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Growth of ICT A Landmark in History

Rashed Khan Menon

Telecommunication or information and communication technology (ICT) are 'power-houses' of global economy – principal tools for gearing up the forward march of national progress. There is no alternative to flourishing ICT for expediting the ongoing efforts for establishing a Digital Bangladesh through implementation of Vision-2021. The journey for flourishing modern telecommunication technology in this country was started by the greatest hero in the thousand-year old history of the Bengali nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. It was through his initiative in 1973 that Bangladesh obtained membership of International Telecommunication Union (ITU) and the functioning of Betunia Satellite Earth Station commenced on 14 June 1975. As a continuation of this, Bangladesh under the dynamic leadership of Bangabandhu's illustrious daughter, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina was elected a council member of ITU in 2011 by a huge margin defeating some powerful countries of Asia. This has not only bolstered the image of the country in the international telecommunication arena, but also created opportunities for a stronger role by Bangladesh in the global sphere.

The 3-G services will be identified as a milestone in the history of flourishing the telecommunication technology in this country. As a result, it is now possible to get high-speed internet services through mobile telephone. Faster exchanges of information and data and their easy availability have thereby been made possible. The mobile telephone subscribers are using high-tech digital services including video calls. The use of digital technology on a wider scale in all areas including education, research, industries, agriculture and the service sectors has been ensured. Opportunities have been created for employment of educated youths in the country. The implementation of Vision-2021 for building a prosperous nation through establishment of a Digital Bangladesh will be expedited and will provide inspiration to all.

Various programmes are being undertaken and implemented for reaching ICT facilities to the grassroots people. Notable programmes include assembly of quality laptops and notebooks at a reduced price, introduction of Wi-max service, programme for launching Bangabandhu Satellite in space, reform of existing laws on telecommunication services, and sanction of terrestrial, IGW, ICX and IIGW licences. Almost all mobile operators have been granted 3-G and VSP licences. E-services and video-conferencing facilities are being provided by linking the Prime Minister's Office with the offices of all Divisional and Deputy Commissioners through high-speed network.

Work is in progress on installation of optical fibre up to the union level for reaching the benefits of technology to the people. Tele-density has risen to 67 percent from the previous 30 percent during the past five years. Around 95 percent area of the country and 100 percent people have now come under the purview of Tele-network. The utilisation of submarine cable bandwidth has surpassed 40 gigabytes per second (GBPS) from the previous 7 GBPS. The average national GBPS has risen to 200 from the previous 44 due to the expansion at Cox's Bazar landing station of Bangladesh submarine cable. The number of mobile and PSTN subscribers has risen from 40 million to almost 110 million. The bandwidth charge has been fixed at Taka 4,800 from the previous Taka 27,000. A uniform rate of 30 paisa per minute has been set for telephone bills throughout the country. International call rate has been reduced and mobile telephone services have been extended to the three hill districts.

If this trend continues, Bangladesh will occupy a glorious position as a self-respecting nation of the world even before 2021. She will most definitely reach her cherished goal.



The present government has formulated the ICT Act and Policy in order to make the information and communication technology easily accessible and investment-friendly. Scope has been created for sending mobile SMS in Bangla. The new generation is getting habituated with the applications of information technology. E-books have been prepared for texts at primary and secondary education levels. Computer education has been made compulsory at primary and secondary stages and introduced even at lower secondary level. All schools are being provided with computers. Multimedia classrooms are being set up. Trainings are being imparted for enhancing ICT skills. Various e-services have been launched by the present government including e-governance, e-commerce, e-health, e-education and e-banking. A total of 120 such services are now available. The people can pay electricity, water and gas bills over mobile phones. They can purchase train tickets in the same way. Results of public examinations are now published online, which can also be obtained via SMS. Applications for admission to colleges and universities can now be lodged online. Skilled manpower in ICT are being groomed. Work has started on setting up a hi-tech park at Kaliakoir of Gazipur. An e-information portal has been set up and four thousand and 582 union information and service centres have been put into operation. Over 4 million people are receiving services from these centres each month. Opportunities have been created for employment generation. People's right to information has been ensured.

Arrangement has been made for distributing 'Doel Laptops' among the students. Availability of information services among the grassroots people will also be facilitated as a result. Mobile money order service has been introduced at 2,750 post offices of the country. Work is in progress for converting around 8,500 post offices into e-post-offices. Steps are underway to install the second submarine cable of the country at Kuakata. As a result, it will be possible to earn foreign exchange through export of bandwidth after meeting the domestic demands. By utilising the gifts of technology, our struggle now is to apply the hands of 163.2 million people of the country as a tool for building a self-respecting nation. Everybody has to work together for the purpose by getting imbued with patriotism.

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Translation: Dr. Helal Uddin Ahmed

According to the expectation of the people of the country government achieved remarkable success in the last five years in building a happy, prosperous Digital Bangladesh rekindled with the spirit of our Liberation War. During this phase different effective steps and initiatives have been taken putting importance in the sectors of economics, education, science and technology, health, social safety, environmental issues, telecommunication and infrastructural development and so on. This has created an opportunity for Bangladesh to be a middle income country. Besides these, the country is being called Digital Bangladesh due to its all out use of information technology and its benefit.

At present the per capita income of the people of Bangladesh has crossed 1 thousand US dollars. If the present growth rate 6.2 percent remains on by 2016, our per capita income will reach 1 thousand 235 US dollars. According to the World Bank, any country is considered to be a middle income country if its per capita income crosses 1 thousand 36 US dollars. In order to achieve the specific goal in economic and social development in the long term, for the first time, Bangladesh Perspective Plan 2010-21 and in the light of this plan a medium term sixth five-year plan have been formulated and approved, which is a remarkable success of the government. Now, Bangladesh is at the doorstep of achieving the success in fulfilling the objectives of Millennium Development Goals in the areas of poverty alleviation, gender equity, health and education. Through strengthening social safety network programmes the status of the old, poor, suppressed and disadvantaged population including children has been improved. Putting highest importance on food security, food production and storage have been prioritized.

Success at a Glance

In order to build Digital Bangladesh some epoch making initiatives like Union Information and Service Centres, District E-service Centres, National Information Cell, digitizing the delivery and payment (Purji) system, e-asia-2011 etc have been taken. During the tenure of the present government tele-density reaches around 73 percent. At present the number of cell phone subscriber hits 11 crore. Along with development, the idea of a sustainable future has not been spared. So, policy for environmental protection and climate change adaptation has got much importance.

In the global arena Bangladesh achieved different international awards and honour because of its remarkable successes in developmental and climate issues. Along with mitigating disputable issues with different countries of the world, a huge number of workers have been sent abroad and remittance earned.

As a result of these steps, because of ensuring security in economic development, food security and use of technology, Bangladesh has proved her to be a role model to other developing countries of the world.

Prime Minister's Office

Using information technology to reach fast, cheap, transparent and trouble free service at the door steps of the people of all walks of life, under special attendance of the Prime Minister's Office, 'Access to Information' (a2i) programe has been implemented starting from the Union to Upazilla, Zilla, District and Ministry levels. Activities of building a co-ordinated e-service structure are going on so that wherever service is originated people can avail that from anywhere.



Under Bangladesh Export Development Authority in all the EPZs 130 organizations were established in the last five years which resulted 18,595.14 million US dollar export and direct employment of 1,74,557 people against 1,359.78 million US dollar real investment.

Through Board of Investment, in the last five years 8,413 local and foreign industrial registrations have been done. Against 912 industrial projects as joint and 100 percent foreign investment, a total of proposed investment is of 11,66,130.896 million taka which generates employment opportunity for 17,97,372 people. NGOs also implemented 5,459 projects and employed 5,80,000 people.

Under 'Asrayon-2' project in against tk. 2,20,400.19 lakh estimated cost 50 thousand land less, home less and floating families have been targeted to rehabilitate. In the last five years through implementing 400 projects 30,600 families were rehabilitated and in order to make them self sufficient loan of taka 20 crore has also been disbursed.

Under PPP 35 projects have been marked after scrutinizing and verifying them, which are under process at different stages. By Privatization Commission 77 state owned industrial units have been privatized. Bangladesh Economic Zone Authority (BEZA) has decided to establish five economic zones in Chittagong, Anwara, Moulavi Bazar, Sirajgang and Mongla.

Cabinet Division

In order to nourish and practice honesty and end corruption in all state owned and private organizations to build a Golden Bangla of Bangabandhu, National Integrity Strategy has been approved in the Cabinet in 2012. According to this policy under the leadership of the Prime Minister a National Integrity Advisory Council has been formed. An Executive Committee headed by the Finance Minister has also been constituted in order to assist this Council, increase communication with the administration centrally and strengthen overall co-ordination system. Video conferencing system has been introduced between Cabinet Division, Prime Minister's Office and offices of the Divisional Commissioner and District Administration.

Ministry of Public Administration

Retirement age for the government officials has been raised to 59 years and for the freedom fighters it has been raised to 60 years. It has been consented to create 4,27,471 new posts in different ministries. 3,86,072 people have been recruited in different government services. Financial Assistance Policy 2013 has come into force for the government officials working in civil administration. In case of death during service, a financial assistance for Tk 5 lakh and in case of permanent disability, Tk 2 lakh has been decided to give to the families.

Ministry of Finance

Some initiatives have been taken to face the adverse impact of the global recession such as increasing internal demand, prioritizing agricultural and rural development, providing incentives to expand export, planning for various targeted employment, increasing the foreign remittance, exporting labor to abroad and expanding social security etc. As a result of these policies, Bangladesh has earned an average economic growth of 6.2 percent. During the last 5 years, the per capita income has been increased to USD 1044, export earning to USD 27.1 Billion, import to USD 34.1 billion, remittance to USD 18 billion, foreign currency reserve increased to USD 18 billion. Rate of poverty reduced to 26.2 percent. With the amendment of different Acts, income from tax has been increased, government expenditures have been rearranged and made transparent. Restructuring in banking sector, reformation of the capital market have been done in order to make it stable. Government income has been increased and the size of its national budget has become more than double.

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Development in Power Sector

A S M Alamgir

For quickest possible implementation of plans, and in consideration of the availability of primary fuel, liquid fuel (diesel and furnace)-based rental power plants with the generation capacity of 1,600 MW have been set up in the country. Till date, 4,983 MW of power including 500 MW of rented power has been added to the national grid. When decision was taken to install rental power plants, the total deficit was 2,000 MW, and the deficit was basically due to the lack of generation capacity, which was not possible to overcome by repairing and modernizing the existing power stations and reducing the loss of transmission and distribution. The government then had two options before it— (1) either to set up quick rental power generating stations which can start to operate within 3 to 9 months or (2) to increase load shedding.

Under mid-term plans, which are to implement plans within 3 to 5 years, a good number of power generation projects are in the different phases of implementation. Of these, three 300—450 MW power plants at Bibiana, one 225 MW plant at Bhola, two 450 and one 225 MW power plants at Ashuganj, two 350—400 MW plants at Haripur and Siddhirganj, two 300—450 MW stations at Sirajganj and Meghnaghat, two 300—450 MW combined cycle gas turbine power stations at Ghorashal and Shahjibazar, one 274 MW coal-based plant at Barapukuria, one 300—600 MW imported coal-based power plant at each of Chittagong, Maoa, Barisal and Khulna and one 1,300 MW imported coal-based efficiently running stations at each of Chittagong and Khulna are some of the mid-term projects worth mentioning.

Among coal-based power generation plans is included the plan for setting-up local or imported coal-based 'Base-load Power Stations' by 2018. These plans will be implemented by the government or joint-venture initiatives. Implementation process of 8 power stations with a total generating capacity of 3,849 MW of power by 2018, is in progress. Moreover, an agreement has been signed between India and Bangladesh for a joint-venture project to implement a 1,320 MW power plant at Rampal, Khulna. Implementation of project related works including land development has already started. In the government sector, with the help of JAICA, a feasibility study to implement 1,200 MW power station at Matarbari has just been concluded. The signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with China and Malaysia is underway.

Under sub-regional co-operation plan, steps have been taken to import for future transmission of electricity from neighbouring countries. Import of 500 MW of electricity from India has already started. In addition to this, steps have also been taken to import electricity from the hydro-electric projects of Myanmar, Nepal, Bhutan, and north-eastern regions of India. Different programmes have been undertaken for co-operation in the power sector with the member states of SAARC and BIMSTEC.

In 2009, under the realities of prevailing gas crisis, the government took initiatives for taking up long-term (till 2030) project plans. 'Power System Master Plan 2010 Study' was approved by the government in 2011. In the study, it is seen that if the increased rate of GDP continues, the country will need to generate 24,000 MW of electricity in 2021, and 39,000 MW in 2030 to meet the need of consumers.

According to the long-term plan, 4,000 MW power will be generated from nuclear energy by 2030. As part of this plan, the government has already signed the Ruppur nuclear power station implementation project with Russia on 1 November 2011. To that end, 1,000 MW power will be generated by 2010, and another 1,000 MW by 2021. Russia will provide financial and technical assistance for those two projects. Russia will also be responsible for fuel supply and waste management of the nuclear project.

Renewable energy policy has been formulated for jointly monitoring the renewable energy programme and laws have been framed to form a body called 'Sustainable and Renewable Energy Development Authority (SREDA)'. Under the renewable energy policy, a target has been set to make renewable energy 5 percent of the total generated power by 2015 and increase it to 10 percent by 2020.

In the last 5 years, 34 lac (3.4 million) new connections, have been given, about 1,000 km transmission line and 39,000 km distribution line have been set up. For efficient and cost-effective use of power and energy, formulation of interim 'Energy Efficiency Conservation Rules' and 'Energy Efficiency Action Plan' are in the final stage.

For ensuring best possible services to the consumers, setting up cost-effective power transmission system, reducing arrears, increasing revenue, reducing technical and non-technical loss, Power Development Board has introduced pre-paid metering system. Presently, through different categorizations, 46,000 customers of Chittagong, Sylhet, Bogra, and Sirajganj are enjoying the pre-paid metering service under a pilot project. Moreover, for controlling and determining load, the present government has undertaken a pilot project and signed the 'Turnky Agreement' to start a pilot project for installing another 35,000 pre-paid smart meters, of which 10,000 will be distributed in the DESA area, another 10,000 in the BPDC area, and 5,000 each in the PBB, BPDB and OZOPADICO areas by 2014. Within the next two years, 24,000 pre-paid meters will be distributed in the southern region, Comilla and Rajshahi region.

As a result of achieving 10,000 MW installed capacity and increasing power generation capacity from 25 billion kwh in 2008 to 38 billion kwh in 2013, positive impact is noticed on agriculture, industry and other areas of social activities as a whole.

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