

Telecom Industry and Regulatory Environment

The Telecom and ICT sector has been a priority of the government as it has adopted Smart Bangladesh Vision 2041 as a roadmap to transform the country from a Digital Bangladesh to a smart country by 2041. In 2023, amid macro-economic and political challenges, the Telecom industry has seen growth with a lower rate. The mobile connection reached to above 190.5 million at the end of December 2023 compared to 180.2 million connection at the end of December 2022. Same trend has been observed for mobile data subscribers which reached to 118.5 million at the end of December 2023 compared to 112.5 million at the end of 2022. The industry has seen positive revenue growth as well. All the mobile operators have invested significantly this year in network expansion and improving the quality of services.

Telecom Regulatory Environment

Like the previous years, the telecom regulatory environment remained challenging towards Mobile Network Operators (MNO) in 2023.

QoS of MNOs remained a top agenda of the BTRC and it continued monitoring and following up with MNOs imposing quarter wise KPIs. MNOs also took initiatives to improve network service quality and to cater to higher data demand, and showed their interest in acquiring additional spectrum in the lower (800/900 MHz) and mid (2600 MHz) bands. Dialogues are ongoing with the BTRC, however, discussions have not been concluded yet. Spectrum roadmap also came onto the discussion table. The telecom regulator initiated several consultation processes on policy and regulations. During the consultation on data floor price, MNOs opined that market dynamics should determine the data price which BTRC finally adopted. To simplify the customer journey, BTRC conducted discussions with the MNOS and finally the data product portfolio was reduced to 40 products from the existing 85 products. There have been industry consultations and initiation on reforming some other policies and regulatory issues such as National Broadband Policy, 2G VAT and late fee amendment, OTT guideline, Cyber Security Act, Data Protection Act, NTTN licence amendment etc. A trial on national roaming between BL and TT also received approval from the regulator.

The telecom regulatory environment in Bangladesh remained challenging throughout the year 2023 and it is less likely to be improved soon. The ongoing industry collaboration needs to be further strengthened to shape the regulatory framework and make it predictable and investment friendly.

