

# Star BUSINESS

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## GP reaches 10m subscribers

Plans to offload shares; eyes to double users in 15 months

### STAR BUSINESS REPORT

GrameenPhone Limited, the leading cellular company of the country, has crossed 10 million subscribers mark and the operator now hopes to double the number within a span of 15 months.

The achievement coincides with the 10th anniversary of its operation. On receipt of a license in November 1996, the company started its journey. With having 5.5 million subscribers on the onset of the year 2005, GrameenPhone (GP) continued its advancement throughout the year, registering a 130 percent growth.

"Constantly declining tariffs, affordable prices of handsets and superior network coverage all over the country are the three main factors behind the achievement," explained Erik Aas, GP managing director, at press conference in Dhaka yesterday.

He said, "The mobile phones are not only a tool for privileged people anymore, but it is now empowering people from all groups in all areas of Bangladesh."

Syed Yamin Bakht, general manager (Information), conducted the press conference, while Rubaba Dowla Matin, head of marketing of the company, was present.

Bangladesh's Grameen Telecom holds GP's 38 percent shares and Norway's Telenor the remaining 62 percent.

The telecommunication industry in Bangladesh is now estimated to represent around 1 percent of the country's GDP. The company's contribution to the government's exchequer, including all taxes and VAT (Value added tax) from the services, will be more than Tk 2000 crore this year.

The GP has invested around Tk



PHOTO: STAR  
GrameenPhone Managing Director Erik Aas (L) speaks at a press conference in the capital yesterday organised to celebrate the mobile operator's 10 million subscribers mark. General Manager (Information) Syed Yamin Bakht (R) and Head of Marketing Rubaba Dowla Matin are also seen.

6000 crore so far in expanding its network and services, covering more than 95 percent of the country's population, Aas said, adding that the company invested Tk2000 crore in 2005 and expects to invest the same amount in the current year.

The GP MD said Bangladesh is presently one of the top 10 mobile phone growth markets in the Asia Pacific region with about 16 million mobile phone subscribers. However, the telephone penetration rate still remains low at around 12 percent in the country, he added.

"Shareholders of the company are actively considering the issue," he said, adding "it will take time, we have to examine the market because we think GP's shares will have a huge impact on the capital market."

When asked about allegations that multinational companies have repatriated a huge amount of money to their own countries, The GP top brass said, "We have repatriated an amount less than 10 percent of our net profit. Maximum portion of the profit has been reinvested in expanding networks here".

### PLANS TO OFFLOAD SHARES

Erik Aas said the company's shareholders have reached a consensus on the plan of offloading its shares in the Dhaka Stock Exchange. The GP MD, however, declined to spell out when the plan would be implemented.

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Under the programme, GP will award the 100 subscribers spending an amount ranging from Tk300 to Tk500 with cameras and EDGE enabled handsets, 10 subscribers who spend an amount ranging from Tk501 to Tk1000 will be awarded plasma tv. Besides, five subscribers having expenditure of an amount between Tk1001 and Tk 3000 will be awarded Japanese cars and one lucky subscriber spending above Tk3001 during the time will be awarded an apartment in Dhaka city.

Meanwhile, the GP is going to offer recharge denominations as low as Tk 10. Under the offer, Tk 10-29 denominations reload will have a one-day validity and Tk30-49 denominations will have 3-day validity.

The GP officials also said more than 600 service desks have been established nationwide to serve the customers with a minimum of travel time. The company also plans to launch a programme to establish 500 community information centres by the year-end.

They said the company has more than 5000 employees, while another 1 lakh people are directly dependent on its business by working as vendors, suppliers and retailers.

Moreover, Village Phone, another popular initiative of the company, especially for the rural women, is providing good business opportunities for more than 2.6 lakh operators.

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