

THE CELEBRATION OF PADMA BRIDGE

A population starving for a public spectacle



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THE first couple of days of the Padma Bridge's opening was chaotic, hilarious, tragic and outright ridiculous.

As I was rummaging through social media, and listening to the interviews that our colleagues from Munshiganj sent, I saw – as I guess almost all of us did – grotesque renditions of absurd actions from typical Bangladeshis.

Despite all of these being illegal and dangerously unsafe, they broke fences, they stopped and got off everywhere on the bridge and made TikTok videos doing *I don't know what that is even* poses. Overspeeding killed two; some urinated on the bridge; some performed namaz. Then there was a guy who, after a good beating from the police, said with a broad smile that if he couldn't get onto the Padma Bridge, his heart would've shattered (the original Bangla version "*Koilja faitta moirai jaitam*" is way funnier). And then there was a 30-something woman saying, "I always saw this bridge on Facebook and TV and everyone in the village was coming here. So, I got into a pickup truck too."

Wait. I think there's an actual glimmer of awe in the awkward and shy gaze of this woman. This was perhaps an actual experience of a lifetime for her. And, perhaps, inside all of those reckless bikers, rowdy pickup groups, political-bandana troupes, that girl who swam to see the prime minister, and that father-and-son duo with hilarious haircuts, there is a cathartic emotion of experiencing a monumental spectacle.

And, why wouldn't it be such? The Padma Bridge is one of the most magnificent engineering marvels of the modern world – one of the greatest accomplishments of Bangladesh. And I guess no one in this country could remain unaware of each and every step of this megastructure's construction: from the first false accusations and erecting pillars one by one, to the grand opening of the new vital line of our riverine flatland.

So, was it surprising that people swarmed to the Padma Bridge?

Alongside all breeds of media and corporations jumping on board the hype train, and those songs about Swapner Padma Shetu, the government even issued a toll-free service for 18 bridges on the inauguration day of Padma Bridge so that people could easily come to the ceremony.

Was it at all surprising, then, that there would be mayhem on that day? That the crowd would disregard civility and break the law?

Bangladesh is now starving for public spaces and communal experiences. There is an alarming deficit of open theatres, playing fields, parks, lakes – anything recreational where the citizens can visit, create shared memories, spend a solitary

evening, and grow a sense of belonging with the community, or even understand the concept of communal good. How can they know that if they do not have the civil decency to take care of public properties, all of us would be affected in the long run?

In Dhaka, and in most of the big cities in the country, this generation has lived the entirety of their lives inside rapid and scattered urbanisation, in absurd concrete



labyrinths. The indoors are congested, isolating, barely liveable; and the outside is chaotic, filthy, and life-threatening. There's scarcely any place to take an idle breath, enjoy the moment, and have an anxiety-free engagement with the environment. Living here means scavenging, annexing whatever one can find.

Encounters with the community mostly result in interpersonal power negotiations, or what I'd like to call a "*hedam* culture." Suppose, you are to cross the road; in that very moment, a car and you enter in a *hedam* show-off of who has the stronger guts. If you have more *hedam*, the car will (hopefully) stop to let you cross, and if you don't, well, forget about ever crossing the road (or please take the nearest foot overbridge if there's one around).

This phenomenon is present in all aspects of our society – urban and rural. The laws seem different if you have a big car, are a powerful person or even pretend to know someone in the government. If you have bribes to offer, you are exempted from hassles. If you have political affiliations, you can beat up someone or secure a bed in the hospital. The mass never encountered absolute universality of law, and many distrust the law enforcement.

So, in this context, would it be surprising if the people regarded regulations as challenges to conquer, rather than as acts of communal duty?

They felt triumphant on the Padma Bridge after they elbowed ahead of the crowd, outran the police, ran across the road between two swishing trucks, completed an overtake, did not wear a helmet, unbolted some nuts, sneaked in without paying toll fees, and so on.

Then there's those TikTokers and social media addicts. Is it normal whatever in this bizarre world they were doing? Well,

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PHOTO: COURTESY/NEWSBANGLA

I'm not saying everything that people did on the Padma Bridge is acceptable, nor is the way this society is functioning. But did the two days of madness come out of the blue?

to a surprisingly great degree, yes. The world is now finding new realities and new connections in the virtual realm. Under surveillance capitalism, with powerful devices in hand, and wondrous algorithms controlling our thoughts and actions, the youths have become virtual citizens. And every part of the world is trying to make sense of this whirlwind. (And governments, celebrities and companies are jumping on

is the way this society is functioning. But did the two days of madness come out of the blue? We all knew. We were waiting for something to laugh at, something to gasp at, something to ridicule. And we felt triumphant saying, "I told you so!"; "Typical (uncivilised) Bangladeshis!"

When we say something like "typical Bangladeshis," we somehow place ourselves in a higher position – like we are not typical Bangalees, we are civil, we have common sense, we'd never do that. They did that. They are ridiculous. This is the narrative that almost all those who hold credibility in our society put out, or at least cradle inside: journalists, policymakers, online celebrities – the educated bunch. With this, we are negating the voice and experience of the majority of the population. But have we ever thought that, if the law, the civilised narrative, the streets, the city, the new Padma Bridge alienates them, if beating them is a public spectacle, if ridiculing them is a national event, then they would, too, regard all things "civil" as alien, as not their-headache, or at least an entity to struggle against?

I confess that I, too, am using this "us and them" dichotomy. Let's be honest – the majority of the readers of this article are privileged; we are civil, we know what dichotomy or grotesque means (or at least have the sense to Google it); we don't do these unmindful activities; we keep our air-conditioned offices clean. We don't flock to Padma Bridge in extreme heat and sweat. We go to restaurants where the interiors are nice, maybe to a tourist destination or a foreign country. (Except when some Marvel movie is released or a new branch of Domino's opens. Then it's worth going crazy.)

But if we, and I'd like to believe the organisers, had the slightest hunch that this kind of chaos could have happened, that there'd be TikTokers trying to make videos, that people would never completely maintain the law on their own, why is it only them who are persecuted, ridiculed, or held accountable?

All of these could have been taken into account; there could have been a drive to effectively create awareness, make people understand the situation and maintain regulations accordingly, and of course facilitate the need for a public spectacle. But were these addressed properly?

The Padma Bridge is one of the firsts of many functional megastructures to be opened to the public in the next few years. Maybe next time, instead of laughing at the situation, we can refrain from reducing the people to mere objects of ridicule, and try to understand why this is happening.

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UTTARA BANK LIMITED
ENGINEERING DEPARTMENT (MEZZANINE FLOOR)
HEAD OFFICE, 47, SHAHID BIR UTTAM ASFAKUS SAMAD SARAK (FORMER-90, MOTIHEEL C/A), DHAKA-1000

TENDER NOTICE

01.	Procuring Entity	Uttara Bank Limited, Engineering Department, Head Office, 47, Shahid Bir Uttam Asfakus Samad Sarak, Dhaka-1000.
02.	Tender Name	A) Internal construction and other related works of UBL, Puthia Branch, Rajshahi at the proposed new premises. B) Construction and other related works of extended area as well as existing premises of UBL, Ulapara Branch, Sirajgonj.
03.	Procurement Method	Open Tendering Method.
04.	Eligibility of Tenderers	i) Minimum 05(five) years of work experience in the allied construction works. ii) Should have completed minimum 03(three) nos. of similar nature of works in the last 5 (Five) years but total worth of each work should not be less than Tk.25 (Twenty five) lacs. iii) Should have valid ABC License for electrical works. iv) Should have valid Trade License, up to date Income Tax Certificate and VAT Registration Certificate.
05.	Price of Tender Document	Non-refundable Tk.1,000/- (One thousand) only in cash for each of the tender schedule.
06.	Selling & Dropping of Tender Documents	Uttara Bank Limited, Engineering Department, Mezzanine Floor, Head Office, 47, Shahid Bir Uttam Asfakus Samad Sarak, Dhaka-1000.
07.	Earnest Money	5% of total quoted amount only in the form of Bank draft/Pay order favoring Uttara Bank Limited, Head Office, Dhaka-1000 for each tender.
08.	Last date & time for selling Tender Document.	On or before 17.07.2022 during office hours.
09.	Last date & time for Tender submission	On 18.07.2022 before 2.30 PM
10.	Date and time for Tender opening	On 18.07.2022 at 3.00 PM
11.	Special Instructions	i) Firm having requisite qualifications should apply on their Letter Head Pad to The General Manager, Engineering Department, UBL, Head Office, Dhaka during Office hours. ii) Uttara Bank Limited reserves the right to accept or reject any or all quotations without assigning any reason whatsoever and is not bound to accept the lowest quotation.

Kazi Rayhan Kabir
General Manager

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INVITATION FOR TENDER

Sealed Tenders are hereby invited from the eligible Tenderers who can participate in the following tender of the under mentioned works as per terms & conditions stated below:-

01.	Procuring Entity	Uttara Bank Limited, Engineering Department, Head Office, 47, Shahid Bir Uttam Asfakus Samad Sarak, Dhaka-1000.
02.	Tender Name	Supply and installation of air-coolers of different capacities at different Branches/Sub-Branches/Offices of Uttara Bank Limited throughout the Country.
03.	Procurement Method	Open Tendering Method.
04.	Brand of Air-coolers with country of origin & manufacture	GENERAL (Country of origin: Japan, Country of Manufacture: Thailand) GREE (Country of origin: China, Country of Manufacture: China)
05.	Eligibility of Tenderers	i) The Tenderers must be authorized dealer of GENERAL/ GREE brand air-coolers. ii) Minimum work experience of 07 (seven) years in supplying, installation and maintenance of Split wall, ceiling and cassette type air-coolers in any Govt. / Semi-Govt. Organizations or Corporation or Autonomous Body or Bank or in any other Organizations. iii) Having valid Trade License, up to date Income Tax clearance Certificate, VAT Registration Certificate, Import License and ABC License. iv) Minimum liquid assets/working capital of the Tenderer shall be Tk.50,00 lac.
06.	Price of Tender Document	Tk.5,000 (Taka Five thousand) only (non-refundable).
07.	Amount of Earnest Money	An amount of Tk.1,00,000/- (One lac) in the form of Pay order favouring Uttara Bank Limited, Head Office, Dhaka-1000.
08.	Name and address of the office from where Tender Documents will be obtained & to be dropped.	Uttara Bank Limited, Engineering Department, Mezzanine Floor, Head Office, 47, Shahid Bir Uttam Asfakus Samad Sarak, Dhaka-1000.
09.	Last date & time for selling Tender Document.	At 6.00 PM on 17.07.2022
10.	Last date & time for Tender submission	At 2.30 PM on 18.07.2022
11.	Date and time for Tender opening	At 3.00 PM on 18.07.2022 in presence of bidder (if any).
12.	Special Instructions	i) Intending Firms having prerequisite qualification may apply on their letter head pad to the General Manager (Engg.) alongwith the attested copies of documents as mentioned at 5 (i-iv) to collect Tender Document during office hours from the Engineering Department. ii) Uttara Bank Limited reserves the right to accept partly or fully any quotation or reject any or all quotations without assigning any reason whatsoever and is not bound to accept the lowest quotation.

Kazi Rayhan Kabir
General Manager