

The Nation

Business • Marketing • Personal Finance

# MONEY PLUS

February 16, 2009



USF promoting  
**telecom**  
in under-served areas

-Parvez Iftikhar, CEO Universal Services Fund

*Consumer financing*  
**in IT sector**

-Ibrahim Qureshi, Director Raffles Private Limited

Cover Story:

SBP rules inflict massive losses on oil refineries



# USF promoting telecom in under-served areas

CEO Universal Services Fund, **Parvez Iftikhar** talks to **SAADIA QAMAR** to highlight the role of his company in promoting telecom services in the remote areas

**Q: Please tell us about yourself?**

A: By profession I am an engineer and graduated from the University of Engineering and Technology, Lahore. Most of my life, I have worked with Siemens, till I became the Head of their Telecom division. I have undergone extensive training in Telecom and Business Management. I played a key role in the privatization of CTI, a former Joint Venture of Siemens with PTCL.

**Q: What is USF and what does it stand for?**

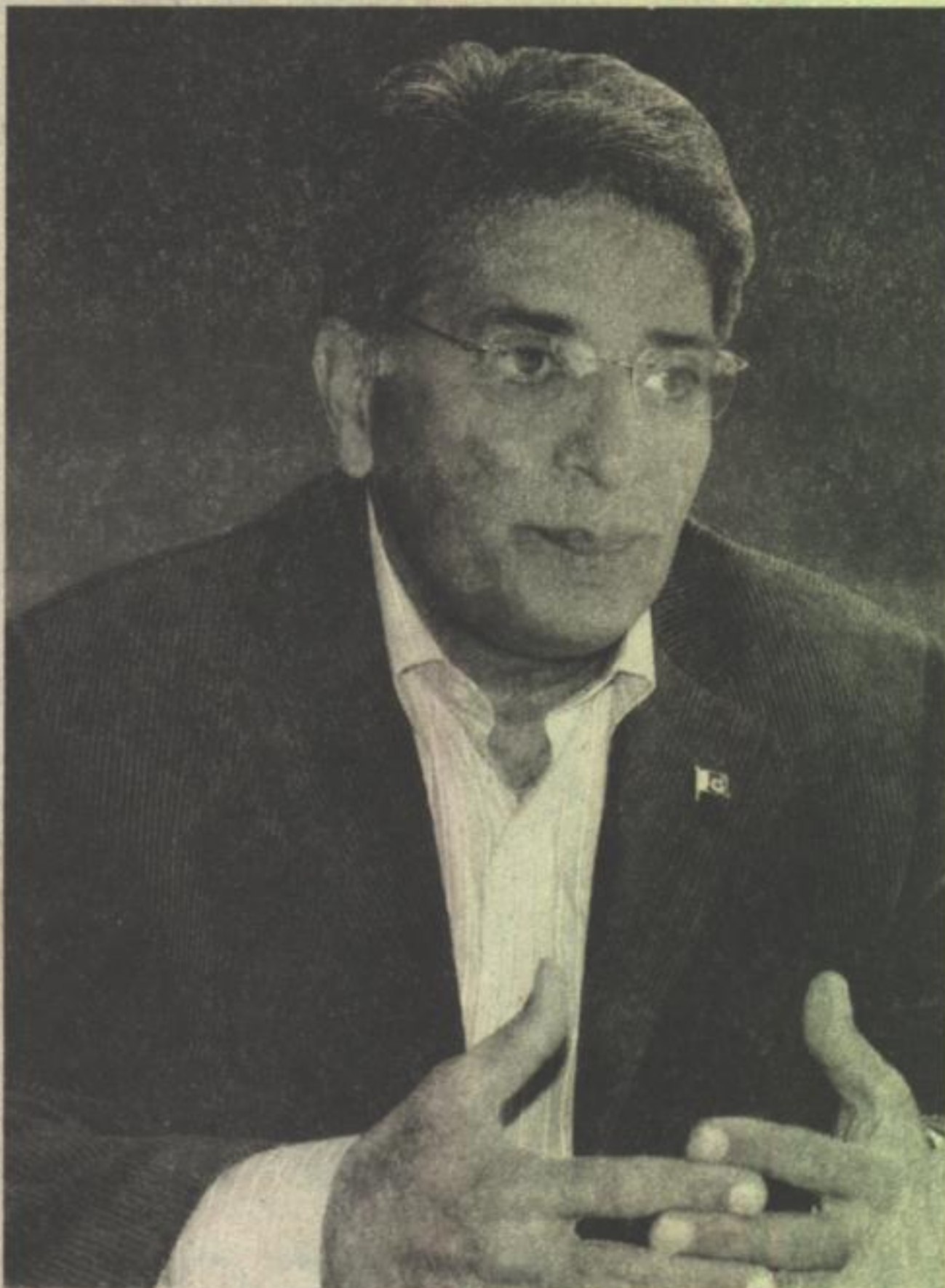
A: I am the first employee of the USF Company that was set-up in 2007 in Pakistan. Universal Services Fund is where all the telecom operators put in their money; because no "business case" is feasible in those underserved or unserved areas of telecom sector. USF was envisaged in the Telecom Act of 1996, which was then amended in 2000 and came into being in

2006.

USF was established by the Government of Pakistan, Ministry of Information Technology and was formed under the public-private partnership, alike the Canadian model. The company has nine directors including me.

**Q: What the USF is doing within Pakistan?**

A: In USF, we go in the unserved and under served areas of the country, where there is no concept of telecommunication. There are four intrinsic chapters to our focused work, firstly the telephony; secondly the case of the optic fibers that should be in every tehsils of the country, because as we know satellites are expensive tools of communication. Optic Fibers in Pakistan are located along the banks of river Indus. Only 30 percent of total country has access to optic fibers. Now we are venturing ahead with the optic fibers access that should be



available to many other areas of Pakistan. Wateen telecom is a great optic fiber distributor and since we have divided the country into ten parts, we have planned to serve Sindh first.

Thirdly, Broadband as a commodity will not be available for villages; many of the urban areas of the country are going to receive broadband services within a short span of time, this will be available at an affordable rate. We have informed the telecom operators to provide broadband services in Faisalabad's seven districts educational centers, with as many as 285 schools and colleges getting the access. In each institution we are setting up a computer lab, with five computers and two trainers. As far as the community-based services are concerned we also facilitate that.

Finally the birth of telecenter; broadband will come through telecenter in the villages.

**Q: Do you believe that the work of USF will revolutionize the telecom**

**industry?**

A: Inshallah! Cities are prone to revolutions. When we were all using Windows 7.0 version, we were hardly aware of the fact that Windows XP will soon be launched. Sixty percent of the lives will benefit in the rural areas and we will revolutionize everything. We will bring telecom revolution in the country.

**Q: Are there many competitors in the Telecom industry and how are you competing against them?**

A: Interestingly, there is nobody to compete with us. However, we do not allot work without competition and final bidding is done, so that the fund that has been setup may be utilized. Telecom Operators here in Pakistan put in as much as 1.5 percent of their revenue towards the fund. In India, the telecom operators provide 5 percent of the fund to the Ministry and it is 6 percent in Malaysia.

**Q: Does USF have a CSR policy or not?**

A: We do not have a Corporate Social Responsibility, since we are not a profit minting company. But we are serving the unserved areas of the country, looking after the education and community based needs of a city and a town of Pakistan and in short duration of time will be able to launch Telemedicine with Dr. Juma is underway, which will be a pilot project for the villages.

**Q: Finally, where does USF stand in next ten years?**

A: You see there is digital divide at the moment in the country, which we will try to bridge. In ten years time, we would create an impact in the telecommunication industry. There will be more peaks to conquer in the next ten years time.

