

Mobile operators keep people's lives normal during the pandemic



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Editorial



COVID-19 has thrown us into a situation for which no one in the world was ready. Its omnipresent effect has affected people at every level of society and the state in one way or another. Managing one's livelihood has become very difficult. In this, we have to survive.

And like all other countries, thousands of people in Bangladesh have been infected with the coronavirus. They are really lucky to have been able to return to a healthy life despite being infected. The death rate may be very low or whatever it is, every soul is precious to us. The mobile industry of the country extends its condolences to those who have passed away at this time.

The mobile sector extends its hand whenever the country and the people of the country are in any calamity; Extends the hand of cooperation. Apart from being technical, this sector also stands by the people in many ways. And so, we are by the side of every person and family affected by COVID-19.

This issue is sorted by a recent GSMA report on how the mobile sector has kept people connected during the COVID-19 era in Bangladesh. There is also a report on a webinar organized by the CTO Forum and AMTOB where prominent people including policymakers of the country's technology, banks and telecommunication sector participated. Besides, there are regular sections.

Brig Gen S M Farhad (Retd.)

Secretary General, AMTOB



AMTOB President's Message



We are at a juncture in human civilization as the world progresses towards the fourth industrial revolution. Although technology has reached its peak and we have just entered the digital age. At just such a time, the people of the world are lost in the omnivorous infection of COVID-19.

One thing is clear; however, the new reality is that we are facing due to the coronavirus infection, which is being termed as New Normal, has accelerated the path to the digital age. New normal means adapting to the new reality.

And people have no choice but to rely on technology to adapt to the new reality. It is amazing to think that despite so much civilization and progress, the whole world is being held hostage by a little virus today. Technology has made it possible for them to protect themselves as much as possible. COVID-19 has taught us how far we have to go.

In this situation, we expect, that the government will come forward with all the necessary policy and regulatory reforms for technological improvement. This sector is still going through many obstacles and is not able to move forward with full strength. We seek the cooperation of the government as a whole.

Mahtab Uddin Ahmed

President, AMTOB

>> AMTOB Board

Mahtab Uddin Ahmed

Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer
Robi Axiata Limited

Erik Aas

Chief Executive Officer
Banglalink Digital Communications Limited

Yasir Azman

Chief Executive Officer
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Chief Executive Officer
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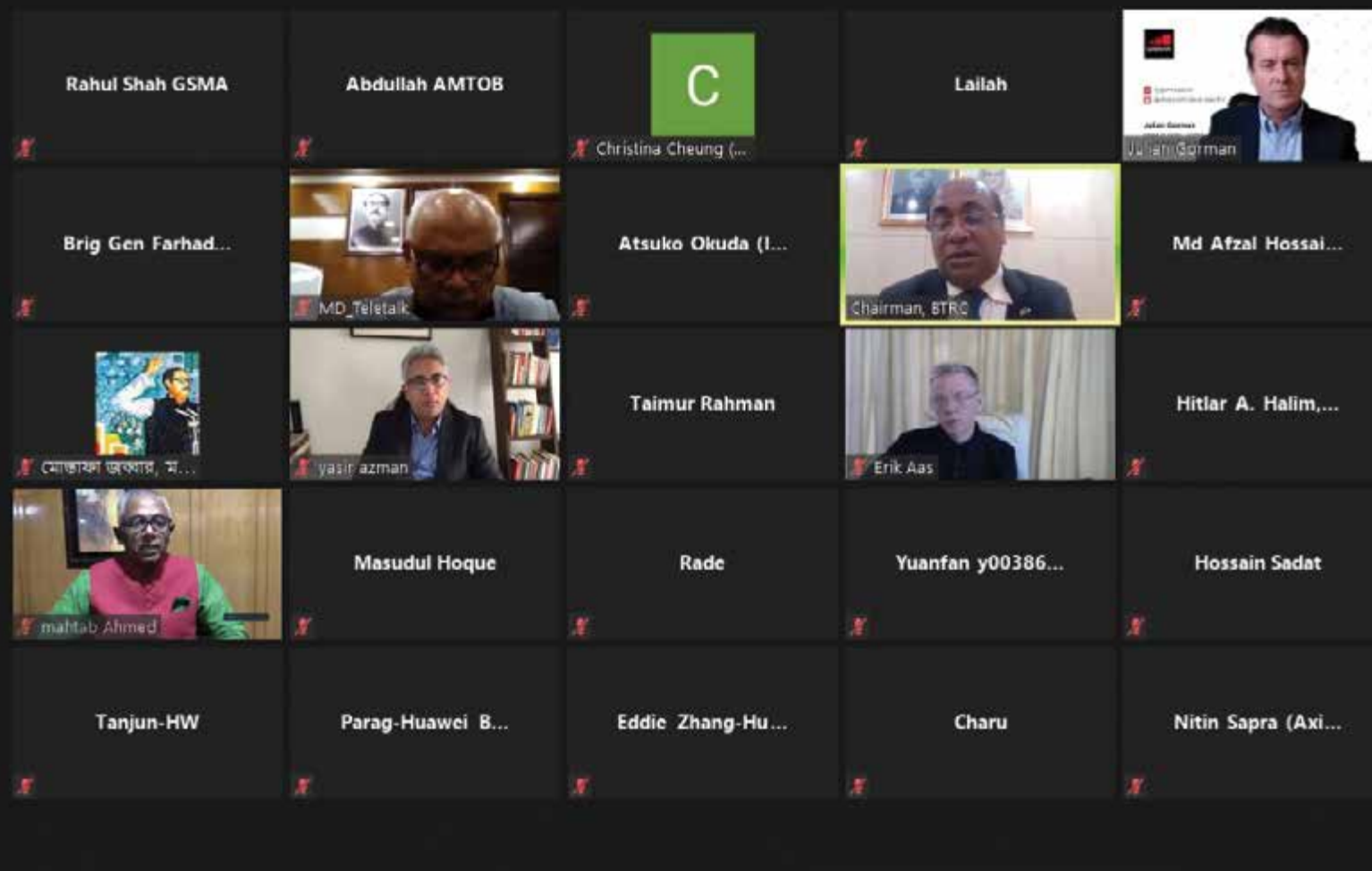
Managing Director
Teletalk Bangladesh Limited

Brig Gen S M Farhad (Retd.)

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.



Mobile operators keep people's lives normal during the pandemic

The National Dialogue of GSMA, a global organization of the mobile industry, recently published a report on how the industry kept Bangladesh connected during the coronavirus epidemic. The report titled “Keeping Bangladesh Connected: The Role of the Mobile Industry during the COVID-19 Pandemic” discusses the impact of the pandemic on the industry. It also highlights some of the recommendations that will help the mobile industry play a more supportive role in the future.

The report was launched on 16th December 2020 when an online roundtable on the same subject kicked off simultaneously. Representatives of the Ministry of Telecommunications, the regulatory body, the chief executives of the mobile service provider companies, GSMA, the United Nations telecommunications agency ITU and AMTOB attended the roundtable.

Posts and Telecommunications Minister Mustafa Jabbar addressed the roundtable as the chief guest when GSMA and ITU presented two separate reports. Md. Afzal Hossain, Secretary, PTD, Shyam Sunder Sikder, Chairman, Bangladesh Telecommunications Regulatory Commission (BTRC) and Managing Directors or Chief Executives of the mobile operators -- Mahtab Uddin Ahmed of Robi, Erik Aas of Banglalink, Yasir Azman of Grameenphone and Md. Shahab Uddin of Teletalk attended the panel discussion.

ITU Regional Director Atsuko Okuda addressed the panel discussion, and GSMA Asia-Pacific Head Julian Gorman conducted it. Rahul Shah, Director, Mobile for Development, Asia Pacific, GSMA hosted the event when AMTOB Secretary General Brig. Gen. S M Farhad (Retd.) delivered the vote of thanks.

Mustafa Jabbar said the government and the private mobile operators, have played a significant role in keeping people's lives normal in the pandemic. He added, the government was aware of the challenges of the telecom sector including high rates and was trying to address responsibly. He thinks that it is possible to find a way to solve the problems through mutual talks.

He further said that Bangladesh has continued uninterrupted internet and telecommunication services very efficiently in the COVID-19 situation. Private telecom companies have played a pivotal role in keeping the network operational, just as our staff has worked with risk. Giving thanks to the private operators, he highlighted various programs of the Government to bring high-speed Internet to the doorsteps of every person in the country.

Secretary of Posts and Telecommunications Afzal Hossain outlined the government's plans to expand the network in the country. He said various initiatives have been taken to bring high-speed internet to the doorsteps of every people by 2021.

BTRC Chairman Shyam Sunder Sikder hoped that the existing excellent relationship between the mobile operators and BTRC will be established on a stronger footing in the days to come. He said that in addition to the initiative to enable the operators to use the ratio spectrum in various services, various initiatives have been taken to expand the network in telecom services and to provide better and safer internet services. He said further steps would be taken to formulate fibre optic guidelines and implement policies to set quality standards.

The chief executive officers of the operators praised the minister and the government officials for their support during the pandemic and declaring telecom as emergency service, in the shortest possible time. They highlighted some pressing issues which need to solve, such as policy reforms and high tax rates.

They added that while operators are working to make internet services accessible to all, the increase in the supplementary tariffs on internet services in the current budget is hampering their efforts. It has

increased the cost of Internet access for the average income-generating people.

Banglalink CEO Erik Aas praised the people of Bangladesh for tackling the Coronavirus pandemic. However, he added that raising taxes in the budget puts pressure on telecom operators as people cut costs.

Yasir Azman, CEO of Grameenphone, said, telecom operators had been dealing with the situation successfully after the coronavirus outbreak in collaboration with the government. He said it was a wise decision to

declare the telecom as an emergency service. When the pandemic was in its final stages in May (last year), Bangladesh faced another catastrophe; it was super cyclone Amphan. Operators ensure telecom service to customers during those difficult times.

Robi Managing Director and CEO Mahtab Uddin Ahmed said the growth in internet data usage in the third quarter of 2020 was not at that level. Various measures to make Internet service more accessible to the people are now stuck in the subject of higher tax rates, regulatory policy reforms, surge prices and some such policies. Immediate steps required in this regard.

Md. Shahab Uddin, Managing Director of Teletalk, said that the operator faced various challenge to provide better service due to some challenges during the COVID-19 era. He said their revenue has declined. But now the situation is slowly changing.



Key Findings in the GSMA Report

Mobile operators in Bangladesh have stepped up to the challenges of the pandemic by taking measures to ensure that mobile technology is effectively utilised to contain the spread of the disease across seven key areas



Collaborating with government to leverage mobile big data to make informed decisions to control the spread of the disease

Customer data is a critical resource for supporting public health actions across the different phases of the COVID-19 pandemic. Mobile operators are working with key stakeholders including a2i14 and the National Telecommunications Monitoring Centre on a COVID-19 Collective Intelligence System. The system combines location data from mobile phones with self-reported data and test reports to create dashboards to assist decision making. For example, the system identifies “hot zones”, where there is a high prevalence of infections, for mass testing.

Providing mobile health services through telehealth

COVID-19 has had severe health ramifications, and the most vulnerable members of society have been the hardest hit. The pandemic has revealed the importance of technology in delivering healthcare solutions. Mobile operators are leveraging mobile and frontier technologies to drive more affordable and quality healthcare, with some services seeing significant growth in usage from Q2 compared to Q1 in 2020.

Facilitating E-learning

Operators are providing solutions to educational challenges during COVID-19 with many supporting the shift to online and distance learning by actively working towards increasing access to digital educational resources. By working with stakeholders, including EdTech start-ups, operators are able to leverage mobile technology to promote and support uninterrupted online learning for students at home. Mobile operators are also providing reduced tariffs to support home working while also enabling access to additional content and services for children at home.

Emergency Telecommunications for Disaster Management

Bangladesh ranks 10th among 187 countries with the highest disaster risk worldwide. Events such as the COVID-19 outbreak and Cyclone Amphan have reinforced the urgent need to build resilience into the country’s infrastructure to reduce the impact of natural disasters and improve Bangladesh’s ability to recover from shocks more easily. The development of an emergency response action plan is a key action from the COVID-19 Crisis Response: Digital Development Joint Action Plan and Call for Action (JAP)18. An emergency response plan aims to ensure communications availability during the disaster mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery phases. Mobile operators and the BTRC have formed a Technical Committee to draft the Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) that will guide the actions of telecommunication services when responding to disasters.

Disseminating vital information

The ability to keep citizens up to date with the latest advice is of paramount importance in fast-developing situations. As such, operators are working with governments by using SMS and social media applications to deliver timely information directly to mobile devices. These tools are helping people identify symptoms and take preventive measures as well as communicate government advice on the pandemic.

Mobilising resources to maintain critical connectivity

With many Bangladeshis working and studying from home, access to mobile technology and mobile internet has proven critical to ensuring people stay connected during the pandemic. Demand for mobile internet has soared with operators experiencing an increase in internet traffic. Network operators have to date successfully maintained services and efficiently utilised pre-existing capacity, and in certain cases expanded this capacity to ensure that the rise in demand can be met.

Short-term measures to improve the affordability of mobile services

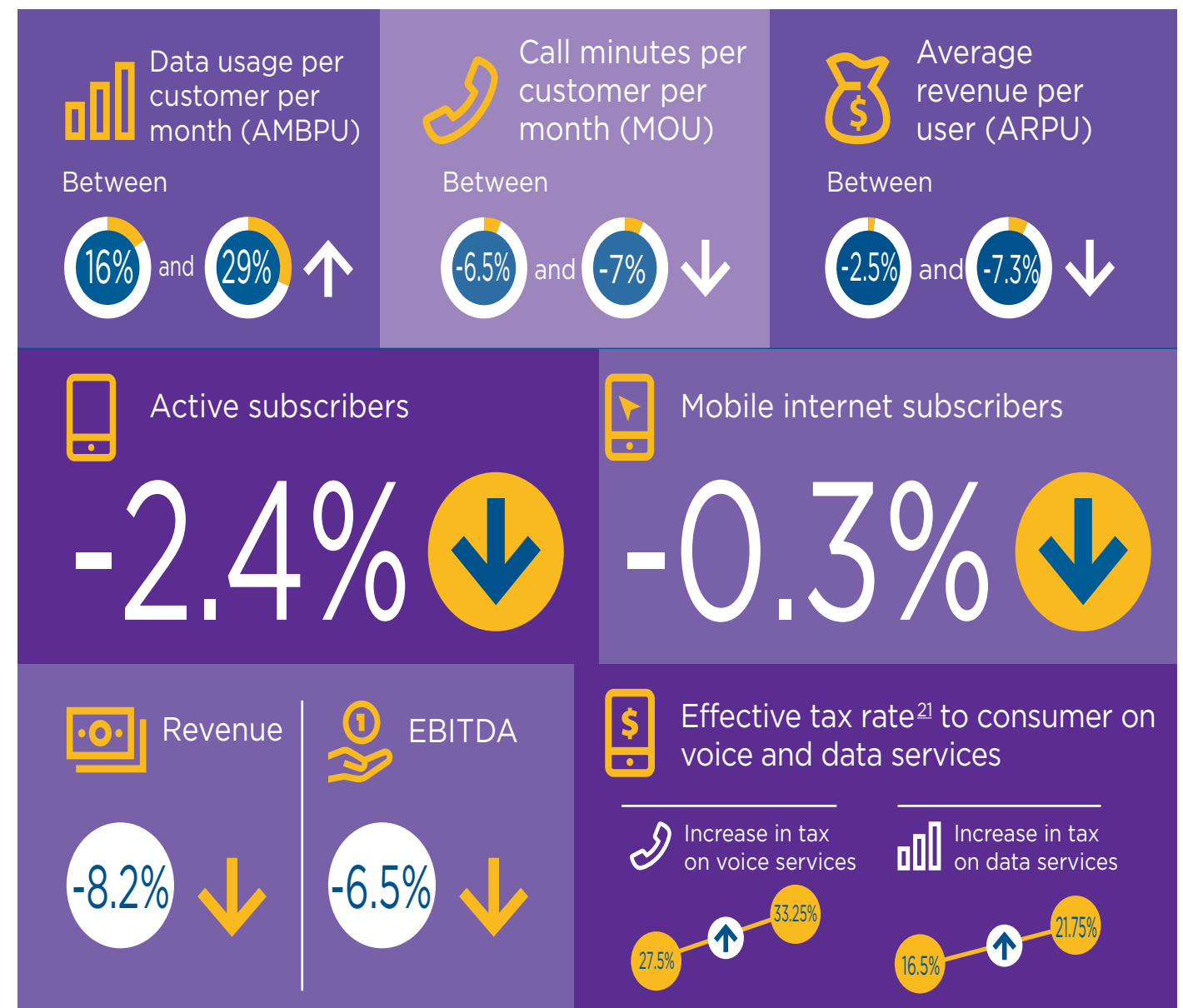
Access to affordable digital content and services is fundamental to ensuring connectivity during the COVID-19 pandemic. Understanding the importance of data during the crisis, mobile operators have been working to make access to and use of mobile internet services more affordable through temporary measures that include discounts on tariffs and subsidising the cost of accessing the internet. Below is a list of these temporary measures.

COVID-19 Impact on the Mobile Industry

The impact of the COVID-19 lockdown measures introduced in March 2020, on the mobile industry, were evident in the industry’s Q2 (April to June 2020) results. Movement restrictions, due to health concerns and government orders, led to an increase in online activity at home (i.e., working and studying from home, e-health, digital commerce, entertainment, streaming, etc). This reliance on the internet saw an increase in per customer data consumption of between 16% and 29% and a decrease in demand for voice calls by 6.5% to 7%. The increase in data consumption was not sufficient to offset overall revenue decline with operators seeing a decrease in service revenue and insignificant growth in data revenue. The latter occurred as a result of operator action to improve the affordability of data services during the pandemic,

through temporary discounted measures such as zero rated access and increased validity of prepaid SIMs, counterbalancing data consumption growth.

Despite the introduction of these short term measures to improve the affordability of mobile services, active subscriber numbers dropped. This was due to the difficulty prepaid customers experienced in topping up credit when movement restrictions were in place or financial constraints because of reduced or no income. Affordability was likely even more affected by an increase in supplementary duty from 10% to 15% which could raise the cost of mobile services and data, with a disproportionate impact on low-income and price-sensitive consumers.



GSMA Recommendations:

Promote network resilience

Allow MNOs to deploy last mile connectivity through their own fiber up to respective BTS/Node-B/eNode-B, New Radio.

- Ensure the continuity of the digital industry supply chain by streamlining customs and logistical processes and classifying network equipment as essential infrastructure. Options include fast-tracking innovative network technology solutions and procurement of connectivity equipment to ensure business continuity.

- Streamline planning processes to enable rapid approval of installation of additional capacity on existing network sites and approval of new sites and installations. This can be addressed by providing access to public sector sites for mobile installation.

- Publish regulatory guidelines for active infrastructure sharing allowing full fledged active sharing (RAN sharing and core network sharing) in order to minimise duplication of investment, ensure optimum utilisation of resources and to cater for exceptional demands due to this pandemic.

Ensure access and affordability of digital services

- Rationalise industry taxes, duties and fees on mobile communications, public and data communications services, mobile money services and international gateways to encourage digital communications and transactions during the pandemic.

- Incorporate a special programme under SOF rules to establish a common mobile network infrastructure to ensure affordable access of digital services for the COVID-19 impacted population and the people or places deprived from such facilities.

Leverage e-health, big data and telemedicine to address the health

- Initiate close dialogue with key stakeholders to determine how to adopt a whole of government approach to address the health crisis that prioritises the harmonisation of policies related to key sectors such as telecoms, e-health, big data and telemedicine across all national development plans such as Vision 2021.

- Create a framework that clearly states how data (including the repository of telecommunication and health data) is shared and handled between key sectors during the pandemic.



Interview



The overall reform of the telecommunications sector has become urgent

Mahtab Uddin Ahmed, Managing Director and CEO of Robi Axiata Limited. Since January 29, 2020, he has been serving as the president of AMTOB, the only business organization of mobile telecom operators in the country. Throughout his tenure, he has gone through the COVID-19 situation. **Mahtab Uddin Ahmed** spoke to ConneXion about how the country's telecommunications sector is doing in this unprecedented situation, the potential crisis of the sector, digital economy, connectivity, infrastructure, policy reforms and other issues.

Speaking on the business and status of mobile operators in the 'New Normal' situation of COVID-19 at the outset, the AMTOB President said, Coronavirus is a curse not only for Bangladesh but for the entire human race. We have not seen such a terrible infectious disease in the last 100 years. During a war, a specific area or region is usually affected, but in this age of globalization, we are all affected by Coronavirus. However, this epidemic has given us the opportunity to see the world we know anew.

As a leading sector in the transformation of Digital Bangladesh and as a connectivity provider, COVID-19 has further enhanced our responsibilities. People are now more reliant on telecommunications and the Internet than ever before for health, education, e-commerce, home office, digital services, etc. Due to the lockdown situation, the use of internet data has increased on the one hand, and on the other hand, due to the economic stagnation, many people have given up the use of mobile phones while many of them have started returning to the network. Bringing



* Image & infographic courtesy by GSMA

back those who left our network was a big challenge. Delivering connectivity to remote areas at this time was another big challenge. For this I would like to especially thank all our partners including Government, BTRC, PGCB, BTCL, Railways. Without their cooperation, the task of providing our services at this difficult time would have been very difficult.

Customers have long complained about the quality of telecommunication services. In this regard, Mahtab Uddin Ahmed said, there is no way to deny the question about the quality of telecommunication services. But we are not interested in going deeper into why the quality of service does not mean what is expected. Three things are essential for quality telecommunication services - waves, fiber optics and smartphones. In the COVID-19 situation, the demand for data has increased by 25-30%. This created an additional pressure on our network overnight and we requested the government to allocate unused spectrum to the operators as temporary basis. In response to the emergency situation, it was hoped that the government would respond to our call and allocate airwaves, albeit for a short time. At present, more than 150 MHz airwaves in various bands in Bangladesh are lying unused by the government. We think that allocating spectrum from there would ensure proper use of government resources.

Mahtab further said that the fact that the price of radio spectrum in Bangladesh is higher for the operators can be understood by looking at the airwave auction held so far. A large part of the of the spectrum that were offered for sale at each auction, remained unsold in the end due to the high price. We think we should determine the value of our airwaves in terms of reality.

AMTOB President Mahtab Uddin Ahmed thinks that the lack of adequate fiber optic cable is one of the reasons for providing quality services. In this regard, he said, 80-75% of our towers are not yet fiber connected. These towers do not yet have the amount of fiber needed to connect. BTCL, PGCB, Railway fiber is not everywhere, and the cost of fiber lease of private NTTN is still very expensive. Now is the time to change the policy making process to increase fiber connectivity.

Mahtab said 5-G services could not be successful without strong fiber connectivity. Because the 5-G ecosystem is completely different from the 4-G, BTS connections have to be made over short distances and this has to be done through fiber connectivity.

Regarding the lack of increase in smartphone usage, Mahtab Uddin said, "In less than 3 years, we have brought 80% of all operators

“mobile operators have provided the most effective technical assistance to the government in tackling Coronavirus. Operators have come up with technology-based services like analytics based corona mapping, corona infection tracing, SMS alert service, corona helpline.”

in the country under 4-G network.” Compared to that, our smartphone usage is still not more than 40%, 4G handset penetration is less than 20%. The main reason for low penetration of smartphones is its high price. A 4-G smartphone is available in India for BDT 2,000, whereas the minimum cost to buy a 4-G smartphone here is BDT 5,000-6,000. In order to reduce digital inequality, the government needs to take some steps to enable low-income people to buy smartphones at lower prices. If Digital Bangladesh is to be fully implemented, there is no alternative to increasing the use of smartphones.

On the role of mobile operators in tackling COVID -19, AMTOB president Mahtab said mobile operators have provided the most effective technical assistance to the government in tackling Coronavirus. Operators have come up with technology-based services like analytics based corona mapping, corona infection tracing, SMS alert service, corona helpline. In addition to corona, we have taken several steps to provide free data to frontline veteran physicians, reducing the cost of data by 25-30%.

Mahtab thinks that a silent digital revolution has taken place in the country because of Corona. People are now feeling more comfortable using digital services than ever before. We need to look at the habit that people have developed to receive digital services so that we can maintain it. For this we need to think on a larger scale.

“We have to acknowledge that we are still lagging behind in the strong infrastructure that is needed to deliver digital services. Mobile operators as well as the government, regulators and other stakeholders have a role to play in ensuring the benefits of this infrastructure. An overall reform of the mobile telecommunications sector is urgently needed for implementation, and the government has undoubtedly taken many commendable steps to take this sector forward, but in some other cases, if the government extends its hand of cooperation, all existing questions about service quality can be overcome. At the moment, there is no alternative to policy reform on a number of issues, including radio waves and fiber connectivity.



Nokia's unwavering commitment towards leading digital transformation in Bangladesh

Building upon this momentum, at Nokia Bangladesh we are assisting all our mobile as well as fixed customers through our innovative set of solutions. We are constantly addressing challenges brought by Covid-19 with the objective of helping our partners maintain service and business continuity. Our solutions spanning over - radio, cloud core, transport, OSS, and fixed network - are helping customers deliver best-in-class services to the end users. Nokia Bangladesh Country Head **Rashed Haque** recently spoke to Connexion

Over the years, Bangladesh has shown an impressive track record for growth as well as development. It is on track to become a middle-income country in 2022. We believe technology will play a major role in further accelerating the pace of development in Bangladesh and at Nokia we are excited to take part in this process.

Also, we see Bangladesh inching closer to the path of digitization and that can be attributed to the government's push to promote ICT through incentivization and establishment of ICT parks. To support this, Nokia is committed to Bangladesh Government's "Digital Bangladesh" vision to connect the unconnected part of the population. Furthermore, we are constantly thinking of ways to advance technological development in the region. With our vision of driving innovation for tomorrow and delivering technology today, we're making businesses more productive, environments cleaner, workplaces safer, economies stronger and people's lives richer. We are shaping the future of technology by adhering to the highest ethical standards.

However, we believe that the real transformative power of widespread digitalization, industrial automation, Internet of Things (IoT), and artificial intelligence is yet to be unleashed, especially in Bangladesh. Today, Nokia, through its bleeding-edge research, is leading the global aspiration in IoT, Smart City, Industry Automation etc. Therefore, we believe 5G will be a key catalyst in realizing the Fourth Industrial Revolution, and our networks and connectivity will play a crucial role in

this digital transformation.

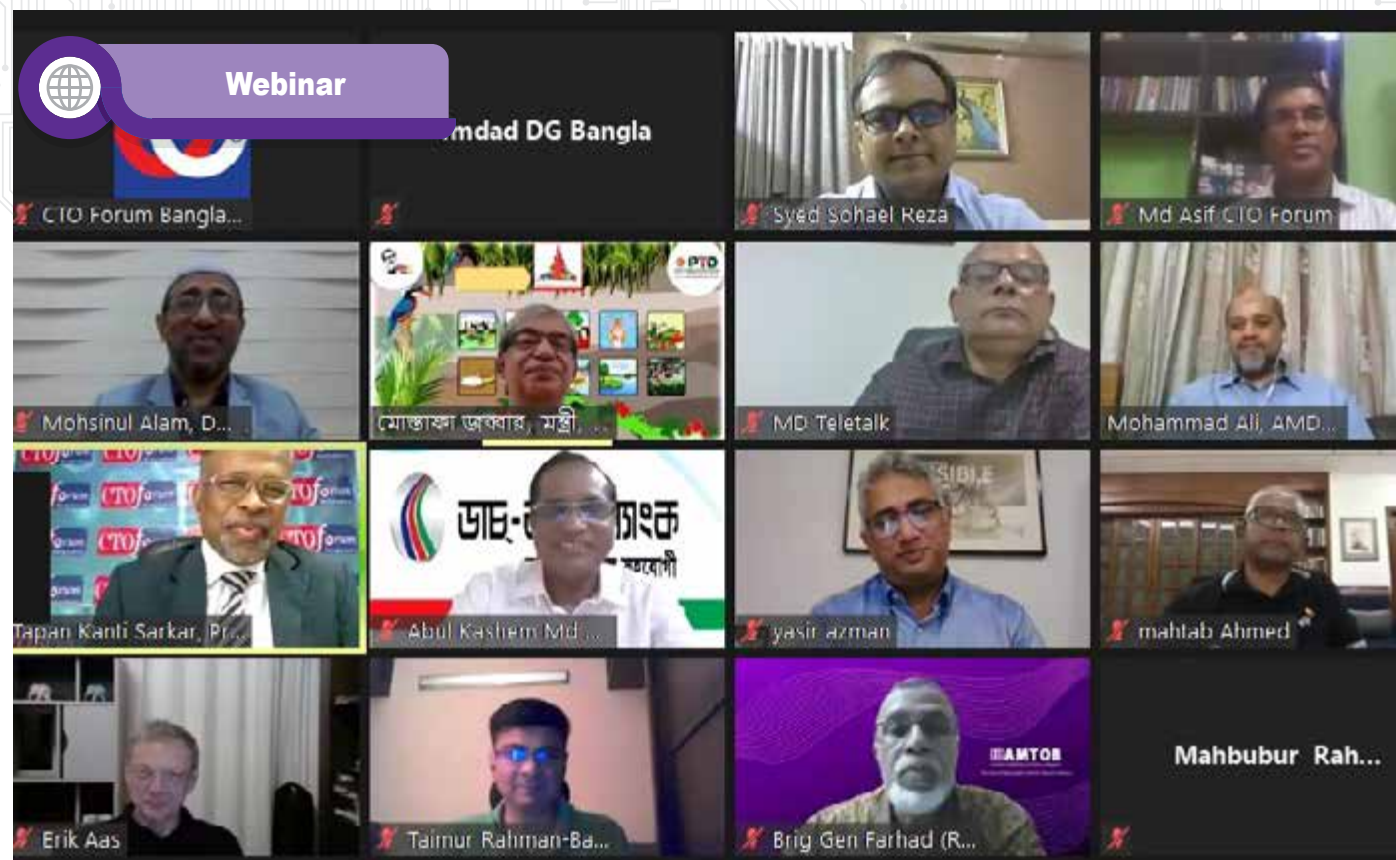
Our overall vision is to enable groundbreaking digital health care, automated transportation, bring learning and education to students in remote parts of the world, help address climate change and build a more sustainable world.

In these times, Nokia's first and foremost focus is to ensure the health and safety of its employees, customers and partners. Keeping that in mind, like others around the world, we have also adopted WFH (Work from Home) mode. Nokia employees, around the clock, are always ensuring we are just one click or call away from our customers. Through on-line collaborations, we along with our customers are joining hands to overcome the new

challenges in order to meet the subscribers' needs.

At Nokia, we create the technology to connect the world. With this intent, we are striving to connect the unconnected population of Bangladesh by creating a digital backbone for transforming legacy networks into future-ready, agile networks.





Future Civilization Will Be Built on The Highway of Telecommunication, PTD Minister

CTO Forum and AMTOB recently jointly organized an online conference styled “Role of Telecom in Accelerating Digital Bangladesh,” where the respected industry leaders including the relevant minister discussed about the urgency of the telecom industry for the success of the government’s vision. CTOF is the organization of the current and former chief technology officers’ while AMTOB is the association of the mobile operators and ICT solution providers in Bangladesh. Post and Telecommunication Minister Mustafa Jabbar was the chief guest while CTO Forum founder and President Tapan Kanti Sarkar presided over the webinar. The event was conducted by Mohammad Ali, Secretary General of the Forum and Additional Managing Director (AMD) of Pubali Bank Limited. Forum’s executive committee member Md Asif introduced the guests at the session and Syed Sohael Reza described about the newly established innovation centers of the Forum. The chief executives’ officers of four mobile operators Banglalink, Grameenphone, Robi and Teletalk and Managing Director of Dutch Bangla Bank Limited were present as panelists. We have highlighted the main points of the discussions.

Mustafa Jabbar

Honorable Minister, Posts and Telecommunications
He said that the next civilization would be built on telecommunication highways. The key to the digital transformation we are talking about is telecommunications. In the days ahead, when new technology will evolve and millions of devices will be connected, it will be possible to go completely digital.

The minister said that there are some policy issues to take the telecom highway forward which need to be made people-friendly. He said the urgency for voice calls and mobile data has been highly understood during the outbreak of the corona virus. Rural people also feel the need for mobile data at least to educate their children.



Md. Mohsinul Alam

Vice President, CTO Forum & DG, Department of Telecom

Md. Mohsinul Alam said that, Bangladesh is now the 5th largest market in the Asia-Pacific region and the 9th largest in the world in terms of unique subscribers. He said that now all sectors including economy, education, technology, agriculture is becoming dependent on telecommunication.

Mahtab Uddin Ahmed

AMTOB President and MD & CEO, Robi Axiata

When the Digital Bangladesh vision was first enunciated by the Government back in December 2008, it was well ahead of its time and naturally stirred a lot of curiosity at home and abroad. Much to our delight, we found the Government to be fully committed to implement this vision. What ensued thereafter was relentless drive by the telecom industry alongside the Government to make that vision a reality. The telecom industry pumped in billions in investment, which helped to push the industry’s contribution up to 6% of the GDP. While the debate over quality of service and price rumbles on, the industry has moved beyond the role of connectivity provider; we are now creating digital solutions to turbocharge peoples’ digital lifestyle. But the existing taxation and other regulatory cost structure hardly leaves any fiscal headroom for the industry to play the role it is well capable of; given the insatiable appetite for digital lifestyle among the people, such a situation is becoming increasingly untenable. In this backdrop, we urge the Government to address all the policy bottlenecks in the telecom sector in consultation with the industry.



Erik Aas

AMTOB Sr. Vice President and CEO, Banglalink

It is still too early for Bangladesh to launch 5G, as many crucial parts of the ecosystem and regulation are yet to come into being. There is no doubt that once a new technology is introduced, our service-quality reaches new heights as a consequence. New technologies always come with new opportunities. Forthcoming 5G, of course, will enhance the speed of the mobile broadband, connect billions of devices, automate many industries and Internet of Things will become the new trend. However, it is necessary to formulate a favourable regulatory regime and reconsider a few crucial issues such as the affordable spectrum price, conducive infrastructures, appropriate policies and an acceptable taxation regime for building a 5G ecosystem that can make a sustainable impact on the country’s digital advancement.

**Yasir Azman**

AMTOB Vice President and
CEO, Grameenphone

Our role as an essential service provider is now more critical than ever before. COVID-19 pushed us hard to innovate and leapfrog solutions that were not accounted for before the new-normal days. With the excessively increased demand for connectivity now as an industry, we must work even closer to ensure supply and experience all over Bangladesh. Govt and regulators in the new Digital economy need to see telecom industry differently, not as a vertical commercial entity rather a horizontal integrator for all services to build an ecosystem of the digital economy which is unavoidable for the future growth of the country. No matter how long this pandemic is going to stay and continue to take a toll on us - we must collaborate better and bring in solutions to tackle it -

Md. Shahab Uddin

AMTOB Director and
MD, Teletalk

Mobile plays a very important role in connectivity and digital governance, two of the aspects of digital vision of the government. Mentioning that 95 people in the country are dependent on mobile internet, he said that during the coronavirus epidemic, people's reliance on mobile has increased.

**Abul Kashem Md. Shirin**

Advisor, CTO Forum and
MD, Dutch Bangla Bank Ltd.

The advancement of digital banking services is impossible without the contribution of mobile sector. Moreover, the way mobile financial services have progressed, it would have been impossible without mobile. After every transaction, every customer notified by short messages which has increased the confidence of the customers. On the other hand, millions of people are recharging their mobiles through banking channels with various services. As a result, the banking and mobile sectors are interdependent.



In online classes, 70 to 80 per cent of the students connect through mobile phones

Najnin Akter
Assistant Professor,
Rajuk Uttara Model College,
Dhaka



With mobile internet, students can take part in online classes even during this time. Not everyone can afford to buy a laptop or personal computer, so mobile is the only hope. Najnin Akter, an assistant professor in the Bangla department of Rajuk Uttara Model College, thinks that 70 to 80 per cent of students in online classes take their lessons through mobile phones.

Talking to ConneXion recently, she said students can stay connected seamlessly if they take online classes on mobile. Moreover, they do not become disconnected even during power outages. In particular, we recommend students to stay connected on the mobile during exam times.

After the outbreak of the Coronavirus in early 2020, many students moved out of Dhaka. But having a mobile phone does not interfere with their studies.

Najnin said she usually gives lectures in 2/3 online classes a day while junior teachers do more. Her school started taking classes online from the middle of 2020. She is in the teaching profession for more than a decade and a half but never witnessed such an unprecedented situation indicating COVID-19.

She said each class lasts 40 minutes, but it is difficult to keep the attention of the students during this whole time. It is normal to have more attention on face-to-face conversations in the classroom, however, may not be possible in the online classes, she said. Through the blessings of mobile service, the study work is going to continue. Without it, all studies would have stopped, she added.

The professor also mentioned some of the benefits

of studying online. She said that if there is a need to teach a topic, any content can be downloaded from the web and sent the link that helps the students understand the subject matter very quickly. For example, she added, when teaching about Nawab Siraj-ud-Daulah, a video can be shared from a play or movie while teaching; everyone gets it quite easy. In science subjects, such as mathematics, biology, chemistry or physics, this advantage (content) is much more available.

Asked what software usually used when teaching students, she replied Zoom is the most popular among the academics and the students. The reason for this, she told, a large number of students can get access through the software at once. Moreover, it can confirm 100% of students' attendance during the exams.

Asked if she had experienced having digital classrooms before, she said, most of the rooms in the college she works for are digitally equipped. These rooms have facilities like projector, smartboard, computers, etc. Earlier, she used to create video content on various topics and upload those on YouTube. Students could get easy access to those contents. However, creating video content is not easy because it is hard to talk in front of the camera, where there is no interaction. On the contrary, a live conversation is possible in online classes.

She expressed her gratitude to the mobile service providers and said that students could continue their studies as there is a nationwide network and hoped that the operators would continue their services.

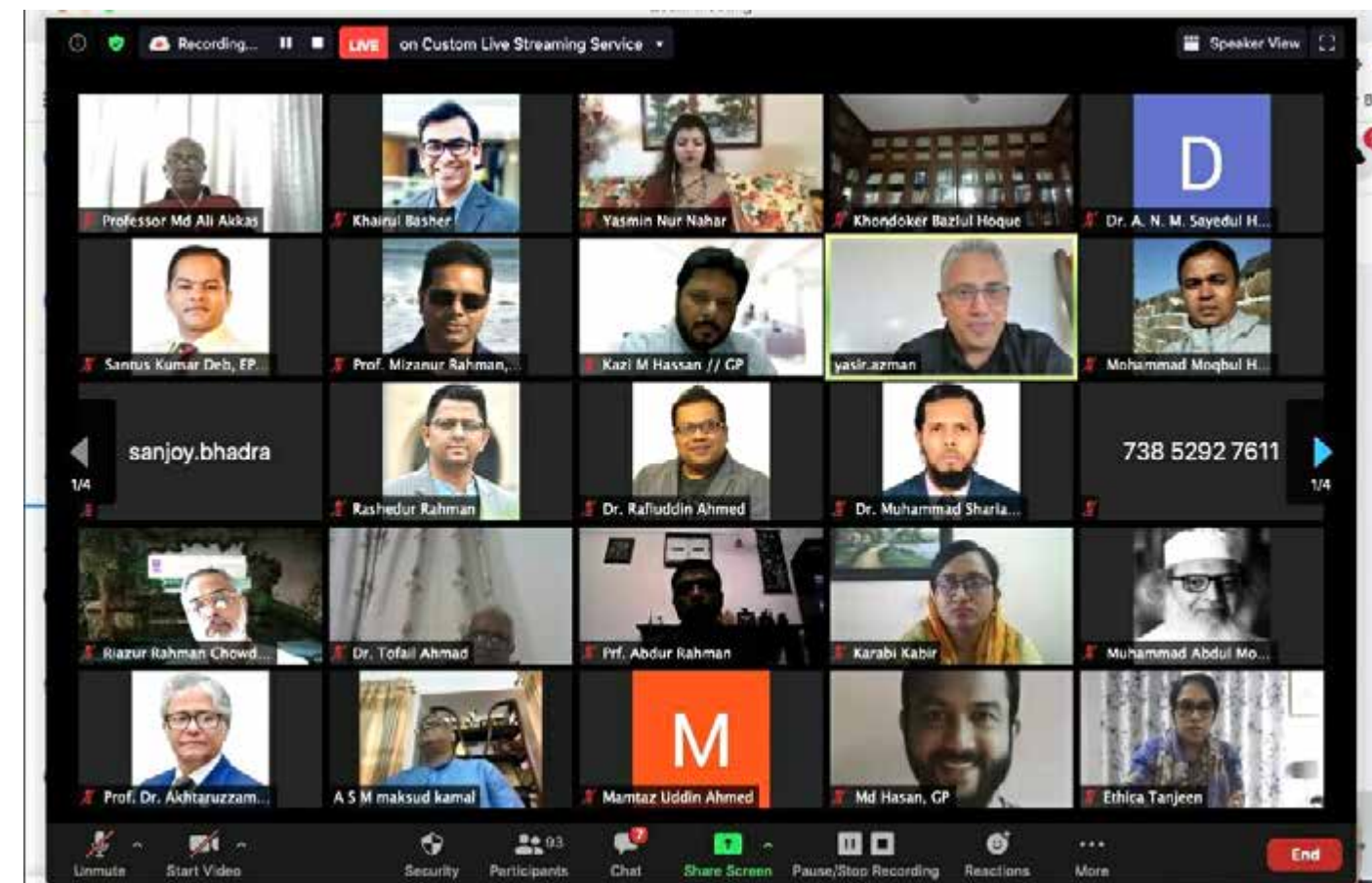


Banglalink and its employees, with the support of Bangladesh Sena Kalyan Sangstha and Bangladesh Army distributed food and hygiene relief to 31500 families

At the 3rd quarter in the year Grameenphone distributed relief items to 100,000 flood affected households partnering with Bangladesh Red Crescent Society



Banglalink supported Teach it, a startup of IT Incubator to conduct free live PEC preparation classes



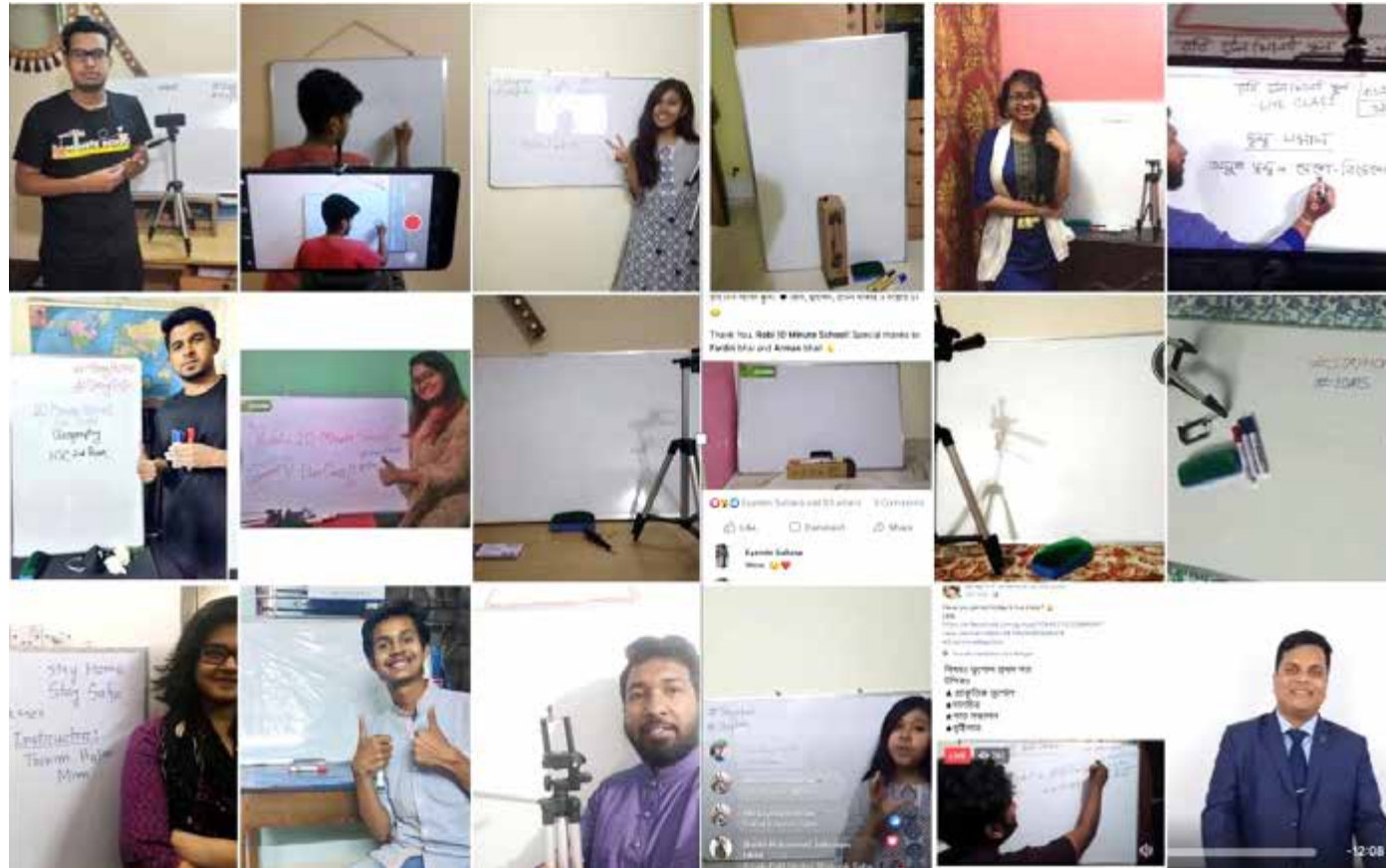
Grameenphone has partnered with the Faculty of Business Studies, University of Dhaka to leverage their nationwide 4G connectivity, and strong distribution to hand over SIM cards to the students' doorsteps



Robi is providing all the cost of operation and technical support for 333, the National Information Centre for the citizens of Bangladesh in partnership with a2i and Genex Infosys Ltd. since 2017. The company is providing toll free access to 333 in COVID-19 situation



Md. Shahab Uddin, Managing Director, Teletalk, recently spoke at the digital lottery for the schools first to ninth grades admission process. Teletalk provided technical support in the process



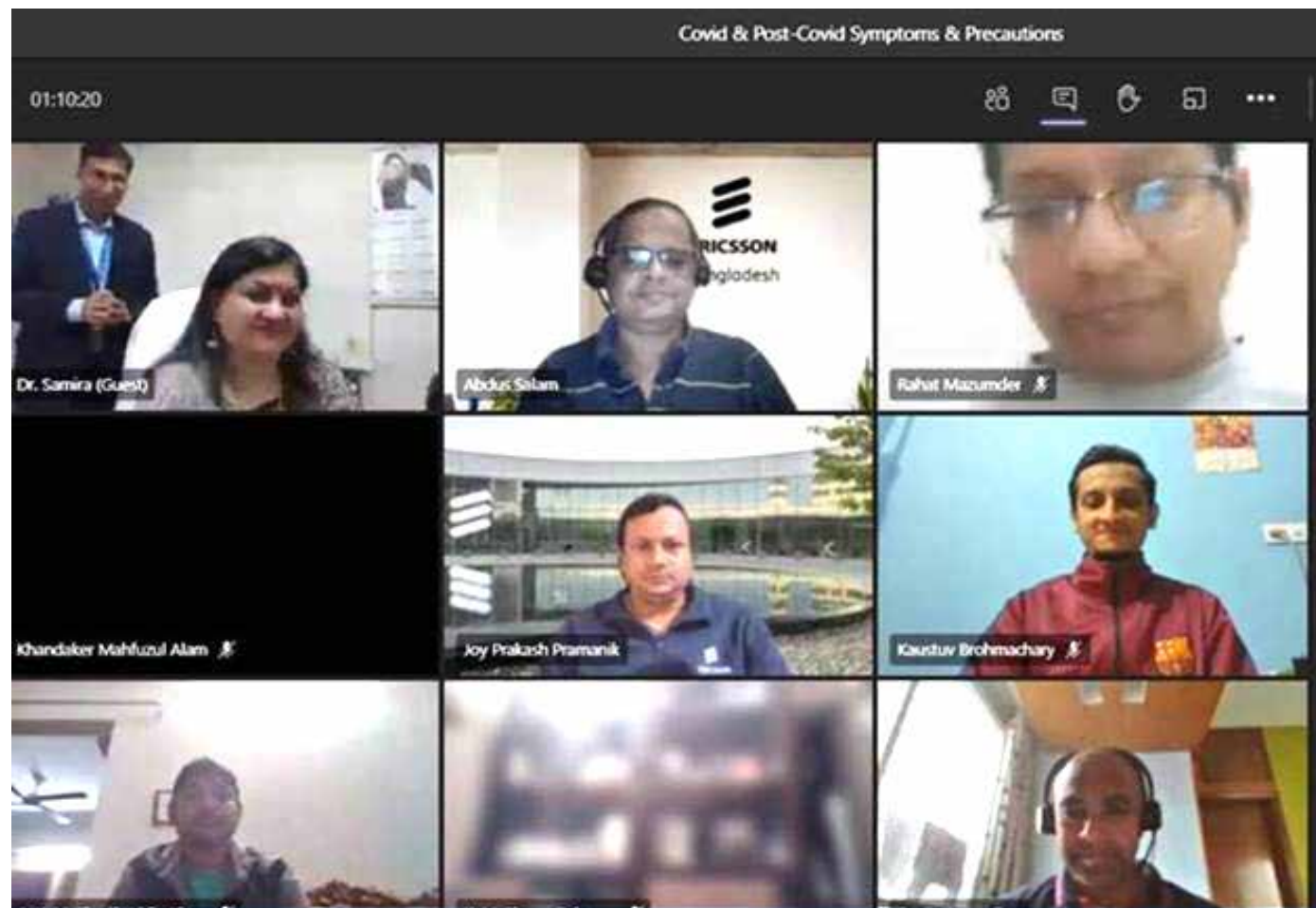
Ever since the students have been locked down in their homes, Robi-10 Minute School, the country's largest online school is regularly broadcasting Live classes from its various digital platforms to engage the home-bound students. The platform is also supporting the Directorate of Secondary & Higher Education of Ministry of Education to develop digital education content which are being telecasted through the Sangsad TV



Teletalk recently signed an agreement with the Dhaka Officers Club. Among others, Teletalk Managing Director Md. Shahab Uddin and others were present



LM Ericsson Bangladesh Ltd. delivered KN 95 masks to the Directorate for General Health Services in Dhaka, Bangladesh. LM Ericsson Bangladesh Ltd. Country Manager Abdus Salam handed over the KN95 masks to the Directorate of General Health Services (DGHS). Additional Director General (Admin) Prof Dr Nasima Sultana and her team accepted the donation and thanked Ericsson for their support.



As part of continuous health awareness session with experts, LM Ericsson Bangladesh Ltd. hold online awareness session for all employees on Covid & Post Covid symptoms and Precautions in December 2020. This is a continuous program Ericsson Bangladesh runs with all employees.



Huawei Technologies (Bangladesh) Limited has been organizing 'Seeds for the Future', an ICT talent hunt education program to develop local ICT talents and thorough transfer of knowledge. In the latest event, ten students from different universities of Bangladesh were selected based on their academic performance and innovative ideas. Recently they have participated trainings on advanced ICT knowledge from Huawei's headquarters in China. The training session was inaugurated in presence of some key people

Huawei Technologies (Bangladesh) Limited has partnered with Bijoy Digital to provide digital solutions to T&T High schools across Bangladesh to facilitate distance learning. 'Bridging the Digital Education Divide to Reduce the Gap' - the project formed under the partnership will aid Huawei smart devices along with Bijoy Digital App and connectivity to the pre-school to Grade 4 students. The project received collaborative support from the UNESCO Office in Bangladesh





Nokia Bangladesh Country Head Rashed Haque with the PTD minister Mustafa Jabbar, APAC President Jae Won and Teletalk Managing Director Md Shahab Uddin at a conference



AMTOB leadership meets newly appointed Posts and Telecommunications Secretary Md. Afzal Hossain



AMTOB Secretary General Brig Gen S M Farhad (Retd.) meets the newly appointed Chairman of BTRC Shyam Sunder Sikder

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



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



Internet

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

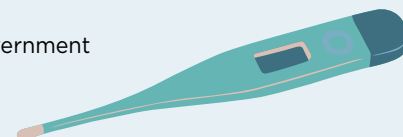
Bonus on data packages duration



Medical supplies

Professional PPE for Doctors and health workers

Corona test kit to the government



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.



Free services related to COVID-19

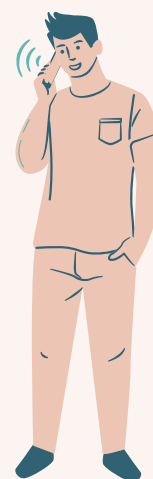
Toll-Free number facility

Free SMS

Free doctors service

Free talk-time to doctors

Free e-learning and online class



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