**Ministry of Road Transport & Highways**

**Draft notification for Provision of Six Airbags in Cars**

**Relevant to M&M - MRV & Auto Division**

A draft notification has been issued on 14th January 2022, which mandates that vehicles of category M1, manufactured after 1st October 2022, shall be fitted with two side/side torso air bags, one each for the persons occupying front row outboard seating positions, and two side curtain/tube air bags, one each for the persons occupying outboard seating positions. M1 category is the motor vehicles are used for the carriage of passengers, comprising not more than eight seats, in addition to the driver’s seat.

**Air Bag**

* An airbag is a vehicle occupant-restraint system which interferes between the driver and the vehicle’s dashboard during a collision, thereby preventing serious injuries.
* "Side/side torso air bag" means any inflatable occupant restraint device that is mounted to the seats or side structure of the vehicle interior, and that is designed to deploy in a side impact crash to help mitigate primarily torso injury and/or occupant ejection, for the persons occupying front row outboard seating positions.
* "Side curtain/tube air bag" means any inflatable occupant restraint device that is mounted to the side structure of the vehicle interior, and that is designed to deploy in a side impact crash or rollover to help mitigate primarily head injury and/or occupant ejection for the persons occupying the outboard seating positions.

**Earlier Notifications**

* This Ministry, vide GSR 1483(E) dated 7th December 2017, mandated the requirement of airbag for the driver, as per Automotive Industry Standard (AIS) 145.
* The Ministry has notified GSR 148(E) dated 2nd March 2021 regarding mandatory provision of an airbag for the passenger seated on the front seat of a vehicle, next to the driver, as per AIS 145, as amended from time to time for the vehicles manufactured on and after the 1st Day of April 2021, in the case of new models, and 31st day of August 2021, in the case of existing models. However, due to COVID 19 pandemic, this Ministry vide GSR 595(E) dated 26th August 2021 has extended the timeline in respect of date of implementation of fitment of air bags on existing models up to 31st December 2021.

**Key Challenges**

* More airbags as standard will inevitably drive up the cost of vehicles, particularly in budget cars. Car with six airbags could cost up to Rs 50,000 extra, which is a significant bump for Rs 3 lakh-3.5 lakh category.
* Most carmakers in India that offer six airbags only do so in top end models and those above Rs 10 lakh. A number of entry-level models are specifically designed for markets like India and might need re-engineering. Installing additional airbags will involve re-engineering in cars not originally designed to offer that level of protection.
* Installing additional airbags will include making modifications to the body shell and the inside compartment.
* The other issue pertains to timing as Indian auto industry is currently transitioning to stricter BS6 emission norms.
* In the absence of adequate domestic manufacturing of airbags, OMEMs need to rely upon the imported airbags. The auto industry has already been reeling with rising input and operational costs plus stricter emission norms.
* Manufacturers argue that consumers get what they pay for and very few want to shell out more for a safer car.

**Industry Reaction**

* **R C Bhargava, chairman, Maruti Suzuki India Ltd.** – It is all good to talk about more features, but it all adds to the cost. Policymakers need to think in terms of the consumer--how much is he willing to pay and for what." "That is my biggest grouse. Just because it is prevalent in some other market doesn’t mean it should be here. The per capita incomes are vastly different. Cars should not become so expensive that the masses cannot afford them.
* **Ravi Bhatia, President and Director, JATO Dynamics -** Nobody can argue that cars should not be made safer. Globally consumers do not want to pay for the extra safety equipment. They would rather pay for better air conditioning or more fuel efficiency. They presume all all cars are safe and want to take a chance on it. The consumers also do not get any reward for it by way of lower insurance premium. If that can be changed and insurance firms are made to offer incentives, then this would make more sense.

**Conclusion**

Now, minimum of 6 airbags is compulsory for vehicles carrying up to 8 passengers. This would minimise the frontal and lateral collisions to the occupants seated in both front and rear compartments. The new guidelines will ultimately ensure the safety of passengers across all segments, irrespective of the cost or variant of the vehicle. Prices are expected to increase by around Rs. 50,000 per vehicle which would be a significant rise in the low-price segment.