

Govt. puts delayed road projects on Indo-China border on track

The Cabinet Committee on Security approved the revised cost estimates for the ongoing construction project to ₹3,482.52 crore

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Two months after the Doklam stand-off, when the Indian Army prevented the Chinese from building a road that would have given China access to the North East, the Centre cleared an additional ₹3,400 crore for making 73 strategic roads along the Chinese border a reality. The strategic roads project had been sanctioned in 2005 and the roads should have been constructed by 2012.

2020 deadline

On November 10, the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) headed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi approved the revised cost estimates for the ongoing road construction project to ₹3,482.52 crore. The project

known as ICBR-I (Indo-China Border Roads), has missed several deadlines. Now the CCS has set 2020 as another deadline to complete the project. As per Home Ministry's records, only "13 roads have been completed in all respects and are in operational use." Agencies have blamed inclement weather, rough terrain and shortage of manpower as reasons for the delay.

For more than 70 days, India blocked the Chinese PLA at Doklam, at the Bhutan-Sikkim-China trijunction, from proceeding with constructing the road which could have given the latter an advantage over the Siliguri corridor, which connects east with North East India.

Unlike other decisions taken by the Cabinet that are made public, those taken by



Deadline missed: The Union Cabinet has set 2020 as the new deadline to complete the project.

the CCS remain unannounced. "To redress the situation arising out of lack of infrastructure along the India-China border, the Government has decided to undertake construction of 73 roads of operational significance along the border. Out of these 73 roads, 27 roads involving 804.32 km are be-

ing constructed by Ministry of Home Affairs in Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh at an estimated cost of ₹1,937 crore," a government note said.

Last year, the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) had criticised the BRO heavily

for "defective construction which resulted in delay in completion of strategic roads."

Beyond schedule

The CAG noted that as much as 98% of the funds allocated for construction for 61 strategic roads had been spent on only 22 roads. The rest were woefully behind schedule. "Out of 61 strategic roads that were to be constructed by 2012, only 22 roads had been completed till March 2016, despite incurring an expenditure of ₹4,536 crore (98%) against the estimated cost of ₹4,644 crore," the CAG said in its report. The CAG pointed out that the "non-completion and faulty specifications" of works have a serious bearing on the operational capability of the armed forces in

strategically sensitive areas.

"Road works executed by the BRO did not adequately meet the users' requirement. Even six roads which had been completed at a cost of ₹164 crore, were not fit for running of specialised vehicles and equipments due to limitations in execution of works. Deployment of GREF personnel was done

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in remote and hazardous working locations without adequate facilities," the CAG report said.

The 2006-07 annual report of the Ministry said, "To redress the situation arising out of poor road connectivity, which has hampered the operational capability of the border guarding forces deployed along the India-China

border, the Government has decided to undertake phase-wise construction of 27 road links totaling 608 km in the border areas at an estimated cost of ₹912 crore."

The official said that out of these 27, five roads with 243.38 km length are under construction in Arunachal Pradesh.

A senior Home Ministry official said now the construction of 15 roads has been assigned to Border Roads Organisation (BRO), eight to the Central Public Works Department (CPWD), two to NPCC and two to the Himachal Pradesh Public Works Department.

"CCS has approved on 10.11.2017 the revised cost estimates amounting to ₹3,482.52 crore to complete the ICBR-I project by December 2020," the note said.