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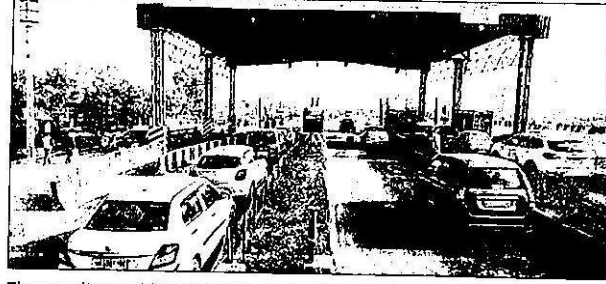
Vehicles without FASTag will be charged double toll, owners face fine

New Move To Check Leakage At Toll Booths

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New Delhi: Getting a FASTag for your vehicle may buy you peace of mind. While starting from Monday midnight, vehicles without the RFID tag on their windshield will have to cough up twice the normal toll in case they pay cash at a toll plaza on a national highway, even those not venturing onto highways would face a challan for violating provisions of the Central Motor Vehicles Rules.

State transport departments have started sending text messages to vehicle owners pointing to the violation - which most car owners are un-



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ware of - and also mentioning that they are liable to be penalised for this offence. The penalty would be Rs 300 for first offence and Rs 500 for repeat offence.

And things are only going to get worse from here. The government has amended the Motor Vehicle Rules making it mandatory for all vehicles (four-wheelers and above) to fix FASTag from January 1 and from April, it is mandatory for renewing your vehicle insurance policy. It's a different

matter that the tag is useless on city roads and most state highways, leave alone using it to pay your parking fees. For those not planning to drive down a national highway, it will only result in coughing up Rs 200 to buy a FASTag from a bank or a wallet operator.

While new cars sold since December 2017 are coming with FASTags, nearly 75 lakh tags fixed prior to this date by vehicle manufacturers had become duds. Even now, near-

ly 20% of highway commuters don't have FASTags on their vehicles, which has prompted the road transport ministry to "seek cooperation" from states for enforcement of the new rule. Estimates suggested that nearly two crore four-wheeler and bigger vehicles are yet to buy FASTag.

Though some states have signed MoUs with the NHAI to extend FASTag-based transaction for toll collection, there has been very little impact on the ground. For example, while FASTag is accepted on the UP government-owned and tolled expressways, it is not accepted on Yamuna Expressway since it's not under government control. Moreover, different municipal corporations including Delhi have issued their own RFID tags for commercial vehicles, resulting in commercial vehicles using multiple tags. Besides, the Centre is silent on what happens to nearly

73 lakh vehicle owners who were made to pay for RFID tags that preceded FASTags but turned out to be duds.

The government is banking on the new cashless mechanism to check leakage at toll booths, as highway developers were often found to be under-reporting collections, apart from smoother traffic flow at the plazas. Earlier, there was a proposal to completely do away with cash transactions, but officials said invoking the clause of "double" toll charges for cash payers will be a big disincentive.

"We have been instructed to fix FASTags on vehicles which don't have them at the spot. The imposition of double toll charge on non-FASTag vehicles will reduce the chance of confrontation at toll gates. We are expecting there will be deployment of more police personnel to deal with any issue," a toll operator told TOI,