

# 1,125 Indian star tortoises seized from train passengers

They were to be smuggled to Bangladesh, say DRI officials

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT**  
VISAKHAPATNAM

In a major haul, 1,125 endangered Indian star tortoises, which were meant to be smuggled to Bangladesh, were seized from three passengers on board a train at the city railway station.

Acting on intelligence inputs, the officials of Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI), Vizag Regional Unit, searched the Yesvantpur-Howrah Express on Saturday and found the three passengers with the tortoises stuffed in cloth bags in coach S-7, a DRI communiqué said here on Sunday.

The passengers who boarded the train in Vijayawada were travelling to Howrah in West Bengal from where the tortoises were meant to be smuggled to Bangladesh. During the search, the DRI official found the tortoises of different sizes stuffed in five bags and apprehended the pas-



The species is listed in the Schedule IV of Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972.

sengers. The DRI officials roped in forest officials to examine the species. The Divisional Forest Officer of Vizag certified that the species were Indian star tortoises (*Geochelone elegans*).

### **Categorised 'Vulnerable'**

The species is categorised as 'Vulnerable' in the red list of endangered species of the International Union for Conservation of Nature the global authority on the status of

the natural world and the measures needed to safeguard it. The species is listed in the Schedule IV of the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972 and prohibited from export under the Foreign Trade Policy. The species are liable for confiscation under the Customs Act, 1962.

"The three passengers have admitted that they were given the tortoises by a person at Chelur near Balegowdanahalli village in Karnataka, saying that he had collected the species from Madanapalle in Chittoor district. The person told the passengers that the tortoises should be delivered to his accomplice in Howrah and from there they would be exported to Bangladesh," the DRI communiqué said.

The tortoises were seized under the Customs Act, 1962 and have been handed over to Forest Range Officer, Vizag for safe custody. Further investigation is on.