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Title: Need to commence rail services between Velankanni and Nagapattinam in Tamil Nadu.

SHRI D. VENUGOPAL (TIRUVANNAMALAI): Velankanni, the holy pilgrim place of our Lady of Health attracts devotees from all religions. The Basilica is situated in Velankanni village about three kilometers near Nagapattinam - Nagore Railway Section. Pilgrims from several parts of India and many parts of the world throng this holy shrine on pilgrimage throughout the year and in hundreds of thousands especially in the month of September during the annual festival celebrating the birth of Mother Mary. Right from 1991, when Tiruchirappalli - Nagore gauge conversion work was announced, there has been reiteration of demand to provide rail link to Velankanni from Nagapattinam - Nagore railway line section. For this purpose, the Velankanni Church has also handed over a crore of rupees to the railways to help funding the project. Even after many years rolling by, the project is still pending. Pilgrims from far flung places are still deprived of direct railway line. Considering the benefits to the pilgrims and the public in the vicinity and nearby villagers, the gauge conversion work must be completed at the earliest and the rail operations must commence. At least during this year's annual festival, Velankanni-Nagapattinam rail travel facility must be available. Hence as a gift to the devotees on the occasion of Velankanni festival that begins from August 29, rail service may be operated. I urge upon the Hon. Railway Minister to do the needful in this regard.