

**Shri Ashwini Vaishnaw**

Hon'ble Union Minister of Railways, Information and Broadcasting & Electronics and Information Technology

Respected Shri Ashwini Vaishnaw Ji,

Sub: Southern Railway - Ongoing protest by All India Loco Running Staff Association (AILRSA) - Urgent intervention - reg:

Kind attention is invited to the captioned subject.

We, the Members from both Houses of the Parliament, have come together in endorsing this joint letter to address a pressing concern regarding the ongoing agitation by the All India Loco Running Staff Association (AILRSA) at Southern Railway, which has escalated into a critical issue demanding your immediate intervention.

The locomotive running staff, integral to the safe and efficient operation of our railway system, have articulated their demands with clarity and urgency. Despite their unwavering dedication and the strenuous nature of their duties, their appeals for reasonable working conditions have been met with punitive measures rather than constructive dialogue. This situation not only undermines their morale but also poses potential risks to the safety and reliability of railway operations.

Various committees, including a recent High-Power committee, have studied the working conditions of the locomotive running staff and recommended that they should not be mandated to work more than two consecutive nights. Furthermore, recommendations concerning their working hours and weekly rest have also been made, based on studies on the psychological and physical strains they endure as well as the international labour standards upheld by the ILO Convention.

The right to adequate rest for the locomotive running staff was unequivocally recognized by the Central Administrative Tribunal (Bangalore) in its order dated 01.04.2010 in O.A. No: 33/2008. The Tribunal directed the Railways to limit their working hours as per the provisions of Section 133 of the Railways Act and Rule 8 of the Railway Rules, and to grant periodical rest under the provisions of Rule 133 of the Railways Act and Rule 12 of the Railway Rules. Though the Union Government and Railways challenged this order before the Hon'ble High Court of Karnataka vide W.P. No. 66707/2010 (S-CAT), the same was dismissed by the High Court on 13.04.2012, thereby upholding the directive of the Central Administrative Tribunal (Bangalore). [Copies of the order dated 01.04.2010 in O.A. No: 33/2008 of CAT and order dated 13.04.2012 of the Hon'ble High Court of Karnataka in W.P. No. 66707/2010 (S-CAT) are appended herewith for your kind consideration].

In light of these judicial orders, the locomotive running staff have opted to seek to exercise their statutory rights, seeking a weekly rest period of 30 hours plus 16 hours of headquarters rest (totalling 46 hours). Following repeated appeals to the Southern Railway authorities by staff and their representative associations, which yielded no response,

AILRSA commenced their protest on 01.06.2024, following a formal notice issued on 15.05.2024 to the General Manager. During this protest, staff members have begun to avail their weekly rest without disrupting train services.

The notice dated 15.05.2024, addressed to the General Manager, Southern Railway, outlined several critical concerns, including:

1. Excessive Duty Hours: The staff are frequently required to work beyond the recommended 10-hour duty limit, contravening the assurances made by various committees and the then Labour Minister's announcement in Parliament on 14.08.1973. Such prolonged work hours not only affect the well-being and efficiency of the staff but also jeopardize railway safety, particularly under challenging operational conditions.
2. Inadequate Weekly Rest: The current provision of weekly rest is grossly inadequate, failing to meet even the basic standards recommended by the International Labour Organization and supported by judicial precedents. Often stationed away from their home bases, detached from their families, these staff members face significant challenges in fulfilling familial responsibilities.
3. Continuous Night Duties: The current requirement to work up to four consecutive night shifts disrupts natural circadian rhythms, contributing to heightened stress levels and compromised safety standards.
4. Prolonged Absences from Headquarters: Extended periods spent away from their families exacerbate the physical and emotional strain on locomotive running staff, adversely affecting their overall health and morale. On arrival at HQ after a 72 hours absence from family, loco running staff often receive only 16 hrs of rest before resuming duties for another 72-hour cycle.

AILRSA communicated to Southern Railways in the aforementioned notice that, effective from 01.06.2024, the running staff will no longer consent to working more than 10 hours consecutively. They also reaffirmed their intent to avail 46 hours of weekly rest, limit consecutive night shifts to two, and ensure timely return to headquarters after 48 hours at outstations.

Despite repeated representations and demands, Railway authorities have failed to address these genuine concerns, prompting the AILRSA to start their agitation on 01.06.2024 in Southern Railway. Instead of addressing the legitimate demands raised by the loco running staff, Southern Railway has resorted to retaliatory measures such as suspensions, transfers, and issuance of penalty memos against AILRSA members, aggravating the situation further. It is distressing that several locomotive pilots have been either suspended or subjected to administrative transfers, along with approximately five hundred penalty charge sheets issued since June 1st, 2024. These punitive actions not only demoralize the employees but also severely impact the workload and operational efficiency.

If this impasse persists without remedial action from the Railway authorities to address the grievances of the locomotive running staff, it will further deteriorate the harmonious relationship between staff and administration, ultimately jeopardizing the operation of passenger and goods trains, thereby adversely affecting the public and the economy at large.

Thus, the gravity of this situation necessitates your urgent and resolute intervention. As such, we earnestly request your goodself to direct Railway authorities to urgently engage in constructive dialogue with the loco running staff, addressing their legitimate demands and striving for a mutually acceptable resolution. Additionally, it is imperative to cease all punitive measures against protesting employees, including suspensions, transfers, and issuance of memos, in order to restore trust and foster goodwill. The safety, efficiency, and harmony of our railway operations hinge profoundly on the well-being of our locomotive running staff.

Thank you for your immediate attention to this critical issue.

Yours faithfully,