

# Massive shot in railway’s arm

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Thanks to the opening of the Padma bridge today, the people and businesses in south-western regions of Bangladesh will finally have road access to the rest of the country. However, they will have to wait a

little bit longer to make use of the railway system being built on the multipurpose bridge, which is the largest in Bangladesh.

If you want to go to Jashore from Dhaka by train, you currently have to spend around 10 hours to travel the 480-kilometre (km) distance,

which includes a stretch through the Bangabandhu Bridge on Jamuna River.

But once the Padma bridge opens and the under-construction rail line from Dhaka to Jashore via the bridge becomes functional, the distance would decrease by 200 km and cut the travel time in half.

The much-awaited bridge will play a greater role in expanding the rail network in south-western parts of Bangladesh.

The double-decker bridge with road and rail facilities will create a scope to link around a dozen new districts by railway, which will help implement the government’s plans to bring the entire country under the rail network.

Besides, the bridge will create strong railway connectivity among the capital and three sea ports – Chattogram, Mongla and the under-construction Payra port – and give a boost to freight transportation.

It will also help establish a link with the Trans-Asian Railway Network and boost cross-border railway operations for both passenger and freight trains.

“The bridge will work as a transformational structure for the expansion of the country’s rail network and open new windows in this regard,” said Prof M Hadiuzzaman, director of the accident research institute at the Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology.

However, he said Bangladesh Railway has to develop some crucial structures, including the rail lines and inland container depots (ICD), to reap the benefits of the bridge.

Bangladesh Railway has already undertaken a project, styled “Padma Bridge Rail Link Project (PBRLP)”, to connect Dhaka and Jashore with a 169 km rail line via the bridge.

### IMPACT OF PADMA BRIDGE

Currently, Bangladesh Railway has a rail network across 44 districts and as per its 30-year master plan (2016-2045), all districts sans Bhola – the country’s lone island district – will be brought under the network.

The government undertook the Padma Bridge Rail Link Project (PBRLP) in 2016 to build a rail line between Dhaka and Jashore through Padma bridge.

Physical work of the Tk 39,246 crore project started in July 2018 and the

**Padma Bridge Rail Link Project will also help establish a link with the Trans-Asian Railway Network and boost cross-border railway operations for both passenger and freight trains.**

overall progress was 57.5 per cent as of April this year.

The authorities expect to start rail operations from Dhaka to Bhanga, which is already connected with the rail network via Faridpur, within June next year while the full line would be operational by 2024.

The rail line will reduce the travel distance between Dhaka and Jashore by more than 185 km, Dhaka-Khulna by 212 km and Dhaka-Darshana by 44 km, shows a project document.

The new line will connect four districts – Munshiganj, Shariatpur, Madaripur and Narail – with the country’s growing rail network, officials said.

Currently, Khulna is linked with Dhaka by a rail line through Bangabandhu Bridge, which takes more than 10 hours, not only for distance but also for speed restrictions on the bridge and lack of track capacity.

“The journey time would be reduced by four to five hours once the direct line via Padma Bridge is operational,” Afzal Hossain, project director of PBRLP, told The Daily Star recently.

All the trains that now operate via Bangabandhu Bridge will be operated via Padma Bridge upon completion of the line by 2024 as expected, he said.

Besides, the bridge would create a scope for operating inter-city trains between Dhaka-Gopalganj, Dhaka-Faridpur and Dhaka-Magura, the railway engineer said.





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