

New cellphone co likely to debut early next year

MD HASAN

A new cellphone operator is likely to make foray into Bangladesh market early next year.

BTRC (Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission) has already invited proposals from local and overseas companies to establish a new GSM (Global System for Mobile Communications) mobile phone company in Bangladesh, which has now around 70 lakh cellphone subscribers.

BTRC, the telecoms watchdog, said the main objectives of the new licence

are to encourage orderly development of new services; ensure reasonably priced, reliable and modern GSM services; and progressively ensure a market-based environment to maximise the tele-density at affordable prices.

According to BTRC invitation of proposal, only one company either local or foreign with 100 percent own investment or a joint venture with Bangladeshi partners having experience in telecommunication for GSM technology will receive the licence.

BTRC sources said the telecoms watchdog is issuing only one licence because of shortage of adequate

frequencies. The licence will be issued for an initial period of fifteen years covering the whole Bangladesh, the sources added.

The BTRC invitation of proposal said the existing GSM and CDMA (Code Division Multiple Access) cellular mobile licensees or their shareholders in Bangladesh, either in own name or in association with any other operator, will not be eligible to apply for the new GSM licence.

At present, four private, three GSM and one CDMA, and one state-run operators are offering mobile telecommunication services.

Mobile phone industry insiders

said UAE-based Dhabi group will be one of the strong contenders for the licence.

Seeking anonymity, officials of private companies said if the BTRC allows licences one after another, the mobile phone market of Bangladesh will not sustain.

They also said existing operators are facing frequency problems as BTRC has failed to disburse sufficient spectrum among the operators.

Citing an example of Malaysian telecom sector, they said a couple of years ago, five more cellphone companies were given operating licences. But the new companies failed to sustain.

Asian women entrepreneurs' Eid festival begins

BDNEWS, Dhaka

The six-day 'Asian Women Entrepreneurs Eid Festival 2005' began yesterday at Gulshan National Shooting Federation in the capital.

Commerce Minister Altaf Hossain Choudhury inaugurated the festival. Products of women entrepreneurs of Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Iran, Turkey and Indonesia are being exhibited at 57 stalls. The Women Entrepreneurs Association of Bangladesh (WEAB) and Pakistan High Commission in Dhaka jointly organised the festival.

Jamdani saree, Tangail silk and cotton saree, ornaments, handicrafts, panjabi, salowar, kamij, shoes and herbal cosmetics are available in the festival.

Barkat Ullah Bulu, commerce ministry adviser, Veena Sikri, Indian high commissioner, Alamgir Basher Khan, Pakistani high commissioner, Mir Nasir Hossain, president of the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI), and Nasreen Awal Mintoo, WEAB president, among others, were present at the inauguration.

US wants 80pc cut in EU, Japan domestic farm aid

AFP, Zurich

US trade chief Rob Portman called on the European Union and Japan on Monday to cut their domestic farm aid by 80 percent.

Portman said it was up to major players to take bold steps if they were to kickstart struggling World Trade Organisation talks on liberalising global commerce.

"I don't think it's unfair to ask countries who subsidise more than us to at least come closer to us," Portman told reporters ahead of a WTO gathering in Zurich.

Earlier, the US official had set out a proposal that would see the US cut its own domestic farm aid by 60 percent.

Oil climbs on technical bounce

AFP, London

World oil prices shook off recent heavy losses on Monday to rise on technical factors and expectations that strong US economic growth would lead to higher energy usage, analysts said.

New York's main contract, light sweet crude for delivery in November, gained 40 cents to 62.24 dollars per barrel in electronic trading.

In London, the price of Brent North Sea crude for November delivery added 24 cents to 59.45 dollars per barrel.

"Crude futures rose on a technical bounce" after shedding more than eight percent last week in London, Sudden analyst Sam Tilley said.

World oil prices had sunk to the lowest points for more than two months last week on evidence that the high cost of energy had curtailed demand in the United States, the world's biggest consumer of energy.

A Hong Kong-based investment strategist with CFC Seymour Securities, Dariusz Kowalczyk, said that technically, the oil market was due for a rebound after falling dramatically last week.

US trade chief moots talks with EU over Airbus-Boeing

AFP, Zurich

US Trade Representative Rob Portman said on Monday that the United States would prefer to negotiate a settlement of a trade dispute with the European Union over state aid given to aircraft manufacturer Airbus.

The US and EU have accused each other of providing an unfair advantage to their civil aircraft makers -- Airbus in the EU and Boeing in the US -- and have taken the issue to the World Trade Organisation for resolution.

"Negotiation is preferable to litigation," Portman said during a press conference here.

Bimstec meet begins to finalise draft deal on trade in goods

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

A five-day meeting of the Trade Negotiation Committee (TNC) of the Bimstec began in Dhaka yesterday to finalise a draft agreement on trade in goods.

The eighth meeting of the officials from Bimstec members -- India, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Myanmar and Thailand -- put effort to improve the language of the draft agreement and talked on safeguard measures and anti-dumping issues.

Deputy Secretary of Commerce Ministry AKM Fazlur Rahman led Bangladesh side at the trade talks, being attended by around 40 delegates from Bimstec (the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-sectoral Technical

and Economic Co-operation) members, at Sonargaon Hotel.

A small group comprising seven delegates, each from a member country, talked safeguard measures and anti-dumping issues in the second session of the day.

The TNC, a body of official-level trade experts, will also work on settling trade and investment-related disputes aiming to open a free trade area (FTA) from July 2006, sources said.

The meeting will focus on such issues as sensitive lists, rules of origin and dispute-settlement mechanism to frame a draft agreement on trade in goods, sources added.

The member countries of Bimstec signed a framework in February 2004

to reach an FTA among the members.

The TNC is also scheduled to hold two other meetings -- one in India in November and another in Nepal in December -- before the deadline to complete negotiations by December this year.

The TNC meeting is being held in almost every month since the February 2004 framework agreement, with the latest one in Thailand on September 12-16.

The seven-member trade group agreed to go for the FTA from July 2006, covering only products at the initial stage, with a provision for bringing even services and investment under its purview after 2007.

Europe on bird flu alert

AFP, Bucharest

The European Union banned poultry imports from Turkey Monday following an outbreak of avian influenza and sent experts to Romania to carry out further tests following a bird flu outbreak there.

The experts were seeking to confirm whether cases of bird flu in Romania resulted from the H5N1 variant of the disease, which could provoke a deadly global pandemic among humans.

The European Commission in Brussels said it was banning poultry imports from Turkey after avian influenza was identified there, although not tied to specifically to the H5N1 variety.

Authorities in the northwestern Turkish province of Balikesir slaughtered hundreds of birds overnight after the flu was detected in the region, while the health ministry assured humans they had nothing to fear.

Nearly 3,000 birds were gassed and buried in lime pits in Kizikska, where the first case of bird flu in the country was confirmed at a turkey farm over the weekend and some 2,000 birds were initially slaughtered, the sub-governor of Manyas district, Resul Celik, said.

Birds in Turkey tested positive for the avian influenza virus "but the exact strain is not yet known, nor is it known if the strain is of high or low avian influenza," the commission said.

Meanwhile, initial tests at a Bucharest laboratory on embryo-

containing eggs failed to give a positive reading for the H5N1 variety Sunday, the commission said.

It said it was sending experts along with reagents to carry out a second round of tests on embryonated eggs, and that results were expected by Friday.

Hungary Monday joined Poland in banning poultry imports from Romania in growing economic disruption caused by the outbreak, which could have a devastating impact on agricultural production even if the disease is caused by a strain to which humans are immune.

Austria announced it was building up stocks of face masks, disinfectant and vaccine in case avian flu spreads there. Greece said it was reinforcing preventive measures. Switzerland said it was building up a stock of 100,000 doses of vaccine to protect people who might come in contact with the virus.

In the Netherlands, which slaughtered some 25 million head of poultry as a result of an outbreak of bird flu in 2003, Agriculture Minister Cees Veerman said measures would have to be adopted "immediately" if the Romanian samples test positive for avian influenza. "There is a lot of uncertainty," he said. "We need to know what is rumor and what is not."

In Turkey, the flu was detected close to a nature reserve and lake that attracts migratory birds, feared to have brought the disease from Russia and central Asia.

A senior health official in the

region, Adnan Pac, said all birds in a three-kilometer (two mile) quarantine zone would be slaughtered and that the quarantine would be maintained for three weeks.

In Romania, nearly 15,000 birds were scheduled to be slaughtered and incinerated around the village of Ceamura de Jos.

The potentially killer H5N1 strain has infected 112 people in 10 south-east Asian nations, of whom 60 have died. The cases were mostly infected directly by birds, and experts say the disease does not easily spread from person to person.

However, the fear is that the disease could be highly infectious if it mutated with ordinary kinds of influenza that could turn it into a global pandemic.

To reduce the risk of this happening, both Turkey and Romania were giving flu shots to populations at risk.

Romanian officials said up to 125,000 people in the Danube delta, where the first suspected cases have been identified, are due to be vaccinated. In addition, vaccination campaigns were being carried out in six regions.

"It is very important because it leads to a strengthening of general immunity," said a health ministry official, Oana Grigore.

Although the flu strain found in Romania had not been confirmed as being the H5N1 variety, "we have to act as though it were," said Agriculture Minister Gheorghe Flutur.

Indian co acquires Aromatic soap

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

Mumbai-based Marico Ltd yesterday said its wholly-owned subsidiary Marico Bangladesh Ltd (MBL) has signed an agreement with Bangladesh-based Aromatic Cosmetics Ltd (ACL) for acquiring its soap brand "Aromatic". It did not, however, disclose any financial details of the agreement.

MBL has also purchased certain equipments and IPR from ACL, the company informed the Bombay

Stock Exchange.

Aromatic has an aggregate turnover of about Tk 300 million in Bangladesh with a market share of around five percent.

Earlier this year, MBL had acquired another soap brand - Camelia, signalling its entry into the toilet soaps market in Bangladesh.

MBL is a market leader in the coconut oil category through its flagship brand 'Parachute' and has a strong distribution network of about 2,90,000 outlets in Bangladesh.

Green investments offer huge promise in Asia: ADB

AFP, Manila

Investments in environmental goods and services hold a huge promise in Asia and the Pacific as governments in the region tighten pollution control laws, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) said Monday.

An ADB report, Asian Environment Outlook 2005, said Asia's share of the global market for environmental goods and services is likely to triple over the next decade to some 100 billion dollars per year.

The region now accounts for just 37 billion dollars of the 600 billion dollar global market, but its fast growth rate of between eight and 12 percent should triple market size by 2015, when the market should be about 800 billion dollars, it added.

"If the Asian governments really cracked down and started to require clean-ups then the number would go up very rapidly," the bank's senior environmental economist David McCauley told AFP in Sydney, where the report was released Monday.

"I think for a government trying to crack down on pollution and resource degradation, at least in the short-term, the numbers about economic activity

and job creation are somewhat reassuring," he said.

"But clearly some firms will lose, others will gain."

The report said that after governments took notice, it was time for the private sector to follow the lead.

The "critical missing ingredient in the pursuit of a sustainable future for Asia and the Pacific... (was) a fully engaged corporate sector."

"We now see that governments across our region -- from India, to Thailand, to the People's Republic of China -- are increasingly ready to take on environmental challenges," said Nessim Ahmad of the ADB's environment and social safeguards division.

"Enforcement of pollution control laws is tightening, budgets for environmental protection are increasing, and judiciaries are taking tougher stances," he added.

"The improved environmental quality demanded by the public will require investment in wastewater treatment, solid waste management, sustainable public transport, and clean, renewable energy systems -- all of which are critical to the economic and environmental future of the region."



Stratex Networks CEO due today

Chuck Kissner, chairman and chief executive officer of California-based Stratex Networks, one of the world's leading providers of high-speed wireless transmission solutions, arrives in Dhaka today, says a press release.

Stratex Networks supplies wireless transmission solutions to several telecommunications service providers in Bangladesh including BTB, TM International (Bangladesh) Ltd (AKTEL), Pacific Bangladesh Telecom Ltd (CityCell), Jalalabad Telecom Ltd (Bijoy Phone), Onetel Communications Ltd, Westec Ltd (Bay Phone) and other ISP operators and utility markets.

The company is also planning to open a new office in Bangladesh, the release added.

"Bangladesh is a very significant market for us," said Kissner in a statement prior to his visit.