

It's final: No more horse cart rides on Tableland

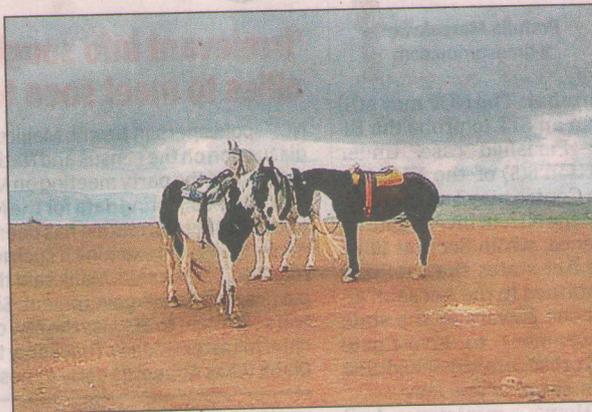
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Mumbai: The Supreme Court has upheld the Bombay high court order three years ago prohibiting horse cart rides on 80 acres of the Tableland, the famous tourist spot in Panchgani.

"It is very clear to us, considering the topography, the high court is right in prohibiting the use of 80 acres Tableland by the horse cart owners," said a bench of Chief Justice of India Sharad Bobde, and Justices Bhushan Gavi and Surya Kant on Friday. The apex court also directed the Panchgani municipal council to "set out a plan for providing a levelled track for horse carts within 20 acres demarcated for horse cart owners".

Horse cart owners had approached the Supreme Court against the 2017 order of the high court, barring them from 80 acres of the Tableland. It had allowed them to use "designated tracks" on 20 acres on the lower side of the Tableland.

They pointed out it would be impossible to use the 20 acres as it was "extremely uneven and unsuitable



for horse carts" and wanted to use the main Tableland, but stay within a road on 2 acres. But the SC bench observed that the "HC is right in restricting the horse cart owners to the 20 acres of land below the Tableland".

The owners also pleaded that they had been plying the horse carts on the Tableland for the entertainment of tourists for a long time. The apex court found merit in the submission by Narender Hooda, counsel for the horse cart owners, that it was a question of their livelihood and asked the civic body to provide a levelled track as against the present track which is "dangerous" at places.

Kunal Cheema, counsel for the Panchgani Municipal Council, said the possibility of providing levelled track for horse carts can be explored. The SC asked them to explore the possibility of "levying some entry fee or cess for generating funds for the same (leveling the tracks)". The apex court will hear the matter for compliance after six weeks.

The SC also directed the municipal council to "consider providing alternative livelihood for horse cart owners either by formulating some scheme for purchase of taxis or allotment of shop areas at a suitable place to them".