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School buses should not be money-making avenues for managements: Govt officials

'If schools commercialise transportation of kids, safety will be compromised'

OUR BUREAU

New Delhi, April 29

School buses cannot be money-making tools for managements if the safety of children is given top-priority, said a government official at a road safety conference organised by the Institute of Road Traffic Education here.

Abhay Damle, Joint Secretary-Transport, Road Ministry, said that there are schools which have large vacant spaces within their premises and offer their own bus services to drop the children after school-hours.

But "Children who travel in buses run by other private operators — which charge

lower than those run by the schools — have to cross busy roads because the management does not allow parking facilities to such buses within the school premises," he added.

If schools start commercialising the transportation of kids, the safety of these children will be compromised, Damle said. He added, "Protectionism for your school buses has to go. Pro-active schools can solve problems and train the drivers of private buses on weekends."

The economics of road safety plays as much of a role, indicated Sudeep Lakhtakia, Director General, Bur-

eau of Police Research and Development (BPR&D).

Road accidents data

Both Lakhtakia and Damle called for better methods and common standards to collect data related to accidents.

Lakhtakia noted that road geometry or design, vehicle and climate conditions can as much be reasons for accidents, as drivers' skills.

BPR&D, recently, started a Centre for Traffic in the BPRD Training Institute at Bhopal. This centre looks into multiple policy interventions to bring road safety to the centre of public discourse.

A cue from South Korea

"Private transport also tends to increase the chances of ac-

cidents. One of our studies found that most of the students hit were within 100-200 metre distance of school, by vehicles of parents dropping other kids to the school, said Jo Yee Yung Fung," Chief-Sustainable Transport Section, Transport Division, UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and Pacific.

Korea Transport Institute's Jae Hoon Sul said that South Korea brought down school children fatalities by 97 per cent through different low and high cost interventions — spread over an almost 20-year period. These included forming "mothers' group" in each school which pushed policy interventions and re-designing school zones and buses.