

Indian Railways - The Challenges Ahead

What is the issue?

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- The new Railway minister 'Piyush Goyal' recently took charge.

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- 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**.

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- 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.

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- But an attitudinal change to facilitate frank information sharing within the organisation about safety issues is what is primary.

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- A culture of openness needs to be cultivated, overcoming decades of secrecy and finger-pointing between departments.

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- To ensure funds are invested productively, it is necessary to evolve a comprehensive safety plan covering the next five to 10 years.

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- 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 covers 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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