

Failure to Implement Ministry of Railway's Orders resulted in Damage to Railway Cables: South Eastern Railway and West Central Railway

[Action Taken by the Government on the Observations and Recommendations of the Committee contained in their 70th Report (17th Lok Sabha)]

MINISTRY OF RAILWAYS

**PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE
(2023-24)**

ONE HUNDRED AND THIRTY FIFTH REPORT

SEVENTEENTH LOK SABHA



**LOK SABHA SECRETARIAT
NEW DELHI**

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Railway's Orders resulted in Damage
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[Action Taken by the Government on the Observations and Recommendations of the Committee contained in their 70th Report (17th Lok Sabha)]



Presented to Hon'ble Speaker, Lok Sabha on 23.02.2024

Presented to Lok Sabha on:

Laid in Rajya Sabha on:

**LOK SABHA SECRETARIAT
NEW DELHI**

February 2024/ Phalguna 1945 (Saka)

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* not appended to cyclostyled copy of the report

COMPOSITION OF THE PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE

(2023-24)

Shri Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury - Chairperson

MEMBERS

LOK SABHA

2. Shri Subhash Chandra Baheria
3. Shri Thalikkottai Rajuthevar Baalu
4. Shri Bhartruhari Mahtab
5. Shri Jagdambika Pal
6. Shri Pratap Chandra Sarangi
7. Shri Vishnu Dayal Ram
8. Shri Rahul Ramesh Shewale
9. Shri Gowdar Mallikarjunappa Siddeshwara
10. Dr. Satya Pal Singh
11. Shri Brijendra Singh
12. Shri Rajiv Ranjan Singh alias Lalan Singh
13. Shri Jayant Sinha
14. Shri Balashowry Vallabhaneni
15. Shri Ram Kripal Yadav

RAJYA SABHA

16. Shri Shaktisinh Gohil
17. Dr. K Laxman
18. Shri Derek O'Brien*
19. Shri Tiruchi Siva
20. Dr. M. Thambidurai
21. Shri Ghanshyam Tiwari
22. Dr. Sudhanshu Trivedi

SECRETARIAT

1. Shri Sanjeev Sharma - Joint Secretary
2. Smt. Bharti S. Tuteja - Director
3. Shri Alok Mani Tripathi - Deputy Secretary

* Elected w.e.f. 19.08.2023 consequent upon retirement of Shri Sukhendu Sekhar Ray, MP on 18.08.2023.

INTRODUCTION

I, the Chairperson, Public Accounts Committee (2023-24) having been authorised by the Committee, do present this 135th Report (Seventeenth Lok Sabha) on Action Taken by the Government on the Observations/Recommendations of the Public Accounts Committee contained in their 70th Report (Seventeenth Lok Sabha) on "Failure to Implement Ministry of Railway's Orders resulted in Damage to Railway Cables: South Eastern Railway and West Central Railway.

2. The Seventieth Report was presented to Lok Sabha/laid in Rajya Sabha on 10th August, 2023. Replies of the Government to all the Observations/Recommendations contained in the Report were received. The Public Accounts Committee considered and adopted the draft Report at their Sitting held on 9th February, 2024. Minutes of the Sitting are given at Appendix I.

3. For facility of reference and convenience, the Observations and Recommendations of the Committee have been printed in bold in the body of the Report.

4. The Committee also place on record their appreciation of the assistance rendered to them in the matter by the Committee Secretariat and the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General of India.

5. An analysis of the action taken by the Government on the Observations/Recommendations contained in the Seventieth Report (Sixteenth Lok Sabha) is given at Appendix-II

NEW DELHI

9 February, 2024
20 Magha, 1945 (Saka)

ADHIR RANJAN CHOWDHUR

Chairperson,
Public Accounts Committee

CHAPTER-I REPORT

This Report of the Public Accounts Committee deals with the Action Taken by the Government on the Observations and Recommendations of the Committee contained in their Seventieth Report (17th Lok Sabha) on **"Failure to Implement Ministry of Railway's orders resulted in Damage to Railway Cables: South Eastern Railway and West Central Railway"**.

2. The Seventieth Report was presented to Lok Sabha/laid in Rajya Sabha on 10.08.2023. The report contained eleven Observations/Recommendations. The Action Taken Notes on all the Observations/Recommendations have been received from the Ministry of Railways (Railway Board) are categorized as under:

- (i) Observations/Recommendations which have been accepted by the Government:

Para Nos. 1-3,5,7-11

Total: 9

Chapter - II

- (ii) Observations/Recommendations which the Committee do not desire to pursue in view of the replies received from the Government:

Para No. NIL

**Total: NIL
Chapter - III**

- (iii) Observations/Recommendations in respect of which replies of the Government have not been accepted by the Committee and which require reiteration:

Para No. NIL

**Total: NIL
Chapter - IV**

- (iv) Observations/Recommendations in respect of which Government have furnished interim replies/no replies:

Para No. 4,6

**Total: 2
Chapter - V**

3. During the detailed examination of the subject "**Failure to Implement Ministry of Railway's orders resulted in Damage to Railway Cables: South Eastern Railway and West Central Railway**", the Committee had identified certain shortcomings/deficiencies on the part of the Ministry of Railways, which inter-alia included lapses in adhering to Joint Procedure Orders (JPO) by South Eastern Railway and West Central Railway, need for improved coordination, provision of cable route plans, and effective resource allocation to address staff shortages for safeguarding railway cables etc.

4. The Action Taken Notes furnished by the Ministry on the Observations/Recommendations of the Committee contained in their Seventieth Report (Seventeenth Lok Sabha) have been reproduced in the relevant chapters of this Report. The Committee will now deal with the Action Taken by the Government on some of their Observations/Recommendations made in the original Report which require reiteration/merit comments.

5. **The Committee desire the Ministry of Railways to furnish Action Taken Notes in respect of Observations/ Recommendations contained in Chapter I and Chapter V within six months of the presentation of the Report to the House.**

6. Recommendation at Para No. 9

The Committee in their original report had recommended as under:

In light of the potential accidents that could arise due to cable cuts, the Committee emphatically urge the Ministry to prioritize the protection and maintenance of the OFC communication system. As an example, the recent derailment of Train No. 12841, Coromandal Express, the Committee feel, serve as a stark reminder of the serious consequences such incidents

may have. The Committee observe that to mitigate such risks, the Ministry must take immediate action and invest in advanced technology for proactive fault detection. They, therefore, recommend that the Ministry should invest in upgrading and replacing damaged cables to ensure seamless functioning of the communication system. The Ministry of Railways should also provide clear guidelines and parameters for replacing cables that have been repaired with joints but still result in degraded performance of the communication system. By establishing specific criteria for replacement, the Ministry can ensure optimal performance and prevent further degradation of the communication infrastructure.

7. The Ministry of Railways in their action taken reply has furnished as under:

“Clear guidelines for replacement of cable, in case of deterioration of performance of cables, exist in various manuals issued by Telecom/Signal Dtes”.

8. In light of the potential accidents that could arise due to cable cuts, the Committee had urged the Ministry to prioritize the protection and maintenance of the OFC communication system and recommended that the Ministry should invest in upgrading and replacing damaged cables to ensure seamless functioning of the communication system. Further, to ensure optimal performance and prevent degradation of the communication infrastructure, the Committee had recommended the Ministry of Railways to provide clear guidelines and parameters for replacing cables that have been repaired with joints but contribute to degraded performance of the communication system. The Committee note from the reply of the

Ministry that clear guidelines for replacement of cables, in case of deterioration of performance exist in various manuals issued by Telecom/Signal Departments. The Committee while noting that the wrong labeling of wires and ignoring past red flags can lead to wrong signaling that may result in serious accidents, desire that the existing guidelines be reviewed and updated to rule out such a possibility in future. The Committee, further, reiterate their earlier recommendation that Ministry should invest in upgrading and replacing damaged cables to ensure seamless functioning of the communication system.

9. Recommendation at Para No. 10

The Committee in their original report had recommended as under:

The Committee desire that the Ministry should provide an update on the recovery of penalties in the 85 cases that have already been initiated. It is crucial that the penalties are imposed and the Ministry takes appropriate action to recover the same. Further, the Committee feel that the Ministry should clarify the level at which the cause of cable cuts has been ascertained during the review process in the 113 cases. It is essential to have a well-defined and transparent procedure for reviewing cable cut incidents to identify the parties responsible and take appropriate actions to prevent future occurrences. In light of the recent Audit Report No. 25 of 2022, which once again highlights the non-adherence to JPO guidelines resulting in significant financial losses, the Committee strongly recommend a complete review of similar cases by the Ministry in all railway zones. It is crucial for the Ministry to analyze the root causes of these issues and implement corrective actions to ensure strict compliance with guidelines across the entire railway network. The recurring audit reports pointing to

similar findings from other Railway Zones, serve as a clear indication that immediate action and fundamental changes are necessary. The Committee, therefore, stress the importance of conducting a thorough review and implementing robust measures to address these longstanding concerns.

10. The Ministry of Railways in their action taken reply has furnished as under:

“The Zonal Railway concerned is actively pursuing the case for recovery of penalties in the 85 cases. However, the cases being old and contracts having been closed, prospects of recovery have been reported to be bleak. Ascertaining of the causes for cable cuts in the 113 cases mentioned by Audit have been done at the level of Sr.DSTE during the review process in the 113 cases.

As mentioned in the foregoing paras, various measures have been taken to prevent cases of cable cuts which includes framing of local guidelines, monitoring of cable cut cases at the appropriate level in the Zone for remedial actions as preventive measures”.

11. While opining that it was essential to have a well-defined and transparent procedure for reviewing cable cut incidents to identify the parties responsible and take appropriate actions to prevent future occurrences the Committee had recommended that Ministry should clarify the level at which the cause of cable cuts was ascertained during the review process in the 113 cases pointed by the Audit. The Committee had desired the Ministry to provide an update on the recovery of penalties in the 85 cases that had already been initiated.

The Committee had also recommended that a complete review of similar cases by the Ministry in all railway zones be undertaken to analyze the root causes of these issues and implement corrective actions to ensure strict compliance with guidelines across the entire railway network. Further, the Committee note that ascertaining the causes for cable cuts in the 113 cases mentioned by Audit has been done at the level of Sr.DSTE and various measures have been taken to prevent cases of cable cuts which include, framing of local guidelines, and monitoring of cable cut cases at the appropriate level in the Zone for remedial actions . The Committee note from the reply of the Ministry that the Zonal Railway concerned is actively pursuing the case for recovery of penalties in the 85 cases. However, the cases being old and contracts having been closed, prospects of recovery have been reported to be bleak. The Committee, therefore, desire that henceforth, adequate penal provisions in the contract may invariably be made and financial procedures strengthened to ensure that payment to the contractor is made only after deduction of any penalties etc from the payable amount and receipt of no dues certificate from all the agencies concerned . Further, bank guarantees may invariably be taken and retained for a prescribed period to ensure that penalties, if any, are recovered even after the work is completed.

12. Recommendation at Para No. 11

The Committee in their original report had recommended as under:

The Committee note that zonal railways failed to impose penalties totalling to ₹ 6.7 crore in 263 cases of cable cuts between March 2017 and March 2020. The Committee, therefore, recommend that these cases be investigated so as to find shortcomings in enforcing the conditions stipulated in the JPO on account of which penalties could not be levied. Lessons learnt should be utilized to prevent similar cases in the future.

13. The Ministry of Railways in their action taken reply has furnished as under:

“In addition to the tasks proposed against item Nos. 7 & 10, meetings at Board level with concerned officers in the Railway Zones are regularly being held to effectively monitor cases of cable cuts. As already stated in previous Para, a committee of SAG formed to deliberate on the issue of cable cuts found that shortcuts were resorted to which resulted in instances of cable cuts. The committee thereafter recommended revision of JPO”.

14. The Committee while noting that zonal railways failed to impose penalties totalling to ₹ 6.7 crore in 263 cases of cable cuts between March 2017 and March 2020 had recommended that these cases be investigated so as to identify shortcomings in enforcing the conditions stipulated in the JPO on account of which penalties could not be levied. The Committee note from the reply of the Ministry that meetings at Board level with officers concerned in the Railway Zones are regularly being held to effectively monitor cases of cable cuts. The Committee while expressing shock to note the findings of the committee of SAG that shortcuts were resorted to which resulted in

instances of cable cuts, opine that the monitoring mechanism be strengthened and inspections carried out at regular intervals. The details of inspections carried out, the shortcomings noticed and the remedial action taken thereon may be recorded. For this, the Committee desire that a portal accessible by the highest authorities may be developed to ensure immediate action by the officers concerned.

NEW DELHI

9 February, 2024
20 Magha, 1945 (Saka)

ADHIR RANJAN CHOWDHURY

Chairperson,
Public Accounts Committee