Making Roads Safer

What is the issue?

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- There was a series of road accidents in different parts of the country in recent days.
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- It calls for fixing road design and enforcing safety protocols in India.
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What are the concerns?

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- **Accidents** - Nationally around 1,50,000 are dying and several hundred thousand are injured annually.
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- The data on Indians killed or injured in road accidents put out annually by the Centre do not reflect the picture.
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- It obscures the human impact of the loss on national and State highways, as well as urban and rural roads.
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- **Investigative mechanism** - There is lack of expert help to conduct a technical investigation into an accident.
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- The executive agencies such as the Police and Public Works Departments thus fall short in this regard.
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- The present investigative machinery does not have the capability to determine faults.

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- Thus the officials responsible for bad road design and construction and lax traffic managers often escape liability.
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- **Victims** - For accident victims, there is the heavy burden of out-of-pocket expenditure on medical treatment.
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- The government had promised to address this issue through a cashless facility.
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- But it has not been able to do so.
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- As, the requisite amendments to the Motor Vehicles Act have not yet been passed.
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How is the response?

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- **Supreme Court** - SC has been trying to shake governments out of their apathy.
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- It constituted the Committee on Road Safety in 2014 at this end.
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- It has also made several specific and time-bound directions.
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- However, the response of the Centre and the States has been far from responsible.
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- **Black spots** - Safety black spots on roads were identified on the basis of fatal accidents between 2011 and 2014.
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- But only around 190 out of the around 790 such spots had been rectified.
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- Funds had been sanctioned for another 256.
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- The rest are either under State jurisdiction or awaiting sanction.
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- Mere incremental approaches such as these result in worrying national record on road fatalities.
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What should be done?

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- **Investigation** - The accidents should be probed by qualified transport safety experts.
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- This is crucial to determine the systemic shortfalls.
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- Only a scientific investigation system can stop the routine criminalising of all accidents.
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- There needs to be a report on the mishaps, to identify lapses, if any.
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- And the remedial road engineering measures should be taken up accordingly.
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- **District Committees** - The SC has directed that the performance of district committees should be reviewed periodically.
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- This should ideally follow mandatory public hearings every month.
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- This is for the citizens to record road risk complaints.
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- **Mechanism** - The much-delayed National Road Safety and Traffic Management Board should be formed.
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- The provision for State governments to participate in this has to be materialised.
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- Ultimately, road safety depends on enforcement of rules with zero tolerance to violations.
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- More importantly, officials should be made accountable for safety.
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Source: The Hindu

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