

A second peace bus for Kashmir today (Kashmir)

POONCH: All is set for the launch of a second trans-Kashmir bus service between the border towns of Poonch on the Indian side and Rawalakote in Pakistan-occupied-Kashmir tomorrow.

(19.06.2006)

The United Progressive Alliance chairperson and Congress president, Mrs Sonia Gandhi, and the defence minister, Mr Pranab Mukherjee, will be around when the peace bus revs up on this historic route on the Line of Control situated south of the Pir Panjal mountain range. A Muzaffarabad-Uri bus service was begun on 7 April last year.

After last year's earthquake, some crossing points were opened at the LoC for distribution of relief. The bus service on the Poonch-Rawalakote road will render fortnightly crossings on foot from Chakan-Da-Bagh redundant. Chakan-Da-Bagh, the last halt on the Indian side where passengers would be dropped by the buses from Poonch and Rawalakote, is 10 km from Poonch. From Chakan-Da-Bagh, passengers would be driven to Poonch and Rawalakote by buses belonging to the two States. Poonch is 29 km from Rawalakote.

A total of 66 civilians would be boarding the first bus from Poonch to Rawalakote. Forty-five people will travel from Rawalakote to Poonch, says Mr Shiv Darshan Singh Jamwal, senior superintendent of police, Poonch. A pregnant woman from PoK would be on board the first bus to give berth to her child in Poonch. The woman, whose identity is a secret, is due for delivery in the next few days. She has been advised against travelling but put her foot down, said Poonch's deputy commissioner, Mohammed Ramzan Thakur.

She has relatives in Poonch. Reopening of the Poonch-Rawalakote road has long been demanded by families divided by the political border. The maximum number of divided families in the two halves of Kashmir live in Poonch-Rajouri. Most people in Poonch have relatives across the LoC that divides Jammu and Kashmir between India and Pakistan. People on both sides of the border share a language and culture. As this historic road was once a lifeline for people on either side of the LoC, its reopening is an emotional resonance. Before Partition, which divided the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir into two parts, the people used to travel from Poonch to Rawalakote and back taking two routes. Passing through Kunia, Mangnar, Jhalas, Salotri, they reached Rawalakote across the Poonch River. At Salotri, a bridge on the River Poonch used to link Poonch with Rawalakote in PoK.

But, during the 1965 Indo-Pak war, the bridge was completely damaged as the famous Hajjpeer mountain range - through which the road runs - saw some of the bloodiest confrontations.

The second route passed through Khari-Gulpur-Tetrinot. The 29-km road, long strewn with hundreds of anti-personnel and anti-tank mines on both sides, will now reunite families as part of confidence-building measures between India and Pakistan. "After the reopening was announced, the road needed to be worked on for travel.

Even before that, the authorities had to decide which of the routes would be used for the second peace bus," said Mr Jamwal, SSP, Poonch. He said the first route, via Mendla, would have entailed the spending of more money and time than the other one. Two culverts and a bridge with a 250-metre span needed to be constructed. It also needed widening and black-topping. However, the other route, passing through Tetrinote, was less time-consuming, with only a four-kilometre stretch to get to PoK. Only 400 metres required to be de-mined by the Army, said Mr Jamwal, who is supervising security measures.

He informed this correspondent adequate steps had been taken for the inaugural ceremony. The Special Protection Group is already in town. Checkpoints have been erected at sensitive points in the insurgency-blighted district.

Both the Army and the police are active. According to Poonch's SSP, a double shift system of work was introduced for building a customs and immigration complex. At Chakhan-da-Bagh, a mosque, a temple and a gurudwara have been built in a compound to highlight Kashmir's secular traditions. "Immigration, customs and transport offices are ready. Banks have set up counters for currency exchange.

The State Road Transport Corporation has specially designed a bus for the inaugural run, the fare for which is Rs 70. The SRTC has already set up its counter in Poonch", said Mr. Jamwal. As with the Srinagar-Muzaffarabad service, passengers would travel with special permits issued on both sides. "Initially, the service will only reunite divided families," said the Jammu and Kashmir chief minister, Mr Ghulam Nabi Azad.

Von: 20.6.2006 www.thestatesman.net

[<<< zurück zu: News](#)
