

# How absence of a new, tougher road safety law helped teenager get away

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**NEW DELHI:** The minor who mowed down 32-year-old IT professional Siddharth Sharma with a speeding Mercedes car on Monday in Delhi would not have managed to get away lightly had the government's proposed road transport and safety bill, which provides for stringent penalties for various traffic offences including a jail term, been in place.

Sharma was walking towards his sister's house in north Delhi's Civil Lines at around 8.30pm when the car hit him. The teenager who allegedly crushed Sharma under his Mercedes spent less than seven hours in jail before being released on bail.

But his father, an Old Delhi businessman who deals in wedding cards, was issued a challan under section (5) and 181 of the Motor Vehicles Act for giving the car keys to his son who is not authorised to drive.

Police said that under the MV Act, the teenager's father, if proven guilty, will spend three months in prison and pay a fine of ₹1,000.



■ **Relatives at Siddharth Sharma's cremation on Tuesday.**

SONU MEHTA/HT

Piloted by the road transport ministry, the proposed law is not likely to be introduced in Parliament when it recommences on April 25, officials said. Since taking charge of the ministry in 2014, highways minister Nitin Gadkari has been listing the passage of the crucial bill as one of his top priorities.

The law will replace the 26-year-old motor vehicle act that was last amended in 2001 and proposes stringent penalties that would get harsher as the gravity of the offence increases — a ₹1

lakh fine and not less than four years in jail for causing death by over-speeding, ₹10,000 fine and impounding of vehicle if an unauthorised person is driving the vehicle, etc.

Sources said that with states continuing to protest over several provisions of the bill on the ground that it impinges on their federal rights, the ministry has now constituted a group of ministers comprising transport ministers of seven states to review the bill and thrash out the differences.

This is the first time a state transport ministers' group has been formed to examine the best practices in road safety and transport sector and suggest actionable points for implementation.

"It's a comprehensive law covering all aspects of road safety and transport. We want to get the states on board before introducing the bill in Parliament. Since issues related to proposed law fall in the purview of concurrent list, it's important that there is a consensus. Otherwise, it would be difficult to get the bill cleared in Parliament," a ministry official said.

Besides sorting out issues and differences of individual states vis a vis the bill, the state group of ministers headed by Rajasthan's transport and public works department minister, Yoonus Khan, has also been mandated to strategise on how to reduce road accidents in India, which has one of the highest road fatalities in the world with 1.40 lakh deaths reported in 2014. On an average, this comes to 16 lives lost every hour.

The eight member group, mandated to meet once in three months, will also frame a National Road Safety Code with the aim of reducing fatalities and road accidents by 50% in the next five years besides working for improving public service delivery in respect of driving licences, transfer of personal vehicles, no objection certificates for driving licences, among other areas.



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