

Harrowing paths they trace to school

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BANGALORE: Vyashak (12), a student of a school on Museum Road, can never forget the harrowing experience of commuting to and from his school in a private autorickshaw when he was in Class 3.

"Around 15 of us were made to sit in the auto. The smaller ones, in UKG or LKG, were crammed into the back of the vehicle, or were made to sit on the laps of older children. We had to scramble for seats and sometimes ended up fighting with other children," he said.

A parent claimed that the school where her son studied could not be relied on for the safety of her child. This is alarming, as the school is among the more prominent ones in City.

"The issue of school commuting crops up only when related accidents take place or when the High Court asks the

Reaching school safe



government to seriously look into such incidents. Far from taking active steps, there is a general air of helplessness and passing of buck," said Suprabha N K, another parent.

Zaheda Asif, a former lawyer, said, "My grandson once went on a school picnic and the bus driver, who was drunk, drove back home in an unsteady manner. I feel school buses should have trained and efficient drivers capable of handling children with care. An eligibility test needs to be done to check if drivers can be safe, lest we do our children a grave injustice. School managements, however, blame the parents.

"I see children being



crammed into vehicles every day. In order to try to help the situation, I have sent four circulars in the past 10 years asking parents to come forward if they are interested in starting a school bus system. None of

them has responded till date. What can the school management do?" the principal of a school asked.

Archana Vasudev, a teacher, says, "I have noticed JP Nagar does not have many speed-

In focus

The fortuitous escape of 17 schoolchildren, when their bus met with an accident at Banashankari, turned the harsh spotlight on the City's failure to ensure the safety of children from their homes to school and back. It goes without saying that the onus squarely rests upon the government, school managements, parents and civil society to ensure such accidents do not recur.

Commencing today, *Decan Herald* will run a series of articles exploring the various dimensions of this critical issue.

breakers. To prevent buses from overspeeding, more speed bumps are necessary. Similar to traffic parting way for an ambulance, a system should be introduced where traffic makes way for school

buses. Since it is impossible to expect this during peak hours, an alternative could be strict installation of seat belt facility in buses." However, the 10,000-member-strong Karnataka United School and Light Motor Vehicles Drivers Union claims that the entire situation has been misunderstood.

"Most cases of accidents involve buses and vehicles that belong to schools. However, when they take place, it is private drivers with our vehicles that get blamed," said secretary Srinivas.

He said there had not been even a single accident involving its members. Kunal Ashar, an expert on school traffic safety, said, "I took my daughter out of her first school because commuting facilities were not good. The safety of schoolchildren is abysmally low. While lakhs of rupees are spent on various educational implements to improve learning in classrooms, the safety of children is being ignored."

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