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PM inaugurates 'strategically imp' tunnel

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PRIME Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday inaugurated the 9.02 kilometre-long Atal Tunnel built at an altitude of 3,000 meters (10,000 feet) in Rohtang. Addressing a function after inaugurating PM Modi said the country's defence interests were compromised for a long time as their governments kept 'playing around with files' and delayed procurement of fighter jets, arms, ammunition and other strategic equipment.

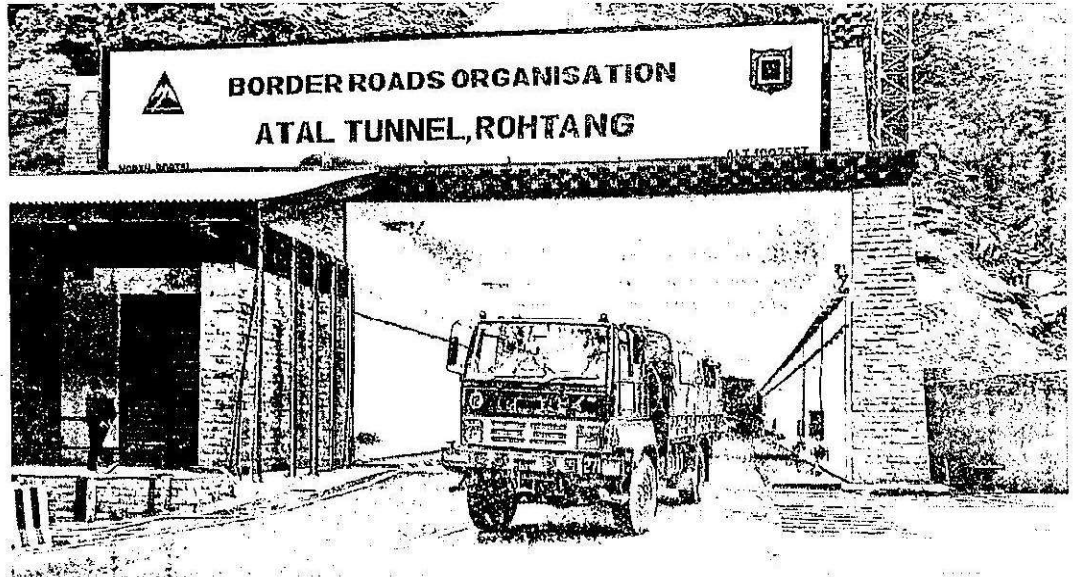
PM said, "Nothing is more important for us than the defence of the country. But for a long time, the country has also witnessed an era when the defence interests of the country were compromised. The Air Force of the country kept demanding a modern fighter plane, while they kept opening and closing files after files, and kept playing around with those files."

He added, "This day is a historic day as not only the dream of Atal Bihari Vajpayee has been realised but also decades-long wait of Himachal is over."

Hitting out at the Congress, which headed the coalition government at the Centre during 2004-14, Modi cited a number of strategically important projects, from Atal Tunnel to the airstrip at Daulat Beg Oldi in Ladakh and Tejas fighter aircraft production, to assert that they were delayed or almost forgotten.

The then prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee had inaugurated the approach road to Atal Tunnel in 2002, but the project was almost forgotten after his government was gone, Modi said, targeting the Congress-led UPA dispensation.

Work on only 1,300 meters was completed by 2013-14, he noted, adding that the project would have been completed by 2040 by this pace before his government took charge in 2014 and speeded it up at an unprecedented rate. Modi's reference assumes significance in the



PM Modi with Rajnath Singh (R), DG of BRO Harpal Singh (ZL) during inauguration of Atal tunnel in Manali. An army convoy passes through the Tunnel | PTI

wake of the government's repeated assertion that the UPA regime had delayed decisions on the acquisition of Rafale fighter jets from France.

"Be it ammunition, modern rifles, bulletproof jackets, equipment that are used in cold weather conditions, everything was kept in abeyance. There was a time when the strength of our ordnance factories would make many jitters, but the country's ordnance factories were left on their own," he

said after inaugurating the tunnel, which would reduce the travel distance between Manali and Leh by 46 km and the travel time by four to five hours.

Modi reached Manali earlier on Saturday, with Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, Chief of Defence staff Bipin Rawat, Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister Jairam Thakur, Minister of State for Finance Anurag Singh Thakur and the DG BRO Lt Gen Harpal Singh at the inauguration ceremony.

9.02 km-long
 Longest highway tunnel in the world

To reduce the distance between Manali and Leh by 46 km and travel time by 4-5 hours.

COST ₹3,300 crore

Built with ultra-modern specifications in the Pir Panjal range of Himalayas at an altitude of 3,000 metres (10,000 feet) from the MSL

- A telephone facility at every 150 metre of its stretch
- CCTV cameras every 250 metre.
- Emergency exits every 500 metre
- Turning cavern every 2.2 km
- Air quality monitors every km
- A fire hydrant every 60 metre

The Atal Bihar Vajpayee government had taken the decision to construct the tunnel on June 3, 2000