

Rapid Rail: The Journey Begins

Roses & Chocolates, Selfies & Certificates, Busy Day 1 For Record Seekers & Keepers

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Ghaziabad: The first Namo Bharat train rolled out of Sahibabad station at 6am on Saturday with a small group of riders who made a special effort to become part of a special moment.

There were rewards – chocolates, roses and certificates – for the earliest birds, some of whom had waited patiently at the station from 4.30am as the country's first rapid rail began passenger operations on a 17km section of the inaugural Delhi-Meerut corridor that was flagged off by the Prime Minister on Friday.

Atharva, a 2-year-old boy who came with his family, was possibly the youngest rider on the first train while Sahib Ahmad was the first to purchase a Namo Bharat ticket at 5.36am from Sahibabad to Duhai.

The NCR Transport Corporation, rapid rail's operator, expected Day 1 ridership to cross the 10,000 mark. Downloads of the Namo Bharat Connect app, which helps commuters navigate rapid rail and buy tickets, had exceeded 2,000 by Saturday evening, with a few hours still to go for train services to wrap up for the day at 11pm.

Speaking to **TOI**, Ahmad, a Vasundhara resident, said he had seen the rapid rail corridor taking shape for years and wanted to make sure he part of the milestone. "I wanted my name to be recorded as the first to book a ticket on a Namo Bharat train. So I reached Sahibabad station before 5am even though I knew the service would only start at 6am," said Ahmad, who was among those to be awarded a 'first rider' certificate by the NCRTC.

FIRST DAY, FIRST SHOW



Greeted with roses, chocolates and certificates, two-year-old Atharva Singh (top left) was among students and office-goers who embarked on a historic journey on the first Namo Bharat trains on Saturday

Asked about the ride, Ahmad said he had expected it to be similar to metro. "I was wrong. This is totally different," he said.

Yogendra Sharma, who too was among the first riders, described the station and the train as "world class". "When Delhi metro launched its first line from Tis Hazari to Shahdara in 2002, I had gone there within days to get a feel of a metro train. This time, I wanted to be here on the first day itself," said Sharma, who had come from Muradnagar.

Passengers who boarded the trains on Saturday moved from one compartment to another to check out the facilities, pausing frequently for selfies, video calls and also going live on social media. Samendra Singh, a student, kept changing seats till a train attendant gently restrained him. "I just wanted the best view. I was so excited, I couldn't resist it," Singh grinned.

Khushi Mittal, a second-year student of mass communication from IMR college in Duhai, was thrilled because she can take the train to her college every day. A resident of Rajendra Nagar, Khushi's usual mode of commute is an auto, which she hopes to bid goodbye to.

"It's not only expensive but takes a long time, especially with the jams at the Meerut tri-section," she said. The rapid rail ride will take less than 15 minutes. Parnika Tyagi, who lives in Delhi, was visiting a relative's place in Ghaziabad and decided to make the most of the opportunity. "It was a sudden plan. The stations look like an airport. The ride was very smooth," said Parnika.