

Hardinge Bridge still maintains regional connectivity

Speakers tell conference

FE Report

Speakers at a conference on Bridge Engineering recalled the services rendered by Hardinge Bridge, one of the largest and oldest railway bridges in the region, constructed over the Padma River in 1915.

"Even after 100 years, the 1.64 km Hardinge still today maintains good railway connectivity in the region," said Railway Minister Md Mazibul Hoque.

The minister was addressing the concluding session of the two-day conference at a city hotel.

The government has already undertaken some reinforcement programme to strengthen the century-old steel-made rail bridge to boost its services, allowing it to maintain railway connectivity with the Southeast Asian region.

Finance Minister AMA Muhith, who attended the programme as the chief guest, also highlighted the contribution of the bridge that gave uninterrupted broad gauge rail connectivity between Darjeeling and Kolkata for the then Eastern Bengal State Railway.

The bridge completes its 100 year of successful service this year, but speakers expressed the hope it would serve more effectively in future.

Dwelling on the history of bridge development beginning from Hardinge Bridge, the finance minister said Bangladesh has advanced more in bridge construction after developing inter connectivity, which was applied to the Bangabandhu Bridge over the Jamuna.

Through exchanging structural engineering knowledge, the Finance Minister expressed the hope that engineers will be able to identify present and future needs and work towards meeting those with innovation and progress in structural engineering.

Presided over by Prof. Jamilur Reza Chowdhury, the concluding session of the "IABSE-JSCE joint conference on Advances in Bridge Engineering - III" was addressed among others by Tokyo Metropolitan University Professor Dr. K. Nogami and CUET professors Abdur Rahman Bhuiyan.

Earlier, speakers at the conference identified Bangladesh as among the countries that are constrained by limited budget and borrowing capacity.

To overcome the constraints, they stressed the need for proper management of the existing infrastructure not only through timely repair and maintenance schemes, but also through undertaking strengthening schemes to cope with the next generation demands.

Besides facilitating communication, the bridge has played an important role in the economic, social, and cultural development of the people on both sides of the Padma River in the region since the early 19th century, said speakers while recalling the contribution of the bridge.

The railway department of the then British government started the construction of the bridge in 1901 under the supervision of engineer Sir Robert William Gayles. The first train moved over the bridge on the 1st January of 1915 as an engineering test before its official inauguration by Lord Hardinge on March 4 that year, said the railway minister.

During the 1971 Liberation War, the historic bridge got damaged due to aerial bombing. It was repaired in 1972 to resume smooth movement of trains there.

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