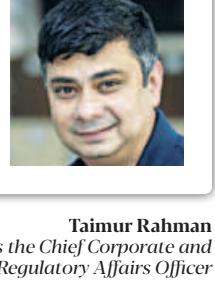


Towards a connected society: Hurdles to overcome

TAIMUR RAHMAN



Taimur Rahman
is the Chief Corporate and
Regulatory Affairs Officer
at Banglalink

The growing importance of a digitally connected society in today's modern world requires no explanation.

Over the last two decades, many developing countries, including Bangladesh, have proven the direct correlation between the increase of mobile and internet penetration with gross domestic product (GDP) and economic growth.

In fact, we have witnessed how digital connectivity can empower people from all spheres of society by making them better equipped to handle socio-economic challenges.

It is needless to say that the telecom industry in Bangladesh has played a pioneering role in ensuring connectivity across the country since its inception. Having accomplished its initial mission of providing mobile telephone to the masses, it is now focused on making mobile internet accessible in every corner of the country.

The fact that mobile internet users in the country account for over 90 per cent of the total internet users clearly reflects the industry's contribution to this progress.

With over 180 million customers, the telecom industry remains a driving force behind the government's "Digital Bangladesh" agenda.

The coming years are going to be extremely important for the telecom industry. It has already been instrumental in making the masses aware of the importance of connectivity, internet, mobile financial services, and other digital facilities.

Digitalisation of our society is now on the verge of taking off, but we need to make sure that it happens in the right direction; and for that, all the players,



including telecom operators, vendors, technology providers, regulators, and of course the government, must move forward with clearly defined strategies.

As we have seen, the government is eager to step into the 5G era. While we always embrace new technologies, before stepping into 5G, we need to realise that 5G is just not another technology for providing better wireless speed, but rather an entire ecosystem.

To have that ecosystem, we need to ensure that considerable internet

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PHOTO: STAR

coverage is provided to the masses, and it should be done through 4G. However, in our country, it has been nearly four years since 4G was launched, but the 4G smartphone penetration rate is still around 30 per cent, which is still low.

Therefore, the challenges lie not only in rolling out advanced network technologies, but also in encouraging people to adopt them. For that to happen, we need to have the abilities to reach end customers through their proper applications.

Currently, the regulations and policies

are not integrated enough for this purpose. Therefore, vertical integration of policies among various government bodies is an absolute necessity before 5G is introduced nationwide.

It should also be kept in mind that the speed provided by 4G is sufficient for the kind of customer base we have served in Bangladesh so far. Moreover, 4G will remain the base 5G technology for next generation mobile networks even after 5G is launched.

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