

Developments Ahead

InterComms talks to Mr Sami Al Basheer Al Morshid,
Director of the Bureau, ITU Telecommunication Development



Mr Sami Al Basheer Al Morshid was elected Director of the ITU Telecommunication Development Bureau by the Plenipotentiary Conference on 14 November 2006 in Antalya, Turkey. He took office on 1 January 2007.

Mr Al Basheer Al Morshid has more than twenty-three years experience in telecommunications in Saudi Arabia and abroad, including two years at the ITU Regional Office in Cairo.

Throughout the major part of his career he was responsible in the Saudi Arabian Government for the development of economic and financial policy and regulatory aspects of telecommunications as well as international coordination and cooperation.

As head of the department responsible for telecommunication policy and investment matters at the national, regional and international levels, he has extensive

experience in telecommunications management and development as well as in negotiating and formulating international agreements on commercial, operational, maintenance and investment issues.

As Adviser to the Minister of Communications and Information Technology, Ministry of Communications and Information, Saudi Arabia he was responsible for international relations and regulatory issues. He was also a Board Member of the Communications and Information Technology Commission (CITC).

As Director, Middle East & North Africa Affairs, at ICO Teledesic GL, Seattle, USA, he coordinated the introduction of the interests of ICO in Middle Eastern and North African countries.

During his tenure as Chief of the Regional Office for the Arab States of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) in Cairo, Egypt, he was responsible for planning, organizing and directing the work of the Regional Office and contributed to the development of telecommunications in the countries of the region in both public and private sectors.

In addition to his role at the national level Mr Al Basheer Al Morshid played a leading role within regional organizations, acting as Chairman and participating in many conferences in ITU and at other regional and international organizations in the telecommunications sector.

Q: ITU - D is responsible for the development of communications worldwide how is the current financial situation effecting getting programmes started?

A: Because ICT development is one of the

main drivers of both social and economic progress, the financial crisis has made it all the more important that people everywhere should continue to benefit from ever-greater access to ICTs. This has been recognized by many ITU Member States, some of whom included investment in ICTs in their recovery plans.

The growth of the last few years may be hard to match. Nevertheless, with sufficient commitment from governments and good public-private cooperation, ICT programmes can continue to develop successfully and have been the first to show recovery.

Understandably, stimulus plans in developing countries have tended to focus on other, more urgent needs, but because the ICT sector has a major role to play in fuelling economic recovery, we are doing everything we can to ensure that investment in ICTs is not neglected.

I believe the current resurgence of the financial markets and the full recovery of the ICT industry will provide many opportunities in terms of the availability of project financing, innovation and the emergence of new and exciting technologies.

Q: With a seemingly widening gap between the information poor and information rich, how do you envisage trying to bridge this gap and how can the industry help?

A: I would say that there are two factors that are of prime importance for bridging the information gap. One is the roll out of broadband and the other human capacity building.

The ITU has recently launched its Build on Broadband campaign. Not only does access to broadband boost productivity

► and competitiveness, but it also enables the delivery of essential services – such as e-health, e-education, e-commerce and e-government. In most parts of the developing world, broadband access remains not just limited, but prohibitively expensive. It is not easy for developing countries to dedicate enough resources to ICT infrastructure. However, with enough Government commitment, effective market liberalization and the provision of an enabling environment for migration to next generation infrastructure and services, public-private partnerships can be built to implement broadband connectivity projects. We are at present implementing a project on Wireless Broadband Infrastructure in Africa together with Industry and other partners. Furthermore, many of our activities, such as those on regulatory and policy reform or spectrum management, play a key role in facilitating broadband development and access.

For increased access to ICTs to be effective and sustainable it must go hand in hand with adequate human capacity building. Competitive advantage in today's knowledge economies lies principally in fostering the skills and competencies of people. Individual human development is fundamental to our collective development as societies. We are streamlining our extensive ICT skills development efforts through the ITU Academy initiative. The vision of ITU Academy is to strengthen the human, institutional and organizational capacity of developing countries by making available ICT learning and development opportunities at the highest possible levels of quality. We are working with industry and other partners to further these goals. For instance our Internet Training Centres initiative was launched in 2001 in partnership with CISCO, who provided their curricula for free and Microsoft donated computers and applications through its Unlimited Potential programme. We are pleased with the success of these partnerships and will build on them in the future.

Q: New technology hybrids are entering the market such 2.3 MZM WiMAX,

how can these be utilised to develop communications globally?

A: The rapidly merging boundaries between telecommunications, broadcast and broadband networks is challenging the limits of traditional communication networks design warranting a user-centric approach. User-centric network designs require not only network interoperability, but also interoperability of applications across a wide variety of networking mechanisms and heterogeneous devices. In this context, hybrid networks composed by satellite backhauling and terrestrial radio access network comes into place, specifically to provide broadband connectivity to low densely populated areas, i.e. suburban and rural areas.

For example with Satellite-WiMAX, the advantage of combining these two technologies is that of efficiently extending IEEE 802.16 network coverage and of avoiding deployment of expensive backbone infrastructures needed to enable connectivity in non-urban areas.

Q: Are there any new programmes developed by the ITU-D, that should be recognised?

A: Last year, during the ITU TELECOM Youth Forum, the United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon joined us in launching our Connect a School, Connect a Community flagship initiative. Schools are community hubs. They are places of learning and accessibility. By connecting schools we are connecting youth as well as others in the community to knowledge and information, leading to improved employment and social and economic development. Connected schools can meet the ICT needs of underserved groups in the community, including women, persons with disabilities and indigenous people. Connecting all primary, secondary and post-secondary schools to ICTs by 2015 was one of the targets set by world leaders at the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS).

Through the Connect a School, Connect a Community initiative, ITU will work with a

range of partners to identify and compile best practices on policies, regulation, applications, services and practical experiences. These best practices will be shared with Member States through the development of an online toolkit and related capacity-building activities.

Q: What are the key goals of the BDT this year and how are these going to be achieved?

A: This year we will be holding the World Telecommunication Development Conference in Hyderabad, India. The World Conferences set the agenda and the guidelines for the following four-year cycle, so we are putting maximum effort into assessing past achievements and fine tuning our way of working, in order to have maximum impact in the future. Much of this work is already underway with the six Regional Preparatory Meetings that have been held in the last year. Each region has identified a set of Regional Initiatives and in general the Regions are in favour of streamlining our activities into fewer, but consolidated programmes. Of course, the priorities of each Region differ, but two areas that have been identified as initiatives by all of the Regions are transition from analogue to digital broadcasting and broadband.

Q: The ITU Americas event has been postponed this year, as this is a key development marketplace, do you feel this will affect the positioning and influence of the ITU?

A: The ITU TELECOM events are only one component of the many ITU activities. Although the TELECOM Americas event has been postponed ITU is still extremely active in the region, through its offices in Brazilia, Santiago, Bridgetown and Tegucigalpa. Furthermore, the Americas region hosted a Regional Preparatory Meeting for the World Telecommunication Development Conference, in Colombia last year, and will be hosting the ITU's Plenipotentiary Conference, in Mexico in October 2010.

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