



Bangladesh

Statement by Hon'ble State Minister for Foreign Affairs
Ministerial Meeting of the "Alliance for Multilateralism-
Our Commitment and Contribution to Building Back Better ", 25 September 2020

Distinguished Co-Chairs, Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates,

I thank Germany and France for organizing this very important meeting of the Alliance.

The Covid-19 pandemic is a global emergency, bringing devastation to millions worldwide, impacting lives and jobs, and upending much of the global economy. As the world is scrambling to cope with the shocks of the pandemic, digital technologies may be harnessed to overcome many of the challenges posed by the Covid-19. Bangladesh has also embraced digital solutions in fighting Covid-19. Our government's aspirations to build a 'Digital Bangladesh' by 2021 has helped facilitate the rapid implementation of these technologies.

In Bangladesh, we used digital technologies for Covid-19 screening to identify high-risk zones, track the infection, and prioritize the allocation of resources. The economic packages and social protection benefits offered by the Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's government were transmitted to people through digital platforms. Alternative education opportunities, albeit on a limited scale, were offered to our children digitally through online classes.

Although the digital divide is not a new phenomenon, the current crisis reveals the stark divide and adds a renewed urgency to address the gap. The coronavirus crisis has accelerated the uptake of digital solutions and hastened the global transition towards a digital economy. However, it has also revealed the wide gap between the connected and the unconnected. Equitable access to digital infrastructure has never been more important than now.

As the spread of the virus is waning, the conversation has already begun on 'building back better' the economy and society. The responses to Covid-19 highlight the importance of digital technology in fostering inclusive, just, and fair societies. To bridge the digital divide,

we need to understand the gaps and needs of our peoples adequately. Closing the digital divide also means ensuring technology is non-discriminatory and accessible to all. Digital technologies shall not leave anyone behind or widen existing inequalities, particularly in the global South. Investment in developing capacity in this sector through new and innovative financing models and support for skills development in low-income countries are critical in this regard.

Distinguished Co-Chairs, Excellencies,

The use of digital technology has proven that it is possible to save lives and maintain livelihoods during the Covid-19 pandemic, and in the process, turn a crisis into an opportunity. To avail of this opportunity, we will need a coordinated response. Coming together will allow us to ensure that technology is harnessed for the greater benefit of the larger majority, seek the opportunity to manage its impact, and ensure that it presents a level playing field for all.

Bangladesh stands ready to work with all in the Alliance in building back better from this unprecedented crisis.

Thank you.