

## Northeast railway projects should get special status: panel

A parliamentary panel has proposed that the special status and facilities given to railway projects in Jammu and Kashmir be extended to the northeast as well.

Chairperson of parliamentary standing committee on railways Basudev Acharya said the proposal to put ongoing railway projects in the northeast at par with those in Jammu and Kashmir has been made to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh.

'All the capital cities of the northeast are to be connected by rail by 2011,' he said.

Some important railway projects in Jammu and Kashmir and northeast India had earlier been declared as national projects. These include the Udhampur-Baramula railway project (in Kashmir), Lumding-Badarpur-Kumarghat gauge conversion (in Assam) and the Kumarghat-Agartala project (in Tripura).

'We have visited some important railway project sites in the northeast aimed at expediting such works,' Acharya told journalists here Thursday.

The standing committee would also propose the construction of a railway line up to south Tripura's bordering sub-division Sabroom.

He said Agartala would be the second capital city in the northeast after Guwahati to come under the railway map by next year.

Tripura now has a 66-km railway line with Assam that will be extended up to Manu in Dhalai district. 'Laying of the Manu-Agartala (109 km) railway line, which was scheduled to be completed by March 2007, has been delayed by few months due to technical problems, particularly difficulties related to tunnel construction,' Acharya said.

The project cost was estimated at Rs.7 billion and Rs.5.40 billion has already been spent so far. More than 75 percent of the work had been completed.

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