India’s Road Safety Record

Why in News?

Union Transport Minister said that the amendments made to the Motor Vehicles Act have begun reducing the death toll due to road accidents.

What is the reality?

- Any reduction in road safety incidents in a rapidly motorising country is encouraging.
- But the cold reality is that the data on those who lose their lives or are incapacitated do not reflect a marked decline.
- Small reductions in this infamous tally have little meaning, since they don’t represent a trend of targeted reductions.
- The rise in fatalities from 80,888 (2001) to 1.5 lakh lives each year since 2015 explains that the policymakers are just tolerating the loss of lives.

Did the amended law have an impact?

- The new Motor Vehicles law does have more muscle in being able to levy stringent penalties for road rule violations.
- But this doesn’t mean that India has moved to a scientific road system marked by good engineering, sound enforcement, appropriate technology use and respect for all road users.
- The World Bank’s ‘Delivering Road Safety in India’ report says that rapid motorisation and more high-speed road infrastructure have raised the risks for road users.
- The transition to a professional road environment requires implementation of **first-tier reforms**.

How the reforms should be?

- These reforms should deal with **quality** of road infrastructure and **facilities** for vulnerable users.
- There should be **zero-tolerance enforcement** of rules by trained professional and empowered machinery.
- A key mechanism of change is the District Road Safety Committees.

How these committees should work?

- A mandatory **monthly public hearing** of such committees involving local communities can highlight safety concerns.
- Their follow-up action can be supervised by the Members of Parliaments' Road Safety Committees.
- It is essential to make the Collector, local body and police accountable.

What could be done?

- Making **dashboard cameras mandatory** (with the video evidence accepted in investigation) would aid enforcement.
- To save lives on highways, **quality trauma care at the district** level holds the key.
- In the absence of good hospitals and cashless free treatment, no significant improvement is possible in the quest to save life and limb.

Source: The Hindu

