

IT & TELECOM

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Industry views on alternative link

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The nation is set to tie links with its giant neighbour, India, through optical fibre by next month.

But insiders within the telecom and IT industry are still in a haze about whether the move will actually be able to ease the problems that the sector faces.

While a majority of the insiders have hailed the move to create an alternative to the existing lone submarine cable connection, many are still sceptical as to whether this would be a step in the right direction in reducing the high price of bandwidth that deters growth of internet connectivity across Bangladesh.

State run Bangladesh Telecommunications Company Ltd (BTCL) said earlier this month that it is ready to launch its long awaited optical fibre cable, linking Darshana of Bangladesh with Kkrishna Nagar of India.

"From our side, we are all set to go into operations within four weeks. Hopefully, our Indian counterpart Bharat Sanchar Nirgom Ltd (BSNL) would also be prepared within that period," Absar Alam, managing director of BTCL, said earlier.

"This would surely increase the quality of both voice and data services," Alam told The Daily Star. "The link would provide extra bandwidth, while handling many more voice calls at a time."

Nonetheless, he was also unsure of the terms and conditions under which the international call handlers and internet service providers would be able to use the new ter-

restrial optical fibre.

"We are yet to decide on the actual terms and conditions for using the terrestrial cable," Absar said. "Many things depend on bilateral negotiations between the two countries that are beyond the control of BTCL."

Such notions have evoked mixed reactions among the country's major IT and telecom service providers. They have long been waiting alternative links to ensuring unin-



terrupted data and voice services, as well as reducing the price of bandwidth.

"We welcome the historic government move," Grameenphone Chief Executive Officer Oddvar Hesjedal said, referring to the upcoming terrestrial link with India.

"We believe such an initiative will help the growing telecom and

ICT industry," he said. "We hope to see more terrestrial cables be deployed in future."

"However, the high bandwidth price is still a bar to building Bangladesh as an outsourcing hub," added Hesjedal.

Other leaders within the telecom and IT industries also share the view that an alternative optical fibre link could bring manifold benefits to the local ICT sector.

"This could be a real boon to the

submarine cable, SMW-4, in 2006 at a cost of \$35.1 million. It has a capacity to handle 120 Gb of bandwidth, of which, the country now subscribes to 24.12 Gb.

Bangladesh Submarine Cable Company Ltd handles the lone undersea cable from Cox's Bazar to Dhaka. The country uses 23 percent of its capacity domestically.

In Bangladesh, six million people are now using the internet, while the internet penetration rate is four percent. High-speed broadband is yet to flourish because of costly bandwidth.

"With better connectivity, all sorts of web centric services and activities are likely to see a boom, as local hosting services would flourish. Providing remote access management services would be easier," Quasem said.

However, the internet service providers said the move is unlikely to have an impact on bandwidth price, referring to the cost of other infrastructure involved in providing internet services.

"Bandwidth price accounts for merely 25 percent of the total cost of providing internet services to end users," said Akhteruzzaman Manju, president of Internet Service Providers Association Bangladesh.

"Infrastructure costs, including the high procurement cost of various equipment, eat up much of our investment."

"Therefore, the internet price can only be lowered if the government provides duty free facilities on the import of such equipment," he added.

growth of the local call centres and other IT outsourcing industries," said Forkan Bin Quasem, secretary general of Bangladesh Association of Software and Information Services (BASIS).

"This could provide a solution to the frequent submarine cable glitches we often face," he said. Bangladesh was linked with a



Microsoft bets big on new phone software

AP, New York

Microsoft Corp. knows the cell phone world is where it's happening, and it's determined to be a part of it.

After years of declining sales of phones based on Microsoft's Windows Mobile software, the company is starting with a fresh slate a completely new operating system for phones.

The new handsets will go up against Apple Inc.'s highly popular iPhone and the expanding number of phones running on Google Inc.'s Android operating system.

The first phone with Windows Phone 7 will be the Samsung Focus, which hits AT&T Inc. stores Nov. 8.

In the most recent quarter, Microsoft's older system, Windows Mobile, accounted for just 5 percent of the worldwide smart phone market. That compares with 41 percent for Symbian (mainly used by Nokia Corp.), 18 percent for Research In Motion Ltd.'s BlackBerry phones, 17 percent for Android and 14 percent for the iPhone, according to research firm Gartner Inc.

From a hardware standpoint, the Windows 7 phones are indistinguishable from high-end Android phones: They have big touch screens, and a few models have slide-out keyboards.

To stand out from the competition, Microsoft has given the software a different look. It is centered around "tiles" on the front screen that are supposed to tell the user at a glance about important new information, such as e-mail and Facebook status update.

Both the iPhone and Android are fundamentally more application-centered the user has to tap on an application to see new information. However, some companies including Motorola Inc. have designed overlay software for Android that's reminiscent of Windows Phone 7's information-at-glance idea.

"We want you to get in, get out and back to your life," Microsoft CEO Steven Ballmer said at a launch event in New York. He called it "a very different kind of phone."

To make Windows Phone 7 a success, Microsoft has to win over not just phone manufacturers and phone companies, but software developers. The iPhone and Android are popular in part because of the tens of thousands of tiny applications, or "apps," made by outside software developers.

Although there are lots of applications written for Windows Mobile, they won't work on Windows Phone 7, so Microsoft has to recruit a whole new base of developers.

Quake relief iGame aims to raise aid work awareness

REUTERS, Sydney

An earthquake measuring 8.2 on the Richter scale strikes a densely-populated island in the Atlantic, killing and injuring thousands. How would you save lives?

That's the premise of a game application for the iPhone, iPad and iPod devices by the Australian branch of child rights group Save the Children that aims to give players a sense of what aid work is really about.

One screen of "Earthquake Response" requires players to get people -- represented by video game-type icons -- to tents for first aid, water or housing within a certain period of time.

As the clock runs, the number of lives saved or lost adds up, with the screens speeding up as the player advances through the levels.

"It's quite fun to play, it's quite addictive," said Ian Woolverton, a spokesman for "Save the Children" Australia.



embedded into it about what we do in times of emergencies to save the lives of children and their families."

This is provided by information about disaster relief that is flashed between each screen, he said.

So far in 2010 there have been over 80 natural disasters, including the Haiti earthquake that killed 230,000 people and the recent floods in Pakistan that have affected 21 million people, according to the Save the Children Australia website.

Though the game was aimed originally at tech-savvy young people to give them an idea of what relief work involves in a format they would understand, Woolverton said the game can be enjoyed by anyone aged 10 and above.

"The feedback has been that it's fun to play. You become quite focused on trying to save as many lives as you can," he added.

The game is available for free at iTunes.



Sony unveils 'Google TV' sets

AFP, New York

Japanese electronics giant Sony has unveiled a line of television sets featuring "Google TV," which merges online content with traditional television programming.

The Internet-enabled high-definition LCD TV sets, which will go on sale on October 16, range in price from 600 dollars for a 24-inch (61-centimeter) model to 1,400 dollars for the 46-inch (117-centimeter) version.

Sony is also offering a 32-inch (81-centimeter) set for 800 dollars and a 40-inch (102-centimeter) model for 1,000 dollars.

A Blu-ray disc player with Google TV built-in retails for 400 dollars.

"Finally, you can seamlessly search your favorite TV programs and websites on the same screen, at the same time," said Mike Abary, senior vice president of Sony's Home Division on Tuesday.

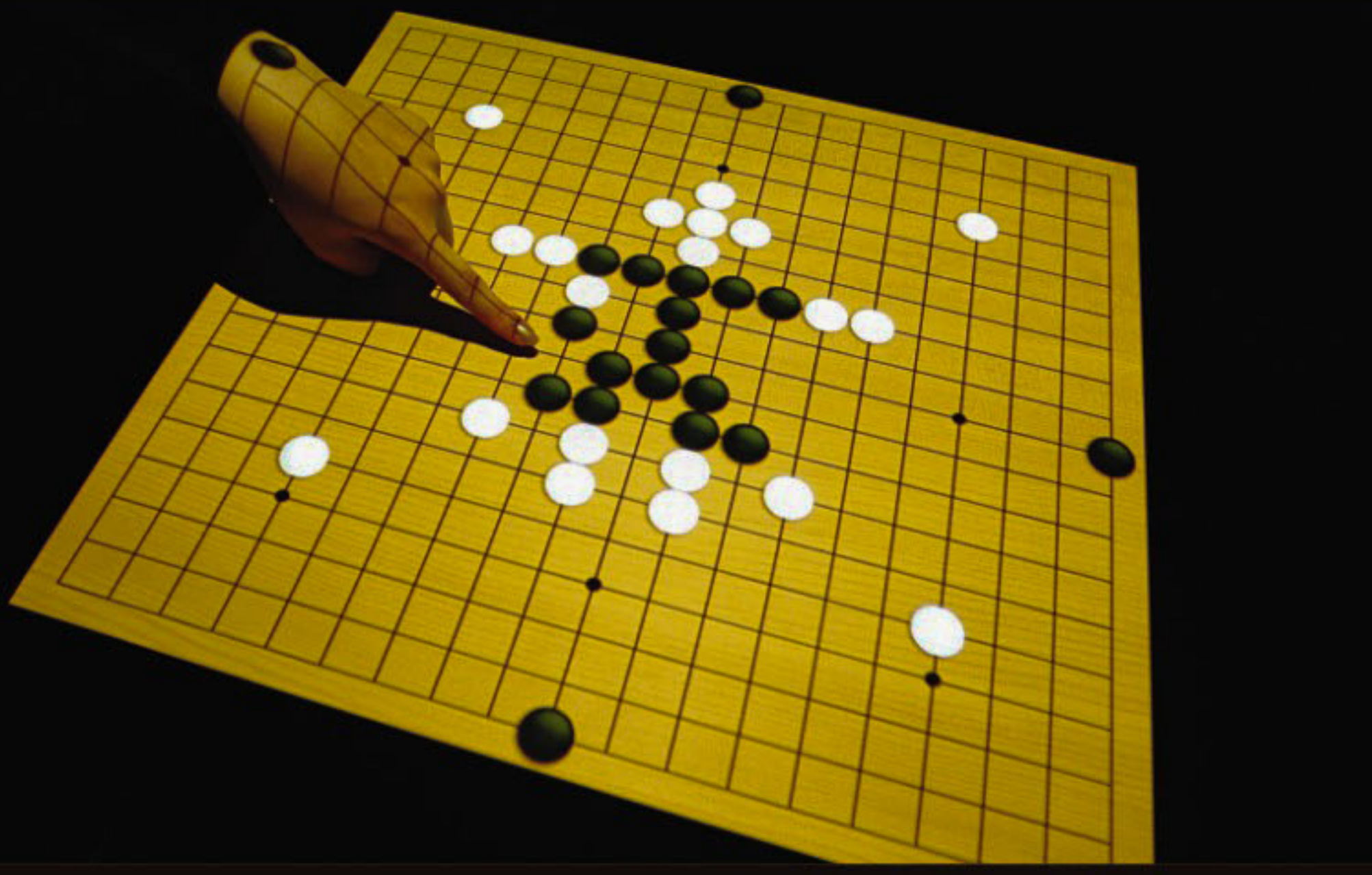
The Mountain View, California-based Google unveiled Google TV in May at a software developers conference in San Francisco.

Developed in partnership with Sony, Logitech and Intel, Google TV allows users to mesh television viewing with surfing the Web.

Google TV, which is powered by Google's Android software and Chrome Web browser, can be accessed using the Sony TVs or set-top boxes from Logitech that route Web content to existing TV sets.

Amazon, the NBA, Netflix, The New York Times, NBC Universal, Time Warner, USA Today and others will provide content and applications for Google TV.

Google is not the first technology company to attempt to marry the TV set and the Internet. A number of electronics manufacturers already offer Web-enabled televisions or digital set-top boxes.



TECHPHOTO

Mixed reality

A woman demonstrates "mixed reality go-game" during a photo-opportunity at Digital Contents Expo 2010 in Tokyo on October 14. The visual images of stone checkers on a plain wooden go-game table are placed and moved by a projector and motion-sensitive camera sensors on top. The expo goes on till October 17.

PHOTO: REUTERS



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