



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina visiting a coach of Sonar Bangla Express after inaugurating the luxury train at Kamalapur Railway Station yesterday. The train will run on the Dhaka-Chittagong route from this morning.

PHOTO: PMO

Luxury train hits Dhaka-Ctg route

Named Sonar Bangla Express, it will be the fastest train on the route

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A new luxury train is going to hit the Dhaka-Chittagong route from this morning with a promise to provide faster and better service to passengers.

Sonar Bangla Express will be the fastest among 15 trains on the route as it will take five hours and 40 minutes with only one stop at the Airport Railway Station. The other trains running on the route stop at several stations and take more than seven hours.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday inaugurated the train at Kamalapur Railway Station around 11:30am.

The new train has 746 seats. Of them, 420 seats are Shovan Chair, 220 AC Chair, 66 seats in AC berths and 40 others normal seats adjacent to the dining car.

Every day the train would start from Kamalapur at 7:00am and reach Chittagong at 12:40pm. In the return journey, it will start from Chittagong at

5:00pm and reach Dhaka at 10:40pm.

This is the second non-stop train on the Dhaka-Chittagong route. In 1998, the first non-stop train Subarna Express was introduced.

In the new train, passengers will be provided with food and its cost will be included in the tickets.

"As the new train will provide better services and food facilities, passengers will have to pay additional charges," said Feroz Salah Uddin, secretary to the Ministry of Railways.

A passenger pays Tk 380 for travelling in Shovan Chair from Dhaka to Chittagong in Subarna Express but the passengers will have to pay around Tk 600 for the same class in Sonar Bangla Express.

Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation will supply food for passengers in the new train, said railway officials.

Around Tk 112 crore has been spent to buy the carriages from Indonesia, Feroz told The Daily Star.

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Gamble makes him tragic hero

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to join the European Economic Community, which was later evolved as EU, from the first day of 1973.

Yet, he felt proud to say, "I've worked for this for 25 years, I was the prime minister who led Britain into the community."

His successor, Labour leader Wilson, had gambled on the debate on UK's membership in the then EEC. In the general election in 1974, the Labour Party promised to hold a referendum to decide UK's membership in the EEC.

In the referendum held on June 5, 1975, British voters backed the UK's continued membership of the EEC by a large majority in the country's first nationwide referendum.

Just over 67 percent of voters supported the Labour government's campaign to stay in the EEC, or Common Market, despite several cabinet ministers having come out in favour of British withdrawal, said a BBC report on June 6, 1975.

The result was later hailed by PM Wilson as a "historic decision". The win saved his political life as his Labour Party was split prior to the referendum.

In April 1975, a one-day conference held by the Labour Party to debate the issue voted by almost 2-1 to leave the EEC. Wilson favoured the campaign for staying in the EEC. Many of his colleagues and in the cabinet and party campaigned against his stance.

The Conservatives were also campaigning to stay in the EEC. Margaret Thatcher, the then elected Conservative leader, said the "Yes" vote would not have happened without the opposition's support for it. Like Wilson, Thatcher's political career was not disturbed. She became the UK premier and emerged as "Iron Lady."

RECKLESS DECISION TO HOLD REFERENDUM?

In the 2015 general election, Cameron followed the path of Harold Wilson and promised to hold a refer-

endum on UK's membership in EU. The difference is: Wilson was the then opposition leader. But Cameron was premier when he made the promise.

Cameron returned to power by winning the 2015 elections. He then proceeded with his gamble on a referendum.

The day after the referendum, the Economist in an article "David Cameron quits Downing Street with a ruined legacy" was critical of Cameron's political strategy for holding the referendum.

It said, "To put it kindly, this was a fantasy. Mr Cameron took the reckless decision to pledge to hold a vote (against the better wisdom of George Osborne, the chancellor, who is also bound to go) back in 2013. He had not needed to."

"The public was certainly not clamouring for one. His motive was to placate his cranky backbenchers. His consideration given to the risks and realities of such a promise was lacking. His understanding of the "renegotiation" of Britain's EU membership, on which he rested his strategy, was cursory at best," it added.

The results of the June 23 referendum show public opinion in the UK kept gaining ground against the EU.

When the UK joined the EEC four decades ago, a survey found 39 percent of the respondents was unhappy about joining the EEC, 38 percent was happy and 23 percent didn't give any opinion, according to an AP news item on January 1, 1973.

The opinion research centre for the BBC conducted the survey with the participation of nearly 1,000 Britons in all parts of the country and all walks of life in mid-December in 1972.

In the latest referendum, 51.9 percent voters opted to leave the EU. Only 48.1 percent opted for remaining in the EU which was 67 percent in 1975. This shows people were not happy with the way things were moving.

SHOCKING OUTCOME

The outcome of the referendum

shocked Europe and other parts of the world as well.

It has been a big blow to the EU, a bloc of the 28 nations, which has kept peace in Europe after the second world war.

Both the world wars originated in Europe. Against such a background, the evolution of the EU has effectively buried the fear of another war. Therefore, the EU has been playing a significant role in maintaining world peace and stability.

Given the situation, UK's departure from the EU, many feared, may generate turbulence in Europe as the demand for leaving the EU by rightist leaders may be intensified in some other EU member states.

The referendum also made the fate of integrity of the UK uncertain to some extent.

Immediately after the results of the referendum were made public, first minister of Scotland Nicola Sturgeon said fresh independence referendum for the Scottish people is now highly likely.

In the 2014 referendum on Scotland's independence, David Cameron was successful in securing a win. But political analysts now believe a fresh referendum may prompt Scotland to vote to leave the UK and emerge as an independent state.

Nicola Sturgeon said Scotland is being taken out of the EU against its will as Scottish people voted in favour of staying in the EU. She termed it undemocratic.

In Northern Ireland, the situation is not pleasant when it comes to the integrity of the UK.

Northern Ireland's Deputy First Minister Martin McGuinness has called for a border poll on a united Ireland after the UK voted to leave the EU.

Support for the EU is considerably higher in Northern Ireland and Scotland than the rest of the UK.

It is the English people who voted largely in favour of leaving the EU. And

they won the referendum. Their win, however, has also paved the ground for political and economic unrest in the UK in coming days.

David Cameron was unable to resist the outcome of the referendum. He had to announce his resignation by October. How will he be remembered in history? His predecessor Edward Heath had taken the UK to the EU and his move to hold a referendum is set to take the UK out of the EU.

The Economist wrote: "A time will come for reflection on the good in Mr Cameron's leadership of the Conservative Party and his premiership, on his fundamentally correct vision for a one-nation Tory party in possession of the centre ground."

"But it will surely be dwarfed by this giant, nation-changing misstep, one guaranteed to scar the country for decades and diminish his place in the history books. He leaves office in ignominy," wrote The Economist.

Conservative Party leader and former London Mayor Boris Johnson, who launched vigorous campaign to leave the EU, may be the new leader replacing Cameron.

The fate of Jeremy Corbyn, leader of the Labour Party, has also become uncertain after the referendum.

Two senior Labour MPs have submitted a no-confidence motion against Corbyn. In the petition, they said Corbyn had "failed" the test of leadership in the EU referendum as voters even in the Labour strongholds opted to leave the EU.

Despite all these consequences and more possible impacts, there is a bright side of the referendum which is victory for democracy in which none but people hold all powers.

The UK government is not legally bound to abide by the outcome of the referendum. But there is no alternative but to implement the outcome because refusal to do so will be suicidal for the government.

There is a lot to learn for the countries suffering from democratic deficit.

Medicare costly

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to be named. Other doctors at the hospital also engage themselves in the practice, he said, adding that at least 40 to 50 such contact lenses are sold at nearby stores every day.

The prices of Indian lenses vary from Tk 200 to Tk 5,000 each while each American lens cost between Tk 6,500 and Tk 16,100.

The lenses would have been much cheaper had the doctors not gone for their share in the profit, another medical representative told The Daily Star.

"Representatives from lens-making companies influence the doctors to refer patients to buy specific brands of contact lenses."

"The doctors get a certain percentage of money for each of the lenses sold. On the other hand, the companies hike prices of contact lenses to ensure their original profit, taking money out of patients' pockets."

Patients' sufferings at the hospital don't end here. For a bed at the hospital, which is thronged by hundreds of people every day, a patient has to pay some employees from Tk 500 to Tk 5,000.

A hospital staff, seeking anonymity, said some "influential" doctors get a big share of the money.

During a recent visit to the hospital, this correspondent talked to Mohidul Islam, 30, a man who had one of his eyes critically injured in an accident in his village home in Faridpur.

"I have been going through a severe pain since morning and want to take rest. But without arranging any bed [for me], they are sending me from one room to another."

"I know they are doing this for money," he said around evening that day.

Another patient, who also hailed from Faridpur and was also looking for a bed, said, "One of the staff told me that it was not possible for me to get a bed as all of them were occupied. But I have seen many new patients getting beds."

Many other patients echoed the two

men. They also alleged that they were not given proper attention by some doctors and employees at the hospital.

Prof Anisur Rahman Anjum, a former president of the Swachip unit at the hospital, admitted that some doctors belonging to the pro-AL organisation were referring special brands of contact lenses to patients for their commission.

He has recently been transferred to Dhaka Medical College from the hospital at Agargaon.

"Some doctors always get united whenever any move against them is taken. So, it's quite difficult to stop the practice," he said.

Prof Anisur also said the central body of Swachip had been informed about the allegations but it was yet to take any action over the matter.

However, Enamor Rahman Choudhury, acting president of the Swachip unit at the hospital, said there were some illegal practices in the past but the situation has improved recently.

Talking to this correspondent on June 8, he also claimed that prices of lenses have come down following some steps by the hospital authorities. He did not elaborate on those steps.

He also said action would be taken against Swachip doctors, if found guilty of having involvement in any syndicate that takes money out of patients' pockets.

Prof Dr Golam Mostafa, director at the eye hospital, denied the allegations that patients had to give money for hospital beds and had not been given proper attention by doctors and hospital employees.

He said some patients might have expressed their dissatisfaction after failing to get their desired treatment.

"Every day, we have to serve around 1,000 patients at the outdoor alone. So, it is not possible for us to make everyone happy."

He, however, said they would form a probe committee to look into the allegations.

Rice-laden trucks

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Dinajpur town. "Our trucks will carry the rice up to Phulbari point of Nepal, while trucks from Nepal will carry the load to Kakarvita," said the DC.

Giasuddin Ahmed, director of the Department of Disaster Management, Abu Raihan Mia, ADC (General), Abdul Kadir, district food controller and Mokhlesur Rahman, district relief and rehabilitation officer in Dinajpur, were also present on the occasion.

"The total shipment of 10,000 metric tons of rice will be completed by this month by road via Banglabandha port in Tentulia, Panchagarh," added the DC, thanking the Indian government for allowing Bangladesh transit facilities for the shipment.

Around 5,500 metric tons of rice is coming from Dinajpur and the rest from Thakurgaon.

This food assistance for the earthquake-affected people of Nepal is being sent out as per the directive of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

Talking to The Daily Star, rice millers of Dinajpur said they feel proud to be a part of this friendly gesture to the people of Nepal. "We thank Sheikh Hasina for her decision ... this [gesture] will strengthen the bond between Bangladesh and Nepal," said Mosaddeque Hossain, President of Dinajpur Chamber of Commerce and Industry. Earlier, Bangladesh sent rice to Sri Lanka as humanitarian assistance.

In 37 minutes

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inaugurate at Bangabandhu International Conference Centre today.

Dhaka Mass Rapid Transit Development Project, official name of the metro rail scheme, stretches from Uttara to Motijheel.

It has purchased 22 hectares of Rajuk land in north Uttara, paying Tk 328 crore, for the depot, which will be the maintenance and resting place for metro rail.

The Tk 22,000 crore (\$2.5 billion) ambitious metro rail project is expected to provide an improved, safe, faster and affordable but modern means of urban public transport service significantly reducing the perennial traffic congestion in the capital and prevent environmental pollution, said eminent transport engineering expert Prof Shamsul Hoque.

With every metro rail train comprising six air-conditioned spacious cars, a city commuter will travel between Motijheel and north Uttara in 37 minutes and there will be a train in every four minutes at each of the 16 stations on the way in both directions, said Mofazzel.

A total of 24 trains will together transfer 60,000 passengers every hour in both directions, he said.

The metro rail would be noise-free, with noise barriers and vibration-free lines, and the cars would be made of stainless steel and aluminium alloy, he said.

The metro will save Bangladesh an annual economic loss of Tk 200 billion equivalent to 1.5 percent of the country's gross domestic production, according to a former Jica country representative in Bangladesh.

Currently, city commuters spend several hours to travel from Uttara to Motijheel in snail-pace traffic.

Once the ground development is done, second part of building metro rail will begin on the depot premises by March next year, with the construction of a workshop, yard, train trial lines, training centres, metro rail company headquarters, electricity substation, washing plant, medical centre and metro operation control centre, said Mofazzel.

Contracts would be signed by February, he said.

Simultaneously, the tender process for the third and fourth part of building a 10km elevated viaduct (overpass) and metro stations, from the depot to Agargaon through Pallabi, would begin by April next year.

A five-km elevated viaduct from the depot to Pallabi and four stations would be under the third part, he said, adding that the fourth part would be of another five km viaduct and five stations.

Early last year, Mofazzel had said that this would start by end of this year.

A 10km metro rail service, including five km from the depot to Pallabi and another five from Pallabi to Agargaon

will be ready for operation by the end of 2019, and the following year, the entire 20km metro system will ready for use.

The entire project is being implemented under eight separate contracts, including four for building the 20km elevated overpass.

The 16 stations would be in north Uttara, Pallabi, Mirpur, Kazipara, Sheorapara, Agargaon, Rokeya Sarani, Bijoy Sarani, Farmgate, Karwan Bazar, Shahbagh, Dhaka University, Bangladesh Secretariat and Motijheel.

The fifth part will be on the construction of a viaduct and stations from Agargaon to Karwan Bazar and the sixth on similar construction from Karwan Bazar to Motijheel.

The seventh will be electrical and mechanical work and the eighth procurement of 144 metro rail cars. Procurement of 24 locomotives and the cars will go on simultaneously and be delivered by the second half of 2019, said Mofazzel.

Pre-qualified bidders for car procurement will drop tenders this August and contracts will be signed in January next year.

The project formalised as Dhaka Mass Rapid Transit, otherwise known as Mass Rapid Transit (identified as MRT line-6 in the Strategic Transport Plan), is being implemented by government-owned Dhaka Mass Transit Company Ltd while Dhaka Transport Coordination Authority is supervising.

Consultants, having experience in building New Delhi, Hyderabad, Jakarta, Bangkok metro rails, are applying their knowledge in developing Dhaka metro rail, Mofazzel said.

A consortium of consultants, led by Nippon Koei Ltd of Japan and including Nippon Koei India Ltd, Delhi Metro Rail Corporation Ltd, Mott MacDonald Ltd India, Mott MacDonald Ltd UK and Development Design Consultants Ltd Bangladesh, was hired in November 2013 for general consultancy. They are taking care of the project's design, construction supervision, procurement support and management of work.

The Japanese government through Jica will provide Tk 16,600 crore of the project's total cost as soft loan while Bangladesh government will provide the rest.

TRAFFIC PLAN

The city dwellers have to prepare for a difficult time during the construction of the viaducts, which would be on the existing city streets. Things would be particularly bad during relocation of utility service lines, said Mofazzel.

Traffic management during the construction of elevated viaduct along the busy and crammed Dhaka streets will be the biggest challenge, he said.

As part of the traffic management, two lanes on each side of a street will remain open for traffic and traffic will also be diverted through Mirpur-1 and

Shatth-foot street via Shyamoli towards Agargaon Radio Station, he said.

Besides, they will request Mirpur cantonment authorities to allow more public transport vehicles through the cantonment area.

Construction materials will be mobilised only at the dead of night, Mofazzel.

PROGRESS MADE

Since 2013, the topographical survey, traffic demand survey, geotechnical survey, basic design, detailed design (for tender and implementation), environmental survey, right of way survey and survey for any historical and archaeological sites along the metro route have been completed, said the project director.

The geo-technical examinations have been completed. The 120 bore-hole soil tests along the proposed alignment was required to know soil condition on which detailed design and construction of metro stations and elevated viaduct were dependent.

Relocation of utility service lines of around a dozen private and government organisations, including DPDC/Desco, Titas Gas, Dhaka Wasa, Dhaka City Corporations and BTCL, begins next month.

The organogram of around 1,700 employees of DMTC that will own and operate the metro service is ready for approval. Formulation of a recruitment plan is also underway.