

Double entry visa to up passenger volume on Dhaka-Agartala route

KAUSAR ISLAM AYON

As Bangladesh agreed to provide Indian citizens with double entry visas, the operators of Dhaka-Agartala direct bus service hope that it would also be a viable route like Dhaka-Kolkata with increased number of passengers.

Dhaka agreed to grant double entry visas to the Indians through air and land routes, a long-drawn demand from operators in the Indian state of Tripura, at a two-day home secretary-level meeting that ended in Dhaka on Friday.

"A double entry and exit visa for Bangladeshi citizens has already been provided by India and Dhaka's decision was only a reciprocal move on our part," said Omar Farooq, home secretary of Bangladesh at a press conference after the meeting.

Bangladesh Road Transport Corporation (BRTC) and Tripura Road Transport Corporation (TRTC) in April this year jointly submitted a letter to the home ministry recommending introduction of double entry visa

Lack of double entry visa does not permit Indian passengers from Agartala to go to Kolkata or other parts of India via Bangladesh. If they are allowed to take the route, it will save huge time and money for the visitors

for the Indians.

BRTC Chairman Taimur Alam Khaneker expressed his satisfaction over the latest decision on visa facility saying: "This will make the route profitable as more passengers from Tripura will take the route specially to visit Kolkata."

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Passengers from Agartala can reach Kolkata in 13 hours via Dhaka while it takes at least 30 hours to reach the West Bengal capital from Tripura through Indian territory.

The service was suspended for more than a month for flooding until mid August. Then it resumed for only two days and stopped again from August 18 as a bridge collapsed at Debagram under Akhaura upazila in Brahmanbaria district.

Officials at BRTC hope to restart the service as soon as the bridge is repaired.

After successful launching of Dhaka-Kolkata bus, the authorities selected Dhaka-Agartala route for operating the second such service but it carried only 804 passengers in the first 75 days or less than 10 passengers a day on average.

"In spite of financial loss, we'll continue the service as per the agreement between the two

countries," said the BRTC chairman. "We are trying to overcome all the problems of this route, we are always in touch with the TRTC."

The second Indo-Bangla direct road link was opened on September 21 last year with the aim to boost business and tourism of the two neighbouring countries.

Initially the BRTC and TRTC operated the Dhaka-Agartala service six days a week but both operators agreed to reduce the service to three times a week from December last year due to very low response from the passengers.

Dhaka-Kolkata bus service, the first direct bus service between the two countries was initiated on July 9, 1999.



Dilemma over Saarc Fountain relocation

SULTANA RAHMAN

Planners are still in dilemma whether the Saarc Fountain sculptured by Nitin Kundu should be relocated from Sonargaon roundabout to the nearby park Panthokunj after the SAARC Summit in January.

"The plan has not yet been passed as the fountain is symbolises the spirit of SAARC," said Quamrul Islam Siddiqui, executive director of the Dhaka Transport Coordination Board (DTCB).

"If we relocate the fountain, then we will also demolish the roundabout to reduce traffic congestion at the intersection," Siddiqui added.

Siddiqui assured that the fountain will not be destroyed, rather the entire structure will be relocated to Panthokunj.

The SAARC fountain was constructed in 1985 on the eve of the first SAARC Summit in Dhaka. Rajuk funded the project as part of a city beautification plan as well as to mark the summit memorable.

However, the DTCB suggested relocation of the fountain and demolish the roundabout to improve traffic movement from Farmgate to Matshyabhaban. All the authorities concerning including Dhaka City Corporation (DCC), RAJUK, Institution of Engineers, Bangladesh (IEB), Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET) and the Institute of Architects, Bangladesh (IAB) unanimously supported the plan.

According to a DTCB study, every vehicle has to waste at least three minutes at the Sonargaon crossing due to traffic congestion. It also said the annual cost of fuel for vehicles waiting at these crossings stands at Tk 76 million.

During peak hours, at least 10,000 vehicles commute through the Sonargaon intersection every hour. As traffic congestion at the roundabout costs Tk 7.6 crore a year in wasted fuel, this has initiated the DTCB to do away with the circle and straighten the roads for smooth vehicular movement.

"We will create different traffic channels at three important crossings of the city to maintain smooth flow of traffic and to reduce intersection crossing time for vehicles," said Siddiqui.



STAR PHOTO

RAJUK SITS ON REVISED PLAN

Chhayanaut complex in limbo

AVIK SANWAR RAHMAN

The construction work of Chhayanaut Sangskritik Bhaban (cultural complex) remains suspended as the Rajuk officials in October 2002, said Sanjida Khutun, president of Chhayanaut.

Rajuk Zone-1 is responsible for the building plans of Dhamondi area. The officer in charge of the zone Abdul Latif Hilali said: "Building Construction Committee verified the revised plan but it did not approve it."

Hilali further said: "I have been in charge of this zone for last one year. Now we are looking for the file of the revised plan after Rajuk chairman gave instructions recently."

Chhayanaut authorities complained that they had been trying for years to pass the plan without any result due to Rajuk's inaction.

"Though the land was allotted only at a token price of Tk 1,001 we had to spend Tk 20 lakh to get permission for commercial building. We already spent

another Tk 20 lakh in the construction before Rajuk stopped it," said Sanjida Khutun.

"Rajuk could not explain why they are not approving the revised plan," she said.

Sources said Rajuk could not

approve the revised plan of Chhayanaut building without

approval from the Prime Minister's Office. Chhayanaut also appealed to the prime minister in April this year but no action has been taken.

The estimated cost of the six

storied Chhayanaut Bhaban is Tk 5 crore. Chhayanaut is

expecting to cover the cost from

donations from general people.

Meantime, Chhayanaut

received huge response from

people of all walks of life. More

than Tk 1 crore has been col-

lected so far from both local

residents and expatriates.

"We started with our own fund of Tk 1 crore which was

saved from students' fees," said

the Chhayanaut president.

"Artists, theatre and recital

groups have contributed from

their show money and individu-

als sent cheques. People are

contributing whatever they can, even a peon of a government office contributed Tk 100."

The fund collection has been hampered due to the stoppage of the work on the building.

The Chhayanaut Sangskritik Bhaban will comprise an auditorium for holding cultural programmes, classrooms and a recording studio.

To raise more funds for it, Chhayanaut is marketing quality cassettes of songs and recitation. Chhayanaut has already marketed a 60-minute cassette of the recitation of late Golam Mostofa and songs of late Nilufar Yasmin. "This was the last performances of the two great artistes for the fund of Chhayanaut," said Sanjida Khutun.

Founded in 1961, Chhayanaut has created many talents and about 40,000 students in its school on the University Laboratory School compound. To cope with rising number of students Chhayanaut has also rented a space in Kalabagan Girls' School.



The land allocated for the Chhayanaut complex is left unattended since the work on the building stopped two years ago.

SYED ZAKIR MOSSA