

Eyeing 2019 polls, rail puts big-ticket projects on fast track

PICTURE FOR REPRESENTATION

By **Rakesh Ranjan**
in New Delhi

JUST over a year is left for the 2019 General Elections and the railway ministry is under tremendous pressure to complete several infrastructure projects. The projects are crucial for transformation of the rail system in India and so the ministry has advanced the deadline of these big ticket projects.

The prime minister's office (PMO) is constantly monitoring the progress of dedicated freight corridors and upcoming world-class stations at Habibganj in Bhopal and Gandhi Nagar in Gujarat.

A top railway ministry official said the PMO wants both projects to be completed before 2019 General Elections. The dedicated freight corridor was scheduled to be completed by 2020 but the ministry has



Projects crucial to transforming rail system

revised the deadline to February 2019, just before the elections.

Similarly, the ministry has told the contractors to complete the two world-class stations by 2018. The idea is to showcase these projects as big achievements of the Modi government in rail transport sector during elections.

The eagerness of the government can also be gauged by the fact that no key project announced by the present government has been completed till now. At the same time the government has also been facing flak for deteriorating rail safety after a series of accidents and rise in passenger fare with introduction of surge pricing in premium trains.

■ PMO is constantly monitoring the progress of dedicated freight corridors and upcoming world-class stations at Habibganj in Bhopal and Gandhi Nagar in Gujarat

■ The dedicated freight corridor, scheduled to be completed by 2020, has a revised deadline of February 2019

A top railway board official said the contractors have been instructed to expedite the work on DFC and keeping in view the urgency, its deadline has been advanced. Earlier, the DFC was scheduled to be operational from December 2019 but now the deadline has been revised to February 2019.

This, officials said, would also increase the average speed of passenger trains on Delhi-

GEARING UP

■ Rail also asked contractors to finish two world-class stations by 2018

■ Besides, ministry is also fast-tracking Kashmir valley rail project that will enable trains to operate between New Delhi and Srinagar in 14 hours flat

Mumbai and Delhi-Howrah corridors by 25 kmph. Railway plans to operate trains at the speed of 160 kmph on these two most saturated corridors in the country.

While the Delhi-Mumbai corridor is 115 per cent saturated, the Delhi-Howrah corridor is operating at 150 per cent of the capacity.

However, with commissioning of the DFC, railways

expect the situation to relent.

Two key projects launched in 2005 are the 1,504km-long western dedicated freight corridor (Mumbai-Delhi) and the 1318km-long eastern DFC (Delhi-Howrah). When commissioned, the new freight corridors will absorb 70 per cent of the existing freight traffic on those routes, thus significantly freeing up line capacity.

Officials said the ministry is also fast-tracking the Kashmir valley rail project which will enable trains to operate between New Delhi and Srinagar in 14 hours flat.

The railway line, which could become functional in four years, is seen as a big development push by the Narendra Modi government in the Valley.

Costing over ₹10,000 crore, it will provide all-weather connectivity and be a cornerstone of the government's outreach programme in Jammu & Kashmir. The project is also being monitored by the prime minister's office.

