

## Important Vocab For the Editorial

1. **futile** (adjective) – pointless, useless, valueless.
2. **enforcement** (noun) – imposition, implementation, execution.
3. **mitigate** (verb) – reduce, lessen, decrease, make less severe.
4. **steep** (adjective) – sharp, sudden, rapid.
5. **backlash** (noun) – a strong negative reaction; adverse response, counteraction.
6. **quantum** (noun) – portion, part, division.
7. **provision** (noun) – term, clause, requirement.
8. **stringent** (adjective) – strict/stern, severe, tough/rigorous.
9. **outrage** (noun) – indignation, fury, anger.
10. **pursue** (verb) – engage in, follow, conduct.
11. **reiterate** (verb) – repeat, say again, restate.
12. **deterrence** (noun) – the act of deterring/stopping someone from doing something.
13. **radically** (adverb) – completely, thoroughly, entirely.
14. **determinant** (noun) – factor, issue, concern.
15. **untouched** (adjective) – unaffected, unchanged, uninfluenced.
16. **lie in** (phrasal verb) – be present, be contained, exist.
17. **concessionaire** (noun) – one who holds a concession or a right granted (for example, by the government) to conduct a certain business.
18. **lay down** (phrasal verb) – formulate, stipulate, draw up/frame (a rule).
19. **litigation** (noun) – legal process, legal proceeding, legal action.
20. **pedestrian** (noun) – walker, person on foot, wayfarer.
21. **ambit** (noun) – scope, limits, purview.
22. **steep** in (verb) – imbue with, fill with, pervade with.
23. **lapsed** (adjective) – expired, invalid, out of date, discontinued.
24. **impunity** (noun) – immunity, exemption/freedom from punishment, special treatment.
25. **lose no time** (phrase) – be quick, hurry up, move quickly; press on.

## Futile fines: On traffic violation penalties

### Better enforcement and infrastructure are key to mitigating anger over higher road fines

The steep penalties for violation of road rules that came into force on September 1 under the Motor Vehicles (Amendment) Act, 2019 have produced a backlash, with several State governments opting to reduce the quantum of fines, or even to reject the new provisions. Gujarat has announced a substantial reduction in the fines, West Bengal has refused to adopt the higher penalties, Karnataka and Kerala are studying the prospects to make the provisions less stringent, and others are proceeding with caution. Motorists have reacted with outrage at the imposition of fines by the **police**, obviously upset at State governments pursuing enforcement without upgrading road infrastructure and making administrative

arrangements for issue of transport documents. Union Transport Minister Nitin Gadkari has reiterated that it is left to the States to choose the quantum of fines, since it is their responsibility to bring about deterrence and protect the lives of citizens. Mr. Gadkari's argument is valid, and the intent behind amending the Motor Vehicles Act cannot be faulted. After all, India has some of the deadliest roads in the world, and 1,47,913 people died in road accidents only during 2017. The question that has arisen is whether enhanced fines can radically change this record when other determinants, beginning with administrative reform, remain untouched.

The core of reform lies in Section 198(A) of the amended law, which requires any designated authority, contractor, consultant or concessionaire responsible for design or construction or maintenance of the safety standards of the road to meet those laid down by the Central government. This provision, which prescribes a penalty for a violation leading to death or disability, can be enforced through litigation by road users in all States. Since the standards are laid down, compliance should be ensured without waiting for a road accident to prove it. Until infrastructure meets legal requirements, fines and enforcement action are naturally liable to be challenged in courts; the condition of roads, **traffic** signals, signage and cautionary markings which affect motorists, cyclists and pedestrians, would all fall within its ambit. State governments also cannot escape responsibility for failing to reform their Regional Transport Authorities, since these offices are generally steeped in corruption. The Transport Ministry could well have made electronic delivery of RTO services mandatory, something that a lapsed UPA-era Bill promised. It should act on this now. Ultimately, ending the culture of impunity that allows government vehicles and VIPs to ignore road rules will encourage the average citizen to follow them. Mr. Gadkari should lose no time in forming the National Road Safety Board to recommend important changes to infrastructure and to enable professional accident investigation.