

NOTE

## ‘No’ to Nano

**Sabuj Mukherjee writes :**

The "threat" of Tata Motors that they are going to lose their patience if the situation (i.e. agitation) continues and will leave West Bengal soon, has created immense pressure upon those who took their stand against Tata's small car project all along. However, the Nano controversy is being reduced to the question of giving back 400 acres of land to the unwilling farmers. But people have many reasons to express their concern from a different point of view.

Setting up a small car industry is dangerous for the millions of pedestrians because with the increasing number of private cars, the number of road accidents increases side by side, especially in a Third World country, where traffic management is very poor and inefficient.

First, it has been seen that the number of accidents occurring per 10,000 vehicles in a Third World country is 10-15 times higher than that in a First World country. So, if 10 road accidents happen per 10,000 vehicles in a European city, it would be 100-150 in an Indian city. At present, in India every year 75,000 people have to die as victims of road traffic accident, which is highest in the world. Besides this, another 3,50,000 people have to suffer serious injury; most of them become paralysed for a long time, and even forever. Apart from this huge wastage of human resource, the country has to afford Rs 5,000 crore every year for road accidents.

Particularly in West Bengal, according to the latest information, 13,000 accidents took place in 2006. Only in the small jurisdiction of Kolkata Police area, on an average 450 people die every year in road accidents, most of them pedestrians.

Secondly, right now in India a person dies in every 6.5 minutes due to road traffic accidents. According to an estimate, within a few years the situation will go like this: A person will have to die in road accident in every 3.25 minutes due to the increase of middle-class owned private cars. So, it becomes clear that there is a direct relation between road accident and number of vehicles, especially in a Third World country, where the number of pedestrians is much more than any First World country, along with a poor traffic management system.

Thirdly, there were 80,000 vehicles plying in the streets of Kolkata in 1980. Then, the total road space of the city was 6.5 per cent. In 2008, it is estimated that 14,00,000 vehicles are plying in the city streets, where the total road space has become 7.3 per cent. So, in the last 28 years, despite narrowing the pedestrians' pavements, building flyovers and constructing the Eastern Metropolitan Bypass, the total space has increased by 0.08 per cent. And the number of vehicles has increased by 1650 per cent! This abnormal ratio will increase more at geometric progression if Tata and others sell the cars at 1-1.5 lakh rupees. Will not the traffic system of the city collapse then? For the small increase in road space with building the flyover, the number of private cars has increased more. So, a flyover can hardly solve the problem.

In many European countries, the number of private cars is being controlled strictly now. Also, they find making the public transport system developed and economical is the only solution for traffic problems, as one public vehicle can carry as many people as 16 private cars.

In case of Kokata, they have been able to increase 0.08 per cent road space in the last 28 years (even at the cost of pedestrians' pavements). So, it is next to impossible to reach the international standard of road space—33 per cent of the total city area. Then, people have to choose one of the options—either to accept more accidents and congestion, or to restrict the private cars strictly.

It is not only the concern of farmers of Singur, it is more of common concern to say 'No' to Nano, as millions of urban pedestrians' lives are at stake. □□□