

## Broadband poised for a leap

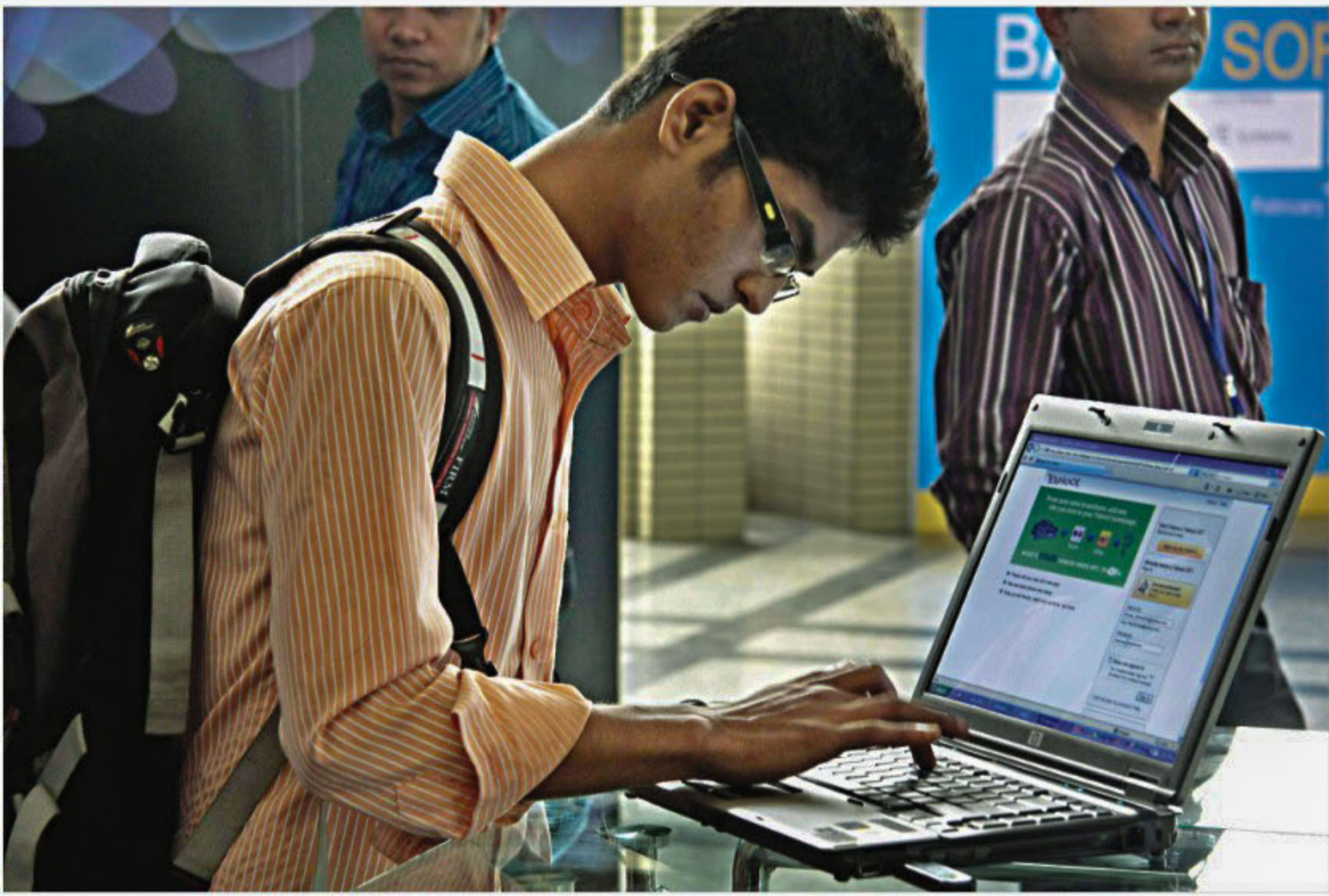


PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

Mobile internet usage has increased the country's online penetration.

MD HASAN

Bangladesh's slowly advancing broadband market is expected to flourish with affordable rates for the masses, as the telecom minister assured prospective licensees that the 3G spectrum will not be auctioned.

The minister's assurance however raised mixed responses among telecom industry insiders, as no one is sure about the criteria of the "beauty contest", which is expected to become a tool for awarding the 3G (third generation) licences. Traditionally, beauty contests incorporate personality, talent and answers to judges' questions as

criteria for selection.

In response to journalists' queries, Telecom Minister Rajuddin Ahmed Raju recently said: "The 3G licence will not be auctioned as was happened with the WiMax licence, which was awarded at a hefty price of Tk215 crore."

Bangladesh's internet penetration rate may reach 32 percent at household level and 66 percent at business level by 2020, according to a study conducted by Boston Consulting Group (BCG), USA.

At present, the average internet penetration rate is only 4 percent, which is mainly driven by mobile operators' EDGE (enhanced data rates for global evolution) and

GPRS (general packet radio service) solutions.

All the mobile operators are ready to upgrade their networks to 3G from the existing 2.5G or 2.75G as 3G is considered one of the most competitive tools to provide high-speed internet.

The telecom regulator has already reserved 40 MHz spectrums to allocate to four prospective operators.

"We welcome the telecom minister's comment on arranging a beauty contest to award the 3G licence, rather than monetary bidding," said Ahmed Abou Doma, chief executive officer of Banglalink.

He said this is exactly what happened in many advanced countries that have already launched 3G.

"They implied the beauty contest approach because it ensures fastest and widest 3G coverage along with the highest service levels and quality for the customers," Doma said.

However, the market's top player -- Grameenphone (GP) -- has doubts about the transparency of the 'beauty contest'.

"I don't have details on the exact model or form of the 'beauty contest' that the telecom ministry and the regulator have talked about. Therefore, it's difficult to accept or reject the idea. It may be noted that beauty contests are inherently a non-transparent process," said Oddvar Hesjedal, chief executive officer of Grameenphone Ltd.

Hesjedal, however, said it might be considered if the 'beauty criteria' are wide enough to include all mobile players in Bangladesh and all the terms and conditions of spectrum allocation are affordable to all the existing operators.

"GP will support any process, which is credible and transparent," he said.

He suggested the regulator proceed with public knowledge and go for an open consultation before launching the model.

"In any process, we must not forget the ultimate objective of providing affordable mobile broadband and modern services," said Hesjedal.

Among the six operators, five GSM (global system of mobile communication) operators are technically eligible for the 3G spectrum. Except for CDMA (code division multiple access) technology-based Citycell, Grameenphone, Banglalink, AKTEL and Warid will contest for the 3G spectrum.

However, state-run Teletalk may enjoy a privilege in getting the 3G

spectrum without participating in the 'beauty contest'.

"Nothing has been decided yet," said Zia Ahmed, chairman of Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC), the regulator. "We are working on finalising the guideline for 3G."

In Bangladesh, only 4.4 million people have access to the internet.

Forty-eight percent of urban Bangladesh is aware of internet services, while 29 percent of the rural population have heard about the service, said the BCG study.

Bangladesh will have around 20 million internet subscribers by 2020 if proper policy support is provided, and 90 percent of the users will be added through wireless connections, the study said.

Annual earnings from broadband internet penetration in Bangladesh is expected to reach Tk 128 billion by 2020 if the country ensures a rule-based policy regime, according to the US-based consulting group.

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### Five billion people to use mobile phones in 2010: UN

AFP, Barcelona

The ranks of cell phone subscribers will swell to five billion people this year thanks to the growth of smartphones in developed nations and mobile services in poor nations, a UN agency said on February 15.

The International Telecommunication Union (ITU) also said the number of mobile broadband subscriptions would exceed one billion this year after reaching 600 million in 2009.

"Even during an economic crisis, we have seen no drop in the demand for communications services," ITU Secretary-General Hamadou Toure said in a statement at the Mobile World Congress in Barcelona, Spain, the industry's biggest trade show.

The number of mobile subscribers had reached 4.6 billion people last year.

"I am confident that we will continue to see a rapid uptake in mobile cellular services in particular in 2010, with many more people using their phones to access the Internet," Toure said.

In the developing world, the growth has been driven by the use of phones for mobile banking and health services, the ITU said.

"Good examples include sending SMS messages to deliver instructions on when and how to take complex medication such as anti-retrovirals or vaccines," he said, adding that such uses can save millions of dollars and lives.

People with no bank accounts but mobile subscriptions are also increasingly able to do financial transactions with their phones in developing countries, he said.

A sign reading 'Mobile World Congress' is pictured during the opening of the 3GSM World congress in Barcelona.

PHOTO: AFP



### Acer unveils new notebooks, smartphones

IT.TELECOM DESK

In a glamorous event, Executive Technologies Ltd., the distributor for Acer products in Bangladesh unveiled its new product line in the local market.

The event for the officials titled 'Aspiring Night' was held on Wednesday night at the grand ballroom of Westin Hotel in the capital.

S. Rajendran, chief marketing officer of Acer India Pvt. Ltd, introduced a full suite of fresh technologies such as Core i architecture, Multi-Touch and 3D Notebooks at the event.



S. Rajendran, chief marketing officer of Acer India Pvt. Ltd, speaks at the event.

Acer launched the Aspire 4740 and 5740g notebooks with the Core i3, the new breed of processors from Intel. The Aspire 5738 3D notebook and the touch-screen Aspire 5738pg were also launched.

Acer Smartphones (bTouch e100, bTouch e200 and neoTouch s200) were also launched at the event.

IT policy-makers, business partners, resellers, media were present at the event. Representatives of Acer from Acer India Pvt. Ltd along with guest speakers from Intel and Microsoft were present at the event for keynotes address.



## Nokia rolls out five Bangla range phones

IT.TELECOM DESK

Morshedul Haque, an employee of a state-owned bank, always seems puzzled about the operating system (OS) of his cellphone. Most of the times he is seen taking tutorials from his university-going daughter on 'How to operate the device properly'.

A small-time rice trader of Chittagong, Rokibul Islam, treats texting system of his cellphone as a 'curse' of his life. As a businessman, he often gets huge text messages. But he had to appoint an assistant to receive the messages and to reply as per Rokib's instructions. These are common scenarios of daily lives of many Bangladeshis.

People like Morshed and Rokib could breathe a sigh of relief if they could understand their handsets' features in their own languages.

Understanding the gravity of the situation, many mobile handset manufacturers now opened up separate segments to only concentrate on how to reach this particular portion thus they can easily understand and use their features according to their wills.

Nokia, the world leader in mobile handset manufacturing, has been working to deal with this particular issue for a certain period of time. As part of it, Nokia on Tuesday unveiled five new affordable

and user-friendly handsets -- Nokia 1280, Nokia 1616, Nokia 1800, Nokia 2220 slide and Nokia 2690 -- in their Bangla language support range in order to make mobile communication easier and simpler which will help both urban and rural people to access information.

Speaking at the launching programme at Shilpakala Academy, Nowfel Anower, head of marketing of Nokia Emerging Asia, said Nokia launched these phones in February to pay tribute to the martyrs of the language movement in 1952 and the International Mother Language Day as well.

He said, "As mobile technologies are for empowering entrepreneurs and providing consumers with knowledge, entertainment and the ability to connect with friends and family, these new handsets will offer consumers a whole new range of opportunities, including getting their first digital identity, without the need for a PC."

Bangla-supported operating system is one of the common key features of these newly launched handsets. Even those, who find it difficult, would feel comfort with these. Other features are exactly the same of Nokia's regular phones in affordable range. The price range of the devices starts from Tk 1870 to Tk 4995.

Nokia 2220 is currently available in

the market. Nokia 1616 will be available in the market in the last week of February, Nokia 2690 in March while Nokia 1280 and Nokia 1800 in April.

PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HAQ

### Microsoft eyes mobile comeback with new platform

AFP, Barcelona

Microsoft unveiled a new version of its mobile operating system on February 15 as the US software giant seeks to regain lost ground in the highly competitive smartphone market.

Chief executive Steve Ballmer presented the Windows Phone 7 Series at the Mobile World Congress in Barcelona, Spain, ending months of speculation about what Microsoft had in store for the industry's biggest trade show.

"We're taking a step, I think a big step," Ballmer said, adding that devices fitted with the new software would be available in time for the winter holiday shopping season. "I'm enthusiastic about the direction that we're heading."

"We hope 7 is our lucky number," he said. Microsoft has been up against strong competition from Internet giant Google's Android, as both newcomers fight for a share of a market dominated by the BlackBerry and Apple's iPhone.

"The primary goal of Windows Mobile 7 is

clearly to address Microsoft's shortcomings in the consumer mobile market," said Charles Golvin, analyst at research firm Forrester.

"All plaudits for their persistence aside, in my view this is their final chance to get it right," Golvin said.

Google has made a splash in the mobile phone industry with its Android operating system, launched in 2007, and phone makers have announced that they would release several more smartphones with this platform this year.

In its upgrade, Microsoft completely changed the platform's interface and installed the capabilities of its Zune MP3 player, which has only been available in the United States.

The system includes six "hubs" that group services by themes, such as a "people" inbox that includes emails, text messages and updates from social network activities, or an Xbox Live icon for online games.

Microsoft-powered touch-screen phones will be rolled out later this year.



**TECHPHOTO**  
**HEXBUG**  
Various types of Hexbugs by Innovation First, Inc. on display at the annual Toy Fair, February 14, in New York. Hexbugs are described as micro robotic creatures that are self-powered and motorized.

PHOTO: AFP



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