

Shramik Special Trains

During COVID-19 pandemic, Indian Railways through its various endeavours provided immense assistance to the fellow citizens like Kisan Rails (Parcel Spls), demand-based freight loading and its movement etc. One of the endeavour was the introduction of Shramik Special trains to cater the strangled shramiks in various states. These trains were operational in the month of May, June and July 2020. In this endeavour, Lucknow Division (NER) has facilitated number of Shamik specials at various stations which includes Terminating as well as By-passing trains. Additional staffs were deployed to cater the rush of shramiks and precautionary measures were duly adopted for the safe passage of these shramiks. Moreover, on the demand of state-agencies, Originating Shramik specials were planned and operated for the shramiks to their respective destinations.

Brief Summary

1. Various stations of Lucknow Division (NER) where sharmik specials were terminated are as follows
 - Gorakhpur (320)
 - Lucknow (02)
 - Gonda (81)
 - Basti (87)
 - Sitapur (10)
 - Balrampur (20)
 - Lakhimpur (01)

Overall, 521 nos. of terminating Shramik Specials were dealt by the division and Gorakhpur station alone managed to deal with astounding 320 nos. of trains.

2. 400 nos. of By-passing Shramik specials dealt by Lucknow division (NER) over the three months' span of May, June and July 2020.
3. On the demand of state-agencies, 11 nos. of Shramik Specials originated from the various terminals of Lucknow Division (NER) for the Eastern part of the country. These terminal were Gorakhpur (05), Basti (02), Sitapur (02), Gonda and Khalilabad one each. These Shramik specials were planned in liaison with the state administrative agencies.

Management of Shramik Specials

1. Close coordination was established with state machinery to ensure smooth management of shramiks which were deboarding at different terminals. Special arrangements had been made to ensure decongestion at stations as many shramik trains were running in tandem.
2. Emergency cell, headed by Sr. DOM, was conceptualised and created in Divisional Control office to facilitate and monitor the movement of Shramik Specials. Officers-in-charge were deputed round-the-clock to supervise the shramik special movement in the control office and likewise stations were manned with supervisory level staff.

Additional staffs such as TIs, TNLs and TNCs were placed in each shifts to co-ordinate with station staff and provide assistance in case of any sort of contingent work. On daily basis, stats were communicated to higher authorities at every six hours.

3. Electronic and Print media were utilised to ensure spread of relevant information to general public especially shramiks about the train timings, routes, stoppages etc.
4. Beside this, social media platforms such as WhatsApp, twitter were used extensively. WhatsApp groups like Shramik Specials, Originating Shramik Specials etc were created among office personnel's for sharing of COIS mails, upcoming shramik trains, other plans and data.
5. Division has ensured for proper meal and drinking water arrangements for shramiks at various stations and along with that adequate COVID protocols such as automated hand sanitizer dispensers, social distancing norms and thermal screening were followed during the whole shramik flow.
6. More than 7 lakhs stranded Shramiks bound for different terminals of Lucknow Division (NER) such as Gorakhpur, Basti, Gonda etc were safely deboarded and reached their hometowns.
7. Roadways facilities like Buses, taxis and other arrangements outside the stations premises were made accordingly in liaison with the state agencies.
8. Division has managed to deal with 63 nos. of Intrastate and 458 nos. of Interstate origin trains and in whole division has catered Shramik rush from 15 states and 03 UTs.
9. Effective management of Shramik Specials by the division was even lauded by the CRB. A *certificate of excellence* has been given to the Station Director (GKP). Along with this, several staff were awarded as 'Corona Warriors' for their perseverance and hard work.
10. Strict adherence was given to the guidelines which were issued at the Ministerial level at different times in order to manage the incoming rush of stranded Shramiks.
11. Gorakhpur station of Lucknow Division (NER) had dealt with the maximum number of terminating Shramik Specials (i.e. 23 trains) on 28th May 2020. Along with this, on the same day, 15 By-passing trains were dealt by the division. This was itself a record as no any other station had dealt with such maximum number of trains in a day over the entire Railway.

Challenges / Lesson Learnt:

Indian Railways being the backbone of the transport system, has once again proved its metal during the pandemic period and this has been proved by IRs time and again. Especially in the unexceptional situations, IRs worth and its performance has become a great lesson for the other institutions. Pandemic has showcased many challenges towards the institution and its employees and the experience has taught great lessons.

1. One of the very first challenge was to handle the huge number of Shramik trains bound at various stations such as Gorakhpur, Gonda, Lucknow Jn, Basti, Balrampur, Sitapur and Lakhimpur of the Lucknow Division (NER). Overall, division has

managed to deal with the humongous number of Shramik specials i.e. 521 terminating and 400 by-passing trains.

2. Moreover, not only the inbound trains but also the disposal of their empty rakes has created a huge challenge for the Division. Beside this, proper cleaning and sanitisation of coaches led to the overburdening of workload. Existing infrastructure were utilised in such a manner so that undue terminal detention could be avoided to facilitate the seamless mobility of Shramik special trains.
3. Many inbound trains and their respective rakes were required to be go under unscheduled pit maintenance. This has led to the overcrowding of the pit lines.
4. More than 07 lakhs stranded Shramiks deboarded at the multiple station of Lucknow Division (NER). These numbers are huge as compared to the average footfalls of passengers. In order to follow additional preventive protocols such as thermal screening, social distancing etc required more manpower at the stations.
5. Persistent flow of shramik special trains led to the saturation of line capacity in the division and thus detention at the various divisional Interchange points which restricted the seamless flow of these trains.
6. On daily average basis 15-20 terminating shramik inbound trains were received from different directions to the Lucknow division (NER) which required daily planning and proper execution of these plans as well.
7. Asset failures during the pandemic also affected the mobility of these special trains and thereby its repercussion led to the uneven detention enroute.
8. During the whole shramik special movement, provision of meal/drinking water to the shramiks was an uphill task. Close coordinaton with the commercial and other departments, these were made available to shramiks.
9. Many unscheduled shramik trains especially diverted ones saturated the available paths for the scheduled special trains. It was a big challenge to plan these diverted trains accordingly without distressing the available path.
10. Staffs during the lockdown period faced many hardships such as low confidence, health factor, transport issue and so many others but they managed to dodged these challenges and contributed tirelessly in order to provide service to the stranded shramiks so that they can reach their home safe and sound.