

## Mobile sector's tax rationalization is urgent



Increasing use of mobile will  
be crucial to implementing  
2041 perspective plan

Telemedicine has  
been institutionalized  
during COVID-19



## >> Content

- 03** Mobile sector's tax rationalization is urgent
- 07** Increasing use of mobile will be crucial to implementing 2041 perspective plan
- 09** Interview : Md. Sahab Uddin, Managing Director of Teletalk Bangladesh Limited
- 11** Interview : Abdus Salam, Country Manager, L M Ericsson Bangladesh Ltd.
- 12** Telemedicine has been institutionalized during COVID-19 : Dr Lubna Marium
- 14** AMTOB Daffodil Webinar
- 15** Members' Activities

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## Editorial



The second wave of coronavirus has hit the world in a more deadly form. We are not out of it either. Many of us have lost loved ones or acquaintances. There is a need to be very careful at this time. We have to follow the public health advice.

However, no matter how bad the situation is, we all have to carry out urgent and essential work. With a nationwide network, mobile phone communication or internet usage is now in everyone's hands. Starting from school lessons, all kinds of financial transactions or treatment are going on mobile.

Nevertheless, mobile service providers keep the wheel of telecommunications and the country's economy moving, the sector is not as good as it supposed to be. Excessive VAT-tax is affecting the sector. The new budget is going to be announced up front. So, this time we have presented the newsletter Connexion with the industry's tax proposal that discusses the problems identified in bold. In addition, a summary of GSMA's recently published report on mobile enabled digital inclusion in Bangladesh, a doctor's interview on telemedicine, and a series of online discussions on the future challenges of the mobile sector with a private university are also covered.

**Brig Gen S M Farhad (Retd.)**

Secretary General, AMTOB



## AMTOB President's Message



Every year, during the budget proposal in the national parliament, people in the mobile telecom sector become worried, whether any new tax imposed or increased the existing ones. The concern raised as this is taking place for the last several years. Tax hike means more pressure on customers ends; on the other hand, it increases the doing business for the operators.

We have seen that last year the government increased taxes on mobile voice and internet services. It happened when everyone was overwhelmed by the coronavirus, and mobile became the main driving force of the economy and all communications.

The tax burden in the mobile sector has reached such a stage that even non-profit organizations pay very high minimum corporate tax, which usually imposed on the manufacturers of health or environmentally hazardous products. Corporate tax is also more for the mobile sector in Bangladesh. Along with minimum tax and corporate tax, there are some other areas in which tax reform has become very urgent.

We are already in talks with various quarters of the government to bring the tax to a logical level as the national budget proposal for the next financial year to be presented in the National Parliament soon. We hope that the government will listen to the mobile telecom sector and consider that this sector can provide better quality services to the country and the people and give more value.

**Mahtab Uddin Ahmed**

President, AMTOB

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## >> 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 sector's tax rationalization is urgent

Every year when the national budget is proposed, there is a tendency for everyone to pay more attention to which products or services costs are going up and which are going down. There is no denying that this is very important because it directly affects everyone's life. But many of us ignore one thing; National Budget is the direction of the country's economy and business.

The National Budget indicates the government's desire and goal. For example, how the aspirations of Digital Bangladesh will go further is determined by the allocations, concessions, facilities provided or withdrawn, increase or decrease the cost of internet usage, encourage, or discourage the manufacture or import of devices, or incentives to these service providers.

There is no doubt that the country is moving towards the dream of Digital Bangladesh. But in doing so, there is room for discussion about how much assistance is being provided to these concerned service providers or how difficult situations they are facing. This article is mainly about the mobile industry. This industry is not only providing comfort to the people of the country for mobile communication, but also providing access to the internet to 100% population. About 95% of the people in the country are dependent on mobile internet.

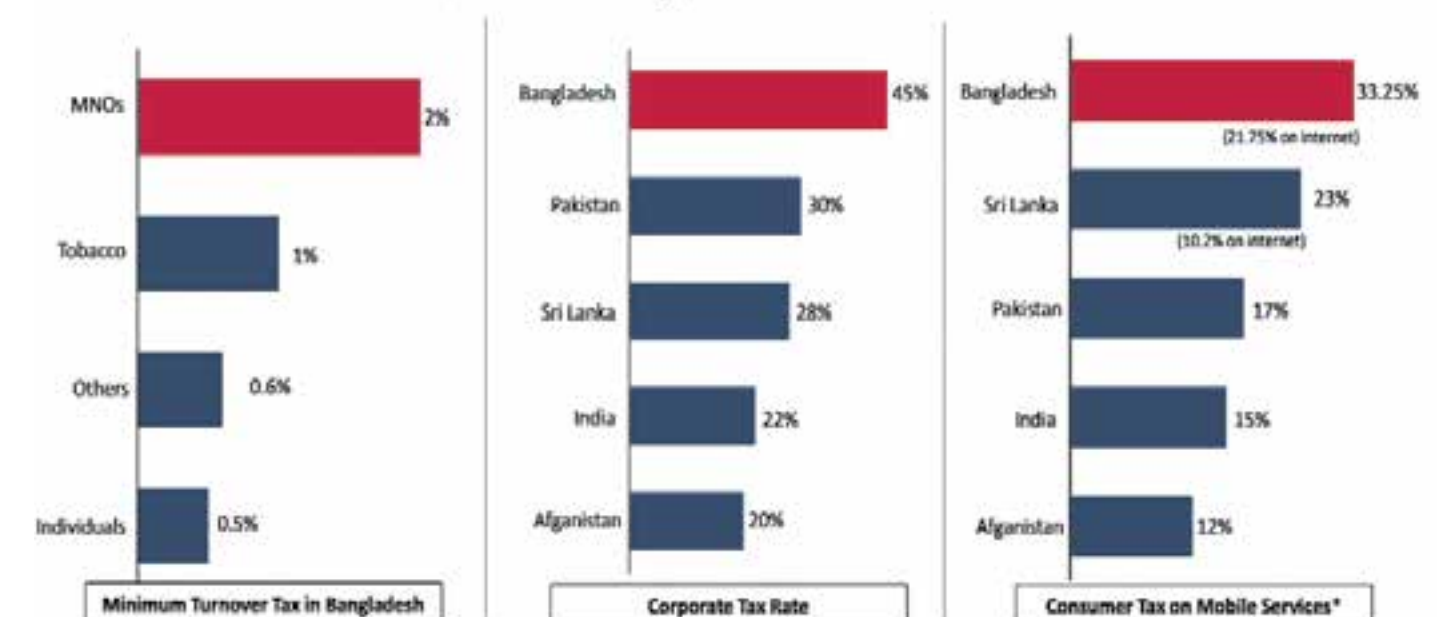
As said at the outset, this article discusses the national budget impact on the mobile telecommunications industry, it is good to say that the government and the National Board of Revenue (NBR) consults with the stakeholders before proposing it. It is noteworthy that an additional or new tax burden is being imposed on the sector almost every year. Even in COVID-19 when different business entities, education, health, etc. become dependent on mobile communications and mobile internet. In this article we will discuss some of the proposals of the mobile sector placed to the government including income tax and value-added tax:

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.

## Withdrawal of minimum tax rate

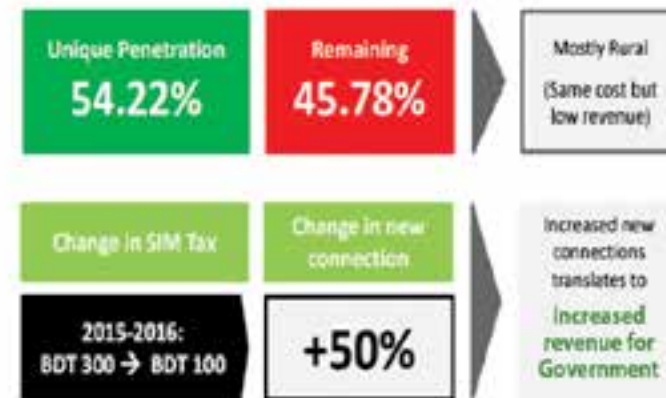
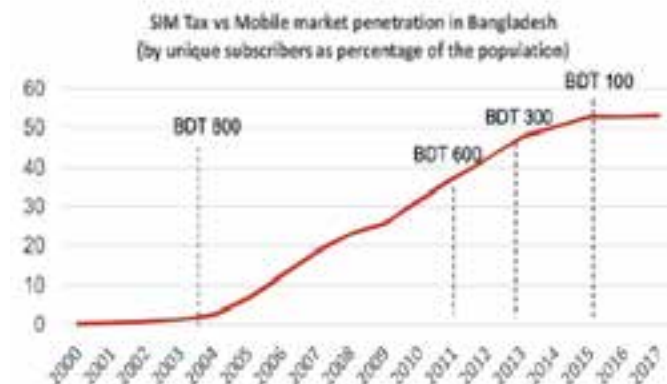
The minimum corporate tax is against the principles of the Income Tax Act. Because income tax is paid on income-- not on sales or receipts. Paying minimum tax even after the loss of business means paying tax from the capital. It acts as a barrier to business expansion. Even then, treating advance-paid income tax as the minimum tax is considered a deviation from the tax policy.

## Taxation Status: Global Scenario and Bangladesh





## SIM Tax should be eliminated to reach the rest 46% population



The minimum tax is usually imposed for industries that are considered harmful for public health or the environment like cigarettes or tobacco. Ironically, the tax rate is 1% for the cigarette industry but it is 2% for the mobile industry that is related to the overall development of the country. To sustain the industry and contribute more to the implementation of Digital Bangladesh, there is no alternative but to withdraw or reduce the minimum tax rate. Earlier, the turnover tax rate was .75%.

### Reduce or rationalize high corporate tax rates

We know that till the financial year 2006-2007, the telecom industry was paying corporate tax as a general category. To encourage the telecom operators to enter the stock exchanges in the following year, 2007-2008, the tax rate increased to 45%. The tax rate for listed telecom operators was 35% till 2012-13, which increased to 40% in 2013-14 to reduce the tax gap between listed and unlisted telecom companies. Over time, the tax rate for the general category has been reduced to 32.50% for non-listed companies and 25% for listed companies.

However, despite the positive impact on the macro-economy, the tax rate for listed telecom companies is still 40%. It is to be noted here that the telecom industry has a huge contribution to the public treasury. Moreover, compared to other industries, the telecom industry is a capital intensive industry that invests a huge amount of money in network expansion every year.

### Provide amortization facilities on all intangible assets

Due to the development of information technology, the service sector has to use many intangible resources.

To comply with the standards of international financial reporting, it is necessary to capitalize on some intangible assets in the financial statements of the mobile operators and its disposal which is purely a business expense.

However, there is no provision in the Third Schedule of the Income-tax Ordinance, 1974 for the disposal of these intangible assets. As a result, taxpayers like mobile operators cannot avail this facility Schedule 3 of the Income-tax Ordinance. If the amortization facility is provided, investment in the information technology sector will increase and the government's Digital Bangladesh Vision will be implemented faster.

### Abolish mobile SIM tax

Currently, mobile connectivity is entering the disadvantaged population at the bottom of the pyramid. But for each SIM supply, BDT 200 has to pay as VAT which is commonly known as SIM tax. It acts as a barrier to increasing the speed of connection for low-income people. Removing VAT on SIM supply will make it easier to provide mobile connectivity to rural and remote communities. On the other hand, it will play a supportive role in bringing the whole country under digitization along with increasing the revenue of the government and will ensure the development of the industrial sector.

Mobile and Internet facilities will connect the low-income populations with technology, health and education and bring them into mainstream economic activities that will help achieve the goal of extreme poverty alleviation by 2031 and the goal of a developed country by 2041.

### Rationalize the tax on the purchase of digital services using mobile balance

As 33.25% tax is included in every BDT 100 of mobile

airtime and it is of prepaid nature, if the customer purchases a non-telco service using the airtime balance, they are paying an additional 16% levy. This additional tariff is making the service costlier and discouraging digital payments.

### Reasonable tax on internet usage

Initially, VAT on the Internet was 15%, which the government reduced to 5% in June 2016. However, at present, customers pay a tax of up to 21.75% for every BDT 100 internet usage. Which has made this service costlier and is hampering the concept of digitization of the government. Currently, other Internet service providers, such as Internet service providers, do not pay supplementary fees and surcharges. So, 15% tax on internet usage i.e. 15% VAT rate will make the internet more affordable by exempting the supplementary duty and the surcharge.

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.

### Provide clear guidelines for VAT exemption for government agencies

Government agencies and regulators are not following VAT laws and regulations proportionally. Because of this, the operators are ultimately the victims. In most cases, government agencies claim 15% VAT. A direction is needed to solve this problem.







Digital technologies and mobile, in particular will be crucial to implementing the Bangladesh Government’s 2041 Perspective Plan, achieving the SDGs and recovering economically in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, according to a report “Achieving mobile-enabled digital inclusion in Bangladesh”, published by the GSMA recently.

The report also states that enhancing digital inclusion, by increasing the coverage and usage of the mobile internet, will be essential to maximising the impact of digital technologies on the government’s development aspirations. The new GSMA report analyses the barriers to coverage and usage of the mobile internet in Bangladesh and concludes with recommendations on how to strengthen efforts to increase mobile internet adoption and support infrastructure deployment.

A virtual roundtable discussion was also organised at the end of March, jointly by GSMA and AMTOB where stakeholders from the government, regulator, mobile industry, and development community discussed how Bangladesh can advance digital inclusion by addressing two of the country’s key barriers to mobile internet usage and adoption: Affordability and Digital Knowledge and Skills.

Mustafa Jabbar, Minister of Posts and Telecommunications Division, said, “The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the importance of digital technologies in keeping our citizens connected; and the need to accelerate the progress of digital transformation in Bangladesh. The ministry recognises the urgency of this and remains committed to ensuring that everyone in Bangladesh can utilise the Internet in order to be a part of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. To achieve this, we will continue to work collaboratively with key stakeholders, including the mobile industry, to understand and address the barriers that prevent the people of Bangladesh from using the internet.”

Julian Gorman, Head of APAC, GSMA said, “The internet

drives economic growth, so improving access to and usage of the mobile internet remains a key priority for the GSMA. This GSMA report provides insights on what can be done to address the barriers to mobile internet access and adoption. We remain at hand to help both our members and the government achieve our shared goal of leveraging the full power of the mobile internet to connect more citizens and further drive digital inclusion.”

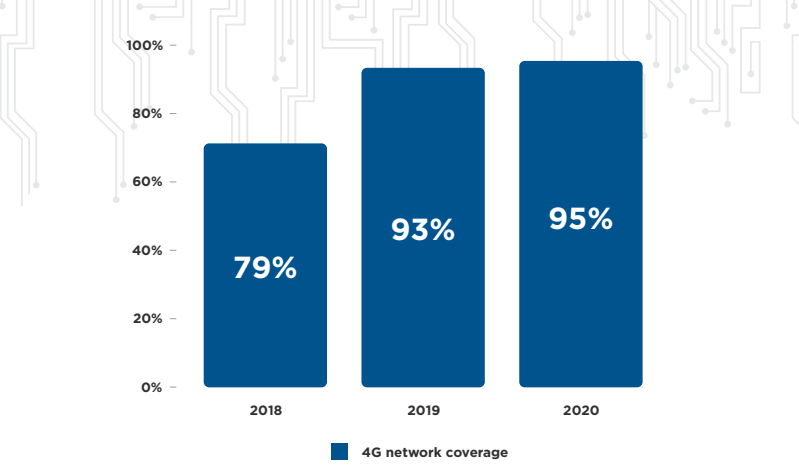
Mahtab Uddin Ahmed, AMTOB President, said, “The report shows us that there is a significant gap between 4G coverage and usage of 4G services. Addressing the factors behind these key issues such as 4G device availability & affordability and digital skills will be fundamental to ensuring a Digital Bangladesh for All. The mobile industry will continue its work to improve access to and usage of the mobile Internet and calls on the government to implement the report’s recommendation to aid us in doing so.”

Among the panellists, representatives from a2i, the Alliance for Affordable Internet (A4AI), Bangladesh Telecommunications Regulatory Commission (BTRC), GSMA, and the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) participated. The event ended with a closing note from AMTOB Secretary General Brig Gen S M Farhad (Retd.).

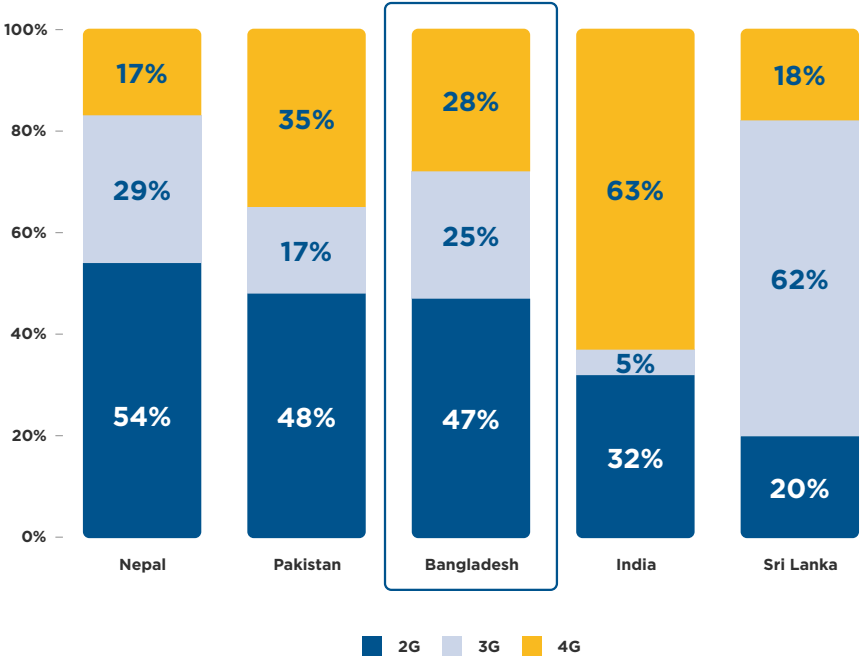
Key findings from the GSMA report “Accelerating mobile-enabled socioeconomic progress in Bangladesh by improving Digital Inclusion”

- The internet and digital technology have played a key role in helping to drive economic growth and societal development in Bangladesh. Mobile, as the primary means of internet access and the principal form of digital technology use in the country, has been at the forefront of this digital transformation.
- 170m mobile connections, serving 90m unique mobile subscribers – a penetration rate of 54% (December 2020)
- 102m mobile internet connections, serving 47.1m mobile

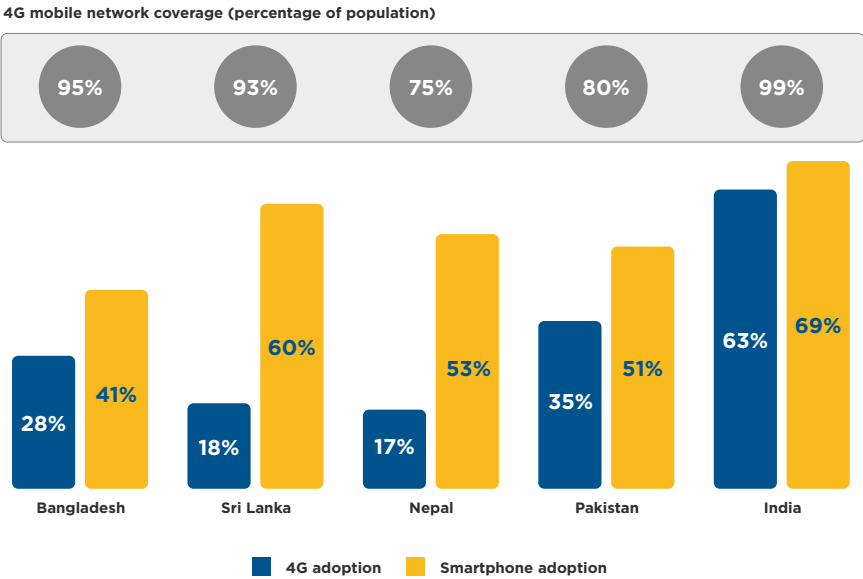
4G network coverage reaches around 95% of the population



Mobile technology as a percentage of total connections



4G networks now cover around 95 per cent of the population in Bangladesh, but the share of 4G connections remains low and the country lags regional peers in smartphone adoption<sup>24</sup>



- internet subscribers – a penetration rate of 28% (December 2020)
- 1.6m cellular IoT connections (December 2020)
- 32.3m active mobile financial services accounts and average daily transactions of \$2.1bn (November 2020)
- \$16bn of economic value from mobile technology and services in 2019, equivalent 5.3% of GDP
- 4G network coverage reaches around 95% of the population
- Digital technologies and mobile, in particular, will be crucial to implementing the 2041 Perspective Plan, achieving the SDGs and recovering economically in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Enhancing digital inclusion by increasing the coverage and usage of the mobile internet will be essential to maximising the impact of digital technologies on the government’s development aspirations.

### What are the barriers to digital inclusion in Bangladesh?

- Despite the investments of the telecoms sector to expand 4G mobile broadband coverage, which now reaches 95% of the population, 4G is yet to emerge as the dominant form of mobile technology and accounts for only 28% of total mobile connections in Bangladesh.
- This suggests a lag between 4G coverage rollout and usage of 4G services.
- This lag in usage is largely explained by issues related to the affordability of devices, low levels of knowledge and digital skills, a perceived lack of relevance, as well as safety and security concerns.
- High sector-specific taxes, a fragmented licensing regime, as well as issues with the pricing and usage restrictions on spectrum have been identified as barriers to expanding coverage.

### Recommendations to improve digital inclusion

- Addressing the barriers to coverage and usage, to achieve digital inclusion, will require concerted government and regulator action to implement policies and regulations that strengthen efforts to increase mobile internet adoption and support infrastructure deployment.
- Government leadership will also be essential to establish an enabling environment and develop the momentum for greater stakeholder collaboration, including public and private sector consultations on key policies to incentivise innovation and investment in digital inclusion initiatives.





# Countrywide mobile network has multiplied the living standards of the people

Mobile phones are the main means of telecommunication for the people of the country. Therefore, the role of the mobile telecommunication sector in the socio-economic development of Bangladesh is very important. Md. Sahab Uddin, Managing Director of Teletalk Bangladesh Limited, thinks that the expansion of the mobile network across the country has multiplied the standard of living of the common people. He recently raised various issues about the sector in an interview with ConneXion.

**M**d. Sahab Uddin said that farmers are getting a fair price for their crops through mobile communication. It is possible to provide health services (telemedicine) in remote areas, and small entrepreneurs are running their business with the help of mobile phones. The mobile sector has a tremendous positive impact on all aspects of human livelihood and the economy that is accelerating the overall development of the country, including economic growth.

How do you evaluate the contribution of the mobile sector in the digitization process of the government? When asked, he said, "Mobile networks and mobile devices are the main tools of the government's digitization process. It is undeniable that mobile phones (especially smartphones) are the means of effectively delivering the government's digital services to the people. The widespread digital services



of the government across the country has been possible through the extensive mobile telecommunication infrastructure. By taking the blessings of mobile network operators, government agencies have digitized their work and service delivery management. The mobile sector continues to be one of the major driving forces in building a digital Bangladesh."

He further added-- if the government take proper steps in the light of National Telecommunications Policy-2018, the mobile sector will move forward with full strength. In addition, some steps need to be taken to ensure that the sector is more business-friendly and competitive. For example, it is time to introduce some more asymmetric regulations, including the effective implementation of SMP, so that the small operators can compete in the market with larger operators. In addition, the ILDTs policy needs to be re-evaluated and updated.

Regarding the provision of quality services of mobile operators, the Managing Director of Teletalk said, "Mobile operators have been providing quality services to the best of their ability with some limitations. However, to further enhance the quality of service, it is necessary to use adequate spectrums, ensure optical fibre network (including the last mile) across the country and make it easier for operators to set up new sites."

Expressing his views on the overall control system of the telecom sector, he said that the overall control system of the telecom sector is good. However, some steps can be taken to make the sector more dynamic, customer and business-friendly. It is necessary to strengthen service quality monitoring of service providers at different stages of the value chain to ensure better customer service.

What do you think should be the tax structure of this sector? He said, "Taxes in this sector are currently the highest. In particular, companies like Teletalk are under financial pressure as turnover tax has been increased from 0.75% to 2%. In addition, customers pay 33.25% tax on VAT, SD and surcharge for mobile voice calls. Therefore, the tax structure needs to be restructured considering the contribution of this sector to economic growth."

Expecting a slash in the mobile sector tax in this year's budget, he said, "I am especially requesting a reduction in SIM tax and turnover tax." Mentioning the important contributions of his company



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in implementing the government goal of digitization, he said that as a state-owned mobile operator Teletalk has always implemented the government directives in the Digital Bangladesh building efforts.

Providing a list of the company activities, he said-- Teletalk first launched 3G services in Bangladesh in October 2012. Teletalk was the first to launch mobile telecommunication services in the hill districts in 2009 and providing mobile telecommunications services in the Sundarbans alone since 2014. The Mobile network providing services to the people of Haor-Baor, enclaves and islands and is working to install 400 solar-powered towers (BTS) in remote areas.

Md. Sahab Uddin further said the call rate of Teletalk and the price of 3G/4G internet services are the lowest in the country. With the free distribution of more than 12 lakh Mothers Smile SIMs, it has become possible for primary school students to get the government scholarship amount to the mothers at the right time. Aiming to empower women, Teletalk distributing 2 million free 'Aparajita' SIMs to women across the country. Teletalk provides free 'Agami' and 'Alphabet' SIMs to young students at the college and university level. The cost of voice calls and internet through these SIMs is the lowest in the country. Bangladesh Public Service Commission (PSC) has completed the activities of all recruitment automation system software. Besides, JSC, SSC, HSC and equivalent examination results of all the education boards (10 general education boards, madrasas and technical education boards) have implemented through a dynamic database. A central management system for accepting job applications has implemented too. Teletalk introduced a Toll-free 1090 to facilitate disaster management.





## Robust Mobile Data Infrastructure Crucial for Bangladesh as a Manufacturing Destination

Growing data consumption and subscriber growth in Bangladesh, especially since the Covid-19 pandemic, are strong indicators for Bangladesh to continuously invest in and improve its mobile data infrastructure in areas such as fiberization, tower build up and affordable devices while preparing for the imminent arrival of 5G technology in the country. **Abdus Salam**, Country Manager, L M Ericsson Bangladesh Ltd. recently discussed about different aspects of the telecommunication sector of the country.

**S**alam who is also the Head of Network Solutions, Ericsson Bangladesh, Malaysia and Sri Lanka, said, to support and meet current and future demand, as well as the customer usage expectations, a robust mobile data infrastructure must be in place where both capacity and coverage are planned with expansion in mind especially as access to data has become a basic essential service and not just a lifestyle. Ericsson is the global leading telecom infrastructure and service provider company.

Achieving this will require a big picture approach where all the eco system players such as the Mobile Network Operators (MNOs), National Telecommunication Transmission Networks (NTTNs) play a part in expediting the growth alongside the growing availability of devices and content.

With spectrum being the key, Ericsson appreciates how BTRC conducted the recent auction for the 7.4 MHz of spectrum in the 1800 band and 20 MHz in the 2100 band in an open and transparent manner.

"Spectrum is the key natural resource for our industry and Ericsson is very excited to see unutilised spectrum awarded to MNOs. This additional bandwidth will help improve the Quality of Service for the short term, but more can be done to build up a robust mobile data infrastructure," said Abdus Salam.

"An important element which is needed in the evolution is a spectrum roadmap for Bangladesh, with plans for all 3rd Generation Partnership Project (3GPP) spectrum bands. It should include all relevant 3GPP spectrum (700, 2300, 2600, 3500 MHz) for MNOs with a clear roadmap for spectrum availability and a longer payment schedule," he added.

It would also prepare Bangladesh for the imminent arrival of 5G which will offer high speed, low latency data services, lower the cost per GB for MNOs. 5G will also provide technology for Massive & Mission Critical IoT (Internet

of Things) services and purpose built dedicated private networks for industries (smart factories).

5G will be the key enabling factor of Industry 4.0 and Bangladesh's appeal as an attractive destination for manufacturing industries and part of global supply chain will require such technological infrastructure for investors.

In the initial phase of the 5G introduction, eMBB (Enhanced Mobile Broadband) technology will be used to deliver ultra-high wireless bandwidth capabilities.

While Abdus Salam is confident that BTRC is well equipped with processes and tools to oversee a smooth 5G roll out, he believes that optimisation of the current tax regulations would spur further growth in the industry.

"Bangladesh is one of the highest taxed country for telecom services and we hope that the government can review the tax structure to increase mobile affordability and open up digital inclusion. When the user base increases net volumes can grow even with a lower tax rate."

To remain competitive by improving automation and increasing production yields that benefit from Artificial Intelligence (AI) and machine learning (ML) techniques, Bangladesh has to ensure that its mobile data networks are up to the task and ready to take on the future.

As the world leader in 5G, Ericsson is able to bring the cutting-edge technology, its experience and best practices from markets and customers around the globe to Bangladesh, which it has been doing over the past 24 years since the inception of this industry in Bangladesh.

Ericsson was named a Leader in the recent 2021 Magic Quadrant for 5G Network Infrastructure for Communications Service Providers by independent IT research and advisory company, Gartner.

"Ericsson is uniquely positioned to play a critical role in the development of Bangladesh by enabling access to mobile services that will help bridge the digital divide, which in turn would contribute to the economic growth of Bangladesh."



## Telemedicine has been institutionalized during COVID-19

### Dr Lubna Mariam

**D**r Lubna Mariam, an assistant professor at the Bangladesh Cancer Institute, said that telemedicine has been institutionalized in the country after the coronavirus outbreak.

Telemedicine is a process by which physicians provide medical advice, consultancy, etc., to patients over the telephone. However, after the widespread use of the Internet and smartphones, doctors have been providing medical services to patients using a variety of mobile applications along with mobile communications.

In a recent interview with ConneXion, Dr Lubna said telemedicine was already available in the country which got pace during the COVID-19 period. But for the last year, several organizations formed are providing the service institutionally. Moreover, large hospitals and pharmaceuticals companies are also offering telemedicine services.

"A large number of our senior doctors, who are over 50 years, are not







coming face to face with patients considering the coronavirus infection,” she said. “However, those who are relatively junior are giving medical services or consultation services to the patients directly.”

Another big benefit of telemedicine is that senior doctors are now accessible to all people, especially to the patients who live in remote areas, said Dr Lubna. “At least 20% of the doctors in the country are allocating their 100% time providing medical consultation services through telemedicine, while 70% of doctors who are relatively juniors are treating their patients face to face.

She said, consultancy, counselling etc. can be provided very easily on mobile phone similar to any other country. However, public hospitals are lagged as most of the patients who come to these hospitals are from the lower-income segment with less affordability. Although mobile numbers are provided in government hospitals, telemedicine does not do much because very few of them can use smartphones.

Lubna added due to telemedicine, doctors can serve patients at home or work. Video calls through WhatsApp or similar apps are considered as added value. Patients can also send laboratory test reports directly to doctors. In some cases, patients have to be examined in advance and given treatment and advice. But due to having mobile internet, the number of subsequent visits is much less. At least half of the problems can be solved over the phone.

Regarding the facility of medical services during the Covid-19 period, she said that there are three main types of patients admitted to the ICU (intensive care unit) - those with kidney complications, cancer, and cardiological complications. For certain cases face to face treatment is a must. But in all

“**At least 20% of the doctors in the country are allocating their 100% time providing medical consultation services through telemedicine, while 70% of doctors who are relatively juniors are treating their patients face to face. She said, consultancy, counselling etc. can be provided very easily on mobile phone similar to any other country. However, public hospitals are lagged as most of the patients who come to these hospitals are from the lower-income segment with less affordability. Although mobile numbers are provided in government hospitals, telemedicine does not do much because very few of them can use smartphones.**”

other cases, the treatment is possible through telemedicine. It is safe for both physician and patient.

Lubna said the world is now running on the Internet, and the medical system is no exception. “Imagine, what would happen to the healthcare if you had to go to the office, school or the college during the pandemic situation?”

Praising the mobile operators for sending awareness messages about COVID-19 at the beginning of their ringtones, Lubna said, “As a result, the message is reaching the tens of millions of mobile users in the country, in no time.” Comparing this, she said that just as the media was used a few decades ago to promote diarrhoea saline, now mobile and internet are being used as media to prevent the Coronavirus outbreak.

Asked how the study of medical science is doing in COVID, she said, “Initially, we feared that medical studies might be stopped, and students would be frustrated. But the opposite happened, rather the tendency to study has increased.” It is possible to give lectures from home or elsewhere. Not only medical students but also teachers and doctors are listening to lectures of world-famous doctors online. “In the past, we had to spend thousands of dollars to go abroad and attend conferences which is very important for doctors. We can now attend those conferences for free at home,” said Dr. Lubna.

## AMTOB Daffodil Webinar

# It is possible to solve the problems of the telecoms through continuous dialogue and mutual respect, BTRC Chairman

**B**TRC Chairman Shyam Sunder Sikder said that a lot of work has been done in the telecom sector, but there is still a lot to be done. It is possible to solve the problem in the sector through continuous dialogue or discussion and mutual respect among all concerned in this sector.

Speaking as the chief guest at the 4th and concluding online discussion (webinar), jointly organized by AMTOB and Daffodil International University (DIU) on March 15th, BTRC Chairman further said that data price has been dropped drastically in the last decade. However, he added coordination are necessary among the stakeholders including BTRC, mobile network operators, transmission network operators, tower companies, etc. to improve the situation.

Dr Md. Sabur Khan, Chairman, Board of Trustees, DIU, who was the guest of honour at the discussion titled “Mobile Communication in Bangladesh: Challenges of the Future”, said that the importance of mobile and internet is understood during the Coronavirus situation. We are in such a situation when we cannot do almost anything without mobile and the internet.

He added that coordination or linkage is necessary between industry and educational institutions. We have a lot of talented graduates, but due to a lack of coordination between these two sectors, we cannot utilize them properly. They have the potential to revolutionize the technology sector.

Mahtab Uddin Ahmed, AMTOB President and MD & CEO of mobile operator Robi Axiata, said, the consumer tax in the mobile sector in Bangladesh is higher than all other sectors. If a customer spends Tk 100 on a mobile service, Tk 53 goes to various types of taxes and Tk 20 is spent to avail various services from other licensees in the sector.

On the one hand, he further said, corporate tax is as high as 45% and even if the mobile operator has

no business profit, still it has to pay 2% turnover tax. The tax structure needs to be reformed and unified licensing needs to be enacted so that mobile operators can provide more types of services.

Md. Kamruzzaman, Additional Secretary of the Posts and Telecommunications Division, said, it is possible to solve the problems of the telecom sector by coordination among the relevant government departments, the telecom and tax regulatory bodies.

He suggested that before the national budget proposal, all the telecom sectors stakeholders, including BTRC can discuss and make recommendations to place to NBR.

Ericsson Bangladesh Country Manager Abdus Salam said that every year new tax is imposed on the telecommunications sector. It surprises the stakeholders. He added, too many licenses have created a complex ecosystem that is affecting the quality of service. The recent radiofrequency auction has been highly transparent, which has been praised by colleagues in neighboring countries. But much more spectrum is required for good quality of service.

Professor AKM Fazlul Haque, Associate Dean, Faculty of Engineering, DIU, said that due to the availability of mobile internet there was no hindrance in providing education during the COVID-19 situation. The university is now managing the education system using various tools of artificial intelligence.

AMTOB Secretary General Brig Gen S M Farhad (Retd.) moderated the panel discussion. He said that the series of webinars, which started last January, was attended by industry, government, regulators BTRC and NBR and university professors to discuss various issues in the sector.

The webinar was hosted by Taslim Arefin, Associate Professor and Head of the Department of Electronics and Telecommunications Engineering, DIU.





Banglalink entered into a strategic partnership with Kormo Jobs by Google, a jobs and career development app. The announcement on the partnership was made on last February by Erik Aas, CEO, Banglalink at a virtual press conference. Mustafa Jabbar, PTD Minister was the Chief Guest, when Bickey Russel, Operations Lead, Google's Next Billion Users initiative, Taimur Rahman, CCRO, Banglalink, Ankit Sureka, Head of Corporate Communications & Sustainability, Banglalink were also present



To mark the 50th anniversary of Bangladesh's independence, Grameenphone announced on March 26 that 100% 4G has been enabled in 15,500 towers. Posts and Telecommunications Minister Mustafa Jabbar and BTRC Vice-Chairman Subrata Roy Mitra were the chief guests and special guests, respectively at a function held in the capital on the occasion. On the event Grameenphone CEO Yasir Ajman, CFO Jens Baker and CMO Mohammad Sajjad Hasib were also present.



In association with Bangladesh Sena Kalyan Sangstha (BSKS) and Bangladesh Army, Banglalink distributed relief among 14,500 pandemic and last winter season's affected households. Taimur Rahman, CCRO, Banglalink and Air Commodore M Moyeenuddin, Acting Chairman, BSKS signed an agreement regarding the relief campaign at the Sangstha's head-office in Dhaka when other high officials were present. The relief pack comprises rice, pulse, oil, semolina, sugar, salt and soap bars



Through an orientation session, Grameenphone launched the second edition of its own youth development initiative - 'Grameenphone Explorers 2.0' on April 1. The event was attended by 340 potential students from across the country and expressed their interest and inspiration. State Minister for Information and Communication Technology Junaid Ahmed Palak, MP was the chief guest at the inaugural function. Grameenphone CEO Yasir Ajman was also present at the time





Mobile application platform 'bdapps' has been declared as the national mobile application store of Bangladesh. The announcement was recently made by ICT State Minister Zunaid Ahmed Palak, MP. ICT division and Robi Axiata Ltd. have signed an agreement in this regard. The store has over 12,000 developers and over 23,000 apps



Teltalk Managing Director MD Shahab Uddin recently delivered his speech at a roundtable jointly organised by GSMA and AMTOB

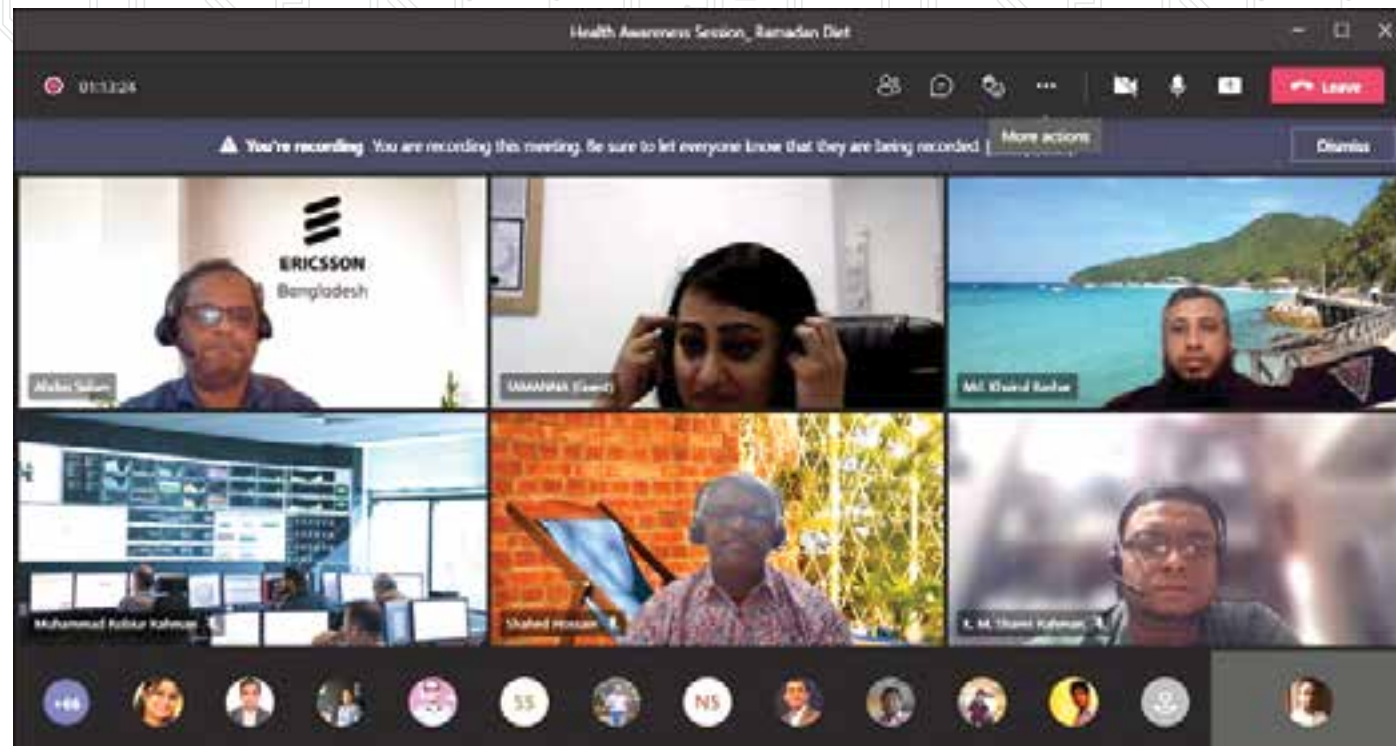


333- the short code for accessing public service in Digital Bangladesh by Robi Axiata has been awarded as Honorable Mention Best innovation Public Service-Innovation in Service Delivery at the 3rd edition of the Bangladesh Innovation Award 2021



Last March, Md. Sahab Uddin, Managing Director, Teletalk, signed an agreement with the Engineers Institution of Bangladesh (IEB) on 'Kshadra Sandesh'. At this time, IIB's honorary general secretary Engineer Md. Shahadat Hossain signed the Shibulu Agreement





Ericsson Bangladesh employees well being session: Dieting during Ramadan. Session was taken by Ms Tamanna Chowdhury, Principal dietician & Head of Dietetics Department, Evercare Hospital Dhaka



Abdus Salam, country manager, Ericsson Bangladesh presented the key note and participated in the panel in a webinar titled "Mobile communication in Bangladesh: challenges of the future" organized by Daffodil university and AMTOB on March



Huawei and BUET are going to set up the first ICT Academy at the university. A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) has been signed between the two parties on last February. This initiates Huawei's broader plan to run a special ICT academy in association with the top engineering universities in Bangladesh so that young ICT students in Bangladesh can carve a niche for themselves in the global professional market



Bangladesh's largest solar power plant in Mymensingh has been fully installed with the Huawei Smart photovoltaic (PV) solution, through which it's been now connected to the national grid. The 73 MW PV power plant would help meet the government's target of generating 10 percent of the country's total electricity using renewable energy by 2021





AMTOB and Daffodil International University arranged an online discussion on “Mobile Communication in Bangladesh: Challenges of the Coming Days” on March 15. BTRC Chairman Shyamsunder Sikdar, DIU Chairman Md Sabur Khan, AMTOB President Mahtab Uddin Ahmed, Additional Secretary, PTD Md Kamruzzaman, Ericsson Bangladesh Country Manager Abdus Salam, and Associate Dean, Engineering Faculty, DIU AKM Fazlul Haque participated in the session. The panel was hosted by AMTOB Secretary General Brig Gen S M Farhad (Retd.) and presented by Md Taslim Arefin, Associate Professor and Head, Department, Electronics and Telecommunications Engineering, DIU.



AMTOB and Daffodil International University organised a webinar on January 11. Subrata Roy Maitra, Vice-Chairman, BTRC was the panel chair when BTRC DG Brigadier General Md. Nasim Parvez, Banglalink CCRO Taimur Rahman and DIU Associate Dean Dr. AKM Fazlul Haque participated as panellists. The panel was hosted by AMTOB Secretary General Brig Gen S M Farhad (Retd.) and presented by DIU Associate Professor Md. Taslim Arefin.



GSMA and AMTOB jointly arranged an online roundtable discussion in March. PTD Minister Mustafa Jabbar, BTRC DG Brigadier General Md. Nasim Parvez, AMTOB President Mahtab Uddin Ahmed, Teletalk CEO Md. Shahab Uddin, Grameenphone CFO Jens Baker, Banglalink CCRO Taimur Rahman were among the discussants. The event was hosted by GSMA Mobile for Development Director Rahul Shah.



Senior Secretary, ICTD, N M Zeaul Alam, Additional Secretary, ICTD, Bikarna Kumar Ghosh, DG, DoT Md. Mohsinul Alam, Head of Public and Regulatory Affairs, Grameenphone, Hossain Sadat, Additional Registrar, DIU, Dr. Mohammed Nadir Bin Ali participated at a webinar organized by AMTOB-DIU on January 26. The panel was hosted by AMTOB Secretary General Brig Gen S M Farhad (Retd.) and presented by DIU Assistant Professor, ETE Department, Zahirul Islam.



# 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

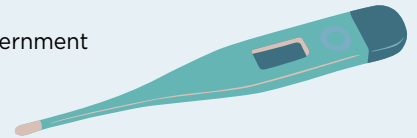
Those who could not top-up have been given talk time & data balance, and extended accounts duration



## Medical supplies

Professional PPE for Doctors and health workers

Corona test kit to the government



## Free services related to COVID-19

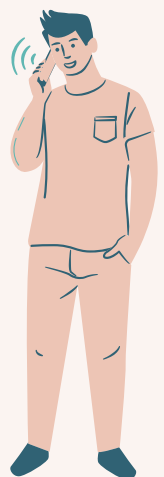
Toll-Free number facility

Free SMS

Free doctors service

Free talk-time to doctors

Free e-learning and online class



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