

Safety concerns in Indian Railways

What is the issue?

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Derailment of the Kalinga Utkal Express in Khatauli in Uttar Pradesh demands a deeper analysis of the working of Indian Railways.

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What led to the incident?

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- Preliminary probe suggests that the train derailed because it was allowed to run on a section of track that was undergoing repair and maintenance work.

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- Not blocking the traffic while the repairs were being conducted is said to be the main lapse.

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- The twin demands of punctuality and carrying out repair works on tracks has led to a compromise on the minimum safety standards.

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- The government has responded to the incident by sending some top officials on leave with immediate effect, and suspending some others.

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Is the government's response appropriate?

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- Indian Railways has had an undesirable safety record given the high incidence of derailments and resultant tragedies.

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- A Parliamentary Standing Committee report on railway safety noted that 75 to 85 % of all railway accidents happen because of derailment.

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- It's a known fact that there is an acute deficiency when it comes to maintenance and track renewal in Indian Railways.

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- The growth in the route kilometres in railways is disproportionate with the percentage rise in the traffic of passengers and freight over the railway network.

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- The government has only tried to find a quick fix solutions for the accidents by treating them as episodes of “sabotage” or isolated episodes of mistakes at the level of local officials.

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- However, the response requires attention to the larger question of systemic problems in railway services and associated safety requirements.

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What lies before the government?

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- Government should speed up the setting up of Rashtriya Rail Sanranksha Kosh announced in the Budget for 2017-18.

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- The fund, a recommendation of the Anil Kakodkar-led high-level safety review committee, is intended to improve safety preparedness and maintenance practices.

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- The railway ministry should move beyond announcing new trains and pay attention to systemic problems of maintenance, safety, sanitation and timeliness.

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Source: Business Standard

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