

## Railway Accident: Causes and Remedies

---

Synopsis: The safety standards of Indian railways are too low and there are frequent accidents because of human and mechanical failure. Hundreds of train passengers die every year and thousands others are wounded, injured and maimed in train accidents. Paucity of funds is advanced as arguments for such low safety standards. But the argument hardly holds any water because Indian Railways is the biggest undertaking and should be run professionally and competitively to generate enough profits. The railway minister should never run the enterprise either as a charitable institute or a personal fiefdom and all wasteful expenditures be avoided. Non-remunerative lines should not be introduced nor new Shatabdis and Rajdhani trains introduced indiscriminately without putting the infrastructure place.

The number of those injured, wounded and incapacitated for life is many times bigger than those killed in railway accidents. It amounts to colossal in men and material and also a great national tragedy. It is a sad commentary on the poor management of our railways and continued apathy towards railway safety and maintenance. The Champa railway accident was the result of sheer negligent and casual approach to the safety measures. In this case all the mandatory safety rules were thrown to the winds. The track was under repair and yet no caution order was issued to the driver of the train from the control room nor were the red flags put up at the required place to warn the approaching train of the repairs going on the track. The flag was put only 16 meters from the repair site instead of mandatory 1,200 meters away. Moreover, the repair work was being carried out even while the sun was setting against the strict rule that no such work should be done while the sun is setting when the visibility is really poor.

Indian Railway is the largest public sector undertaking which boasts of having 7,806 locomotives, 39,929 coaches, 3,444 electric multiple units and 3,46,394 wagons till 1993. It is also the largest employer in the world with about 2 lakh employees. But as far as safety is concerned, it is far below the international standards. The poor and common passengers are the worst victims. There are too many mechanical and human failures resulting in frequent accidents. It is said that there is lack of funds which does not allow the required improvements in the safety standards. But on the other hand there was open criticism of the Railway Minister Pawan and it was alleged that his monthly food bill alone amounted to Rs. 3 lakhs.

The authorities cannot escape the responsibility of introducing too many new trains without proper maintenance and operational facilities. ON the one hand it is said there is paucity of funds, on the other it is alleged that the funds allocated for improvement of tracks, signaling, passenger amenities and other safety measures were returned unused, It reflects that there is no responsibility and accountability and a sort of chaos prevails, there is blatant favoritism in granting railway contracts and employment of personnel. There is no accord between the authorities on the top and the various railway officials and workers and the end result in increasing railway accidents and resultant deaths and suffering.

To reduce the railway accidents and ensure greater safety and security effective and immediate remedial measures should be taken. There should be proper accountability and responsibility and railways should be managed and operated professionally and with commitment to earn enough profits commensurate with the huge investments. It should not be run either as a charitable institution or a personal fiefdom. Modern advanced technologies and automatic signaling systems should be introduced in all sectors of the undertaking. Expert foreign advice and expertise should be sought to eliminate mechanical failures. In the rural areas they can be used for cultivation and plantation. Above all, the corruption should be dealt with an iron hand.