

Mismanagement in the Railways

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The triple-train-collision at Ghotki was a horrendous tragedy, the first of its kind in the country and perhaps in the region as well. On July 13, Ghotki railway station witnessed an unprecedented catastrophe that exacted a heavy toll on human lives. Three ill-fated trains of the Pakistan Railways collided one after the other leaving hundreds dead.

This is for the second time that such an incident occurred at Ghotki. In 1991, a train carrying about 800 passengers from Karachi to Lahore hit a parked freight train, killing more than 100 people. This should not have occurred; yet it has and calls for a thorough probe to pinpoint the cause so that country's railroad system could be purged of the ills to prevent such disasters. That could only be done if no preconceived notions are allowed to influence the enquiry. There is nothing worse than giving longest of legs to the smallest of ideas.

The macabre tragedy that turned the whole country into rare grief and lament over the mismanagement in a vital department that miserably failed to avert the disaster because of its inefficiency and negligence. With such a huge managerial structure, which is a burden on the public exchequer, the train journey has become so unsafe that people literally say their last rites before boarding a train. The mishap exposed the paradigmatic quality of service so widely acclaimed by the senile hierarchy.

Accidents do happen because of human error but not because of bureaucratic negligence and inefficiency that has become the hallmark of a specialised organisation responsible for the safety of travelling masses. Gone are the good old days when the train journey used to be considered as the cheapest and safest mode of conveyance for the people. It used to be an ardent wish of children, women and men to be on a train. That fairy dream train has been transformed into a devouring locomotive monster because of the inefficiency of the railway department under the high-profile ministers and bureaucrats.

Whatever it is that led to this triple-dream-shattering collision needs to be identified clearly and indisputably. And that can be unearthed only if the investigators work with an open mind and uninfluenced by any conjectures. They should not try to refute the

change after the initial hullabaloo, expression of sympathies with the bereaved families, in certain cases whole of the families were wiped out with no one left to mourn with. All this amounts to dropping foolish tears upon the graves of those who had fallen but for the negligence of those who were supposed to protect them. The same minister, the same chairman and his cronies would continue devouring the public money. The minister could not be held responsible because he was not at the driving seat when the accident occurred and so were the others sitting in the safe havens at the railway headquarters.

There is something called moral responsibility and grace, and both these commodities are rare in this unfortunate country. How many times, a President, a Prime Minister or a member of the cabinet resigned in public interest? Nobody owns the responsibility and nobody quits with honour. It is a matter of shame for the country when in the initial reaction to the catastrophe, the responsibility was shifted on to the driver of the train who could not read the signal and the points-man, the readily available scapegoat for the sins of others.

Reportedly, the local DPO (District Police Officer) did register a case against "no culprit". In fact, he should have registered a case against the railway hierarchy for causing deaths by negligence under the relevant sections of law to proceed further against the delinquents who are known.

After all, how would the things improve if an example were not set? Giving away two lacs or more after every accident to the grief-stricken families is not the answer. The senile administration must be taken to task to prevent recurrence of such tragedies.

Inquiries and investigations have always been used as the 'pass-time' manoeuvres to cover up the failures of those who really matter.

The Chairman Pakistan Railways in his press conference asserted that the management suspended some of the officers so that 'the innocents' in the department might be saved. All these inquiry committees, especially, when constituted by the department which is known for its senility, are basically meant to cool down the tempers with the passage of time so that a safe passage could be given to the real culprits.

The top-heavy railway HQ



They should not try to refute the truth by unsuccessful critical jargon. They must avoid giving strange and newfangled names to inefficiency and negligence even if it was at the highest level. All speculations should, therefore, stop and the investigators must be allowed to do their job without any hindrance. To make the investigation more authentic and impartial, if it is felt that some foreign expertise is indispensably needed, even that assistance should be procured without any hesitation. After all this has become a recurring tragedy in our railway history.

As in the past, nothing will

real culprits.

The top-heavy railway-HQ which maintains a full-fledged control room, itself failed to react in time, which makes the situation all the more alarming. It is too gruesome a tragedy to be left in the hands of the railway headquarters that has already made a mess of everything.

A high-powered judicial enquiry by the judges of the Apex Court is the answer. Could the PM prevail upon his railways minister to resign to set a moral example for which the nation would be proud of? The country does need a PM who would pen a new history. The question is, can he do it?