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## Govt hits fast lane to raise road fines

Our Special Correspondent



honking alert

**New Delhi, July 28:** Drivers across the country face steep hikes in fines for common violations, from honking to not wearing helmets or seatbelts, under amendments planned to the Motor Vehicles Act.

The Nitin Gadkari-headed road transport and highways ministry will soon seek cabinet approval for the amendments, crafted as an alternative route to introduce stricter penalties because a proposed new legislation has been stalled by objections from states, officials said.

Transport is on the concurrent list - allowing both states and the Centre to make laws - and several states feared the Road Safety and Transport Bill encroached on their turfs. The bill was to replace the existing act.

The proposed amendments not only provide for a significant increase in punishment - fines, jail and suspension of licences - they also seek to hold juvenile drivers and their guardians or vehicle owners responsible for crashes caused by minors.

The fines for not wearing helmets or seatbelts, jumping traffic lights and triple-riding on two-wheelers have been set at Rs 1,000 for the first offence and Rs 2,000 for subsequent ones. The amounts range from Rs 300 to Rs 500 at present.

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Honking, including in zones where it is barred, will attract a fine of Rs 500 the first time and Rs 1,000 later. The existing act is silent on this. Local authorities have fixed fines in no-honking zones but these are as low as Rs 100 in some states and, therefore, not considered enough of a deterrent.

"The amendments intend to curb speeding and drink-driving, two major reasons for road crashes, by imposing high costs on drivers. These provisions will have to be cleared by Parliament before they become effective," a ministry official said.

A fine of Rs 5,000 or six months' jail has been proposed for drink-driving the first time and Rs 10,000 or two years of jail for subsequent offences. Repeat offenders will have their licences revoked. For most other offences, the plan is to introduce "compulsory training" for revalidation of licences.

For speeding, a penalty of Rs 1,000 to Rs 2,000 has been mooted for two-wheelers, three-wheelers and cabs. The fine will be Rs 2,000 to Rs 4,000 for heavy vehicles. Higher compensation is also planned for crash victims and families of those who perish in hit-and-run accidents.

The amendments - which will need to be separately notified by states as transport is a concurrent subject - also seek to streamline the issue of driving licences, registration certificates and permits by curbing corruption through greater use of information technology.

The changes were part of the Road Transport and Safety Bill, drafted two years ago and later referred to a committee of eight state transport ministers, headed by Rajasthan's Yunus Khan.

Most road safety-related provisions were acceptable to states but the bill ran into resistance from them once measures for a larger transport reform were introduced.

Key objections were related to the bill's proposals for a national transport authority, a unified vehicle registration system for standardisation of registration rules and taxes, and some other measures.

"Since transport (reform) is still a bone of contention between the Centre and the states, we thought of introducing road safety measures through these amendments to the Motor Vehicles Act so they can be implemented at the earliest," the ministry official said.

Experts welcomed the planned changes. "It is welcome that at least issues related to road safety and traffic violations are being addressed through amendments to the existing act. But we are waiting to study the fine print," said Saji Cherian, director of SaveLife Foundation, an NGO working to instil safe road practices in people.

The ministry also plans to take the cabinet soon a comprehensive taxi policy to regulate app-based cab aggregators like Uber and Ola.

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