

Ensuring empowerment through interconnection

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As a local telecommunication company, Grameenphone has done wonders in connecting the country by providing exemplary network coverage and services all across the nation. In the fourth part of this five-article series on Abu Saeed Khan's 'Partner in Digitalization 1997-2022', we will take a look at how Grameenphone has extended their network, accessibility and services in Bangladesh, even to the most remote areas of the country.

Remote coverage

A prime example of Grameenphone's extensive network is their coverage empowering some of the most remote and technologically inaccessible areas of Bangladesh. Abu Saeed Khan states in his report that Grameenphone provides essential coverage across the country's coastline, to Cox's Bazar, Kuakata, Bhola, Patuakhali, Sandwip and other major fishing spots. Fishermen, who constantly need to be wary of coastal storms, mechanical issues and pirate attacks via maritime communication, are dependent on the invaluable mobile network coverage provided to such regions.

Even newly formed local regions aren't exempt from Grameenphone's network. After the Land Boundary Agreement in 2015, Bangladesh gained new pieces of land that were previously known as enclaves. Later the same year, Grameenphone launched accessible 3G mobile services in such former enclaves, especially the Dahagram region of northern



Lalmonirhat district; steadily rolling out reliable mobile internet for the 42,000 citizens of the 111 former enclaves. The service was eventually made available in the neighbouring areas of Lalmonirhat, Panchagarh, Kurigram and Nilphamari districts as well - places previously lacking reliable mobile coverage.

An EDGE in remittance

Poorer families are often dependent on migrant family members sending money from abroad. Grameenphone's 2.5G mobile internet service, called EDGE, greatly helped the country's foreign remittance by providing reliable internet access and extensive nationwide coverage that facilitated international money transfers.

Abu Saeed Khan states in his report that when EDGE was launched, it drove forward

a remittance revolution in Bangladesh; helping banks and NGOs manage cross-border payments more easily and at a much cheaper rate than before. The remittance process involved the migrant worker sending the family a unique code with which they could withdraw money from a local NGO branch office or exchange house. As the process heavily depended on reliable internet service, rural branches of remittance NGOs greatly benefited from the ease provided by the EDGE 2.5G internet.

Flexi Load to the future

A major reason behind the accessibility of Grameenphone's network services lies in their revolutionary balance top-up system. By utilising the intelligent network (IN) billing systems, Grameenphone's electronic top-up service, known famously as Flexi

Load, allows customers to recharge their account balance in small denominators. This means that Grameenphone users no longer need to rely on fixed-cost scratch cards, as all possible amounts of credit can be deposited at any time thanks to the sheer possibilities of Flexi Load.

Thus, prepaid mobile services became more accessible to the general public, especially to poorer and rural citizens who could now make long-distance calls without sacrificing a significant portion of their expenditure. Since the inception of Flexi Load, many other local telecom companies have adapted the concept, allowing small to medium-sized businesses to invest smarter in essential telecommunication functions. Even now, many local companies are dependent on the adaptable cash deposit system provided by Flexi Load to conduct important transactions and payments.

Grameenphone's accessible services and extensive network paved the future of telecommunication in Bangladesh. Citizens of remote, distant areas now have access to mobile internet and reliable electronic top-up. As such, the economic empowerment facilitated by such services cannot be overlooked - a factor we will explore in the final instalment of this series, coming next week.

[The viewpoints and findings in this article are based on Abu Saeed Khan's compiled report 'Partner in Digitalization 1997 - 2022'.]

A modern user's guide to buying a new smartphone: Basic know-hows

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Before buying a new smartphone, we often research and compare the best features obtainable within our budget. In the first part of this two-article series, check out some key features to keep in mind when purchasing your next mobile companion.

Platform/Software

Android is the most widely used platform that comes in various ranges. Designed by Google and used by most manufacturers, Android smartphones have access to the Google Play Store and a wide range of apps. Experts users will often say that Android devices open the scope of a smartphone is capable of, as you can test out various customisation features, service suits and in-built apps that Apple doesn't always give the freedom for.

Owned by Apple, iOS devices are great to use but come in a high price range, owing to their unique and secure media features. Those who

prefer iPhones over Android mostly do so for the security in management and access. The browser in iPhones prevents intelligent tracking and third-party access to personal information. Moreover, password protection, two-factor authentication, restricting location information, controlling website access and cookies, securing email addresses, etc., provides an exclusive and safe experience.

Screen and size

As for screens, if you want better contrast, go for OLED. LCD has lighter blacks than OLED. AMOLED screens are expensive but perform better. The iPhone and Galaxy range of Samsung phones uses an AMOLED screen. The size range for high-end devices ranges from 5.5 inches to 6.5 inches and above. The screen should be full HD, as anything higher than 1080 pixels is good and sharp in quality.

Processor and RAM

For the best performance in Android phones, you will need a new processor of at least 4GB RAM. For iPhones, the best processor is the A-series chipset. For Androids, it is the Qualcomm Snapdragon 865 Plus. As for the memory, modern smartphones come with built-in storage. Starting from 16GB, the amount can reach up to 512GB as well. For efficient use, at least 64GB is recommended, as it makes the device's functionality speedy.

Camera

The quality of the camera in a smartphone does not solely depend upon the megapixel of the device. If you want a phone with a good camera, check out other factors such as the camera sensor and aperture of the lens. While some brands provide better resolution, exposure, colour and focus, others offer whimsical choices and creative clicking options.

Most smartphones come with

a triple or quad camera setup with around 48-megapixel to 50-megapixel camera resolution. For experimental photography, you can look for special features like optical image stabilisation and ultra-low light sensors. For the front camera, a 13-megapixel to 20-megapixel single camera setup is the most common. Look for the best selfie camera if you are a fan of selfies. For those who are more into mobile videography, there are features like a 4k video shooting option and a 60 to 90 Hz refresh rate.

Two popular high-end smartphones in the market in terms of camera features are the Google Pixel 6 Pro and iPhone 13 Pro Max. Google Pixel 6 Pro has a 50MP primary camera, while the iPhone 13 Pro Max has a 12MP camera. Both the brands support 4k videos with a refresh rate of about 60 Hz. Apple phones tend to provide very vibrant photos owing to their great sensors. Pixel provides much sharper and more colour-accurate photos.