

Padma Bridge and Fulfilling Vision-2041: Perspective Realizing SDGs

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Bangladesh is a riverine country and most of the public transport and business depends on rivers. Padma is one of the vital rivers to influence the country's economy as well as GDP. The Padma Multipurpose Bridge has significant impacts on the whole country that contributes to the socio-economic and industrial development on southern-west region Bangladesh. It has improved the connectivity of southern-west parts of the country with the capital. The bridge is very special as it has been built on a most complex river system which was a divide between the south-western region and the most important economic hubs of Bangladesh. The Padma Bridge changed the lives of nearly 30 million people living in the southwestern region of the country, promoted modern and commercial activities, and expanded economic and job opportunities. Bangladesh government has been rigorously working towards achieving the SDGs by 2030 and attaining middle-income status by 2031. It also attempts to be an economically developed, socially inclusive and environment-friendly country by the year 2041. The country has reached several milestones, among which the self-financed Padma Bridge is the most significant and thus the self-financed Padma Bridge will contribute to fulfilling Vision-2041 as well as realizing SDGs.

Economists and policymakers claim communication system is called the pillar of economic development. In this aspect, definitely Padma bridge will play the dominant role in the overall economic development of the country. In fact, economic growth and development of a country depends upon a good transport and communication system and all economic activity recycle it. Due to Padma bridge, our economic activities especially agricultural product, raw materials and finished goods of industry will transfer easily and at the low-cost. comparatively, This bridge directly has connected the 21 districts of the southern part with Dhaka and its adjoining industrial towns like Narayanganj, Narsingdi and Gazipur. Direct connectivity with Dhaka will expand industrialization, trade and commerce and ease the supply of raw materials. Swift transportation will result in a quick return of investment and economic expansion.

Bangladesh steps into a new era of development as a communication's mega infrastructure, the Padma multiple bridge, becomes a reality undeterred by multiple headwinds. Our Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina mentioned that the Padma bridge is not merely a structure of steel, cement and concrete, it is a symbol of the country's capability, pride and dignity. The Premier also mentioned that this bridge belongs to the people of Bangladesh and it encapsulates our passion, creativity, courage, endurance and perseverance. Bangladesh's foreign friends continue to congratulate Bangladesh on the completion of the Padma Bridge and appreciate its determination and courage under the leadership of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

To improve lives and livelihoods of the people, role of this bridge is very significant. The bridge will have its positive impact on achieving the UN's SDGs by 2030. According to the economists, the inauguration of the Padma bridge will reduce the overall poverty index in the country. They mentioned that once the communication and investment environment is improved with the Padma bridge, the poverty rate in this region would be reduced by 1.01 percent every year while the countrywide poverty rate would be reduced by 0.84 percent every year and thus, our people's income will increase. Experts also mentioned that around 1.04 percent of the country's total workforce would be employed while around 10 lakh new employments would be created in the next five years which would be triple after 10 years. Various structures would be built on both side of the Padma Bridge. As a result, there will be

a lot of progress in the human development index. Already, the collection of vehicle tolls contributed to our national growth. So far taka- has been collected from Padma Bridge toll plaza.

The Padma Multipurpose Bridge is going to be a miracle for the world in many ways. It will be able to bring a radical change in the economic dynamics of the country. Economists said, the bridge would function as a 'game changer' of the country's economy. They cited that due to the improvement in regional and international communication connectivity, the GDP growth of the southern region would be increased by 2.3 percent every year while that at national level by 1.23 percent per year. Besides, there will be additional 0.5 percent GDP growth once the rail communication is launched at the bridge (BSS, 25th June 2022).

In several ways, the Padma bridge is one of the highest achievements of independent Bangladesh. The bridge has opened up huge possibilities in the tourism sector in Bangladesh. It will have significant positive impacts on the tourism industry, a sector which contributes about 4% to the GDP of Bangladesh. Since this Padma multipurpose bridge has improved the communication system between Dhaka to Kuakata, as a result, many tourists will visit Kuakata, Sunderban and its surrounding area very often that a strong communication network will be built. After the inauguration of the Padma bridge, the number of then tourists in Kuakata and Sunderban, will be increased which is much less than that of the Cox's Bazar and then the potential of tourists spots in southern parts.

The Padma Bridge is expected to save nearly two hours in travel time between Dhaka division and the south-west for cars and buses and from five to ten hours for trucks. The bridge also cuts the travel time between Dhaka and the Mongla Port as the distance will come down to an unbroken 170 Kilometres, only which is much shorter than the Dhaka-Chattogram Seaport distance of 264 Kilometres. It will encourage landlocked countries like Nepal and Bhutan to use these ports. The bridge will contribute to creating a multi-dimensional international road and rail transport network for the eastern region of the Indian Subcontinent. It will establish the missing link (Trans-Asian Highway and the Trans-Asian Railway). These are expected to transform Bangladesh into a regional hub for development, connectivity, trade and investment and thereby boosting its geopolitical value. The international road and rail transport network will promote our trans-border ties as well as cultural development of the eastern region of the Indian Subcontinent.

Over the past few years, economic progress, GDP growth, and the gradual improvement of various social indicators have gained international recognition. Of course, this bridge will reduce overall poverty and contribute to industrial development, regional trade, agricultural expansion, and connectivity. Setting up economic zones, industrial cities and high-tech parks have already been initiated in the southern region. Gradually investment and employment will be increasing which will eventually develop the living standards of the people of the southern-west parts of the country. Foreign investors will be encouraged to invest in infrastructure and trade in Bangladesh. Therefore, the Padma Multipurpose Bridge will support Bangladesh towards achieving the SDGs by 2030, attaining middle-income status by 2031 and being a developed country by 2041.

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08.08.2022

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