

Rail Safety - II

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What the CRS report says?

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- The preliminary finding of the **Commission of Railway Safety** (CRS) that the derailment of the Indore-Rajendranagar Express near Kanpur that killed over 140 people was primarily caused by carriage and wagon defects should serve as a reality check for the Railway Ministry.

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- While sabotage is indeed a factor in some derailments, **bad railway performance** is responsible for the majority.

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- The CRS report has specifically identified a variation in the wheel gauges of two coaches, and found carriages being run beyond their useful life.

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- This is not a rare instance where inquiries have found the Railways seriously deficient.

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- In fact, the annual report of the CRS Lucknow for 2012-13 cites **failure of railway equipment, derelict staff, rail fractures and, on some occasions, non-railway factors to be responsible for fatal accidents.**

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- The collision of the Hubli-Bengaluru City Hampi Express with a goods train that left 25 people dead, for instance, was caused by failure of staff.

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What does Kakodkar committee says?

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- The Kakodkar committee on railway safety found that out of 441 derailments it analysed, only about 15% were the result of sabotage, while the **majority were caused by factors completely under the control of the railway**

administration.

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What measures are to be taken to promote safety?

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- India's Railways serves the vital function of providing travel access to millions and have the responsibility of making it equitable and comfortable. It must also be safe.

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- The Railway Ministry is pursuing a major safety initiative, the **Rashtriya Rail Sanraksha Kosh**, with a non-lapsable corpus of Rs.1,19,183 crore.

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- The Finance Ministry says the Fund should rely mainly on internal resources, but there is a strong case for higher gross budgetary support to raise safety in a government-run transport network that has a universal service obligation.

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- Replacing ageing and unsafe carriages with modern Linke Hofmann Busch coaches is the recommendation of Kakodkar panel, but supply has not kept pace with requirement.

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Way ahead:

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- The dedicated safety funds to rail track renewal and safety should be governed by a transparent framework with **public reporting requirements**.

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- Travel demand has continued to leap as economic growth both needs and encourages greater mobility.

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- Raising the performance of the Indian Railways needs a clear vision for both service and financing, with **zero tolerance for accidents**.

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- Along with technologies such as ultrasonic flaw detection to keep tracks safe, the Railways must look at ways to carry more passengers safely.

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