Onward to Moscow

General Victor N Kiryanov knows that historically, expeditions to Moscow end badly for foreign nations. He is hoping this winter it will be a different story. The Russian Federation is playing host to the first Global Ministerial Conference on Road Safety in November. As Deputy Chairman of the National Organising Committee, General Kiryanov has been traveling the globe, laying the groundwork for a successful conference. The Star caught up with him at the UN Road Safety Collaboration meeting in Bangkok.

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General Kiryanov, the Global Ministerial Conference has been described as a historic opportunity to mobilise support for road safety. What can we realistically expect from the conference?

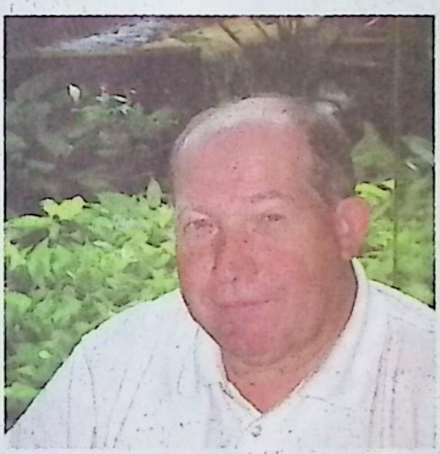
The Global Ministerial Conference in Moscow is the first time that ministers from all over the world will gather to discuss the road traffic injury problem. This is the first time that road safety issues will be deliberated at such a high level. So it will throw the spotlight on road traffic injury. A problem that costs 1.3 million lives a year deserves our urgent attention. We hope there will be a clear consensus for sustained action against death and disability on the roads.

What will happen at the meeting?

Well, first of all there will be sharing of experiences between the countries. There will be discussions on how road crashes affect development goals; there will be a focus on best practices in road safety. It is envisaged that President Dmitry Medvedev will give the welcome address. We are working closely with the UN road safety partners to make sure the conference is a success in terms of catalyzing action for road safety.

With the global economy in a recession, do you think there will be political will to adopt road safety measures?

All over the world, new roads are being built, and the number of vehicles is going up. Road safety should be a priority for every country. The development goals will be undermined if the roads are not made safe.



General Victor N Kiryanov

In times of economic hardship, we just have to find targeted and cost-effective solutions. Political will is a must if road traffic injury is to be reduced. Without it, no amount of social awareness will solve the problem.

Why did Russia decide to take a leading role in planning and hosting this conference?

Russia also suffers badly from this worldwide epidemic. We had 35000 deaths a year, and 200,000 injuries. The number of young people dying on our roads was very high. This is why the Russian Federation decided to take action. After our international road safety partners suggested it, Russia played a leading role at the UN General Assembly to get the conference approved. We then offered to host it.

You are the Chief of the State Traffic Safety Inspectorate. What is the road safety situation in Russia?

As I said, we had 35,000 deaths a year from road crashes. We have taken action and thankfully, reduced the crash rate by 10%. But much more needs to be done. One of our successes is the launching of a fully automated computerised E-system that helps us monitor road conditions, traffic patterns, and accident data throughout the country.

How does the E-system work?

It is a fully networked interactive system, and it helps me identify regional patterns, and create targeted solutions. In Russia we have created a National Commission for Road Safety; there are also regional commissions. If I notice that a particular road traffic problem is prevalent in a particular region, I can chase up the head of the regional commission regarding it. The data also helps us pass specific laws in parliament to solve the problem.

Do you think such a system could be applied in other countries, such as Bangladesh?

From experience we know that such a system is very helpful in solving specific road safety problems. Perhaps we can demonstrate the system in Moscow, and people can decide for themselves whether it can be applied in their country.

You seem very passionate about road safety on a personal level. Why?

Coming through the ranks of the armed forces and the traffic police, I have seen with my own eyes death and destruction on the road. I believe no one should have to die such a sudden and horrible death. ■