

The Horrific Railway Accident in Odisha is the Result of Callous Neglect and Indifference of our Rulers and Railway Administration towards the Safety of People!

CPI(ML) Central Committee Expressed its Condolences to the Victims

The train accident at Bahanaga Bazar near Balasore is certainly heart-breaking and horrific. The death of so many passengers is very sad, and CPI(ML) expressed deep condolences to the victims. This terrible accident has exposed the weakness of our railway system.

It is surprising how two trains run on the same track despite the claims of applying new technology and advanced means of communication. It shows that the issue of advanced technology and communication is just a publicity stunt.

There are a greater number of goods trains running on the train line than passenger trains. These goods trains running within Odisha mainly carry mineral resources like coal, iron ore, chromite, bauxite etc. are being heavily used by track to transport them abroad. This too increases wear and tear of tracks. Hence the necessary infrastructure is not being developed accordingly. In this accident also, a train derailed after hitting a stationary goods train and several bogies ended up on the opposite track and the train travelling in the opposite direction crashed into the derailed train.

Most of the passengers who died were passengers sitting in the general compartment of Bengaluru-Howrah and Coromandel Express trains. These people mostly from Bihar, Bengal, and Odisha who are employed as irregular and unorganised workers in the southern states. Here the government is very much interested to provide every traveling facilities for the ultra-rich sections by Vande Bharat Express or by Air, while on the other hand most of the trains have few number of general compartments. The number of second-class reserve and unreserved coaches are limited. Therefore, more than three times the designated number of passengers are carried in general coaches at any time. Therefore, in any train accident, passengers of general coaches are the highest number of dead-injured passengers. We can see it in this accident also.

Most of the services of railways are now privatized. It is either outsourced or contractualization to private parties. The system from traffic to maintenance of tracks, signalling system being privatised undermining the safety of passengers. Unaccountable is the order of the day. Although the number of both passenger and freight trains have increased manifolds, the officers and personnel to manage the railway system is not increased accordingly. Rather it is reduced. Nearly three lakh twelve thousand posts are lying vacant in the Railway. Almost fifty percent posts in safety and maintenance department is lying vacant. As a result, the work load on the personnel is increasing a lot. That's why man-made mistakes and accidents are taking place regularly.

Due to lack of minimal investment in track improvement/ repair, several accidents occur every year. Railway is now not a service but a source of ultra profit.

In fact, this horrific accident was the result of a systematic failure and continued negligence.

It is a matter of uncontrollable extreme anguish and severe agony to the entire nation that in a so-called accident of railways at Bahanaga Bazar railway station of Balasore district of

Odisha more than 300 people were dead and more than thousand people were severely injured and that many more deaths and severely injured are expected.

This is a manmade disaster created by the railway administration and the Central government with utmost callousness undermining the safety and welfare of the passengers, which cannot be termed as an accident but must be recognised as a crime perpetuated by the rulers and the railway administration with culpable negligence and untold carelessness towards the people and particularly the passengers and their safety.

For the past few decades, the Central government and the railway administration instead of running railways and strengthening it into an effective public transport that caters the needs of the people of this country, they have been moulding it into a commercial transport, carving it to the private sector to gain profits at the cost of the safety and welfare interests of the passengers. The railways are being reduced into a transport system that caters the needs of the newly emerging urban elite, due to the spread of IT servicing industry and the of the corporates.

By converting passenger trains into express trains common man is denied easy access to rail travel. High-speed trains such as superfast expresses and ultra super speed expresses like Vande Bharat expresses are being introduced in the name of cutting the travelling time to the lowest possible extent, serving the interests of the rich and the business elite. All this is being projected as development and modernization of railways to the world-class standards and the requirements of 21st century. By the so-called modernization of the railway stations etc. the private business community and private contractors are facilitated with thriving business and profits.

Almost all the passenger trains throughout the country have been cancelled and their operation is completely stopped; removing any scope for rural poor and needy common passengers to travel. Various concessions provided to the elderly and physically handicapped etc. are removed. The fares have been abnormally increased.

Scarce attention is being paid for safety of railways, particularly in track maintenance. In the name of automation and technology, the number of staff working in the track maintenance and daily track inspection is considerably reduced. In the name of cutting costs, the number of track men is reduced. Instead of human inspection of the tracks, devices are introduced.

Most of the derailing of express trains occur by their abnormal high speed and by improper condition of the track. It could be due to lack of strong soil conditions of the track on which the ultra-high-speed trains are run or due to improper maintenance and inadequate inspection of the condition of the tracks. Almost all the major train "accidents" occurred in our country from 1998 are due to derailing of trains running on tracks of improper condition.

Even the Comptroller and Audit General (CAG), in its study of railway accidents occurred from 2017-18 to 2020-2021 had specifically pointed out that 171 accidents out of 422 accidents occurred due to failure of proper inspection of tracks and recommended that track inspection and maintenance must be improved. It had also specifically pointed out that railways are reducing the funds for renewal of tracks every year. While in 2018-2019 railways allotted Rs. 9607.65 crores for track renewal and maintenance, in 2019-2020 they were reduced to mere 7417 crores, and even this amount was not fully utilised by railways. The CAG also pointed out that from 2017 to 2021 there were 1127 cases of derailment accidents out of which 286 accidents are connected to track renewal problem.

This lack of attention and seriousness for the safety of railway passengers is due to the policies imposed by the Central government and lack of carefulness on the part of railway administration. That even after a lapse of one day of the occurrence of the accident, the railway administration is unable hesitating in providing the exact cause of accident is itself a proof that

how the railway administration is callous and irresponsible towards the safety of passengers and behaving unaccountable to the people at large.

The announcement of ex-gratia to the deceased and injured by the railway minister or the shedding of crocodile tears expressing grief over the accident by the PM and other rulers is in no way a condolences, to those affected by the accident or to the people of the nation shocked at this disastrous tragedy.

The Central government and the railway administration are solely responsible for this manmade crime, but not any scapegoats to be invented in future.

The railway minister Aswini Vaishnav; and the railway board members ought to have resigned accepting their moral and administrative responsibility for this gruesome manmade railway accident!

The necessity of a powerful commuter and people's movement demanding the operation of railways as a public transport system accessible to common man and the strictest safety of the railway passengers appears to be the immediate necessity for the protection of the people's interests and safety!

**Central Committee
CPI(ML)**