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Integrating Jammu and Kashmir: The Banihal-Katra Rail Link Tunnel

In what could be termed as an exemplary endeavour towards the building up of New India, Prime Minister Narendra Modi gifted the nation the high-value Chenani-Nashri Tunnel in the State of Jammu and Kashmir. Inaugurated on the 2nd of April 2017, the venture has been regarded as an extremely important and well thought of connectivity of Kashmir with the rest of the country. It was the Jammu-Udhampur-Katra-Qazigund-Baramulla railway operation began earlier which set the ball rolling.

Background of the Banihal-Katra Rail Link

With a view to provide an alternative and a reliable transportation system to Jammu and Kashmir (J & K), the Government of India planned a 345 km long rail link joining the Kashmir Valley with the Indian Railway Network. Declared as a Project of national importance in March, 2002, the Jammu Udhampur-Katra-Quazikund-Baramulla railway line may be regarded as an altruistic project in the construction of a mountain railways. The project is likely to be completed by 2020. Despite difficult terrain and the uncertain geology, work on the sector is progressing satisfactorily and 35 km out of 95 km of tunneling has been reportedly completed. Till recently, trains in Kashmir moved only from Baramulla to Banihal via Budgam-Srinagar-Anantnag and Qazigund. Now through this cherished and sustained rail connectivity, trains can also ply from Katra. The prized network will not only help the people of the Valley in increasing their facility to travel but also assist in meeting contingencies.



Major held up in the project were through the five Public Interest Litigations (PILs) filed in the Apex Court regarding the alignment of the project. With the Supreme Court stating that the railways were the best to judge the alignment and thus disposing of all the PILs, the alignment work at the Katra-Banihal project shall be completed within a time frame of three years from now. In order to add to the stations at Banihal and Baramullah, two new halting stations at Ratnipora and Sadura have also been proposed. The rail track is likely to have the world's longest and highest bridge (359 metres high, with a span of 467 metres). An official handout released by the Additional Director General, Public Relations, the Railway Board, mentioned of special trains being planned to ply between Jammu and Katra from Howrah, Mumbai and Ahmedabad. IRCTC will also work towards firming up much desired tourism packages and encourage religious tourism in this sector. Shri AK Mittal, Chairman Railway Board, informed of the investments as Rs. 45,000 crore in 2014-15, 93,000 crore during 2015-16 and 1.21 lakh crores in 2016-17 to include expansion of the network, doubling and tripling of lines, electrification, laying out of new tracks and modernizing of the signaling system.

Socio-economic Impact of the Project

Completion of this project will provide an all weather and reliable connectivity between the J & K State and rest of the country by the railway network, as follows:-

Construction of Access Roads – A total of 262 km of approach roads to work sites are to be constructed, out of which 160 km are already constructed. With completion of approach roads, more than 73 villages will have road connectivity to the benefit of as many as 1,47,000 people. 29 villages have already been connected.



Employment Generation - Direct employment to the local people (about 7000) and indirect employment to thousands to meet the day to day requirement of manpower would provide economic empowerment and help mitigate militancy. Permanent job in the Railways to one of the family members, whose more than 75 percent of land has been acquired - 343 persons so far - have been provided The Indian Railways could thus serve as a game changer for the state of J & K.

Chenani-Nashri Tunnel

In yet another enterprising and a resolute step, comes the Chenani-Nashri Tunnel linking Chenani of Jammu Sector to Nashri in Kashmir. Deemed to be India's longest road tunnel (9.28 km) it connects the Kashmir Valley to Jammu by an all weather route and reduces the travel by 31 km. World class surveillance system equips the Chenani-Nashri Tunnel. All necessary environmental safety measures have been kept in mind in this big time project built in the lap of the mighty and invincible Himalayas. Among its various salient features, one is Variable Speed Driver (VSD) which are installed at the North (Nashri) and South (Chenani) portals to control air supply and exhausts. Considered to be an avant-garde, the Tunnel has come up in the country's toughest terrain. This apart, a total of 124 cameras and linear heat deduction system inside the Tunnel shall alert the Integrated Tunnel Control Room (ITCR) located outside the Tunnel, should any eventuality arise. Bypassing the snow bound upper reaches, the Tunnel shall reduce the journey time by roughly two hours. The combined effort of over 1,500 engineers, geologists and skilled workers have gone into the effort. Another highlight of the Tunnel is the use of over 6000 LED multiple coloured lights that help in breaking the monotony for the drivers. Further, an Automated Integrated Traffic Control system would monitor movement of traffic round the clock. Interestingly, listening to 92.7 FM is mandatory for vehicles moving inside the Tunnel wherein all the emergency messages shall be relayed in case of any exigency. ABB limited, the Zurich based headquarters of power automation technology multinational firm has installed its state-of-the-art ventilation



system. The ABB Ltd. is remembered for building the world's most powerful ventilation system for Gottard Base Tunnel in Switzerland in December 2016.

While inaugurating the Tunnel, Prime Minister Modi drew a distinction between progressive and the forward looking Kashmiri youth and the infamous stone-pelters and all their negative vibes sullyng the valley. Indeed, the Prime Minister is leaving no stones unturned in achieving the mantra of 'Reform, Perform and Transform'.



About VIF

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