

## INFRASTRUCTURAL DEVELOPMENT IN BANGLADESH

## Mega projects need expert management



Prof Jamilur Reza Choudhury, vice-chancellor of University of Asia Pacific, Salehuddin Ahmed, adjunct faculty of Independent University of Bangladesh, civil engineer M Shamim Bosunia (at the head of the table), and experts and academics at a discussion on "Infrastructural Development in Bangladesh" at The Daily Star Centre yesterday.

PHOTO:  
STAR

## STAFF CORRESPONDENT

As Bangladesh is going for mega infrastructure projects worth billions of dollars, their management is becoming ever more important for ensuring the maximum benefit for Bangladesh, experts said yesterday.

They said most of the projects are complex, use modern technology, and involve complicated financial arrangements. But Bangladesh lacks expertise in each of these areas.

The Daily Star and BSRM, the country's leading steel maker, jointly organised a roundtable on "Infrastructural Development in Bangladesh" at The Daily Star Centre in Dhaka.

Prof Jamilur Reza Choudhury, vice-chancellor of University of Asia Pacific, said Bangladesh is progressing in terms of infrastructures. "But perhaps the progress could have been faster and better-managed."

He said there was weakness in implementation agencies.

Many who have become project directors do not have the relevant educational qualifications. The professor recommended establishing a special cadre on project management.

Project managers should be groomed to handle the mega projects and trained on contractual aspects, negotiation skills and financing, he said.

They should be given training for a year or two so they can run the mega projects in the pipeline.

Prof Jamilur said the culture of maintenance was lacking in Bangladesh.

He said he had had some opportunities to witness decision-making at the top level. "Some of the major decisions are taken without much thought."

Ahsan H Mansur, executive director of the Policy Research Institute of Bangladesh, said infrastructure deficiency in Bangladesh was serious and widespread and cut across all sectors.

He said Bangladesh needs to spend \$20-30 billion a year on infrastructure development. Now it spends \$8 billion.

"We have to get value for money. That is a major issue given the governance situation in Bangladesh," he said.

Ahsan said Bangladesh was setting up the Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant for \$13 billion to generate \$2,400 megawatts of electricity but the same amount of power could be generated for \$2.5 billion or less.

"Why should we then go for this kind of investment?"

The railway on the Padma Bridge is a Tk 40,000-crore project, which is costlier than the bridge itself. "How many trains need to run on the lines a day to make that investment worthwhile? Is there any analysis of that? No," said the economist.

"There is funding and let's go for it, that's not the way to go ...," he said.

Ahsan said it does not take long to get a country to pile up liabilities. "I agree that we are in a good position and have fiscal space.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Enhance capacity to implement mega projects
- Involve legal, financial, technical and managerial experts
- Make rail and waterways integral part of transport system
- G2G projects must be thoroughly examined and negotiated
- Develop a special cadre on project management
- Source construction materials domestically
- Make long-term plan for debt servicing
- Strengthen domestic research capacities
- Update Bangladesh National

But we can't squander money."

"I would say there is a nexus between the government and the business forces in the power sector," he said, adding that this nexus was causing inefficiency and was going to hurt the whole economy.

Syed Afsor H Uddin, chief executive officer of the PPP Authority, said he recently attended the PPP Global Conference in Sydney and Bangladesh was highlighted there as one of the rising markets for public private partnership development projects.

He said Bangladesh's debt to GDP ratio stands at about 27 percent, a rate that is envious for many countries. "We have huge amount of fiscal headroom to increase infrastructure spending."

Md Kabir Ahmed Bhuiyan, president of the Institution of Engineers, Bangladesh, said decision-making process has to be decentralised.

Renowned civil engineer M Shamim Bosunia said many infrastructure projects remain ineffective because of poor planning and lack of feasibility studies. The government has built several flyovers in the city but these are contributing very little to solving the unbearable traffic situation.

Khan Mahmud Amanat, a professor of the civil engineering department of Buet, said tunnel blocks are being imported from China for the Karnaphuli tunnel project, which raised the project cost. These blocks can be easily produced in Bangladesh, he claimed.

Toufiq M Seraj, managing director of

Sheltech, said the government should immediately implement the Detailed Area Plan of Dhaka city.

M Firoze, head of marketing and product development of BSRM, said the government should develop railways and waterways sectors to reduce the pressure on roads.

Md Abu Sadeque, director of the Housing & Building Research Institute, said the government should immediately finalise and publish the gazette of the Bangladesh National Building Code 2017. Otherwise, the country will not be able to solve the current chaotic situation in the construction sector.

Prof AMM Safiullah, vice-chancellor of Ahsanullah University of Science & Technology, said Bangladesh has been neglecting the railways.

Sujit Kumar Bala, professor of the Institute of Water and Disaster Management at Buet, said the country should pay attention to land utilisation.

Mahfuz Anam, editor and publisher of The Daily Star, said infrastructure development is a must for Bangladesh to become a middle income and developed country.

"The interesting thing is that we are getting evidence that there is no hesitation on the part of the government about it. It is also clear from the spending of the government on infrastructure development."

Salehuddin Ahmed, an adjunct faculty of Independent University Bangladesh, moderated the discussion.

POINTS OF VIEW J2

www.bsr.com



পুরো বিশ্ব বলেছিলো 'সম্ভব না'  
একজন প্রধানমন্ত্রী আর  
১৬ কোটি বাঙালি বলেছিলাম  
**কেন না!**

পদ্মা সেতুর ভিত্তিপ্রস্তর স্থাপনের ২য় বর্ষ পূর্তিতে অভিনন্দন জানাই:

প্রধানমন্ত্রীর অফিস • সড়ক পরিবহন ও সেতু মন্ত্রণালয় • সেতু বিভাগ  
বাংলাদেশ ব্রিজ অথরিটি • বাংলাদেশ সেনাবাহিনী • কোরিয়া এক্সপ্রেসওয়ে কর্পোরেশন (কেইসি)  
চায়না মেজর ব্রিজ ইঞ্জিনিয়ারিং কর্পোরেশন • বিএসআরএম গ্রুপ



BSRM  
building a safer nation