

**Statement by the Head of the Delegation of Bangladesh (Secretary,
Ministry of Post and Telecommunications) to the Plenipotentiary
Conference of the International Telecommunications Union,
Marrakesh, Morocco, 23 Sept-18 Oct.2002.**

Mr. Chairman,
Honourable Ministers
Excellencies
Distinguished Delegates
Ladies and Gentlemen

I feel honoured and privileged to have been given the opportunity to address this august gathering of telecommunications professionals and policy makers from all over the world. May I, On behalf of the Government and the people of the People's Republic of Bangladesh express our gratitude and thanks to the Royal Government of Morocco for hosting the ITU Plenipotentiary Conference (2002) and for the hospitalities extended to my delegation in the beautiful city of Marrakesh.

I would like to join others in congratulating you Mr. Chairman along with other elected officials for your illustrious appointments and to pledge our sincere co-operation for effecting a successful conclusion of the Conference.

Like other developing countries, Bangladesh has realized that the convergence of the media and the Information Technology with Telecommunications has become a reality. We also believe that the converged technologies have the potential of reducing the observed imbalances between developing and developed countries as well as between urban and rural areas. If not properly looked into, these could however eventually increase the existing information gap between the developed and developing nations. We

therefore, look up to the ITU to provide the required leadership for addressing the ensuing problem with a view to finding a lasting solution. The Union should live up to its mandate of keeping its members and the general telecommunication community informed of advances in the field of telecommunications and their application in solving problems, particularly in the developing countries. It is our desire that this conference should strive towards narrowing the gap between the developed and the developing countries and bridging the digital divide by adopting appropriate policies and strategic plans for equitable development of telecommunications globally.

With the present rapidly changing telecommunications environment and global economy characterized by liberalization, privatization and competition in the provision of services, Bangladesh has adopted a policy of gradual liberalization in the telecommunications industry. To this end, Government of Bangladesh has taken various steps towards increased competition and efficiency. With this in view, National Telecom Policy was adopted in 1998 with the objective of providing universal access to telecommunication facilities for all strata of population – the rich and the poor, the privileged and the under-privileged, the urban and the rural. Various value added services like Cellular Mobile Telephone, Radio Paging, Radio Trunking, Internet and VSAT services have since long been opened up for the private sector. Basic telecommunication services too have already been opened up for the private sector in rural areas and urban areas as well will very soon have the same scenario. Given the prevalence of multi-operator environment, Bangladesh Telecom Regulatory Commission has been established with a view to offering level playing field to all operators – public and private, while protecting at the same time consumers' interest.

Bangladesh has a vision for development of telecommunication facilities and the use of such facilities for rapid dissemination of ICT amongst its people by 2005. As a part of this vision, the Government has an ambitious plan with a fixed target, by 2005, (a) to increase tele-density from the current 1% to 3% plus (b) to bring the entire population of Bangladesh under tele-access (c) to develop communication infrastructure i.e., telecom transmission facilities for voice and data communication, and (d) to make the tools of access to communication infrastructure like telephones (including mobile phones) and Internet easily and quickly available to the people of Bangladesh. To achieve this goal, the number of telephones in the country (fixed plus mobile) would be increased from the present 1.507 million to 5.0 (five) million (fixed plus mobile) with a net proposed increase of 3.5 million. Of this, 1.76 million would be done by the Public Sector and a minimum of 1.73 million is expected to be done by the private sector.

Tele-access i.e. bringing people within the reach of telephones is as much and perhaps more important than tele-density. For this purpose, 100,000 mobile telephones will be made available in ~~one~~ village, of Bangladesh. These will be placed with one individual, man or woman, who would in turn make this facility available to the people of the village and charge them for use of this facility keeping a margin over what would have to be paid to the telephone company. This would on the one hand bring the entire population of Bangladesh under tele-access by the year 2005, and on the other hand hopefully provide about 100,000 people with employment and income. Bangladesh Government's plan to make provision of telecommunication services is thus not only commercially oriented but is public welfare oriented as well.

Development and generation of communication would be meaningless and useless without facilities for communication of such information. Bangladesh has a plan to develop a nationwide terrestrial optical fiber network by the year 2003. This will hopefully be linked up with the global information super highway through linkage with the proposed Consortium Submarine Cable Network namely SEA-ME-WE-4. This submarine cable network is expected to be completed by the year 2004. Bangladesh also has a plan to strengthen, augment and modernize its digital data network. With the above facilities in place, flow of information to and from Bangladesh will be easier, of greater volume and of high quality. It will also be comparatively less costly.

Mr. Chairman, we share others in believing that the future of the global telecommunications is promising but complex. Hence, ITU has an arduous task ahead. Since we are now in the new millennium, we appeal to all member nations to collaborate in ensuring the establishment of realistic strategies and concrete plans as well as mobilizing all possible human, financial and technological resources for the provision of the much desired universal access to telecommunications services at the earliest.

Permit me Mr. Chairman in conclusion to commend the elected and other appointed officials of the ITU for their wonderful and meritorious contributions towards the enviable achievements of the ITU to-date. We also wish the top officials to be elected in this conference a memorable tenure of office and the vision to carry the ITU and the world of telecommunications in a manner that encourages balanced development between the developed and developing countries.

Thanking you for listening.

Faruq Ahmad Siddiqi