

Historic Breakthrough Achieved at Zojila Tunnel Project; Shri Nitin Gadkari Highlights Transformational Connectivity Initiatives Across Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh

Zojila Tunnel to Establish All-Weather Connectivity Between Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh; Strategic Infrastructure Push to Accelerate Regional Development, Tourism, Trade and National Security

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Union Minister of Road Transport & Highways Shri Nitin Gadkari today witnessed the historic breakthrough of the main tunnel at the eastern portal of the Zojila Tunnel Project at Minamarg in Kargil district. Lieutenant Governor of Jammu & Kashmir Shri Manoj Sinha, Chief Minister Shri Omar Abdullah, Members of Parliament, public representatives, senior officials and distinguished guests were also present on the occasion. Lieutenant Governor of Ladakh Shri Vinai Kumar Saxena joined the event virtually and lauded this significant milestone in the Zojila Tunnel Project.

The breakthrough marks a major milestone in India's road infrastructure development and brings the country closer to realizing year-round connectivity between Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh.

Zojila Tunnel: A Landmark Engineering Achievement

Being constructed between Baltal and Minamarg on National Highway-1, the nearly 14-km-long bi-directional Zojila Tunnel is one of India's most ambitious mountain infrastructure projects, being developed at a cost of approximately ₹6,800 crore. Built at altitudes ranging from 2,900 metres to 3,310 metres, the project represents a significant engineering accomplishment in one of the world's most challenging terrains.

Despite heavy snowfall, harsh weather conditions and complex geological challenges, the project has progressed steadily through the efforts of engineers, workers, consultants, contractors, the National Highways & Infrastructure Development Corporation Limited (NHIDCL) and other stakeholders. Shri Gadkari congratulated all those associated with the successful breakthrough.



Advanced Safety Features and World-Class Infrastructure

Shri Nitin Gadkari highlighted that the tunnel will be equipped with modern ventilation systems, automatic fire detection systems, advanced CCTV surveillance and cross-passage facilities for pedestrians to ensure safe and efficient travel.

To address snow loads and geological challenges, the project includes eight cut-and-cover sections, four bridges, 40 culverts, snow galleries, catch dams, avalanche protection structures, approach roads and state-of-the-art safety arrangements.

Transforming Connectivity, Tourism and Strategic Mobility

Shri Gadkari said that the Zojila Tunnel is much more than a transportation project and will serve as a gateway to development for the region.

Upon completion, travel time between Sonamarg and Minamarg will be reduced from nearly two hours to about 30 minutes, resulting in significant savings in time and fuel. The project will also reduce accident risks and disruptions caused by avalanches and adverse weather conditions.

The tunnel is expected to boost tourism, facilitate trade, improve access to remote areas and strengthen connectivity to border regions. From a national security perspective, year-round connectivity will enable faster and more efficient movement of the Indian Army, equipment, supplies and logistics, thereby strengthening strategic preparedness.

The project will also generate employment opportunities, promote economic growth and improve the quality of life of local communities through enhanced connectivity and regional integration.



Major Connectivity Projects Strengthening Ladakh

The Minister stated that road and tunnel projects worth about ₹18,000 crore are under implementation between Kargil and Leh-Ladakh.

Among the important initiatives is the Kargil–Zaskar–Padum highway project, which is improving access to the Zaskar region while strengthening strategic connectivity and facilitating Army movement.

To improve traffic management in Leh, South and North Bypass projects are being developed to provide seamless movement for vehicles travelling towards Srinagar, Manali and Khardung La without entering the city.

Shri Gadkari also highlighted the proposed Fatu-La Twin-Tube Tunnel and Kela Pass Tunnel, which will improve all-weather connectivity and enhance access to key tourism destinations, including Pangong Lake.

Direct All-Weather Connectivity on the Manali–Leh Axis

The Minister informed that tunnel projects are being planned at Baralacha La, Lachulung La and Tanglang La along the Manali–Leh route.

These projects will substantially improve travel reliability, reduce journey time and strengthen year-round connectivity to Ladakh.

Highway Development Worth ₹1.35 Lakh Crore Underway in Jammu & Kashmir

Following the breakthrough, Shri Gadkari highlighted the Government's broader efforts to transform road infrastructure across Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh.

He informed that highway projects worth approximately ₹1.35 lakh crore, comprising completed, ongoing and upcoming works, are being implemented across Jammu & Kashmir to strengthen connectivity, improve logistics efficiency and accelerate socio-economic development.



High-Speed Corridors Transforming Jammu & Kashmir

Shri Nitin Gadkari said that four major high-speed corridors are under development to strengthen connectivity across Jammu & Kashmir.

The Jammu–Udhampur–Srinagar corridor is nearing completion and will significantly reduce travel time through upgraded highway infrastructure and tunnel networks.

The Jammu–Chenani–Anantnag corridor will improve connectivity between the Chenab Valley districts and Kashmir Valley, while the Srinagar–Baramulla–Uri corridor will strengthen connectivity in North Kashmir and facilitate smoother movement of people and goods.

The Jammu–Akhnoor–Poonch corridor is also progressing rapidly and is expected to improve connectivity in border districts while providing substantial travel-time savings.

Strategic and Border Connectivity Initiatives

The Minister highlighted several upcoming projects of strategic importance, including the Katra–Srinagar High-Speed Corridor, the Rafiaband–Kupwara–Chowkibal–Tangdhar road project and the Srinagar–Sonamarg–Gumri corridor.

These projects will improve access to border areas, facilitate tourism, support horticulture activities and strengthen strategic infrastructure.

A new corridor connecting Surankote, Bufliaz, Supen, Doodhpathri and Magam is also under planning to enhance connectivity between the Pir Panjal region and Kashmir Valley.

Ring Roads to Improve Urban Mobility

Union Minister Shri Nitin Gadkari stated that the Srinagar Ring Road project is being implemented in multiple phases to decongest the city and facilitate seamless movement towards Baramulla, Kupwara, Bandipora, Gurez, Kargil and Leh. Connectivity to Srinagar Airport and the railway station is also being strengthened through dedicated spur links.

Similarly, the Jammu Ring Road project is being developed to reduce urban congestion and improve traffic circulation around the city. The proposed eastern section will further strengthen regional connectivity and provide a shorter route towards Katra.

Delhi–Amritsar–Katra Expressway to Strengthen Regional Linkages

The Minister said that the Delhi–Amritsar–Katra Greenfield Expressway will provide faster and more efficient connectivity between Delhi and Katra while strengthening economic linkages across northern India and improving access to Jammu & Kashmir through a modern access-controlled corridor.

Tunnel Infrastructure Driving a Connectivity Revolution

Highlighting the Government's focus on tunnel infrastructure in the Himalayan region, Shri Gadkari said that tunnel construction has become a key component of highway development to ensure all-weather connectivity, improve road safety and enhance strategic mobility.

He emphasized that these infrastructure initiatives are not merely transportation projects but instruments of economic growth, tourism development, employment generation, regional integration and national security.

Shri Gadkari said that the successful breakthrough of the Zojila Tunnel symbolizes the emergence of a New India that transforms geographical challenges into opportunities for development, prosperity and national progress.



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