

Uniform rules for telecom sought

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The country's telecom industry should be run by such a set of uniform regulations that ensure a level playing field for both the local and foreign investors, speakers at a discussion said yesterday.

The speakers also urged the government to reduce bandwidth prices soon for the sake of the sector's development.

"Discriminatory regulations should be removed," said Qazi Kholiqzaman Ahmad, president of Bangladesh Economic Association.

It is very natural that any investment is meant for getting a return within a certain period, he said, adding: "The regulations should be

in way that a healthy competition remains among the operators."

The roundtable on Telecommunication in National Development: Problems and Prospects, organised by Bangla daily Samakal, also highlighted the taxation policies in the telecom industry.

Mehbub Chowdhury, president of South Asia Mobile Forum, high officials from telecom operators, vendors and internet service providers also spoke.

SM Khabiruzzaman, managing director of Bangladesh Telecommunications Company Ltd, questioned why the last government did not open up the voice over internet protocol (VoIP) technology.

He said the government had a plan

to open up VoIP for all the operators. But bypassing that the last government restricted the technology.

No one in the world can avoid VoIP technology, said Mehbub Chowdhury, adding that all the telecom operators need to use VoIP technology.

"The government should not restrict the technology," said Ashrafur Haque Chowdhury, general manager of Warid Telecom. He demanded that the government formulate a policy consulting the operators about how VoIP should run.

Parvez Ahmed, a consultant for Banglalion, a WiMax licensee, said there is no alternative to reducing bandwidth prices if the government

wants to reach internet or telecom services to the mass.

Citing an example, he said in Europe for the end users 1Mbps bandwidth costs only Tk 1,000, whereas in Bangladesh operators have to pay Tk 22,000 for 1Mbps.

"Like the government, we also want to provide internet services at minimum costs. But if I pay Tk 22,000 for 1Mbps, it is not possible," Parvez said.

Responding to the operators' demand for withdrawal of Tk 800 tax on a SIM (subscriber identity module) card, Abdul Mannan Patwari, a member of National Board of Revenue, said they would discuss the matter before the upcoming budget.



Top Citi official to visit Dhaka

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Mohammad Al-Shroogi, division executive of Citigroup (Middle East, Levant, Egypt and Pakistan) is scheduled to arrive in Dhaka today on a two-day visit.

In a statement, Citi said Al-Shroogi would explore business opportunities on Islamic banking in Bangladesh.

The purpose of his visit is to further strengthen relations between companies in Bangladesh and Middle East and government entities, according to the statement.

Al-Shroogi, a graduate from the University of Kuwait, is also the chief executive officer of Citi United Arab Emirates based in Dubai. He is the chairman of Citi Islamic Investment Bank.

Comcast CEO receives \$24.7m compensation

AP, Philadelphia

The chief executive of Comcast Corp received a compensation package worth \$24.7 million in 2008, down slightly from the prior year, according to calculations by The Associated Press that were based on a Friday Securities and Exchange Commission filing.

Brian Roberts received a base salary of \$2.8 million, up 5 percent from the prior year, and a bonus of \$881,000, down 39 percent. This bonus was in exchange for cancellation of certain options to buy common shares of QVC Inc., in which Comcast once held a stake.

Roberts also received a bonus pegged to performance totalling \$7.4 million, up 17 percent from 2007, while all other benefits totalled \$3.4 million, up 7 percent. These benefits include \$417,000 in insurance benefits.

Commodities steady

AFP, London

Commodity prices held steady this week as the G20 summit stoked hopes of an economic upturn and rising demand for raw materials but gold fell as world leaders agreed to sell reserves to help fund IMF lending.

Markets were overshadowed Friday by news that the US unemployment rate jumped to a fresh 25-year high of 8.5 percent in March as recession-battered employers shed another 663,000 jobs.

OIL: Oil prices paused after a volatile week as investors reacted to a mixed outlook for the global economy and US energy inventory data.

Prices jumped sharply early in the week on hopes of improved demand thanks to G20 efforts to kick-start the global economy. However, they fell late Friday after the US unemployment report.

By Friday, on the New York Mercantile Exchange (NYMEX), light sweet crude for delivery in May had eased to 51.89 dollars a barrel from 52.21 dollars a week earlier.

On London's Intercontinental Exchange (ICE), Brent North Sea crude for May firmed to 52.49 dollars a barrel from 51.80

dollars a barrel a week earlier.

PRECIOUS METALS: Prices diverged, but gold dipped briefly under 900 dollars per ounce after the G20 said they would seek to sell IMF gold reserves to raise funds to help the world's poorest nations.

"Gold prices remained weak against improved equity markets," said Lewis at Deutsche Bank.

By late Friday on the London Bullion Market, gold had fallen to 905 dollars an ounce from 924 dollars a week earlier.

Silver fell to 12.68 dollars an ounce from 13.22 dollars.

On the London Platinum and Palladium Market, platinum rose to 1,139 dollars an ounce at the late fixing on Friday from 1,131 dollars a week earlier.

Palladium gained to 219 dollars an ounce from 215 dollars.

BASE METALS: Base metals prices rose, reflecting gains in equities as investors looked ahead to an expected easing of the worst global slump since the 1930s and a pickup in demand.

"We believe industrial metal prices are being supported by the recent rally in global equity markets," said analyst Joel Crane at Deutsche Bank.

By Friday on the London Metal Exchange, copper for delivery in three months rose to 4,179 dollars a tonne from 3,994 dollars the previous week.

Three-month aluminium gained to 1,450 dollars a tonne from 1,415 dollars.

Three-month lead climbed to 1,280 dollars a tonne from 1,262 dollars.

Three-month tin advanced to 10,550 dollars a tonne from 10,175 dollars.

Three-month zinc rose to 1,341 dollars a tonne from 1,335 dollars.

Three-month nickel increased to 10,750 dollars a tonne from 9,649 dollars.

GRAINS AND SOYA: Grains and soya prices were higher.

By Friday on the Chicago Board of Trade, maize for delivery in May rose to 4.01 dollars a bushel from 3.87 dollars the previous week.

May-dated soyabean meal - used in animal feed - gained to 9.80 dollars from 9.17 dollars.

Wheat for May increased to 5.53 dollars a bushel from 5.07 dollars.

SUGAR: Sugar prices were higher.

By Friday on LIFFE, the price of a tonne of white sugar for delivery in May rose to 400 pounds from 388.30 pounds a week earlier.



Jalil named Mercantile Bank chairman

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Mercantile Bank Ltd has recently elected Md Abdul Jalil, MS Ahsan, and Golam Faruk Ahmed as the bank's chairman, first vice-chairman and second vice-chairman respectively.

Jalil, one of the sponsor directors of Mercantile Bank, contributed to formulating trade and commercial policies of the country as a commerce minister during 1996-2001.

MS Ahsan, a sponsor director of the bank, is founder president of Bangla Bazar Mohila Madrasah, according to a press statement.

Golam Faruk Ahmed, another sponsor director of the bank, is also the director of Peoples Insurance Co Ltd.

Kraft Foods offers salmonella timeline

AP, Fresno, California

Kraft Foods Inc, the company whose testing led to the nationwide pistachio recall, said Friday it first heard there was salmonella in its trail mix in late 2007, but could not trace the possible source to tainted nuts from California until two weeks ago.

Workers at one of Kraft's manufacturers in Illinois turned up a contaminated batch of fruits and nuts in December 2007. Then, in September of last year, another positive sample appeared.

Only after thousands of tests could the company pinpoint the source for the second positive test as California-based Setton Pistachio of Terra Bella, Inc., said Kraft spokeswoman Susan Davison.

Last week, the food products giant recalled or destroyed all suspect foods, and notified its suppliers and the Food and Drug Administration.



National Board of Revenue Chairman Muhammad Abdul Mazid speaks at a pre-budget view-exchange meeting, organised by Chittagong Chamber of Commerce and Industry in the port city yesterday.

Recession safeguard to figure in budget

Says NBR chairman

CU CORRESPONDENT

National Board of Revenue (NBR) chairman yesterday said the ways to offset the fallout stemming from the global recession and materialise the dream of "Digital Bangladesh" will figure high in the budget for the next fiscal year (2009-2010).

Muhammad Abdul Mazid called upon all not to be panicked amid recession and said every crisis will have to be tackled with patience and the economic power Bangladesh has.

He was addressing a pre-budget view-exchange meeting organised by Chittagong Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCCI) at its conference room.

The NBR boss said recession will cast a negative impact on foreign currency

inflow, and called for restraining from importing unnecessary and luxury goods and those available in the country to help ease the crises.

"Import substitutes and export-oriented industries are also being emphasised in the upcoming budget and the pace of our economic growth should be kept through creating domestic demand," Abdul Mazid said.

All necessary initiatives to materialise the dream of "Digital Bangladesh" within the declared timeframe will be included in the budget, he added.

Termining the cooperation between the government and the business community inevitable, the NBR chairman said they have to work amid limitation of legal, logistic and manpower supports.

He however declined to

make any advance comment on the budget, saying any speculation over the budget might create impact on the economy.

CCCI President MA Latif presided over the meeting, while NBR Member Farid Ahmed, CCCI Senior Vice President MA Salam, Vice President Shafiqul Haque, BGMEA First Vice President Nasir Uddin Chowdhury, trade body leaders, customs and VAT officials and CCCI directors were present.

The business leaders brought allegations of hassles during export and import through the customs house and urged the NBR boss to take immediate steps for easing the problems. They demanded round-the-clock services at the customs house and amendments to some laws related to customs activities.

World economy gets reality check after G20 euphoria

AFP, Washington

Gloomy data from the world's leading nations Friday provided a stark reminder of the perilous state of the global economy a day after euphoria stemming from a G20 summit in London.

The US jobless rate leapt to a 25-year high of 8.5 percent in March as employers shed 663,000 jobs, offering evidence the crisis is far from over.

"Obviously, this is hitting the United States hard," US President Barack Obama said, as he addressed the deepening economic slump during a joint news conference with German Chancellor Angela Merkel on a visit to Germany.

"If we do not have concerted action, we will have collective failure."

There was also another decline in the key US services sector, which contracted for the sixth consecutive month in March instead of the uptick analysts expected for the sector that dominates the world's top economy.

The Institute for Supply Management said its nonmanufacturing index stood at a seasonally

adjusted 40.8 percent in March, 0.8 percentage point lower than the 41.6 percent registered in February.

The ISM index sets 50 percent as the barrier between growth and contraction.

Economists said the unrelenting surge in joblessness was not surprising because recovery will begin to show up in other data.

Douglas Porter, economist at BMO Capital Markets, said the view looking forward is not as bleak as in the rear-view mirror.

"Employment will be among the last major indicators to turn the corner," he said.

"First, sales must revive, and then be sustained, then business will try to squeeze more out of remaining employees, then add hours to the workweek, and only then add to payrolls. So, even as jobs spiral lower, another broad array of indicators this week suggested that the howling recession winds may be easing a touch."

Ethan Harris at Barclays Capital said that the test for the economy will be to sustain recovery with the help of government stimulus even if rising unemployment dents

consumer spending, the key driver of activity.

"The fiscal stimulus will be overwhelmed if the job market does not begin to stabilize in the coming months," he said.

The outlook was dismal in Europe too, where the Spanish central bank forecast an unemployment rate of 19.4 percent next year and Ireland said its recession-hit economy would shrink by about 7.0 percent in 2009.

There was a note of optimism however as the Purchasing Managers Index in the eurozone improved. The PMI level rose to 38.3 points from 36.2 points in February -- although still far below a 50-point threshold indicating contraction.

The upward revision of the index "marginally boosts hopes that the rate of contraction could be starting to moderate," said Howard Archer, chief European economist at IHS Global Insight, an economic research consultancy.

There was also fresh data from China indicating manufacturing activity expanded in March for the first time in six months, pointing towards a "stabilizing" economy following massive stimulus measures by Beijing.

Google in talks to buy Twitter

AFP, Washington

Google chief executive Eric Schmidt recently dismissed Twitter as a "poor man's email" and shot down speculation the Web search giant was interested in buying the micro-blogging sensation.

That may no longer be the case.

Influential technology blogger Michael Arrington reported on his blog TechCrunch on Friday that the Mountain View, California-based Internet powerhouse is in talks to acquire the hot San Francisco-based startup.

Citing two sources familiar with the matter, TechCrunch said the price was unknown but it was likely to be "well, well north" of the 250-million-dollar valuation placed on Twitter in a recent round of venture capital funding.

Arrington said Google would pay cash or publicly valued stock for Twitter, which turned down a 500-



This file photo shows the sign for Google headquarters in Mountain View, California. US Internet giant Google is in negotiations to acquire micro-blogging sensation Twitter for over \$250 million.

million-dollar takeover offer from social network colossus Facebook just a few months ago.

Arrington initially reported that Google and Twitter were in "late-

stage negotiations" but he backed off that assertion slightly in a later post in which he said the acquisition talks were "still fairly early stage."

But Kara Swisher, another

respected Silicon Valley blogger, writing on her blog Boomtown, dismissed the report by rival TechCrunch.

"While the 'news' that Google was in 'late-stage' talks to acquire Twitter, which TechCrunch reported last night, certainly sounds exciting, it isn't accurate in any way," Swisher said.

"In fact, Twitter and Google have simply been engaged in 'some product-related discussions,' according to one source, around real-time search and the search giant better crawling the microblogging service," she said.

"No negotiations, no deal, nada," she quoted an unnamed source as saying.

Despite CEO Schmidt's protestations, Twitter's potential as a real-time search engine has sparked recurring bouts of speculation that Google may be interested in buying the company.



Mr. Prodipto Basu Roy (ML) with participants in a seminar organized by Intertek Bangladesh Limited

Intertek organized ISO 9001:2008 training for leading Companies in Dhaka to help bring competitive advantage to all types of organizations

Intertek, a leading global provider of management systems auditing and certification, organized a briefing session to raise awareness on the benefits of ISO 9001:2008 yesterday. The session was conducted for multinationals, local companies, industries, pharmaceuticals and educational institutes.

"ISO 9001 is now the most widely recognized standard for Quality Management. Companies in both public and private sectors seek suppliers who have ISO 9001-based quality management systems. It is therefore an area that you cannot afford to ignore," said Mr. Prodipto Basu Roy, Intertek's

General Manager of Systems Certification in India. The System Certification business unit of Intertek provides management systems audit and registration services to a variety of internationally-recognized standards. These services provide global market access to customers by providing evidence that their management systems are effective and continuously improving.

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