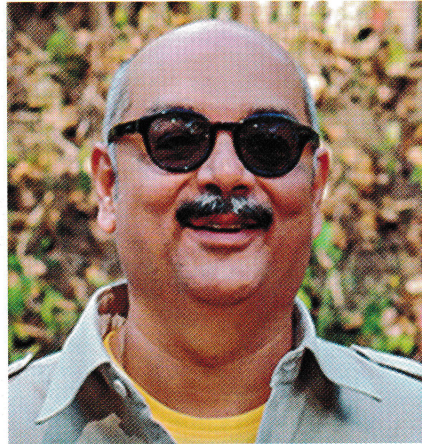


Due to the recent demonetisation, collection of tolls was suspended for some time at all tollbooths across India. On November 18, 10 days after Prime Minister Modi declared that ₹500 and ₹1,000 notes would not be legal tenders, a national association of transporters met the Finance Minister Arun Jaitley with a very interesting proposal. A proposal to permanently do away with the collection of tolls.

Amritlal Madan, the chairman of the coordination committee of the All India Motor Transport Congress (AIMTC) and who was part of the delegation that met Jaitley, said to the media, "According to our information, the total toll collection in India in 2015 was around ₹15,000 crore. We are ready to pay ₹5,000 crore over that amount for the government to stop collection of toll." According to the AIMTC, the transport industry loses ₹1,45,000 crore a year due to fuel burnt by idling vehicles at tollbooths and the time lost. Madan is also reported to have said, "We will happily part with ₹20,000 crore every year as the losses we are suffering due to tollbooths are crippling."

The Maharashtra State Road Development Corporation Ltd. (MSRDC), the state government's own road agency, has also in the past recommended closure of all the five tollbooths on the fringes of Mumbai, citing losses that are nearly 20 times higher than the actual toll collection. It is estimated that Mumbai's economy suffers a loss of about ₹6,700 crore due to the average waiting time of eight minutes at these five tollbooths. And what is the annual revenue from these booths — just some ₹360 crore!

Given all this, the proposal to permanently stop collection of tolls looks like a very sensible one. The government wins because it gets more revenue from the transporters than it does in toll collection. This amount can also be increased annually to factor in inflation, etc. The transporters benefit because their losses are reduced. The drivers, cleaners and others involved in the transport business gain on account of less stress and wastage of precious time. The reward for other motorists and road users is that they don't pay any toll, because the transporters are bearing their load. And



Bob Rupani

bob@overdrive.co.in

Mandatory AC cabins for truck and bus drivers will not help reduce road fatalities

would be mandatory. He said, "With the objective of reducing the number of road accidents, we are going to make air conditioning of driver cabins of trucks and buses mandatory so that the drivers, who work for several hours non-stop, get some relief and can drive with more alertness." The intentions of the minister are obviously very good, but will it result in fewer accidents and road fatalities? I have serious doubts. Having done lots of highway driving across our country for over 35 years now, I have very closely observed the lives of Indian truckers. And let me tell you they are a tough breed used to a very hardy lifestyle. They are used to living and sleeping in the cabins of their trucks or on the charpoyas at dhabas. Whatever be the weather or terrain,

we all also benefit because traffic moves more smoothly.

But will this happen? Your guess is as good as mine. What makes complete sense often does not happen in our country. And there are enough people who will not like things to be so straightforward and transparent. This includes those who are employed in toll collection. Also those who give out such contracts for toll collection. The VIPs who are exempt from paying toll will not appreciate the fact that other than transporters, most common citizens of our country will also not have to pay toll. There will be others who will say the transporters are willing to pay this money because their profits will increase, and we should not allow that to happen, I anticipate many such illogical arguments and responses. Hopefully, the Modi Sarkar that has shown it has the guts to take tough decisions like 'demonetisation' will also demonstrate that it has the wisdom and will to take such decisions.

The Union Transport Minister Nitin Gadkari recently also announced that from April 01, 2017, air conditioning of the driver's cabin of buses and trucks

they know how to make themselves comfortable. And most (if not all) don't generally have air conditioners at home and are not used to such an environment.

It's true our truckers and bus drivers who are responsible for about 12 per cent of the fatal accidents on our roads. But the reason is certainly not absence of AC cabins! One factor that definitely results in many accidents is the fact that our truckers and bus drivers often fall asleep at the wheel. Why? Because they drive for far longer hours than permitted in most other countries. They also spend lots of time on paperwork at various check posts. Not to mention the time at tollbooths. They also have to deal with breakdowns and punctures. And any sort of delay means they have to put in longer stints behind the wheel. Despite all the tea they consume and the drugs they take to keep awake, yes opium is regularly consumed to stay awake, these drivers eventually crash due to their 'drowsy driving'. Lack of sleep being such a big problem, I think an air-conditioned cabin will only make the drivers sleepier. And dozing off is the last thing you want them to do behind the wheel. [GD](#)