

Governor J J Singh is a busy man, chasing Arunachal works in Delhi

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AN ARUNACHAL Pradesh MP left quite a few red faces in Parliament recently when he said they could approach Beijing for a rail line if Delhi couldn't deliver. Now, the state has found an unusual votary in Governor J J Singh. While it's chief ministers who are known to chase state-specific developmental issues in New Delhi's power corridors, the former army chief and retired general has taken up that role for the easternmost frontier state.



With the PM when he came visiting

Since he moved into Arunachal Pradesh Raj Bhawan two months ago, Singh has held one-on-one

meetings with Union Ministers for Tourism, Civil Aviation, Communications and Information Technology, Defence, Surface Transport and Railways, presenting the state's aspirations, showcasing its potential and demanding its due.

The General's ideas range from opening up the Mechuka and Tawang sectors to foreign tourists and fast-tracking the work on a greenfield airport at Tawang, to getting Bharat Sanchar Nigam Ltd to provide mobile telecommunication in Arunachal's

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J J chasing Arunachal works in Delhi

border areas and relaxing Restricted Area Permit (RAP) and Protected Area Permit (PAP) for foreign tourists, while simultaneously streamlining the system of issuing Inner Line Permits (ILPs) to Indian nationals.

And one of the primary items on Singh's agenda is a railway line. During his meeting with Railways Minister Lalu Prasad Yadav, the General gave the example of the Qinghai-Tibet Railway to make his point on economic viability versus social and strategic needs.

Singh is learnt to have impressed upon Lalu the strategic significance of a railway line, citing the challenge of "troop movement". He also quoted news reports from Chinese agencies saying China was moving towards building a rail line to the Tibetan town of Chomo, near a Himalayan border pass to Sikkim. At a recent meeting with Tourism Minister Ambika Soni, Singh strongly advocated relaxing the norms for foreign tourists, asking her to play a "dominant role" in convincing the Centre on this. "For Arunachal Pradesh, our immediate need is to open up the Mechuka and Tawang sectors to foreign tourists," he is learnt to have told Soni.

Singh also informed her that the Arunachal Government had initiated the process for a daily helicopter service to Tawang. Emphasising the need to make issuing of ILPs citizen-friendly, the Governor suggested to the Tourism Ministry a round-the-clock process, with the use of information technology. Singh also reminded Soni of her ministry's in-principle nod to setting up 18 helipads at a cost of Rs 9 crore, and sought an early sanction to the project.

When he met Civil Aviation minister Praful Patel, Singh told him that "air-connectivity will remove the feeling of isolation and will work as a

catalyst for development of the area". Reiterating the Airport Authority of India's opinion that a greenfield airport at Tawang was feasible provided the funding pattern was the same as that for Itanagar, Singh said there was a need to put this project on fast track for "tourism as well as strategic reasons".

For the proposed greenfield airport at Itanagar, Singh told Patel that some work should start immediately "to give a visible impact in the minds of the citizen that the government is keen on keeping its promise".

The Governor also raised the issue of the five non-operational airstrips at Tezu, Pasighat, Aalo, Daporijo and Pasighat, pointing out that the airstrips which were functional till 1990 could be made operational again immediately, avoiding time-consuming formalities like pre-feasibility studies and project reports. With Communications and Information Technology Minister A Raja, Singh talked about the need to provide mobile services in border areas, where people couldn't understand why they could catch telecom signals of the neighbouring country and not their own.

He requested the Telecom Minister to immediately provide mobile communication in Walong, Kibithu and Mechuka on the Indo-China border as a goodwill gesture.

"We understand that the mobile telephone exchanges need reliable power supply. To start with we must establish mobile telecommunication facilities in all the border blocks with reliable electricity supply," Singh told Raja. He also underlined that the typical 'cost-benefit' formula would not work in this part of the country. "We have to understand the increased expectations of the people and also the strategic importance of the area," he said.