

Indian Railways - The Challenges Ahead

What is the issue?

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- The new Railway minister 'Piyush Goyal' recently took charge.
- Railways currently is facing certain issues needing high priority.

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What would be the primary concern?

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- The main focus of the railways will undoubtedly be on improving the **safety profile**.
- As reports of various committees appointed in the recent past are already available, newer committees hopefully won't be appointed.

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- Emphasis in the past has generally been on investments in physical infrastructure to improve safety.
- But an attitudinal change to facilitate frank information sharing within the organisation about safety issues is what is primary.
- A culture of openness needs to be cultivated, overcoming decades of secrecy and finger-pointing between departments.
- To ensure funds are invested productively, it is necessary to evolve a comprehensive safety plan covering the next five to 10 years.
- Also, clearly defined **rational targets** for reduction of accidents of different types are to be envisioned to work towards.

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What are the other areas of concern?

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- **Transaparancy** - The impact of scrapping the Railway Budget is yet to be ascertained.
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- But opacity has certainly crept into railway balance-sheets for now.
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- This is majorly in areas regarding the actual state of the finances of the Railways and its liabilities vis a vis the Centre.
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- This assumes importance in the light of huge borrowings such as the 1.5 lakh crore loan from the LIC for funding infra-projects.
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- The financial health of the railways is too important to be allowed to fade into anonymity within the General Budget.
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- Hence, a performance report that coveres the physical and financial performance of Railways - could be considered annually.
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- **Revenue** - Freight earnings have fell behind the target this fiscal.
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- While coal is the main source of freight earnings for railways, there has to be a long-term plan for a life after coal.
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- The ministries of railways and the road transport need to jointly come up with solutions that optimise passenger load among them.
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- Sustaining Railways a viable self-sustaining entity is need to ensure its health & robustness.
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Source: Businessline

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