

# Interim govt must act swiftly on telecom reforms

Says Veon Group CEO Kaan Terzioğlu in an interview with The Daily Star

MAHMUDUL HASAN

The interim government should swiftly implement reforms in the telecommunications sector by eliminating unnecessary licensing, reducing taxes, and granting spectrum free of cost -- without waiting for an election, according to a top multinational telecom CEO.

"I really think that this interim period is very important to take decisions, and I hope it will not be wasted by waiting for another cycle of elections," said Kaan Terzioğlu, group CEO of Banglalink's parent company Veon, in a recent interview with The Daily Star.

"And I also believe that we need to strengthen the deployment of infrastructure, and the worst thing we can do now is to go for another cycle of spectrum auctions and again put an incredible burden on the industry."

"I think if you want to deploy further 4G or 5G, we have to make spectrum free and available to telecom operators," he added.

When asked what reforms he would suggest for the interim government in the telecom and internet sectors, he identified two key issues.

"The telecom industry today contributes 1 percent of Bangladesh's GDP but pays 5 percent in taxes. So, it is the highest taxed industry in the entire world, and I think this burden, on top of high spectrum costs, makes the industry suffer. So, this is number one."

Secondly, he pointed out that the industry is fragmented into small segments, from transmission to fibre to interconnect, with multiple licences required to operate, which disrupts the value chain.

"I think a simplification of the licensing scheme and a reduction of taxes is a must for the country's future."

"If you look at the list of all the licences needed to operate in the country, you need a licence for deploying fibre, a licence to operate networks, a licence for interconnect, and a licence for towers,"

## Key takeaways

- » Interim government must reform telecom sector fast
- » Spectrum should be free for 4G/5G deployment
- » High taxes hinder growth of the telecom industry
- » Bangladesh needs simplified licensing and reduced tax burdens
- » Two mobile operators sufficient for Bangladesh
- » Internet shutdowns harm digital economy and future growth
- » Starlink's entry vital for emergency coverage
- » A single national infrastructure provider can ensure efficiency, reduce cost



KAAN TERZIOĞLU

Terzioğlu said.

He said that no similar structures exist anywhere in the world. In his view, Bangladesh should align itself with global best practices, which the GSMA can provide by showcasing how the most efficiently managed countries operate.

According to him, Bangladesh is an extremely resilient country.

"Its strength comes from its people, its youth, and we need to enable them through better networks and better internet. And that's why I think a lot of responsibility falls to us but also to the interim government," said Terzioğlu.

"We are as committed as ever, perhaps even stronger than ever, for Bangladesh. I see the country's future as bright," the CEO said.

Asked about the imminent entry of Starlink in Bangladesh, he said space coverage is essential for a country like Bangladesh.

"This will be good for the country, and we are ready to take our role in that. As

you may have noticed, we have signed a Direct-to-Cell contract with Starlink for Ukraine, and I believe it is also important for Bangladesh to have a Direct-to-Cell capability, apart from satellite internet," he added.

Direct-to-Cell satellite service allows satellites to connect directly to regular mobile phones, ensuring coverage in remote areas without extra hardware.

It enhances emergency communication, prevents network blackouts, and integrates with terrestrial networks for seamless global mobile connectivity.

"These are, of course, new technologies, and terrestrial networks are prone to certain issues during emergencies, including earthquakes and wartime. In these situations, it is very important to have an emergency capability utilising satellite network. That is why we started this relationship in Ukraine, and we are very happy with it," he added.

He also mentioned the adverse effects

of internet shutdowns on the digital sector under the previous government.

"In the previous environment, we often had instructions to shut down the internet. When you shut down the internet, you are shutting down the future of the digital economy."

"Because how can you develop an ecosystem if the players are not sure that tomorrow they will be able to transact online? I think now, again, it's a period of opportunity because we can sustainably build businesses that rely on online capabilities. I think this is a new era, and we have to take a fresh look at this, from the capabilities of e-commerce, to mobile payments, to financing available to millions of people. Now, there is an opportunity to really focus on these areas."

He also addressed the dominance of a single company and emphasised avoiding duplication in the telecommunications network infrastructure in Bangladesh.

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## Dhaka chamber for uniform VAT rate

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry (DCCI) yesterday recommended setting a uniform single-digit value-added tax (VAT) rate and raising the tax-free income limit to Tk 5 lakh.

The proposals were placed during a pre-budget meeting for the fiscal year 2025-26 with National Board of Revenue (NBR) Chairman Abdur Rahman Khan at the NBR office in Agargaon, Dhaka.

Currently, the standard VAT rate is 15 percent across the board, but it has been segregated into different slabs, such as 10 percent, 7.5 percent, and 5 percent, in different sectors.

"These various slabs are actually causing difficulties for traders as well as disputes in many cases," said DCCI President Taskeen Ahmed.

"Many traders are forced to bear the burden of additional tax due to the non-availability of input tax rebate benefits," he said.

Besides, the DCCI proposed setting a nominal 1 percent VAT for traders in the informal sector in the next budget.

"It would bring transparency to overall revenue management, reduce the cost of doing business, and have a positive impact on the manufacturing sector," said Ahmed.

Furthermore, the DCCI president also urged the government to raise the tax-free income limit for individuals from Tk 3.50 lakh to Tk 5 lakh.

**The DCCI also proposed setting a nominal 1 percent VAT for traders in the informal sector in the next budget**

Earlier, the Centre for Policy Dialogue had suggested increasing the tax-free income threshold to Tk 4 lakh.

In this regard, Ahmed requested that the prevailing inflationary situation and its burden on the masses be considered.

During the meeting, the DCCI proposed raising the second tax slab threshold from Tk 1 lakh to Tk 3 lakh while maintaining the current 5 percent tax rate for that range.

The trade body also called for reducing the highest income tax rate from 30 percent to 25 percent for the top income slab.

In addition, the DCCI president proposed a gradual reduction of advance tax at the import level for commercial endeavours and the gradual phasing out of the existing advance tax on manufacturers at the import level.

Traders have to pay more customs duty than the actual import price due to the difference between the tariff value set by the customs authority and the market price, he said.

This is increasing business costs as well as making the import process complicated and expensive, said Ahmed.

DCCI Senior Vice President Razeev H Chowdhury and Vice President Md Salem Sulaiman were also present.

In another meeting, the Anti-Tobacco Media Alliance (ATMA) proposed merging the low and medium price tiers of cigarettes and reducing the number of price tiers to three. Currently, there are four price tiers—low, medium, high, and premium—for cigarettes. This has rendered tobacco price and tax measures less effective, stated the ATMA.

Particularly, the very narrow price difference between low and medium-tier cigarettes allows consumers to choose brands belonging to either of these two tiers, it said.

To safeguard public health, this loophole can be addressed by merging the low and medium price tiers and reducing the number of price tiers to three, said the platform.

## Govt to import two LNG cargoes in April

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The government has approved the purchase of two cargoes of liquefied natural gas (LNG) for April at a cost of Tk 1,376 crore.

Chaired by Finance Adviser Salehuddin Ahmed, the Advisory Committee on Government Purchase approved the procurement yesterday. Both cargoes will be supplied by TotalEnergies Gas and Power Ltd, a UK-based company.

One cargo is priced at Tk 14.48 per MMBTU (million British thermal units), while the other will cost Tk 14.22 per MMBTU.

The committee also approved the import of 50,000 tonnes of non-Basmati rice through the Indian company Pattabhi Agro Foods Private Limited, Velpur, at a rate of \$429.55 per tonne.

Besides, 10,000 tonnes of lentils will be procured through local tenders for subsidised sales via the

Trading Corporation of Bangladesh (TCB).

Of this, 5,000 tonnes will be supplied by Dhaka-based Modina Trading Corporation and another 5,000 tonnes by Chattogram-based Payel Traders, both at a price of Tk 94.23 per kg.



The committee also approved the purchase of 11 million litres of refined rice bran oil at Tk 126.50 per litre through local tenders.

The oil will be procured from three companies: Dhaka-based Green Oil and Poultry Feed Industries (2 million litres),

Majumdar Products Ltd, also Dhaka-based (4.5 million litres), and Noapara, Jashore-based Majumdar Bran Oil Mills Ltd (4.5 million litres).

The government is preparing a smooth transition plan for Bangladesh's graduation from the least developed country (LDC) category, Finance Adviser Salehuddin Ahmed said yesterday.

The United Nations supports Bangladesh's graduation, as it would inspire smaller nations with newfound confidence, he told reporters after yesterday's meeting of the advisers' council on government purchases at the Bangladesh Secretariat.

"Numerous underdeveloped countries are observing Bangladesh. Graduation would not only set an example but also enhance our national pride. Bangladesh's overall performance is commendable, despite minor flaws or mistakes," he added.

## Why are Chinese automakers launching fast-charging EV systems?

REUTERS, Shanghai

China's BYD has unveiled a megawatt charging system that it says can charge an EV as quickly as filling up a fuel tank, and said it will build a network across China, igniting a new super charging race.

Here are more details about the Chinese electric vehicle giant's new technology and why the fast-charging space is attracting interest:

### WHY DOES FAST-CHARGING EV TECHNOLOGY MATTER?

Drivers sceptical of EVs have cited worries that their batteries could go flat during long-distance drives, prompting automakers to come up with fast-charging as well as battery-swapping technology as solutions.

Chinese automakers are increasing using such technologies as key selling points to attract buyers in a hyper competitive market and such technologies have been credited for contributing to the high adoption of EVs in China. Tesla also offers ultra-fast chargers.

### HOW DOES BYD'S NEW SYSTEM COMPARE TO OTHERS?

BYD said its so-called "super platform" will be capable of peak charging of 1,000 kilowatts (kW), enabling cars that use it to travel 400 km (249 miles) on a 5-minute

charge.

To achieve such performance, BYD said it had developed a package of technologies including batteries with a 10C charging multiplier, which means they can be

charged at 10 times the battery's capacity per hour. Others include high-power motors, high-volt silicon carbide power chips and fast chargers that support 1,000 kW of power.



Visitors watch a BYD Yangwang U9 electric vehicle by Chinese car manufacturer BYD at Singapore Motorshow in Singapore.

By comparison, Tesla mainly sticks with a 400-volt system that can charge at up to 250kW for its EVs. The exceptions for the U.S. automaker are its Cybertruck that runs on a 800-volt architecture with a maximum rate of 350kW, and Semi truck that has a 1,000-volt powertrain.

Zeekr, Geely's premium EV brand, launched last year an 800-volt platform that can charge 80 percent of a 75-kwh battery in its Zeekr 007 sedan from 10 percent in 10.5 minutes. Li Auto and Xpeng have similar technology that can achieve more than 400 km driving range on a 10-minute charge.

### WHY DOES BYD NOW WANT TO BUILD A CHARGING NETWORK?

BYD accounts for more than a third of the EV sales in China but its owners have largely relied on other automakers' charging facilities or public charging poles run by third-party operators to date.

The company said the latest super e-platform required its own fast chargers and that it would build more than 4,000 such charging stations across China, without specifying a time frame. Founder Wang Chuanfu, at the unveiling event on Monday, also appealed to external investors, saying the company would welcome their help in building more.

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## Do interviews really reveal the best talent?

MD TOUHID ALAM KHAN

In the world of hiring, interviews are often treated as the ultimate test of a candidate's potential. Yet, this process is far from foolproof. A recurring paradox plagues recruiters and hiring managers: some individuals excel in interviews but struggle in their roles, while others falter under the pressure of an interview but thrive once given the opportunity. This disconnect raises a critical question—are interviews truly effective in identifying talent, or do they inadvertently overlook some of the most capable individuals?

Consider the candidate who walks into an interview and openly admits, "I'm not great at interviews, but I know the job, I have a strong work ethic, and I'm a fast learner." This level of authenticity can be refreshing, yet it often goes undervalued in traditional hiring processes. Surprisingly, such candidates frequently prove to be exceptional employees. One individual who made this admission during an interview was not only hired but also promoted five times within five years. Their story underscores a critical truth: interviews don't always reveal true potential.

On the other hand, some candidates deliver flawless interviews—confident, articulate, and polished—but fail to meet expectations once hired. They may have mastered the art of self-presentation, but their performance doesn't align with their pitch. This isn't to say that interview skills are irrelevant—they certainly matter—but they shouldn't be the sole measure of a candidate's worth. After all, an interview is a performance, and not everyone is a natural performer.

The hiring process, as it stands, often favors extroverts and those who excel at selling themselves. Quiet, introverted candidates, who may bring unique perspectives and problem-solving skills, are frequently overlooked. This bias can lead to missed opportunities for organizations seeking diverse talent. The challenge, then, is to refine the hiring process to ensure it identifies not just the best interviewees, but the best candidates.

One way to address this issue is to look beyond the resume. While qualifications are necessary, they don't always reflect a candidate's character or potential. Some of the most successful hires have resumes that don't stand out but demonstrate exceptional integrity, resilience, and a willingness to learn. Skills can be taught, but these inherent traits often lead to long-term success.

Simplifying the interview process is another critical step. Lengthy, multi-round interviews can deter top talent and create unnecessary stress for candidates. A streamlined, well-structured interview can often reveal more about a candidate's potential than a drawn-out series of meetings. Additionally, providing a comfortable environment for introverted candidates can help uncover talents that might otherwise remain hidden.

Equally important is the role of feedback and guidance. Not every candidate will be the right fit for a specific role, but that doesn't mean they lack potential. Giving constructive feedback can significantly impact a candidate's career journey. A small act of kindness, such as suggesting alternative roles or providing improvement tips, can inspire confidence and open doors they might not have considered.

Interviews don't define a candidate's worth—authenticity, dedication, and work ethic matter more than a polished pitch. Recruiters should prioritize potential over performance, character over charisma, and long-term fit over first impressions.

Hiring isn't about perfection but finding the right match. Sometimes, a candidate just needs guidance and a chance to shine. By rethinking interviews and focusing on what truly matters, organizations can unlock talent potential and build thriving teams.

*The author is a former managing director and chief executive officer of a first-generation private commercial bank in Bangladesh.*