

Essay on The Proposed Padma Bridge

Introduction

It is said that Sheikh Mujibur Rahman dreamed of the Padma Bridge, and now the Bridge is a much-talked term of home and abroad. The catastrophic Padma of once is being ruled by a bridge today, and at the same time, the long-cherished dream of the south-west region people of Bangladesh is going to be materialized. The materialization of the proposed Padma Bridge was one of the promises of Awamileage before the 9th Parliament Election. For the last four years, the Awamileague-led government has been making our dream of the realization of the dream of the Bridge. Through the realization of vision-2021, the present government has wanted to turn Bangladesh into a mediocre country respecting income, and in this case, the Padma Bridge may be greatly helpful for making direct communication between Dhaka and the south-west Bangla. The economical importance of such a bridge is undeniable, no doubt. But now it is unknown to almost all the countrymen whether the dream will remain a dream. Despite this, we will wait with patience for the dream Bridge to be materialized. Notable that keeping the vision-2021 ahead multifarious government organizations have already adopted manifold strategic plans which may be implemented after the implementation of the proposed bridge.

The Padma Bridge and ins and outs

The Padma Bridge is now connected with the hope and aspiration of the people of the south region. But several people fear if the Bridge will be able to play a role to improve man's lot successfully at all. At the very post-war period, the necessity of two bridges was felt; one will be over the Jamuna and it will work as a connector between the capital city Dhaka and north Bengal; the other on be over the

Padma and it will connect Dhaka with south Bangla. After many obstacles and impediments. In 1998, the project work of the Jamuna Multipurpose Bridge ended successfully, but now the fate of the Padma Bridge is hanging on the string. The Padma Bridge is needed for the south region of the country. But a question arose that where would be the bridge; Maa-Jajira point or the Dauladia-Paturia point? At last, after a long debate, Maa-Jajira's point was finalized, and thenceforth man began seeing the reflection of a long-time hope and aspiration of the nation.

The Padma Bridge at a glance

Transport: Motor vehicles & Railway

River: Padma

Situation: From Louhajong, Munshigonj to Sariyatpur and Madaripur

Management: Bangladesh Setu Katryapaxma

Designer: Maunsell AECOM

Ingredient: Steel

Total length: k.m.

Breadth: miters

Expected beginning year: 2013

Expected ending year: 2016

Total expenditure: US \$ billion

BD government allocation: the US \$ 560 million

It was also decided that the resting expenditure would come as a loan from the international financial institutes for help for development; these institutions are friendly with us. Some data are given as follows;

WB (World Bank): US \$ 120 crore

ADB: US \$ 61 crore

IDB: US \$ 14 crore

JAICA: US \$ 40

Expected advantages of the Bridge

In the Padma Bridge project assessment papers, which have been submitted to the WB, the following facilities are mentioned:

Three crore people of south Bangla of Bangladesh have to depend on ferry-boat while coming to Dhaka. That is why all the Dhaka-bound vehicles from south Bangla have to spend excessive time at ferry ghat and so the up and downtime for south Bangla-Dhaka-south Bangla is unlimited. Moreover, for the constant ferry movement, both the sides (ghat area) of the river are eroded. But a Bridge here must save Bangladesh from the above losses.

As the Bridge will be associated with a railway line apart from highway connection, it will be easier to bring all kinds of goods from the south region to Dhaka.

Dhaka and Kolkata will be more close than before. As a result, international trade and commerce facilities must be extended. Through the Bridge telecommunication, power, and gas facility can be sent to the south region so that citizen benefit of the people of that region may be ensured.

Through the increase in the southern Mongla Port working skills, the Bridge will play a vital role to bring about better trade facilities.

Besides, social, economic, cultural, political– in all these sectors the Bridge can profoundly contribute to communicating with all-level people of the country.

Corruption related to the Bridge

The WB has alleged that regarding the Padma Bridge some persons,

related to the project, have been involved with an act of bribery. Later, the Bank has alleged the personalities as conspirators in the field of corruption. Now the Bank apprehends the smooth materialization of this gigantic project. The WB, quoting the weak governance of Bangladesh, has expressed its worry. So, at the very outset, the Bank imposed a condition upon Bangladesh that corruption must be thwarted and financing would be stopped with the availability of evidence of corruption. As a result of it, the following measures are taken:

- Administrative and answerable work plan
- NGOs as representative institutions
- Project integrity advisor
- Regular submitting of progress report

After fulfilling the above conditions the WB posed the complaint of corruption still. In fact, on two points the Bank brought charge in which corruption or conspiracy of corruption was mentioned;

- validity of the mediator institution 'Salco' to have the work order for constructing the Bridge, and
- WB allegation concerning consultant appointment; and these can be described as following:

Construction contract

On 21 September 2011, the WB reported that there is an allegation against the negotiator institution 'Sako' owned by the then Communication Minister Abul Hossain. But the Minister discarded the complaint brought against him or his company.

As the minister himself was the MD of the company, he resigned for somewhat pressure from the WB. Later, the Anti-corruption Commission

was attributed to investigate the complaint brought in February 2012.

Agreement concerning consultant and corruption

In every September 2011, Canadian police framed a charge sheet against the SNC Lavalins of that country, In February 2012, the Department of Foreign Corruption of Canada took action against SNC Lavalins. The allegation against them was that they had given bribes to some Bangladeshi officials to be appointed as the consultant firm of the Bridge. Of course, SNC Lavalins was formerly accused of corruption in Tunisia and Libya. In April 2012, the WB alleged the company for grafting. A report, related to it, divulged the name of six Bangladeshis including Abul Hossain.

The debate about the then Communication Minister

Astringent complaint of corruption was brought against Abul Hossain, the Communication Minister of the 9th National Parliament of Bangladesh. In the allegation report, it was reported that he was associated with corruption in many other projects before. It was also mentioned that for the illegal foreign tour he was dismissed from the cabinet, 1996-2000. The then US diplomat was termed as “a less than honest”.

WB conditions

In the context of different complaints, the WB imposed some conditions upon Bangladesh; after the fulfillment of the conditions, they will give Bangladesh a loan. Conditions are following;

- all the govt. officials must be expelled,
- a special investigator team, which will work with the Anti-corruption Commission, must be appointed,

at all levels of investigation the WB must have participation.

But the matter of regret that Bangladesh govt. did not dismiss anyone in time, and withdrew WB access to the investigation. As a result, the WB, on 30 June 2012, refused to give a loan to Bangladesh.

The anxiety of the high officials

Every person, related to the Padma Bridge, discarded the WB complaints, they claimed innocent themselves saying that the graft complaint is a token of the WB whimsicality; the Prime Minister expressed hope that the dependence on the WB should be stopped. Again, the officials alleged that the WB, in the name of giving a loan, had killed time.

Debate flow in another direction

The government high officials claim that the Nobel winner Dr. Yunus is responsible for not having a loan from the WB. Of course, the cause behind such a saying is that the loan agreement and the debate on the Grameen Bank Chairman and MD appointment are contemporary events. Again, in the critical moment of higgling between the WB and Bangladesh, US Foreign Secretary Hillary Clinton visited Bangladesh and met BRAC founder Fazley Hossain Abed and Dr. Yunus. For this reason, the govt. circulated that Yunus is involved in the financing process of the WB.

Financing from an alternative source

After the WB refusal to disburse the loan, Bangladesh began finding a new source to construct the Padma Bridge anyhow, and in this way the govt. wanted to pacify the disquiet general people of the country. In 2012, Bangladesh signed a memorandum agreement related to financing

with Malaysia. Malaysia demanded 6.5% interest and they also demanded the repayment within twelve years. But Bangladesh expressed their incapacity and again moved onto the WB to observe their conditions.

A further step of agreement with the WB

At the very outset of taking a further step, the Communication Minister resigned in 2012. The Anti-corruption Commission submitted a charge sheet against seven officials including four Bangladeshi and three Canadian officials. But the basic problem remained the same. The WB said that there is no charge against the then State Foreign Minister and the Communication Minister. Monsieur Rahman, the financial advisor of the PM, went on an obligatory leave; and the Anti-corruption Commission agreed to work with the WB. But alas! The WB could not believe Bangladesh. As a result, other financiers also withdrew their proposal.

Conclusion

For the overall development of the country the Padma Bridge can play a vital role; the govt. has to earnestly work for the successful materialization of the Bridge, and all people of all walks hope such. An alternative source must be found. And the best source may be our source, that is, our govt. has to finance. In this case, the govt. has to go to the doors to PPP. If Bangladesh itself has to finance, a review of the former states is needed. As, for the realization of the Padma Bridge project, Bangladesh has to purchase most components or construction materials from foreign countries, our bank reserve must be reviewed, so that the possible risks can be avoided. Above all, govt. has to exercise former experience and accordingly, they should seek the appropriate sources for financing the project. Otherwise, 0% possibility is impossible for the gigantic project to see the light at all.