

GP hopes to reach 4m subscribers by next yr

Plans \$250 million new investment

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Having reached the two million subscribers' mark in August this year, GrameenPhone (GP), the largest cellphone operator in Bangladesh, contemplates doubling its subscribers base to four million by 2005.

The company will invest around \$250 million in network expansion next year in its quest to reach the magic figure of four million, a senior official of GP said yesterday.

"The new investment is expected to bring 60 percent of the total population of Bangladesh under its network coverage," GP's Director (Sales and Marketing) Mehboob Chowdhury told The Daily Star during an iftar party yesterday.

He said Bangladesh has huge potentials for growth in telecommunication services in the coming year as the market has started to take off.

"The market will grow further if government waives tax on mobile handset. It would also stop smuggling of handset into the country," he added.

On the occasion of Eid, GP will offer attractive packages with lower tariff, he observed.

GP has doubled its subscribers' number to two million in August this year and forecasts the market could grow by five times of its present subscriber base in next three years.

Bangladeshi cellphone users could grow up to 15 million in next three years but the lack of basic telephone services to cater for growing telecommunication needs of the country will hinder that.

GP, which uses GSM (global system for mobile communications) technology and has a 51 percent ownership of Norwegian state-run company Telenor, had one million users at the end of August last year.

It has about 60 percent of Bangladesh's three million mobile phone subscribers, with the remaining 40 percent shared by three other private operators.

GP has spent \$160 million on network expansion this year and hopes to bridge every corner of Bangladesh by the year of 2007.

The company's operating revenues jumped by around 50 percent to Tk 12 billion (\$202 million) in 2003, riding on strong subscriber growth.

GP, which started operations in 1997, has also a 35 percent share by Bangladesh's Grameen Telecom, 9.5 percent by Japan's Marubeni Corp and 4.5 percent by Gonofone Development Corp, a New York-based development company.

Bonus talk-time to Aktel One pre-paid users

TM International (Bangladesh) Limited, owning company of Aktel mobile phone, has offered its One Pre-paid subscribers special Ramadan talk time bonus.

Under the scheme, the subscribers will get extra talk-time on various refills during the month of Ramadan under different slabs of bonus, says a press release.

The subscribers will receive an extra 10 percent talk-time on actual usage of Tk 601-900, 15 percent on Tk 901-1200 and 25 percent bonus on Tk 1200 and over.

The bonus amount will be added to the respective pre-paid accounts automatically on Eid day.

Singer service centre relocated

Singer Bangladesh Limited has shifted its service centre to new premises at New Eskaton Road recently.

The Sewing academy of the company has also been shifted to the new premises, says a press release.

New UN-Escap Business Advisory Council member



Mahbubur Rahman

International Chamber of Commerce-Bangladesh President Mahbubur Rahman has been made a member of the Asian Business Advisory Council (BAC) of UN-Escap (United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific).

Rahman is one of the 20 prominent business leaders selected to the BAC from countries of Asia and Pacific region, says a press release.

The purpose of BAC is to create a mechanism for injecting private sector views into the UN-Escap's work.

Rahman has served in many national, regional and international bodies in various capacities including member of the Central Executive Board of Governors of Paris-based ICC, president of Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry, vice-president of Saarc Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and executive board member of Confederation of Asia-Pacific Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

'China, India to sustain global economy'

ANN/CHINA DAILY

Rising oil prices are slowing growth across the world but key emerging economies such as China and India will continue to support the near-term outlook for commodities, the world's largest mining company said Friday.

BHP Billiton Chairman Don Argus told the company's annual general meeting in Sydney that strong demand growth in the United States and China had flow-on effects on the rest of the world.

"Europe, Japan and Asia have all been beneficiaries of the improvement in global trade, while commodity-producing nations have benefited from stronger prices," Argus said.

He said indicators had more recently pointed to an easing in growth across the world as monetary and fiscal policies were tightened.

As well, there were indications of a slowing in economic activity in China from the frenetic pace of earlier in the year, while high oil prices would affect spending throughout the world.

"Nevertheless, providing countries can successfully manage these headwinds, a growing global economy, in particular the ongoing development of China, India and other key emerging economies, continues to support the near term outlook for commodities," he said.



PHOTO: STAR

Customers check out a pile of sarees to pick the ones matching the latest fashion trend at a shop in city's New Market yesterday. With Eid still three weeks away, shoppers have started treading markets to complete shopping before heavy Eid crowd.

Dhaka for binding pledge on LDC products

WTO advisory committee meeting observes

StarBusiness Report

Bangladesh wants a binding commitment from the developed countries on special and differential treatment for the least developed countries (LDCs) products, a meeting of commerce ministry advisory committee observed yesterday.

The advisory committee meeting on WTO discussed some recent WTO decisions, which also include continuation of trade facilitation negotiation, one of four Singapore issues. The meeting also discussed possible guideline in this regard.

With Commerce Minister Altaf Hossain Chowdhury in chair, the meeting was attended by Annisul Huq, president of Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and

Exporters Association (BGMEA), MA Awal, president of Bangladesh Textile Mills Association (BTMA), Prof Mustafizur Rahman, research director of the Centre for Policy Dialogue and other officials of the commerce ministry held at its conference room in Dhaka.

The four Singapore issues are trade facilitation, trade and competition policy, trade and investment, and transparency and government procurement.

"We will seek assistance from developed nations to modernise our ports. Movement of natural persons has been included in the new text that is a priority area of Bangladesh," the commerce minister told reporters after the meeting.

Under the trade facilitation, there

should not be any binding on the LDCs that don't have financial and technical ability.

Citing an example, a commerce ministry official said if a developed country wants Bangladesh to provide scanning facility at Chittagong port and maximum turnaround of three days, the country seeking such facility should give financial and technical facilities first and then set a reasonable time to implement these.

Products from the LDCs should not be subject to face anti-dumping and counter-vailing measures, he said adding the developed countries have also agreed to withdraw export subsidy gradually.

The least developed countries (LDCs) are supposed to get market

access for non-agricultural products from the developed countries and can seek similar trade preference from the developing countries, meeting sources said.

The fifth WTO ministerial meeting collapsed when developed nations were rigid of subsidy issue refusing to withdraw it and the developing countries and LDCs were also rigid of not to start negotiation on Singapore issues.

The timeframe for Doha Development Agenda (DDA) that was supposed to end by December this year has also been extended to December next year, sources said.

The sixth WTO ministerial meeting will be held in Hong Kong in December next year.

Ensure product standards to face post-MFA

Quality management system seminar told

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Businesses need to ensure standards of products through quality management system (QMS) in order to cope with the challenges of post multi-fibre arrangement (MFA) beginning from early next year.

This was said in a keynote presentation at a seminar on 'Quality Management System in Bangladesh including its Impact on Import and Export Trade' organised by Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry (DCCI) at its secretariat yesterday.

Manzur Ahmed, director of DCCI, in his presentation on Elements of Quality Management said to ensure the standards and suggested the government should reconstitute the national standards setting body Bangladesh Standards and Testing Institution (BSTI).

He proposed formulation and adoption of an appropriate legislation to transform BSTI and other public sector institutions, relating to Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) and sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) measures, into joint ventures between the government and the respective stakeholders in all aspects of QMS.

"To protect the interest of the consumers and to facilitate as well as expedite global market access for Bangladeshi products and services, it is imperative to establish and implement an appropriate QMS and accreditation system," he recommended.

Ahmed also recommended affiliation to International

Accreditation Forum (IAF) and the international bodies concerned to expedite and conclude agreements on mutual recognition and acceptability of the national accreditation scheme with the member states of Saarc, BIMST-EC, EU and other trading blocks.

"Bangladesh Accreditation Board/Commission (BAB/C) should be constituted as a joint venture initiative of the public and private sectors under the terms and conditions to be specified in the proposed Accreditation Act," he added.

The speakers at the seminar also stressed the need for adopting QMS in all kinds of business in order to turn external trade position around.

They said there is no alternative to taking in quality management system to survive in the present competitive world market. Speaking at the function, Industries Minister Motiur Rahman Nizami urged to survive in the global competition and suggested that management of each and every firm or business in Bangladesh, particularly who are actively engaged in external business, should attain the QMS standards.

The minister, citing example of USA and EU requirement of Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP) test for shrimp and frozen foods export, said: "Bangladesh's items are now facing not only tariff and non-tariff barriers, but also technical barriers for accessing respective export markets."

"Almost all our competing exporters are going to implement QMS due to the WTO agreement on TBT, so all exporters need to attain quality not only in management but also in their products and services simultaneously," he said.

DCCI President Fazle RM Hasan said to gain greater access to export market so that developing countries can influence international standards by using WTO agreements on the application of SPS measures and TBT to their advantage.

"In order to meet the requirements of international markets regarding quality and standard, we have to undertake an integrated approach for overall development of our standard and quality of products and enforcement of the relevant rules and regulations," the DCCI president said.

ABM Abdul Howk Chowdhury, director general of BSTI, said there is no alternative to ensuring quality of products to survive and sustain in the world export market.

"Unless we produce quality products we will lag behind in the export as well as import market," he said.

Md Lokman Miah, assistant director (Physical Testing) of BSTI, presented another keynote paper on Product Labelling at the seminar.

MA Matin, professor of Electrical Department of Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET), Liaquat Ali, director (Physical) of BSTI, Nazrul Islam and Saiful Islam, directors of DCCI, also spoke at the function.

Ctg businesses to take part in Dubai Shopping Festival

BSS, Chittagong

Chittagong businessmen and women entrepreneurs will participate in next year's Dubai Shopping Festival to earn consumer confidence on Bangladeshi products in the Middle East market.

The 12-week festival will begin on January 12, 2005 in United Arab Emirates' financial hub Dubai.

Chittagong Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCCI) yesterday held a preparatory meeting to discuss on how to derive maximum benefits from the event.

Presiding over the meeting at the chamber's auditorium yesterday, CCCI President Amir Humyun Mahmud Chowdhury said the Dubai fair may open a scope to create consumers faith on Bangladeshi products in Middle East market.

"Bangladesh can take advantage from the fair to introduce its products to the consumers and traders, as Dubai is the gateway and commercial hub of the entire Gulf region," he said.

During the festival period, the Bangladeshi participants will get ample opportunity to survey market for their products without additional cost. Bangladesh has been participating in the Dubai Shopping Festival since 2001.

The Inscope, Middle East, would organise the Bangladesh Pavilion at the global village of next DSF with the permission of the government.

Monowara Hakim Ali, president of Chittagong Women Entrepreneurs, said that at least 10 members of association are ready to take part in the festival with an aim to promote their home made products including handicrafts and small and cottage products.