

## Pak makes fresh offer for engines, Rlys wary

Pakistan has pitched in with a renewed and upgraded proposal to buy or take on lease about 100 rail engines from India for re-starting its defunct train services. October last year, Pakistan had initially proposed the purchase/lease of 50 train engines from India. The Indian Railways had shot down the proposal on grounds of the "corporate risk" involved, as also because of the high domestic demand for train engines in India.

Of its fleet of 520 locomotives of the Pakistan Railways (PR), only 76 were operational in the month of March 2012. Acute shortage of locomotives has forced the Pakistan Railways to suspend operations of as many as 128 passenger trains.

Foreign Secretary Ranjan Mathai met Chairman, Railway Board Vinay Mittal last week to pursue Pakistan's proposal.

The fresh proposal is understood to have been made by Pakistan President Asif Ali Zardari during his luncheon meeting with Indian premier Manmohan Singh at New Delhi on April 8.

Indian Railways officials are still disinclined to do business with Pakistan, unless the neighboring country provides advances commitments for simplifying Visa procedures and for providing diplomatic immunity for Indian engineers that will need to be deputed to that country as technical support staff.

The sale or lease of engines to Pakistan will imply a training aspect, as also the sourcing of a substantial supply of spares from India, including consumables like filters, oils and greases.

Pakistan needs to make advance commitments for permitting the easy flow of men, material and spares from India, sources said.

Mathai is understood to have assured Mittal that he would attempt to address concerns of the Indian Railways officials at the diplomatic level.

Options being considered includes the possibility of the lease or sale of new engines (WMD3D type) for approximately Rs.7 crores apiece, or the rehabilitated (WDM2 type), which come at a lesser price of Rs.4.5 crores apiece. The option of offering old, retrofitted engines is also being considered.

Pakistan Railways have failed to handle maintenance of train engines, either on account of financial crisis or because of the non-availability of skilled manpower.

The Chinese engines fleet available in Pakistan has gone out of service because of the reported lack of support from Chinese suppliers.

The Indian Railways has 4,214 electric and 6,000 diesel engines in its inventory. Approximately, 500 engines roll out from its two public sector manufacturing units each year, but the public transporter is still unable to meet its domestic demand of around 700 train engines annually.

The Indian Railways have remained massively short of its Vision-2020 target of manufacturing 1,200 train engines annually.

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