



BUILT BY BANGLADESH

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We cannot see them now but these will have some monetary value in future,” he said.

The tangible benefits would come in the lessening of travel time between the Dhaka division and the southwest region and possibly on to India.

Travel time savings are expected to be about two hours for cars and buses and more than 10 hours for trucks.

This will bring down the cost of passenger and commodity movement, vehicle operation and maintenance costs and reduce the wasteful burning of fossil fuels.

“A neglected region will get connected to the mainstream economy. This will play a positive role in inclusive development,” Rahman said, adding that there would be visible impacts on marketing, distribution, efficiency and timeliness of delivery of consignments from the region.

The market for perishables from the southwest region will widen as truckers would be able to carry the produce to Dhaka on the same day, said Zahid Hussain, a former lead economist of the World Bank’s Dhaka office.

That also means the farmers and fishermen would get better prices.

“This will work as an incentive for them to scale up their production.”

In other words, the bridge will yield an agricultural boost.

Inter-district commerce would grow too.

“From commerce, the focus would then shift to production. You increase your production by investing.”

Given the backward nature of the region, land availability is easier, still.

Getting workable land near Dhaka or Chittagong is hard and costly. But the land prices in the Khulna region are still reasonable, Hussain said.

“Since connectivity is no longer an issue, investment interest will increase. Even if there is no improvement in the regulatory environment, there would still be benefits,” Hussain said.

Because of the superlative connectivity thanks to the Padma bridge, the Payra deep seaport and the Mongla port would become viable too, according to Rahman.

The bridge would also serve as a transmission channel for gas and electricity.

“Economic benefits would come in many ways,” said Ahsan H Mansur, executive director of Policy Research Institute.

The southwest region is home to the Sundarbans and Kuakata, two tourist attractions that are not easily accessible.

“A tourism industry will burgeon based on the Padma bridge. People would come to see the Padma bridge and also go forth to the Sundarbans,” Hussain said.

However, for the Padma bridge to be truly epoch-making, the southwest region needs to be transformed into an economic corridor.

“The benefits will multiply then,” Rahman said.

For that, the planned special economic zones must have a good service delivery, a conducive business environment and skilled manpower.

“Only then would the investment flow in – we must pay attention to this. Parallel initiatives are necessary too to get the full benefits,” Rahman added.

Hussain said the economic incentives to fix the existing problems for border trade issues including custom procedural harmonisation have vastly improved.

There are good chances of investment flowing in from India because of its proximity to the neighbouring country, according to Mansur.

“If the government can implement the economic corridors planned, this area can be revitalised. This will have a serious impact, which will be hard to quantify now,” he added.

Massive shot in railway’s arm

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Currently, freight trains from India come up to Noapara of Jashore, he said, adding that once the Dhaka-Mawa-Jashore line comes into operation, those trains would come to Dhaka directly, which will ultimately increase cross-border transportation.

“It wouldn’t have been possible to expand the rail network in the southwestern region had the bridge not been constructed,” said Afzal, adding that Padma bridge will play a great role in railway expansion.

Prof Hadiuzzaman said the bridge will facilitate Bangladesh Railway to bring two sea ports – Mongla and Payra – under its network while Chattogram Port is already connected with the railway.

Bangladesh Railway is currently implementing a project to link Mongla with Khulna and has plans to build a line to connect Payra.

This way, the three ports and the capital would come under a strong railway network and create a huge opportunity for Bangladesh Railway to increase its freight transportation many folds, which is a step that could help the state-run transport agency reduce the gap in its income and operation costs, Hadiuzzaman said.

However, to reap the benefits from the connectivity, Bangladesh Railway has to build two ICDs near Dhaka, preferably in the south of Dhaka city, to facilitate the shifting of containers.

“If all these can be done on time, then the railway will see a paradigm shift,” he added.

Following Bangladesh Railway’s request, the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), a regional office of the UN, agreed to incorporate the Dhaka-Bhanga-Jashore route as a part of the Trans-Asian Railway (TAR) Network.

The TAR is a regional transport cooperation platform aimed at enhancing the efficiency and development of the railway infrastructure in Asia, according to ESCAP.

The network now comprises approximately 125,500 km of railway lines serving 28 member countries.

Bangladesh Railway has to do many things, including gauge conversion from Meter Gauge to Broad Gauge, to establish effective connectivity with the TAR, in which Bangladesh is a signatory, Hadiuzzaman said.

OTHER EXPANSION PLANS

To take benefits of the bridge, Bangladesh Railway has a plan for a project – the Bhanga-Payra Rail Link – which would create the scope for expanding rail networks in Barishal division – crisscrossed by rivers – earlier thought to be too challenging logistically.

Bangladesh Railway has already completed a feasibility study and detailed design of the rail line from Bhanga to Payra port in Patuakhali via Barishal.


The 214 km line, which will have 19 stations, will cost around Tk 41,797.6 crore, or \$4.93 billion. The proposed deadline of the project is June 2029.

The rail authorities are now searching for funding for the project, which once implemented, Barishal and Patuakhali will directly come under the rail network and several other southern districts will also benefit from it.

Besides, Bangladesh Railway is implementing a project for construction of Khulna-Mongla port rail line, to connect the country’s second seaport with the rail network. The Tk 3,801.61 crore project is expected to be completed within this year.

It has also undertaken a project to connect Magura with the railway network. Physical works of the project, titled “Construction of broad gauge rail line from Madhukhali to Magura Via Kamarkhali”, began last year. The cost of the project is Tk 1,202 crore and expected to be completed within April 2024.

A feasibility study for the construction of a rail line from Darshana to Meherpur via Damurhuda and Mujibnagar has already been completed and the project would cost around Tk 2,000 crore.



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Sheikh Hasina

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Long Live the PADMA BRIDGE

BCCCI takes the privilege to congratulate the Government and people of China for the time-tested bonding of friendship and cooperation with the Government and people of Bangladesh




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