Ensuring Rail Safety

What is the issue?

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The rising incidence of accidents on the Indian Railways (IR), calls for an assessment of the Indian Railways system.

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What are the problems in this regard?

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- **Capacity utilisation** - This refers to the traffic flow in the available railway lines.
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- For optimal performance, utilisation should be 80% to 90% of the capacity.
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- However in India, in many routes, it ranges from 120% to 150% and sometimes exceeds this which poses risks.
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- **Maintenance** - IR carried out modernisation and upgradation of track and other infrastructure with a massive infusion of funds from 1985-2000.
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- This includes acquisition of new locomotives, coaches and wagons.
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- However after that, IR was not focussing on the last mile works that are essential for unlocking the full potential of an upgraded network.
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- This include works like easing of sharp curves, strengthening some bridges, improving track geometry to tighter tolerances, cab signalling, etc.
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- **Safety** - Over-utilisation of railway lines leaves little time for safety inspections and essential maintenance works.
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- Also, worldwide, reducing the speed differential between freight and passenger trains is done along with raising the speed of trains.
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- This is the key to increasing capacity and improving safety; however IR has

not met this.
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- As a result of all these, IR has one of the highest incidence of rail accidents due to material, equipment and human failures.
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- Besides, IR is planning for expansion through Dedicated Freight Corridors (DFCs) and High-Speed Rail (HSR) lines.
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What is to be done?

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- Given the safety concerns with existing lines, these new plans require well planning before execution.
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- It is high time that IR shifts focus to the core network that carries more than 80 per cent of the total traffic.
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- Also, the last mile works for upgrading the trunk routes which were repeatedly deferred should be undertaken on a priority basis.
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- Only this will ensure a faster and a safer rail travel in India.
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Source: Indian Express

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