

From Khulna to Kolkata by train

Passenger train service begins today

STAR REPORT

The long wait for another train service for smooth communications between Bangladesh and India is going to end as the premiers of two neighbouring countries are expected to inaugurate a new passenger train service from Khulna to Kolkata today.

The train will be operated through Benapole from the Bangladesh side and Petrapole from the Indian side. Primarily, the train -- Maitree Express-2 -- will make its trip once a week. The number of train trip would increase later.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina arrived in New Delhi yesterday on a four-day official visit to India. During her stay there, agreements in different areas, including the railway sector, are expected to be signed.

The inauguration ceremony will take place at Benapole Station where Bangladesh Railways Minister Mazibul Hoque, among others, will be present.

Hasina and her Indian counterpart Narendra Modi are going to open the train service after speaking to Mazibul through a video-conference from Delhi.

Station Master of Khulna Railway Station Amirul Islam said the distance between Khulna and Kolkata is about 200 kilometres, and the journey would take maximum four hours in train.

Infrastructure has already been developed on both sides of the countries for the international train service. Offices have been built for immigration, customs and railway police.

Additional General Manager of Bangladesh Railway Habibur Rahman said primarily passengers would not be able to get on the train at Jessore junction, Benapole and Nawapara stations.

Considering passengers' demand for the train, the number of train trip and stations would be raised, he said, adding that passengers could buy tickets both from station counters and through online.

Benapole Railway Station Master Shahidur Rahman said passengers would first reach Benapole Station by the train from Khulna Station, and the train would then head for Kolkata with the passengers after completion of their customs and immigration formalities at the Benapole Station.

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Indian Foreign Minister Sushma Swaraj called on Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at the Rashtrapati Bhavan in New Delhi yesterday.

PHOTO: PID

Commercial supply of diesel from India formally starts today

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT, from New Delhi

India starts the commercial supply of high speed diesel (HSD) to Bangladesh today with an inaugural consignment of 2,200 metric tonnes.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, now in Delhi on a four-day state visit, and her Indian counterpart Narendra Modi are going to inaugurate the commercial operation jointly.

Minister of State for Petroleum and Natural Gas Dharmendra Pradhan made the declaration while talking to the visiting Bangladesh media delegation at a hotel in New Delhi yesterday morning.

India has planned to install a pipeline to carry HSD to Bangladesh, and a formal proposal on the friendship

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INDIAN MEDIA

Hasina's Delhi visit under spotlight

STAR REPORT

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's visit to India is widely covered by the neighbouring country's media with special focus on the defence deal and Teesta water sharing treaty.

Most of the media outlets yesterday reported that Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi broke the protocol and went to the Delhi airport to receive his Bangladesh counterpart.

Hasina went to India on a four-day state visit yesterday.

The Hindustan Times writes an editorial headlined "India must go the extra mile for Sheikh Hasina to strengthen ties with Bangladesh."

Hasina also wrote an article styled "Friendship is a flowing river" where she said India and Bangladesh could achieve many things that were beneficial to the people of both sides.

She added the support and cooperation of the neighbouring and friendly

countries had accelerated their goal to earn independence of Bangladesh. "Among those, India played the leading role."

The Hindustan Times in its editorial says as the next election in Bangladesh will be held in early 2019, Hasina cannot afford to be seen in any way as bowing to India on key issues.

"... it is therefore imperative for India to strengthen the hands of an ally who has adopted a common stance on issues that are crucial for New Delhi, such as terrorism and regional diplomacy."

It is important for the Bangladeshi premier to send a message to her people that Bangladesh is engaging India on an equal footing, "and in this New Delhi can help by going the extra mile to address her concerns," the editorial adds.

Both the sides -- India and Bangladesh -- should focus on the big

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It's time

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the Teesta deal, the Bangladesh PM said, "I am always hopeful about the Teesta. Let's see."

Hasina also said she was looking forward to a deal on constructing a barrage on the Ganges river with India's assistance.

In reply to a question about Modi setting aside protocol and going to the Air Force Station to welcome her, Hasina said, "I am really overwhelmed by the fact that the prime minister of such a large country like India can take the trouble of coming to the airport and receive me."

Asked what is her priority during the visit, she said, "I want an agreement on building a barrage on the Ganges with the assistance of India for the benefit of the people of the two countries."

Earlier, Hasina was given a red carpet welcome upon her arrival. The Bangladesh PM and her Indian counterpart vowed to take the Indo-Bangla ties to a "new level."

Indian External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj paid a courtesy call on the Bangladesh premier at the Rashtrapati Bhavan where the latter is staying.

During the four-day visit, the Teesta deal appears unlikely, as Indian officials have said "it will be a visit without water."

Hasina comes face to face with Mamata Banerjee, who has been resisting the Teesta deal, at a luncheon hosted by Modi for the visiting PM today and at a dinner by Indian President Pranab Mukherjee tomorrow.

The Teesta deal was set to be signed during the then Indian PM Manmohan Singh's visit to Dhaka in September 2011 but had to be scrapped at the last minute due to Mamata's objections.

Teesta water is crucial for Bangladesh especially in the lean period from December to March when water flow temporarily comes down to less than 1,000 cusecs from 5,000 cusecs.

Talking to this newspaper, a senior Indian official said, "India's transforming relations with Bangladesh is an unfolding good story and shows what can be achieved in neighbourly

relations with political will and mutual trust."

In a Twitter post yesterday, Modi said, "PM Sheikh Hasina and I are determined to take the relationship between our nations to a new level."

"Delighted to welcome H.E. Sheikh Hasina, the Prime Minister of Bangladesh, on her State Visit to India," he wrote in a separate post on the microblogging site.

In an article published in Indian newspaper "The Hindu" yesterday, Hasina expressed the hope that her India visit would take the bilateral ties to a new height.

Citing common linguistic affinity and shared cultural heritage with West Bengal, Hasina noted that there was no reason why the two countries cannot solve the Teesta issue.

The remarks by Hasina and Modi set the tone of her four-day visit, which will see the two countries sign more than 20 pacts in a range of key sectors. Those include a landmark agreement on defence cooperation and civil nuclear deal.

The framework agreement to be signed on civil nuclear energy will provide for extensive cooperation in the sector. It includes setting up of nuclear reactors by India for the Rooppur power plant in Bangladesh.

Modi and Hasina will hold comprehensive discussions today when India is set to announce a concessional loan of \$5 billion, and also a credit of \$500 million for Bangladesh to source military equipment from India.

During talks between the two premiers, issues such as combating terrorism, containing radicalisation of youths and enhancing counter-terror cooperation between the two countries are likely to figure prominently.

Mamata will be present when Modi and Hasina launch via video conferencing Khulna-Kolkata passenger bus and train services, and diesel supply from India's Radhikapur to Bangladesh's Parbatipur today.

To boost trade, the two sides are likely to announce setting up of another set of border haats.

Hasina will visit Ajmer tomorrow, and meet Indian business leaders and a pro-RSS think-tank on Monday before returning to Dhaka.

Fresh \$5b

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and Tongi and construction of Khulna-Mongla rail line with a bridge over the Rupsa river -- have been delayed for difficulty in acquiring land.

Implementation of the Khulna-Mongla rail line project can now start after the issues blocking the project have been resolved recently.

The progress of another project for modernising and strengthening Bangladesh Standards and Testing Institute is also slow.

With the second line of credit, 14 projects are to be implemented; but only three have been finalised.

The ready-to-be-implemented projects involve procurement of trucks and buses for Bangladesh Road Transport Corporation as well as equipment and machinery for road construction, repair and maintenance from India.

The rest 11 projects yet to be finalised were approved by the Exim Bank of India. Their estimated cost is \$1.7b, finance ministry officials said.

Among them are three railway projects -- a double line track in Khulna-Darshana section, extension of Saidpur Railway Workshop and conversion of Parbatipur-Kawna metre gauge line into dual gauge.

Development of an economic zone for Indian businessmen and construction of Ashuganj inland container river port are also on the list.

Of the expected \$5b fresh loan, \$4.5b will be given for various development projects, including economic zones, ports and road infrastructures, and river restoration, a finance ministry official told The Daily Star.

The remaining \$500m will be made available for defence procurement, the official said, but could not provide any details.

After discussions, the two countries have come up with 17 projects to be funded by the new credit. Around \$1b will be spent on the infrastructure development of Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant Project alone.

This time India will also provide credit for upgrading 245km roads -- Benapole-Jessore-Narail-Bhanga (135km), Ramgarh-Baruerhat (35km) and Maynamati-Brahmanbaria-Sarail (75km) -- considering transit and transshipment facilities and the operation of Chittagong and Mongla ports.

Like for the two previous loans, the interest rate of the new credit is one percent. Conditions will also be similar, such as the contractors should be hired from India and majority of the goods should be bought from there.



Chand Miah, sitting extreme right, of Gilabari village in Tangail's Basail upazila was all set to marry off his 14-year-old daughter Sadia Akter Thursday afternoon. But Saima Akter, extreme left, Basail upazila nirbahi officer, intervened and stopped the event. She fined Chand Miah Tk 1,000 and had an undertaking from him that he would not marry off his SSC examinee daughter until she was 18.

PHOTO: STAR

Lorry attack kills 3 in Stockholm

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The incident occurred just before 1300 GMT at the corner of the store and Drottninggatan, the city's biggest pedestrian street, above ground from Stockholm's central subway station.

Many police and emergency services personnel were at the scene, a Reuters witness said.

Nobody has been arrested in connection with the attack police said. There was no immediate claim of responsibility.

The attack followed a string of assaults in Europe by people using vehicles as weapons.

The deadliest attack came last year in France on the Bastille Day national holiday of July 14, when a man rammed a truck into a crowd in the Mediterranean resort of Nice, killing 86 people.

He was shot dead by police, and the Islamic State group later claimed responsibility.

Last month, Khalid Masood, a 52-year-old convert to Islam known to British security services, drove a car at high speed into pedestrians on London's Westminster Bridge before

launching a frenzied knife attack on a policeman guarding the parliament building.

The incident killed five people, while Masood himself was shot dead by police.

And in December, a man hijacked a truck and slammed into shoppers at a Christmas market in Berlin, killing 12 people.

That attacker was shot dead by police in Milan four days later, and the rampage was claimed by the IS.

In 2014, IS spokesman Abu Mohammed al-Adnani called for attacks on citizens of Western countries and gave instructions on how they could be carried out without military equipment, using rocks or knives, or by running people over in vehicles.

A government source told Reuters all Swedish government offices had been closed. All ministers were safe, the source said.

"We were standing by the traffic lights at Drottninggatan (Queen Street) and then we heard some screaming and saw a truck coming," a witness, who declined to be named, told Reuters.

"Then it drove into a pillar at Ahlens City (department store) where the hood started burning. When it stopped we saw a man lying under the tire. It was terrible to see," said the man, who saw the incident from inside his car.

Radio Sweden reporter Martin Svenningsen said he saw three dead people "but probably more". A Reuters witness saw a number of body-like forms covered by blankets at the scene.

Police confirmed three deaths and eight people injured.

King Carl Gustaf, Sweden's head of state, expressed his horror at the attack. "Our thoughts are going out to those that were affected, and to their families," he said in a statement from the royal palace.

European politicians reacted with solidarity to the news of the attack, with European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker saying that it was an "attack on us all."

Meanwhile, a spokesman for German Chancellor Angela Merkel said: "Our thoughts go out to the people in Stockholm, to the injured, their relatives, rescuers and police."

"We stand together against terror."

Well-equipped, short-staffed

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diagnostic tests done at private hospitals.

More often than not, patients suffer when they seek services there after 2:00pm since, the hospital authorities said, most of the existing manpower are available in the morning shift.

According to a senior health technologist, the radiology and imaging departments have only six staff. Five of them work in the morning shift, and one in the afternoon only to carry out X-rays for emergency cases. There is not a single person to work in the night shift.

Similarly, the clinical pathology department has staff mainly for the morning shift. For the afternoon and night shifts, there is only one person designated to provide services in very severe cases and mostly to deliver reports.

"We became helpless" in the middle of the night on February 16, said Abdul who finally managed to take his sister outside for the tests and then got her admitted to the Suhrawardy hospital.

The treatment was good and Ferdousi got well fast, but what he cannot shake off from his memory is the sheer panic he felt that day.

Monowara Begum had a similar experience one evening in the last week of January when she took her 11-year-old son Samir to the 550-bed hospital after he had swallowed a coin.

Samir needed an X-ray, but it was not possible there due to lack of staff.

"I was then forced to have Samir's X-ray done in a private diagnostic centre," Monowara said. The test cost her Tk 1,400 whereas she would have to pay only Tk 400 at the Suhrawardy hospital.

She expressed shock as to how a public hospital, which sees 2,500 patients daily from around the country seeking service, have issues like manpower shortage unaddressed.

The improved emergency department was inaugurated by Health Minister Mohammed Nasim on February 5 this year.

It is supposed to be functional 24 hours a day, but it seems all but technologists are set to provide most of the medical tests that any tertiary hospital should have arrangements for.

The number of patients coming to the emergency department is on the rise, but they are not getting services like MRI, CT scan, Ultra-sonography

and X-rays mostly in the afternoon and night shifts, said an emergency medical officer.

As a result, they have to go to other hospitals in the city. Many are also advised to get tests done at nearby diagnostic centres.

SSMCH Director Prof Uttam Kumar Barua acknowledged the shortage of medical technologists, but said the hospital authority wrote to the health ministry six months ago asking for permission to hire people for the vacant posts.

At least 30 health technologists are required to run the hospital's diagnostic centres round the clock, while there are less than 20 now.

"We haven't received any approval for recruitment," Uttam Kumar told The Daily Star.

A 20-bed casualty ward is being built to provide treatment to patients with serious injuries and so people should be hired to offer services there as well.

Health Secretary Sirazul Islam said he was aware of the matter. "We are seriously working on it and hope to start the recruitment process soon."