

Banglalink prepares employees to face 3G

ABDULLAH MAMUN

BANGLALINK is in the process of rearing itself to face the challenges of offering 3G services to the Bangladesh market in the near future, a top official said.

The operator is gradually turning focus from voice centric services to data, according to its Chief Executive Officer Ziad Shatara.

The country's second largest mobile phone operator is training its employees on different issues like marketing, customer service and human resources to adapt to the new service, he added.

The government will provide four 3G licences to the private mobile operators after an auction that is likely to be held on September 2.

All the mobile operators are making accommodations for the new service, including preparing their manpower and technologies.

Along with voice services, the operators are currently providing two other data services -- EDGE and GPRS -- but 3G offers a far better data experience. Only Citycell provides a data centric service in Bangladesh.

The Banglalink CEO has vast knowledge and leadership in maintaining data services, with experience in other countries, including Italy.

Expressing satisfaction with his employees, Shatara said, "Banglalink is one of the few companies that I have worked in with a very intelligent team. Working environment of the company is extremely positive."

"People are proud and happy to be a part of this organisation." "We are also a part of an international group -- VimpelCom, the sixth largest company in the



Ziad Shatara

world. So, the employees grow inside the organisation and also become leaders outside the organisation," Shatara said in an interview with The Daily Star.

In 2011, Banglalink faced a

merger when Amsterdam based group VimpelCom became the company's majority shareholder from Egypt based Orascom Holdings.

Many of the former Banglalink

officials are now working in the group's organisations outside Bangladesh, both on a permanent and temporary basis, he said.

It is good exposure for the employees of Banglalink when they learn on the job, alongside employees with experience in the group's companies in other countries, he added.

A total of 19 foreign consultants are working for Banglalink, who have vast knowledge on data operations, said Riviera Ho Rathore, human resources and administration director of the company.

She said, "We appoint experts based on business requirements. The company is entering 3G, which requires people who have experience in third or fourth generation technology. These people are adding value to the company."

Four Bangladeshi employees are now also working in the group's foreign operations, she added.

"We know the vision of VimpelCom is 'Focusing Locally, Empowering People, Connecting Globally'. Our intention is to maintain our local competitiveness as our local identity."

On the environment inside the company, she said the employees have their own support system as they are part of an extended family.

"We are focusing on the employees' behaviour to evaluate them on customer focus, being proactive, being bold, respectful, passionate and transparent."

Sk Nur-Ul-Alam, regional commercial head of sales department, said he designed the overall sales distribution structure of the Cambodian stake with the help of his experience in Banglalink.

He worked for three months in Cambodia with another operation of the group.

Account credits make remittances efficient and convenient

SUDHESH GIRIYAN

GLOBALISATION and increasing trade activities across the world have had a beneficial effect on Asian economies. For Bangladesh, this has resulted in an increase in job vacancies and employment opportunities. More and more Bangladeshis are migrating to other developing countries for job opportunities, better livelihoods and to provide for their families. This has resulted in an upward surge in the remittance inflow to the country.

Bangladesh is pre-dominantly a receive market, rich with blue-collared workers. As per the remittance figures given by Bangladesh Bank, the country witnessed a remittance inflow of \$1,194 million in April 2012-13. The Bangladesh government is robustly promoting its workforce under the G-to-G system. Currently, there is a demand for manpower in countries like Hong Kong, Saudi Arabia, Malaysia and Kuwait among others.

Since transferring money back home is a key requirement for these thousands of workers earning abroad, money transfer operators are constantly innovating their services and products to make the transfer of money an easy process. Though the cash-to-cash service is still the most popular service, with its ease, there is a growing need among the Bangladeshis to have an easier and more convenient way of sending money back home. The direct to account credit service is the latest offering by money transfer operators to fill this gap.

The direct account credit services allow remitters to transfer money to the beneficiary's bank account within 24 working hours from the time the transaction is done. The remitter has to simply deposit the funds at the agent location in the send country and provide the bank account details of the beneficiary. The money is transferred directly to the beneficiary's bank through a payment system. The beneficiaries, back in Bangladesh, can then withdraw money from the nearest branch of the bank or ATMs.

The key advantages of this service are the benefits of safety, cost-effectiveness and overall efficiency it brings with it. Some of the highlights of this service are:

- **Network:** Through Bangladesh Electronic Fund Transfer Network (BEFTN), there is smooth payment to beneficiaries in 7000+ bank branches across Bangladesh. With the use of this wide banking network, this money transfer facility reduces cost.

- **Cost-effective:** This account credit service does not demand monthly fees or maintenance charges.

- **Fast:** The funds are transferred within 24 working hours from the time the transaction is done.

- **Secure:** This service is backed by the bank's security and safety standards. Therefore, a beneficiary can be rest assured that the money will not be lost or stolen.

- **Easy access and management:** This service is hassle-free as it requires only a one time set up of account details.

- **Financial planning:** The beneficiaries will individually be able to effectively monitor their expenses and plan their finances accordingly.

Remittances through account credit transactions can be done by principal agents, commercial banks through BEFTN system and mobile account credit. All the commercial banks in Bangladesh are members of the BEFTN system. It is a paperless system which has brought in significant changes in the inter-bank fund transfer mechanism of Bangladesh which has translated into increased efficiency of money transfer. Additionally, instant amendment and cancellation is possible at all these banks and there is no withdrawal limit at the receiver's end. The remitter can transfer up to Tk 500,000 at one go.

Lastly, this service is also playing a key role in promoting formal channels of money transfer working alongside with Bangladesh Bank to enable financial inclusion through its awareness initiatives among the migrant population. In a few years, one will see the importance of the direct account transfer system, which will foster a secure and a safer platform and will open a new chapter in evolving the remittance market of the country.

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Leading by example in company culture



Renren Chief Executive Joe Chen

BBC WORLD SERVICE

IT was personal tragedy that spurred Hong Kong-based entrepreneur Allan Zeman to take an interest in business. "My father died when I was eight years old," he says. "I don't really remember him."

The loss forced him to become self-sufficient from an early age while he was growing up in Canada with his mother and older sister. "I think that, sure, you become a product of your existence," he says.

Zeman's independent spirit has led him to believe strongly in the importance of leading by example in creating his company's culture.

Starting with a newspaper round at the age of 10, he quickly supplemented his income with a weekend job as a waiter. By now, he was earning a third more than his school teachers. "I grew up thinking that if you didn't work, you kind of didn't eat," Zeman says.

At the age of 19, he made his first million, in Canadian dollars, from his own business importing women's sweatshirts made in Hong Kong. He moved to the region soon afterwards.

In Hong Kong, Zeman founded the Lan Kwai Fong Group, which gave a boost to the nightlife in the territory's district of the same name.

In 2003, he was appointed chairman of the government-owned Ocean Park theme resort, turning its fortunes around.

He says that since a company's culture is established at the helm, it is important for the boss to set a strong example.

"It's usually top-down," he says. "If the boss is good, a company is good. If the boss is bad, the company is bad."

That sentiment is shared by Rupert Soames, chief executive of energy supplier Aggreko.

"People watch much more than they listen," he says. Soames warns against bosses who say everything is going well when they are laying off workers at the same time. This is damaging for the culture within a company, he says. "You have to have consistency between what you say and what you do," he says.

Soames believes that ultimately, everyone in a company must set an example to everyone else.

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Bhutan banks on 'white gold' hydropower

AFP, Chukha, Bhutan

HOME to meditating monks and Himalayan nomads, the sleepy kingdom of Bhutan has set its sights on becoming an unlikely energy powerhouse thanks to its abundant wind-rivers.

Hydropower plants have already harnessed the country's water flows to light up nearly every Bhutanese home, generating electricity that is sent to remote villages by cables strung through rugged mountain terrain.

It is a rapid transformation for the long isolated nation, where less than a quarter of households had electricity in 1999 -- the same year Bhutan became the last country to introduce television.

But the kingdom now has much greater ambitions for renewable hydropower -- already its biggest export -- which it hopes will provide more than half of its gross domestic product by the end of the decade.

"It is the white gold for Bhutan today," said Chhewang Rinzin, managing director of state-owned Druk Green Power Corporation, which runs the country's hydropower sector.

Bhutan's first megaproject, opened in the southwestern Chukha district in the 1980s, is now one of four major plants which between them have almost 1,500 megawatt capacity -- at peak output roughly equivalent to a large nuclear power station, and only five percent of Bhutan's hydropower potential.

Already going far beyond domestic needs in summer months, when monsoon rains fill up the rivers, most of the electric power is sold to India, Bhutan's giant energy-hungry neighbour.

In cooperation with the Indian government, and funded by its grants and loans, the kingdom is now aiming to reach capacity of 10,000 megawatts by 2020 through the building of 10 new plants.

In contrast, politically deadlocked and once war-ravaged Nepal has just 700 megawatts of installed capacity, despite being among the top potential hydropower producers in the world according to the World Bank.

"India we see as a market that cannot be satisfied," Rinzin said of the demand for Bhutan's natural resource, which is driving economic growth estimated by the Asian Development Bank at 8.6 percent this year.

While hydropower is hailed as the country's ticket to self-sufficiency after years of depending on donors, there are



Workers at the Chukha hydropower station in south-eastern Bhutan stand near colourful murals depicting the Buddha's life-cycle.

reservations about the speed and scale of its development while other sectors of the economy lag behind.

One of the first new plants being built, the Punatsangchhu I project, is projected to cost about two billion dollars -- more than Bhutan's total gross domestic product. And there are nine more projects to complete.

"While no one disputes that harnessing hydropower energy is the way to go, there is concern that Bhutan is trying to do too much, too soon," said an April editorial in the national Kuensel newspaper, titled "Drowning in hydropower".

At the Chukha plant, colourful murals depicting the Buddha's life-cycle contrast with the whirring machinery but hint at the country's unique development model of pursuing "Gross National Happiness" (GNH).

Retaining Bhutan's Buddhist cultural identity and protecting the environment are key parts of the GNH philosophy, which aims to balance the financial advancement of the nation with spiritual well-being.

The existing hydropower schemes are all "run of the river" sorts that depend on natural water supplies rather than large reservoirs, designed to cause less disruption

to their surroundings.

But three reservoir dams have been proposed among the upcoming projects to ensure plentiful water in the rain-free and freezing winter months, when power output currently drops by about three-quarters.

Rinzin says Bhutan's steep and sparsely-populated valleys will suffer much less impact than areas affected by big Indian or Chinese reservoirs -- the number of households displaced is in the hundreds rather than thousands.

But Samir Mehta, South Asia programme director at US-based watchdog International Rivers, expressed concern at a lack of transparency around the proposals and their impact. "The level of public engagement is not known," he said.

He warned that hydropower plants also face serious threats from climate change, given Bhutan's susceptibility to floods from lakes formed high in the mountains by melting glaciers.

In the capital Thimphu, people have other concerns on their mind about hydropower's rise, sometimes described as "jobless growth".

Despite its dominance in Bhutan, Druk Green has a staff of only 1,800, expected to rise to no more than 6,000, in a country where unemployment is a growing

worry among its youthful population of 736,000.

The construction phase is more labour-intensive, but only 10 to 15 percent of these jobs are going to the Bhutanese by Rinzin's calculation, as most of the building work is carried out and overseen by Indians.

"It's money in and money out," said Tenzing Lamsang, editor of The Bhutanese newspaper. "Your own companies are not making the money that they should."

The kingdom, which is holding its second parliamentary elections after shifting to democracy in 2008, is already hugely dependent on India for imports and soaring demand led it to run out of Indian rupee supplies last year.

Many think the flurry in hydropower development, and subsequent demand for costly imported equipment and machinery, exacerbated the crisis.

While he believes in hydropower's long-term benefits for Bhutan, Lamsang says the financial and environmental concerns show that it should not be relied upon to the cost of other industries.

"The danger here is that we put all our eggs in one basket. If the basket does fall or something happens to the basket, then we're in for a lot of trouble."