

## **PRESS RELEASE**

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### **Statement Issued by Shri Randeep Singh Surjewala, In-Charge, Communications, AICC**

#### **Criminal Negligence on Railway Safety Responsible for the Tragic Derailment of Utkal Express.**

#### **No amount of Conspiracy Theories can absolve BJP Government from the death of 23 passengers owing to compromise on Safety Protocols.**

#### **Dismal Safety Record of Modi Government reflected in 27 major Railway Accidents since May, 2014 resulting in death of 259 passengers and serious injuries to 899 Rail Commuters.**

#### **Time to reset priorities and allocate budget for Railway Safety Protocols vis-a-vis the Bullet Trains Jumlas.**

Tragic and scary derailment of Utkal Express causing loss of 23 innocent lives and injuries to 70 Rail passengers has again brought attention to the dismal track record of BJP Government and Railway Ministry on the all important issue of Railway Safety. First reports suggest that a massive miscommunication led to derailment of at least 14 coaches of Haridwar bound Kalinga-Utkal Express in Khatauli, Muzaffarnagar, Uttar Pradesh. This is a sad commentary on absence of safeguards as also vulnerability with which train system operates, not to mention the criminal negligence involved. The Indian National Congress conveys its thoughts and prayers with the families of the victims of this enormous tragedy.

The Railway Minister, Shri Suresh Prabhu and Railway authorities appear to be setting new records of laxity and unpreparedness with regard to safety and security of passengers. Times demand that Railway Minister, Shri Suresh Prabhu must own responsibility. **Forget the Bullet Trains, 27 train accidents have taken place since the Modi Government took office and 6 major tragedies have taken place in Uttar Pradesh alone in the past 15 months.** Every time there is an accident, the Railway authorities invent a fresh conspiracy to wash their hands of culpability but facts speak otherwise. Even in the present accident, miscommunication, misconduct and total disregard of safety by the Railways are prima facie apparent. Some important facts tell a shocking tale of negligence:-

1. An ongoing 'Signaling work' was underway on the tracks, since past 2 days. There was no "Caution Call" made to the Utkal Express' driver about the same.

2. The train was supposed to run at a speed of 15 kms-20 kms per hour on a 'loose coupling track', but was reportedly moving at a speed of 105 kms per hour, which lead to the tragic derailment.
3. Will the PM and Railway Minister, who regularly boast about 'laying new tracks', tell us why just 200 metres track in this area couldn't be repaired for last many months, which caused the accident.
4. Local sources reveal that that a similar accident was avoided 1½ months ago by raising a red flag and halting another train. This reveals the vulnerability of the track conditions in this area.
5. An utterly dismal picture of accident preparedness is revealed by the fact that 65 private ambulances and local citizens with gas cutters rushed to the accident site, while Railway authorities and local administration reached much later. In fact, despite power cuts, ordinary citizens arranged for the generators as BJP administration completely failed.
6. Two Railway coaches rammed into a nearby school building, resulting in more injuries. All this could have been avoided, had the Railways alerted the driver beforehand and took corrective measures.

**The Modi Government has increased Railway fares by 70% since it assumed office, but no concrete blue print has been laid down to secure the lives of Rail passengers. The BJP, which has promised 'Bullet Trains', has done away even with the 'Railway Budget' providing a reflection and accountability of the status and capacity of the Railways.**

**The Railway Minister, who continuously 'unveils grand schemes of privatization' and spends majority of the time on twitter, has utterly failed to perform his primary duty to secure Rail passengers. People demand basic facilities and a Safe Rail Network. It is time the BJP Government stops 'painting, polishing and garnishing' the most important public transportation system i.e. the Railways, which needs urgent tangible reforms that secure the commuters.**