

Flagged off by PM, Vande Bharat brings Gorakhpur, Lucknow closer

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Onboard Vande Bharat Express: Long before a decked-up Vande Bharat Express chugged into the Gorakhpur station for its maiden voyage to Lucknow on Friday, the mood in the city streets had turned electric.

A sea of people – old, young, men and women, some with their faces painted and others showering petals and waving flags – lined up both sides of the road leading to the station. Soaked in rain and vibrant atmospherics & cheering hysterically, people

pushed through the barricades to catch a glimpse of Prime Minister Narendra Modi as his motorcade made its way to the train station.

The semi-high-speed train – Uttar Pradesh's second Vande Bharat train as the first between Varanasi and Delhi was started in February 2019 – was flagged off at 4:47 pm by PM Modi in the presence of CM Yogi Adityanath and Governor Anandiben Patel at the Gorakhpur junction.

The 302km journey of the train – between Gorakhpur to Lucknow via Ayodhya – with 540 passengers onboard was



PM Narendra Modi interacting with students on Vande Bharat Express, in Gorakhpur on Friday and (right) people click selfies after the train's arrival in Lucknow on its maiden run

no less exciting. Across the trip, at its different halts – Sahjanwa, Khalilabad, Basti, Bhabhnan, Mankapur & Ayodhya – people lined up near

the tracks, perched precariously on rooftops, trees, even pole and windows, standing in playgrounds and other open spaces to watch the tra-



ins' aerodynamics and cheered when the train passed by.

Officials, however, said the train will have just two stops – Basti and Ayodhya –

once regular operations start on July 9. The express train will run six days a week, barring Saturdays, with a little over 550 passengers.

Cruising smoothly at 111kmph, the train offered a unique experience to the passengers who were served food and beverages by the catering staff. Railways, too, had decorated all seven halts with colourful lights themed around Diwali.

At Ayodhya junction, the train had a grand welcome ceremony with trumpets, dance and petal shower modelled on the arrival of 'Pushpak Viman' in Ayodhya when Lord

Rama returned after his conquest of Lanka.

The train was packed through its entire journey with schoolchildren, media persons, railway fans and some passengers who were offered complimentary passes for the inaugural journey.

Some 100 YouTubers who were invited by the Indian Railways from across the country fed live details of the Vande Bharat Express maiden journey to their millions of subscribers in their vernacular languages.

"It's a dream come true. I had been watching visuals of Vande Bharat Express on TV

and social media, but today I'm actually travelling on it. The train gives the feeling of an airplane that cruises on track," said Satya Shukla, the class XI student of a private school in Gorakhpur. She also drew a painting of the train for the inaugural ceremony.

Among those who came to see off the train was sniffer dog Pluto, a police Labrador. "Pluto has served for 10 years and is set to retire in 20 days. Its duty for the inaugural run of Vande Bharat Express will be memorable for us," said head constable Ram Prasad, the dog's handler.