

The Padma Bridge : Dream on the Verge of Fulfilment and its economic Importance

"Bangladesh wasn't born to live off others or on the mercy of others and be dependent on them."

— Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina

Introduction:

Construction of the Padma Bridge has been a dream for many especially for the ones born and bred in the southern region of Bangladesh. Such an infrastructure is projected to benefit the economic activities all over the country through a multiplier effect. The dream of Padma Bridge has already turned into reality with its construction inauguration in 12 December, 2015.

The Padma Bridge is a multipurpose road-rail bridge across the Padma River. When completed it will be the largest bridge in Bangladesh and the first fixed river crossing for road traffic. It will connect Munshiganj with Shariatpur and Madaripur, linking the south-west of the country, to northern and eastern regions.

The bridge will contribute to a great extent to our communication, economy and industrialization.

History:

The Bangladesh Bridge Authority (BBA) invited the pre-qualification tenders for the project in April 2010. Construction of the bridge was expected to commence by early 2011 and be ready for major completion in 2013.

After allegation of corruption by some people associated with project preparation, the World Bank withdrew its commitment and other donors followed. The Government of Bangladesh then decided to fund the project from its own fund.

China proposed building the bridge on the build-operate-transfer (BOT) basis by investing \$2 billion or 70 percent of the project cost. Four companies - China Major Bridge Engineering Company, Daelim-L&T JV and Samsung C&T Corporation - purchased the tender papers. But only the Chinese company submitted their financial proposal on 24 April, 2014.

On 17 June 2014, important progress had been made in the construction of the Padma Multipurpose Bridge. A construction firm, China Major Bridge Engineering Company Ltd, has been selected to construct the long aspired bridge on the river Padma. The 6.15 km bridge, costing an estimated 91.72 billion taka.

Design and Structure:

The bridge design contract was awarded to a team led by Munsell AECOM, the New Zealand business of AECOM. The design team also includes experts from North-west Hydraulic Consultants, SMEC International, AEC consultants, Aas Jakobsen and HR Wallingford.

The bridge will be 6.15 km long and 18.10 m wide. It will be a double deck composite steel truss structure and will use 41 spans. Any span is 150 m long. The upper deck will contain a four lane highway, while the lower deck will house a rail line, gas transmission pipeline, optic fibre cable and power transmission lines.

Padma Multipurpose Bridge: At a Glance

Carries : Motor Vehicles, Railway

Crosses : Padma River

Locale : Mawa, Munshiganj to Tajira, Sharzhatpur
Bangladesh.

Maintained by : Bangladesh Bridge Authority

Designer : Maunsell, AECOM.

Contractor : China Major Bridge Engineering Corporation

Design : Truss Bridge

Material : Steel

Total Length : 6150 m (20180 ft)

Width : 18.10 m (59.38 ft)

No. of spans : 41

No. of lanes : 4

Pillar : 42

Project cost : 6.5 billion dollar

Boost GDP : 1.23%

Construction begin : December, 2014

Open (Probable) : June, 2022

Financing :

The donor agencies including World Bank, Asian Development Bank and the JICA promised a loan \$ 1.9 billion for the project. But the loan was cancelled by the donors on the allegation of corruption conspiracy against former Communication Minister Syed Abul Hossain. However, the government dismissed the World Bank's allegation and decided to construct the bridge through its own fund. The government has made an allocation of Tk. 8100 crore for the Padma Bridge project in the Annual Development Programme (ADP) of the next fiscal year (2014-15). And thus, the government will fund for the project for its total cost figuring BDT 30193.88 crore.

Constructing Process :

For the benefit of fast and smooth construction the project is broadly divided into six parts. Among them five are physical and one is supervisory work.

Total six parts are as follows:

- a) Main Bridge
- b) River Training
- c) Tajira Link Road
- d) Mawa Link Road
- e) Other Infrastructures
- f) Supervision Work

Economic Importance of Padma Multipurpose Bridge:

On the eve of its 50th birthday, Bangladesh basks with glory and pride. The country has crossed several milestones along the way and is set to achieve many more in the coming years.

With a high growth of its gross domestic product (GDP) the country has increased its per capita income much more than many of its peers and reduced the rate poverty.

On December 10, 2020, another feather in the cap was added. The dream of having a bridge over the mighty Padma river is going to be

fulfilled finally. The last span of the Padma Multipurpose Bridge was installed. This will connect both sides of the Padma river. This long-awaited bridge carries significance for Bangladesh on several accounts.

"Bangladesh's largest river bridge is expected to bolster the country's economy through a landmark connection between Dhaka and the country's southern region".

— Financial Express

i) Economic and Social transformation will be enormous :

Reliable infrastructure plays a key role in economic growth. Studies have found positive relationship between infrastructure and economic output in many countries. This happens through gross domestic capital formation, employment, trade and human capital. The Padma Bridge is estimated to increase the GDP of the country and will benefit about three crore people across 21 south-western districts of Bangladesh.

ii) Bangladesh's confidence goes up :

This bridge is a testament on how a country with limited sources can achieve its goal if there is determination. Undoubtedly, the construction has enhanced the confidence of the country. This will allow policymakers to plan for larger infrastructure. This will also encourage foreign investors to invest in infrastructure and in order to progress in some other sectors in Bangladesh.

iii) Total Economic Development :

Padma Bridge will enhance the economic development as a whole by developing the communication system between southwest districts and the whole country.

A "World Bank" assesment shows,

Padma Bridge will lead to a \$ 6,000 million rise in GDP over 31 years from 2015. Its economic benefits will peak by 2032 with an annual return of about \$ 300 million a year.

As a result of it,

Facts	Percentage
Total GDP increase	1.23%
GDP increase in south-west parts	2.3%
Rate of reduction in poverty	0.84%

Source: A review of ADB, JICA & Bridge Authority (SANEM)

iv) Improving Regional Cooperation

It will enhance the scope to increase regional cooperation between neighbouring states. The Padma Bridge will also connect Bangladesh with the proposed Trans-Asian Highway and International communication Network.

v) Industrial Development:

Road communication is considered the life of industrial development. This is because a better transportation and communication system is a prerequisite for the availability of raw materials and to market the finished products. So, undeniably Padma Bridge will improve the industrial development.

v) Development of farming, manufacturing, construction, transport and services :

The accessibility of good communication brought by Padma Bridge will play an important role in the development of farming, manufacturing, construction, transport and services.

According to the ICE Business Times — The Prospects of Padma —

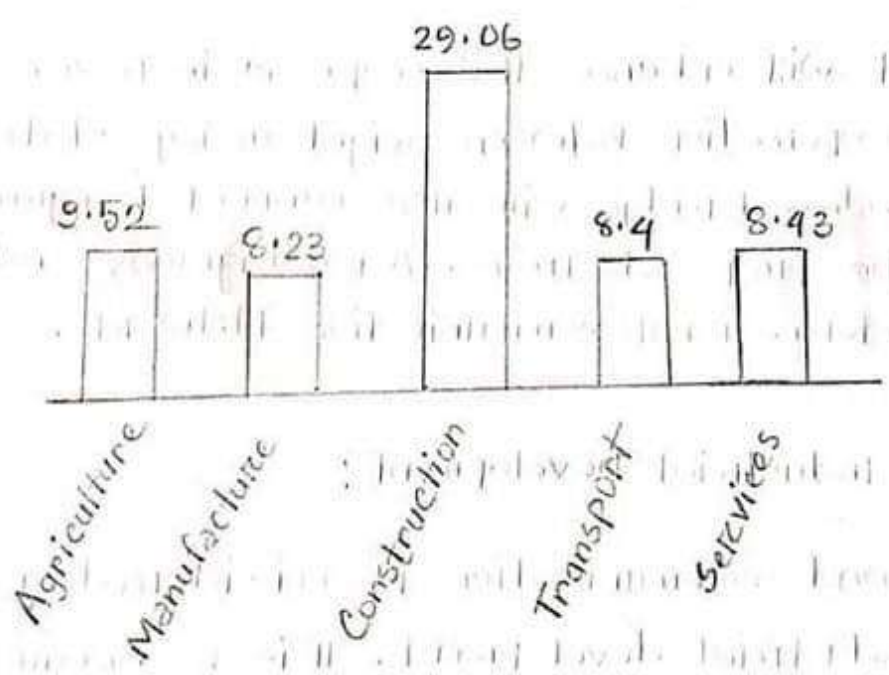


Fig. Gross output percentage increase of various industries.

vi) Employment Opportunities :

Padma Bridge will help with the expansion of industrialization, commercial activities and transport system. As a result, some people out of about two crore unemployed people will get work.

vii) Poverty Reduction :

The bridge will reduce poverty by 1.9% a year at the national level, donor organizations assessment shows. As a result we will notice a change in the course of life of poor people.

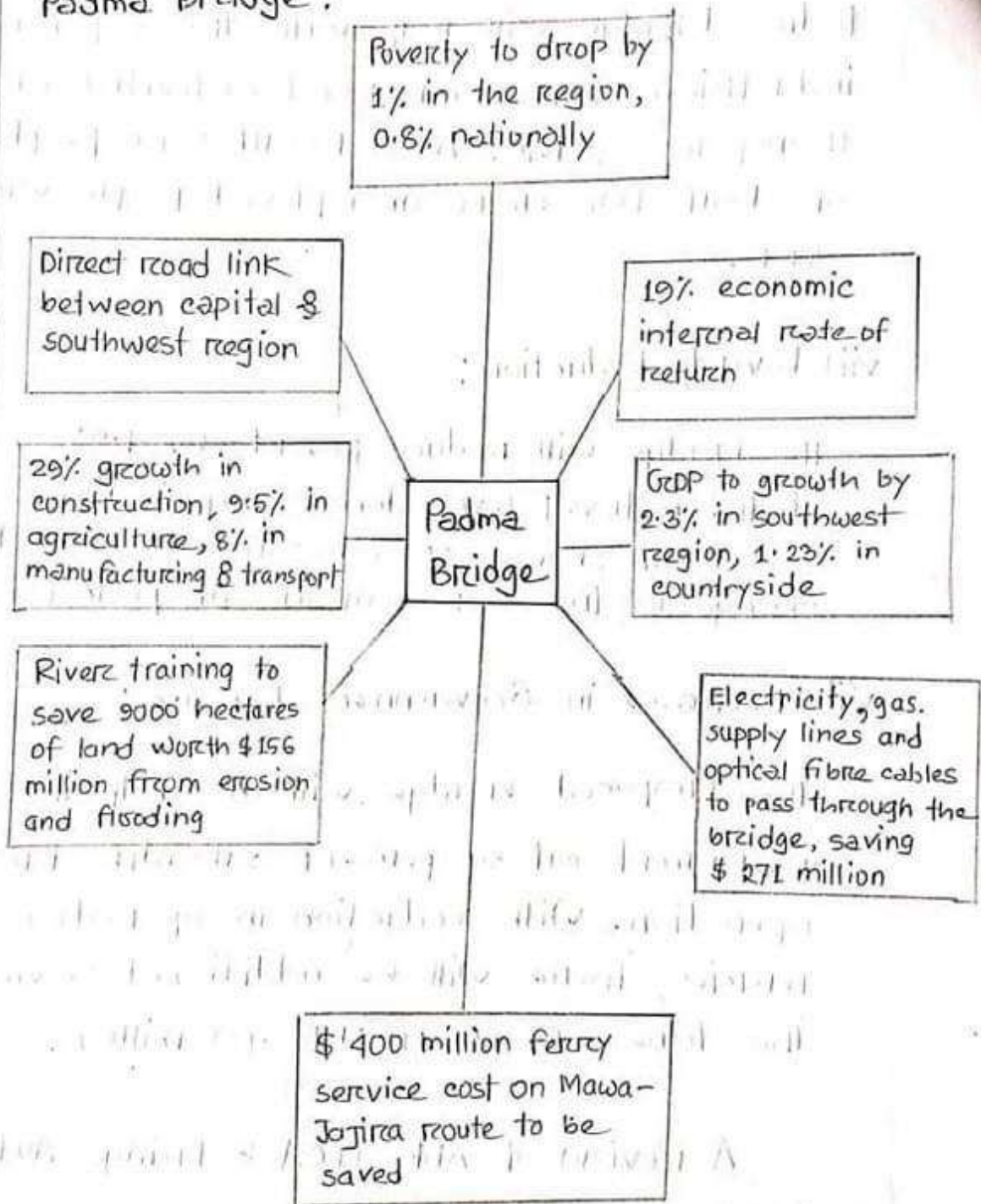
viii) Decrease in Government Expense :

The proposed bridge will also help the government cut 50 percent subsidies for ferry operation. With reduction in operation of ferries, there will be additional savings, to the tune of about USD 400 million.

A review of ADB, JICA & Bridge Authority finds that,

"Total savings will be 1,29,584 crore Tk within 31 years through transportation in Padma Bridge."

An overview of economic importance of Padma Bridge :



Conclusion :

The construction of the Padma Bridge has been a landmark achievement of the government.

Earlier it was thought impossible to build a mighty bridge like this with own fund but it is on the verge of completion. With this we can prove that we can build a mighty bridge with our own fund without any loan or any help from any monetary organization. But, without its efficient management and governance, the rate of return from this mega project will be low.

Finally, as Bangladesh is working towards reviving the economy from the fallouts of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Padma Bridge can help the country fulfil this effort to a great extent. It can also contribute towards achieving sustainable development.

Sources / Reference

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