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Bhaskon Khannabha, Managing director of First Dhaka Elevated Expressway

Company Ltd

Bangladesh's first expressway is going to be partially opened on September 2, 2023. Bhaskon Khannabha, the managing director of First Dhaka Elevated Expressway Company Ltd, the private partner of the PPP Project, discusses various issues related to the long-cherished development scheme with The Daily Star's Tuhin Shubhra Adhikary.

The Daily Star (TDS): Would you please tell us about the progress and your plan to open the expressway partially?

Bhaskon Khannabha (BK): We started work in 2011 when we won the project following an international bid. Many issues, such as land acquisition, fixing the alignment, resettlement, and providing compensation to the people affected by the project, had to be settled. From our side, we had to secure financing. It took us a long time due to the credit issues associated with this greenfield project. Obtaining project finance loans is very challenging. In the end, we managed to secure a loan of more than \$800 million from the Export-Import Bank of China and The Industrial and Commercial Bank of China (ICBC) for a 15-year term, and we signed the loan agreement in March 2019. Land acquisition, alignment, the approval process, and relocation of utilities took time and caused delays in the project.

Today, we can see that we have completed 62 percent of the total project, and we will have partial operation from the Airport to Farmgate, which is about 11 km out of 20 km. We are pleased to begin partial operations. I believe people in Dhaka will be delighted to use the expressway for easier travel. It will be much faster. It will probably take only about five minutes to reach Banani from the Airport, instead of half an hour. People will be able to drive at speeds of up to 80 km/h on the expressway. It will take less than 10 minutes to reach Farmgate from the Airport, a journey that would take more than an hour on a normal road. We are now ready to

open the Airport to Farmgate section

elevated of the expressway.

TDS: How long will it take to complete the entire project? When will the entire expressway be opened?"

BK: We planned and expect to complete the entire project by June next year, subject to no obstruction. We have to overcome all the challenges. Work is ongoing for the remaining part of the expressway. Actually, we have to finish by June next year because we have a commitment to our lenders. We have to start repaying the loans. So, we have to push ourselves as well.

in reducing traffic congestion in the initiated for Dhaka city, will hopefully implementing the PPP project?

BK: Over 80,000 vehicles will be able to use the expressway with its rampups daily once the entire expressway is opened to traffic next year. In the beginning, we think 70 percent of the total capacity may use the expressway, and the number will increase gradually. The expressway will increase the road capacity of the city by 20 km. So, you will have an additional road capacity of 20 km.

We will try to minimize traffic at the intersections by installing traffic lights

to understand that Dhaka city is expanding due to urbanization, so people have to travel inward. It's natural for every country when economic development takes place. So, a project like ours is meant to help people travel easily, quickly, conveniently, and reliably. As I mentioned, we can go from the airport to Banani in about five minutes instead of getting stuck in a traffic jam with an uncertain duration. TDS: Some experts have already apprehended that some ramps of the

expressway can create traffic congestion at some particular points. What would you say about it?"

BK; The expressway will reduce traffic on the existing roads as it opens up additional options. This way, the expressway will alleviate traffic problems. At the ramps, we will have traffic lights. We will engage with the police and city authorities in this regard. If people follow the rules, it will help. We hope there won't be any additional problems at the ramps.

TDS: There was a long-standing dispute over a ramp from Hatirjheel to Palashi. Has the dispute been resolved?"

BK: There was a meeting on June 8 at the Prime Minister's Office, and the honorable Prime Minister has instructed all government agencies concerned to support this project so that we can proceed with construction, including this area. Besides, we have also modified our design. Instead of going through Hatirjheel, the ramp will now go around the lake. We made efforts not to encroach upon the lake, and the alignment has been approved.

TDS: Will you be able to complete this Hatirjheel ramp by June next year? **BK:** Yes, we are hopeful about it. I have faith in our contractor. They will be able to do it. Currently, 5,000 to 6,000 people are working every day, and we will have more after the partial opening. We will bring in more engineers and supervisors to meet the deadline.

TDS: What challenges have you faced in

reduce traffic problems. You have BK: All major infrastructure projects face challenges. There were challenges with land acquisition, design, financing, obtaining approvals, and at the construction site. We have to overcome these challenges. It took us eight years to sign loan deals.

> **TDS:** Is the delay in the implementation of the expressway project allegedly affecting a major railway project for expanding the existing rail line from Dhaka to Tongi?

> BK: I think you have the wrong information. We started the project before the railway began the expansion project. However, we have to expand the cross beams for their expansion project. So, we are not causing any obstruction to the Bangladesh Railway (BR). We work outside the BR project site. You have to understand that whenever we work alongside the railway, we have to obtain approval. We submit our plan to BR every week. If we interfere with their work, they will not grant us approval. We can work only after receiving approval from BR.

> **TDS:** The project was supposed to be completed within three and a half years starting from 2011. Will we get the same benefits after a nine-year delay?

> BK: Of course. The benefits are still there. I believe people will receive the same benefits as projected at the initial stage of the project. Besides, there will be room to expand the expressway, considering all the other planned government projects.

> TDS: You are the Managing Director of FDEE and have taken on a massive project, which is soon to be partially launched. How do you feel about this achievement?

BK: I have been involved with the project from the very beginning. I have been visiting Bangladesh since 2010. The project is in my blood. Of course, I am happy. We have achieved this much starting from nothing. I am happy that your people will be able to benefit from



A glimpse into the beginning of the Elevated Expressway Project

TDS: Will people get the expected at the exit points of the ramps. So, the benefit from the partial opening of the expressway?

BK: Of course, they will benefit. We have completed 11 km. We have used about \$700 million for the construction work. Let the people use it. We need to educate the public about how to use the lanes and both manual and electronic toll payment systems.

use the expressway? How will it benefit other projects the government has

at-grade road can flow, and people using the exit ramp can proceed using the traffic lights. We believe this would create the least disruption to normal traffic. People will be able to travel faster and more easily. So, I think it will provide many benefits to the people of Dhaka.

The government has undertaken this project to help reduce traffic problems **TDS:** How many vehicles will be able to in Dhaka. So, this project, along with

UNFOLDS TODAY

Country's first-ever elevated expressway opens today from Airport to Farmgate. This 11.5 KM

Dhaka Elevated Expressway

overhead transit is here to transform Dhaka forever, easing traffic, curbing pollution, bridging North and South, and gearing up country's socio-economic momentum.

We thank

Hon'ble Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, MP

for her development vision and constant support to bring this landmark project to life.









