

Net Neutrality – A basic for Netizens in a Free Society

Type: Roundtable	Date: Thursday, February 22, 2018	Venue: Windy Town
Chief Guest : Syed Almas Kabir, President BASIS		Audience : 70-80
Keynote Speaker : Pro.Dr. Rokonuzaman Electrical and Computer Engineering Department ,North South University	Moderator: Mostafizur Rahman Sohel Director BASIS Chairman, Bangladesh E-Commerce Alliance Convener, BASIS Soft Expo-2018	
Panelist <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Habibullah N Karim , Former President , BASIS & CEO Techohaven Company Limited2. AKM Fahim Mashroor, Former President BASIS & CEO Ajkerdeal.com3. Syeda Kamrun Ahmed, Chairman e-commerce standing committee, BASIS & Co-founder Bagdoom.com,4. Tapan Kanti Sarkar, President, CTO Forum Bangladesh5. Ashish Chakraborty, Chief Operating Officer, SSL Wireless6. SM Ashraf, Former Executive Director of Bangladesh Computer Council and Executive Director of E-generation Ltd7. Ashiqul Alam Khan, Founder & CEO , Priyoshop.com8. Zia Ashraf , CEO , Chaldal.com9. Mujtaba Fidaul Haq CEO, Shurjomukhi Ltd10. Khairul Amin , Joint Secretary , ICT Division		

Session Summary:

E-commerce is gaining popularity in Bangladesh. As domestic and international investments are also increasing simultaneously, new employments are being generated. Telecom service providers are becoming interested in the first growing sector. They are using the Scale Advantage facility to reduce the price of products at the marginal level and progressing in the competition. Since they have the advantage of giving product subsidy, they can offer quality services at a lower cost. People with the platform which is being used in e-commerce business are entering the same business. Thus they are hampering the e-commerce sector by creating an uneven competition. The system will let the telecom operators create a monopoly which is contrary to the normal market system. So Net Neutrality must be ensured here to stop the uneven competition in the sector. The role of BTRC (Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission) is important in this regard

as it should not allow the telecom operators to enter the e-commerce business and make an uneven competition. So net neutrality is to be ensured with the participation of all, otherwise the e-commerce sector will face destruction in the near future.

Net Neutrality – A basic for Netizens in a Free Society

Thursday, February 22, 2018: Bangladesh Association of Software and Information Services (BASIS) has organized a roundtable styled “Net Neutrality – A basic for Netizens in a Free Society” today in SoftExpo- 2018 at Bangabandhu International Conference Center in the capital. BASIS President Syed Almas Kabir was the chief guest of the session.

Habibullah N Karim , Former President of BASIS & CEO of Technohaven Company limited , AKM Fahim Mashroor, Former President of BASIS & CEO of Ajkerdeal.com, Syeda Kamrun Ahmed Chairman of E-commerce Standing Committee & Co-founder of Bagdoom.com, Tapan Kanti Sarkar, President, CTO Forum Bangladesh, Ashish Chakraborty, Chief Operating Officer of SSL Wireless, SM Ashraful, Former Executive Director of Bangladesh Computer Council and Executive Director of E-generation Ltd, Ashiqul Alam Khan, Founder of Priyoshop.com, Zia Ashraf , CEO of Chaldal, Mujtaba Fidaul Haq, CEO of Shurjomukhi Ltd , Khairul Amin Joint Secretary of ICT Division were present at the discussion as panelist .

The key-note paper on the subject was presented by Prof. Dr. Rokonzaman, Electrical and Computer Engineering Department of NSU (North South University).

The session was moderated by Mostafizur Rahman Sohel , Director, BASIS and Convener , BASIS Softexpo-2018 .

In his keynote speech, **Rokonuzzaman** said that there are 7 million internet users in the country today. Of them, 75 million people use mobile internet. Popularity of smartphones has increased, as those help people connect with the Internet easily. So, the number of netizens increases. Internet becomes the fundamental right for this generation or netizen involved in the Internet. Presently 50 ISPs including 4 telecoms are offering net services in the country. And the number of online shopping centers or e-commerce based on this internet is nearly 2500. E-commerce is creating both the opportunity of employment and the need of investment. Foreign investors are being attracted in this sector as a fast-growing industry. As there is immense possibility to build up careers in this sector, a level playing field is required to be ensured. But platform providers in our country are also involved in e-commerce business. As a result, net neutrality or level playing field is being hindered. Telecom companies can use the Scale Advantage facility to reduce the price of products at the marginal level and go ahead in the competition. Utilizing cost sharing and subsidy facilities, telecoms can reduce the price of commodity service or even provide free services, in many cases. In this way they can take the market to their possession and force other competitors out of the market.

There is also network externality. As the usage continues, its utilities will continue to grow, and it is easy for the telecom sectors to grab this opportunity for increasing their market.

These issues do not exist in the general market system. Therefore, it is difficult for local e-commerce institutions to survive competition directly with telecom companies. That is the challenge of net neutrality and thus the naturalness of the market is hindered and monopoly is established. So in the telecom industry of Bangladesh, the monopoly market is prevailing. As their penetration in the e-commerce market will help expand their market, small entrepreneurs will be affected badly. According to the Competition Act 2012 in our country, business must have balanced market opportunities for everyone and the same service providers can not hurt others to raise the market. Here the role of policy makers is important. Because, if the monopoly continues in this way, there will be no competition in the market. Consumers will suffer at one stage. This is how Amazon and Alibaba Monopoly are harmful to any economic development. Monopoly is harmful to any economic development. People will not invest in the market if monopoly exists. Others will not take risk to compete there. It's not right to let it be. We have to control the competitive behavior. To ensure net neutrality, traders must face certain regulations on market entry. Free services with products should be discouraged. Apart from the local net neutrality, the international one should be given priority. In other countries, Google-platform service providers are not allowed to enter the business. They can take good things for a little price. Regulator should regularly update the information and take action accordingly so that any uneven situation is not created in the market.

Sayed Kamrun Ahmed said- Net neutrality in Bangladesh is currently a barrier. On the other hand, e-commerce market is a fast growing market in this country, although we still do not have enough experiences in this market. The government is still working on policy framework. Those, who have been trying hard for 6/7 years in the sector, are facing this obstacle today. But we had to create the market at our own costs and hard labor. But foreign companies can easily enter the market with their existing technologies and can reduce their service expenditure. As a result, they can offer low cost service in the market. It is a challenge for us to survive this unequal competition. Whenever we advertise the product on Google and the telecom companies give more lucrative advertisements then the vendors will take the product from telecoms, not from us. In the beginning, consumers experienced Citycell market monopoly. As soon as GrameenPhone entered the market, a competitive environment is introduced breaking the monopoly and consumers started getting more benefit than ever before.

We have a lot of obstacles - our customers are still not quite familiar with this business. Besides, all our merchants have no access to the technology. E-commerce echo system institutions can not offer delivery services properly. Above all, the issue of the net neutrality is now one of the obstacles. We encourage everyone to become entrepreneurs in e-commerce. Many are coming, but cannot survive the unequal competition. It started creating frustration that can lead to terrible consequences. We need policy support as well as development of business ethics. Before that we have to think where our economy is going.

BASIS former President **Habibullah N Karim** said- There are some differences between monopoly and net neutrality. If Grameenphone offers browsing at a free of cost and if you have to use bandwidth to browse the e-commerce sites where money is involved then

there is uneven competition. Generally, the customers will browse on Grameenphone. This policy needs to be changed. Many times some people use less while some others use more bandwidth sharing same network. But the cost remains the same. That's not right. It should be based on use. And telecom's participation in e-commerce is different. We have to take steps to maintain net neutrality. We have no internal net neutrality even. Consumers are facing different cost involvements while using Internet in Dhaka and Netrokona. It takes more money in Netrokona. Somewhere there is no internet connectivity. It is not ethical.

If the location independence access cost can be defined, the net neutrality barrier will come down. Our current IT minister is very interested in this matter. So there must be a good thing.

e-CAB Finance Secretary **Mohammad Abdul Haque Anu** said- Not only in the country, but also in the whole world, Net Neutrality is a major problem. Facebook and Google are taking away money from advertisements all over the world. As a result, local media or news media are facing problems. They have been struggling and creating the market for the last 23 years. Referring to the activities of China in protecting the market, he said the country has made a separate search engine for them to reduce dependency on Google. They also created own social network. We only busy with making policies and laws. We have to face this situation together.

Khairul Amin said At first the government must understand what the net neutrality is, and whether the authorities concerned know it. There is no specific law on this issue. According to the current law, there is a right to participate in economic development apart from a balanced distribution policy. There are net neutrality laws in different countries, he said, adding, "We need to know more about it. All stakeholders including the BASIS have to do more work on it and finally take some collective steps to draw attention of the ministries concerned in this regard."

BASIS former President **AKM Fahim Mashroor** said- We are frustrated to talk about this. How can we make the government alert if they are not interested in it. In our country, BTRC is busy in patronizing the telecom sector rather than giving attention to regulatory activities. Citing an example of India Telecom Regulatory, he said that regulators play a leading role in controlling such situation. Our government is still not taking this issue seriously. But one more important thing is whether we are doing right in the right place. According to the Competition Act, price cannot vary while purchasing same product from different buyers. We can move on the basis of this law. Our e-commerce along with our startups is on the verge of destruction due to this uneven competition. We did not allow telecom companies to access or use our data analysis commercially. It is the responsibility of the BTRC to control the situation. BASIS or e-cab should spare none in this regard.

Tigers Den Digital Services Director **Abdul Mukit Ahmed** said- Voice and data are the main businesses of telecom companies. They are facing threats. We are working on network distribution, connectivity and consumer. We want to support innovation and we also want to work in the e-commerce industry. In this case, we really want to give priority to the

needs of the buyer. We have no alternative to survive here in the market. But in that case we want to go ahead together.

Ashraful Islam said-We do not know what's the future of the World Wide Web or what will be the next technology. We have huge digital divides in our country. The internet should be open to everyone however. But everyone wants to do monopoly business. Business, politics and access issues are important. BTRC should come forward to resolve this issue strictly. The cost of internet coverage outside of Dhaka depends on their expenditure, so it varies. In this case, the role of the government is important. And the government will be interested when it is placed as the demand of everybody.

Mujtaba Fidaul Haq said- BTRC should not be a part of business. Its responsibility is to ensure a fair business environment, but they are doing opposite role. BTRC's duty is to show how to ensure net neutrality. There is still no internet outside of Dhaka. The telecom operators should focus on their own business and ensure internet connectivity all over the country.

Ashiqul Alam Khan said- We have weaknesses in leadership and lack of farsightedness. Other industries such as readymade garments or pharmaceutical industry can co-operate the government in policy making. They also protect their own communities by their strong leaderships, so they are successful. So to save e-commerce, our forums including BASIS and e-CAB have to take responsibility in protecting our industry. Then e-commerce will also become a significant industry.

Ashish Chakraborty said- Not only telecom operators, ISPs are also in the same position. They also provide payment gateway services. So using their networks, we cannot provide better and quality services like them naturally. Besides, they will not give us same opportunity as we are competitors in this field. I think e-cabs, BASIS, CTO forums should make a set of demands to place it before the ministries concerned. This can make the matter clear to them. We should also go to the market competition commissioner. If a regulator becomes a business competitor, it takes a dangerous shape.

Zia Ashraf said: Telecoms are now coming forward to sell rice and pulse. In this situation, how long the level playing field will exist is important. But the telecoms have their own limitations in giving minimum network services. If they focus on their own business, the uneven competitions will disappear from the e-commerce sector. Public awareness is needed to ensure the net neutrality.

As chief guest **Syed Almas Kabir** said The necessity of the net neutrality is required not only in Bangladesh, but also in all over the world. Referring to the monopoly of Microsoft Browser Explorer and later the introduction of Mozilla, he said - monopoly is not good for any market. The people who are doing business here are not only sufferers, the right of buyers is also violated. If a buyer is getting product at low price today, when it becomes monopoly, it took him hostage then. So most of consumers will then suffer. As the BTRC itself is working like shareholder of the telecoms, it is failing to discharge own

responsibility as regulator. Internet service providers also offer payment gateways and video services on-demand. In this case, BASIS, E-CAB and CTO Forum will have to take effective initiatives. It is difficult to refrain someone from participating in any business, so the legal issue is important. We have to make sure the net neutrality. Telecom can do business, but there should be same environment for all other competitors in offering same product or free services. We will all go to BTRC to address the issue. Moreover, the present Post, Telecommunication and ICT minister is our own person, so we will definitely get cooperation. Telecoms can come to the market as a separate institution and compete. But that must not be uneven.

BASIS director and soft expo-2018 convener **Mostafizur Rahman Sohel** said: If we encourage youth to become entrepreneurs and push them also towards destruction, then development is not possible. In this connection, the role of mass media is also important. We all must be united to give right delivery in the right place. Netizens are those who work based on the internet. So net neutrality is not an issue for businessmen only, it is the matter for all of us. Not only telecoms, country's ISP (Internet Service Providers) are also involved in such unethical penetration and competition of business. Telecom was earlier interested in providing mobile finance services, he said, adding, at that time we resolved the issue with the help of Bangladesh Bank. Referring to the negative aspects of the Internet, he said the government should consider the net neutrality issue through a holistic approach as the matter should not be kept limited only in business as it's a crime in other aspects. As it is the right of all citizens, we should go for realizing our demands incorporating netizens. It can be easy to attract the government if we can give it a universal shape not keeping it centralized. Because the government interest on public issue is high.

Recommendation

1. Public awareness on net neutrality is needed. The role of mass media in this regard is important.
2. Uneven market competition to be controlled for avoiding monopoly.
3. All traders to face regulations for doing business.
4. Platform or logistic service providers must not enter the related business. The law enforcement is important here.
5. The regulator to be attentive in discharging its own responsibilities. It must be updated in collecting information, so that situation of monopoly cannot take place. The regulator must tackle the situation if monopoly is created.
6. Businessmen should develop moral conditions.
7. Need to develop own technology solutions by reducing dependency on foreign technology.
8. Need to organize different programs to make government interested in net neutrality.
9. Enactment of laws in this regard important.
10. Net neutrality is to be presented as a citizen's right, not just a business. Netizens should also be involved.
11. Try to work with Commerce Ministry for implementing the traditional law.
12. A white paper to be prepared and placed to the authorities concerned in this regard.

13. BASIS, E-CAB should lead and protect this industry.
14. Collective efforts of all can figure out a solution.