

Khaleej Times

India's Modi to visit Kashmir to unveil strategic railway

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is to make his first visit to contested Kashmir since a conflict between [India and Pakistan](#) last month, inaugurating a strategic railway to the mountainous region, his office said on Wednesday.

Modi is set to visit on Friday to open the Chenab Bridge, a 1,315-metre-long steel and concrete span that connects two mountains with an arch 359 metres above the river below.

"The project establishes all-weather, seamless rail connectivity between the Kashmir Valley and the rest of the country," the Prime Minister's Office said in a statement.

Modi is expected to flag off a special train.

The 272-kilometre Udhampur-Srinagar-Baramulla railway -- with 36 tunnels and 943 bridges -- has been constructed "aiming to transform regional mobility and driving socio-economic integration", the statement added.

Its dramatic centrepiece is the Chenab Bridge, which India calls the "world's highest railway arch bridge".

While several road and pipeline bridges are higher, Guinness World Records confirmed that Chenab trumps the previous highest railway bridge, the Najiehe in China.

Indian Railways calls the \$24-million bridge "arguably the biggest civil engineering challenge faced by any railway project in India in recent history".

The bridge will facilitate the movement of people and goods -- as well as troops -- that was previously possible only via treacherous mountain roads and air.

The train line could slash travel time between the town of Katra and Srinagar, the region's key city, by half, taking around three hours.

The bridge will also revolutionise logistics in Ladakh, the icy region in India bordering China.

India and China, the world's two most populous nations, are intense rivals competing for strategic influence across South Asia.

Their troops clashed in 2020, killing at least 20 Indian and four Chinese soldiers, and forces from both sides today face off across contested high-altitude borderlands.

The railway begins in the garrison city of Udhampur, headquarters of the army's northern command, and runs north to Srinagar.