of kids in the world are the parents of kids themselves. Is it really possible that the parents of such children are unaware of how their kids are being carried to schools since every day they come to see them off and receive them? In my view most of them know this fact and probably due to economic factor they find themselves helpless to intervene. If they ask the auto driver to reduce the number of the kids he is carrying by half, he would then ask for double the fare for their kids.

[VIII] PROPER TRAFFIC REGULATION

A good traffic system is extremely necessary for smooth traffic and decongestion of the city. In fact, the traffic system should be considered



A traffic policeman on duty here told me to put the road-dividers this way. It will prevent traffic jams as well as traffic, he said.

to be an important component of the road infrastructure. Upgrading of city infrastructure without a proportionate increase in the traffic personnel will not give the desired output. It will be like making an excellent garden without the adequate number of care takers and gardeners.

The role of traffic authorities and important aspects related to traffic control have already been covered in chapters 2 and 7. Besides that some other ways of helping the traffic control are as follows:

(1) Traffic Wardens or Volunteers: These are some sincere and dedicated persons from the community who assist the traffic police in controlling traffic at important junctions. They can check the papers and can report any traffic violations and irregularities to the traffic police for further action. On some special occasion in the city like festivals, fair, games, they can play a constructive role. Under the new scheme wardens can inform traffic authorities by phone regarding any faulty signals, improper parking and encroachment.

Considering the fact that traffic police is already overworked, more and more people from among us should volunteer to help them. Sparing 2-3 hours for 2-3 days in a week for the traffic of your city can be of great help in traffic control. Anyone of us can enrol as traffic warden and after some basic training by police, can start the job. Alternatively, it is possible that some local societies and organizations may adopt a crossing for traffic control.

(2) Help from defence personnel: Defence personnel could be better traffic regulators. They have been found to be stricter in regulating the traffic. Both in-service and retired defence personnel can be involved in traffic regulation. Though a war occurs once in 10-20 years, it is the fear of war that costs a significant national budget. That we can't deny. However, this is also a fact that a more serious war is going on roads. If some of the defence personnel could be involved for traffic regulation on deputation on a regular basis that can be of great help. Similarly, we can depute some retired defence personnel on ad hoc basis for traffic control.

(3) Use of Roundabout: Instead of traffic signals, use of roundabouts have been found more useful. The advantages are: [1] They eliminate the use of policeman. [2] A large roundabout calms down traffic and reduces road accidents by 40%. [3] They are especially helpful when more than four roads join at a spot. [4] Emission is reduced by 20% as compared to signaled intersection. A study shows that out of total fuel 11% is wasted with engine idling at traffic signals and in traffic jams. Keeping the engine on for three minutes consumes an approximate amount of petrol that

could run your vehicle one km. longer.

(4) Intelligent Traffic Signals: We know that traffic flow at intersections is not always the same from all directions for all the times. Thus Installation of Intelligent Traffic Signals [ITS] will help to regulate the traffic at intersections. It gauges the volume of flow of traffic from all directions and automatically adjusts the cycles accordingly. In addition to it, this can be equipped with video camera and Automatic Number Plate Recognizer [ANPR] camera that will send the details of the number plates of the vehicles flaunting the traffic norms to a central server for generation of challan slips.

[IX] CORRECTION OF INDIRECT FACTORS

The government should also find solution for some indirect but significant factors in relation to problems of road traffic. It is important that besides taking measures against the direct causes, it is also necessary to discuss here some indirect but very important factors in relation to road traffic.

(1) Check Urbanization: At present the total urban area is 2% of the country's total land area. But it accommodates 28% of Indian population. In recent times the rate of urbanization has increased significantly as every 10 years, urbanization is increasing by 31% [from 1991 to 2001]. At present urban areas are facing a double burden of the population growth. In addition to general population growth of 2% per year, it is also accommodating an urbanization of 3% a year. According to studies, the present figure of 28% is expected to get doubled by 2030. What would happen to civic amenities and road infrastructure that are already on the verge of collapse, when urbanization will be doubled? This process of rapid and unplanned urbanization is affecting the infrastructure very seriously. Unfortunately, very few researches and studies have been done in our country showing a correlation among various facts e.g. urbanization, trends in income, population, vehicular numbers, etc.

Thus we see that the reversal of urbanization and the prevention of migration of rural population to cities is an extremely important step now. How to check urbanization? If we really want to solve it, then we have to go deep into the problem to get the answer for 'why rural population migrates? In other words, when to call a rural person an urbanized one? I think any person who starts getting a good opportunity for jobs, better school for children, better hospitals for treatment, better civic amenities, markets and means of entertainment can be labelled 'urbanized'. To avail of better things in life is the basic right of every citizen and if it involves

migration, then nobody can prevent him. The only way to check it would be to provide all above-mentioned urban facilities in rural area. This is certainly not an easy task. However, some efforts have to be made to tackle the situation. It is not mandatory that all these facilities should reach the last village, but at least we can make it available to the level of smaller towns and tehsils. If these smaller towns are well-connected by a road network to its dependent villages, we would be able to reduce this migration to a good extent. Thus we can achieve the goal of better uniformly distributed urban, civic amenities. The states of Gujarat, Haryana and Punjab are making good efforts in this direction.

(2) Curb Corruption: Corruption and the lack of proper planning are the two most important factors that are responsible for wastage and misuse of most of the government's money, the public's money. The top government officials know it very well and one Indian Prime Minister admitted that more than 85% of the money sanctioned goes to corruption. It is sad to see that in spite of a frank admission, there are no effective steps to curb it. The situation has become worse now and young politicians feel that now only 5% of the sanctioned money reaches the common people. According to Transparency International's Global Corruption Perception Index, India is enjoying the 72nd rank among the 179 countries of the world. But if we consider the black money kept in the Swiss banks by the people of any country, as a parameter of corruption, India is on the top. The confidence of citizens in its government and politicians has already dropped to a very low level and a more worrying fact is that now citizens are rapidly losing faith in bureaucrats also. This high level corruption is more adversely affecting the development of the nation. The so-called will, determination and commitment are lacking amongst the senior officers. The irony is that often corrupt people are assigned the job to check or make enquiries against corrupt officers. It is strange that corrupt people are expected to remove corruption!

If we consider the Public Work Department (PWD) in road-making only two or three groups are involved. The first is of the government officials who do the planning, sanction money, supervise and approve when the road constructed is completed. The second group comprises of the private contractors who do the job. The third group is of politicians who remotely and cleverly supervise the funds or the budget. There are very good rules and guidelines regarding allotment of contracts of road works, its payments, quality check, etc. Thus theoretically it looks very easy to find out the black sheep easily from this channel. Why government finds corruption so difficult to tackle is really difficult to understand. Though

from time to time there are formal press releases and statements by the government that corrupt officials will not be spared. God knows when this 'now' will come.

Now the public and media should come forward against corruption. The Right to Information Act can help us in this regard. For example, if a new road is being made, you have the right to demand sample of materials and you can inspect an old work that has been completed and the work that is going on. If you ask for the sample the authorities are bound to give it to you in a proper manner for lab testing. Under RTI act you can also see other records regarding road construction, like names of contractors, dates of start and completion, rates of work, amounts paid and so on. Besides the poor quality of material, the other common mode of corruption is the difference in the length, breadth and thickness of the road in records as compared to the actual one at the site. If you suspect any foul play or any underlying corruption you may inform the media or may complain to higher authorities in the State, or to the anti-corruption bureau or vigilance departments.

After all it is public money so the public has every right to know how effectively it is being used. I believe the contract should not only be given for construction but also for its maintenance for a certain period. The money should be released in installments during this total period of contract. As compared to small-level contractors big companies have been found to be a better choice as these are not only better equipped in road making but also easily traceable if something goes wrong later on.

Similarly, for cleanliness on roads, you may enquire from the local corporation about the actual number, place of posting and attendance register of various sweepers and sanitary inspectors and supervisors in your area that are responsible for cleanliness.

(3) Population Control: If you consider causes for India's top problems, population explosion is the main denominator for the first five most important problems of our country like poverty, illiteracy, health, unemployment and would be contributory to almost all the problems in the country [food shortage, water, electricity, etc]. So how can it spare the traffic-related problems? Tremendous rise in the population is a significant cause for traffic congestion and overcrowding on roads. This increased number of vulnerable road users can easily become victims of accidents, especially if some speeding heavy vehicle drivers lose control. In many of the developed countries there are few pedestrians and two-wheelers on roads, so there are little chances of vulnerable road users getting victimized in such situations as the uncontrolled vehicles have nothing

to collide with except the fixed objects and getting hurt themselves.

Similarly, this population load affects significantly the planning and budget for the infrastructure. Population explosion is perhaps the most important issue for the country but unfortunately the least discussed among politicians. Perhaps bad memories related to family planning programmes during the Emergency regime have brought the population control measures to a standstill with the result that no political party dares to touch it or include it as priority in its manifesto. Every government wants to deal with this issue very softly. We ourselves do not want to co-operate and listen to population control programmes, but just want a solution from the government. At present, the concerns for the population is mainly confined to the editorials of newspapers and other print media. However, most of the electronic media is presently busy with encouraging superstitions or exorcism and taking the tantra, mantra, ghost stories more seriously as compared to the more relevant issues like population.

[3] Poverty or Economic inequality: Now, instead of three classes [high, middle or low], we need at least ten categories to define the economic strata of Indians. Considering this fact, how is it possible for the government to cater for the traffic related needs of the people whose earnings range from Rs 20/day to Rs 20,000/day? It is a fact that requirements, strategies, attitudes, views among commuters on roads vary greatly according to their economic and social levels. In developed countries, the majority of people [especially middle and low classes] fall in a short range according to their earnings, so that every government plan benefits the larger section of the population. This is not only helpful in the field of road traffic but also in other areas, like health and education. However, in India due to vast disparities in their economic strata, there is a compulsion on the government to make more plans and strategies for different categories. Even if the government has the best intentions to do so, I believe that it would find it tough to do so. This fact has also been discussed in chapter 12 in section 'Better Mass Transit Systems'.

I totally agree with Noble Prize-winning economist Amartya Sen, who has called India a country of contradictions. Unity in diversity or incredible India sounds very good and gives us a good feeling. We feel satisfied and proud that we are united in spite of wide disparities, like those of languages, religions, cultures, ecology, geography and so on. However, there are some more facts with great diversities that we should also pay attention to. Out of 10 wealthiest persons in the world four belong to India yet there are 37 crore people earning less than Rs 20 a day and 80 crore earn less than Rs 80 a day. Indian medical facilities have advanced to the extent that even the people from developed countries

are coming to India for their treatment and yet India has the record of maximum number of newborn deaths in the world to its credit. India's brains are occupying the top positions in top companies all over the world and yet only 20% of its people are able to have education above high school. Similarly, as far as the individual signs of prosperity are concerned i.e. pot belly or obesity, our country is on top now and yet every year 7000-8000 poor people commit suicide due to hunger. There is no dearth of such contradictory records in our achievements touted prominently. Yes India is incredible!

In India, there is unequal pace of economic growth. A wide gulf in relative economic status among Indians exists. Unfortunately, the gap between the rich and the poor is widening rapidly with time, so that the rich are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer. I distinctly remember when the Finance Minister was asked by a correspondent at the time of budget declaration for the year 2008-09 about this increasing gap, he cleverly answered that it is a political question and there is no truth in it. However, in this regard as compared to FM, I believe more in illustrations of cartoonist R K Laxman that give much more realistic pictures of social and economic inequalities in India. According to a survey by an industrial body called PHDCCI, during the last 25 years [between 1980 to 2005] the gap between the lowest and the highest per capita income has increased from 2.5 times to 3.8 times. In absolute terms, the gap between the two groups has increased from Rs 5,700 to Rs 15,000. This clearly indicates that the advantages of our resources, planning and economic policies are not uniformly reaching out to all the needy groups.