

Chenab bridge ends wait for Delhi-Kashmir rail link

DHRUVAKSH SAHA

New Delhi, 6 June

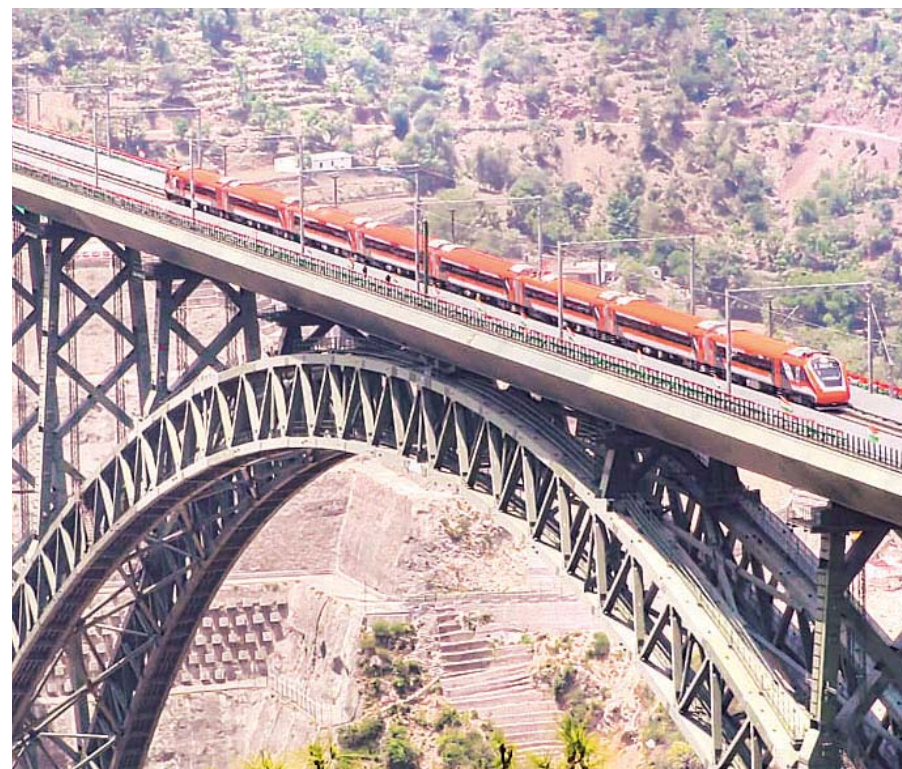
India's wait for rail connectivity between New Delhi and the Kashmir Valley ended on Friday as Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated a host of infrastructure projects, including two Vande Bharat trains and two of India's most advanced rail bridges — Chenab and Anji.

"Whether it is Chenab Bridge or Anji Bridge, these will become a means of prosperity for both Jammu and Kashmir. This will not only increase tourism, but will also benefit other sectors of the economy. Rail connectivity between Jammu and Kashmir will create new opportunities for businessmen of both regions. This will give impetus to the industry here, now apples from Kashmir will be able to reach the big markets of the country at a low cost, and will be able to reach on time," Modi said while inaugurating multiple infrastructure projects in Katra, including the completed Kashmir rail link.

"Be it dry fruits or pashmina shawls, the handicrafts here will now be easily able to reach any part of the country. This will also make it very easy for the people of Jammu and Kashmir to travel to other parts of the country," he said.

The Udhampur Srinagar Baramulla Rail Link (USBRL) project stretches 272 km through the rugged Himalayas. The entire project, which had been getting completed in parts over the past decades, has been completed at a cost of ₹43,780 crore, 42 years after the foundation stone was laid by then PM Indira Gandhi. It has 36 tunnels that span 119 km, and 943 bridges that knit together valleys, ridges, and mountain passes. Designed to overcome the region's challenging geography, it connects remote areas to the national rail network.

"When this project was conceptualised, I was a student in



A Vande Bharat train, flagged off by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, crosses the Chenab rail bridge in Reasi district of J&K on Friday. The train service between Katra and Srinagar is the first train connection between the Kashmir valley and the Jammu region

Photo: PTI

eighth standard. Today, I'm 55 years old," said Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah at the inauguration event.

Vande Bharat trains on the route will begin starting Saturday.

The Chenab Bridge, standing at a height of 359 metres above the river, is the world's highest railway arch bridge. It is a 1,315-metre-long steel arch bridge engineered to withstand seismic and wind conditions. A key impact of the bridge will be in enhancing connectivity between Jammu and Srinagar.

"Through Vande Bharat train moving on the bridge, it will take just about three hours to travel between Katra and Srinagar, reducing existing travel time by two-three hours," said the railways.

Modi said the bridge in and of itself will become a prominent tourist destination.

PAKISTAN ATTACKED BOTH HUMANITY AND KASHMIRIYAT IN PAHALGAM. ITS INTENTION WAS TO CREATE RIOTS IN INDIA

Narendra Modi
Prime Minister

THE LINE WILL STOP THE AIRLINES' LOOT AND WE'LL BE ABLE TO MOVE EASILY

Omar Abdullah
Chief minister, J&K

Similarly, the Anji Bridge is India's first cable-stayed rail bridge.

Speaking for the first time in J&K since the Pahalgam terror strike, Modi attacked

Pakistan for conspiring to stir instability in the region.

"Pakistan attacked both humanity and Kashmiriyat in Pahalgam. Its intention was to create riots in India. Its intention was to stop the earnings of the hardworking people of Kashmir. That is why Pakistan attacked the tourists. Tourism was continuously increasing in the last four-five years, every year a record number of tourists were coming here. Pakistan targeted tourism that helps the poor of Jammu and Kashmir run their homes," he said.

Abdullah said the introduction of train services in the Valley was a relief for the people of the Union Territory (UT) who got "looted" by airlines whenever highways in the UT had to be closed due to rains. He claimed that airlines looted J&K by hiking airfares from ₹5,000 to ₹20,000 in a matter of an hour.