

Better digital connectivity to ensure better life



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THINGS have changed a lot in Bangladesh in the last two decades. Bangladesh is now experiencing high-speed ICT development and the changes in the ICT sector are remarkable.

Here we are having a number of digital inclusions like picking a ride within a minute just by tapping our phone. We can buy gadgets, lifestyle products or even order pizza online while sitting on our cozy couch in between watching movies.

Government services are at our fingertips and we can avail them from anywhere, anytime. And even we have some rides based on Internet of Things (IoT) here. Nobody would have imagined that it could have been a possibility even a decade ago. But right now it is becoming the regular lifestyle for Bangladeshis.

With the exponential growth in economy, telecommunication, information technology, and e-commerce, the country is already in a race to become one of the most developing economies very soon.

Just for an example, Bangladesh took 16 long years to switch from 2G to 3G, then only four and a half years to enter into the 4G era in February 2018. And now the government is enthusiastic to take Bangladesh into the next era by the coming year.

But if we consider the context of network readiness and highest smartphone adaptation rate, Bangladesh is yet to reach the forefront. Let us pick Singapore as a random example of one of those leading countries to mention where more than 94 percent of the people are smart device users.

To show how technology can shape lives entirely in a new way, we can think about the daily

life of a student there. Students enjoy enormous cloud storage and 44.5 Mbps internet speed on average currently there.

A student there can learn his graduate courses through smart devices along with getting involved into other online learning programmes at convenient time slots.

The coverage of the campus network and the popularisation of smart terminals enable knowledge to be transmitted anytime and anywhere. These are very helpful for every student. We need to establish that kind of connectivity here in Bangladesh.

We know that this is the era of internet. Every day the world is advancing from one technological milestone to another while keeping pace with the global tech transformation.

The fourth industrial revolution is coming which will be all about intelligent technology or artificial intelligence (AI). This future world will be an intelligent world featured by all things sensing, all things connected and all things intelligent.

In today's world, all countries are investing to embrace that smart change that will help in many ways. Some data says return from ICT investment is more than six times higher than non-ICT investments.

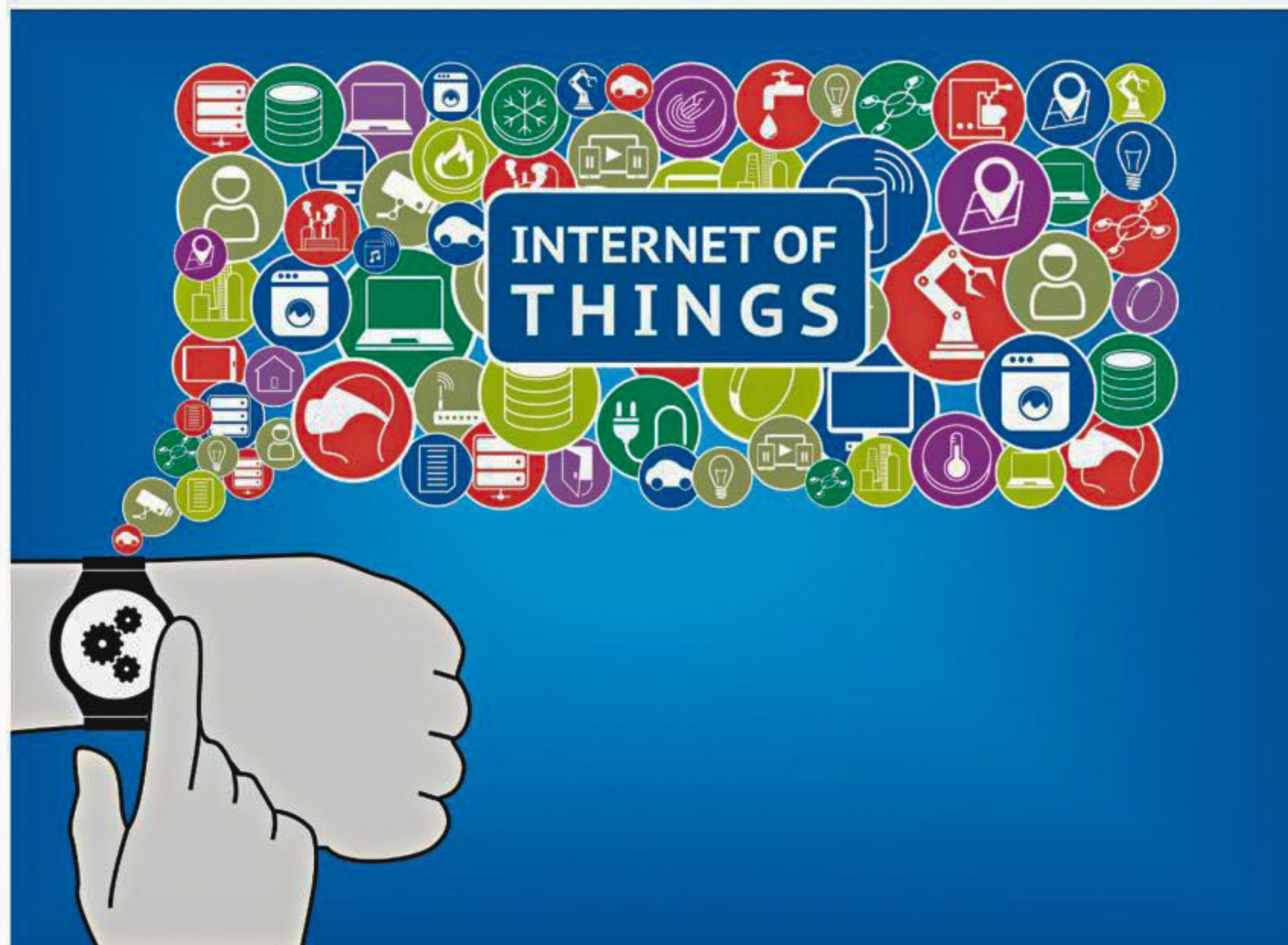
Smart investments is taking place and we are getting good results. For example, we can consider transformation of Yanbu, a port city of western Saudi Arabia, into a city of smart industry.

That transformation has increased business investment in that area by 16 percent and decreased road investment cost by 20 percent and municipal lighting cost by 30 percent.

We can also realise the benefits of introducing Safe City model in Kenya where we can see that Kenya's crime rate has been reduced by 46 percent.

IoT will bring facilities to all levels starting from individuals to industry.

Digital facilities will be changing our life entirely and it will be on its leap. Smart bands



will be our friends to monitor health conditions and will be connected with the community with so many solutions.

Smart motorcycles or cycles are being connected with law enforcing agencies, families and other industry houses with real time monitoring so that we can avoid any accidents and operate with better efficiency. This kind of activity will also help full community to take part in that value chain.

Even further, we can think about smart petrol pump where riders do not need to spend time to refuel anymore.

We can also think of smart shop which will support us to manage a better home and of smart home for an easy, cost-efficient, balanced and better life.

But to have a better life we need to have better digital connectivity. ICT infrastructure will be the foundation of the intelligent world. In the upcoming years, Bangladesh needs to be very focused in this area.

And success in that will help this country achieve sustainable development goals (SDGs)

focused on health, education, gender equality, industry, innovation, climate change and so on.

Good news is we are heading towards 5G. It will be 10 times faster than 4G. In a 5G network, people can get 100 mbps anytime, anywhere.

In 5G, we will have Ultra-reliable Low Latency Communication (uRLLC). With this kind of coverage, we have a huge potential in the field of IoT. We need to work for better broadband services and internet application here as well.

But it is all about ecosystem. In Bangladesh, government functions, non-profit organisations, academic institutions, ICT enterprises and private entities have their roles to play in making and implementing policies and standards, developing technology solutions, providing services, and connecting effects and services.

Equipment and solutions providers, operators, IT companies, vendors, the government and all the stakeholders should work

together to continue with the thriving pace of digitalisation.

We also need to look into smartphone penetration. With a supportive ecosystem with shared innovation, open collaboration and better ICT infrastructure, technologies will produce the highest benefits.

More importantly, companies equipped with advanced technologies need to play a vital role in this new journey. Because these companies can establish the infrastructure and provide the solution from smart banking, telecom services, e-governance etc.

The coming few years will bring a deciding opportunity for Bangladesh to achieve better digital connectivity. Bangladesh is now on the highway of global ICT development and cannot afford to lag behind. The whole ICT industry should be streamlined to build Digital Bangladesh. Let's not only live in Bangladesh, let's work together to build a better Digital Bangladesh.

The writer is the CEO of Huawei Technologies (Bangladesh) Ltd.

LPG use surges in India

REUTERS, Singapore

INDIA'S demand for liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) rose to a record in the fiscal year ended in March amid government measures to provide cleaner cooking fuel to rural households, and analysts expect consumption to keep rising.

About two-thirds of India's population live in rural areas, typically using firewood, coal or dried dung cakes for cooking.

India consumed a record 24.9 million tonnes of LPG in the financial year 2018/19, 53 percent higher than five years ago, and 6.9 percent higher than the previous year.

The boost follows a social welfare programme, known as the Ujjwala scheme, launched by the government in 2016 that has provided about 72 million new LPG connections to households in 714 districts, according to official data.

"Supported by government policies, mainly through the 'Ujjwala Scheme' and a rising middle class population, LPG penetration in Indian rural areas has been extremely robust," Sri Paravaikkarasu, director for Asia oil at energy consultancy FGE, said in an email.

Amid the Ujjwala programme, close to 80 percent of Indian households have access to LPG as of the end of 2018, up from 56 percent in 2016, according to FGE.

"Favourable government policies will support LPG demand to increase strongly in coming years," said Paravaikkarasu, adding her consulting firm expects LPG demand grow by 8 percent in 2019 and 6.7 percent in 2020.

Growing LPG consumption has kindled a surge in India's imports of the fuel, and analysts expect this trend to intensify.

India imported 13.2 million tonnes of LPG in the year to March 2019, a record high and more than double the import volumes in the 2013/14 financial year. Imports were 15.9 percent higher than the previous year.

"The phenomenal growth in LPG usage will reduce India's self-sufficiency of LPG to 42 percent in 2025 from about 70 percent in 2013," said Aman Verma, a research analyst at Wood Mackenzie.

"An additional 5 million tonnes per annum of import terminal capacity is being built and supposed to be completed by FY 2020-21 in order to meet the demand," Verma added.

Indian consumers have used the LPG to erode kerosene's role as a cooking fuel in the country.



Workers load liquefied petroleum gas cooking cylinders onto a supply truck outside a distribution centre in Mumbai.

Rains come as boon for tea gardens



Tea gardens will see better yields this year due to favourable weather and timely rain. MINTU DESHWARA

THE rainfall and low temperature in the last few days came as a boon for the tea gardens in Sylhet Division as the favourable weather condition may help the country pull off a record production.

Favourable weather and timely rain would help the gardens get a good yield this year, said Md Zahirul Islam, general manager of M Rahman Tea Company in Srimangal.

"We are hopeful that we will see a much better yield this year than that of last year as the weather in fact has been very good since the beginning of this year's tea season."

If the favourable weather persists, the country might witness another bumper crop, he said.

Some 27.60 millimetres of rainfall were recorded on Thursday and Friday, said Md Zahidul Islam Masum, observer of the Srimangal Meteorological Centre.

There are 166 tea gardens registered with Bangladesh Tea Board. Of them, 91 are in Moulvibazar, 25 in Habiganj, and 19 in Sylhet.

irrigation facilities. As it is a hilly area, it is difficult to pump water from deep tube wells.

The natural streams, the main source of water for tea garden, are yet to have water, said Shahjahan Akondo, a tea leaf researcher and former general manager of New Samanbagh Tea Estate in Barlekha upazila in Moulvibazar.

He said there are reports of red spider attack in some areas. But rain keeps spiders at bay. "This is giving us hope."

Golam Shibli, chairman of Sylhet branch of Finlay Tea, said there is a demand for 85-90 million kilogrammes of tea in Bangladesh this year.

"We are very hopeful that we will be able to meet the demand."

Dhona Bauri, president of the Bangladesh Tea Workers Union for Monu-Dhalai valley unit, said plucking of tea leaves more than doubled this season due to the timely rain.

Tea output in Bangladesh stood at 8.21 crore kg last year, a two-year high, according to Mohammad Ali, director of the Bangladesh Tea Board.

The yield was 7.89 crore kg in 2017 and 8.50 crore kg in 2016.

German car sales stuck in reverse gear

AFP, Frankfurt

New car registrations in Germany fell back in April, official data showed Friday, in a sign the vital industry is still grappling with tougher emissions tests and a broader economic slowdown.

The KBA transport authority said it registered 310,715 new cars last month, 1.1 percent less than a year before.

Sales between January and April were flat compared with the same period in 2018, at almost 1.2 million.

Carmakers have struggled with new EU emissions tests that came into force from September, which turned into a bottleneck for some manufacturers.

Mammoth Volkswagen highlighted the new cycle, known as WLTP, as a challenge for high-end subsidiary Audi when it released first-quarter results Thursday.

Audi's sales were down 12.8 percent year-on-year in April, although competing luxury brands BMW and Mercedes-Benz both moved more cars.

Looking at carmakers' performance from January to April, VW's own-brand vehicles accounted for almost one in five sales in Germany, at 221,000 -- although that figure was down 4.5 percent on the same period in 2018.

Peugeot-owned mass-market brand Opel was also down three percent.

HSBC quarterly profits jump in 'good start' to 2019

AFP, London

GLOBAL banking giant HSBC said Friday that first-quarter net profit soared by more than a third to \$4.1 billion on a strong performance across its Asian operations.

The London-listed bank added that pre-tax profit jumped 31 percent to \$6.2 billion in the first three months of 2019 from a year earlier on strong revenue growth in retail banking, wealth management and commercial business. That beat market expectations.

"We have made a good start to 2019," said John Flint, chief executive of the banking group that makes the lion's share of its profits in Asia.

"We remain alert to risks in the global economy. We are proactively managing costs and investment in line with this more uncertain outlook and will continue to do so."

The banking behemoth also said it had reduced reported operating expenses by 12 percent as Flint embarks on a planned overhaul aimed at growing the group while keeping a lid on costs.

The new HSBC figures "came in ahead of expectations, leading to a rise in the share price," noted Graham Spooner, investment research analyst at online trading firm The Share Centre.

He added: "Unsurprisingly, there was the normal comment on Brexit uncertainty and how the group are watching the situation closely."

Shares in HSBC finished up 1.93 percent at 680.60 pence on the British capital's FTSE 100 index, which ended

0.4 percent higher on Friday. "HSBC shares are in demand today after the bank posted solid first-quarter results," said analyst David Madden at traders CMC Markets.

"Profit before tax jumped ... to \$6.21 billion, and the consensus estimate was \$5.39 billion."

Flint's progress in bringing costs more under control was welcomed by investors, especially given that revenue gains outpaced cost increases in the first three months of the year.

- 'New person, new atmosphere' - Asia-centric bank had failed last year to live up to its pledge for revenue growth to outpace costs growth.

Analyst Dickie Wong from Kingston Securities said Flint's arrival had injected some fresh energy into the bank and a tighter leash around costs.

"A new person, a new style, brings in a new atmosphere," he said, using a Chinese idiom.

Adjusted operating expenses rose 3.2 percent in the quarter, compared with a 5.6 percent increase in the same period last year.

HSBC saw a profitable 2018 but suffered a tough final quarter when it took a hit from uncertainty over Brexit and the long-running trade row between Washington and Beijing.

Overall, last year saw strong growth for HSBC with net profit ballooning 30 percent to \$12.6 billion.

But the yearly growth figures were dampened by a tough final quarter when the markets -- especially those in Hong Kong and China -- went into meltdown over global trade fears.

It's "time for the organisation to get back into growth mode", Flint said in a recent video produced by HSBC detailing his first year in office.



Pedestrians wait to cross a road as they stand under an HSBC signage outside one of the bank's branches in Hong Kong.