



Chevella banyans battle: Heritage vs highway makes NH 163 a 'deadly' corridor

Conservationists clash with NHAI over plans to fell 900 Nizam-era trees for road expansion, citing accident risks

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FOR nearly a century, the majestic banyan trees lining the Chevella-Moinabad stretch of National Highway 163 (NH 163) have stood as a living heritage of Telangana's past, with their origins dating back to the Nizam era. These almost 900 ancient trees, along with thousands of others, provide a unique ecosystem and a remarkable canopy that travellers have marvelled at for generations.

However, since 2019, this green legacy has become the epicentre of a fierce environmental battle. Citizen-led groups, notably 'Save Banyans of Chevella' and 'Nature Lovers of Hyderabad (NLH)', have been championing the cause to protect these irreplaceable trees against the National Highways Authority of India's (NHAI) plans to expand the highway from two to four lanes.

These groups have mounted persistent protests, filed petitions with the National Green Tribunal (NGT), and meticulously geotagged the banyans to counter government claims and demand comprehensive ecological



considerations within the expansion plans.

During the previous BRS government's tenure, the land acquisition for the NH 163 widening project saw significant delays. Disputes over compensation, protracted court cases, and environmental litigations fuelled by activism culminated in multiple NGT orders halting construction to ensure thorough Environmental Impact Assessments (EIA).

The NGT formally recognised the ecological importance of the banyans, particularly their biodiversity support, and mandated revised assessments to minimise environmental damage. Despite these clear directives, stalled land acquisitions and political hesi-

tance have perpetuated dangerous bottlenecks on this already perilous highway.

Activists contend that the government prioritised avoiding conflict over proactive dialogue, which effectively prolonged the highway's hazardous state and led to numerous fatal accidents.

The 'Save Banyans of Chevella' group employed a scientific approach to data collection and advocacy, exposing gaps in the NHAI's mitigation claims. They have demanded genuine measures, such as reliable tree translocation with survival guarantees and road realignment where feasible.

This critical stretch between Moinabad and Manneguda, which links Hyderabad and Bijapur, re-



mains a stark reminder of the clash between heritage conservation and infrastructure needs. While the ancient banyan trees are spared for the moment, the highway continues to bear the burden of delayed development and recurring tragedy.

As the NH 163 expansion resumes under government mandates, the hope remains for balanced progress that preserves these ecological treasures while simultaneously ensuring safer passage for the thousands who travel this vital route daily.



Experts warn overloaded buses, heavy vehicles fuel road tragedies in Telangana

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FOLLOWING heavy vehicle accidents, the road safety experts have stressed a combination of safety measures focused on controlling overloading of carriers or overcrowding of buses, over-speeding and vehicle condition. The experts urged the State Transport Department to be proactive in their enforcement efforts.

In the last 10 days, the state witnessed two major road accidents with nearly 40 deaths of the people in two Telugu states. On October 24, a private bus going to Bengaluru from Hyderabad burst into flames in Kurnool district after colliding with a bike, killing 19 people.

On Monday, 19 persons lost their lives when an RTC bus from Tandur to Hyderabad was crushed under a gravel-laden tipper truck near Mirzaguda in Chevella in Ranga Reddy district.

The experts highlighted that the preliminary police investigations revealed that both vehicles were carrying excess load. The truck was overloaded with gravel, while the RTC bus had far more passengers than its permitted capacity.

Opinions are that an overloaded truck and an overcrowded bus were a deadly combination, regardless of who was at fault. Poor road conditions and failure to deploy enough buses to handle passenger rush were also being cited as major causes.

The experts said that the Mahalakshmi scheme has caused overcrowding on TGSRTC buses by significantly increasing daily commute, especially among women.

Earlier, the state-run buses used to transport over 50 lakh passengers in the state but now following the scheme it has crossed 66 lakh passengers, with the same fleet of buses.

"In the tragic accident that occurred in Chevella on Monday, 14 female and five male passengers lost



their lives. The incident was caused by overcrowding, which also underscores the need for adequate bus services under the existing state transport schemes," said R. Nageshwar, a road safety expert.

It has been witnessed that the buses are running overcrowded across the state. The buses are accommodating more passengers than the capacity. The bus which collided with the tipper was accommodating more than 70 passengers.

Mohammed Asif Hussain, another expert highlighted that the RTA officers must act on the RTC buses for overcrowding. When overloaded, the vehicle becomes unbalanced, which can result in accidents.

Citing the example of the inspection by the Jagtial district transport officials in July last year, Asif Hussain said, "The Jagtial transport officials seized the state-run bus for carrying 112 passengers, which was supposed to carry 55 passengers. Since then, there were no reports of the RTA inspecting RTC buses," said Asif Hussain.

Sri Harsha, a member of the Road Squad Team dedicated to promoting road safety across the country, said that the overloading of buses is a serious concern. It can only be controlled when both the government and the public understand the risks involved. The long-term solution lies in increasing the number and frequency of buses so that passengers are not forced to travel unsafely.

Furthermore, the Tipper lorries are often used

for shuttle services repeatedly travelling on the same stretches of roads. This familiarity tends to create overconfidence among drivers, leading to over speeding and careless driving, pointed out Harsha.

He said that a major reason behind the frequent heavy vehicle accidents is the lack of proper driver training. In many cases, cleaners gradually become drivers without undergoing any structured training. This poses serious risks on highways.

"In Telangana, there are only a few Institutes of Driver Training and Research such as those in Karimnagar, Sangareddy. For RTC drivers Warangal and Hyderabad training institutes are available, which are insufficient to meet the state's growing demand.

The government should encourage and support private sector participation in establishing more high-quality driver training institutes across all districts," said Harsha.

The member of the Road Squad Team said that strict enforcement is equally important. Installation of dashcams in all heavy vehicles and periodic monitoring by independent audit teams can greatly enhance accountability and road safety standards.

The road safety experts urged the authorities to fill potholes and resurface damaged patches, install lane reflectors, signage, and rumble strips, enforce speed limits and driver rest regulations and deploy night highway patrols.

HORROR PAIN...

Post-mortem done, bodies handed over to kin; 19 injured get treatment

HANS NEWS SERVICE
HYDERABAD

THE injured passengers in the RTC bus and tipper collision were treated at Chevella and nearby hospitals, while the post-mortem examinations of the deceased were conducted by a team of doctors from Gandhi and Osmania Hospitals. The bodies were handed over to their families by 3 p.m.

According to officials, 19 passengers died in the accident, including 13 women, five men, and a two-month-old infant. As many as 19 passengers are undergoing treatment at various hospitals — 14 at Patnam Hospital, three at the CHC in Chevella, and two at Lalitha Hospital in Chevella. The condition of 18 passengers is said to be stable. Doctors stated that one patient with a head injury is under treatment but is now out of danger.

After learning about the accident, the Health Minister C Damodar Raja Narasimha directed the higher officials to rush to the accident site and supervise the treatment and complete other formalities.

He had directed the Health and Family Welfare Commissioner Sangeetha, State Medical Education Director Dr Narendra Kumar and Vaidya Vidhana Parishad Commissioner Dr Ajay Kumar to form a team of doctors to provide better treatment to the victims.

The minister directed the officials over the phone to appoint a committee of doctors to provide better treatment to the injured. The minister later visited the hospital and interacted with the injured. The minister consoled the injured, assuring that the government would oversee their treatment. He also enquired about the incident from the bus conductor.

TGSRTC announces ₹2 lakh ex-gratia after fatal Chevella crash

Corporation confirms insurance aid for victims; preliminary report clears bus driver, blames speeding tipper lorry

HANS NEWS SERVICE
HYDERABAD

THE TGSRTC has announced an ex-gratia payment of Rs 2 lakh each to the victims of the recent fatal road accident in Chevella, in addition to providing the insurance amount through the Vehicle Insurance Policy.

Y Nagi Reddy, the TGSRTC Vice Chairman and Managing Director, visited the accident site, personally monitored the rescue operations, offered his condolences to the bereaved families, and instructed officials to provide comprehensive support.

According to a preliminary inquiry conducted by the TGSRTC, there was no fault found with either the condition of the TGSRTC bus or the driving of the bus operator. The bus was confirmed to possess all necessary Fitness and valid Insurance certifications. The

corporation stated that the accident was caused by the over-speeding of a heavily loaded gravel tipper lorry, which overturned and fell onto the bus after the tipper driver lost control of the vehicle in what is known to be an accident-prone spot.

The crash occurred around 6:15 am near Indira Reddy Nagar, Mirzaguda (within Chevella limits). The bus, registered TS34TA 6354 (Tandur), was struck head-on by the tipper lorry, registered TG06T 3879, which was travelling in the opposite direction at high speed.

A senior TGSRTC officer explained that the tipper, which was loaded with gravel and hard stone chips from Lakdaram (Patancheru, Sangareddy District) and en route to Manneguda, lost control while attempting to overtake multiple vehicles. It subsequently veered directly into the path of the oncoming bus. The

resulting impact caused extensive damage to the bus, with a large volume of gravel and dust pouring into the passenger compartment. This debris led to passengers being trapped, resulting in severe breathing difficulties, multiple injuries, and fatalities due to a combination of suffocation and trauma.

Senior TGSRTC officials, including the Executive Director (O&IT), ED/HZ, JD (V&S), RM/RR, Dy.RM(O)/RR, and Dy.RM(M)/RR, rushed to the location to oversee operations and review the circumstances of the crash.

Swift rescue and relief operations were coordinated by senior Police Officers, Emergency Services personnel, the District Collector, and Revenue Department officials. TGSRTC Depot Managers from Tandur, Parigi, and Vikarabad coordinated the on-ground response and the transfer of the injured to hospitals.

