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# Railways to police: Capacity panel plans to boost citizen-state interface

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Written by [Anil Sasi](#) | New Delhi |

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AS PRIME MINISTER Narendra Modi leads the NDA government into its ninth year, a silent reform of capacity building within the government is likely showing results in the Indian Railways.

An exercise initiated by the Capacity Building Commission which was set up in April 2021, and rolled out across various zones by the Railways has identified 12 friction points that can spoil the travel experience of customers; and four level of employees — the Traveling Ticket Examiner, the booking clerk for passengers, the booking clerk for freight consignments, and the stationmaster in smaller stations, who potentially make or mar the impression the customers carry back home.

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At the top of the list of the dozen identified pressure points is the ticket refund scheme. An overwhelming 60 per cent of the problems reported by urban elites using the railways cited refunds as an issue. The exercise showed that **IRCTC**, the Railways' arm that runs the online ticketing platform, took between 10 days and 14 days to refund a cancelled ticket.

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Given this discovery that three out of every five complaints related to refunds, the Railways has been tasked with undertaking a quiet exercise to “clean up” the refund system, with another citizens survey six months slated down the line to check if the effort has indeed worked.

The Commission itself is uniquely staffed with representation from the private sector, the civil society, and the IAS. Former McKinsey India head Adil Zainulbhai is

Chairperson, civil society veteran R Balasubramaniam is Member (Human Resources) and the 1985 batch IAS officer – Praveen Pardeshi is Member (Administration). Its mandate is to evolve a de-siloed approach to improve civil service capacity and analyse competency related data to create shared learning resources.

With the specific intention that its work doesn't get dissipated, and its efforts result in changes that are visible on the ground, the Commission has started a customer-interface led improvement exercise with the Indian Railways, the postal service, and police departments in Union Territories.

“The Government of India runs very limited citizen facing services, the railways being one and the postal... We've initiated this cognitive dissonance study, and we have a team just watching the ratings. In the Railways, the identification of the 12 repeated friction points was a (result of) citizen surveys. So, **we are training all these (four) categories of officers across the nation, around one lakh people. To be citizen friendly, we empowered these employees to resolve these frictions,**” Subramaniam told [The Indian Express](#).

Incidentally, a Passenger Satisfaction Survey exercise conducted by the Railways a decade ago reported illumination and signages, availability of porters at the stations, booking clerk competency and behaviour and clarity of announcements at stations, among the “top efficiencies”. The top deficiencies were listed as cleanliness of toilets, unauthorised vendors and passengers, cleanliness of platforms and the late running of trains.

**A similar exercise is being initiated in the police departments in the Union territories. The project involves training Master Trainers who will then engage with constables and inspectors. Here, the project entails measuring four aspects and an Impact Assessment toolkit used to calibrate the immediate response and measuring cognitive attainment.** “Six months later, we will measure their behavioural change. One year later, we'll go back and do surveys to find if citizens feel the impact of the change,” said Subramaniam.

**The exercise has the backing of the Prime Minister's Office, with the specific mandate to improve customer interface and experience across sectors.**

In the case of the police departments, information distilled from inputs and the survey showed that 80 per cent of complaints reported by citizens revolved around

80 issues, generically clubbed under 14 categories. While the exercise is primarily focused on the UTs, the Capacity Building Commission has received feelers from states on inputs from the studies, which can be replicated in their police departments as well.

In the case of the Indian Post project, the postman is no longer just delivering mail; he's a banking correspondent, an insurance agent and part of the extended support system in the rural areas. Unlike policing, the expectations are not so high, but an improvement in the interface could still be tangible, according to the Commission's findings.

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