Performance of Indian Railways in 2023

Why in News?

The Performance of Indian Railways in 2023 showed significant strides in infrastructure but reveals underwhelming freight loading and financial performance.

How Indian Railways performed in 2023?

- **Near completion of DFC** – Dedicated Freight Corridors are nearing completion with ***more than 200 freight trains*** already running on the corridors.

Dedicated Freight Corridor (DFC)
• It is one of the largest rail projects to date in India. • **Aim** – To provide a *seamless freight transportation between eastern, northern and western India*. • **Executed by** – Indian Railways • **Implemented by** – Dedicated Freight Corridor Corporation of India Limited (DFCCIL), a subsidiary of the Indian Railways. • **Arms** - Eastern Dedicated Freight Corridor (EDFC) - Western Dedicated Freight Corridor (WDFC) • **Route** - It passes along the *eastern and western arms of the Golden Quadrilateral*, the national highway network connecting Delhi, Kolkata, Mumbai and Chennai.

- **Udhampur-Srinagar-Baramulla Rail Link (USBRL)** – It is symbolic for *connectivity and seamless integration of J&K* with India.
- But its poor progress reflects on IR's credentials in executing and implementing large projects.
- **Delhi-Srinagar train** – The 1st train is expected to run sometime next summer.
- **High-Speed Rail project** – It was mooted in 2014 between Mumbai and Ahmedabad, intending to complete it by 2021.
- But the goal post kept shifting, however, due to non-cooperation between the Centre and Maharashtra governments and is expected to be operational by 2028-29.
- **Vande Bharat** – It was success with large-scale deployment from a mere 6 at the year start and with nearly 50 trains at the end.
- It showed that there is the space for fast and comfortable trains even with higher fare.
- But some of the trains were *deployed on political merit* and some run with *poor occupancy*.
    - Example: Bhopal-Jabalpur and Bhopal-Indore fail to cut travel time.
- The *sleeper version is badly-delayed.*
- **Railway tracks** – Delay in upgrading the tracks for higher speeds.
    - Work on raising the speed of Delhi-Howrah and Delhi-Mumbai sections to 160 kmph has seen tardy progress.

- **Safety Issues** – On safety front, Indian railways has shown improvement in the last 5 years with the *closure of all unmanned railway crossings* and improvements in track maintenance.
- However, the ***Balasore accident*** dented IR's safety record and was followed by at least 4 more accidents with fatalities and injuries.
    - Delhi-Kamakhya Express ***derailment*** near Buxar.
    - ***Fire cases*** in Patalkot Express near Agra and Delhi-Darbhanga Superfast Express near Etawah.
    - ***Collision of two trains*** near Vizianagaram.
- **Financial performance** – The rail freight and total revenue is *only between 3-4%, leaving no surplus* for investments, thus *increased reliance on the Centre* for the same.
    - In an economy growing nearly 7%, one would expect rail freight and total revenue to expand at a minimum of 10%.
- **Dismal roll-out of IRMS** – Indian Railway Management Service at the entry level is the *lowest choice among Civil Services* aspirants.
- Only 90 out of 150 vacancies could be filled up, as many candidates likely to qualify choose another service.
- **New Amrit Bharat Trains –** 2 Amrit Bharat Trains are to be launched**.**
- The Amrit Bharat train is a *Linke Hofmann Busch (LHB) push pull train* having locos at both ends for better acceleration.
- It provides improved facilities for rail passengers with a maximum speed limit of ***130 kmph.***

*Indian Railways has launched theme - based Tourist Circuit trains (**Bharat Gaurav Trains**) to showcase India's rich cultural heritage and magnificent historical places. 1st Bharat Gaurav Train (Shirdi Yatra) was launched in 2022.*

- **Record Amrit Bharat Stations -** 1,309 Amrit Bharat Stations have been identified across the nation to modernize passenger amenities and improve accessibility & inclusivity of railway stations.
- **One Station, One Product (OSOP) Outlets** - It promotes 'Vocal for Local' vision, providing a market for indigenous products and creating additional income opportunities for marginalised sections of society.

Indian Railway has set a target of becoming Net Zero Carbon Emitter by 2030.

What should be focused in 2024?

- **Safety** – The shift should be strongly to improving safety of rail travel, including track and signalling upgrades.
- The progress of installation of Kavach, a unique safety system developed by IR engineers need to paced up.
- **Address Issues** – While electrification of rails are promoted for greening railways it is silent on
    - The fate of more than 500 diesel locomotives

    - The need for ‘hydrogen trains’ amidst electrification
    - The requirement for airport-like stations
- **Prevent saturation** – The announcement to add 3,000 passenger trains to eliminate waiting lists should consider the saturated capacities into account.
- **Non-political deployment of trains –** Vande Bharat should be made after traffic surveys to reduce poor occupancy issues.
- **Future prospects** – IR should make efficient use of initiatives like ***Gati Shakti*** to improve its loading and revenue performance significantly.

> ***PM Gati Shakti*** *is a National Master Plan for Multimodal Connectivity launched in 2021 to transfer India into a hub of world class infrastructure by providing integrated and seamless connectivity for movement of people, goods and services.*

References

1. Business Line| Evaluation of Indian Railways’ performance
2. The Print| Dedicated Freight Corridor

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