

After 10 years of delay, Mongla-Khulna rail line likely to open in October

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Online Desk: Rail communication with the country's second largest seaport Mongla is likely to begin in the last week of October as 98 percent work of Mongla-Khulna railway has been completed. Officials of the project are optimistic about finishing the rest of the work this month. "We have a plan to complete the work this month. We hope that train movement on the rail line will begin from the end of October," said project director Md. Arifuzzaman.

The project was approved at a meeting of the Executive Committee of the National Economic Council (ECNEC) on December 21, 2010 but the work began in November, 2016. Initially, the project was scheduled to be completed within May, 2020. Unfortunately, the project has experienced both time and cost overruns. This achievement is poised to usher in new opportunities in trade and commerce for the southwestern region, including the bustling Mongla port. Furthermore, there are plans to establish this railway as an international rail route, further accelerating the port's trade activities, said project officials.

According to project authorities, the government initiated this railway project, linking Phultala railway station in Khulna district to Mongla port, with the aim of facilitating the transportation of goods to neighboring countries -India, Nepal, and Bhutan under transit agreements. Initially the project cost was estimated at TK 1,721 crores, divided into three essential components: the construction of a railway bridge over the Rupsa River, the laying of main railway lines, and the establishment of telecommunications and signaling system.

The project commenced in 2011 with a scheduled completion date of December 2013, but it was delayed. As a result, the cost of the project in the first revision surged to Tk 3,801 crores. Despite subsequent timeline adjustments, the project remained incomplete, prompting a second revision and an extension until December 31, 2022. Alongside the extension, the project's cost escalated to Tk 4,260.44 crore. Indian contractor Larsen & Toubro took charge of constructing the railway bridge over the Rupsa River, while Indian contractor Ircon International was responsible for the rest of the project.

Project director Arifuzzaman attributed the delay in project implementation to various factors, including the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite the cost increase by 2539 crore in two revisions, the project's third phase did not see any additional cost, he said. Arifuzzaman expressed optimism about completing the project on schedule, noting that the Mongla-Khulna railway is poised to invigorate business activities once the train services commence.

Businessman Mostak Ahmed Mithu of the Mongla port, lauded the government's efforts and said this promises to enable cost-effective transportation of various goods, including garments, which will undoubtedly accelerate trade and commerce, he said.