

Vande Bharat: India's fastest train takes off

The semi-high speed express will cover Delhi to Varanasi in just eight hours

YUTHIKA BHARGAVA

ON BOARD THE VANDE
BHARAT EXPRESS

The inaugural trip of India's first semi-high speed train, Vande Bharat Express, was flagged off by Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the New Delhi railway station on Friday.

The train, named 'Train 18' at the concept stage, is a plush 16-coach, air-conditioned, self-propelled train set and doesn't have a locomotive.

The express will ply between Delhi and Varanasi, with halts at Kanpur and Allahabad. It will complete the 780-km journey in eight hours, slicing off 180 minutes from the current travel time of 11-and-a-half hours. This is India's fastest train to date, capable of commercial speeds up to 160 km per



New service: Narendra Modi being saluted by the guard of Vande Bharat Express at New Delhi station. ■ SANDEEP SAXENA

hour. On the Delhi-Varanasi route, however, its top speed would be restricted to 130 km per hour. The train will start commercial operations on this route on February 17. The tickets for that date are already sold out.

A big crowd gathered to witness the launch of the train in Delhi, greeting its flagging-off with excited chants of 'Vande Mataram'. Many onlookers tried to take selfies with the gleaming blue-and-white train and

even tried to touch it. Cell phone-wielding crowds and selfie-mania greeted the train at both Kanpur and Allahabad.

The express will have two travel classes: executive and chair car, similar to the Shatabdi. From Delhi to Varanasi, an air-conditioned chair car ticket will cost ₹1,760, while the executive class fare will be ₹3,310. In the return direction, the chair car and executive class tickets will cost ₹1,700 and ₹3,260 respectively. The fares are inclusive of catering charges.

Keeping with the Railways' stated aim of offering a "totally new travel experience" to passengers, the train's interiors have the look and feel of a commercial airplane.

**IT WILL BE A GAME-CHANGER,
SAYS GOYAL** ▶ PAGE 5