



## ITU Workshop on Emergency Telecommunications for Disaster Management in BANGLADESH

Date: 29<sup>th</sup> MARCH 2006

Venue: BTRC, Dhaka, Bangladesh



### Executive Summary

The earthquake that triggered the deadly tsunami and devastated several countries along the Indian Ocean in December 2004 has prompted international organizations as well as national governments to undertake studies and initiatives in helping the affected countries. Although Bangladesh was not affected by the recent tsunami, the country remains on the list of those countries that are most vulnerable to natural disasters. In response to the country's request for assistance, the **International Telecommunication Union (ITU)** formed an integral part of a global project that sought to provide help to all the countries that were affected by the tsunami or vulnerable to natural disasters. The project for Bangladesh was geared to study the current situation of the Country's emergency communications and to give recommendations on setting up the National Emergency Telecommunication and/or National Early Warning System.

The ITU Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific has identified the **Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC)** as the Country's counterpart of the project and commissioned the **Asian Disaster Preparedness Center (ADPC)** to conduct: a) an assessment report of emergency telecommunication for disaster management including recommendations for setting up/enhancing telecommunication network; and b) a national workshop on emergency telecommunication for disaster management.

During the first mission to the Country made from 11-18 September 2005 in Dhaka, the ITU and ADPC in coordination with BTRC met and discussed with government agencies involved in early warning system and disaster mitigation including national and international organizations and private institutions. All pertinent data and information collected from concerned agencies and institutions were integrated to come up with the assessment report. Some gaps and deficiencies in the telecommunication network of warning agencies were identified, e.g. the Bangladesh Meteorological Department (BMD) has yet to upgrade its link with India to access important weather data and tsunami warnings. Although Bangladesh has a good telecommunication infrastructure in place with the entrance of more private telecom operators, government agencies involved in early warning system in particular and in disaster management in general, have yet to upgrade their existing telecommunication networks to address the needs of the community or end users during disasters.

In the context of the recent natural disasters, institutional, regulatory, technical and financial problems and constraints faced by telecom operators were also identified. To address the gaps and problems of both the concerned agencies and telecom operators, the

ITU report has provided several recommendations. These include the creation of a National Emergency TeleCOmmunication Management (NETCOM) Team/Committee that should form part of the National Disaster Management Center (NDMC). The main objective of the team/committee is to build up cooperation among government agencies and optimize existing communication infrastructure and skills/experiences with clearly defined responsibilities of each member of the team/committee. The use of short messaging system (SMS) during emergency should be considered since it is affordable and also has increasing coverage in the village. It is also recommended that Priority and National Roaming will be enabled for certain user groups in the commercial mobile networks during emergency.

The initial findings and recommendations are presented to the stakeholders through a national workshop with the following objectives:

- To share assessment conducted by ITU on the Emergency Telecommunications for Disaster Management in Bangladesh;
- To update on-going activities by government and international agencies and NGOs particularly in the area of Early Warning Systems and Telecommunications for Disaster Management;
- To discuss issues and resolutions for setting up the National Early Warning Systems (EWS) and/or Emergency Telecommunications enhancement for Disaster Management;
- To make recommendations based on the discussions; and
- To formulate an action plan related to Emergency Telecommunication for Disaster Management.

Participants in the workshop include representatives from organizations/agencies who are currently involved in the Country's Early Warning Systems (EWS) setup and/or Disaster Management. Ideally, the participants will have country-wide understanding of the implementation needs, on-going related activities and technical/operational issues. Participants should be prepared to fully engage in the technical/operational discussions and participate for the entire duration of the workshop.

The expected outputs of the workshop will be a matrix of issues and concerns with the corresponding action plans and the creation of the NETCOM Team or Committee that will address the issues and concerns identified during the discussions.