



LAPTOP FAIR 2010

The tale of telecom

MD HASAN

In the early 90s, Mahmudul Haque paid Tk 20,000 in bribes for a telephone connection. But unfortunately, Haque did not get a connection and neither did he get his money back. The money was pocketed by a BTB middleman.

Presently, all of Haque's family members, including his 17-year-old grandson, own mobile phones, thanks to the handy GSM technology.

There was a time when the telecoms service provider was dictator in the single player market. Customers were like slaves and service provider became their masters.

"But after GSM operators debuted in the mid 90's, competition changed the situation. Subscribers became the masters and the service providers became slaves," said Abu Saeed Khan, senior research fellow of IJRNEasia, a regional telecom think-tank.

Looking back at the history of telecoms in the country, Bangladesh Telephone and Telegraph Board (BTB) was the lone telecoms operator until 1993. Bangladesh Telecom Limited (BTL) then awarded the license to operate cellular services.

However, the first mobile service in Bangladesh remained limited to only a few rich customers, due to its hefty price.

Haque, who frantically sought a BTB (now BTCL -- Bangladesh Telecommunications Company Limited) telephone connection to talk with his son living abroad, could not even then get a connection then because of exorbitant prices.

"It was difficult for me to buy a mobile phone that cost more than one lakh taka. The tariff was also beyond my capacity," said Haque.

Monopolisation in the telecoms sector shattered with the debut of three GSM operators -- Sheba Telecom,



Grameenphone and Aktel -- in the mid 90's.

Competition among the GSM players brought phenomenal power into the hands of the customers.

Customers could switch from one operator to the next with the GSM (global system for mobile communications) technology without the need for changing handsets, which was not the case for CDMA, said Khan.

Although mobile tariff dropped from around Tk 25 a minute to around Tk 11 from the shift from CDMA operator to GSM, the technology remained beyond the grasp of the masses until 2005 due to the still high prices then.

Bangladesh needed almost decade to add 10 million customers into the mobile networks. Interesting enough, the next 40 million customers were added in a mere four years -- 2005-09.

The price war among the operators intensified after Egypt based mobile operator Orascom acquired Sheba Telecom in 2005. Connection prices were further lowered to Tk 10 and the per minute tariff dropped to Tk 0.25 under the aggressive marketing strategy by Banglalink, the subsidiary of Orascom.

The mobile phone customer base reached 52.43 million by the end of 2009.

In the latest move in the telecoms industry, Bharti Airtel acquired a 70 percent stake of Bangladesh's fourth largest mobile operator Warid Telecom. From a customers' point of view, arrival of the new operator will instigate a fresh new round in the price war among operators.

Haque, a retired government official from Magbazar, wants more people connected with the handy communication technology. He feels many more of his rural relatives could stay in touch if the call tariffs were lower.

Affordable to all, mobile phones are now a common phenomenon in the country

TELECOM HISTORY

Landmarks in the history of telecom industry in Bangladesh

Bangladesh Telegraph and Telephone (T&T) department was created in 1971

Sheba Telecom (Pvt) Ltd was granted a license in 1989 to operate cellular services in the rural areas of 199 upazilas

Pacific Bangladesh Telephone Ltd (1989) and Bangladesh Telecom (1989) received the mobile phone license

Grameenphone (1996) and Telephone Malaysia International Bangladesh (1996) were formed

Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission was formed in 2001

Egypt based Orascom acquired Sheba Telecom in 2005

Japanese NTT DoCoMo bought 30 percent stake in Aktel in 2008.

Market largest telecom operator Grameenphone listed in capital market in late 2009

Bharti Airtel acquired 70 percent stake in Warid Telecom in January 2010.

HP award winners

MUSA IBRAHIM

Aggressive marketing in the computer accessories sector of the country is what has set Hewlett-Packard (HP) as one of the top companies in the country. The company's sales volume is increasing day by day after introduction of local warranty.

The company is also trying to introduce touch smart desktop and speakers. These were announced at the HP's grand reseller meet and award winner's programme held on January 14. More than 100 HP partner participated in the occasion.

Ng Tian-Chong, vice president of HP-PSG South East Asia, Taiwan and Korea handed over a special lifetime achievement award to MN Islam, chairman of Flora Limited for his contribution in the sector.

Imrul Hossain Bhuiyan, country business manager of HP-PSG Bangladesh addressed the programme saying the consumer market is the key focus for the company in the country.

Ng Tian-Chong said the mobility, greater adoption of international brands, and increasing consumer demand for PCs and notebooks are the main drivers of growth for the computing market.

Philip Lau, country general manager of HP-PSG RoAEC said on-the-ground initiatives, specialised customer promotions and partner programmes would be continued to drive the consumer market in Bangladesh for HP.

Google unveils Nexus One

AFP, California

Google unveiled its new Nexus One smartphone on January 5, in a direct challenge to heavyweight Apple's iPhone handsets.

The Internet giant billed the touch-screen device, the culmination of collaboration with Taiwanese electronics titan HTC, a 'superphone' that marked the next step in the evolution of its Android software.

"I think you will see it pushes the limits of what's possible on a smart phone," HTC chief executive Peter Chou said as the smartphone debuted at Google headquarters in Mountain View, California.

"It is very thin and feels good in your hand."

Nexus One handsets are no thicker than pencils and no heavier than keychain Swiss Army knives, Google engineer Erick Tseng said while demonstrating one of the smartphones.

"It is a great marriage of form and function," Tseng said.

Nexus One smartphones are built on the same Android 2.1 software that runs Droid smartphones that recently hit the market with innovations like 3D graphics, according to Tseng.

The handsets feature new speech command capabilities that allow users to speak emails, text messages or Internet search queries.

Nexus One devices can provide turn-by-turn spoken driving directions from a Google mapping program.

Google launched its own online store



at google.com/phone where the Nexus One will be sold.

"This is really a Google phone," said Interpret analyst Michael Gartenberg.

"A lot of the Android phones that came to market are kind of lackluster. One of the

ways to avoid mediocrity is to kick things up a couple of notches yourself."

Nexus One smartphones will be sold at the Google-hosted Web store for 529 dollars "unlocked," without ties to a telecom carrier.

Hard to Pick: visitors look at different models of notebooks on the first day of Zoom Laptop Fair



PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HAQUE

Banglalink 'Jigyasha' wins Asia Mobile Awards 2009

IT, TELECOM DESK

Banglalink Jigyasha won the Best Mobile Enterprise Application Product or Service award at the Asia Mobile Awards 2009. Organised by the GSM Association, the apex body of GSM operators around the world, the Asia Mobile Awards are designed to highlight and reward the change-driving products, services, innovation and initiatives across the mobile eco-system that serve the diverse Asian marketplace.

Banglalink, the second largest mobile operator in Bangladesh have always tried to make a difference in the lives of people by providing appropriate communication solutions. In line with such efforts, Banglalink pioneered to launch this unique service called "banglalink jigyasha". The first phase of 'Krishi (agriculture) Jigyasha 7676' service was launched on December 19, 2008, and the second phase 'Babsha (business) Jigyasha 7677' was launched on August 28, 2009.

Commenting on this prestigious achievement, Banglalink CEO Ahmed Abou Doma said "Banglalink has always been the market leader in driving value, firstly by making mobile telephony affordable and available to the masses, and building on it thereafter through our innovative products and services that truly make a difference in the lives and livelihoods of the people of Bangladesh". He further added, "Being recognised on a truly global scale by the apex body of GSM operators is a remarkable honor and something that we can be really proud of as Bangladeshis".

Before this service was launched, farmers and SME owners had to travel to a number of different sources to find all the relevant information. But with 'banglalink jigyasha' SME owners and farmers from any part of Bangladesh are able to get the solutions to their problems by simply dialing 7676 or 7677 from their Banglalink connections.

The winner of the GSMA's Asia Mobile Awards 2009 was announced on November 18, 2009, at the Mobile Asia Congress in Hong Kong. Shihab Ahmed, marketing director of Banglalink received the award on behalf of Orascom Telecom and Banglalink.



Roundtable on 'One year of Digital Bangladesh'

IT, TELECOM DESK

Despite some developments towards 'Digital Bangladesh', coordination in achieving the goal has become the most essential need of the time, speakers said at a roundtable on 'One year of Digital Bangladesh' organised by Bangladesh ICT Journalist Forum (BIJF) on January 16.

They also suggested appointing an adviser to oversee the process and reforming the ministries concerned to make it organised, if necessary.

Hasanul Haq Inu, chairman of the parliamentary standing committee for post and telecommunication ministry chaired the roundtable while Dr. Akram Hossain Chowdhury, MP and chairman of Centre for e-Parliament Research was special guest at the event. Mohammad Kawsar Uddin, president, BIJF, convened the roundtable.

Inu at the event said a lot of effort is already in process towards developing 'Digital Bangladesh', but people are unaware of the situation because of irregular developments and lack of information. He expressed the need of a coordinator to centrally manage the whole process.

The speakers also expressed the need of public and private partnership towards faster implementation of the vision 2021.

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We gave a new look to 'StarTech' and renamed it 'IT and Telecom', it's not just the look but the focus has also shifted more towards the ICT and telecom industry, the fastest growing segments of the country. Readers and related companies are requested to send in their articles, press releases, comments to In-charge, IT & Telecom Page, Email: nafid@thedailystar.net



TECHPHOTO

PARROT AR.DRONE

A man maneuvers the AR.drone from French company Parrot -- a small remote-controlled helicopter using the accelerometer in an Apple iPhone -- on January 13, in Paris.

PHOTO: AFP



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