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# CONNEXION

Tech • Service • Development



## Quality of mobile phone service Perception, Reality and Way forward



**Interview with  
BTRC Chairman  
Shyam Sunder Sikder**

**AMTOB**  
Association of Mobile Telecom Operators of Bangladesh



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## Editorial



For the past year and a half, people all throughout the nation have been going through a very trying time, which we thought was finally coming to an end in the last few months as the COVID-19 crisis was hoped to be under control.

We extend our condolences to the families of those in the ICT industry who perished as a result of the corona pandemic.

We were gradually returning to routine as the infection rate dropped below 5% across the country. However, because the epidemic is rapidly spreading across numerous countries, the situation might quickly escalate.

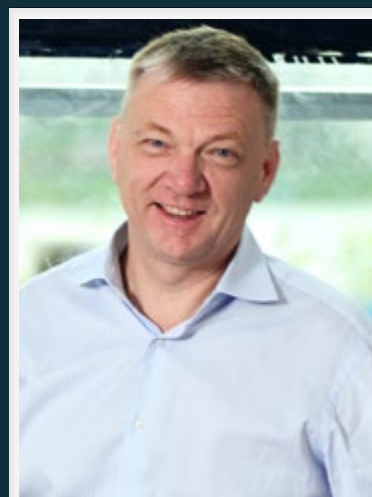
We all know that mobile services, including voice and internet, were a vital part of our country during COVID-19. The mobilization of a large number of people put a lot of pressure on the network. The operators did everything they could to provide the best service possible so that life could continue.

In this issue of ConneXion, we wanted to focus on the quality of service issue so that policymakers and mobile users could have a better knowledge of the situation. In addition to the cover story, the BTRC chairman is interviewed. Other common items are also covered, as is normal.

**Brig Gen S M Farhad (Retd.)**  
Secretary General, AMTOB



## AMTOB President's Message



The telecom industry in Bangladesh has been working dedicatedly as a development partner of the country for more than two decades. It has made significant contributions to Bangladesh's remarkable economic development by advancing it technologically.

During my recent visit to several regions of the country, I witnessed clear signs of rapid development and digitalization everywhere. It is now quite evident that development in Bangladesh is not a capital-centric agenda, but rather a nationwide phenomenon.

As a forerunner in the country's digital domain, we want to keep contributing to the growth, and raise people's living standards through our services. Our industry is consistently working to address people's growing demands for digital services and devices, and serve them accordingly. Furthermore, we are actively contributing to empowerment of different communities through our increased involvement in CSR activities.

Bangladesh has recently stepped into 5G era through Teletalk's trial run. It is a significant development in the telecom industry, which is indicative of the way it is moving forward by embracing new technologies. Now it is important to build a proper ecosystem around it, and ensure its relevant applications so that the country can benefit from it in the long run.

**Erik Aas**  
President, AMTOB

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Secretary General, AMTOB

## >> About AMTOB

Association of Mobile Telecom Operators of Bangladesh (AMTOB) is a national trade body representing all mobile telecom operators in Bangladesh. AMTOB has emerged as the official voice for the Bangladesh mobile Industry for interacting with relevant government agencies, regulators, financial institutions, civil society, technical bodies, media and other national and international organizations. It provides a forum for discussion and exchange of ideas between the stakeholders and industry actors for the development of mobile telecom industry through public private dialogue. AMTOB facilitates an environment which is conducive for its members and industry stakeholders with a view to establish a world class cellular infrastructure for delivering benefits of affordable mobile telephony services to the people of Bangladesh to eliminate digital divide.





# Quality of mobile phone service

## Perception, Reality and Way forward

As the days go by, people are relying more and more on wireless technology for everyday communication. Given the situation, mobile devices have become the biggest catalyst. With regard to mobile phones, a Bangladeshi citizen reaps the benefits using the same technology used by a citizen of the world's most developed country. However, any type of technical service usually creates some problems. Many complain about the quality of mobile phone services offered in Bangladesh. In this report, we will discuss the causes of the dissatisfaction.



Everyone can remember the time when the first computer came into our hands! After writing a few lines, we had to wait some time to save the file, then write and save again; That's how it went.

Yet, the world did not stop there. Computer accessories manufacturers are giving us new products on a regular basis. There has been a seismic change in the product quality of 20 years ago and 20 years later. The same goes for mobile phones. There was a time when we could not save too many mobile numbers in handsets. And now we need not think about it. All the numbers are stored in the cloud.

Any advancement of technology derives from human requirements. Users want to experience products of the best quality. Accordingly, manufacturers and service providers put all their eggs in a basket. This is how we move forward. Today's smartphones are much faster than a computer of 20 years ago. Does the product only get a boost? Over time, we have got GPRS, EDGE, 3G, 4G, and most recently 5G on the mobile internet. Wireless technology is getting speed keeping pace with the time. User expectation is rising—more speed, efficiency, etc.

However, the mobile phone operators in our country use the latest technology to speed up the internet like mobile phone service providers around the world. They spend thousands of crores of taka to buy spectrum from the government and deliver world-class services to their customers. But the service quality depends not only on network development but many other relevant issues are entailed. In today's article, we will briefly discuss mainly the issues and causes that disrupt mobile phone services in some cases.

“

**We have got GPRS, EDGE, 3G, 4G, and more recently 5G on the mobile internet. Wireless technology is getting speed keeping pace with the time. User expectation is rising—more speed, efficiency, etc.**

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### Quality of mobile handsets

Two different handsets of different quality can offer two different quality experiences on the same network in the same area. It is possible to get much better speed service on an expensive handset with high tech. Even if the charge of a handset goes down, the service might have adverse effects. Those who use mobile handsets of good quality experience relatively better quality service.

### When the credit limit is exhausted

In case of prepaid connection, when the mobile account balance reaches zero, the call is dropped or the network is disconnected. Whenever the network is disconnected, it is possible to check out if it is due to balance.





## Too many licensees

Driving a car directly from one end of the country to the other will take less time than required if the car stops at different places or passengers need to change transports frequently. The same goes for the internet or phone calls. The service reaches out to the customer through multiple operators. On the way, it may face disruption at every operators end. We need to keep in mind that the information through the internet reaches customers via submarine cable via international gateway via NTTN operators via mobile operators. So, the service usually gets somewhat disrupted, if any fault hits any operator.

## In case of spectrum shortage

In a country like ours, every mobile phone operator normally needs 80 to 100 MHz spectrum or air wave to provide quality service. But the operators have much fewer radio waves. Apart from that, as compared to other nations with comparable GDP, the cost of spectrum in Bangladesh is quite expensive. It is possible to increase the quality of mobile services once adequate spectrum is allocated at a reasonable price.

## Blind spots or pockets

Although the mobile network is spread out over the country like a web, sometimes some blind spots or pockets can be

“ Covid-19 causes displacement of a large number of people in the country in a short period of time and hampers most of the tower companies’ activities, leaving an adverse impact on telecommunications.”

developed due to the large establishments or roads. If you are in the blind spot, naturally the call drop will occur or the normal speed of data will be affected. Engineers are to struggle to design the network due to the high-rise buildings constructed in the country, particularly in urban areas.

## In the event of a natural catastrophe or travelling

Some radio waves are extremely vulnerable

to natural disasters. Cloudy sky or rain can have a negative effect on the network. Similarly, when someone gets on the elevator, the network suddenly does not work. However, the nationwide drive test conducted by the telecom regulator shows that the country’s operators have been providing services in line with the international standard. Though, the country’s regulatory standards are tougher than the international ones. For example, internationally 3% call drop is considered normal but in Bangladesh, it is 2%.

## Use of jammers, boosters, or repeaters

Bangladesh imposes restrictions on importing jammers or boosters to protect the security of sensitive areas. But it is seen that such accessories are widely available in the market and many people are using those. It will be difficult to get the right network around the area where the network jammer is used. It is important for everyone to be careful when using this type of booster or jammer.

## Power outages

Prolonged power outages can have a negative impact on mobile networks. These issues are particularly widespread in outlying locations. Moreover, in many cases, it is seen that the battery is stolen from the

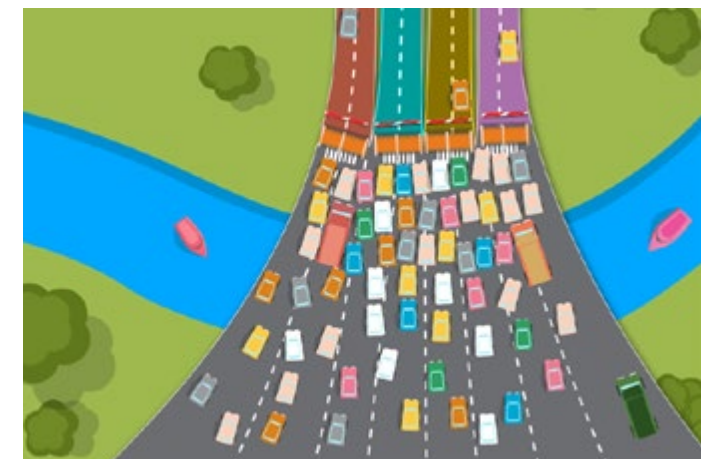
mobile tower. Then, when the power goes out, there is no way to backup or run the network in any other way.

## Shortage of fiber cable

Mobile towers spreading like a web across the country are supposed to be connected through fiber cables so that high-quality data can be transferred. But we have very few towers connected by the fiber cables and the rest are connected via wireless transmission, bringing adverse effects to calls or data exchange. As a result, the network is disrupted.

## Too many users in the same place at the same time

When a huge number of individuals utilize telecommunication at the same time, it might cause problems. If the number of consumers residing in a location rapidly increases, the frequency capacity in that location must ramp up as well. A sufficient spectrum, as well as an infrastructural facility, are required to support this, both of which are lacking in Bangladesh. Furthermore, Covid-19 displaces a huge number of people in the nation in a short amount of time and disrupts the operations of most tower firms, resulting in a negative impact on telecommunications. During festivals, a large number of consumers travel.







## Mobile phone operators play the most effective role in delivering modern telecommunication technology services

BTRC Chairman Shyam Sunder Sikder

Bangladesh has experienced an unprecedented revolution in expanding the mobile communication system. Along the way, mobile network operators have been playing the most effective role in bringing all the services of modern telecommunication technology to the doorsteps of the people. Through their extensive networks, marginalised group of rural people is also enjoying a range of telecommunication services at affordable prices. Against this backdrop,

Conecxion reached out to Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC) Chairman Mr. Shyam Sunder Sikder. He shared his insights on several issues including the contribution of the mobile sector, quality of service, spectrum auction, and many more things in this exclusive interview.

In his words BTRC Chairman Mr. Shyam Sunder Sikder said, “Keeping pace with the times, the mobile sector is continuously opening up new services in the age of rapid technological advancement. At present, mobile internet makes up the lion’s share of the demand for broadband internet. New services are regularly being added to the sector, making it a sustainable, stable, and potential sector. The number of active customers in the country is increasingly growing. BTRC has been conducting several programmes such as regular monitoring and giving instructions to make this sector competitive, customer-friendly, and above all investment-friendly. There is a pressing need to improve the quality of mobile service.”

About voice and internet charges, he said BTRC has introduced various telecommunication services such as upper and lower limits of call rates for voice calls so that everyone enjoys telecommunication services at affordable prices and the work is underway to fix maximum and minimum prices for internet services.

Shedding light on the 5G spectrum auctions, the BTRC chairman said, “Between 2022-2023, 450 MHz air waves will be allocated of different frequency bands to mobile phone operators. In line with the government’s plans and instructions, BTRC will hold spectrum auctions on time to increase technical efficiency in mobile coverage and quality, create new services, market analysis, demand, and development of mobile service-related experience at the customer level. Our plan is to complete the auctions works by March 2022.”

Asked about any plan BTRC may take to bring down the spectrum price at a reasonable level in the future, he said, “According to global standards, spectrums are allocated to the mobile operators through competitive bidding process by determining the appropriate base price. Due to the spectrum’s usefulness and demand, the price of the frequency band for mobile is higher than any other band in the world and Bangladesh is no exception to it. However, in order to provide affordable prices to the marginalised group and their easy access to mobile services, BTRC will take necessary measures as per the instructions of the government to fix the spectrum price for the mobile operators at a rational level considering all the relevant issues in Bangladesh.”

The country now has more than one lakh kilometers of fiber optic cables. However, mobile phone operators have been unable utilize it for various reasons, putting a lid on the services they are now providing, he said. About the issue, he said, “The first condition for building a digital Bangladesh is a strong self-reliant network spreading across the country. And one of the basic infrastructures of the network is an accurate, reliable, strong optical fiber network. The government issues NTTN licences to

separate the transmission network from the access network. Optical fiber infrastructure has already reached every Upazila headquarters of the country. To make proper use of the nationally important infrastructure, NTTN operators need to reduce the distance from mobile network operators and take initiatives to start activities through optical fiber through mutual cooperation. In this case, NTTN operators should also extend the all-out cooperation to mobile network operators. BTRC is working to maintain good coordination and to create mutual understanding between the two groups of operators.”

The demand for towers and fiber cables will increase significantly when 5G technology will be rolled out in the country. Explaining the BTRC’s plan about coordinating the entire issue, Mr Sikder said, “5G is the latest version of the current telecommunication system where the subscribers



will receive high-speed internet as well as very low latency services. 5G technology has already been commercially launched in different countries of the world. In order to provide high-speed internet services through the technology, mobile operators also need to put in place a large number of small cells. In this case, four companies have already received green signals for the construction and sharing of towers. Ensuring site sharing through tower operators is crucial for quickly and efficiently meeting the mobile network operators demand for site rollout. In this case, tower operators with the mobile network operators are speedily rolling out sites owned by them, which will help accelerate the 5G network launch in the country. Besides, NTTN operators are ready to make mobile network operators’ transmission networks stronger and provide high-speed internet services to their customers.

The BTRC chairman added that BTRC prepared an ‘Analytical GIS Map’ where mobile operators have



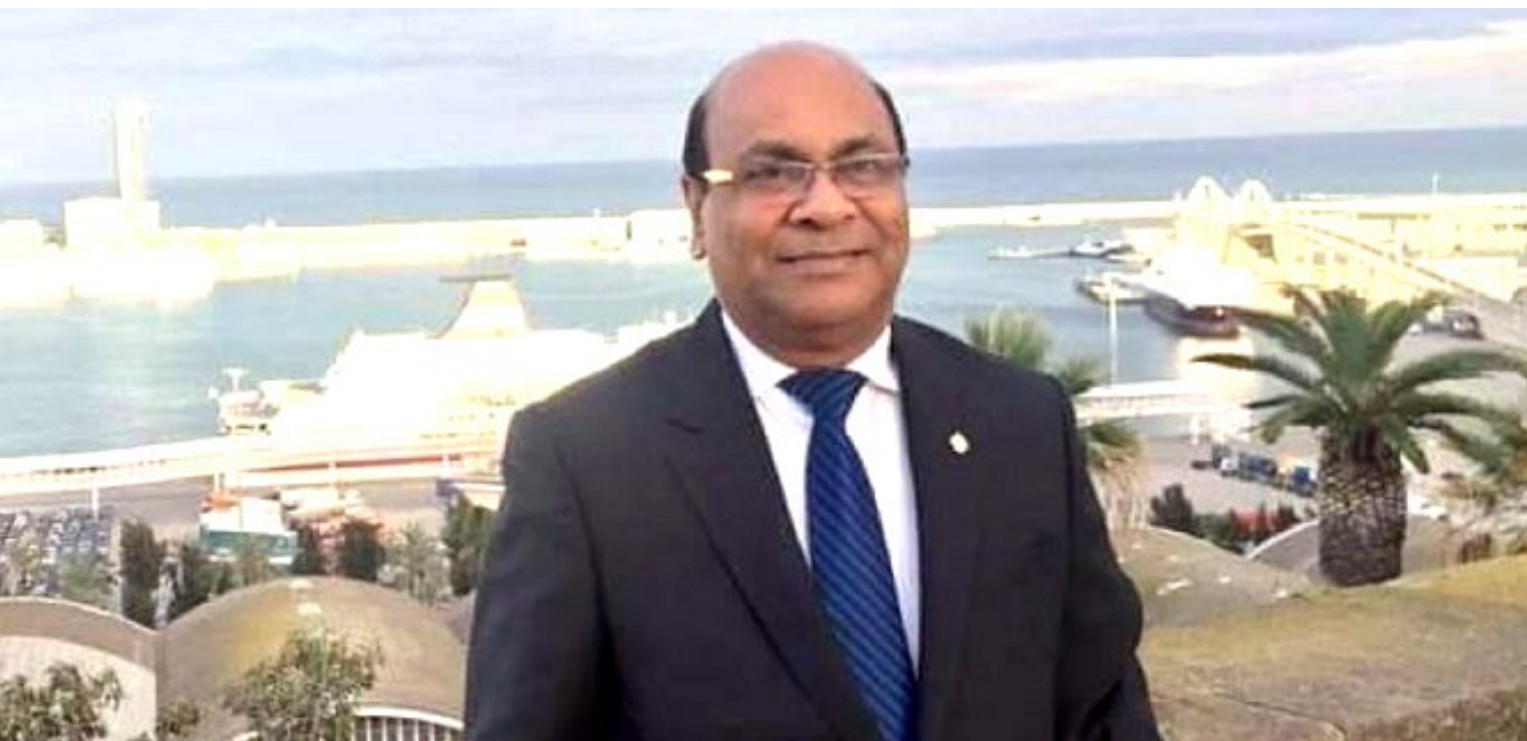
their BTSs and optical fiber, and NTTN operators have detailed information on their locations in the districts, Upazilas and unions. In phases, mobile BTSs need to connect through optical fiber in places where NTTN operators have fiber connectivity. In vice versa, NTTN operators need to shift to fiber connectivity in places where BTSs have fiber cable. Recently, another NTTN operator was given the licence for faster 4G network coverage. BTRC has already framed the 5G guideline with all the relevant issues.

Asked about steps BTRC might take to settle the complaints piled up against the operators about the quality of mobile phone services, he said, "The regulator is working on a priority basis to improve the quality of service of mobile phone operators and protect customer interest. Mobile operators rely on optical fiber, towers, commercial power, interconnection systems and so on. I'm hopeful that various measures taken by the BTRC aiming to develop the overall telecommunications ecosystem, including new spectrum, setting up new sites in remote areas under tower sharing, expanding optical fiber infrastructure, and increasing the use of 4G devices will improve the service quality."

He also said, "As you know, a comprehensive regulation on the quality of telecommunication services for mobile phones and all other ANS operators has already been formulated. The regulation outlines acceptable values for data throughput, call drop and other KPIs. Following the comparative analysis of data obtained through quality of service regulation standards and drive tests on voice and data services provided by mobile phone operators, the regulator instructs them to take corrective measures to achieve standards in places where required. The trend of ongoing activities will continue in future too."

**The regulator is working on a priority basis to improve the quality of service of mobile phone operators and protect customer interest. Mobile operators rely on optical fiber, towers, commercial power, interconnection systems and so on.**

In this context, he went on and said that BTRC regularly collects monthly reports on service quality from operators. In order to verify the reports, the BTRC team collects data from the system by conducting on-site inspections time to time. On January 23, 2021, the BTRC launched 'drive test' to monitor the standard of services provided by mobile phone operators. To protect the interest of customers, the drive test verifies the complaints lodged by the users about the accuracy of voice and data services. The drive test has already been completed in 164 Upazilas of Dhaka, Chattogram, Mymensingh, Sylhet, Rajshahi, Rangpur, Barisal and Khulna divisions. More drive tests will be launched in more than 300 Upazilas of the country. After scrutinizing the issue more closely, it will be possible to give the necessary instructions then.



Interview

## Customer behavior has changed significantly over time in Bangladesh

**Erik Aas**

Chief Executive Officer  
Banglalink Digital Communication Limited

The telecom industry has been playing a key role in digitalizing the country and facilitating its overall infrastructural development for over 20 years. As AMTOB president, I want to focus on building an environment in the industry that is conducive to its further development by working more closely with the Government, regulators and policy-makers. The upcoming years are going to be crucial both for us and the country, as more advanced technologies are likely to appear and overhaul the digital landscape. AMTOB President and Banglalink Chief Executive Officer Erik Aas told ConneXion recently at an exclusive interview.



**As AMTOB president, which objectives have you set for the organization to take it forward?**

The telecom industry has been playing a key role in digitalizing the country and facilitating its overall infrastructural development for over 20 years. As AMTOB president, my focus is on building an environment in the industry that is conducive to its further development. We want to work more closely with the Government, regulators and policy-makers to ensure even better services for Bangladeshi people. The upcoming years are going to be crucial both for us and the country, as more advanced technologies are likely to appear and overhaul the digital landscape. It is important to address our future opportunities and challenges now, so that we can continue to support the country's economic growth and improve people's living standards through our services.

**5G has been launched experimentally in Bangladesh. However, the smartphone penetration is around 50%, while 4G enabled handsets are around 25%. In this situation, what is your view on this?**

I believe that the demands for 5G will be mostly in the industrial sectors, and 4G will be the base technology for the masses in Bangladesh. For this reason, I think 5G should be rolled out on a cluster-basis in the country. In the initial phase, it will be more relevant in certain commercial hotspots across the country. The first place that comes to my mind when I think of 5G is Chattogram Port. This is a place where so many mechanical, logistical activities and movements are happening all the time. 5G-powered automation can facilitate such processes. Another sector that can benefit from 5G is the medical sector. Some advanced medical operations such as remote & robotics surgeries can be possible in future with 5G. However, as I mentioned, 5G is unlikely to make any considerable impact on general customers in near future. 5G is not just another technology for giving high speed data to the masses; it is an ecosystem which requires readiness of many things. There are hardly any 5G-smartphone users outside Dhaka at present. Even if 5G is launched nationwide, the scenario is unlikely to change overnight. Most importantly, we believe that the kind of internet speed customers are getting from 4G is sufficient for them. Therefore, we should focus on improving 4G's overall quality further before thinking of the 5G scenario.

**What types of supports do you expect from the regulators in future?**

All telecom stakeholders including regulators need to realize that regulations should evolve with technologies. We require regulations that address prospects and challenges of new technologies, and set right directions for us accordingly. For example, if spectrum prices and tax rates remain high, it will be challenging for us to invest in new technologies in future. Network sharing is another factor which deserves regulators' consideration. If the telecom operators are allowed to expand network in a collaborative manner, it will be easier to provide advanced services in a cost-effective way. Moreover, some parts of our telecom operations are overregulated.

**“As telecom operators, our first responsibility is to make sure that they get such experiences seamlessly by utilizing our connectivity. Secondly, we need to focus on widening our digital service portfolio, so that they can get such facilities from us.”**

If such issues are relaxed, we shall be able to come up with new approaches, and contribute more significantly to the industry.

It is also note worthy that apart from the Telecom Regulator, we are also regulated through other regulators. National Board of Revenue (NBR) and Bangladesh Bank act as the financial regulators. Moreover, with the digitalization of our products and services, we have new regulators in the form of the Ministry of Commerce that regulates various digital and e-commerce activities, and also the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, which is in the charge of regulating broadcasting activities. We need to make sure that they also understand the changes in our industry, and enable us to contribute more to the society, which we have been doing over the last two decades.



**It has been more than two decades since mobile companies started providing services to Bangladeshi people and it has become the primary source of communication in terms of voice and data. How do you observe the shift in customer behavior in Bangladesh as a leader in the sector?**

Customer behavior has changed significantly over time in Bangladesh, especially in recent years. There was a time when most customers used their phones only for voice calling. But the situation is changing fast with more and more customers opting for mobile internet. A large number of customers now want to purchase digital experiences to enhance their lifestyles. As telecom operators, our first responsibility is to make sure that they get such experiences seamlessly by utilizing our connectivity. Secondly, we need to focus on widening our digital service portfolio, so that they can get such facilities from us. Telecom operators running businesses in Bangladesh have done a great job so far in this regard. If we look at the digital service scenario in the country, we shall find telecom operators in the forefront. We have already introduced many digital services covering key areas such as entertainment, health, education and gaming.

# Telecos get same global technology deployed in the developed countries

**Zhang Zhengjun**

**CEO, Huawei Technologies (Bangladesh) Limited**

When we talk about good QoS, the experience at user's end is no call drop, no network interruption or high internet speed. Globally, users have a common hopes and expectations for this scenario, and rightly so. He added—to quantify the same, there are basic matrices of QoS like, the coverage, accessibility, speech quality and internet speed. All of these depend on many diverse factors; however, for high level understanding there are three key parameters. First, total number of sites; second, spectrum allocation for a given operator, and the third is technological innovations. Analyzing these three matrices is good enough to portray an overview of mobile QoS, Zhang Zhengjun, Chief Executive Officer of Huawei Technologies (Bangladesh) Limited said to ConneXion recently.

In Bangladesh, relying on the formulation of the Digital Bangladesh strategy, The CEO added, the telecommunications industry has developed rapidly in last decade, until now there are roughly around 48,000 mobile towers combining all operators. However, Since every country has unique geography, socio-economic and developmental factors, a more generalized idea can be distilled in a formula like this,

Resource available to end-users= (Number of Site X Allocated Spectrum)/Number of users

This formula facilitates a more educated estimation of how the end-users perceive the quality of service across operators and nation states.

In Bangladesh, each megahertz (MHz) of spectrum is shared by around 1.2 million mobile phone users. Additional spectrum for the MNOs will alleviate capacity constraints greatly and positively impact the performance capability of our MNOs. We are looking forward to the forthcoming spectrum auction planned in 2022. Now, if we go back to the formula – another path comes to light. We can also tinker with the number of sites to enlarge the resources available to end users. This is a time proven strategy. As more sites are added, number of users per site is distributed among those sites. In essence, resources/site remain same – but resources/user grows. This is the quicker path as well because spectrum allocation happens periodically whereas sites can be deployed in tandem with capacity demand.

As the third factor I have mentioned, there are technical solutions to enhance usage of spectrum and/or more efficient usage of capacity. Bangladesh has taken some strides in technological advancement. Just like other developed countries, Bangladesh is also using 4T4R, and extensive tests have been conducted for 8T8R technology. Bangladesh is ready for MIMO/8T8R in LTE, which is vital for deploying 5G. While deploying such advanced technology, all telecommunication eco partners will explore top-notch solutions to maximize the benefits.

It is true that our telecom sector is transforming and going through a transition period as dependency on technology is increasing. Even different fin-tech, education, and medical sectors are reliant on mobile access technology which has ubiquitous coverage throughout the country. In fact, mobile and internet have been driving the primary trajectory of development. A recent information revealed by

Bangladesh Bank shows, there are more than 100 million Mobile Financial Services (MFS) users in the country at the moment. Not only specialized use like MFS, the masses are using mobile internet as a part and parcel of their everyday life – for entertainment, business, e-commerce, logistics and what not. Every 4-6 months, total data traffic carried by each MNO is doubling and the trend is gradually speeding up.

So, in short, our mobile and ICT users are more into network advantages. They have become more dependent on connectivity and that is why they have hunger for interrupted network. BTRC deserves appreciation for introducing Technology Neutrality for Spectrum Re-farming (SR) in the country, we believe as more spectrum allocate to per user, QoS will be improve continuously. And good news is, by now, different telecom operators are already using Huawei "CloudAir" solution to re-engineer their spectrum resources.

One more thing I am happy to mention is that the telecom companies are getting the same global technology deployed in the developed countries by Huawei. For the last 23 years, Huawei has been providing the global standard same technologies, services, and solution to the telecom operators. So, considering the aforementioned aspects, it can be perceived that the low-spectrum allocation is the burning issue at this moment. To increase this capacity, more spectrum allocation is necessary. On the other hand, Bangladesh has done well to have basic 4G coverage where population are concentrated. And if we can keep developinog more BTSs capacity and backhaul bandwidth, our QoS will be better and stronger.

It is also very pleasure to see that Bangladesh continually embrace more advanced technology to improve service quality. Devices with newer technology like VoLTE and MIMO, which can greatly enhance voice quality. Meanwhile, telecom operators explore smarter options to ensure proper ROI while utilize contextual marketing solutions like Huawei's "SmartCare" come in handy for the operators to interact with individual subs and address their needs.

Looking specifically on data usage boom, Bangladesh should go for globally-accepted trends like FWA (Fixed Wireless Access), which has already been adopted by the developed countries, the Middle East, and the Asia Pacific countries as the mainstream solution for high speed internet access. In the upcoming 5G era in Bangladesh, end users will be needing more and more bandwidth and will be using ever increasing number of digital services. Industries will be also needing high-bandwidth when businesses will be revolutionized with M2M and automation. So, this is the right time for us to start preparing.

To conclude, the more mobile technology will develop, the faster we will be able to witness meteoric growth in different sectors. And it is really good to see, Bangladesh is devising plans to enlarge resource available to users by allocating more spectrum, deploying more sites in tandem with demand and also introducing cutting edge resource optimizing technologies to enable enhanced QoS for the end-users.







# GSMA Gender Gap Report

The gender gap in mobile usage is narrowing in Bangladesh as a record number of women utilize mobile services

Women in Bangladesh have increased and diversified their use of mobile internet services since the COVID-19 outbreak began, according to the GSMA Mobile Gender Gap Report 2021, as social distancing restrictions have led to an increase in video calls, social media use, and online video viewing.

According to the research, around 62% of female mobile internet users increased their usage throughout the pandemic.

For example, in Bangladesh, the proportion of female mobile phone owners who view free videos on a weekly basis climbed by 9% to 20% by 2020.

The GSMA conducted a study in eight low and middle-income nations in South Asia, Africa, and Latin America, including Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Algeria, Kenya, Mozambique, Nigeria, and Guatemala, from October 2020 to January 2021.

Although mobile internet is beneficial to Bangladeshi women, it is still out of reach for most of the population. Despite the increased use of mobile internet by existing users, new users in Bangladesh have yet to adopt it in big numbers.

According to the survey, mobile internet penetration among Bangladeshi women increased by just 3% in 2020, from 16% to 19%, as it did in previous years. Only 33% of males utilize mobile internet, indicating a significant gender divide.

According to the report, roughly 47% of Bangladeshi women are aware of mobile internet, but just 4% of them use it.

In most of the nations assessed, the gender disparity in mobile ownership varies by age group, but is greatest among those over 55.

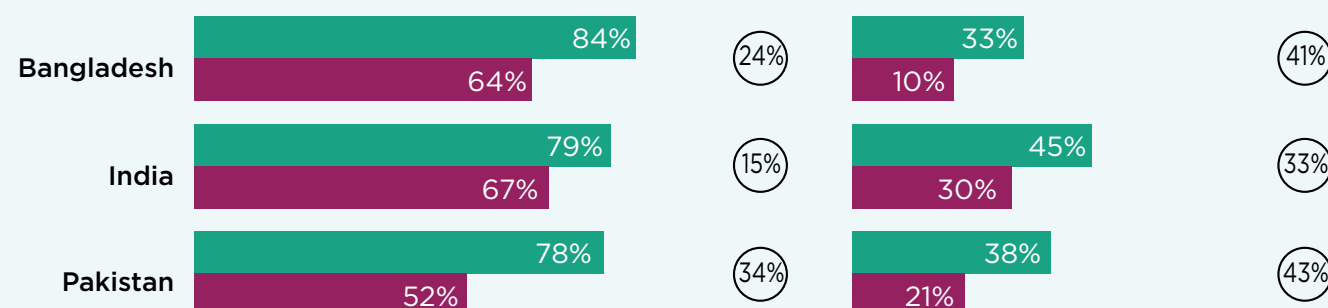
In Bangladesh, the gender gap in mobile phone ownership is 17% among adults aged 18 to 24. The percentage of people over 55 years old is more than twice, at 46%.

## Male and female mobile ownership and mobile internet use by country

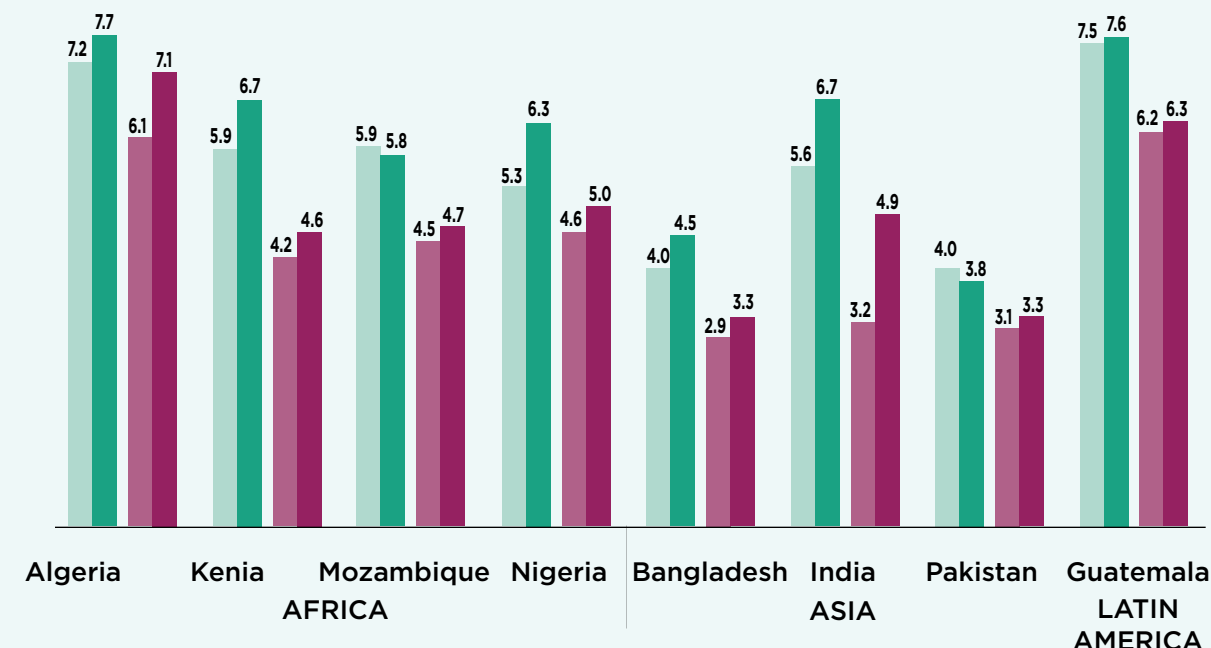
Percentage of total adult population



X% = Gender Gap



## Average number of mobile use cases per week among male and female mobile owners, 2019-2020



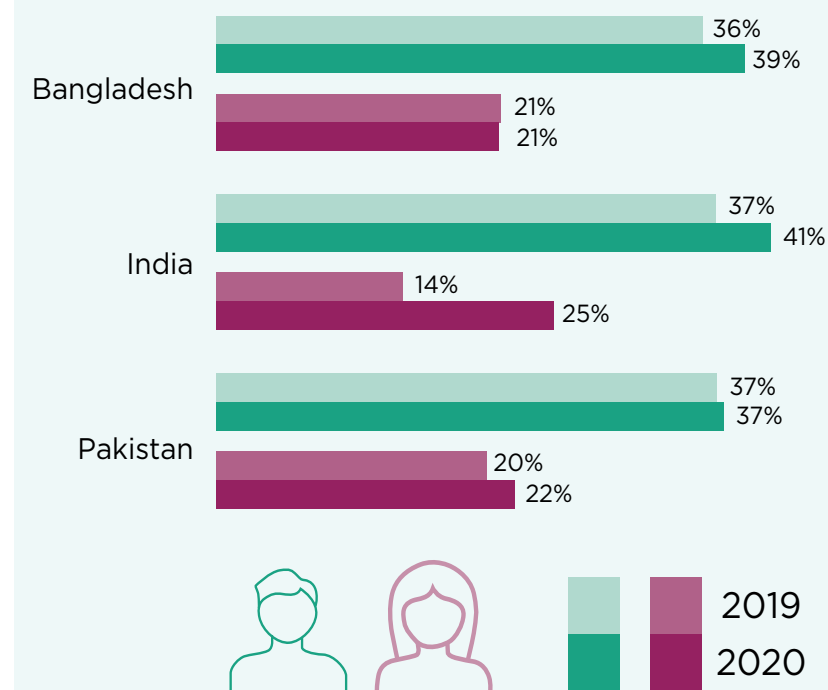
According to the poll, the epidemic has not been able to raise women's smartphone ownership, with just 21% of adult women owning a smartphone in 2019, and this number is expected to stay constant in 2020. In 2020, however, 39 percent of adult men, up from 36 percent in 2019, owned a smartphone.

Over the last several years, women have become increasingly conscious of the mobile internet. In 2020, it was at 66 percent, up from 34 percent in 2017. In 2020, male users accounted for 75% of all users, up from 50% in 2017.

In 2020, only 14 per cent of women had mobile money accounts while 40 per cent men had such accounts. It is substantially higher than that in India and Pakistan as only 4 and 5 percent of adult women in the countries respectively had such accounts.

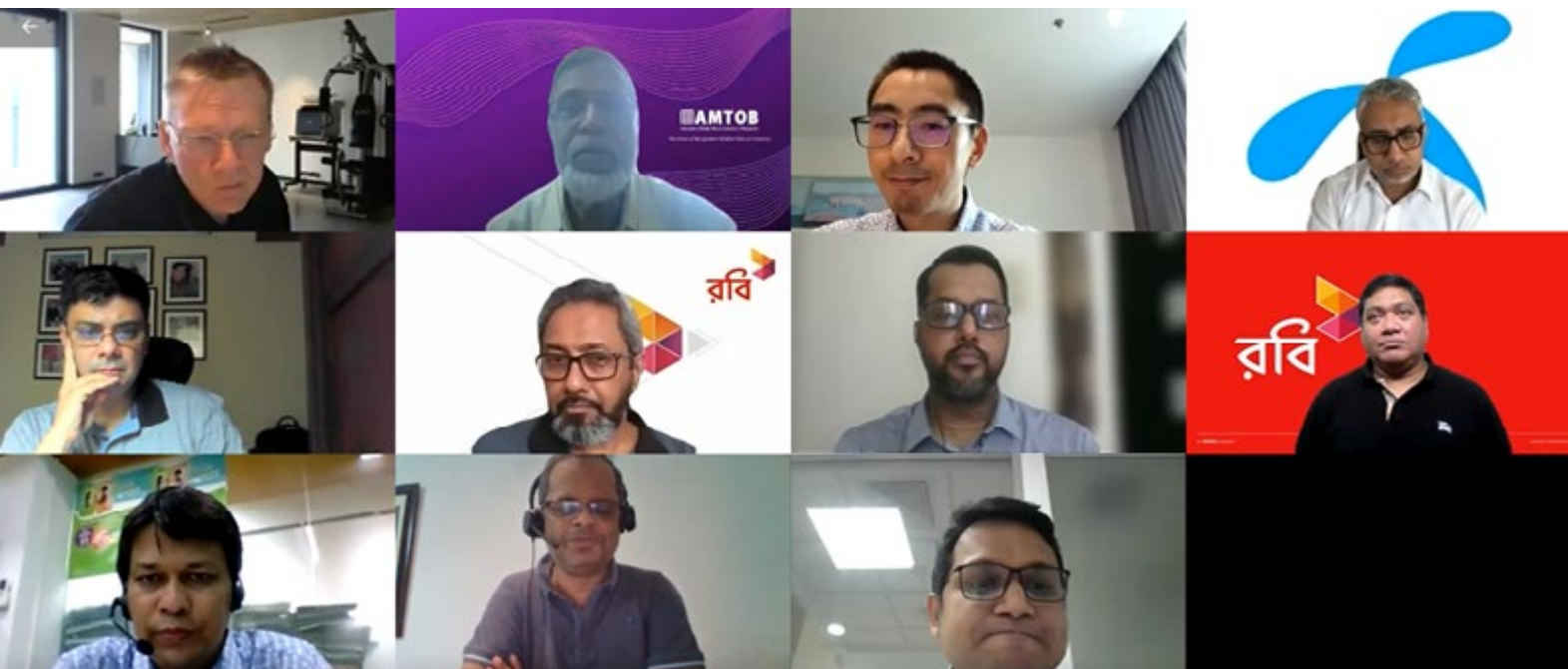
## Smartphone ownership, 2019-2020

(Percentage of total adult population)





# AMTOB Board elects Banglalink CEO Erik Aas as President



The Association of Mobile Telecom Operators of Bangladesh (AMTOB) board has elected Banglalink Chief Executive Officer Erik Aas as its President following AMTOB's outgoing President Mahtab Uddin Ahmed's decision to part with Robi for the current tenure till March 2022.

The board also welcomed Robi's Acting CEO and Chief Financial Officer M Riyaz Rasheed as a director of the board and thanked Mahtab Uddin Ahmed. The Association's virtual board meeting took place on August 25, 2021.

Erik Aas, President, AMTOB said, "The telecommunications

industry is a key contributor to the digitalization and development of the country's overall infrastructure. AMTOB will continue working with the Government, regulators, policy-makers and many other stakeholders to ensure further developments of the country and our industry. We will continue addressing the opportunities



Association of Mobile Telecom Operators of Bangladesh

and challenges for further growth of the country's digital landscape, economy and people's livelihoods."

AMTOB Vice-President Yasir Azman said, "AMTOB as a collective voice of the telecommunications industry plays a pivotal role for the greater interest of the industry and citizens digitalization needs. I hope and believe, together with the regulators, we will be able to address prevailing challenges and contribute to accelerating our journey towards a digitally empowered Bangladesh."

AMTOB's Director, Riyaz Rasheed congratulated Erik on becoming the

President of AMTOB. He felt that the industry has been awaiting some long pending policy decisions to put it on sustainable track. Riyaz expressed his eagerness to work with AMTOB under Erik's leadership to facilitate favorable changes in the interest of country's digital transformation journey.



Banglalink partnered with Sena Kalyan Sangstha and Bidyanondo Foundation to provide aid to about 30,000 households across several locations to support COVID-19 and flood-affected individuals. Rice, lentil, oil, semolina, sugar, salt, bar soap, and oral saline were distributed to each affected home.

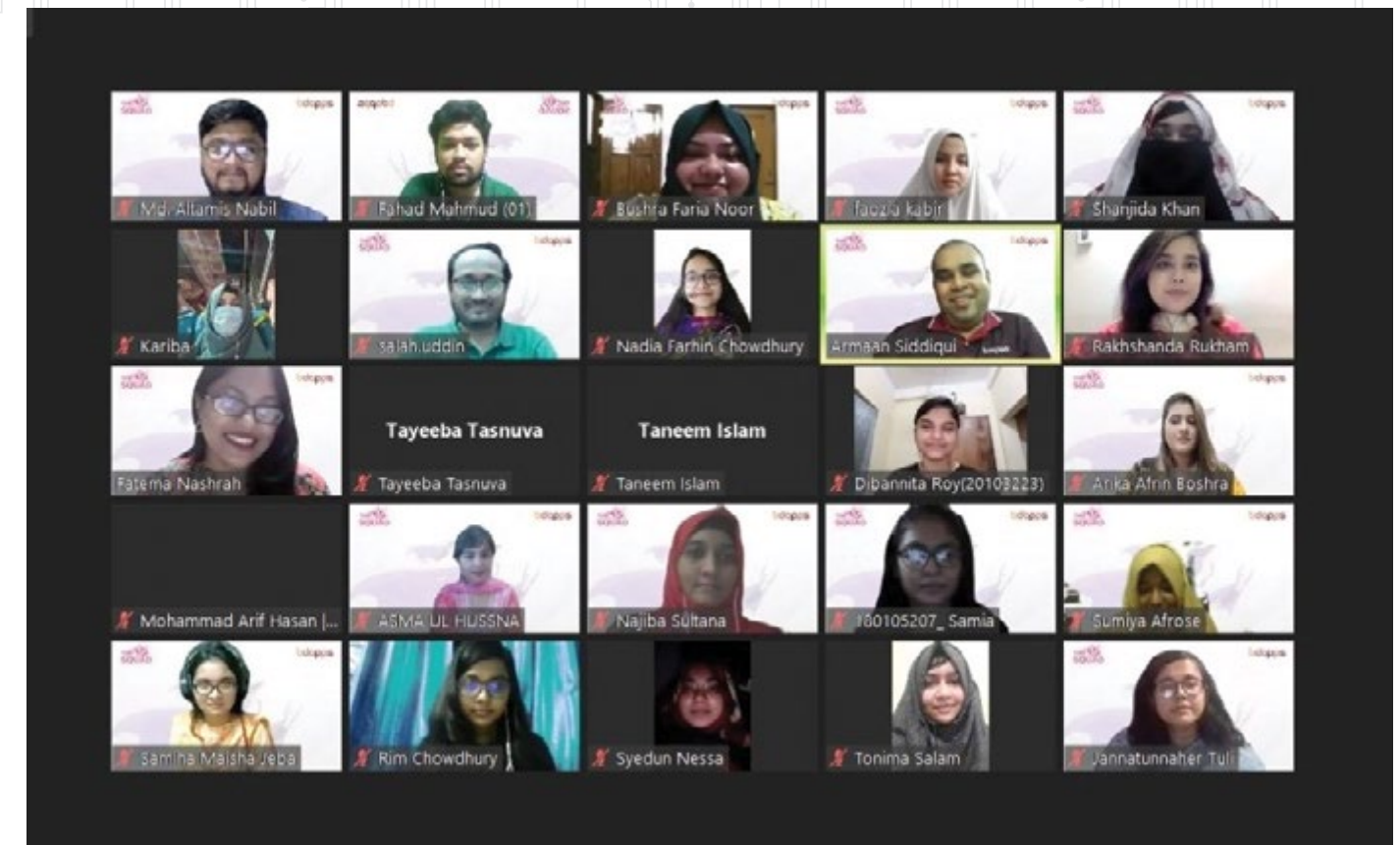


The Banglalink IT Incubator, a collaboration between the ICT Ministry, BHTPA, and Banglalink, aims to find and nurture innovative enterprises. On September 30, 2021, a get-together was held for the cohort of IT Incubator at Software Technology Park, Janata Tower, Kawran Bazar on Banglalink Incubator's floor to discuss the sustainability of startup economy and the way forward, while strictly adhering to the COVID-19 protocols. The program was graced by Honorable Planning Minister, Mr. Muhammad Abdul Mannan MP, State Minister for ICT Division, Mr. Zunaid Ahmed Palak MP, and Managing Director, Bangladesh Hi-Tech Park Authority, Mr. Bikorno Kumar Ghosh along with other dignitaries.





On the occasion of National Youth Day celebrated on 01 November, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and Grameenphone joined up to establish an alliance called “Future Nation” for realizing the full potential of the demographic dividend of the youth population of Bangladesh. Sudipto Mukerjee, Resident Representative of UNDP Bangladesh and Yasir Azman, Chief Executive Officer of Grameenphone, inked the partnership on behalf of their respective organizations.



bdapps She Squad: The National appstore, bdapps, in collaboration with Bangladesh Open Source Network (BdOSN), has initiated a Women Community Leadership Program, “bdapps She Squad” to facilitate greater participation of women in the ICT sector



Oxygen Support During Covid Pandemic: Robi provided Oxygen cylinders for Covid-19 patients through Social Welfare organizations, Songjog and Footsteps

Grameenphone and Telenor Group, in association with Plan International, ran a survey in August and September 2021 among youth with COVID-19 as the backdrop on how internet use and online bullying trends have changed across four countries, Bangladesh, Malaysia, Pakistan and Thailand.





Teletalk Managing Director Md Shahab Uddin congratulates BTRC Chairman Shyam Sunder Sikder on his appointment as chief of the commission.



Teletalk and Bangladesh Police recently sign an agreement on value-added services.



Ericsson recently arranged a session for its employees on Fast Aid & Basic Life Support conducted by Dr. M Hasan Andalib, a consultant of Accident & Emergency of a city hospital.





In an event, themed 'Cultivating a Talent Ecosystem for Inclusive Digital Prosperity' Huawei announces that it will support South Asia countries such as Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Nepal to cultivate 100,000 digital talents over the next five years joint-handedly with the governments, universities, and industrial partners. The summit brought together ministers and scholars from the three countries, experts and representatives from UNESCO and the ICT industry.



At a ceremony attended by PTD Minister Mr. Mustafa Jabbar, ICT Senior Secretary Mr. N M Zeaul Alam, and BTRC Chairman Mr. Shyam Sunder Sikder, AMTOB Secretary General Brig Gen S M Farhad (Retd.) welcomed the newly appointed Secretary for Post and Telecommunication Division Mr. Md Khalilur Rahman.



The nine winners among one thousand participants in 'Bangladesh ICT Skills Competition 2021', organized by Huawei in partnership with Bangladesh Computer Council (BCC), have been announced through a gala event. Zhang Zhengjun, CEO of Huawei Bangladesh, shared, "Huawei has been taking various initiatives to upskill the youth population, so that Bangladesh can keep marching forward relying on the strength of the future leaders."



At a virtual policy dialogue session hosted by Bangladesh Internet Governance Forum on August 26, 2021, AMTOB Secretary General Brig Gen S M Farhad (Retd.) gave a crucial note on Connectivity Regulation and 5G Observation.



# COVID-19 related initiatives by the Mobile Operators of Bangladesh

As a government declared emergency service Mobile telecom operators in the country are ensuring uninterrupted telecom services at the doorstep of the people during COVID-19 situation. In addition to providing the services, carriers have taken several social responsibility initiatives in a difficult time.

## Provide financial and food assistance



## Internet

The price of the Internet has been brought down to half in some cases

Bonus on data packages duration



## Awareness-raising

Awareness through dial tone of mobile

SMS Based Corona alert service



## Technical assistance

Using AI, various ministries and departments of the government have been given the opportunity to update the Corona situation.



## Mobile voice Service

Call rates have been slashed and call duration have been increased

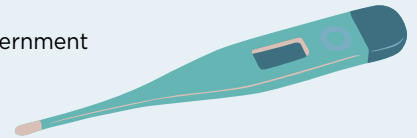
Those who could not top-up have been given talk time & data balance, and extended accounts duration



## Medical supplies

Professional PPE for Doctors and health workers

Corona test kit to the government



## Free services related to COVID-19

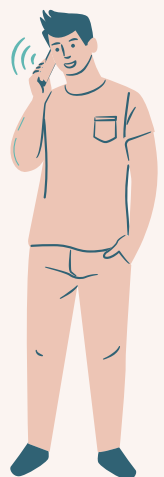
Toll-Free number facility

Free SMS

Free doctors service

Free talk-time to doctors

Free e-learning and online class



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