



SIKKIM POLICE HEADQUARTERS

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On Road Safety and Responsible Driving

The Indian roads are among the most unsafe roads in the world where 16 people die every hour due to road accidents! In Sikkim also, the road accidents appear to be disproportionate to its population size. We have, therefore, made road safety our priority. We are conceiving several measures to combat the problem of bad and risky driving and expect cooperation of all to achieve the ends of this mission. No one has to die on the roads if it can be avoided and we must display a resolute will to deal with the problem and prevent it from becoming a menace.

The vehicular traffic creates a hazardous environment unsafe for life. It, therefore, needs to be regulated effectively. The safety of life is the underlying purpose of the laws made for the roads. However, safety cannot be achieved without orderliness and responsibility. The laws and rules, as a result, insist on the orderliness and responsibility on the roads by the drivers of motor vehicles and as much by the pedestrians. Impatience displayed by anyone might lead to a road accident and also an incident of road rage.

The most important factors of safe driving are **lane discipline** and **speed discipline**. The lane discipline demands that a vehicle is driven in a lane and if the vehicle in front is to be overtaken, a double lane change manoeuvre is made only when the vehicle in front is moving slow and if it is safe to do so. It requires availability of an empty fast lane reserved for overtaking and sufficient empty road ahead of the overtaken vehicle/s for safely coming back to the driving lane which completes the double lane change manoeuvre. No such infrastructure is available in our state as it requires two dedicated lanes for one way and two mirror lanes for the opposite direction, i.e., four-lane road divided by a physical barrier. We barely have two lanes and making a double lane change brings us on to the lane reserved for the traffic moving in opposite direction. In safe conditions on the highway created by low-density traffic, we can overtake occasionally but not inside our city limits teaming with vehicles moving in all directions. I have no doubt that no responsible society and person will approve of it anywhere in the world.

In utter disregard to the rules of safe and responsible driving, however, it is a common sight on our roads to witness some irresponsible drivers dangerously overtaking vehicles in front and risking their own lives and lives of the others. We have become so used to such risky behaviours that it appears 'normal' and 'acceptable' to most of us although it is a very scary experience for someone coming from a responsible society and culture. Unfortunately, even during the rush hour and within the city limits where traffic police personnel are concentrated, it is not uncommon to see the drivers doing such tricks. Whereas all kinds and categories of people display impatience and jump the lane dangerously, I have personally and carefully observed it over a long period that the marked POLICE cars, vehicles sporting beacon lights, and those with 'G' number plate violate the rules in highest frequency and greatest percentage, at least within the city limits and during rush hour right in front of the traffic police with a sense of impunity.

It appears that there are two classes of people who drive on our roads: one subject to the law and the other above the law. Such kind of irresponsible driving not only endangers life but also generates negative emotions of 'general public' in a democratic society based on the professed norms of equality. Unfortunately, we all praise the Western countries for their discipline and orderliness but in our country, we claim privileges that undermine the very pillars of discipline and orderliness, that is, the principle of equality and sense of responsibility.

When we confronted such drivers, we were given two interesting reasons: slow moving vehicle in front and professional urgency. The first problem is an objective reality because some people indeed drive very slowly due to various reasons. But that does not give us sufficient reason to engage in dangerous driving. As far as the problem is concerned, we will take action against those who crawl and jam the traffic notwithstanding a clear stretch of road ahead that provokes others to jump the lane. The second type of reasoning is based on subjective reality. A personal sense of urgency has to be consistent with the agreed definition of emergency applicable to the cross-cultural settings. Otherwise, there would be no end to emergencies and consequent justification to break the rules of road. Everyone is important and everyone's time is valuable. Considerations based on such notions are not tenable. If things can wait and the life and property are not at stake, they must wait for the heavens are not going to fall if some delay is caused due to traffic congestion. In the case of genuine emergency, yes we have to take risks to manage greater risks. But it is difficult to believe that each day and every time when certain people are on the road, they are dealing with the emergency. The problem of traffic congestion is real and it can be safely dealt with by better time management. Driving fast and overtaking repeatedly, when there is no scope for it, is certainly not the solution. We have to live with the time spent or 'wasted' on the roads and accept it as a *fait accompli* in the modern world.

We have decided to take on and curb this sort of driving behaviour. It is the responsibility of driver to follow rules and we will hold him/her accountable for violations and infringements. The person behind the wheel is in charge of the vehicle and it does not matter if s/he does it out of volition or on the suggestion of someone else. The purpose of this communication is to urge all concerned and especially those who sit behind the wheel of four-wheeled vehicles to behave responsibly and make our roads safer and orderly.

I would also like to share that with the cooperation of the Home Department, we are shortly going to open a mobile-based state-wide TRACS-BOX (Traffic Complaint & Suggestion Box) service in order to involve people in our road safety efforts because we cannot post traffic persons everywhere. It is the citizens who have to become the watchdogs and come forward to report the violations of rules in order to check each other and make our country safer and better. There is no other way to do it.

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