The Indian Railway added another feather in its cap with the historic milestone of connecting Kashmir Valley with the Jammu region. The Prime Minister dedicated the newly constructed railway line between Banihal (Jammu region) – Qazigund (Kashmir valley) section and flagged off the first DEMU train from Banihal through the Pir Panjal tunnel – the longest transportation tunnel of India, from Banihal Railway station on 26th June 2013. On commissioning of this section, the first rail link has been established between the Jammu Region and Kashmir Valley providing all weather connectivity with significantly reduced travel time through the Pir Panjal mountains.

This is an alternative connection between the two regions for the Jawahar Tunnel too, which is often snow bound during the winter months. With this section the distance between Banihal-Qazigund section has been reduced to 17.7 kms by railway line instead of 35 kms long road length. With the completion of this section the Kashmir Valley has come a step closer to being connected to the remaining Indian Railway network, signifying the dedication and resolution of Northern Railway in providing rail connectivity to the farthest corners under its jurisdiction.

Ircon International Ltd., a PSU under the Ministry of Railways, has been the
principal executing agency for Northern Railway to execute the work of Dharam-
Qazigund Section of USBRL Project through an agreement signed in 2004 which
includes planning, survey, design and construction of the entire project. The Kashmir
Valley railway is a 119 km long modern railway line that became completely
operational in October 2009. So far it is an island railway, not yet connected to the
Indian Railway network. It connects Baramula in the western part of Kashmir to
Qazigund at the other end of the Valley, via Srinagar.

The extension of this railway line beyond the Pir Panjal mountains in to the Jammu
region provides connectivity between the new railway section Qazigund-Banihal.

On 28th December, 2012, the first trial run train was operated on this section which
is 17.7 kms long, of this 6.5 km is on cutting and embankment including bridges.

This section mostly consists of a 11.2 km long, Tunnel T-80 which pierces through
the Pir Panjal range, providing a direct rail connection between the Kashmir Valley
and Jammu region. About 11,78,500 cubic meters of earthwork in cutting and filling
has been done. The maximum depth of cutting on this section is 15.20 meters and
maximum height of embankment is 16.70 meters. 39 bridges have also been
constructed in this section which include two major bridges, 30 minor bridges and 7
Road Over Bridges/Road Under Bridges.

The total expenditure of Rs. 1691.00 cr. has been incurred by the railways to
complete this section.Pir Panjal Railway Tunnel (Tunnel T-80) has been provided
the State of the Art systems with CCTV cameras at every 62.5 m, linear fire
detection system, fire fighting system with fire hydrants at every 125 m, emergency
telephone with communication to control room at every 250 m, fire extinguishers
and fire alarm at every 250 m, air quality monitoring system at every 500 m, escape route signs to guide the shortest escape route in emergency at every 50 m, emergency lighting and normal lighting and public address system. A 3.0 m wide road along the track for rescue and maintenance purpose has been constructed with a 772.0 m long escape tunnel to provide additional escape route. Tunnel ventilation system has been provided which consists of 25 fans along the tunnel, installed in the ceiling of tunnel in groups of 5 each.

Falling in difficult and mountainous terrain, the State of Jammu & Kashmir has always been a challenge to transportation providers. Other factors which increase the difficulty in providing modes of mass transportation is that the area is geologically unstable, prone to tremors and earthquakes, with deep gorges alternating steep between rocky mountains. For any construction activity, the weather is quite inclement too. Long months of incessant rains and heavy snow can put life on hold for many. But there is a positive fall out of this difficulty too. The residents of these areas have evolved fine traditions in handicrafts in the periods of being home bound and have made established themselves as the finest craftsmen in the world.
Northern Railway has worked in these circumstances and has created the most modern railway line in the Kashmir Valley which provides economical, all weather connectivity. This is something the residents appreciate, especially when other facilities grind to a halt in deep snow. While building this railway line, Northern Railway have to cope with the difficult terrain, geology and the weather. Since it was found to be imperative to complete this railway line at the earliest, construction was started simultaneously at different sites and as the stretch in the Kashmir valley rail link was completed before the rail link which would connect it to the remaining Indian Railway network, all rolling stock and other equipments required for construction and running of trains was transported by road and reassembled once it had reached there. But the result is gratifying.

The commissioning of this section would help realize about 114 year old dream of connecting Jammu region with Kashmir valley. It was Maharaja Pratap Singh who first explored the possibility of connecting Jammu to Kashmir Valley with a Railway Line way back in 1898.

(PIB Feature).

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