

“Curve ahead of accident site hit visibility”

CHENNAI THE HINDU
WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 1, 2021

Curve ahead of accident site hit visibility

Sighting distance was not enough to apply brakes to avert accident, says Southern Railway

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A curve ahead of the accident spot in the Walayar-Ettimadai section of Palghat Division where three elephants were fatally hit by the Mangaluru-Chennai Express on Friday night affected visibility making it difficult for the loco pilots to apply emergency brakes on seeing the animals on track.

Though there was no rain or fog, a curve ahead of the accident site made it difficult for the loco pilots to notice the elephants crossing the railway track and stop the train before it could hit them. “Due to the curve, the sighting distance was not enough to apply brakes to avoid such an incident,” Southern Railway’s spokesperson and Chief Public Relations Officer B. Guganesan told *The Hindu* on Tuesday.

The scene of the accident was a designated elephant pathway where there was a speed restriction for about 15 km on the A-Line. The loco pilots had stated that the



Three elephants were fatally hit by the Mangaluru-Chennai Express on Walayar-Ettimadai section. *S. SIVA SARAVANAN

train was run within the prescribed 45 kmph, he said. Asked whether foot patrolling was done in the section, the official said that there was no night patrolling since the monsoon patrol ended on October 15, 2021. On measures being taken to prevent recurrence of such accidents, Mr. Guganesan said counselling for loco pilots jointly with forest officials on elephant movement patterns was being planned at crew depots.

Forest officials investigating the circumstances that led to the incident have seized the speedometer chip from the locomotive. While no search and seizure report was handed over to the authorities concerned, there was no formal communication yet on registering a case against the loco pilots or seizure of speedometer chip from the locomotive, a senior official said, adding that the expert support of railway officials was essential to decode the chip and access the data.

The two loco pilots – M.T. Subair and M.C. Akhil – were booked under the provisions of Section 9 of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 that dealt with hunting of wild animals. He said though the Act provided for conducting search, arrest and detention to the authorised officer, the process had to be conducted as prescribed by the Code of Criminal Procedure like conducting the search in the presence of two independent witnesses, preparing a list of things seized during the search, handing over copy of the search particulars to the occupant of the place. “We came to know of the loco pilots being booked under the Wildlife (Protection) Act only through newspaper reports...” the official who preferred not to be quoted said.

Meanwhile, the Southern Railway has instructed its loco pilots operating trains in the Walayar-Ettimadai section of Palghat Division to sound horn frequently along stretches known for elephant crossing. If the movement of elephants was noticed, the loco pilot should bring down the speed immediately and stop the train short of the elephants till they completely pass the track. In case they noticed the movement of elephants along the track, they were told to convey it to the nearest Station Master.

Subway for elephants

All India Loco Running Staff Association president V. Balachandran said sounding horn was not an effective solution since animals such as elephants, buffaloes etc., were known for not moving out of the track area with this stimulus. Operating trains at a lesser speed was also not a foolproof mechanism since it would be difficult to bring the train to a complete halt when the elephants are sighted at short distance.

Registering a case against loco pilots would not serve any purpose and instead the authorities should consider constructing a subway for safe passage of elephants in areas known for their regular movement.

News Item in The Hindu newspaper, Chennai Edition dated 1st December 2021

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