



Majority of seats remain vacant as Dhaka-Kolkata train fail to attract passengers these days.

Dhaka-Kolkata train shuttles almost empty

Inconvenient timing and lengthy customs check blamed

DURDANA GHIAS

The Dhaka-Kolkata train service is witnessing great disappointment as the number of passengers is going down steadily due to unwise timing and delay in checking papers at the customs and immigration on both sides of the border.

Sources at the Bangladesh Railway said that the number of people travelling by the Maitree Express is very low for the last few months.

In the last three months, on average only 133 passengers went to Kolkata from Dhaka in a trip while on the return trip there were a little more than 100. "One reason is the inconvenient timing of the train. The service is available only on Saturday and Sunday of the week," said an official at the Kamalapur Railway Station.

"When one goes to Kolkata on Saturday usually he does not return on that very day or on Sunday. He may need 2-3 days to complete his task there. But then he has to wait for seven days to get the next train. This discourages the passengers and often half of the 326 seats go vacant," he said.

According to the sources at the station the train had only 77 passengers yesterday and 70 on

the day before. In the month of August the highest number of passengers was 147 and the lowest was 62 in a trip. In July, the highest number was 151 and the lowest 86 at one trip.

Another reason why passengers feel discouraged is the hours wasted at the customs.

"I go by bus because it takes less time and nowadays buses are lot more comfortable. Although train journey is fun and safer I will go by train only when I will not have to wait for hours at the borders," said Bibek, a singer who often visits Kolkata.

Many passengers think of going by train but change their minds because of hassles at the borders.

"I always thought about going to Kolkata by train because it is more comfortable than bus. I have heard that the authorities are trying to shorten the time of travel by reducing time at the customs. After that I will go by train," said Tareq Ali, another frequent traveller to Kolkata.

Sources at Bangladesh Railway said that it takes around 4-30 hours to check papers at the borders.

"The customs and immigration takes around four and half hours at the borders. So once a person travels by train he does not want to go for the second

time. This is a prime reason why we are losing passengers," said an official of Bangladesh Railway.

He said a three-day meeting was held from August 31 to September 2 on the issue. The meeting decided to take urgent steps to reduce waiting hours at least by one hour on each side.

"We need assistance from our home ministry and NBR to curtail the hours. We have requested them for this and they have taken a positive decision in the inter-ministerial meeting," said the official.

"But the Indian side will also have to reduce it by an hour. We hope they will request their home ministry and NBR for it," he said.

"We have heard that the authorities are holding meetings and have decided to reduce the travel time but we are yet to get an official letter about it," said officials at Kamalapur Railway Station.

Asked if any advertisement is being planned to popularise the service they said they were unaware about any such move.

The train service has three types of seating arrangements normal at Tk 860, AC (chair) at Tk 1,266 and AC (cabin) at Tk 1,910. From Dhaka the train starts at 8:30 in the morning and reaches Kolkata at 9:30 at night.

Tightening grips on the cable TV operators

CITY CORRESPONDENT

Cable television operators will be required to focus more on customer service under the new policy of the information ministry.

Following complaints from subscribers, the ministry has suggested forming an advisory committee with representatives from cable operators and the ministry for bringing transparency and accountability in the cable TV business.

Led by the information secretary, the committee will also monitor the conducts of cable operators to make sure that they attend to subscribers' complaints promptly.

The policy also includes a strict prohibition of airing video, VCD or DVD channels. They will be allowed to air only the government-approved satellite TV channels.

It will be forbidden to downlink foreign channels by sending money to other countries without the authorisation from the authorities concerned, sources said.

Also, it will be mandatory for the cable operators to air important government notifications and speech of the head of the government, important press notes and also crucial warnings regarding weather forecasts.

The rules are being prepared under the Cable Television Network Operation Act of 2006.

The policy comes at a time when previous steps to streamline the cable television business proved futile and the subscribers continued to report irregularities.

Subscribers in the city say the cable television business is monopolistic and anti-competitive. They frequently raise questions about the indiscriminate monthly subscription, ownership structure and the poor consumer service.

Subscribers also allege that complaints regarding service laxity go mostly unheeded.

"Complaints do not help much," said a resident of Moghbazar.

"Most of the cable operators do not even have specialised technicians or trouble-shooters to help maintain smooth service. Sometimes they would spend a whole day trying to

figure out a problem, with little results," he complained.

Cable operators however deny the allegations, saying they give the highest priority to the customers' needs.

"I do not know about other operators but for me my subscribers are of utmost importance. Maybe sometimes we cannot attend to their problems immediately due to technical problem or lack of logistics, but we tend to do it as soon as possible," said Moktar Hossain, a cable operator from Khilgaon Tilapara.

According to sources from the information ministry, a

"We have to pay high charges for the pay channels as they are distributed in packages. Subsequently, the government-fixed subscription charges mean big financial losses for us," said a cable operator from Rayerbazar.

Subsection 7 of the section 3 implies that the pay channels allowed by the government have to be distributed as per the price policy set by the government. But cable operators said the government is yet to specify the price for pay channels.

Asked, officials at the infor-



number of regulations specified in the Cable Television Network Operation Act of 2006 are going blatantly unheeded.

In a directive specified in the subsection 3 of section 17, the government has prohibited the distribution of multiple channels through one single package. The subsection suggests that each channel should be distributed with a price tag as decided by the government.

However, cable operators claimed that distributors compellingly sell multiple channels in one package and allegedly demand high subscription for the whole package.

information ministry said the process of finalising the price chart for the pay channels is in progress.

Distributors also complained that the cable operators do not divulge the actual number of their subscribers, which is depriving the government of a huge amount of taxes while minimising the revenues of the distributors.

According to unofficial sources, there are around 26 cable distributors in the city, who buy the pay channels from the pay channel agents and distribute the feed to around 370 local operators through dish antennas.

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.

"Nothing is unexpected in Bangladesh."

-- Motia Chowdhury

Awami League Presidium Member

Told reporters after the release of BNP leader Tarique Rahman, on Wednesday. Source: Jugantor

"Holding national elections is the only way to save the country as well as the way to save yourselves [the caretaker government]."

-- Khandaker Delwar Hossain

Secretary General, BNP

Said at a discussion at the Engineers Institute, on Monday. Source: The Daily Star

"I have no alternative to engaging my kids in stealing. They are too young for other kind of jobs."

-- Aklima Khatun

A widow who engaged her three children in stealing

Told reporters at the Karwan Bazar vegetable depot, on Monday. Source: The Daily Star

"This is not fair. What benefit will we get from the on-going anti-corruption drive when a corrupt person like Tarique gets released?"

-- Abdullah Al Maruf

A DU student

Told a reporter following the release of Tarique Rahman, on Wednesday. Source: The Daily Star

"I apologise to the people of Bangladesh from distance."

-- Jamie Siddons

Coach, Bangladesh Team

Told reporters after the country's second defeat to Australia in the second one-day, on Wednesday. Source: Prothom Alo

"The country is heading towards the election bringing an end to all the problems."

-- Hossain Zillur Rahman

Education Adviser

Told reporters after the successful dialogue, on Thursday. Source: Jugantor

"This is not prison for me, rather it is a place to learn politics."

-- Obaidul Quader

Joint Secretary General, AL

Told reporters after his release, on Friday. Source: Bhorer Kagoj

Compiled by Durdana Ghias

Chawkbazar air full of iftar aroma

SHAHNAZ PARVEEN

It was about 2:00pm in the afternoon. The road towards Chawkbazar was completely blocked with thousands of people from different parts of the city swarming the area from all directions. Their common destination is the iftar market of Chawkbazar.

Chawkbazar, one of the oldest business hubs in the city, has more than a hundred-year-old tradition of being the city's biggest and most popular iftar bazaar.

Even four hours before the iftar time, hundreds of makeshift food stalls open at Chawkbazar with scores of iftar items -- hot, spicy, crispy and

greasy.

The air is full of the aroma of singara, monchuri, narkel samosa, jhal kachori, panir shamosa, jali kebab, dahi bara or doi dobani, sutli kebab, shahi paratha, shahi halim, irani kebab, nimak para, panir paratha, kashmir sherbet, malpooa and many more delicacies.

Items that attract the most are the five-foot tall shik kebab and the giant shahi gilapi weighing up to 2 to 3 kilo available only in Chawkbazar.

Another attraction is the grand "boro baper polai khai," which is a mixture of a full-size chicken, beef and mutton kebab, sutli kebab, mincemeat, fried chickpea, parched rice

(chira) etc.

However, the iftar market of Chawkbazar this year saw higher prices of almost all items due to the skyrocketing prices of essentials.

Sellers at Chawkbazar said every item is being sold at a higher price compared to last year's. "We had to increase the prices of our iftar items due to rising prices of ingredients," said Yousuf Ahmed of Alauddin Sweetmeat.

The price hike however did not affect the typical crowd. Although restaurants and food stalls in all parts of the city offer assortment of iftar items, Chawkbazar still attracts a sea of fasting devotees every Ramadan.

"The scrumptious items that Chawkbazar offers cannot be found anywhere else in the city. During every Ramadan I come here at least 15 days to buy iftar," said Habibur Rahman, who travelled all the way from Kalabagan for a special treat.

Not at all worried about the greasy, spicy substance of these foodstuff and the health issues, Habibur said, "In Chawkbazar you can find 10 to 15 kinds of kebab like sutli, shik, boti, handi, shami, zali and reshmi kebab, which are not available at any other places."

"The taste is simply divine and cannot be compared with anything that the modern restaurants offer," he added.

