



Structure to Bridge Creation Hubs During the Pandemic

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COVID-19 pandemic forced the world to follow social-distancing guidelines, which made it difficult to collaborate and progress overall. However, from our experience of past pandemics, we know that the world not only successfully preserved civilization and its creators during such challenges, but also moved forward. In 1889, Paris experienced the Asiatic flu pandemic, and yet the Eiffel Tower was built and inaugurated in the same year. The flu reached British India in 1890, just as planning for the Hardinge Bridge over the Padma had started, but it didn't deter the engineers to stop their work. Then in 1918, despite the Spanish Flu, the Seikan Tunnel in Japan was conceived. This just proves that even in the past, pandemics couldn't act as long-term deterrents. Despite the current social-distancing impositions, small, cohesive entities have bonded strongly and offered sustainable solutions. We have also noticed that innovations in information technology is progressing fast, and the fourth industrial revolution (4IR) is advancing more quickly than ever. Nevertheless, the importance of safe and reliable infrastructures cannot be replaced. This is where, IABSE with its worldwide members plays a pivotal role. IABSE not only connects engineers worldwide but also provides a collaborative platform for discussions, and advancement of the profession.

On August 26–27, 2020, the Bangladesh Group of IABSE co-organized an online event with the Japan Society of Civil Engineers (JSCE) at the International Conference on Advances in Bridge Engineering-IV: Definitive Outcomes for the People. 700 participants from six continents with up to 19 hours of time difference joined the virtual event, and presented in real-time, despite the pandemic. The quality assurance in engineering education symposium, co-hosted within the virtual conference organized by us, exposed the importance of bridge engineering to other engineering disciplines—and “bridge” emerged as a metaphor! The strong support from fourteen international, and national entities was vital for this event. In true alignment with IABSE's mission, we achieved in providing a global platform for information exchange. Over the past 15 years, our National Group has organized several international events jointly with JSCE. By publicly celebrating the centenary of the Hardinge Bridge in 2015, we communicated the importance of bridge engineering to the common people—a milestone achievement. This pandemic-time success is well founded on our past efforts.

With the rise of Asian economies, improved access through land-transportation infrastructure is a must, but is often a challenge specially in Bangladesh—which is crisscrossed by hundreds of rivers, resulting in soft soil and ground dynamics. Building enough bridges to create a fixed network of surface roads and rail is necessary to meet not only our steadily growing domestic needs but also to meet emerging regional surface-connectivity demands. National and international stakeholders having solidarity can together bridge this gap by stimulating creativity. Young generations of engineers can also strive to develop new capacities, with the support of experienced structural engineers to execute complex designs, constructions and maintenances. IABSE Fellows'—Young Engineers Program does exactly that. The Bangladesh Group of IABSE for the last 15 years has strived to spread IABSE's message and bring together national as well as international experts towards to advancement of the profession. We shall keep working towards this goal, and hopefully together we shall soon emerge in a post-pandemic world in 2021!



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