



PADMA BRIDGE: AN AUDACIOUS DREAM COMES TRUE

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MISSION IMPOSSIBLE ACCOMPLISHED

A bridge of Bangladesh's very own finally comes to reality riding through rough waters

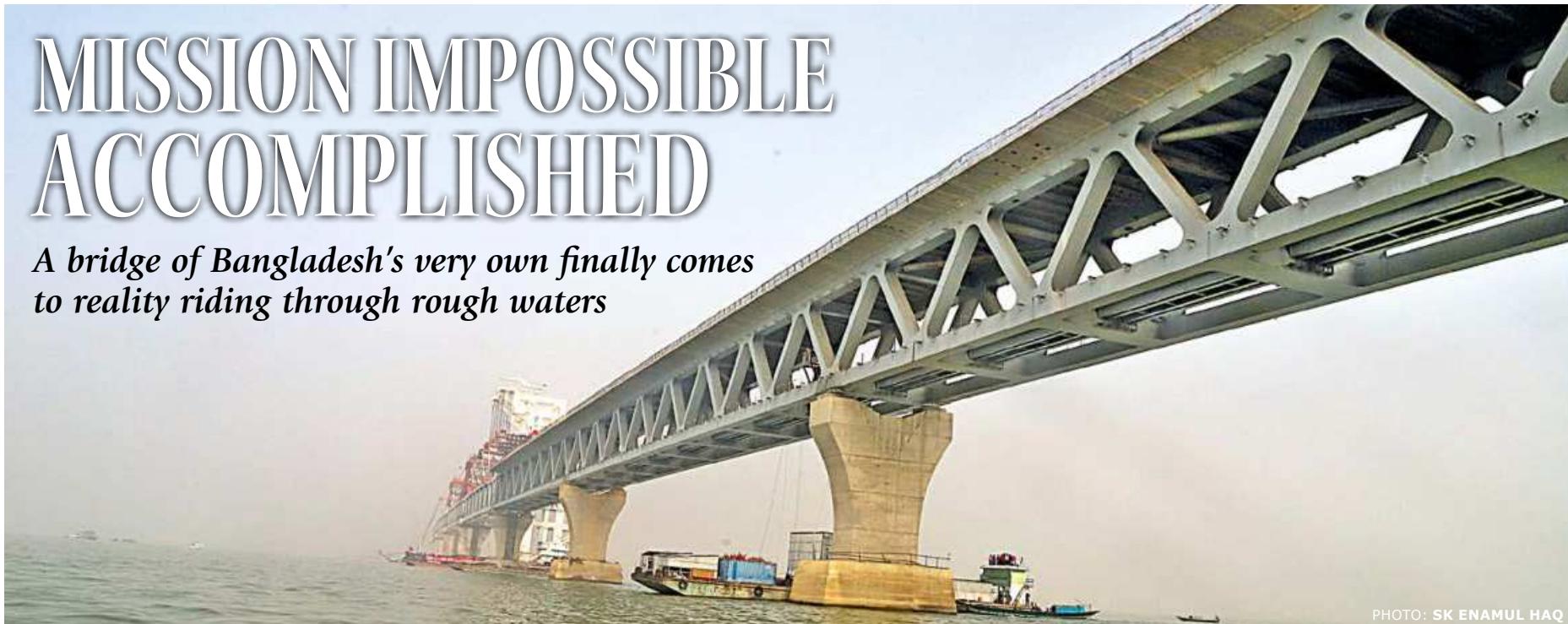


PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HAQ

WASIM BIN HABIB AND TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

Mizanur Rahman stood still, gazing with awe from the bank of the Padma river at the specialised floating crane laying down the last span on the mega structure yesterday.

As the 150-metre span was finally placed on pillars 12 and 13 at the Mawa end, he was thrilled and elated to see the full structure of the Padma bridge.

"Look, here is our dream bridge standing tall. What a great engineering feat it is!" marvelled Mizanur, pointing to the 6.15km bridge that became fully visible for the first time.

The Padma bridge is not a dream anymore; it's now a reality. The mega bridge is expected to be a huge boon for the underdeveloped south and south-western region of Bangladesh.

But decades ago, it was rather an audacious dream, a daunting challenge to tame the turbulent river. Crossing the mighty Padma has always been strenuous and sometimes dangerous due to unreliable and limited ferry connections and long waits for crowded boats and launches.

"I still remember it took around three hours to cross the river by the ro-ro ferry when I first came to Dhaka in 1998. Twenty-two years down the line, it still takes a similar amount of time now," said Mizanur, a private jobholder

hailing from Madaripur.

"But once the Padma bridge opens to the public, we can go home in a few hours and come back to Dhaka the same day. Our travel time will be slashed immensely."

The two-level steel truss composite bridge -- the top deck accommodating a four-lane highway for vehicles and the lower deck for a set of railway tracks -- is the culmination of years-long efforts and an impressive engineering feat.

The authorities expect to open it to the public in the first half of 2022.

The bridge that connects Dhaka to 21 southern districts is a potential catalyst for major economic change in the lives of over 30 million people living in the region and will give a major boost to trade and economic activities.

The Tk 30,193-crore bridge will connect multi-lane expressways and railway lines with Dhaka to Mongla port and the largest deep-sea port at Payra.

It will be one of the major transport corridors linking Bangladesh with India, Nepal and Bhutan besides enhancing regional trade and collaboration along the Asian Highway and the Trans-Asian Railway Network.

REALISING A DREAM

A bridge across the mighty Padma had been in talks since the mid '90s. The idea gained momentum in 1997 when the construction of

Bangabandhu Bridge over the Jamuna was nearing completion, ushering in new hope and optimism among people of the south-western region.

The pre-feasibility study of Padma bridge was conducted in 1998 and 1999. The government then approached the Japanese government for financial and technical assistance for a feasibility study, which was conducted by Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) between 2003 and 2005.

Following further studies and exploring financing options, the government approved the Padma Multipurpose Bridge Project worth Tk 10,161 crore on August 20, 2007 to be built with donor assistance.

On January 11, 2011, the Padma Bridge Project was revised with the estimated cost raised to Tk 20,507 crore, mainly to incorporate a rail line into the bridge.

The government concluded loan agreements with four development partners in early 2011 and an agreement for \$1.2 billion was signed with the World Bank on April 28, 2011.

SETBACKS

But the billion-dollar project became uncertain in September 2011, when the lead donor, WB, suspended its promised \$1.2 billion loans on allegation of corruption conspiracy, which the government denied.

KEY DATES

Pre-feasibility study 1998-1999

Feasibility study 2003-2005

ECNEC approval Aug 20, 2007

Physical work began Nov 26, 2014

PM formally inaugurated work on Dec 12, 2015

First span installed on Sept 30, 2017

Last and 41st span installed on Dec 10, 2020



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