



Center for Strategic & Regional Studies

Kabul

Weekly Analysis-Issue Number 302 (May 18-25, 2019)

Weekly Analysis is one of CSRS’ publications, which significantly analysis weekly economic and political events in Afghanistan and the region. The prime motive behind this is to provide strategic insights and policy solutions to decision-making institutions and individuals in order to help them to design best policies. Weekly Analysis is published in local languages (Pashto and Dari) and international languages (English and Arabic).

In this issue:

Afghanistan’s Telecommunication; Historical Background and Challenges

Historical background3
New development stage5
Challenges Ahead6
Recommendations:8

Afghanistan's Telecommunication; Historical Background and Challenges



Seventeenth of May 2019 coincides with the World Telecommunication Day. Telecommunication is one of the most important industries in the world now a day which connects the world with each other's, from the very beginning of its formation, quickly grew and cross the borders frequently. This phenomenon was also on the right track but the rapid growth in the Afghan civil war in Afghanistan was highly vulnerable and its infrastructure was destroyed. After 2001, the communications industry in our country revived and developed and expanded rapidly again. Afghanistan is among the leading countries in the region, in the field of communications. The weekly report of center is all about telecommunications, opportunities and challenges in Afghanistan.

Historical background

The journey of Afghanistan in the world of telecommunication and relation began with the installation of a Simdarmanul telephone at the Palace of the ARG of Kabul in 1898. In 1908, a small telephone system with a capacity of 25 lanes was installed to the north of the ARG. Telegraph services was another type of telecommunication facility launched in Afghanistan in 1914. At the same time, the station was installed in Kabul with capacity of 20 kilowatt, connecting Kabul to Paris via the first radio. The first automatic telephone machine was 1200 Lane and was purchased from the Tesla Company of Czechoslovakia, which was opened at the former headquarters of the Ministry of Telecommunications located at the Poll-e-baghe Umami. In 1955, the center automation system was activated with the help of Ziemens West Germany company with a capacity of 5,000 Lines. Later, in 1967, the machines of the Kart-e-char and Shahr-e-naw, each with a capacity of 3,000 lines, were assisted by the West Germany and by their specialists.

In the next step, Mazar-e-Sharif, Herat and Kandahar machines were installed at 1,500 lanes each, followed by automatic machines of the Kheirkhana and Makrarian, each with a capacity of 3,000 lines in 1977 with the help of the West Germany; But with the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the refusal of German specialists to travel to our country, its work was half-finished. After sometimes, the rest work was completed and started the operation by Afghan specialists led by Engineer Mohammad Shakir Taher. In the mid-1970s, basic telecommunication services, including telephone and telegraph services, were available at the level of districts and in the local places. Although the telecommunication system mostly limited to some parts and agency of the government, local people had also limited access to these services.

In 1983 and 1984, Grassbar devices were installed in the cities of Kabul, Jalalabad, Parwan, Pul-e-Khumri, Sheberghan and Kunduz. In the 1980 and 1990 there were Political-social instability and war intensities destroyed not only the infrastructure and wealth of Afghanistan, but also destroyed and exhausted many of the telecommunication systems. In recent years of the sovereignty of the People's Democratic Party, in most of the districts and villages there were no facilities of telecommunication systems in the country.

New development stage

Since 2001, the Ministry of Telecommunications and Information Technology has been among the first Afghan agencies to arrange public sector policies and strategies for the telecom sector so that the company and private offices to invest in the telecommunications sector and to deploy telecommunication systems. Since then, Afghan wireless, Roshan, MTN, Wasal Tilcom, Etisalat and Public Networks such as Afghan Telecom and Salam started their operation after each other's. These companies, which were invested a huge amount of capital, quickly developed in close competition. Today, more than 90% of the geography of the country is covered by the telecommunications network. According to some statistics, the number of SIM cards distributed around the country reached 25 million, which brings the number of mobile telephone (mobile) active in the country, will be from 15 to 17 million.

Challenges Ahead

With the rapid growth of telecommunications sector, especially in the mobile phone network, there are challenges also in telecom sectors that prevent the implementation of policies and plans of the Ministry of Communications and

Information Technology, and prevent a balanced growth of telecommunications in the country. The most important challenges are:

1. Security: Security is one of the key factors that shield all areas of social life, including telecommunications and information technology. Protecting existing systems and developing new telecommunications systems in remote areas without security is impossible. Also, the expansions of the fiber optic network throughout Afghanistan depend on security. This cable, which should be connected to neighboring countries for access to the high-quality Internet, has slowly extended and has been cut and destroyed after being renewed. Such as threats against the Northwest, Central and Southern fiber project that eventually terminated the contract.

One of the factors increase the rate of telephone conversations as well as the phenomenon of insecurity that telecom companies have to secure their communications antenna by hiring security guards and bear additional costs which would be given extra cost. Also, in some areas, telecommunication antenna (BTS) were under attack by the opposition and destroyed or their activities are discontinued. Local armed groups and local militants are delaying the implementation of telecom projects and their implementation in remote areas. The lack of security in many parts of the country is an obstacle to the construction of roads. The lack of roads in difficult traffic, the implementation of fiber optic projects and the lack of roadways for the transfer of telecommunication equipment in some parts of the country has also led to the lack of coverage of all parts of the country by the telecommunications network. Distribution of non-registered SIM cards has in turn caused security

problems. This neglect has caused social, political and criminal problems, such as threats, abductions, murders and harassment of women. In addition, the lack of development of wired telephones, with only 356 thousand lines active throughout the country, in addition to other factors, is due to the collapse of the infrastructure of the system during the civil war.

2. Corruption: The lack of capacity and the existence of corruption have led to the downfall of the Ministry of Communications' losses from mobile phone companies. To make in total, these companies have approximately \$ 3.5 billion in annual sales, as each phone has an average monthly cost of \$ 9. According to this measure, the company's revenues for the Ministry of Telecommunications alone are about \$ 600 million annually. While this is not the case, the Ministry of Communications annually receives only a third of this amount, which is about \$ 200 million in taxes from companies. Meanwhile, people are dissatisfied with the 10% tax that comes directly from prepaid cards and are not sure if this amount will be delivered to the government budget. While this amount is estimated to reach \$ 300 million annually, is it really transmitted to the government transparently or somehow are taken by others, According to officials of the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology, the private telecom companies are not paying the tax to government but the obligation to pay financial penalties of their own, are also delayed.

3. The high rate of conversations and customer's abuse

Telecommunication services with significant advances in Afghanistan are still priced higher than in the region and low quality services. Afghanistan is considered one of the poorest countries in the world, and almost 50% of the

population is below the poverty line, so that all citizens of the country cannot use it because of the higher rates. Another reason for the high rate of abuse of telephone conversations free market system is that companies conversations rates in coordination with one another, according to their own liking maintained at a high level And, unfortunately, the Ministry of Telecommunications does not play a role in controlling the call rates. A common complaint is that the credit is stealing from the SIM cards or without the need and permission the packages (which each require additional costs) are activated to them. In some cases, packages like 3G And 4G which are sold to customers on the basis of banners and advertising, is lower than the claimed quality.

Recommendations:

In order to improve the telecommunication situation in the country, it is necessary to implement the following suggestions:

- The Ministry of Communications must conduct a careful study and setting up of healthy competition, costs and prices of telecommunication networks and the price of the Internet must be reduce for all Afghan people, especially for those poor people with less money in hand, needs to have access for communication through mobile and internet.
- Cooperation should be between Ministry of Communications and telecommunication companies to cooperate and coordinate with each other's, to keep balance of price and quality service to ensure customers satisfaction and on the other hand to don't lose government revenue.

- The tax system for telecommunications companies must be based on tax-regulations of government and corruption free to don't waste of government revenue.
- As we know that most of the profits of telecommunication companies are running to foreign countries, Government must implement SIMDAR telephones to prevent flow of capital from our country.

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Note: Please let us know your feedback and suggestions for the improvement of Weekly analysis.

