

Mumbai Stampede

Why in news?

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- A stampede in a narrow footbridge linking two railway stations in Mumbai has left at least 23 people dead and more than 30 injured.

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- People, to take shelter from unexpected heavy rains, crammed into the narrow bridge, eventually leading to the stampede.

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What is the policy flaw in this regard?

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- The recent tragedy is evidential of the failure of civic policy to factor in the need for pedestrian access.

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- It applies not just to stations but to the wider city of Mumbai and other cities in India as well.

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- Mumbai's geography produces a distinct north-south commuting pattern from the periphery, as the business district is located at the southern end.

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- As the financial capital, Mumbai depends mainly on the 300 km suburban railway system.

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- This has some of the highest passenger densities, and yet has no single accountable manager.

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- Also, over the past two decades, policy attention has been tilted towards road projects for wider roads and more flyovers.

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- On the other hand, mass mobility systems and also facilities for walkers and cycle-users have not received similar attention.

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- This skewed policy attention is one of the reasons for the recent disaster.

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What should be done?

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- **Mumbai** - A sound transport demands a management strategy that would consider mapping travel patterns.
- Further, shifting some institutions to areas in the wider Mumbai Metropolitan Region could be an option to diversify the crowd.
- Beyond Mumbai, the tragedy calls for a more focussed attention to the **urban public transport** in India.
- Reforming the archaic **transport planning and management** for urban India on a comprehensive scale is the need of the hour.
- Along with these, a range of measures should be undertaken with high priority. These include:

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1. Augmenting the creaking and broken infrastructure at suburban stations.
2. Creating canopies to shield passengers, such as those crowding the staircase to escape the rain in Mumbai.
3. Installing escalators and lifts.
4. Providing exits on both sides of train coaches towards the street level wherever feasible.
5. Creating multiple entry and exit points.
6. Putting in place an organised feeder transport network to stations and bus termini.

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- The Railway Minister has called for a quick survey of the suburban stations

to identify areas of concern and this must now be extended to all cities.
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Source: The Hindu

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