

# The Train to Kashmir

Udhampur-Srinagar-Baramulla Rail Link is an engineering marvel that connects the Kashmir Valley to the rest of the country by train; a gamechanger that can revolutionise trade, tourism, and the economy of J&K.

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Jammu | June 7, 2025 06:43 IST



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Prime Minister Narendra Modi with the Tricolour on the Chenab bridge in Reasi district, Friday. (PTI)

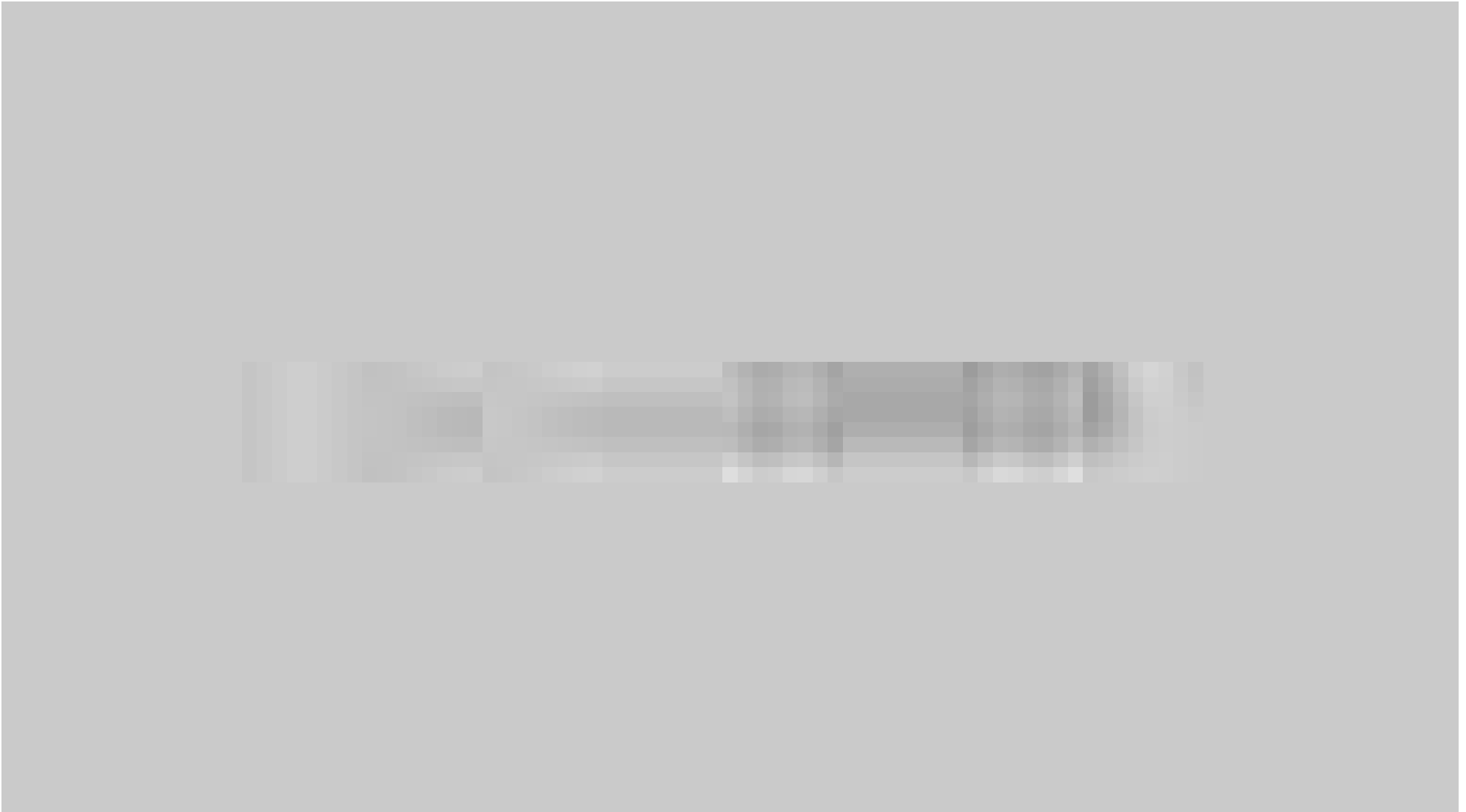
Prime Minister Narendra Modi flagged off two specially designed Vande Bharat trains between Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Katra and Srinagar on Friday. The inauguration of a direct rail link to the Valley is a historic milestone that is likely to have a far-reaching impact on the development, trade, and tourism of Kashmir, and its closer all-round integration with the rest of the country.

## A very long journey

The first railway line in the former princely state of [Jammu](#) and Kashmir was built by the British in 1897 over a distance of 40-45 km between Jammu and Sialkot in the plains.

In 1902 and 1905, a railway line was proposed between Rawalpindi and Srinagar along the course of the Jhelum, which would have connected the Kashmir Valley with the railway network of undivided India. But Maharaja Pratap Singh of Jammu and Kashmir was in favour of a Jammu-Srinagar line via Reasi, and neither project progressed.

After Partition, Sialkot went to Pakistan, and Jammu was disconnected from the rail network of India. Until the inauguration of the Pathankot-Jammu line in 1975, the railway station nearest to Jammu and Kashmir was Pathankot in Punjab.



A Vande Bharat train crosses the newly inaugurated Chenab rail bridge in J&K's Reasi district, Friday. This is the first rail link between the Valley and Jammu region. (PTI)

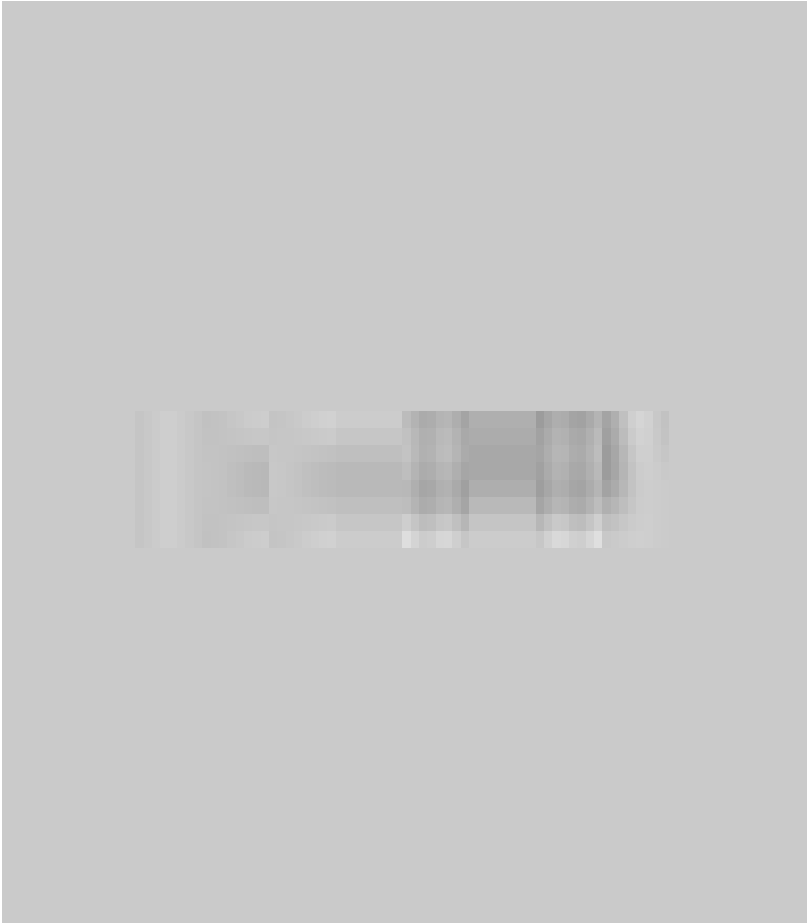
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In 1983, work began on a railway line between Jammu and Udhampur. This 53-km line was supposed to be completed in five years, but ultimately took 21 years. With work still underway, the central government announced, in 1994, the extension of this

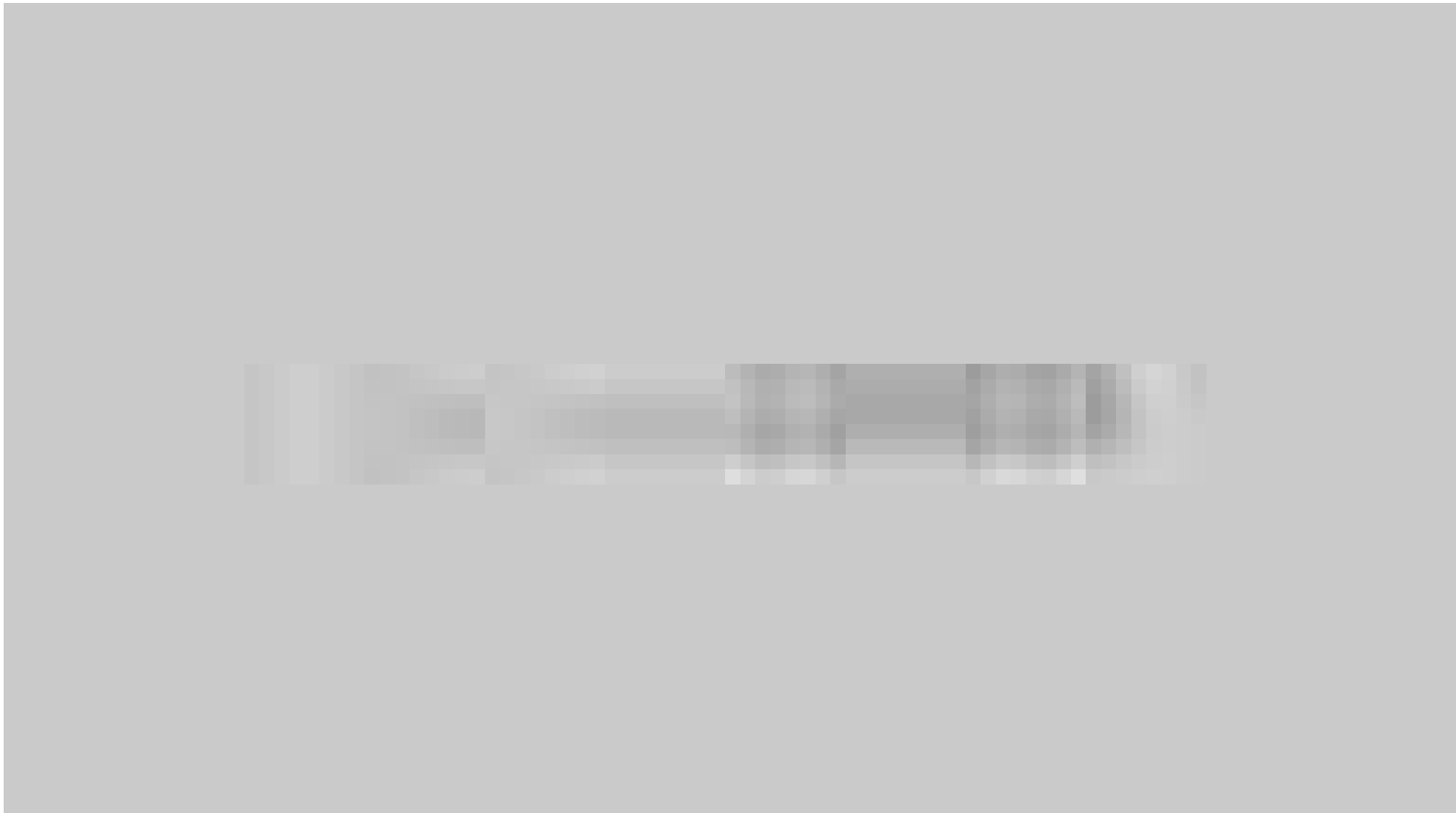
line from Udhampur to Srinagar, and onward to Baramulla.



This was the Udhampur-Srinagar-Baramulla Rail Link (USBRL) Project, which was approved in March 1995 at an estimated cost of Rs 2,500 crore. In 2002, the USBRL was declared a national project, and sections of the line became operational over the years that followed.



The USBRL is finally complete now —272 km of tracks built at a cost of Rs 43,780 crore, passing through 36 tunnels and over 943 bridges, bringing Katra and Srinagar within 3 hours of each other.



The Vande Bharat Express to Katra, Jammu, crosses Qazigund in Anantnag district on Friday. (PTI)

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### **An engineering feat**

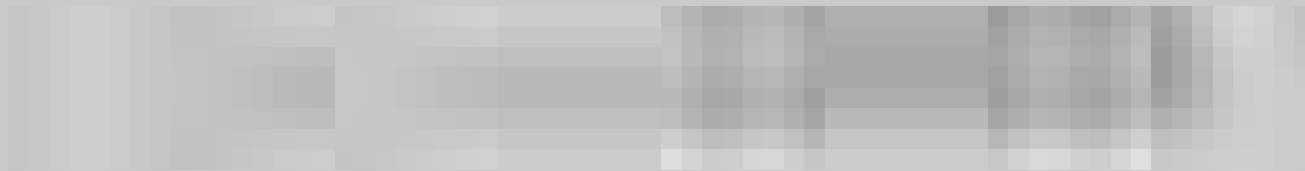
The Himalayas are young, and the geologically unstable Shivalik Hills and Pir Panjal mountains lie in the seismically most active Zones IV and V. The terrain is difficult and sees heavy snow in winter, and presented serious challenges in the construction of

bridges and tunnels.





Among the several firsts of this remarkable achievement of railway engineering are the world's highest railway arch bridge, its arch rising 359 metres above the bed of the Chenab in Reasi district; the first cable-stayed bridge of the Railways on the Anji Khad, also in Reasi district; and the country's longest transport tunnel, 12.77 km long, in Ramban district.



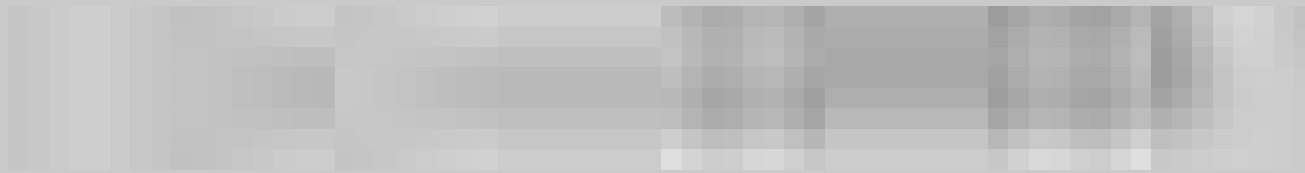
Vande Bharat loco pilots in their cabin at Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Katra station, ahead of the arrival of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to flag off the train to

Kashmir on Friday. (ANI)

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## Development benefits

Two Vande Bharat trains in each direction will cover the distance between Katra and Srinagar in about three hours, halving the time taken by the road journey. The trains will run even in deep winter, providing round-the-year all-weather connectivity to the Valley. The train will be extended soon to Jammu Tawi, which will make it possible to roll into Srinagar directly from almost anywhere in the country.



The highest railway arch bridge in the world, soars 359 metres above the Chenab riverbed, its central arch spanning 467 metres.

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The potential of the train in revolutionising tourism in Jammu and Kashmir has been repeatedly stressed. Over time, the USBRL is expected to have a major impact on the economy of the Union Territory, facilitating hassle-free transport of goods such as apples,

dry fruits, pashmina shawls, handicrafts etc., to other parts of the country in the shortest possible time and at lower costs. The cost of transporting items of daily use to the Valley from elsewhere in the country is also expected to go down significantly.

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