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East Coast Railway hit by staff shortage

VISAKHAPATNAM: East Coast Railway (ECoR) has a shortage of nearly 50 per cent of guards and 20 per cent each of station masters and gangmen (now re-designated as track maintainers).

The railway zone was formed on April 1, 2003, with three divisions including Vizag-based Waltair division which covers Srikakulam, Vizianagaram and Visakhapatnam.

Several studies have been conducted by both private and government authorities on train accidents in India which revealed that the safety, mechanical and operation wings of the railways is always short of staff despite regular recruitments. "Human error is one of the reasons for train accidents. And mishaps happen when there is a slip up on the part of train operating staff, track-men and signalling staff," a senior Waltair division railway official told TOI.

According to ECoR officials, 333 station master posts are lying vacant against the sanctioned 1,620 posts. Similarly, 1,450 posts for guards are vacant against the sanctioned 3,000 posts in all the three divisions. As many as 2,284 posts of gangmen are vacant against the sanctioned 11,176 posts. This apart, there are 419 junior engineers for track maintenance, which is slightly lesser than the sanctioned 443 posts.

"The post of locomotive pilot or engine driver is most crucial as the shortage of pilots increase the pressure on the existing staff. Despite that, nearly 1,262 locomotive pilot posts are vacant in ECoR," a railway source told TOI.

When contacted, ECoR chief official spokesperson JP Mishra told TOI from Bhubaneswar that all possible steps including recruitments are being carried out to fill up all the vacant posts. "Most of the recruited staff are already undergoing training," he added.