

.Wednesday, October 26, 2005

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'26 railway projects pending for over 15 yrs'

Pioneer News Service / Bhubaneswar

Chairman of the Standing Committee on Railways, Mr Basudeb Acharia, on Tuesday came down heavily on the railway authorities for having given a short shrift to Orissa.

"Despite its potential in minerals and other natural resources, Orissa is way behind other states in the country as far as its rail infrastructure goes," Mr Acharia said, adding the shabby state of railways in Orissa is mainly due to a lack of political will.

"There are more than 200 pending projects worth Rs 35,000 crore in the country out of which the State accounts for as many as 26, including Daitari-Banspani, Angul-Sukinda and Talcher-Bimla railway lines, pending for over 15 years," he said.

Speaking to mediapersons on Tuesday after reviewing the work of the Eastern Railway, Mr Acharia said Orissa needs a good railway network for economic growth and industrialisation of the State. Most of the projects here are lying incomplete and time overrun has led to huge loss of funds.

The rate of returns in most of the projects is more than 20 per cent but the projects are backlogged due to scarcity of funds. The committee will recommend the Ministry of Railways to provide sufficient funds to expedite the completion of projects at the earliest, added Mr Acharia.

"In the present scenario, for both the economic development as well as industrial growth of the State, expansion of railways is required," he felt.

The committee will recommend the extension of the Rupsa-Baripada railway line, which was recently converted to a broad-gauge and was extended up to Tata Nagar. Besides, the committee will also recommend conversion of the 90-km-long Nuapada-Gunupur railway line, the only narrow gauge under the East Coast Railway (ECoR), into a broad gauge. This will make the EcoR the first railway zone to successfully complete the uni-gauge project.

The committee expressed its satisfaction on the ongoing electrification projects in EcoR, which is completed up to Bhadrak. If the electrification work finishes fast, the committee will recommend introduction of Multiple Electric Mechanised Units train services for daily commuters of Cuttack, Bhubaneswar, Berhampur and Sambalpur.

The committee will also recommend increasing the capacity of EcoR from 93 coaches to 150 coaches and setting up of a wagon repair shop under the EcoR so that it need not depend on other railways. Mr Acharia expressed his satisfaction on the overall growth of the EcoR in the last six months, which is more than the national average.

"At present, the EcoR transports 58 per cent of coal from the State which will be increased to 70 per cent for the economic well being of the State," said Mr Acharia.

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