

Agarwal Packers & Movers Limited's chairman, RAMESH AGARWAL, tells NEETI NIGAM that their initiative Driver Sewa Kendra is well-received not only by the driver's community but by the International Road Transport Union (IRU) as well



■ Please elaborate on Driver Sewa Kendra (DSK). What were the factors that motivated you for this noble initiative?

In 2012, we celebrated 25 years in the industry. I felt since I have got so much from the industry and society, I should return them with something meaningful. We realised that people working at the ground level of this industry are the drivers. They work hard day and night to deliver goods on time. These people hardly get proper sleep and a place to park their vehicle. So we thought of building first-of-its-kind center at Dudu, near Jaipur. Through DSK, we aim to provide them with basic facilities. Around 15,000 drivers can rest at the center in one month. It is shocking to note that around 1,39,000 people die in India in road accidents every year and out of this 26,678 die due to lack of sleep. This positive step saves around 41 lives every month through this center alone.

■ It is indeed true that they have high-ly pressurising and demanding job.

Despite all the hardships faced by driver's community, his importance is never recognised. Even when he is a victim of an accident, people doesn't sympathise with him. They curse him for driving badly. On the entire highway he is the sole loser and sufferer all the way. Nobody thinks that a truck driver delivers in the most inaccessible terrains with not an iota of his personal gain. I feel, if the BSF takes care of the borders, same way drivers takes care of our goods. They are driving the nation's economy so we need to appreciate their effort.

■ How are you making people aware of their plight?

According to a research, a man's average life span is 72 years but a dri-

ver lives not more than 62 years. Through *Great Indian Drivers*, a documentary film that we have made, we want people to understand their part of the story. In the film, a driver's teenager son is not sure which career he will pursue once he grows up. But he is clear that he would not become a driver.

Though drivers are satisfied with the roads and salary but still wouldn't want their progeny to follow their footprints. When we asked the reason, they say that this job ranks lowest in the society and involves struggle. To our surprise, the former reason weighs 90 per cent of their decision. In 1992, for 1,000 trucks, there were 1,000 drivers, in 2002 it has gone down 890 and in 2012, it declined to 750. The data is alarming and we need to do something to generate interest among the youngsters.

# Drivers carry load of the nation

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■ These people also have to face a lot of hurdle while delivering products.

That's true. There are a lot of illegal collectors who stop them mid way and demand money. In Europe, trucks travel for 620 km a day but in India, it is just 280 km. It isn't that our drivers are incompetent or there is problem with the infrastructure, but illegal activities create problems and in the end our economy suffers.

■ You are also a member of the prestigious International Road Transport Union. What was their response on this initiative?

They were overwhelmed and gave a standing ovation. The transport minister of Germany has recently seen the film and applauded our efforts. We are also running this documentary at various corporate houses to make them aware of this segment.