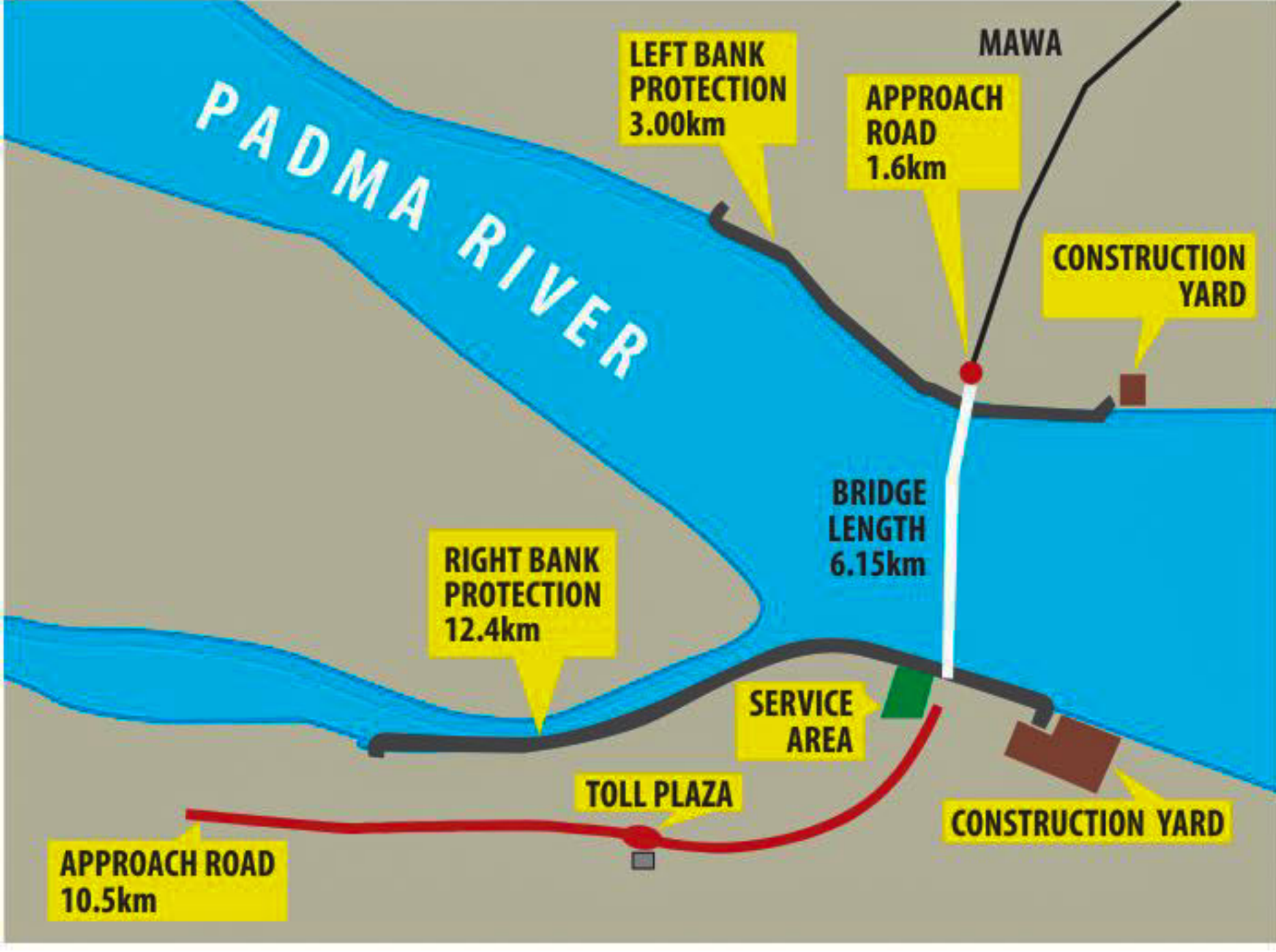




Dream coming true

PM opens main work of Padma Bridge today; but country to miss out on total benefit if additional \$6b is not invested in related infrastructure



M ABUL KALAM AZAD and REJAUL KARIM BYRON

When it opens in 2018, the much-expected Padma Bridge will shorten travel time between the capital and the southern region, giving a major boost to trade and economic activities in the country, say experts.

About a quarter of the country's population living in the southwest region will directly benefit from the 6.15-kilometre bridge as the travel time to and from Dhaka city will be cut short to about one-fourth of what it is now.

Currently it takes about 13 hours on average for a trip from the capital to Khulna via Mawa ferry ghat. This time will be just about three and a half hours, once the bridge is opened to traffic, say experts involved in the country's largest infrastructure project.

People of Bagerhat, Barisal, Jessore and other districts in the South will also benefit from the shorter travel time, they say.

More than half the vehicles that take the Paturia-Daulatdia road will use the bridge to save time and fuel.

The southern region that sees natural disasters and salinity problems will have more investment in different areas, including fisheries and agro-farms. There will be more jobs as well, according to experts.

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BENEFITS OF THE BRIDGE



- 1 Direct road link between the capital and the southwest region, Mongla Port
- 2 Travel time between the capital and the southwest region to be reduced by one-fourth; tourism to get a boost
- 3 Being part of the proposed Asian Highway and Trans-Asian Railway Network, the bridge will facilitate regional connectivity
- 4 29% growth in construction sector, 9.5% in agriculture, 8% in manufacturing and transport
- 5 Poverty to drop by 1% in the region, 0.8% nationally
- 6 GDP to grow by 1.7% in southwest region, 0.56% countrywide
- 7 New employment and business opportunities for local people
- 8 Daily traffic to increase from 4,300 at present to 12,831 in 5 years, to 45,000 in 2040
- 9 19% economic internal rate of return
- 10 River training to save 9,000 hectares of land worth \$156 million from erosion and flooding
- 11 Electricity, gas supply lines and optical fibre cables to pass through the bridge, saving \$271 million
- 12 \$400 million ferry service cost on Mawa-Janjira route to be saved

BRIDGE TO STAND IN HILSA'S WAY

PINAKI ROY and HASAN JAHD TUSHER

While the government's dream project Padma bridge is widely expected to boost the country's economy, there is also fear that it may take a heavy toll on the famous hilsa fish of the river.

According to the environment impact assessment (EIA) report for the bridge project, migration of juvenile hilsa will be seriously hampered during the construction.

The Padma is an important migratory route for the national fish and the construction activities may result in temporary changes in the migration pattern, it reads. "Because hilsa is very sensitive to noise and vibration."

The report, however, does not say anything about the long-term effect on the fish.

Researchers who have been studying migration pattern and biological habits of hilsa say the bridge might have lasting effect on the life-cycle of the fish.

"After the construction, silt deposit will increase under the bridge and pattern of Padma's current would change. It will have an impact on hilsa," said Anisur Rahman, director of Bangladesh Fisheries Research Institute.

The fish may not migrate beyond the Padma bridge if the pattern of current changes or too much siltation occurs in the river, he told The Daily Star.

"Following our conservation activities, shoals of hilsa again started moving up to Rajshahi, even to Malda in India, during the spawning season. But

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