FICCI Monthly Bulletin
October 2024

60 YEARS OF EXCELLENCE

DIGITAL ECONOMY:
CATALYST FOR RESHAPING SOCIETY IN BANGLADESH

DIGITAL ECONOMY

BOARD OF DIRECTORS 2024 - 2025

Mr. Zaved Akhtar, President, and Chairman & MD of Unilever Bangladesh Ltd.
Mr. Eric M. Walker, Senior Vice President, and MD of Chevron Bangladesh
Mr. Yasir Azman, Vice President, and CEO of Grameenphone Ltd.
Mr. T. I. M. Nurul Kabir, Executive Director of FICCI
Mr. Muhammad Ala Uddin Ahmad, Director, and CEO of MetLife Bangladesh
Mr. Md. Mahbub ur Rahman, Director, and CEO of HSBC Bangladesh
Engr. Abdur Rashid, Director, and Country Manager of SGS Bangladesh Limited
Ms. Wu Li Chuan, Director, and MD of LSI Industries Ltd.
Mr. Md. Miarul Haque, Director, and MD of DHL Worldwide Express (BD) Pvt. Ltd.
Mr. M. H. M Fairoz, Director, and MD of Singer Bangladesh Ltd.
Mr. Faisal Ahmed Chowdhury, Director, and Chairman of Baraka Power Ltd.
Mr. Mohammad Iqbal Chowdhury, Director, and CEO of LafargeHolcim Bangladesh Ltd.
Mr. Najith Meewanage, Director, and CEO of Commercial Bank of Ceylon PLC
Ms. Rubaba Dowla, Director, and Country Managing Director-Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan of Oracle Bangladesh
Mr. Sumitava Basu, Director and Country Head of Marico Bangladesh
Mr. Manabu Sugawara, Director and Country Head of Bangladesh, Marubeni Corporation

TABLE OF CONTENTS

60 YEARS OF EXCELLENCE

From the desk of Editor

We regularly publish Monthly Bulletins, and the current edition of the FICCI Monthly Bulletin is dedicated to the Digital Economy. Digital platforms are now an essential part of the modern economy. The foundation of the digital economy is built on organizations, machines, and people interconnected through the Internet, Internet of Things (IoT), and mobile technologies.

Digital economy overlaps with every sector of the economy heavily dependent on or significantly enhanced by the use of digital inputs including digital technologies, digital infrastructure, digital services, and data. New technologies such as artificial intelligence, cloud computing, 3D printing, Internet of things (IoT), and robotics are emerging as forefront drivers of economic growth in terms of raising capital, labor productivity and access to the global market.

In Bangladesh the financial sector is undergoing digital transformation aimed at streamlining services to enhance service delivery efficiency and financial inclusion, leading Bangladesh towards cashless society.

According to estimates, more than two-thirds of new value creation over the next decade are expected to come from digitally enabled business models. Researchers forecast that the digital economy is expected to reach US$16.5 trillion and capture 17 per cent of global GDP by 2028.

FICCI is not just a traditional business chamber. As a leading chamber, FICCI has been creating significant footprints in the growth of twenty-one (21) sectors in Bangladesh. As a forward-looking chamber we constantly endeavor to delve into most update prospects and new avenues of growth.

We organize monthly events such as Luncheon Meeting and Leaders Talk, in addition to our regular activities, with the vision to explore economic and business opportunities that can lead Bangladesh towards sustained growth and prosperity.

In this Edition, we published some member stories and articles on various aspects of digital economy. We hope the articles published in this Edition will trigger forward-looking insights among our readers and all the stakeholders to take up leading role in digital transformation to harness the opportunities and meet the challenges of 4IR and be the torchbearer of transition to knowledge economy.

T. I. M. Nurul Kabir

EDITORIAL BOARD

Zaved Akhtar
President, FICCI and
Chairman & Managing Director,
Unilever Bangladesh Ltd.

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dear Fellow Members, Colleagues, and Stakeholders,

I am delighted to present the October Edition of our FICCI Monthly Bulletin, themed "Digital Economy: Catalyst for Reshaping Society in Bangladesh." As we navigate rapid advancements in digital technology, it is imperative that we understand and embrace the transformative power of the digital economy.

The emergence of digital platforms has unlocked new opportunities for innovation, entrepreneurship, and investment, fostering a dynamic environment that encourages collaboration and inclusivity. From fintech solutions that enhance financial access to e-commerce platforms revolutionizing retail, the digital landscape serves as a powerful catalyst for change.

This edition examines how digital innovations are transforming our society, driving economic expansion, and creating avenue for potential businesses and individuals alike. We will underscore the crucial role technology plays in bridging divides, promoting globalization, and boosting productivity across various sectors. Additionally, we will address the challenges we face, and the policies required to cultivate a supportive ecosystem for sustainable digital growth.

As we embrace this digital revolution, it is essential for the government, private sector, and civil society to work together to fully harness technology's potential. By doing so, we can build a more resilient and prosperous Bangladesh for everyone.

In this edition, we tried to gather insights from CEOs across dynamic sectors related to the digital economy, including telecom, digital finance, e-commerce, delivery services and others. You will also find diverse member stories designed to inspire innovative thinking among our readers and stakeholders, motivating them to lead in digital transformation, seize opportunities, and confront sector challenges.

I extend my heartfelt thanks to all our contributors for their invaluable insights and expertise. Your contributions are essential to enriching our publication and providing our readers with comprehensive and thought-provoking content. I also deeply appreciate the patrons, sponsors, and the FICCI Secretariat for their significant efforts in bringing this bulletin to fruition.

I hope you find this edition both informative and inspiring. Together, let us continue to leverage the potential of the digital economy to drive progress and prosperity for Bangladesh.

Warm Regards,

Zaved Akhtar
President, FICCI

DIGITAL ECONOMY IN BANGLADESH & BANK'S ROLE

COMMERCIAL BANK

Najith Meewanage
Chief Executive Officer
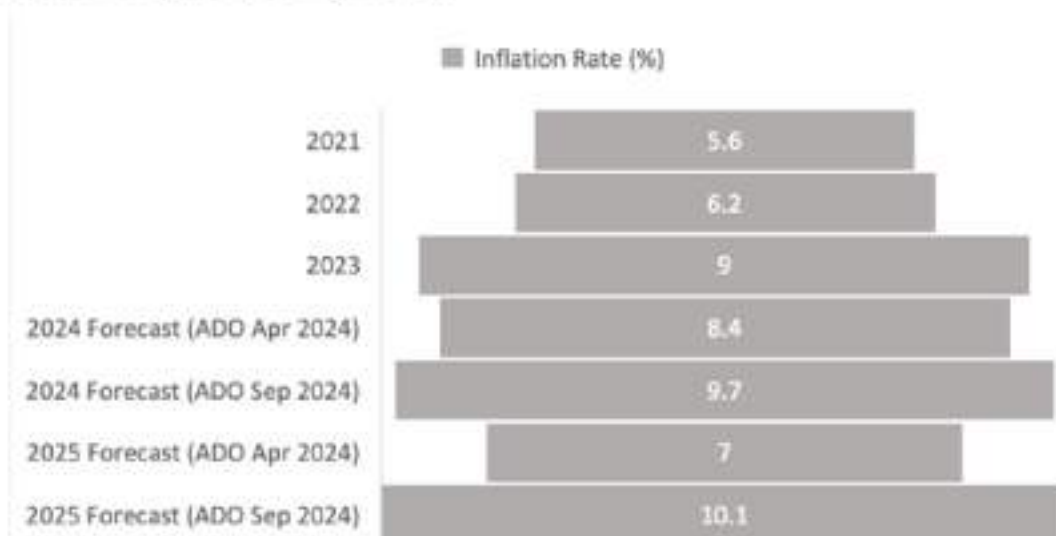Bangladesh Operations
Commercial Bank of Ceylon PLC

Bangladesh's financial sector is advancing rapidly in digitization, unveiling a robust digital infrastructure and innovative products. This development enables millions to access financial services while enhancing service delivery efficiency. In a remarkable stride toward modernization, the sector is undergoing a digital transformation aiming to enhance financial inclusivity, streamline services, and propel the nation into a digital future.

Bangladesh Bank (BB) is playing a pivotal role in promoting a digital society by embracing fintech and digital solutions to achieve Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the National Financial Inclusion Strategy (NFIS). BB is addressing the challenges of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) by reconsidering traditional banking models. It has allowed banks to offer alternative delivery channels, such as Mobile Financial Services (MFS), QR based payment and e-wallets to improve financial access for marginalized populations.

BB acknowledges the importance of digital platforms in enhancing the efficiency of financial product delivery aiming Financial Inclusion, Collaboration with Fin-techs, Regulatory Support, and Smart Bangladesh Initiative.

With that aim, Bangladesh is experiencing a rapid rise in financial inclusion, driven by the swift adoption of digital technology. The digitization of financial services has significantly transformed access to finance, proving crucial for fostering a more inclusive economic recovery in the country. The Central bank played a vital role by guiding and encouraging banks to set a goal of reaching Digital Bangladesh and offered Retail as well as Corporate products such as self-onboarding to accounts through DKYC, secured online banking, system based loan processing, Nano loans that helps Micro Financing, Cash Management to support corporate client's instant need to receipts and payments, ensuring goods mobility to keep balance of supply and demand offering supply chain management system, Faster payments processing by integrating client ERP made entities capable of contributing greater growth of the economy.

ADB forecast on Bangladesh economy as follows:

Inflation Rate (%)

Year	Inflation Rate (%)
2021	5.6
2022	6.2
2023	9
2024 Forecast (ADO Apr 2024)	8.4
2024 Forecast (ADO Sep 2024)	9.7
2025 Forecast (ADO Apr 2024)	7
2025 Forecast (ADO Sep 2024)	10.1

Source: https://www.adb.org/where-we-work/bangladesh/economy

| Year	GDP Growth (%)
2022	7.1
2023	5.8
2024 Forecast (ADO Apr 2024)	6.1
2024 Forecast (ADO Sep 2024)	5.8
2025 Forecast (ADO Apr 2024)	6.6
2025 Forecast (ADO Sep 2024)	5.1

Source: https://www.adb.org/where-we-work/bangladesh/economy

The ADB forecasts lower GDP growth for Bangladesh in 2025 due to factors like global economic conditions, inflation, supply chain disruptions, reduction of FDIs, and the political instability.

Digital financial growth in last 4 fiscal years at a glance:
Figures in Billion (BDT)

Payment Systems	FY 23-24	FY 20-21	% Change
ATM Transaction	3,384.00	1,983.00	71%
POS Transaction	370.00	179.00	107%
CRM Transaction	1,452.00	191.00	660%
e-Commerce Transaction	189.00	87.00	117%
Internet Banking	9,846.00	1,010.00	875%
MFS	15,361.00	7,595.00	102%

Source: Bangladesh Bank website

Digital Financial growth in last 4 years

FY 23-24 ■ FY 20-21
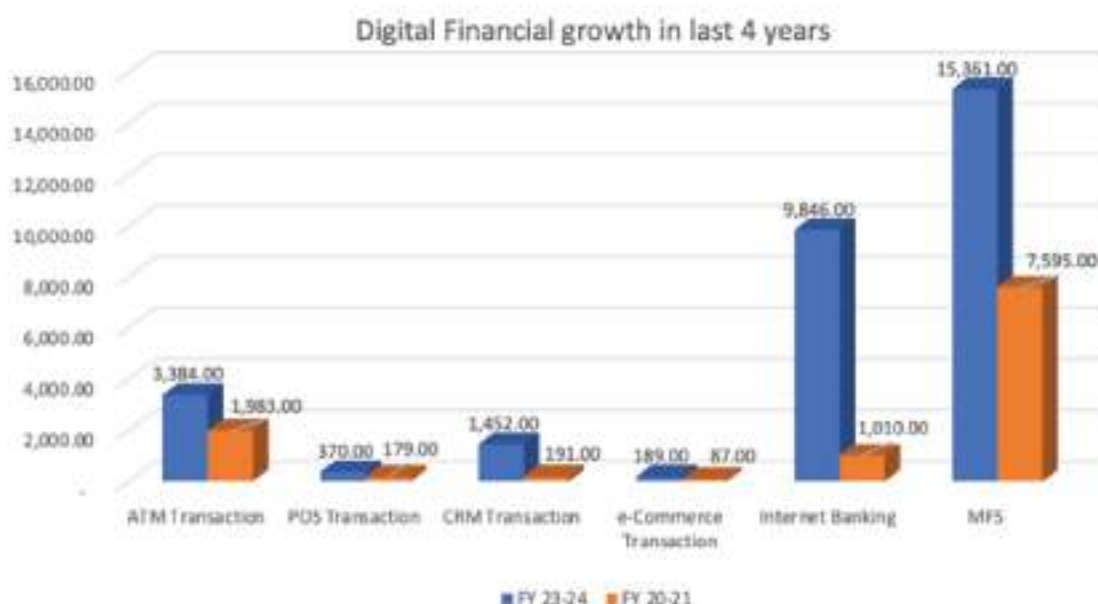
Here are some key statistics for the digital economy in Bangladesh in 2024: (Source: Internet)

Internet and Mobile Usage

- **Internet Users:** 77.36 million (44.5% penetration)
- **Social Media Users:** 52.90 million (30.4% of the population)
- **Active Mobile Connections:** 188.6 million (108.5% of the population)

Population and Demographics

- **Total Population:** 173.8 million
- **Urban Population:** 40.8%
- **Rural Population:** 59.2%

Financial Inclusion and Digital Services

- **Internet Banking Customers:** 7.63 million
- **Agent Banking Outlets:** 21,5591
- **Agent Banking Accounts:** 20.4 million
- **Mobile Financial Services (MFS) Transactions:** BDT 62.23 billion (monthly)

POWER TO YOU
with Digital Banking from Commercial Bank!

By making strategic investments, leveraging innovative platforms, and implementing sustainable growth strategies, Commercial Bank of Ceylon seeks to create value for its customers, stakeholders, and communities by providing tailored solutions, establishing itself as a prominent regional bank in the future leaving a hallmark in the foreign banking cluster in Bangladesh. Despite having the focus in wholesale banking for a considerable period of time, the bank has vision in penetrating to the other segments through the digital technology, CBC developed strategies to leverage technology towards a sustainable growth aiming green financing and enhance financial inclusion through investments in competitive digital platforms like ComBank Digital, a flagship platform that facilitate both Retail and wholesale payments, ePassbook, Card payments, accessible on various operating systems, eExchange facilitating instant remittances to other bank as well as MFS. The bank has undertaken many projects to introduce Q+ payment app, a wallet solution which will serve merchant payments along with QR to provide greater customer experience, ERP integration to support large corporates and SME clients to meet their daily funding needs, streamlining the loan processing system to reduce the turnaround time, Nano loans, Distributor financing to improve the system efficiencies and to provide much needed liquidity to the FMCGs. The bank also is aiming in establishing integrations with government agencies and other stakeholders to offer a pivotal infrastructure that will revolutionize the payment and receipt of the clients ultimately contributing in the economic growth in Bangladesh. CBC already achieved remarkable response by making a growth from 1 billion BDT to 16 billion BDT in digital payment processing through internet banking.

Commercial Bank of Ceylon PLC

CBC has established clear incident response strategies to identify through its 24/7 online monitoring cell established in Colombo, Sri Lanka, and recover from security threats. Our disaster recovery plans are to ensure that business operations continue during a cyber-attack or other emergencies for a smooth operation and service. Adhering to regulations such as PCI DSS and ISO certifications enables our bank to uphold a strong security standard.

Additionally, we have taken initiatives to collaborate with fintech firms via an Open Banking Platform to harness innovative solutions. In line with the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR), we aim to integrate cloud technologies, increase the use of robotic process automation (RPA), and develop an AI-driven loan approval system.

The digital economy is transforming Bangladesh's financial sector, presenting both immense opportunities and significant challenges. While there is substantial progress in digitization, significant hurdles remain, particularly in cybersecurity and digital literacy. Addressing these challenges is crucial in realizing the full potential of the digital economy in Bangladesh.

DIGITAL ECONOMY: TELECOM AS THE CATALYST FOR RESHAPING SOCIETIES IN BANGLADESH

EDOTCO

Sunil Isaac
Country Managing Director
EDOTCO Bangladesh

The digital economy in Bangladesh has grown rapidly, with telecom companies playing a crucial role in its transformation. By expanding network infrastructure and making internet access widely available, telecom operators have become the catalysts for reshaping the country's society and economy.

The key players in telco have enabled financial inclusion, digital education, e-commerce, and remote access to vital services, creating new opportunities for millions of people. As Bangladesh aims for even greater digital growth, understanding the achievements so far and the challenges ahead is essential.

Milestones of the Digital Economy

The rapid growth of Bangladesh's digital economy can be attributed to the pivotal role of telecom companies, which have enabled significant technological advancements across the country. Telecom companies have collectively led the expansion of 4G networks across Bangladesh, making high-speed internet available in rural and remote regions. This has provided over 120 million users with access to digital services, ranging from online banking to virtual education.

The rise of mobile financial services (MFS) like bKash and Nagad has been fueled by the widespread availability of mobile networks. Telecom companies have enabled secure, user-friendly digital payment platforms, helping millions of previously unbanked individuals to participate in the formal economy through digital transactions.

High-speed internet has allowed e-commerce platforms like Daraz and Foodpanda to thrive, enabling small businesses to reach a larger customer base. By offering affordable data packages, telecom companies have supported the growth of digital entrepreneurs and startups, contributing to job creation and economic development.

By extending network coverage, telecom operators have made digital services accessible in rural areas, helping to bridge the gap between urban and rural populations. Digital tools such as Krishi Sheba provide agricultural information to farmers, while online learning platforms like 10 Minute School deliver education content to students in remote locations.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, telecom companies played a vital role in maintaining business continuity by increasing network capacity and offering affordable data packages for remote work and online classes. This ensured that businesses, schools, and healthcare services could operate despite the disruptions.

Challenges to Overcome for the Next 3-5 Years

While the digital economy in Bangladesh has made impressive progress, several challenges remain at large. Telecom companies must address these problems to ensure sustained growth over the next 3-5 years.

One key pain point that keeps creating challenges for the industry is High spectrum cost. It continues to be a barrier for telecom operators, affecting their ability to invest in new technologies. Affordable spectrum pricing is critical for the 5G rollout, which will be essential for smart cities, IoT applications, and enhanced digital services. Collaboration with the government is needed to ensure cost-effective spectrum access.

Moreover, the transition to 5G technology requires substantial investment in network modernization and fiber optic infrastructure. The support of public-private partnerships will be key to making these investments sustainable, allowing telecom companies to provide ultra-fast, reliable connectivity that can support digital transformation across sectors.

Expansion infrastructure is important to support the growing need for connectivity. But bureaucratic hurdles and complex regulations around obtaining licenses and permits slow down the deployment of new telecom infrastructure. A single-window approval system would streamline these processes, enabling telecom companies to expand their network more efficiently and support the digital economy's growth.

As mobile financial services and online transactions become more common, the need for robust cybersecurity measures is critical. Telecom companies must collaborate with the government to develop strong data protection policies and cybersecurity frameworks to ensure user trust and secure digital transactions.

Operating telecom towers and data centers comes with high energy demands. As the digital economy expands, energy costs and power reliability will continue to pose challenges. Investing in renewable energy solutions like solar-powered towers can help reduce operational costs and contribute to sustainable digital growth.

A way ahead for future

To address these challenges and drive further digital transformation in Bangladesh, telecom companies should focus on the following priorities over the next 3-5 years:

- **Affordable 5G Rollout:** Collaborating with regulators to achieve affordable spectrum pricing and leveraging international partnerships will enable telecom operators to roll out 5G services. This will support automation, smart manufacturing, and real-time digital services, propelling Bangladesh's economy forward.

- **Partnerships for Digital Literacy:** Raising digital literacy is essential for a digitally inclusive society. Telecom companies can partner with educational institutions and community organizations to educate users on digital tools and services, ensuring that more people can safely navigate the digital space.

- **Support for Local Innovation:** Encouraging local app developers and content creators can help build Bangladesh-specific digital solutions. Telecom companies can foster innovation through startup accelerators and innovation hubs, creating a pipeline of homegrown digital solutions that meet the needs of the country's diverse population.

- **Strengthening Cybersecurity:** As digital adoption increases, investing in cybersecurity infrastructure is critical. This includes training and awareness programs for users on secure digital practices. Strong cybersecurity measures will ensure the safety of the digital ecosystem and help telecom companies maintain consumer trust.

- **Sustainable Energy Solutions:** To address energy challenges, telecom companies should focus on renewable energy initiatives for their network operations. This would help reduce the carbon footprint of digital infrastructure while ensuring uninterrupted service, especially in areas prone to power outages.

Bangladesh has achieved great success in terms of connectivity through a revolution in the telecom sector, but we still have a long way to go. If we can work together, bring industry stakeholders on the same page, our combined efforts will go the extra mile to achieve the digital dream for millions.

DIGITAL ECONOMY: OPPORTUNITY FOR INVESTMENT

FICCI
FOREIGN INVESTORS
CHAMBER OF COMMERCE & INDUSTRY

T I M Nurul Kabir
Executive Director
FICCI

Fast evolving digital landscape is transforming our societies and economies at unprecedented pace. Cutting-edge innovations led by advanced digital technologies have emerged as one of the key drivers of business growth, economic development and lifestyle improvements. People, organisations and machines interconnected with the Internet, Internet of Things (IoT) and mobile technologies is reshaping business processes, governance procedures, workplaces, markets, consumer experience, social interactions, and leisure and entertainment.

Since the appearance of the first digital platforms in mid-1990s, Bangladesh has been striding diligently alongside rest of the world to keep pace with the digital revolution. Improvement in internet speeds and increased availability of smartphones have boosted rapid growth of digital platforms in Bangladesh in the last decade, transforming our economic and social lives. Digital services, products, and solutions are enhancing our efficiencies, increasing productivity, generating insights through data analytics, expanding access to information and knowledge and facilitating communication across the globe.

To boost up the pace of development, it is imperative for Bangladesh to invest in digital infrastructures, research and development (R&D) for innovative solutions, services and products, and creative ingenuity of the young generations, to fully explore and harness the transformative powers of digital economy and transition to knowledge economy.

Components of Digital Economy

From initial its significance as a low-cost communication channel, the internet has developed into one of the most crucial components of business management, public service delivery, social interactions and communication. Organizations, devices and individuals interconnected with the Internet, IoT and mobile technologies have laid the foundation of the evolving digital economy.

The digital economy overlaps with every sector of the economy heavily dependent on or significantly enhanced by the use of digital inputs including digital technologies, digital infrastructure, digital services, and data. A wide array of sectors are now dependent on or significantly enhanced by digital technologies and digital inputs for production and service delivery such as telecommunications, banking, insurance, tourism, agriculture, trading, health, education, and others. The most visible components of digital economy are:

1. ICT equipment, semiconductors industry;
2. Telecommunication and Internet services;
3. Data processing, software and other information services;
4. Online platforms, including e-commerce platforms;
5. Platform-enabled services (e.g. ride sharing, etc.).

According to estimates by the World Economic Forum (WEF), more than two-thirds of new value creation over the next decade is expected to come from digitally enabled platform business models. The Global Digital Economy Forecast 2023-2028 report released recently by the research and advisory company Forrester reveals that the digital economy is expected to reach US$16.5 trillion by 2028. The study estimates that the digital economy will see 6.9 per cent Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) and capture 17 per cent of global GDP during the forecast period. The study points out that digital economies are predominately driven by consumers, tech spend, and information and communication technology (ICT) exports.

Digital Infrastructure

High-speed, reliable and robust digital infrastructure is the key to digital economy. Digital infrastructure consists of connectivity through high-speed internet and related technologies, IoT such as mobile devices, appliances, computers, sensors, geospatial instruments, machine to machine communications, etc. and data repositories such as data centers and cloud technology. Digital infrastructure provides the channel for people, businesses and governments to access online local and global digital services and connect them to the global digital economy.

Growing reliance on connectivity in the developing world is transforming economies, societies, governance, and interpersonal relationships. Digital transformation was accelerated by necessity during the COVID-19 pandemic when people, businesses, schools and governments had to rapidly adopt digital channels amid lockdowns, and social distancing guidelines.

In Bangladesh, growing demand for digital devices, connectivity and consumer gadgets among the emerging middle class have created a favorable environment for the growth of digital economy. Digitally competent and engaged companies and digitally willing and capable citizens, consumers and employees are vital constituents of the digital economy. Bridging the digital divide is crucial for developing an inclusive society in which digital economy can thrive.

Digital Inclusion

The mobile telecommunication technology thrives as the vital organ of the digital ecosystem. Key transformative power of mobile technologies lies in their role as the enabler of digital economy. According to the Association of Mobile Telecom Operators of Bangladesh (AMTOB), more than 98% of the population in Bangladesh is covered with high-speed 4G network. The Mobile Network Operators (MNOs) are playing a positively supportive role to bridge the digital divide by providing fast and reliable connectivity, particularly in rural areas where other options are limited. The MNOs have invested heavily in their infrastructure with capital expenditure (capex), set to increase mobile broadband network deployments.

According to data from Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC), over 90% of the total internet subscribers in Bangladesh use mobile internet. For 117.47 million mobile internet subscribers, the MNOs are offering diverse digital services such as e-education, e-health, e-commerce, e-entertainment. The benefit consumers receive from mobile technologies is usually quantified by using an economic concept called consumer surplus, i.e., the value that consumers themselves receive, over and above what they pay for devices, apps, services and Internet access.

A number of researches have shown that a 10 percent increase in mobile broadband networks adoption causes a 0.14 percent increase in GDP for non-OECD countries. And a 1 percent increase in mobile phone penetration leads to a 0.12 percent increase in human development index in South Asia.

However, certain barriers still exist for access to the digital economy and digital government services. More than 50% of the population in Bangladesh covered by mobile internet networks still do not subscribe to internet services. Affordability of digital devices and data as well as lack of digital literacy are the core reasons for such shortfall in digital inclusion.

Financial Inclusion

Mobile Financial Services (MFS) have successfully brought a substantial number of previously unbanked poor populations into the formal banking system. MFS operators are supporting financial inclusion boosting the growth of digital economy in Bangladesh. Disbursement of government financial support under social safety net programmes and stimulus packages through MFS have broadened the range of including more unbanked people into the formal financial system.

Currently, 10 banks and 3 subsidiary companies in Bangladesh are providing MFS as an alternative payment channel. Among the more popular MFS providers are bKash, Rocket, Nagad and others. Initially confined to money transfers, the landscape of MFS has been changing with providers introducing digital credit and money-saving features through mobile applications, boosting a broader and more sophisticated financial ecosystem. The share of money transfers stood at 86% out of all transactions in 2022, whereas merchant payments, salary disbursements, government cash transfers to people, utility bill payments, talk-time purchases, and other usages accounted for more than 10% of all transactions.

bKash has been a leader in introducing innovative digital financial services in Bangladesh. bKash offers various bill payment services, including utility bills, internet bills, and mobile phone recharges. bKash has expanded its services to enable users to make payments at various merchants, allowing for cashless transactions at shops, restaurants, and other retail outlets.

bKash has collaborated with international partners to facilitate cross-border remittances, providing a streamlined and cost-effective way for Bangladeshi expatriates to send money home. bKash pioneered digital nano loans and savings accounts through MFS, promoting financial inclusion and allowing users to access credit and savings services. bKash also introduced utility bill payment, ticket payment, government services and educational fee payment, insurance premium payment, government-to-person payment, salary disbursement of RMG and other organizations.

Mobile financial transactions are still dominated by point-to-point (through agents) and person-to-person (P2P) transactions. Payment for vast majority of e-commerce orders is still done on basis of cash on delivery (COD). MFS operators in Bangladesh need to come up with offers that are easy to use and inexpensive in terms of transaction costs. MFS providers need to work with financiers (Banks, NBFIs, and MFIs) to provide loans, insurance services, and innovative savings scheme. Inward remittance flow through MFS is a highly potential segment for Bangladesh.

The major MFS providers in Bangladesh have the potential to inject fresh investments to introduce new services and products. New investments are required for robust technology and skilled manpower. Quality investment, robust technology and distribution network, as well as quality management to maintain regulatory compliance will boost further growth of the MFS, ensuring financial inclusion to build a cashless economy in Bangladesh.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY INDUSTRY

IT Industry in Bangladesh

IT industry in Bangladesh has seen significant growth in the last decade, driven by such factors as increased internet penetration, growing pool of skilled IT professionals as well as initiatives on behalf of government. According to the Bangladesh Association of Software and Information Services (BASIS), the software and IT services industry has been growing steadily, with annual revenue reaching around $1 billion by 2020. According to the Export Promotion Bureau (EPB), earnings of domestic IT firms stood at $221.15 million in July-November of 2023-24.

IT industry in Bangladesh comprises software development and IT-enabled service (ITES) including business process outsourcing (BPO) service, which have high potential for exports. According to Bangladesh Association of Software and Information Services (BASIS), export earnings from software and IT services reached around $1 billion USD in the fiscal year 2020-2021. To gain competitive edge in the global market, IT firms in Bangladesh need to go for partnership with international partners for the sake of brand building and reduction of production costs through economies of scale.

Unlocking the Growth Potentials

Domestic e-commerce and f-commerce has been rising fast in Bangladesh in recent years, particularly since after lockdown during COVID-19 pandemic. According to the e-Commerce Association of Bangladesh, e-commerce sales increased by 70 percent in 2020 compared to a year earlier. The e-commerce retail sector is a significant source of foreign investment, which reportedly raised approximately $41 million dollars in 2020.

In 2016 Malaysia became the first country in the world to establish a Digital Free Trade Zone (DFTZ) to promote e-commerce by providing a state-of-the-art platform for small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and others. Jack Ma, CEO of Alibaba, the largest e-commerce company in the world is reported to have committed major investments to the DFTZ.

India has successfully made technical advancements in diverse digital economy sectors such as Internet marketing services, e-learning initiatives, online banking capabilities, digitisation of the bus and rail systems, etc. Digitalisation is to boost Indian Railways to adopt many of the features planned for the Future Railway Mobile Communications System (FRMCS). GPS tracking, live bus locations, and mobile alerts have enhanced the convenience and safety of bus travel. Operators also benefit from technology in terms of fleet management, curbing speeding, and managing route deviations.

The Industry Development program (IDP) of Sri Lanka has been put forward with foresight. and designed localized projects to align Sri Lanka's tech ecosystem with global trends targeting to reach $ 3Bn of annual foreign exchange revenue generated via knowledge services sector and electronics sector.

Invest Opportunity in Digital Economy

As Bangladesh marches toward its official graduation from the LDC category in 2026, the nation faces transformative opportunities and challenges. The graduation from the LDC category marks a commendable leap forward, including notable advancements in digital economy. It is crucial for Bangladesh to take up viable strategic approach to boost growth in digital economy.

Education, IT Outsourcing, Digital Media, Telecommunication, and emerging (4IR) Technologies are the present and future categories of digital economy in Bangladesh. As Bangladesh strides towards knowledge economy, large scale investment is requisite for deployment and development of technologies such as 5G, AI, IoT, machine learning, Big Data, etc.

The MNOs are now digital service providers offering numerous digital services to diverse segments of customers. There is opportunity for investment in digital infrastructure including telecommunications towers and related infrastructure; Data Centers and related equipment and services; eCommerce applications and solutions; and Fintech, as Bangladesh moves towards cashless society.

Bangladesh is a potential destination for the multinational and foreign industries to establish offshore development hub for software and application and captive BPO centers including call centers. Investment is required for State-of-the-Art Institution focused on Artificial Intelligence, Machine Learning and Data Engineering to create industry-ready human resource proficient in 4IR technologies to meet the demands of digital economy.

BANGLADESH'S DIGITAL FUTURE LIES IN AFFORDABLE, UNINTERRUPTED INTERNET

foodpanda

Ambareen Reza
Co-Founder & Managing Director
foodpanda Bangladesh

We can celebrate Bangladesh has made notable strides in its digital transformation over the past decade with digital platforms like foodpanda, Daraz, Shikho, and Sheba XYZ are at the forefront of the digital economy, transforming how businesses operate and how people live. These platforms facilitate MSMEs, optimize supply chains, create employment, and promote transparency through recorded, cashless transactions across various sectors. The Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission's (BTRC) August 2024 report highlights that nearly 140 million people are now online, and millions of debit, credit, and prepaid cards are in circulation. This clearly indicates a significant shift toward digital payments and a modernized economic structure.

However, the perception of progress does not always align with reality. While this transformation appears impressive on the surface, it remains far from complete. Bangladesh's digital advancement, though commendable, is nowhere near the level of some neighboring countries in the subcontinent or ASEAN nations. Countries like India and Vietnam have seen their digital ecosystems flourish at an accelerated pace, leaving Bangladesh trailing behind.

Despite these encouraging statistics, over 40% of the population remains disconnected, and nearly 60% still lack access to smartphones. This highlights the digital divide that continues to challenge inclusive growth in the country. **Thus, the crucial question arises: with which countries are we drawing parallels, why are we falling behind, and what must we do to bridge this gap?**

This discrepancy is largely due to the current definition of digital inclusion, which is misleading; an "internet user" is defined as someone who has used just 125KB of data in the last 90 days.

To unlock the true potential of the digital revolution, we must adopt a more meaningful metric, such as defining a user as someone who consistently consumes at least 1GB of data over three consecutive months on a smartphone. Additionally, we must urgently address the barriers to increasing digital access and usage that drive transformation, similar to the successes seen in our peer countries.

foodpanda

Why Internet Prices Must Be Lowered

Unfortunately, only a third of mobile internet users in Bangladesh consume more than 1GB of data per month. This low usage is largely due to the high cost of mobile data, which is among the highest in the region, even surpassing prices in Pakistan, India, and developed countries like France and Italy. As a result, Bangladesh has only 6 million online customers, compared to India's 150 million and Indonesia's 40 million.

We can learn valuable lessons from India's Jio data revolution, which dramatically increased monthly internet usage per user from 500MB to 24GB in just six years. This shift has boosted the share of the digital economy in India's GDP from 5% to 15%.

To achieve similar progress in Bangladesh, we should consider declaring the internet a public utility, akin to electricity and clean water. Affordable, high-quality internet is not merely a convenience; it is a gateway to education, entrepreneurship, and financial inclusion. For students in remote villages, the internet offers learning opportunities that traditional education may not provide. For small business owners, it opens new markets both locally and globally.

To drive greater internet adoption and ensure consistent connectivity, one effective strategy could be introducing affordable 30-day auto-renew data packs. By offering these packs with a lower cost per GB than any other option.

The Importance of Smartphones

In addition to reducing internet costs, encouraging telecom operators to provide smartphones on installment plans could significantly increase the number of active users. While nearly 74% of the population owned a smartphone by 2023, according to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, many low-income families still find the cost of devices unaffordable.

To build a truly inclusive digital economy, we must make both internet access and smartphones affordable. The government could play a pivotal role by offering subsidies or tax incentives to smartphone manufacturers and distributors, thereby lowering the cost of devices and making them accessible to more people. By enabling broader smartphone ownership, we can ensure wider participation in the digital economy, where mobile wallets, e-commerce platforms, and other digital services can drive economic growth.

Digital Literacy and Cybersecurity

Above all, these efforts must be complemented by initiatives to improve digital literacy. Many small businesses, consumers, and micro-entrepreneurs lack the skills to fully leverage digital platforms. Public-private partnerships could play a key role in building awareness, providing training, and empowering the next generation of digital entrepreneurs.

At the same time, cybersecurity must be a top priority. As more people engage in digital transactions, ensuring data protection and cybersecurity is crucial to maintaining trust in digital platforms. Without a robust cybersecurity framework, the progress of the digital economy could be undermined. Policymakers should invest in cybersecurity measures and enforce strict data protection regulations to safeguard both consumers and businesses.

A Collaborative Approach for a Digital Future

The student-led movements that gained momentum across the country would not have been possible without a critical mass of internet users. Now, it is essential to harness this momentum and promote collaboration among policymakers, businesses, and innovators to close the digital divide. Meaningful regulatory autonomy is vital for facilitating necessary reforms in the telecom sector. To enable operators to offer affordable data plans, we must alleviate the tax burden by lowering VAT, supplementary duties, and regulatory fees. While taxes on voice and SMS services may remain unchanged, supplementary duties and VAT on data revenue should be minimized or eliminated. Additionally, the BTRC should ease ecosystem costs and spectrum fees to encourage greater investment in network improvements.

Through collaboration and strategic reforms, we can unlock the full potential of our digital economy and build a future that is equitable for everyone. If Bangladesh can achieve a user base of 100 million monthly active internet users, we can anticipate waves of foreign investment, increased venture capital, and a surge in startups, employment, and innovation, this approach would help ensure that the digital transformation is not merely surface-level but deeply integrated, positioning Bangladesh to compete more effectively with its neighboring countries in the digital race.

DIGITAL ECONOMY: THE IMPACT OF REINFORCEMENT LEARNING (AI MODELS) ON HYPER-PERSONALIZED APP USAGE EXPERIENCE IN BANGLADESH

grameenphone

Dr. Asif Naimur Rashid
Chief Business Officer
Grameenphone Ltd.

Introduction

If we have noticed the rate of acceleration that the world of computing technologies is experiencing from the continued exponential rise of GPUs and Gen AI that started a few years back, we know it with certain confidence that the definition of commoditizing key technologies and their value creation for mass people is much closer than we previously thought. We can certainly hope now that artificial intelligence will soon be seen in the form of hyper-personalized intelligence available at a surprisingly lower cost in our mobile phones, liberating many constraints of human-social aspects that currently slow us down.

Globally, we are indeed living in an era of rapidly evolving landscape of digital technology. In Bangladesh also, the demand for hyper-personalization in mobile native apps or PWA (progressive web apps) is currently at an all-time high. Users today expect all mobile apps to not only meet their basic needs but to also provide tailored experiences that resonate with their individual preferences and behaviors. With over 90 million smartphone users in the country, mobile applications are central to daily life, from communication and entertainment to e-commerce and banking.

GP Accelerator   FutureNation   GP Academy   Climate Change

Keeping pace with this need, the app ecosystem in Bangladesh is also rapidly becoming a significant driver of economic growth. As of 2024, the economic value generated by mobile and web applications is substantial, and various factors are expected to contribute to continued growth over the next decade. The app market in Bangladesh is projected to be worth several billion dollars by the end of 2024. Key segments, including e-commerce, fintech, health tech, and entertainment, contribute significantly to this value. Some of the core areas where growing uptake of digital economy will happen through increased app usage by people are highlighted below.

E-commerce Expansion: The e-commerce sector is expected to grow at a good pace, driven by increasing internet penetration and ever-changing consumer behaviors. This growth will create more opportunities for app developers and businesses, leading to a larger economic footprint. Platforms like Daraz, Pickaboo and Chaldal have gained immense popularity, and the trend of online shopping continues to grow, especially among younger Bangladeshi consumers.

Fintech Innovation: As financial services in Bangladesh become more digitized, the fintech sector will continue to expand, offering innovative solutions for payments, loans, and investments. This growth will not only enhance financial inclusion but also create new revenue streams for app developers. Mobile financial services apps such as bKash (with more than 70 million user base) and Nagad (with around 90 million user base) have revolutionized financial transactions, promoting financial inclusion and digital payments across various demographics. Major Banks in Bangladesh have already modernized their banking apps, making them easier to use which, in return, is helping the banks to get more of their customers preferring apps to complete their financial transactions.

Increased Mobile Usage: With the growing smartphone user base, mobile applications will dominate the digital landscape. This trend will boost the demand for various types of apps, further increasing their economic value. Grameenphone's My GP app (with over 20 million monthly active user base), Robi's My Robi and My Airtel apps (with a combined active user base of over 15 million) and Banglalink's My BL app (with around 8 million active user base) already have personalized a great deal of telecom and value-added services for all these app users.

Investment in Tech Startups: Venture capital investment in Bangladeshi tech startups is expected to rise. We have seen in the past some good cases of startup funding taking place, but it has not quite peaked up as expected yet. But with more customers leaning towards digital services, more funding should follow that will lead to the development of new technologies and services that can significantly impact the economy.

Global App Market Footstep: As Bangladeshi apps gain recognition internationally, there will be opportunities for export-oriented growth, contributing to foreign exchange earnings and enhancing the global presence of local tech companies. The global mobile app market was valued at $228.98 billion in 2023 and is expected to grow at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 14.3% from 2024 to 2030. Consumer spending on apps reached $171 billion in 2023.

Focus on Sustainability: Apps that promote sustainable practices, such as eco-friendly products and services, will attract consumer interest, driving economic growth in this niche market.

Expansion into Rural Areas: With mobile operators thriving to expand their 4G coverage areas across the country, with better internet access now spreading to rural regions, there will be new opportunities for app development and usage, tapping into previously underserved markets.

All the above focus areas would continue to see significant 'app-enrichment' of capabilities for all industries allowing people to use their mobile phones more and more to initiate, and in many cases, complete transactions fully online, from within the app ecosystem itself, needing highest level of user-centric micro-segmentation features.

One of the most promising technologies driving this level of personalization is reinforcement learning (RL). This article explores how reinforcement learning AI models can significantly enhance the hyper-personalized app usage experience, transforming the way users interact with digital platforms.

Understanding Reinforcement Learning (RL)

Reinforcement learning is a subset of machine learning where the AI agents learn to make decisions by interacting with the environment they are exposed to. As opposed to traditional supervised learning methods in AI, where AI models learn from labeled data, RL focuses on learning through trial and error, receiving feedback in the form of rewards or penalties based on the actions taken. This unique approach enables RL models to adapt to dynamic environments, making them particularly effective in scenarios where user preferences evolve over time.

As indicated earlier in this article, in today's digital ecosystem, consumers are inundated with choices. Whether it's shopping, entertainment, or social networking, users often feel overwhelmed. Hyper-personalization aims to alleviate this dilemma by delivering content, services, recommendations, and/ or experiences tailored to individual user preferences. This enhances successful conversion rates for businesses making the customers also happier. The hyper-personalized interactions increase customer loyalty, future engagement and buying behavior, that ultimately drives revenue for businesses. According to some international research works, global reinforcement learning market was valued at $2.8 billion in 2022, and is projected to reach $88.7 billion by 2032, growing at a CAGR of 41.5%.

How Reinforcement Learning Enhances Hyper-Personalization

Dynamic User Profiles: One of the core components of hyper-personalization is understanding the user's sentiments. Reinforcement learning models can continuously learn from user interactions across different digital channels, adapting user profiles in real time. If a user frequently engages with content related to international traveling, the RL model can adjust its recommendations to prioritize similar topics. This adaptability contrasts with static models that rely on historical data and past trends only, often leading to outdated or irrelevant suggestions.

Contextual Awareness: Reinforcement learning can also enhance hyper-personalization by incorporating contextual information. For instance, RL models can consider as input parameters the time of day, location, and even the user's mood based on past interactions. By understanding the context in which a user is interacting with an app, RL models can provide recommendations that are not only personalized but also timely and relevant. For example, suggesting a relaxing playlist from the music app during stressful times or workout plans during peak motivation periods can significantly enhance user experience.

Reward-Based Learning: The reward mechanism inherent in reinforcement learning allows for a more nuanced understanding of user preferences. By implementing a system where users receive rewards for specific actions-like completing a task, engaging with content, or providing feedback-apps can gather data on what motivates users. This feedback loop helps refine the personalization algorithms, leading to increasingly relevant recommendations and a more engaging experience.

Approaching Multi-Armed Bandit Problem: Reinforcement learning models can be instrumental in solving the multi-armed bandit problem, where the objective is to find the optimal balance between exploration (trying new content) and exploitation (recommending familiar content). This capability is crucial for hyper-personalization as it allows apps to introduce users to new experiences while maintaining their known preferences. For example, a streaming service might suggest newly released contents based on a user's viewing history while also promoting trending content that aligns with their interest areas.

Adaptive Learning Over Time: User preferences in the digital world do not remain static; they evolve based on multiple factors like trends, seasons, and time. Reinforcement learning models are uniquely positioned to adapt to these shifts. By continuously learning from user interactions, these RL models can update their algorithms, ensuring that personalization efforts remain relevant. For instance, if a user starts engaging more with travel content at the beginning of the vacation season, the app can pivot to provide travel and accommodation related recommendations.

Segmentation and Clustering: While hyper-personalization focuses on individual user experiences, reinforcement learning can also help identify patterns across user segments. By clustering users based on similar behaviors, RL models can tailor experiences not only for individuals but also for groups with shared interests. This dual approach allows for broader personalization strategies while still maintaining the unique touch that hyper-personalization demands.

Real-Time Feedback Loop: Reinforcement learning thrives on real-time feedback, allowing apps to respond instantly to user actions. This immediacy can significantly enhance the user experience. For example, in a shopping app, if a user frequently skips certain categories, the app can adjust its recommendations almost in real-time, showcasing products more aligned with the user's changing preferences. This agility not only improves satisfaction but also reduces the likelihood of user frustration.

Challenges and Considerations

While the potential benefits of using reinforcement learning for hyper-personalization are significant, several challenges must be addressed:

Data Privacy: RL models need to continuously collect data for effective reinforcement learning. This sometimes raises privacy concerns as some data points could reveal sensitive information about the users' personal preferences. To mitigate this risk, users must be informed about how their data will be used, and a robust data protection measure must be put into effect.

Complexity of Implementation: Developing effective RL models requires significant expertise and computing resources. Organizations must invest in upskilling their human resources, in hiring experts from the industry and in technological infrastructure to harness the full potential of reinforcement learning.

Bias and Fairness: If there are biases in the training data for RL models, the models may inadvertently perpetuate these biases in the learning process, affecting outcome accuracy. Ensuring that personalization efforts are fair and equitable requires careful monitoring and quality assurance of training data.

User Trust: For hyper-personalization to be effective, consumers need to trust their app's recommendations. Building this trust requires transparency in how recommendations are generated by the RL models and a clear focus on delivering genuine value to the consumers.

Global References of Using RL in Similar Fields

E-commerce Platforms: Companies like Amazon, Taobao, eBay leverage RL models to personalize product recommendations based on user behavior. By continuously learning from shoppers' interactions, these platforms can suggest items that users are more likely to purchase, significantly increasing conversion rates.

Streaming Services: Netflix, Amazon Prime, Hulu use reinforcement learning to optimize their recommendation engines. By granularly analyzing user interactions, the platform tailors content suggestions, content placement in the screen and dynamically adjusting the content flow to improve user engagement and retention rates.

Social Media: Platforms like Facebook, X, Threads leverage RL to hyper-personalize news feeds. By understanding user preferences and interactions, these platforms can deliver content that matches with individual interests, enhancing user satisfaction.

Conclusion

For a digitally emerging country like Bangladesh, reinforcement learning holds immense potential in transforming the hyper-personalized app usage experience. By leveraging dynamic user profiles, contextual awareness, reward-based learning, and adaptive strategies, apps can provide customized experiences that will resonate deeply with individual mobile phone users in Bangladesh. While challenges such as data privacy, implementation complexity, and bias/ AI hallucination must be navigated, the benefits of enhanced user engagement, satisfaction, and loyalty are supreme. As we ride the next wave of technology transformation, the integration of reinforcement learning in hyper-personalized applications will give a boost to reshape the future of user interactions in the digital economy of Bangladesh.

A NEW ERA OF DIGITAL ECONOMY: THE CATALYST FOR A MORE PROSPEROUS, INCLUSIVE, AND RESILIENT BANGLADESH

Syed Mohammad Kamal
Country Manager
Mastercard

Bangladesh stands on the cusp of a new economic transformation, where the digital economy can serve as a pivotal force for societal advancement. As we look towards the future, it becomes clear that the integration of digital tools and infrastructure will reshape not only our economy but the very fabric of our society.

The dynamic demographic landscape offers opportunities for socioeconomic changes. With nearly half of the population under 25 and a growing middle class of over 34 million—more than one-fifth of the total population—there is significant potential for early adoption of new technologies, particularly digital services.

Over the past two decades, Bangladesh has made significant progress in building a robust digital landscape. From expanding internet access to implementing ICT policies and financial inclusion, these steps have paved the way for a more tech-savvy and digitally inclusive society. Key sectors such as payment, healthcare, education, and e-commerce have all benefitted from this transformation with seamless payment facilities through cards & mobile financial services (MFS) have revolutionized financial inclusion. Starting from cards acceptance in Bangladesh from early 90s, the interoperable processing facilities of cards has given an extra edge. The introduction of contactless cards has tremendously accelerated and streamlined the transaction process.

In August 2024, Bangladesh reached a significant milestone with over 140.50 million internet users. This connectivity is driving unprecedented changes in how we live, work, shop, travel and access services. The payments ecosystem, in particular, has benefited from this surge, with the adoption of digital-native tools increasing ease, access, and security for millions. With a youthful population that embraces digital lifestyle, cashless payments method, now is the time to capitalize on this momentum and pivot towards a more digitally driven society & future.

However, challenges remain. A July 2024 report revealed that Bangladesh scored just 62 out of 100 in the ICT Development Index, lagging behind the global average of 74.8. This score highlights gaps in connectivity, digital services, and governance, signaling that there is still much work to be done if we are to achieve excellence in our digital infrastructure that can contribute to the lives of millions.

Addressing these gaps is crucial as Bangladesh transitions into a new phase of leadership and innovation. The nation must prioritize investments in financial sector, spur innovation, enhance productivity, and create new jobs.

The Impact of Economic and Political Shifts

According to a latest study by Mastercard Economics Institution (MEI) recent political shifts have added complexity to the digital economy's evolution. Supply chain disruptions, labor dislocation, and inflation have impacted growth, but there is hope on the horizon. The pace at which the economy can return to normalcy will play a crucial role in shaping GDP growth for the remainder of the fiscal year. Inflation, which reached 11.7% year-on-year (y/y) in July 2024, has shown signs of easing, falling to 10.5% y/y in August & further decreased to 9.74% in September 2024. This decline follows an average inflation rate of 9.7% y/y over the 12 months ending in June 2024, signaling that while inflationary pressures remain, there is potential for further moderation if economic conditions stabilize.

World Bank has also reduced Bangladesh GDP growth to 4% level recently for 2024-25 fiscal year.

Despite these challenges, digital payments have shown resilience. Remittances, a vital source of foreign currency, have bounced back after a temporary decline, with $2.2 billion in August & $2.4 billion in September 2024. Encouraging more remittances through formal digital channels, rather than informal routes, could help stabilize the economy and boost nation's foreign reserves. The current 2.50% incentive on wage earners remittance through formal channel is making it more competitive & country is seeing a stable foreign exchange rate.

Closing the Digital Divide and Ensuring Inclusive Growth

One of Bangladesh's key challenges in its digital transformation is ensuring that no one is left behind. While digital tools are being rapidly adopted, a significant digital divide remains, particularly affecting women and rural populations. According to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, only 38% of women have access to the internet. In urban areas, more than 62% of people use the internet, compared to over 46% in rural areas. This gap threatens to leave a substantial portion of the population behind as the country moves toward a more digital future.

Small businesses, including micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs), play a critical role in the global economy, contributing up to 50% of global GDP. While CMSMEs account for 90% of industrial units and 80% of industrial employment in Bangladesh, contributing 45% to manufacturing value added. Despite experiencing an annual growth rate of approximately 6%, these enterprises only contribute 25% to the country's GDP, highlighting their potential for greater impact.

To enhance their contribution, access to formal financial tools must be improved. Policies aimed at making unbanked and underprivileged cottages and micro-enterprises bankable are essential. The national industrial policy or SME policy should provide subsidized services for formal & traceable financial transactions, utilities, road connectivity, and transportation to support these businesses.

The recent launch of the first-ever credit card for CMSMEs card by Mastercard can serve as a significant catalyst for societal change in the digital ecosystem. Mastercard's exclusive solutions, including special cards for women entrepreneurs, youth, and wallet-loading services, are effectively bridging the digital divide by enhancing access to financial services. Mastercard has also launched country's first Social Media card few years back, where social media women entrepreneurs have received their first financial tool, which is experiencing a shift from cash to digital.

This integration not only simplifies financial transactions but also encourages the adoption of modern financial tools, playing a vital role in the digital transformation of Bangladesh's economy.

A Unified Vision for Bangladesh's Digital Economy

To unlock the full potential of Bangladesh's digital economy, there must be a unified vision that fosters collaboration between government, industry, and international partners. Regulatory reforms that align with mass people's needs will create a more conducive environment for digital economy. Investments in infrastructure, such as high-speed internet and payment technologies, are necessary to drive sustained growth.

Regulatory challenges, such as mandatory tax return proof for credit card issuance and high taxes on payment cards and POS machines, hinder the growth of the digital payments ecosystem. By streamlining these processes, the government can remove barriers to participation and promote broader financial inclusion. Incentivizing the retail merchants and the users for digital transactions could also drive the adoption of digital payments, making it easier for merchants to embrace digital transactions.

Public-private partnerships are crucial in addressing these challenges. By combining the expertise and resources of both the public and private sectors, Bangladesh can build a more inclusive and sustainable digital infrastructure. Reliable financial systems, widespread internet connectivity, affordable access to devices, and education in digital and financial literacy are all vital to fostering a thriving digital economy.

As we move forward, by fostering innovation, enhancing digital payment capabilities, and ensuring financial inclusion, we believe that Bangladesh can position itself as a leader in the digital economy. Together, we can create a future where technology empowers every individual, every business, and every community in the country.

DIGITAL ECONOMY WITHOUT ROBUST FIBER OPTIC NETWORK IS WISHFUL THINKING

রবি

Niaz Mohammad Siddiqui
General Manager
Strategic Communications
Robi Axiata PLC

Digital Economy in so many ways represent Bangladesh 2.0. It represents a version of Bangladesh that is efficient, agile and ready to innovate. It represents the audacity of hope of millions of people for a resurgent Bangladesh. It is indeed where we find our vision and aspiration coming to reality.

Before we get lost in haze of dreams and aspirations, its always good to have a reality check to see where we stand today. If we look at the latest ICT Development Index published by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), we find that Bangladesh scored only 62 out of 100 in this key global digital index.

When you consider that the average score for lower middle-income countries is 64.8, you can tell how bad our situation is even among our global peers, let alone the advanced nations. The global average score in the ITU ranking is 74.8.

Bangladesh performed well in mobile network coverage (3G and 4G) and has surpassed the average index for lower middle-income countries in mobile internet traffic subscription. However, it is still lagging behind in the Asia-Pacific region. The internet usage rate among individuals in Bangladesh is 38.9 percent, and 38.1 percent of households have internet access.

As you can imagine, there are many components of Digital Economy. But in this piece, I will be focusing on the fiber optic cable based digital infrastructure which is known as the backbone of the digital economy.

Back in 2009, the then Government had introduced a license named National Telecommunication Transmission Network (NTTN). Two private companies were given this license to build fiber optic cable network around the country. Afterwards the mobile operators were not only barred from laying fibre, the NTTN operators decided to stop leasing us the dark core fibre in the fibre cable they laid.

Instead, the NTTN operators offered the mobile operators only bandwidth, which by no means was cost effective. In fact, without access to dark fiber, the mobile telecom operators can't design a robust fiber backbone which is critical to realizing a full-fledged digital economy.

It is important to acknowledge that the mobile operators happen to be the most consequential player in creating the network infrastructure for a robust digital economy. So when we drying them up in terms of unviable access to this vital resource, the digital economy naturally ends up limping forward at best.

Even the limited access mobile operators had to the fiber could not be utilized optimally, as they were barred from importing DWDM equipment. This equipment would have allowed the mobile operators to design network to the best of their requirements ensuring optimum level of service at the user end.

Let's now see where we stand in terms of the amount of fibre optic cable that has been rolled out in Bangladesh, and its quality. According to BTRC's June 2023 Annual Report, Bangladesh has 80,600 km overhead (approx.) and 72,800 km underground fibre optic cable. In other words, 53% of the country's available fibre optic cables are unsuitable for providing quality data service in 4G technology.
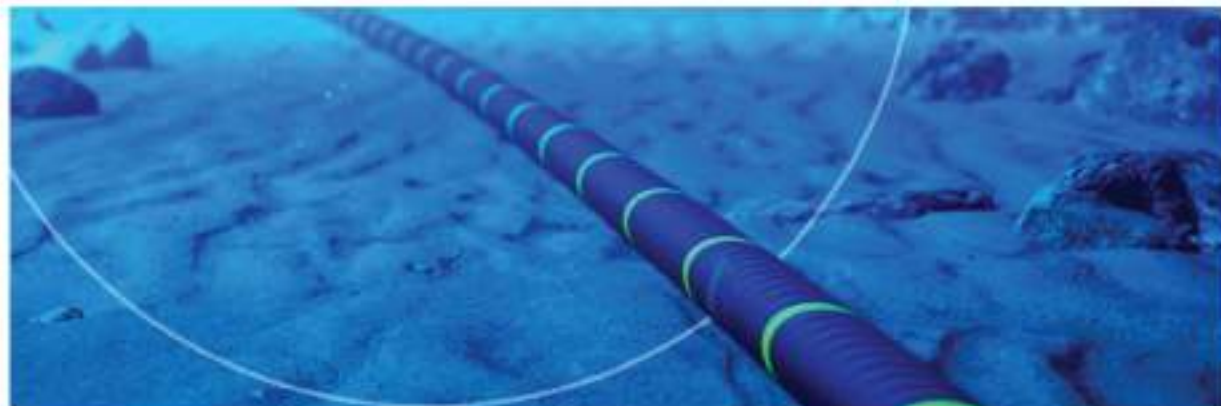
So, in 15 years, the country has created an extremely weak transmission network with almost half of it unsuitable for the technological demands of the telecom sector. Just contrast that with India, you will find that only in the nine months leading up to June'23, they rolled out 9,13,950 km. In total, optical fiber rolled out as of June'23 was a mammoth- 37,26,577 km in India.

Mobile operators in India had a huge role in this astounding level of fibre roll-out. We also see similar pattern in Malaysia and Sri Lanka. Whereas, in our own global benchmarking study, we are yet to find any country other than Bangladesh where the mobile operators are barred from laying their own fibre network.

The real irony is that when we have such poor roll-out of fiber cable, rather than making the most of the available fiber, we have kept more than 19,500 km fibre (Up to Union level) off limits for the mobile operators. This massive infrastructure was funded by the Government under the Info Sarkar project-3 at the cost of 2,141 crore taka.

What we need is to open up the transmission network market to the mobile operators along with anyone who has the credential and the ability to invest and deliver what we need. The more competition we can create in this segment, the better served the nation and our customers will be, as it will help us to bring down cost of data services for our customers.

When more than 90% of internet users use mobile phone to connect to internet, we can't have a meaningful digital economy till we fix it's backbone- the fiber optic based digital infrastructure across the length and breadth of the country.

CHEVRON BANGLADESH PRESIDENT AND MANAGING DIRECTOR MEETS H. E. DR. MUHAMMAD YUNUS, CHIEF ADVISOR OF INTERIM GOVERNMENT OF BANGLADESH

In late September, the U.S.-Bangladesh Business Council (USBBC) hosted a landmark industry roundtable in New York, featuring H.E. Dr. Muhammad Yunus, Chief Advisor of the Interim Government of Bangladesh. The event, attended by key advisors and U.S. officials including Ambassador Geoff Pyatt, marked the first major engagement with the Interim Government. Over forty executives from diverse American sectors participated in this significant meeting.

Chevron Bangladesh, the top U.S. investor in Bangladesh, has been a cornerstone of the country's economic growth for nearly 30 years. Representing Chevron Bangladesh at the roundtable was Mr. Eric M. Walker, President and Managing Director, who also serves as a board member of USBBC. Dr. Yunus emphasized the robust U.S.-Bangladesh partnership and welcomed collaboration aimed at enhancing Bangladesh's business environment and supporting U.S. supply chain diversification across the Indo-Pacific region.

As the largest producer of natural gas and condensate in Bangladesh, Chevron's contributions are crucial to the nation's energy security and economic stability. For nearly 30 years, Chevron Bangladesh has played a pivotal role in the energy sector, powering the country's economic growth.

EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES & PROMOTING SUSTAINABILITY - DHL'S GLOBAL VOLUNTEER DAY AND FLOOD RELIEF INITIATIVES

On October 24, 2022, DHL Express and DHL Global Forwarding in collaboration with Teach for Bangladesh (TFB) organized an inspiring event at Dumni Government Primary School as part of the Global Volunteer Day initiative. The program, centered on climate awareness and career pathways for students, brought together a diverse group of participants including students, TFB staff and fellows, and volunteers from DHL Express and DHL Global Forwarding.

Collaborative Learning and Environmental Discussions

The event began with a warm greeting session where the head teacher and TFB fellows were introduced to the volunteers. Following the introductions, volunteers and students were grouped to foster intimate discussions on environmental awareness. Each group, comprising students and representatives from TFB, DHL Express, and DHL Global Forwarding, discussed important topics such as cleanliness, pollution, and resource optimization. Volunteers shared valuable insights on the importance of recycling and minimizing waste, while students were encouraged to ask questions about their future career paths, fostering an enriching learning experience.

In a hands-on activity, the groups participated in tree planting, symbolizing a commitment to environmental steward-ship. Trees were planted around the school premises, with each group contributing to the greening of their environ-ment, reinforcing the day's lessons on sustainability. In the closing remarks, speakers from TFB and DHL shared inspiring stories and reiterated the importance of sustainability and community engagement.

Extending Support to Flood-Stricken Communities

In addition to the activities at Dumni Government Primary School, DHL Global Forwarding Bangladesh extended its support to flood-stricken areas amidst the unfortunate flooding situation in Bangladesh. Responding to the call from our employees, we collectively decided to contribute one day's salary voluntarily. The cumulative fund, along with the organization's contribution, was donated to the "Chief Advisor's Relief & Welfare Fund." This initiative demonstrated our commitment to supporting the communities we serve, showcasing the spirit of solidarity and compassion within DHL Group.

The Importance of Sustainable Growth

Sustainable growth is integral to DHL Group's mission. By incorporating sustainability into our operations and commu-nity initiatives, we aim to create lasting positive impacts. Through activities like tree planting and environmental educa-tion, we empower the next generation to care for their environment. Our commitment to humanitarian efforts, such as supporting flood-stricken areas, underscores our dedication to community resilience. These actions reflect our belief that fostering a sustainable future benefits both society and the planet.

by DHL Global Forwarding

EDOTCO

RESTORING CONNECTIVITY IN FENI AMIDST FLOOD: EDOTCO'S ROLE
IN DISASTER RESPONSE

Bangladesh is one of the most vulnerable countries to the effects of global warming. A recent study by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) highlights that natural disasters have significantly impacted the telecom sector in Bangladesh, with more than 30% of telecom infrastructure affected annually by cyclones, floods, and other natural calamities over the past five years. The frequency of these disasters has increased by 25% since 2010, causing widespread disruption to network services across the country.

The rising occurrence of such disasters present a growing challenge for mobile operators and tower companies like EDOTCO. These disasters lead to prolonged outages, damage to equipment, and significant economic losses, underscoring the crucial role of tower companies in maintaining uninterrupted connectivity, especially in times of crisis.

The Feni Flood: A Case Study on EDOTCO's Response to Network Recovery During Disaster

The recent flood in Feni exemplified the severity of the natural disasters that Bangladesh has faced in recent decades. Triggered by heavy rainfall and water releases from India, the flood caused widespread damage, displacing thousands of families and severely impacting property, crops, and infrastructure. Floodwaters damaged power lines, causing extended blackouts in many areas, with the flood lasting over 15 consecutive days.

According to Bangladesh Telecommunications Regulatory Commission (BTRC) report, over 4500 site were completely inoperable due to power outage in the first 72 hours. In Feni, 92% of mobile towers were out of service from August 23, 2024 due to excessive flooding. The BTRC also reported that 1,235 mobile towers in 10 flood-affected districts - including Noakhali, Lakshmipur, Cumilla, Brahmanbaria, Chattogram, Khagrachhari, Habiganj, Moulvibazar, and Sylhet - were rendered non-operational.

Despite these challenges, EDOTCO's Operations team swiftly responded to minimize the equipment damage and restore connectivity. The team conducted rapid site mapping and deployed resources on a priority basis, continuously monitoring the flood situation. The flood affected 1,148 tower sites across seven zones, with most sites losing network connectivity due to power outages. Nevertheless, EDOTCO maintained operations at 270 sites using diesel generators (DGs) and supported an additional 290 sites with portable generators (PGs). The company deployed 14 trucks, 29 tractors, 115 boats, and 93 vans to ensure power supply in the affected areas. Within ten days, EDOTCO had successfully recovered all the sites, and restoring network connectivity. In addition to its restoration efforts, EDOTCO's field teams collaborated with the Bangladesh Army, local authorities, and relief organizations.

Setting Industry Benchmark for Excellence

EDOTCO Bangladesh has established itself as a leader in disaster response by taking proactive measures to protect people and infrastructure. When disaster strikes, the company's network infrastructure management team immediately mobilizes to minimize damage and ensure uninterrupted service.

The EDOTCO team operates a 24/7 centralized war room to monitor situation in real-time. Expert technicians and engineers are strategically deployed with suitable equipment, and cell sites are equipped with automated alarm systems that detect power loss or connectivity disruptions. This real-time tracking enables the team to address issues promptly.

Most connectivity issues during natural disasters arise from power outages. EDOTCO's war room closely monitors alarms and dispatches field teams to resolve issues quickly, working in coordination with power companies to repair downed lines and clear debris. After the Feni floodwaters receded, EDOTCO engineers deployed portable generators to key locations, repaired existing generators, and monitored alarm systems to address any remaining connectivity issues.

Collaboration and Government Support in Restoring Network Connectivity

In any national emergency, network connectivity is paramount. It supports rescue operations, facilitates relief efforts, and enables critical communication between government authorities and first responders. Recognizing this, Bangladesh has designated telecom services as an essential service, requiring close collaboration between network infrastructure companies, government agencies, and NGOs.

To ensure swift disaster recovery, the Ministry of Disaster Management should integrate telecom networks into recovery plans, facilitating seamless cooperation between power authorities and telecom operators. The Bangladesh Rural Electrification Board (BREB) must prioritize grid restoration within four to six hours to stabilize the country's communication systems during emergencies.

The flood in Feni highlighted EDOTCO's operational strength, robust skill set, and leadership in disaster management. It also underscored the importance of addressing gaps in emergency readiness. As Bangladesh continues to face the growing impacts of climate change, EDOTCO remains committed to strengthening its infrastructure and ensuring reliable connectivity during natural disasters, setting an example for the entire industry.

BUET'S CIVIL ENGINEERING DEPARTMENT INDUSTRIAL VISIT TO SCCBD

Siam City Cement (Bangladesh) Limited, commonly recognized as INSEE Cement, is a leading company renowned for producing premium-quality cement esteemed for its strength, durability, and commitment to sustainability. The company supplies cement to both large-scale infrastructure projects and individual construction endeavors, with a focus on promoting green infrastructure and contributing to Bangladesh's rapid urbanization and industrialization.

BUET's (Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology) students of Civil Engineering Department had the opportunity to visit INSEE Cement's Narayanganj factory. This educational field trip provided 20 students and 4 faculty members with an insightful, firsthand experience of advanced cement production processes and sustainable construction practices.

During this industrial visit, INSEE Cement Bangladesh hosted interactive sessions that covered an overview of the cement plant, Environmental, Health, and Safety (EHS) demonstrations, and an in-depth look into the manufacturing process, cement technology, and product excellence. Additionally, the sessions included discussions on logistics and supply chain management, providing students with a comprehensive understanding of the operations. A key topic of discussion during the visit was INSEE Cement's commitment to reducing CO2 emissions through its innovative products and processes. As the only company worldwide with Environmental Product Declaration (EPD) certification for all its products, INSEE Cement emphasized its dedication to green construction, minimizing its carbon footprint, and ensuring a sustainable future. This focus on sustainability is integrated across the company's operations and distribution channels, underscoring its leadership in environmentally responsible practices.

The field trip was supervised by General Managers and other senior officials of the INSEE Cement plant, who shared their expertise and insights. This experience effectively bridged the gap between classroom theory and real-world applications, allowing students to gain valuable practical knowledge in sustainable construction and industry innovations. The visit further solidified INSEE Cement's commitment to fostering future leaders in the construction and engineering sectors.

LafargeHolcim

LAFARGEHOLCIM BANGLADESH TRIUMPHS WITH TWO PRESTIGIOUS NATIONAL AWARD

LafargeHolcim Bangladesh PLC. (the Company) has won two prestigious national awards for Corporate Governance Excellence and Best Presented Annual Report from Institute of Chartered Secretaries of Bangladesh (ICSB) and Institute of Chartered Accountants of Bangladesh (ICAB) respectively.

The Company has been honored with the prestigious 'Gold' Award, the top recognition in the Manufacturing Sector category, at the 11th Institute of Chartered Secretaries of Bangladesh (ICSB) National Award. This accolade highlights the Company's exceptional corporate governance practices, transparency, and accountability in overall management. Mr. Kazi Mizanur Rahman, Director Strategic Projects & Company Secretary and Mr. Md. Abul Kalam Azad, DGM - Company Secretariat received the award.

The Company has been awarded the Certificate of Merit under the Manufacturing Sector category at the 24th Institute of Chartered Accountants of Bangladesh (ICAB) National Award for Best Presented Annual Reports in 2023. Mr. Md. Anisuzzaman, Chief Financial Officer of the Company, received the award. This prestigious recognition highlights our commitment to excellence in financial reporting and corporate transparency.

Dr. Salehuddin Ahmed, Hon'ble Finance and Commerce Adviser was present as the chief guest at both the award giving ceremonies.

Nestlé.
Good food, Good life®

THE 'FORCE FOR GOOD' STORY FROM NESTLÉ

SAJIDA FOUNDATION

Nestlé
Good food, Good life

বন্যার্তদের পাশে আমরা

NESTLÉ BANGLADESH JOINS SAJIDA FOUNDATION
TO STAND BESIDE FLOOD-AFFECTED COMMUNITY

Community Engagement: 'Force for Good' - Nestlé's unwavering commitment, was strongly felt in the face of the devastating floods in Bangladesh. Nestlé Bangladesh, as a Call of Duty, partnered with SAJIDA Foundation, a non-profit organization, to distribute essential food relief to over 10,000 flood-affected families in flood affected region.

In a remarkable show of solidarity, the employees contributed one day's gross salary to aid the distressed and marooned individuals, while the Company matched the amount to double the support. This extraordinary display of unity and compassion reflects the resilience of the people during this challenging time.

The partnership with SAJIDA Foundation speaks volumes about Nestlé's commitment to being a 'Force for Good' in natural disasters, making a meaningful impact on affected communities.

Sustainability Journey: In the journey towards 'Net Zero', plastic management has always been a challenge, especially in Bangladesh due to the lack of infrastructure and circular economy. Nestlé is addressing this by innovating and opting for practical solutions for sustainable packaging. They aim to achieve 100% recyclable and reusable packaging by 2027, while also reducing the use of virgin plastic.

To achieve plastic neutrality and create an inner ecosystem, Nestlé now collects its own packets from kiosks, which are mini outlets offering coffee, noodles, soup, and cereals. These collected packets will be recycled into tiles and souvenirs by a renowned recycler. This project will soon expand to retail outlets and superstores.

NESCAFÉ 1gm Regional Packaging
FCB Bitopi

NESCAFÉ 1gm Regional Packaging
FCB Bitopi

Recognition: The packaging innovation of NESCAFÉ's 1 gm limited edition showcases the regional highlights of Dhaka, Chattogram, Rajshahi, and other areas. This demonstrates the brand's commitment to both its heritage and modernity. By incorporating these regional elements into the packaging, NESCAFÉ aims to connect with consumers on a local level and create a sense of familiarity and pride. Nestlé is thrilled to announce that NESCAFÉ has received two "Commwards" at the Communication Summit 2024, organized by Bangladesh Brand Forum.

FCB Bitopi, the agency responsible for implementing limited edition NESCAFÉ's 1 gm packaging, has been awarded the GOLD award in the Packaging category and the BRONZE award in the Efficacy category. The packaging beautifully showcases the regional essence of Bangladesh, celebrating its unique flavors and cultural heritage.

This achievement is a celebration of the incredible journey our team has embarked on to connect with consumers and make a positive impact in their lives.

standard
chartered

STANDARD CHARTERED AND UCEP BANGLADESH CREATES EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR OVER 1000 YOUTHS IN GAZIPUR

The Giving Wings to Dreams for Youth Empowerment Programme, a collaborative project between Standard Chartered and UCEP Bangladesh recently crossed the milestone of securing employment for over 1000 youths.

Kicking off in June, 2023, the initiative is providing skills training, mid-level management, and entrepreneurship development opportunities to participants through various training programmes. Over a duration of two years, the projects will serve a total of 2,000 beneficiaries. As of September, 2024, the project has secured self or wage employment for 1146 beneficiaries. This represents 73% of target, exceeding the scheduled target for the period, ahead of project completion in 2025. The project was launched under Futuremakers by Standard Chartered, the Bank's flagship global community initiative.

Bitopi Das Chowdhury, Head, Corporate Affairs, Brand & Marketing, Standard Chartered Bangladesh, said, 'This milestone is a testament to the incredible potential of Bangladesh's youth. As we continue working towards building sustainable prosperity, the need for equal economic opportunities remains pressing. The skill-development programmes, cocreated in consultation with the public and private sectors, will not only prepare the youth for gainful employment, they will also increase the supply of skilled workforce for the industries of Gazipur, a key industrial hub. We are proud to work with UCEP Bangladesh in providing thousands of youth with the skills they need to build a brighter future for themselves and their communities."

The project is providing classroom and workplace-based training in electrical installation and maintenance; welding; sewing machine operation; apparel screen printing; tailoring and dress making; and beauty care. The initiative also offers a Workplace Wellbeing Management course to sensitize participants on physical and mental wellbeing and ensure sexual & reproductive health and rights are supported. After completing trade-specific trainings, high-potential trainees also receive Entrepreneurship Development Training. The project prioritises inclusivity with a target of 50% female representation and 2% representation of persons with disabilities among the beneficiaries. Graduates provided employment support, with around 1100 securing self or wage employment till date.

With over 119 years of commitment to Bangladesh's growth, Standard Chartered continues to champion initiatives that promote sustainable development in the communities the Bank calls home. Standard Chartered remains dedicated to investing in communities, supporting services, and creating new opportunities for stakeholders, all while fostering inclusive and sustainable growth in Bangladesh.

UNILEVER BANGLADESH AND GAIN WORKING TO TRANSFORM DHAKA'S WET MARKETS

Plastic pollution is a global crisis, with over 450 million tonnes produced annually, approximately 50% of which is single-use plastic, including plastic bags, straws, stirrers, and takeout clamshells. Only 9% of this plastic is recycled. Bangladesh like many other nations, is grappling with the challenge of plastic waste, particularly in the urban centres. Unfortunately, plastic waste management, especially urban plastic waste management in Bangladesh has yet to reach a uniform standard. Wet markets in Dhaka, where fresh produce, meat, and fish are sold to approximately 85% of the households, are particularly vulnerable to plastic pollution, as large amounts of plastic waste are generated from polyethene to disposable bags.

Unilever Bangladesh Limited (UBL), in collaboration with the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN), initiated a 4-month-long campaign in 4 of Dhaka's wet markets: Mohammadpur Town Hall Fresh Market, Mohakhali Fresh Market, Bonolota Fresh Market, and Islambagh Fresh Market. The primary objective of this campaign was to create a sustainable, clean, and plastic waste-free environment by enhancing waste management infrastructure, promoting recycling, and reducing plastic pollution through stakeholder awareness and community engagement, ensuring environmental protection and enhancing food safety.

Under this project, **250 market vendors** were trained in waste segregation, personal health hygiene, safe food handling, and financial literacy, empowering them to adopt sustainable practices, and **190 bins** were placed across the markets, resulting in a **30% improvement** in waste segregation. Daily segregation of collected plastic waste, which was then sold to recyclers, was documented and reported monthly, totalling **2,603.61 kg** of plastic waste collected. One of the key components of the campaign was to encourage consumers to use environment-friendly alternative and reusable bags. Further campaigns on World Environment Day and World Food Safety Day raised awareness about plastic pollution, reaching over **48,000 consumers** through surveys, quizzes, and the distribution of eco-friendly corn starch bags for purchases over 500 Taka.

At the end of the campaign, the respective wet market vendors are continuing to segregate waste, and reduce the use of polythene bags, while consumers are bringing reusable bags from home. Waste is now disposed of in designated bins rather than being littered, resulting in noticeably cleaner market surroundings.

Tackling plastic pollution is a shared responsibility that hinges on raising awareness, fostering collaboration, and driving innovation. This campaign has demonstrated that when stakeholders and value chain actors are well-informed, positive behaviour change is not only possible but sustainable. The continued adherence to better practices by sellers and buyers post-campaign underscores the critical role of awareness. This model's success highlights its potential for adaptation and replication in other markets, with effective partnership and collaboration among all stakeholders. Equipped with the learnings of this campaign, we are determined to continue our efforts in creating a sustainable future for Bangladesh.

FICCI Luncheon Meeting on
"Sustainable Energy for Bangladesh" Addresses Urgent Energy Challenges

The Foreign Investors' Chamber of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) hosted Luncheon Meeting on 20th October 2024 at The Pan Pacific Sonargaon Dhaka, focusing on the critical theme of "Sustainable Energy for Bangladesh." The event gathered industry leaders, policymakers, and academics to discuss pressing challenges and potential solutions for the country's energy sector.

The meeting featured a distinguished lineup of speakers, including Chief Guest Muhammad Fouzul Kabir Khan, adviser for the Ministry of Power, Energy and Mineral Resources. In his address, Khan emphasized the government's commitment to fostering a sustainable energy future for Bangladesh, highlighting ongoing initiatives to enhance energy efficiency and diversify energy sources.

The keynote address was delivered by Dr. Ijaz Hossain, former Dean of the Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET) and a prominent professor in the Department of Chemical Engineering. Dr. Ijaz Hossain presented a detailed analysis of Bangladesh's energy landscape, noting significant shifts in energy consumption patterns. He pointed out that, as of 2022-23, the industrial sector's consumption of grid electricity was only half that of the domestic sector, a stark contrast to 2010 when both sectors consumed similar amounts. This change, he noted, is largely due to the expansion of rural electrification.

Dr. Hossain also addressed the urgent need to maintain natural gas production levels, warning that without the drilling of at least ten new wells annually, the country may face increased reliance on imported LNG. He forecasted that gas demand could reach 4,622 MMcfd by 2030, posing a significant challenge to Petrobangla's capacity to supply.

Nowshad Ali, Country Manager of GE Vernova Bangladesh, served as the moderator, guiding the discussions and facilitating a dynamic exchange of ideas among panelists and attendees. Among the panelists, Dr. Badrul Imam, an Honorary Professor at the University of Dhaka, discussed the geological implications of energy sourcing, while Dr. M. Rezwan Khan, former Vice-Chancellor and Professor Emeritus at United International University, examined the role of renewable energy in achieving sustainability. Mollah Amzad Hossain, Editor of Energy & Power Magazine, provided insights into media coverage and public awareness of energy issues.

The discussions highlighted several critical recommendations, including the necessity for improved regasification terminals, accelerated exploration for natural gas, and a diversified energy portfolio that incorporates coal and renewable sources. Dr. Hossain urged the government to enhance competition in the transport sector by allowing various fuel options and stressed the importance of monitoring gas misuse to ensure efficient resource management.

As the meeting concluded, participants expressed optimism about collaborative efforts between the government and private sectors in addressing Bangladesh's energy challenges. The event underscored the urgency of transitioning to a sustainable energy framework that can support the country's growth while safeguarding environmental and economic interests.

The FICCI luncheon meeting served as a vital platform for dialogue on sustainable energy strategies, bringing together influential voices dedicated to shaping a resilient energy future for Bangladesh.

Among other dignitaries a good number of representatives of stakeholders, Diplomates, High officials of FICCI member companies, FICCI Board of Directors and Advisors attended the meeting.

Workshop on Responsible Business Conduct in Supply Chains Initiative by ILO and FICCI

On October 24, 2024, the ILO and FICCI jointly hosted a workshop at The Westin Dhaka focused on responsible business conduct in supply chains. This initiative by ILO Dhaka aims to foster a culture of best practices and create enabling environments for businesses across various industries.

The workshop saw participation from relevant FICCI member companies, which shared their best practices amid an evolving global business landscape where mandatory due diligence legislation is increasingly prioritized. In Bangladesh, where trade and investment drive employment and sustainable economic growth, promoting responsible business practices is vital for maintaining access to global markets and enhancing trade competitiveness, especially as the country approaches its graduation from Least Developed Country status.

Key areas of focus during the workshop included Stakeholder Collaboration and Policy Alignment, Industry Platforms and Capacity Building, as well as Sectoral Guidelines, Studies, and Tools. The main objectives were to create a platform for FICCI members to exchange good practices in responsible business conduct, identify gaps and support needs in industry capacity building, and pinpoint areas where sectoral guidance could have the most significant impact.

Participants engaged in meaningful discussions, sharing their insights and expertise, which made the session highly interactive and productive.

FICCI Board Meeting

The Chamber's 10th Monthly Board Meeting took place on October 27, 2024, at the HSBC Bangladesh Management Office in Tejgaon, Dhaka. Presided over by President Mr. Zaved Akhtar, the meeting brought together the Board of Directors to discuss key initiatives and strategies for the chamber's growth.

Committee Meeting

The FICCI Tariff, Taxation, and Regulatory Affairs Committee held a session on Customs on October 2, 2024, at the LafargeHolcim Bangladesh Limited office. Several C&F agents attended, providing practical insights.

NEW MEMBER ENROLLMENT IN FICCI

EFL Global

EFL Global, a leading supply chain and logistics solutions provider, has become a member of FICCI. EFL Global offers a comprehensive global service menu that includes transportation, warehousing and distribution, customs brokerage and compliance, and more. With over 3,000 employees across 39 countries, EFL Global is dedicated to simplifying logistics for businesses through flexible, transparent, and future-ready solutions.

GAB Limited, a wholly Canadian-owned company specializing in ready-made garments and textiles manufacturing, is a key subsidiary of Gildan. The company began its operations in Bangladesh in 2019, establishing a manufacturing facility in Baipail, on the outskirts of Dhaka, where it produces T-shirts. The apparel manufactured by GAB Limited is branded under Gildan Activewear. Gildan is a leading apparel manufacturer with a diverse portfolio that includes brands like Gildan®, American Apparel®, Comfort Colors®, GOLDTOE®, and others. With over three decades of global manufacturing expertise, Gildan is recognized as one of the world's most efficient, ethical, and sustainable apparel manufacturers. Founded in Canada, Gildan operates approximately 30 locations worldwide and sells its products in over 60 markets globally.

GAB Limited

Green Delta Dragon Asset Management Company Limited

Green Delta Dragon, a joint-venture asset manager founded by Green Delta Insurance Company Ltd (GDIC), Dragon Capital Management (HK) Ltd., and Equinox Dhaka Ltd., has become a new member of FICCI. GDIC is the largest general insurance company in Bangladesh, covering over BDT 3.5 trillion (US$ 30 billion) in insured assets. Dragon Capital is Vietnam's largest and longest-established asset management group with over US$ 5 billion in assets under management. Equinox brings expertise from some of Bangladesh's most dynamic finance professionals. Notably, Green Delta Dragon is the only ESG-compliant asset manager in Bangladesh and has recently launched the first Foreign Sponsored Mutual Fund in the country.

Puls Trading Far East Limited has joined FICCI as a new member. Puls Trading Far East Limited (Bangladesh liaison office), is the representative office of worldwide H&M Hennes & Mauritz AB, Sweden. H&M was founded in Sweden in 1947 and its business idea is to offer fashion and quality at the best price in a sustainable way. In addition to H&M, the group includes the brands COS, Monki, Weekday, & Other Stories, H&M HOME, ARKET and Afound as well as Sellpy. Today, H&M Group has more than 4,000 stores in 77 markets worldwide with online sales in 60 markets. Bangladesh is one of the largest production markets for H&M, where the group has its own production liaison office for more than four decades. Today, H&M is one of the largest buyers in Bangladesh, the group buys ready made garments from more than 200 factories where the group actively works together with partners on social & environmental commitments.

H&M Group

Puls Trading Far East Limited

RSGT Bangladesh Limited

RSGT Bangladesh Limited, a subsidiary of Red Sea Gateway Terminal International (RSGTI), the global affiliate and investment arm of Jeddah-based Red Sea Gateway Terminal, has joined FICCI. With a 22-year concession to operate the Patenga Container Terminal at RSGT Chittagong Port, RSGT Bangladesh is set to bring world-class efficiency, expertise, and technology to Bangladesh's primary gateway port. The newly-built Patenga Container Terminal (PCT) at Chattogram port officially commenced operations this year under the management of Saudi operator RSGT Bangladesh, marking a significant milestone as the first instance of a foreign firm managing a port terminal in the country.

Talisman Limited, a 100% British-invested company in the Ready-made Garments & Textiles Manufacturing sector, has enrolled with FICCI. This reputable apparel manufacturer focuses on people, planet, and quality. As an enterprise of the FCI Group, Talisman has become a specialist in formalwear manufacturing. The company primarily focuses on men's and women's wear, specializing in premium garment manufacturing ranging from high-quality basics to precision tailoring for some of the world's greatest brands.

Talisman Limited

Moinul Islam elected as Managing Director of TRMBL

S. M. Moinul Islam
Managing Director
Tyser Risk Management Bangladesh Limited

Mr. S. M. Moinul Islam has an impressive 29 years of experience in the insurance industry. He joined Tyser Group Services Limited - Dhaka Liaison Office (TGSL-DLO) in August 2007 as a Local Representative. Prior to this, he served as Assistant General Manager at Bangladesh Shipping Corporation (BSC) for 13 years. On April 1, 2017, Mr. Moinul Islam was appointed Country Manager of TGSL-DLO. A year later, on April 1, 2018, he joined the Board of Directors of Tyser Risk Management Bangladesh Limited (TRMBL) as a Director.

Most recently, on January 23, 2024, he was elected Managing Director of TRMBL. With his extensive expertise in the insurance sector, Mr. Moinul Islam continues to play a pivotal role in expanding TRMBL's client base and enhancing support for existing clients.

Commercial Bank of Ceylon PLC Bangladesh Operations
OFFSHORE BANKING SERVICES

As an offshore banking client, you will benefit from the following exclusive services:

- ✅ Convenient online banking facilities.
- ✅ 24/7 access to our dedicated call center services.
- ✅ A comprehensive range of financial products tailored to your needs.
- ✅ Competitive interest rates are designed to enhance your returns.
- ✅ Personalized support from dedicated relationship managers to assist you in achieving your financial goals.

Enjoy a seamless banking experience with our premium offshore services.

◁ID▷ COMMERCIAL BANK

📞 16734   🌐 https://www.combank.net.bd/

PROUD PARTNER IN
BANGLADESH'S PROGRESS

OUR BRANDS ARE A FORCE FOR **POSITIVE CHANGE**

Unilever

touching **millions** *through* **bKash**

Pivotal role in women empowerment
Women from households using bKash earn 86%[1] more comparing to non-bKash using families. In terms of ownership of financial assets, 'bKash using women' are 20%[2] ahead of non-bKash users.

Parity in financial services
About 44%[3] of the bKash users are women.

Awareness in education and healthcare
Households using bKash are more conscious about education and healthcare, thus spend more in these areas.

Enabling families to increase income
Per capita income of families using bKash is 5.8%[4] higher than non-bKash users. They are also more efficient in tackling disaster-induced situation.

*According to BIDS study on "Impact of Mobile Financial Services in Bangladesh - The Case of bKash"

Source: [1 & 2: Page 104]; [3: Page 71]; [4: Page: 109]

bKash

grameenphone

1st Time in Bangladesh
LIMITLESS
Internet

Scan to try

Visit: grameenphone.com