Technology push for bookings; Wi-Fi facility on the go

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With more passengers preferring to book railway tickets online, Railway Minister Pawan Kumar Bansal said by the end of the year, the railways would introduce the "next generation e-ticketing system".

"The next-generation e-ticketing system will bring about a paradigm shift in internet rail ticketing by significantly improving the end-user experience in respect of ease of use, response time as well as capacity," said Bansal.

The new system will support 7,200 online bookings a minute, which is a huge improvement from the 2,000 bookings a minute at present. Also, the new system will support as many as 120,000 simultaneous users at any point in time, against the current capacity of 40,000 users.

Besides, railway commuters on long-distance journey will soon be able to access the internet on their smartphones and laptops, as Bansal promised free Wi-Fi facility on several trains free of charge.

Some of the initiatives under the new ticketing systems include allowing bookings through mobile phone, increasing e-ticketing hours, and revamping the e-ticketing system

The railways' website at *irctc.co.in*, though making ticket booking efficient, is often criticised for being slow. The site often crashes due to overloading and huge online traffic. The new system seeks to make the online reservation process smooth and hassle-free. For the convenience of the passengers, the internet ticketing time will be extended from 12:30 am to 11:30 pm. However, booking agents would be barred from booking tatkal tickets between 8:00 am and 10:00 am.

The new system will have advanced fraud control and security management tools, thereby improving fairness and transparency in disbursal of tickets. Like airlines, railways will also soon start sending SMS alerts to passengers providing updates on reservation status.

The railways is also making provision of an announcement facility and electronic display boards in trains to disseminate information to on-board passengers about approaching stations, train running, arrival platform, etc.

TECH-TONIC SHIFT

- Aadhaar to be used for various passenger and staff related services
- Internet ticketing from 00:30 am to 11:30 pm
- e-ticketing through mobile phones
- SMS alerts to passengers providing updates on reservation status
- Covering larger number of trains under Real Time Information System
- Next gen e-ticketing system to be handle 7,200 tickets per minute against 2,000 at present
- 120,000 users can use the system simultaneously against 40,000 at present

On a green ride

The Indian Railways has decided to ban the use of plastic in its catering to make the transportation system eco-friendly. Announcing the railway budget, Railways Minister Pawan Kumar Bansal said the railways would encourage the usage of agro-based and recycled paper and ban the use of plastic in catering. The railways would also set up a railway energy management company, which would harness the potential of alternate sources of energy such as the sun and the wind. It is planning to set up windmill plants of 75 Mw and energising 1,000 level crossings with solar power. It is also undertaking other clean projects, which include deployment of new generation energy efficient electric locomotives and electrical multiple units saving about 60 crore units in 2011-12. Bansal also proposed to set up a Chair at TERI — The Energy and Resources Institute to promote railways-related research and reduce the carbon footprint.

Aadhaar for e-ticketing

The railways will soon link passenger tickets with Aadhaar cards to bring in transparency in booking.

"The Aadhaar database generated can be extensively and efficiently used by railways not only to render more user-friendly services such as booking of tickets, validation of genuine passengers with GPS-enabled handheld gadgets in trains, but also to provide a better interface with its employees in regard to their salaries, pension and allowances," said Bansal.

The railways is also bringing a large number of trains under real-time information system, which will allow rail users to access information about delays and train running schedule through nominated websites and mobile phones.