



# Indian Railways

## Complaint Handling Mechanism



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# Indian Railways

## Complaint Handling Mechanism



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# Indian Railways: Complaint Handling Mechanism

## Executive Summary



Transparency International India had requested all the sixteen divisions of Indian Railways to furnish information about their passenger related complaint handling mechanism. The study focuses on analyzing the inflow of complaints between the years 2012-13 and 2013-14, the categories of such complaints and the action taken for the same. The aim of the study is to understand the effectiveness of the system and awareness amongst the passengers about Railways complaint handling mechanisms.

Every Division of the railways was prompt to provide the required information. However, below are some information gaps in the received data.

- In some cases, total number of complaints received during the year 2012-13 and 2013-14 did not have a year wise break up.
- In some cases, the yearly breakup of the complaints was provided but the nature of each complaint was not provided.
- In some cases, the categorization of complaints was mentioned but not the exact details of how many complaints were registered under each category. This posed hurdle in data analysis.
- Most of the records do not give a clear picture about the kind of action taken and the time frame under which the issue was addressed. Almost all the complaints are shown as closed cases. From the data it was understood, that even if a case was forwarded to a high authority, the case was considered as 'addressed' or 'closed'.

The provided data has been judiciously used to conclude the working of the system, however the above mentioned information gaps posed a limitation on drawing concrete inferences.



## I. Introduction

Indian Railways is a state owned enterprise, owned by the Government of India and operated by Ministry of Railways. It is one of the world's largest railways network which comprises of

Track Kilometers	Broad Gauge (1676 mm)	Meter Gauge (1000 mm)	Narrow Gauge (762/610 mm)	Total
	86,526	18,529	3,651	108,706
Route Kilometers	Electrified	Total		
	16,001	63,028		

**Source:** Official Website of Indian Railways ([http://indianrailways.gov.in/railwayboard/view\\_section.jsp?lang=0&id=0,1](http://indianrailways.gov.in/railwayboard/view_section.jsp?lang=0&id=0,1))

Railways was introduced in 1853 from Bombay to Thane. Currently, it operates in twenty nine states and seven union territories with a limited international service, connecting some part of Nepal, Bangladesh and Pakistan. Indian Railways is the ninth largest employer in the world, employing 1.6 million people<sup>1</sup>.

After Independence, Indian railways was one of the first units to be nationalized. Railways operate long distances and suburban distances on broad, meter and narrow gauges throughout the country. Railway was nationalized in 1951 in a phased out manner. Since its nationalization, government converted a number of meter and narrow gauges to broad gauges with a view to improve the connectivity and spread its reach to remote areas. The transition has been successful and only a handful of lines such as the New Jalpaiguri-Darjeeling and Kalka-Shimla are presently operated under narrow gauge.

In 2014-15, Indian Railways carried approximately 8.4 billion ticketed passengers or 23 million passengers daily<sup>2</sup>. In 2014–2015 Indian Railways had revenues of INR 1634.50 billion (US\$26 billion) which consists of INR 1069.27 billion (US\$17 billion) from freight and INR 402.80 billion (US\$6.3 billion) from passengers tickets<sup>3</sup>. It is an important and popular public mode of transport in the country. Its wide spread and economic cost of travelling has contributed towards internal migration of labor force in a big way. It is this movement of the labor force which has led to increase in the spread

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.facts-about-india.com/indian-railway-facts.php>

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.indianrailways.gov.in/railwayboard/uploads/directorate/finance\\_budget/Budget\\_2015-16/BudgetStatement1516.pdf](http://www.indianrailways.gov.in/railwayboard/uploads/directorate/finance_budget/Budget_2015-16/BudgetStatement1516.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.indianrailways.gov.in/railwayboard/uploads/directorate/finance\\_budget/Budget\\_2015-16/BudgetStatement1516.pdf](http://www.indianrailways.gov.in/railwayboard/uploads/directorate/finance_budget/Budget_2015-16/BudgetStatement1516.pdf)





of urban areas. Further, in the coming twenty years, due to ease in travel (railways being one of the contributors), more than half of Indian population will be shifted to urban areas.

Indian Railways have made immense contribution towards the economic development of the country. It is a cheap mode of transporting goods, at present, Indian Railways has 239281 freight wagons and is connected to almost all the major parts of the country. The popularity of its freight carrying services can be gauged from the fact that 7421 freight trains run daily in the country, carrying perishable and non perishable goods.

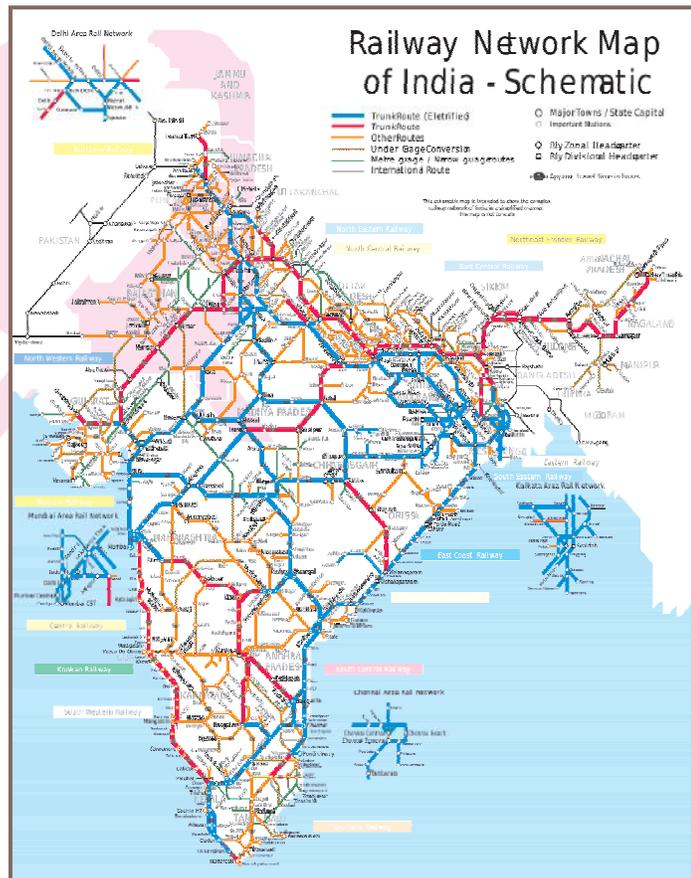
## II. Indian Railways Network

The above information verifies the popularity and dependence of the people and the economy on the Indian Railways. With the mammoth flow of freight and people operating of the railways is a complex process.

<sup>4</sup> While analyzing the map of the Indian Railways network (the side map), it can be seen that over the past sixty years, Railways have connected almost the entire country.

Two regions which have not been connected well through Railways are

- a) Jammu and Kashmir
- b) Region of North East





Less development of railways network in these two areas is attributed to the difficult terrain, including mountainous regions and dense forests.

Railways network have been divided into five regions; namely *western, eastern, northern, southern and central*. According to the track cover, the regions have been divided into zones. At present, there are sixteen zones<sup>5</sup>, each with a zonal headquarter. For better supervision and operations each zone is further divided into three-five divisions.

The details of the railways network is elaborated in the table below:

Sr No	Name of the Railway Zone	Length (Kilometers)	Zonal Headquarters	Divisions
1	Central Railway	3905	Mumbai	1) Mumbai 2) Nagpur 3) Bhusawal 4) Pune 5) Sholapur
2	Eastern Railway	2414	Kolkata	1) Howrah-I 2) Howrah-II 3) Sealdah 4) Malda 5) Asansol 6) Chitranjan
3	East Central Railway	3628	Hajipur	1) Danapur 2) Mugalsarai 3) Dhanbad 4) Sonpur 5) Samastipur
4	East Coast Railway	2572	Bhubaneswar	1) Khurda Road 2) Waltair 3) Sambhalpur
5	Northern Railway	6968	Baroda House, New Delhi	1) Delhi-I 2) Delhi-II 3) Ambala 4) Moradabad 5) Lucknow 6) Firozpur
6	North Central Railway	3151	Allahabad	1) Allahabad 2) Jhansi 3) Agra

<sup>4</sup> [http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/en/a/a4/Railway\\_network\\_schematic\\_map\\_2009.png](http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/en/a/a4/Railway_network_schematic_map_2009.png)

<sup>5</sup> [http://www.indianrail.gov.in/ir\\_zones.pdf](http://www.indianrail.gov.in/ir_zones.pdf)





7	North Eastern Railway	3667	Gorakhpur	1) Izzatpur 2) Lucknow 3) Varanasi
8	North Frontier Railway	3907	Maligaon, Guwahati	1) Katihar 2) Alipurduar 3) Rangiya 4) Lumding 5) Tinsukia
9	North Western Railway	5459	Jaipur	1) Jaipur 2) Jodhpur 3) Bikaner 4) Ajmer
10	Southern Railway	5098	Chennai	1) Chennai 2) Madurai 3) Palghat 4) Trichy 5) Trivendrum
11	South Central Railway	5803	Secunderabad	1) Secunderabad 2) Hyderabad 3) Guntakal 4) Vijaywada 5) Nanded
12	South Eastern Railway	2631	Garden Reach, Kolkata	1) Kharagpur 2) Adra 3) Chakradharpur 4) Ranchi 5) Shalimar
13	South East Central Railway	2447	Bilaspur	1) Bilaspur 2) Nagpur 3) Raipur
14	South Western Railway	3177	Hubli	1) Bangalore 2) Mysore 3) Hubli 4) FAF/YNK
15	Western Railway	6182	Mumbai CST	1) BCT 2) Vadodara 3) Ahmedabad 4) Ratlam 5) Rajkot 6) Bhavnagar
16	West Central Railway	2965	Jabalpur	1) Jabalpur 2) Bhopal 3) Kota

(Source: [http://www.indianrail.gov.in/ir\\_zones.pdf](http://www.indianrail.gov.in/ir_zones.pdf))



### III. Complaint Handling Mechanism

Since the beginning, Indian railways had a complaint handling mechanism. A complaint book was kept at every railway station which could be used by any passenger to register his/her complaint. The complaint handling mechanism has come a long way. Initially complaint handling mechanism meant registering complaints manually in a 'complaint register' kept at major railway stations. With the telecom revolution a dedicated 24x7 helpline has been installed by the Indian railways to receive complaints from the passengers at any hour. Further, SMS services have also been launched to receive complaints. Major issues received through various

Beginning: Railways had maintained a complaint book.

With the telecom revolution came in the introduction of dedicated help line numbers to receive complaints.

2011: The North Eastern Railways introduced an email id for electronic complaints.

2011-12 :SMS numbers (for various zones) were launched to receive complaints.

2012: Railways Police were designated to receive complaints in running trains.

2012: Uniform SMS number (132) was announced to receive complaints.

2012-13: Various Railway Zones introduced a separate space on their respective websites to receive complaints.

2014: In the railway budget of 2013-14, government made provisions for developing a software to facilitate a robust complaint handling mechanism.

2015: In the railway budget of 2015-16, the government made provisions for developing a mobile based application to redress railway related complaints





complaint sources are ticketing and cleanliness. Over the period of time and with swelling railway budgets, information and communication technology (ICT) has been employed to make the complaint handling an effective and timely mechanism. The diagram below showcases the evolution of railway complaint handling mechanism.

### a) Electronic Complaints:

The real beginning of the evolution of complaint handling mechanism came in 2011 when the Lucknow division of North Eastern Railways introduced electronic mail (email) identification (id) for the passengers to report their complaints<sup>6</sup>. Further, the division enlisted the email ids of various departmental heads so that passengers could directly register a complaint or follow-up on a complaint with a particular department. For the effectiveness of the system, a control room was established to monitor the flow of complaints. Following the Lucknow Division, several other divisions introduced dedicated email ids for receiving range of complaints from the passengers travelling in the train as well as freight related issues.

### b) Web Based Portals

During similar period, many zones introduced a website based portal on which passengers could lodge their complaint. There are various data points for which space is provided and a range of issues can be registered through the portal. Apart from lodging a complaint, clarification on a previous complaint and its status can also be enquired through these web portals. Each complaints has a unique identification number which is generated during lodging a complaint.

The first page of the portal has below mentioned options:-

- Lodge your grievance here
- Reminder/Clarification on a past grievance
- View Status of your grievance

A Snap shot of the complaint lodging page:-

SCR SMS based Passenger Complaint and Suggestion System (SPCSS)	
Your Name	<input type="text"/>
Your Address and Telephone/Mobile No.	<input type="text"/>
Your e-mail	<input type="text"/>
Complaint	<input type="text"/>
2f4ee	
<input type="button" value="Submit"/> <input type="button" value="Reset"/>	

<sup>6</sup> [http://www.ner.indianrailways.gov.in/view\\_section.jsp?id=0,1,304,432,799](http://www.ner.indianrailways.gov.in/view_section.jsp?id=0,1,304,432,799)



### c) SMS

During the period of 2011-12, Indian railways introduced SMS as a mode to register complaints, the number is not unique and each/zone has a different number. E.g.:- In New Delhi, the number which is designated for receiving railway complaints is 9717630982. For the Southern Railways the number designated for receiving complaints is 77080 61804.

In 2012, Ministry of Railways announced that they are in the process of integrating all the mobile numbers and to introduce a dedicated all India number to receive all kind of complaints via SMS. Another reason for introducing a dedicated SMS complaint number is the success of dedicated SMS numbers for enquires on train schedule and PNR status. The format of the SMS complaint generally is:

<Train number, bogie number, precise nature of complaint>

### d) Proposed: On-Site Passenger Compliant Redressal System

In the Railway budget of 2013-14, provisions were made to develop an On-Site Passenger Complaint Redressal System (OPCRS). It is a pilot project which will be launched in the super fast trains, such as Rajdhani. Through this new system, a passenger would be able to send SMSs for any issue while he/she is travelling on the train, example coach housekeeping (water, cleaning of toilets, non-availability of liquid soap). The passenger will be required to send his/her PNR number, which will be registered on a GSM network. This GSM network will immediately connect with the concerned authority; if it's a housekeeping complaint then the person on duty (supervisor) on that particular train will be ask to address the issue on urgent bases. After the complaint is addressed the concerned supervisor will send an SMS for the closure of the complaint and the passenger can send the feedback. The main aim of creating such a system is to create a database of nature of complaints, track the response time, train wise and region wise complaints. With such information the concerned authorities will know the working of the systems and propose improvements.





## IV. Nature of Complaints

Railway authorities across the zones and divisions have divided the complaints into 21 categories. The following table enlists the categories under which passengers can lodge their complaint:-

Improper behaviour of Commercial Staff	Improper behaviour other than of Commercial Staff	Improper behaviour other than of Railway Staff	Bookings	Reservations
Allotment of seats and berths by the Train Staff	Refunds	Bookings of Carriage, Luggage & Parcels	Issues related to Sleeper Class	Enquiry Officers
Non Availability of Water	Catering & Vending Services	Cleanliness of Stations	Maintenance of Coaches	Functioning of Electrical Equipments
Punctuality of Trains	Complaint related to Reserved seat/ Unauthorised Passengers	Theft & pilferages	Non-availability of Bed Rolls/ Travelling Bags	Bribery & Corruption
Miscellaneous				

## V. Analysis of the Data

### (A) Comparative Study: Zonal and Division data analysis

As mentioned in the beginning, the railway authorities were requested to provide data for two years; 2012-13 and 2013-14. The reason these two years were chosen was to understand the effects of new and comprehensive steps taken by the Indian railways in the year 2011 to improve their complaint handling mechanism. The evolution of the complaint handling system in India has been elaborated in the Section III of the paper.

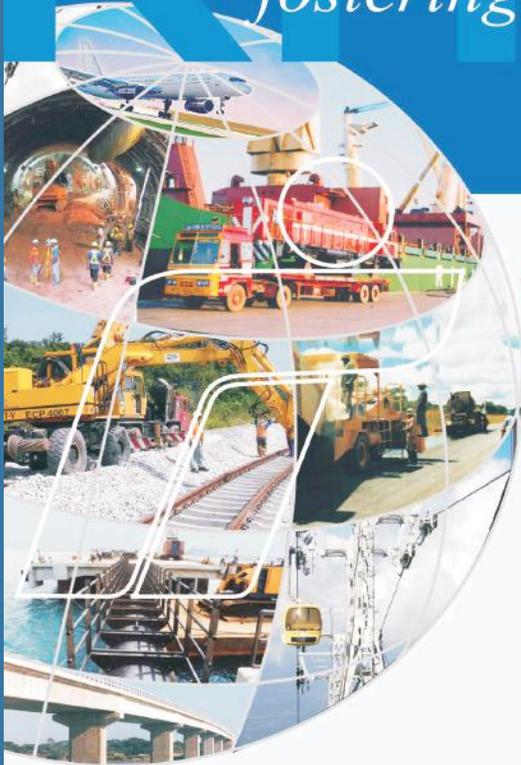


**Figure 1** demonstrates the number of complaints which have been received in the past two years, i.e. since April 2012 (after the introduction of the email and SMS mode of registering complaints) in all the railway zones. The graph shows that every zone had registered complaints, except for the Northern Central Railways, which did not maintain any record<sup>7</sup>.



<sup>7</sup> Based on RTI reply

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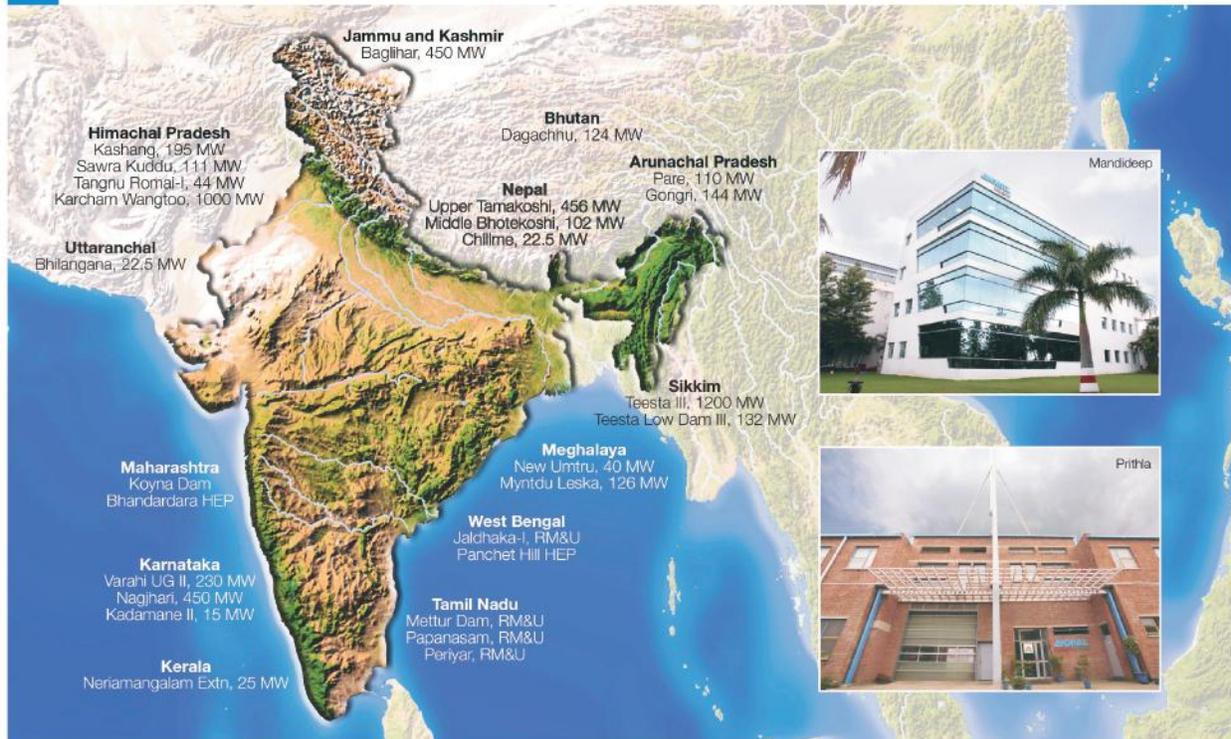
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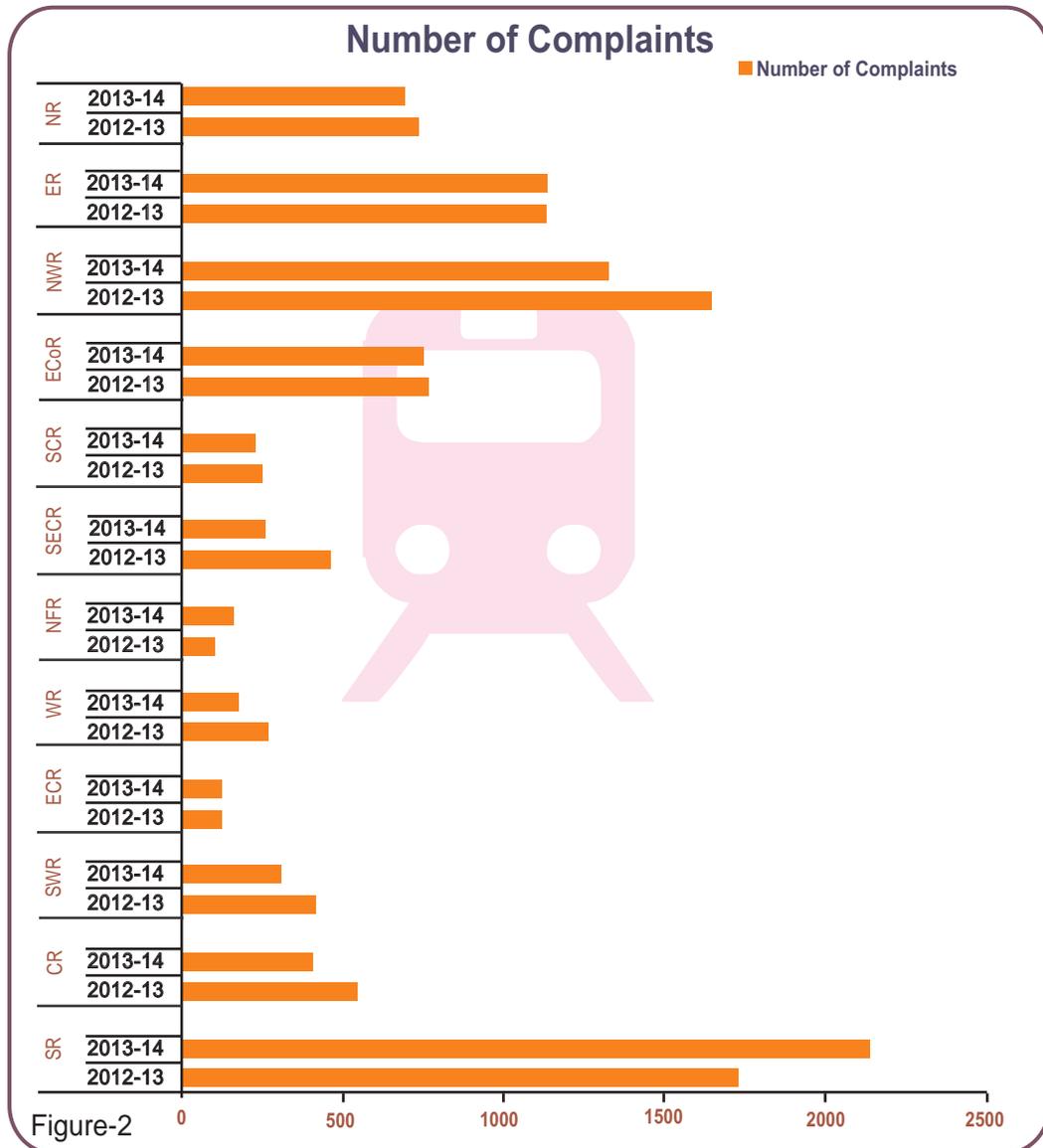


**ANDRITZ HYDRO Pvt. Ltd.**  
D-17, MPAKVN Industrial Area  
Mandideep 462 046  
District Raisen, Bhopal, India  
Phone: +91 7480 400 400  
Fax: +91 7480 403 393  
E-mail: [contact-hydro.in@andritz.com](mailto:contact-hydro.in@andritz.com)

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Conclusions can be drawn that the passengers are utilizing the complaint registering mechanism. The rising bars for East Central Railways, North Western Railways and Southern Railways could indicate that the number of complaints featuring could have been received by ICT modes and not just restricted to manual complaint books/registers.

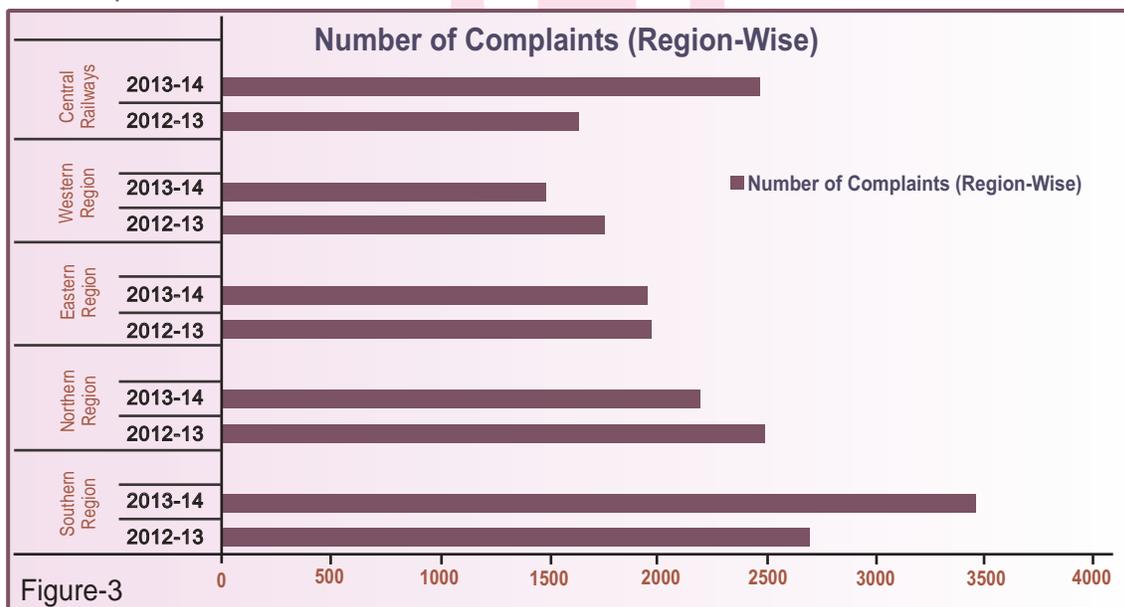




When the data of 2012-13 and 2013-14 is screened (**Figure 2**), it is found that there is not much change in the number of complaints received in these two years. It is only the Southern Railways & Northern Frontier Railway which have shown an increase otherwise all the other zones shows a slight decrease. Some of the zones are not featured in the given graph, such as Northern Central Railways and Western Central Railways as the yearly breakup of the number of complaints was not received. So, conclusively nothing much can be inferred.

However, when we see the data of Western Railways, Northern Railways and Eastern Railways, it suggests that there is an decrease in awareness amongst the passengers in these zones to lodge complaints, which we are unable to infer in other regions. To add to this, Northern Central Region does not have a maintained register for such complaints making it challenging to understand the nature and effectiveness of operation of complaint handling system.

The below mentioned graph (**Figure 3**) shows the number of complaints received in each region. While analyzing the data, there is an even distribution of number of complaints that have been received across five regions of the Indian railways, barring from Southern region where it seems that the passengers are proactive in registering their complaints.





## (B) Comparative Study: Nature of Complaints

There are twenty one different categories under which railways receive complaints. The following graph in Figure 4, shows the number of complaints that have been received under each category during the year 2012-13 and 2013-14.

With the view to understand what kind of complaints received by the railways, all the twenty one categories were broadly divided into four broad themes; Personnel, Services, Ticketing and Others.

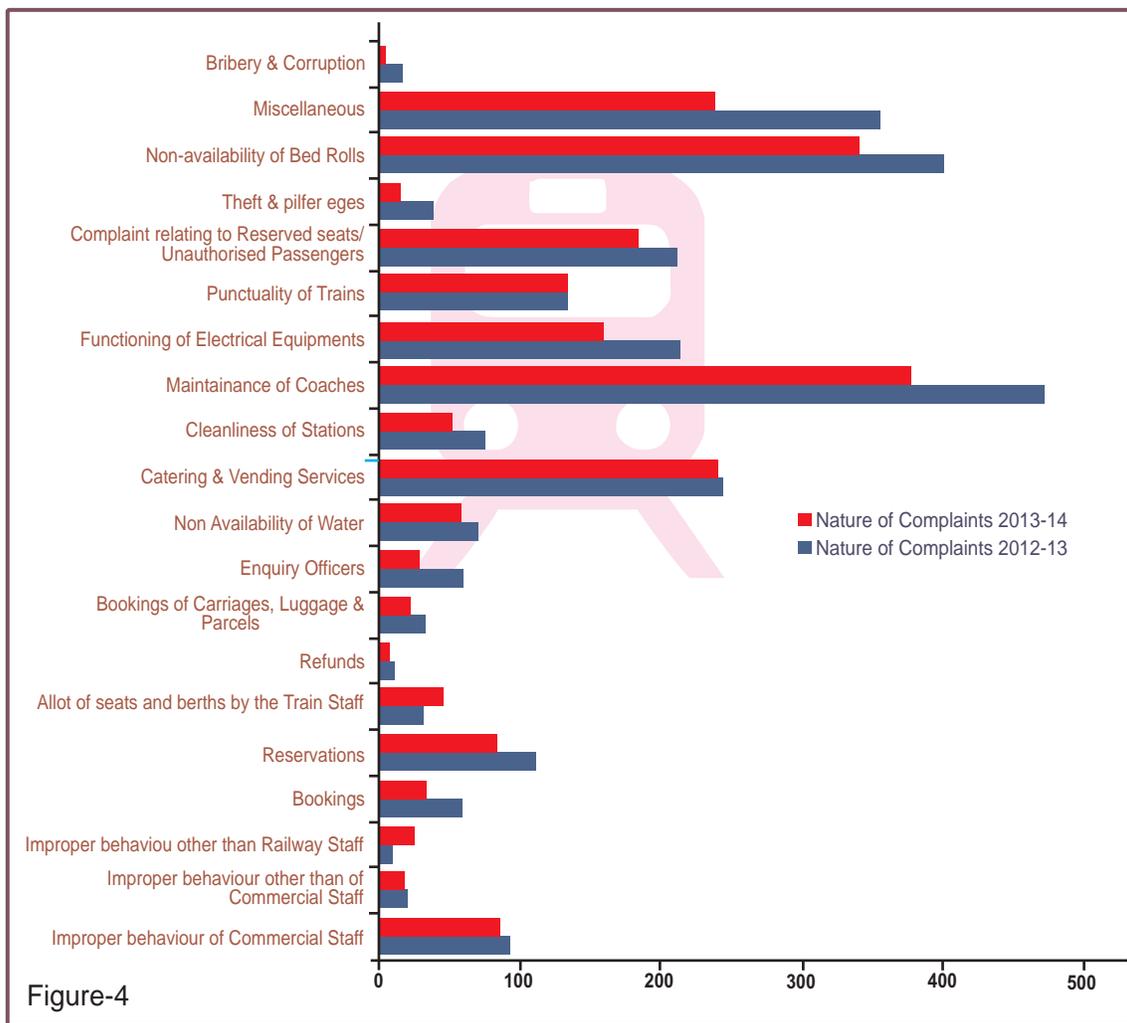


Figure-4



**Figure 5** shows that most of the complaints registered by the passengers pertain to the services of the railways.

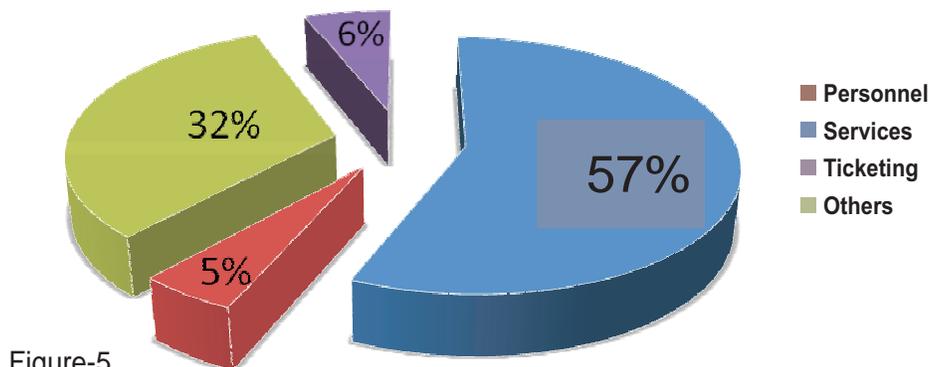
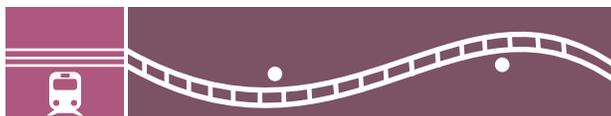


Figure-5

### Personnel Issues:

**Personnel related complaints made to the Indian railways, under three categories**

- a) **Improper behavior of Commercial Staff:** This category of complaints is generally meant to lodge issues related to Railway employees. E.g.: Ticket Checker (TC) in the train, Ticket Checker at the Station, Booking Clerk, Reservation Clerk and other Commercial Staff.
- b) **Improper behavior other than of Commercial Staff:** With the privatization of railway services, contractors have started playing a major role in rendering services to the passengers. Two important services that are being privatized by the Indian Railways are Cleaning of Toilets and Bogies and Catering. This category allows the passengers to register complaints against contractors and their staff, who do not address the issues of the passengers.
- c) **Improper behavior other than Railway Staff:** This category is meant to register complaints against other kind of railway personnel. Some of the personnel who fall under this category are Agents, Booking Stall Keeper, Government Railway Police and others.



While analyzing data of the past two years in Figure 6, it can be concluded that most of complaints are received against the commercial staff. While reading the explanation of the information received, it is the Ticket Checkers (TC) against whom majority of the complaints are registered. Some of the complaints related to Ticket Checkers are

- a) TC not letting a passenger holding a RAC (Reservation Against Cancellation) a confirmed seat.
- b) TC charging money for allotment of seat to an electronic ticket holder (waiting ticket). As per the new laws the electronically booked waiting ticket is not valid once the chart is made.
- c) TC giving his seat to passengers, with charging money for a full ticket.
- d) TC taking money from passengers without giving proper receipt.

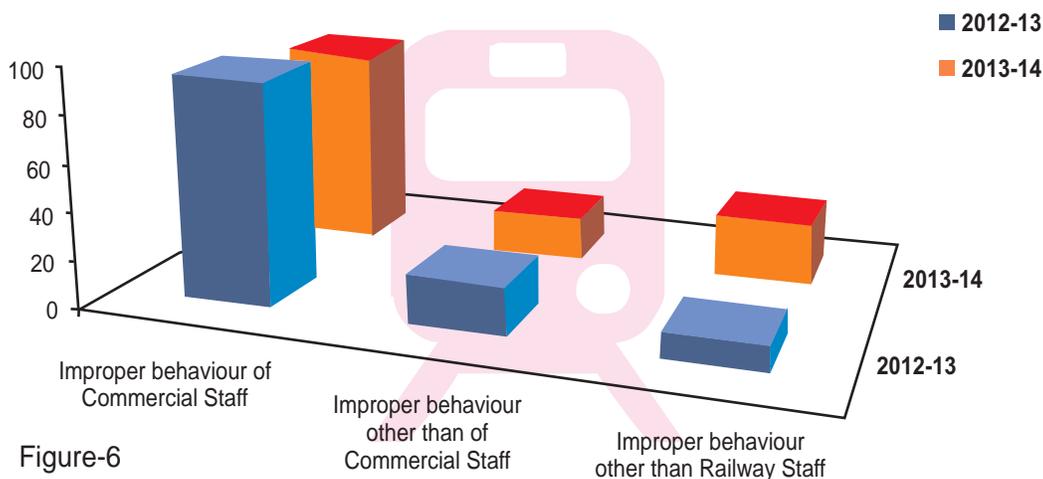


Figure-6

### Services related Issues:

As a passenger there are certain amenities that are required (expected) from the Indian railways such as water, clean toilets, cleanliness in coaches to name a few. The following graph (Figure 7) analyse some of the categories under which railways receive complaints for dissatisfactory services.

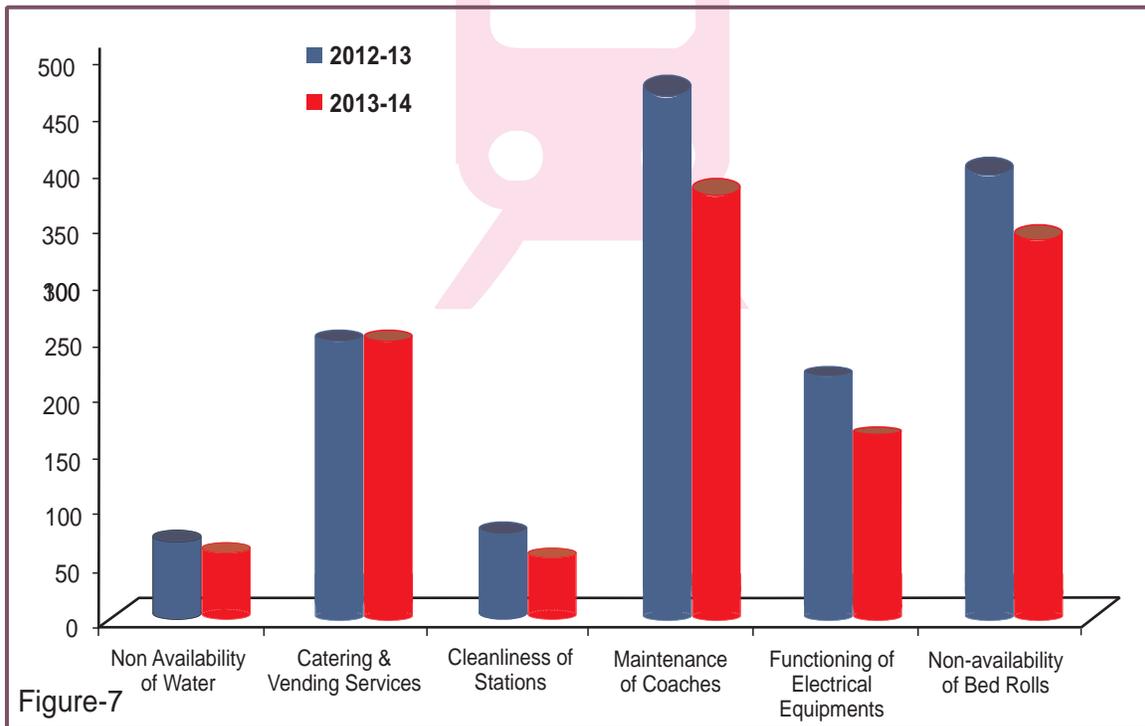
- a) Non-availability of Water (Train and station)
- b) Catering and vending services (departments and contracts)
- c) Cleanliness at stations



- d) Maintenance of coaches including cleanliness
- e) Functioning of electric equipments including the Air conditioners
- f) Non availability of/ or poor quality of travel bags

The data clearly shows that least number of the complaints that have been registered by the passengers pertain to cleanliness. In both the years, increasing number of complaints are registered towards low maintenance of coaches. In the explanation some of the issues that featured under the maintenance of coaches were dirty bogies, torn seat covers, nuts of the seats not tightened, broken side trays, non-functioning of window shutters etc.

Another related issue for which large number of complaints have been registered in same periods was non-availability or dirty travel bags. In 2013-14, there has been a slight decrease in the number of complaints pertaining to travel bags but a conclusive inference cannot be draw for such a marginal decrease.





## Ticketing Issues:

In the ticketing issues there are three sub-categories under which railways receive complaints, they are:

### a) Bookings<sup>8</sup>

- i) Late opening of Booking window
- ii) Excess charging from passengers
- iii) Other related complaints

### b) Reservations<sup>9</sup>

- i) Omission of names in Reservation Chart
- ii) Non-provision of accommodation confirmed ticket
- iii) Non-provision of Rail Journey outward Inter Station
- iv) Allotment of berths in different coaches for a family
- v) Same berth allotted to two passengers
- vi) Non-receipt of confirmation messages
- vii) Other related Complaints

### c) Refunds<sup>10</sup>

- i) E-Ticket
- ii) Other than e-ticket

While analyzing the data in figure 8, it can be seen that most of the passengers complaints are under the 'Reservation' category followed by bookings. With the digitalization of the railways both reservation and booking, have been streamlined. But issues crop up due to human interface and occasional technological failure.

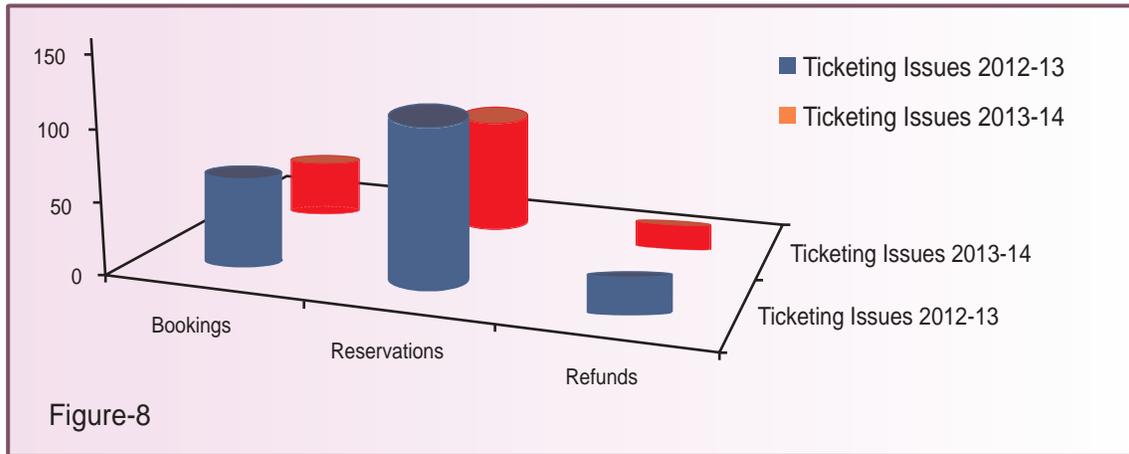
In the explanation of complaints under the Reservation category, two issues which were noticed and do not seem to have concrete solutions are:-

- **Canceled Ticket due to late boarding:** In several cases it has been seen that a TC allots a reserved seat to another waiting passenger, if the seat is not taken within certain number of stations. When the passenger boards the train after a few stations, he becomes a ticket less traveler. This is an issue which cannot be addressed by any technological intervention.

<sup>8,9,10</sup> Heads of receiving complaints elaborated by Railway authorities.



- Group Reservations:** As reservation has become an online activity, computer allots available seats to the passengers. The issue of a group not getting seats together is minuscule and addressing it is a futile exercise.

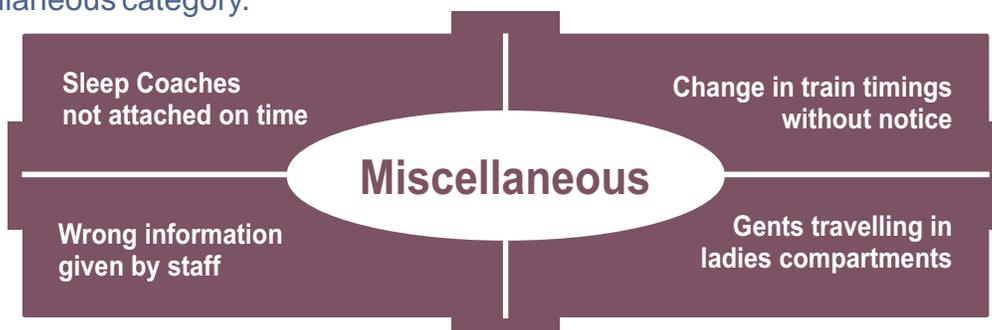


### Others

There are other kind of complaints that are received by the Indian Railways, but the number of such complaints are less and so they have been put under the 'Others' section. Some of the complaints that are put under this section are: booking of parcels, bribery and corruption, enquiry office and miscellaneous.

The data that has been provided do not give details of any kind of complaint that has been registered under miscellaneous category, thus no inferences can be drawn.

Following are the kind of complaints that railways compile (categorize) under miscellaneous category.





## C) Timeliness

Some of the data received about the number and nature of complaints also provide information about action taken. Such data, do not mention about the exact time taken to address the complaint. It just shows that almost all the complaints were closed, barring a few, which requires a higher authority's intervention. As time frame to address complaints is missing, so the effectiveness of the system cannot be gauged. Further, forwarding the complaint to a higher authority in some cases is regarded as 'case closed' so exact action (fine or penalty levied on staff, fixing of the coach infrastructure etc.) after the complaint is received by a concern authority is not known.

## Overall Finding of the Report

- The passengers are vigilant and proactive in registering their complaints.
- Apart from one division, all the divisions of the Indian railways maintain a complaint database.
- Limited information was provided on the action taken, so policy intervention is required whereby it is mandated to provide information on the action taken via each complain.
- No conclusive inferences were drawn on the new steps taken by the Indian railways to improve their complaint handling mechanism and the popularity amongst the passengers.

## Way Forward

The report suggests that Indian Railways, over the past few years, has evolved as a well crafted complaint handling system. The system which started from a complaint book is being digitalized in a phased out manner. However, the ratio of complaints to the number of commuters using the railways is far too less.

There are some suggestions that this report would like to put forth which would help in strengthening the complaint handling mechanism and enhance the travelling of commuters in the Indian Railways:-



### Awareness

- »Name of the concerned officers should be put up on websites and notice boards.
- »Information about the Complaint Handling Mechanism should be put up on every boogie

### Time Bound

- »Complaints should be categorized and a fixed time should be allotted to address each category of complaint
- »Penalties should also be imposed on concerned officers in case the complaints are not addressed in time bound manner.

### Technological Intervention

- »With the penetration of mobile phones and internet, the complaint handling mechanism should be technologically oriented.
- » Boogies should have technology ingrained with which passengers can complaint directly to concerned officers.
- »Websites should enlist the name of ticket checkers on every route as ticket checkers related complaints top the list.

#### Awareness:

- Name of the Concerned Officers should be made public. The name of the concerned officers should be put on the railway division website and notice boards. In the coming years, each boogie should have the name and contact of all the important officials, which today is restricted to emergency numbers in case of fire and alarm.
- The systems are in place but the awareness levels are skewed, so efforts should be made in advertising about the Railways complaint handling mechanism.

#### Time Bound:

- Complaints should be categorized and each category should be designated a time frame in which the complaint should be addressed.
- To make the complaint handling mechanism more effective, penalties should be imposed (designed) for all the officers who do not address complaints in a time bound manner. It is opined in case the concerned officers do not maintain a complaint register, which should also qualify for penalty.





## Technological Intervention:

- With the penetration of mobile phones and internet, the complaint handling mechanism should be technologically oriented. Railways have started SMS services which could be used for registering a complaint. However, only some divisions which have implemented this SMS system. With the technology at our disposal, all the railway divisions should implement the SMS system, same should be with revamping the websites and including the 'online-complaint' system in all the divisions.
- Bogies should have technology ingrained with which passengers can complain directly to the concerned officers.
- Websites should enlist the name of ticket checkers on every route, ticket checkers related complains top the list. This will facilitate accountability in ticketing related complaints during the train journey.



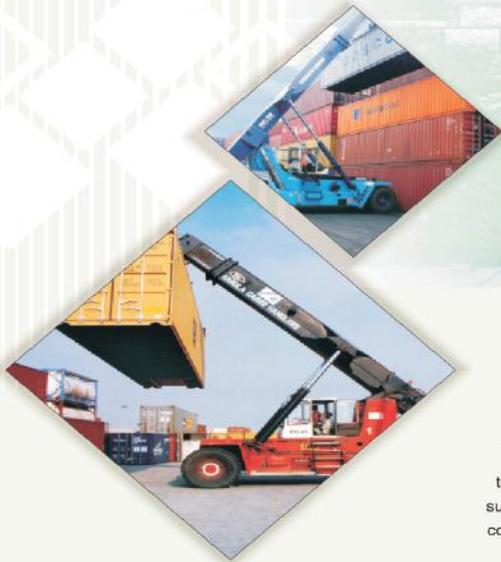
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**Registered Office:**

Qr. No. 4, Lajpat Bhawan, Lajpat Nagar - IV, New Delhi - 110024

**Project Office:**

37, National Park, Lajpat Nagar - IV, New Delhi - 110024

**Phone:** +91 11-26460826; 40634797 **Fax:** +91 11-26460824

**Email:** info@transparencyindia.org; tiindia.newdelhi@gmail.com

**Website:** www.transparencyindia.org

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