

Rail blockades worry East Coast Railway

Frequent protests by people at railway lines that hold up trains for hours have created problems for India's East Coast Railway that caters to three states.

More than 20 major rail blockades have taken place in the section since January this year.

East Coast Railway - started in 2003 as one of the blue chip zones of Indian Railways - manages trains in three states of Orissa, Chhattisgarh and Andhra Pradesh which are rich in mineral and natural resources and considered to be at the threshold of an industrial upsurge.

'We are facing problems due to frequent rail blockades in the recent past,' a senior official of the East Coast Railway here told IANS.

The latest blockade was at Kaluparaghat Station in Khurda district Thursday. The protesters were demanding that some of the trains make a halt in their village. More than 10 trains were detained for more than eight hours. About 15 goods trains carrying coal and minerals for power plants were also detained at various stations.

Thousands of passengers, including women and children, suffered for hours in the face of inclement weather, he said.

Railway services also came to a complete halt at Khalikote station in Ganjam district July 20 when hundreds of villagers obstructed the movement of all mail, express and freight trains for over six hours in the morning. Here too, protesters were demanding that the trains stop in their village regularly.

The worst victims of such hapless situations are senior citizens, patients headed for medical treatment and youths going for entrance examinations and interviews.

'There is an urgent need to curb such incidents. Strong action by law and order agencies is called for,' the railway official said. 'These protests are avoidable and yield no practical results, but passengers suffer a lot.'

Besides, there is also huge loss of national revenue as trains carrying coal and other minerals also get held up, affecting the supply of raw material to power producing units.

Each engine of a train detained for an hour costs the nation more than Rs.8,000, excluding the social and manpower costs, the official said.

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