

NO SIGN OF DHAKA-KOLKATA TRAIN SERVICE BEFORE RAMADAN

Renovation of station, other works go on amid dampened spirits

DURDANA GHIAS

The historical start of the Dhaka-Kolkata direct train service has once again hit snags, as the higher authority is yet to reach a final decision on when the service will start.

The train service will open a new era of communication between the two countries, which has remained suspended for over 40 years, since war broke out between India and Pakistan in 1965.

The renovation work for the Dhaka-Kolkata train service at the Cantonment Rail Station in the city is going on at a slow pace, as the high officials of both countries are yet to decide the date when the service will commence.

The Dhaka-bound train from Kolkata is supposed to arrive at this station where the work on dual gauge rail is going on. Workers were carrying bricks to build a new platform on the other side of the old platform.

When this correspondent went to the station it looked like an abandoned place. A few passengers were sitting on the platform, which was apparently the only waiting place for the passengers of the station.

However, construction of a waiting room with tiled floor is going on at a rather sluggish pace, as the due date for the commencement of the train service is yet to be decided.

"The main waiting room will hold around 100 passengers. Right now we do not have the capacity to accommodate 300 passengers (which will be carried by the Dhaka-bound train) at a time. But we are expecting that might not be a problem as passengers will constantly be coming and going," said Iqbal Kabir, stationmaster of Cantonment rail station.

"The renovation work is going on but we do not know when the



Labourers working on the dual gauge line at the Cantonment railway station (left). A worker laying down tiles on the floor of the waiting room of the station.



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service will start at all," he said.

The waiting room will consist of two bathrooms, a ticket counter and a customs counter, which will be separated by a glass wall. Another small waiting room with a bathroom is being constructed for the second-class passengers.

"Besides what is being built, we need some other things like a bank booth for checking travel tax and cashing travellers checks. We also need proper security here, as the station is in an open area and not within a compound," said Kabir.

"The technicians, workers of electric department, the TXR (an official giving fitness certificate for the train) and other officials will have to be put up somewhere. So we need some more accommodation for the train crew," he said.

"We do not have any system to provide adequate water for drinking and washing for the passen-

gers while travelling in the train," he added.

If online banking system and information centre for the travellers can be set up that will help the passengers more, he added.

The station has also been devoid of any permanent cleaning staff since its permanent sweeper passed away 12 years ago. It has one temporary sweeper and a woman who works on contract.

Qazi Asadullah, additional director general (operation) of Bangladesh Railway, said that a date for the starting of the train service is yet to be decided but they have the preparation to start the service before Ramadan, without giving any details.

"We do not know when the train service will start. The authority will inform us on time. We were told from the higher authority to be prepared to start before Ramadan. We are taking prepara-

tion according to that," he said.

According to reports, the issue of setting up barbed wire on the border by the Indian authority has delayed the train service.

"The Indian authority wants to set up a barbed wire fence from the zero point (border) to their station. To set up this fence India will need the permission of Bangladesh. They have sent the design of the fence to the home ministry. But this has no connection with the train service," said Asadullah.

"At the meeting the Indian side showed a positive attitude. They have set up immigration and customs counters, eateries and a waiting room," he said.

Around 50 new compartments were imported from Indonesia under this project. The work of setting up dual gauge line is going on and within December the line will be laid down up to Dhaka. The customs and immigration checks

will be done at Darshana, said officials.

"The train will run twice a week. If the immigration is at the borders, our calculation shows that it would take eleven and half hours to make the journey. But if the checks are done at the departure points, travel time would be reduced by at least three hours," said Asadullah.

Since independence, several initiatives were taken by successive governments to restore the train service but none of those were fruitful. Last time an agreement was signed in 2001 between the two countries, but that agreement could not be materialised within the time limit. Therefore, a new agreement would be needed, said the officials.

The total length of the rail line would be 538 kilometers (km) of which 418 km will be in Bangladesh and 120 km will be in

India. Bangladesh will get 78 percent of the revenue and India will get 22 percent as per percentage of rail lines between them.

The fares would be \$8 for non-air conditioned (non-AC) coach Shobhon class, \$12 for AC coach Snigdha class and \$20 for first class AC coach. The train will depart at 7:45am from Dhaka and at 7am from Shaldaha station of Kolkata. Free tickets will be given to children under five years of age.

Resumption of the rail link will relieve thousands of people of the several-hour wait at Benapol and Petrapol land ports in Bangladesh and India for immigration and customs formalities.

city express

The latest crop of quotes from the city's press -- words worth repeating, we feel, for their humour, insight or sheer outrageousness. Star City does not necessarily support the opinions expressed in this column.

"I want to assure the nation that the Supreme Court played a role in the past at the critical juncture of the nation. It is doing so at present and will do so in future to pull the nation out of the mire."

-- Mohammad Ruhul Amin
Chief Justice

Said in a seminar on judicial reform and independence of judiciary attended by judicial heavyweights, on Saturday. Source: The Daily Star

"Unlike previous caretaker governments we are not merely to hold elections within three months."

-- Mainul Hossain
Law and Information Adviser

Told UNB, on Friday. Source: The Daily Star

"No questions will be asked; at least I will not ask about the source of the money donated for flood victims."

-- MA Matin
Communications and Shipping Adviser and Chairman, National Coordination Committee to Fight Major Corruption and Serious Crimes

Told reporters while attending a presentation by Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Corporation at shipping ministry, on Monday. Source: The Daily Star

"I welcome political parties to come forward to help flood victims."

-- Tapan Chowdhury
Food and Disaster Management Adviser

Said at a press briefing at the secretariat, on Wednesday. Source: The Daily Star

"I lost all my capital during the eviction drive. Then I took loan from an NGO to restart my business. I don't know why DCC [Dhaka City Corporation] evicted us."

-- Azad
A garment vendor on Mirpur Road

Told a reporter when asked why he is doing business in an unauthorised place, on Saturday. Source: The Daily Star

Compiled by Durdana Ghias

Is it beef you are eating?



If the butchers 'always' sell beef (top) then where do hundreds of buffaloes sold every day at Gabtoli cattle market go?

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Sources in Dhaka City Corporation veterinary section confirmed the regular practice of mixing beef and buffalo. "It has been going on for years," the official said.

SHAHNAZ PARVEEN

City dwellers are unwittingly consuming buffalo meat in various hotels everyday, as a segment of unscrupulous butchers and meat sellers are regularly mixing buffalo meat with beef.

Beef and mutton are the most popular types of red meat among the city dwellers. In the market a kilogram of beef sells at a price of Tk180 to Tk200 and the price of mutton is around Tk260 to Tk280, sometimes even more. Buffalo meat on the other hand has very little demand in the market.

During a visit to the Gabtoli cattle market it was discovered that the rear end of the market is full of healthy buffaloes waiting to be sold. Cows and goats stand at the front blocking the view of the rear end. Naturally, the question arises, if there is no demand for buffalo meat in the market then where do the buffaloes actually end up?

City residents consume around six thousand cows and goats daily. The biggest sell takes place at Gabtoli, the largest cattle market in the city. The Hassil gate at the market keeps

records of every purchase that walks out of the market and collects tax from every sell.

According to the tax collector of Hassil gate, Gabtoli makes a sell of around 1600 cows and buffaloes everyday.

On Wednesdays and Thursdays the sell increases to around 2000 cows and buffaloes as the city prepares for weddings and other special occasions on Fridays. During special festivals the demand increases up to around seven or eight thousands per day.

Supply of cows and buffaloes comes from all around the country, however the largest fraction arrives from the border areas of Kushtia, Dinajpur, Chapainawabganj, Rajshahi, Jessore and Chuadanga. Some also arrive from the Dhamrai, Manikganj and Tangail areas.

One of the sellers at Gabtoli market told Star City that a large well-built buffalo provides around 6 mounds of meat whereas a cow gives about five mounds. The price of the buffalo would be around Tk20,000 to 25,000. A cow on the other hand costs around Tk30,000 to 35,000.

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SYED ZAKIR HOSSAIN

Amid quest for rehabilitating more hawkers, Dhaka City Corporation recently allowed vendors to sit temporarily on the street in between Baitul Mokarram and GPO for seven days a week.