

Rail safety concerns

What is the issue?

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Railways safety record comes under scrutiny in the wake of recent accidents.

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What is the status of railways safety?

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- Rail mishaps are not an uncommon occurrence in India, but rarely does one see heads roll at the very top.

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- The deaths due to derailments was 193 in 2016-17.

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- One accident near Kanpur alone claimed over 140 lives in November 2016, it was highest in at least a decade.

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- The number of accidents has been steadily on the decline, from nearly 200 in 2007-08 to 104 in the last fiscal.

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- The number of derailments and casualties have been on the rise in the last three years even as the total number of accidents has fallen.

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What are the reasons for derailment?

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- Derailments occur due to wear and tear of track, rolling stock and human error.
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- There is a persistent shortage of loco pilots, with nearly 19,000 vacancies out of over 95,000 posts.
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- As a result, loco-pilots are overworked and prone to error in signals.
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- About 25% posts for safety remain vacant, rationalisation of railways' staff does not seem to have worked.
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- As for damaged tracks, 1.15 lakh km length should be renewed annually, but no more than half of that is generally carried out.
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How this issues can be addressed?

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- Budget 2017-18 announced the creation of Rashtriya Rail Sanraksha Kosh with a fund of Rs.1 lakh crore to be used over five years.
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- Proposed safety fund will be utilised for track improvement, bridge rehabilitation, and rolling stock replacement, human resource development, improved inspection system and safety work at level crossing, among other things
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- It is important to focus on operational aspects such as allowing maintenance staff flexibility to hold up traffic even if that implies train delays.
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- A separate post for Member (Safety) needs to be created in the Railway Board.
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Source: Business Line, First post

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