ON HIGH ROAD TO PROGRESS

ENGINES OF GROWTH

SILVER JUBILEE SPECIAL

IT AND BIOTECH

25th anniversary of
The Daily Star
JOURNALISM WITHOUT FEAR OR FAVOUR

24

MONDAY FEBRUARY 1, 2016

E-Governance and ...

EGDI of UN evaluates the impact of ICT on the status of e-government of a country including delivery of electronic services to its citizens. Table 1 shows Bangladesh's position (out of 193 countries) in EGDI as well as those for its neighbouring countries. Online service component, telecommunication infrastructure component, and human capital component are also shown.

According to the UN survey report of 2014, Bangladesh (EGDI score 0.2757) is ranked 148th among 193 countries of the world. However, Bangladesh moved two steps forward from its previous position of 150 according to 2012 survey. In the SAARC region, Bangladesh is fifth after Sri Lanka (score 0.5418), Maldives (score 0.4813), India (score 0.3834) and Bhutan (score 0.2829). Bhutan, with score of 0.2829, made a mentionable progress in e-government by moving forward by 9 steps from its previous positions (152 in 2012).

Sri Lanka with world ranking of 74 topped the list in SAARC region by outstripping Maldives having a rank of 94 in 2014. Up until 2014, the government of Sri Lanka made substantial efforts to develop its online portals which offer 108 e-services for citizens, 51 e-services for businesses, 10 non-residence related e-services, also mobile and SMS service have also been tremendously expanded.

According to the Survey of UN published in 2014, the top ten countries (with score out of 1) are: Republic of Korea (score 0.9462), Australia (score 0.9103), Singapore (score 0.9076), France (0.8938), Netherlands (score 0.8897), Japan (score 0.8874), United States of America (score 0.8748), United Kingdom (Score 0.8695), New Zealand (score 0.8644) and Finland (score 0.8449). The ten countries with

lowest EGDI score are: Democratic Republic of Congo (0.1551), Sierra Leone (0.1329), Central African Republic (0.1257), Papua New Guinea (0.1203), Chad (0.1076), Guinea (0.0954), Niger (0.0946), Eritrea (0.0908) and Somalia (0.0139 with lowest rank 193).

The UN categories the member countries on the basis of GNI of the member countries and it is useful to observe the average scores of high income, upper middle-income, lower middle income and low-income groups

of countries as given bellow.

The 2014 report is based on the survey, when Bangladesh was included in the list of low-income group. It is to be noted that Bangladesh, with GNI of over USD 1300, is now listed in the lower middle-income group and the 2014 report does not reflect our achievements and progress up until now.

New devices and systems
A noteworthy trend in ICT is that numerous devices and services with new and updated technologies are

rapidly replacing the older ones. New technologies for the near future include 3D printing, thumb printing, increased smartphone storage, expanded use of IPv6, and broadband services for consumers, cloud computing, real-time speech transaction, wearable devices, cyber security, smart cities, Internet of Things (IoT) etc. New trends, techniques, devices and systems are going to massively involve online activities affecting our lifestyle.

More and more smart machines and processes will be required for decision-making in administration, and they will impact our lifestyle and the jobs of decision-makers in civil services significantly. All types of jobs, including business and administration, will be digitised. We in Bangladesh will be forced to use and adapt new technologies and will require expertise in new technologies like cloud computing, 3D printing, Big Data, gaming, animation, outsourcing, and the like.

Internet services require radical improvement in terms of speed. Starting from e-commerce, the Internet

is used for numerous applications and the higher speed for Internet services is of great significance for e-services resulting in rapid economic growth. Most nations of the world now give special emphasis on the improvement of internet speeds. Average internet speed of users is above 10 Mbps in many countries like South Korea, Hong Kong, Japan, and Singapore etc.

It is encouraging that the ICT Division of the Ministry of Posts, Telecommunications and Information Technology has undertaken all-out efforts for the development of ICT human capacity through countrywide training. Some examples of these include Learning and Earning, Training for Mobile Apps, Leveraging ICT for Growth, and ITES Foundation Skills. Special emphasis is given to ICT education up to pre-university levels. Ambitious projects like development of the National ICT Infrastructure for Bangladesh Government (Info Sarkar), National Data Centre and IT Parks will bring about radical improvements in e-services and e-governance in immediate future.

Way ahead
We have mentionable progress in ICT considering our previous status. But keeping in mind our current rank and status in comparison with other countries and the rapid development of ICT, the journey ahead for improving our status of e-services and e-governance will not be smooth. Each new technology requires new skills and training. Human capital is a key factor to develop and adapt innovative ideas and technologies. Quality ICT education as well as ICT-based education from the primary to tertiary level along with the orientation of general mass in ICT and e-services should receive top priority.

Owing to cheap rate of mobile charges (second lowest in the world), mobile government services such as

information and notification by SMS, mobile banking and similar other mobile services are of special significance to Bangladesh and extensive use of mobile services can take us far ahead in e-governance in Bangladesh.

With insufficient infrastructure and lack of long term e-government planning, Bangladesh will lose out on the crucial benefits of e-government in making public administration cost-effective, efficient, citizen-centric, transparent and accountable and thereby delaying poverty elimination and sustainable development.

Bangladesh needs inclusive e-participation policy, broad ranging e-services, extensive open government data portals, extensive local contents in Bangla, expansion of Internet access in remote areas, extensive e-ticketing for transports, overcoming digital divides between different sections of society, strategy for reducing national and local government paper works. Also required are further expansion of electronic transactions between government agencies, businesses and other areas.

Elimination of the digital divide between rural and urban areas and between other sections of society is essential to implement and expand e-governance and to improve global status. A peaceful political environment is essential for intellectual, social, cultural and economic development. Time and time again, the nation's dream for Vision 2021 with e-services has been shattered by the turbulent political situation. The country is urgently in need of peaceful and tranquil political environment for the development of all sectors, including e-services and e-governance.

The author is Emeritus Professor of Daffodil International University, Dhaka