

Last ditch efforts on to save new bus corridor

After spending several gruelling hours under a hot Thursday sun monitoring the traffic flow on the Ambedkar Nagar-Moolchand Bus Rapid Transit System (BRTS) corridor, officials worked hard to sort out glitches, especially after Chief Minister Sheila Dikshit's veiled threat to scrap the new bus corridor.

Delhi's Transport Minister Haroon Yusuf, who made a personal visit to the stretch, said that efforts were being made to rectify the loopholes and that the things would further improve in days to come.

"There is substantial improvement in the traffic flow. Every possible effort is being made to fine-tune the corridor's functioning," Yusuf said. Clearly, the Delhi government Thursday doubled up effort to salvage the controversial project.

But opposition to the corridor is building up and the issue found resonance in parliament as well a day earlier.

The main opposition Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) launched a scathing assault against Dikshit's government for launching an ill-conceived and hasty scheme. The party's senior leader and member of parliament from south Delhi V.K. Malhotra Wednesday raised the issue in the Lok Sabha and sought the corridor scheme be scrapped.

Dikshit is under tremendous pressure from her own party leaders to find a way out and not risk public outburst in view of the assembly elections in November this year.

Several members, including Mohammand Salim of the Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPM-M), supported Malhotra's plea. Earlier, calls to scrap the BRTS corridor were also made in the Rajya Sabha.

Chief Secretary Rakesh Mehta inspected the corridor Thursday. Senior officials from the implementing agencies accompanied him. Dikshit has convened a high-level meet Saturday to review the entire project and decide the fate of the corridor.

"Certainly the traffic management has improved," R.K. Verma, commissioner of the department of transport, told IANS.

He said that around 100 private Blueline buses plying on the stretch would be phased out from May 1, when the corridor is officially thrown open to the public.

The official claim apart, the commuters said there was only marginal improvement in the traffic flow as many skipped the corridor to avoid jams. The traffic snarls over the past few days left many apprehensive about getting onto the new corridor.

Earlier in the day, senior officials, including the Delhi Integrated Multimodal Transport System (DIMTS) chief S.N. Sahai, Bus Rapid Transit System (BRTS) senior manager R.K.Minhas, and government officials personally monitored the test-run along the entire route.

DIMTS, the implementing agency for the corridor, had deployed all key officials in an attempt to

justify the Dikshit government's decision to elevate the city's public transport on par with Beijing, Mexico City, Bogota, Taipei and Hanoi - to name a few cities where BRTS has been successful.

The city government has decided to introduce more low-floor high capacity buses and ordinary buses of the DTC.

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