

# Airtel becomes the third largest mobile operator globally

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Bharti Airtel, the parent company of Airtel Bangladesh, became the third largest mobile operator in the world in terms of subscribers, the company said in a statement yesterday.

Airtel jumped one position in the global ranking to achieve the third place serving 303 million customers across 20 countries, according to data from the World Cellular Information Service.

Airtel's mobile networks cover over 1.85 billion people across its operations in 20 countries and carried over 1.23 trillion minutes of calls and over 333 petabytes of data in fiscal 2014-15, according to the statement.

"This is a major landmark in the journey of Airtel and underlines the strength of our business model and our brand that is loved by customers across 20 countries," said Sunil Bharti Mittal, chairman of Airtel.

In India, Airtel has the widest 3G footprint covering approximately 86.8 percent of the country's population and has the largest rural mobile customer base serving over 100 million mobile customers in rural markets, Mittal said.

In Bangladesh, it is the fastest growing mobile operator, with a distribution network comprising over 146,000 retailers.

In Africa, Airtel is the largest mobile operator in terms of geographical footprint. It offers 2G, 3G services and Airtel Money across all 17 countries in Africa. In Sri Lanka, it provides voice, data and enterprise solutions.

# India asks refiners to buy dollars, euros to settle Iran oil dues

REUTERS, New Delhi

India has asked refiners that owe about \$6.5 billion to Iran for oil imports to build up dollar and euro balances to avoid downward pressure on the rupee if six world powers and Tehran reach a final nuclear deal.

Local refiners still owe Iran about 55 percent of the bill for crude bought since February 2013, when a route to pay for Iranian oil through Turkey's Halkbank was stopped under pressure from US and European sanctions.

Iran, the United States, Russia, China, France, Britain and Germany are trying to end a 12-year-old standoff by striking an agreement that would open the door to lifting sanctions in return for limits on Iran's sensitive nuclear work.

Once an agreement is reached, Iran would likely ask for payment of its oil dues, India's oil ministry said in a June 11 letter to refiners that was seen by Reuters.

India, despite agreeing to a US request to curb oil imports from Iran to help force a deal, is keen to rebuild its trade relationship with

the OPEC member state.

"The refineries may buy forex in the spot/forward market in an incremental manner so as to build up the required USD/EUR balance," the oil ministry said in the letter.

The letter was sent to five refiners - Indian Oil Corp, Mangalore Refinery and Petrochemicals Ltd, Essar Oil, Hindustan Petroleum Corp and HPCL-Mittal Energy Ltd (HMEI).

The rupee dipped briefly on the news but currency dealers said the refiners had likely built up their hard currency positions since the letter was sent to them.

"It may have been covered or hedged in forwards," said Ashtosh Raina, head of foreign exchange trading, HDFC Bank in Mumbai.

The oil ministry advised refiners to make arrangements and seek approvals from the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to make the payments.

"Depending upon the terms and conditions of the agreement, the payment may be in one go or could be staggered...over a few weeks," it said.

Talks in Vienna are likely to miss Tuesday's deadline, but should continue in search of a deal that

would allay fears that Iran is seeking to build an atom bomb. Tehran says its intentions are peaceful. Under an interim deal between Iran and the international powers in November 2013, some of the blocked funds have already been released for Iran.

The companies are depositing 45 percent of their oil payments in a rupee-denominated account at an Indian state bank that Iran is allowed to use to buy non-sanctioned goods such as food and medicines from the South Asian nation.

Two refiners confirmed they have approached State Bank of India to open dollar and euro accounts, and SBI has in turn applied to RBI for approval to pay Iran.

India's imports of Iranian crude oil rose by 66 percent in May from a year earlier to their highest level since March 2014. Two months earlier India had imported no oil from Iran for the first time in at least a decade.

India on Monday extended approval to two Iranian insurers to cover container and tanker vessels calling at Indian ports by a year to June 25, in a move that will aid oil imports from Tehran.

# Kafco gets new chief executive

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Toufiq Ali joined Kamaphuli Fertilizer Company (Kafco) as its chief executive officer on June 21, it said in a statement yesterday.

Prior to joining Kafco, Ali served as chief executive of Bangladesh International Arbitration Centre.

Ali joined the erstwhile Civil Service of Pakistan in 1968 and served as the permanent representative of Bangladesh to the WTO and UN Offices in Geneva as his last assignment with the government.

After leaving public service in 2007, he joined the United Nations Industrial Development Organisation in Vienna as senior adviser.

Kafco is the largest joint venture investment in Bangladesh in the industrial sector and produces granular urea and anhydrous ammonia and markets its products to many countries around the world. It currently employs over 600 people.



# BAT Bangladesh receives AAA rating

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British American Tobacco Bangladesh has received AAA credit rating for the long term and ST-1 in the short term for highest credit quality and outstanding financial commitments to shareholders.

AAA credit rating is the highest possible rating assigned to the bonds of a company by credit rating agencies. The rating signifies a company's strong capacity to repay stockholders and congenial position in the stockmarket.

This recognises the strong and confidential financial commitments of the company, said William Pegel, finance director of BATB.

"The rating indicates our excellent financials, healthy and sustainable franchise and first rated operating environment."

The lone listed tobacco company of the country got the apex rating for the first time from Credit Rating Information and Services (CRISL) after its scrutiny of audited and up to date financials for 2014, BATB said in a statement recently.

About 15 percent of BATB is owned by the government and it is the highest tax paying private company, according to the statement.

# German unemployment steady at historic low in June

AFP, Frankfurt

German unemployment remained at historically low levels in June as the recovery in Europe's biggest economy stayed on track, data showed on Tuesday.

The number of people registered as unemployed in Germany fell by a seasonally-adjusted 1,000 to 2.786 million, the lowest level since December 1991, the Federal Labour Office said.

That was slightly fewer than expected, as analysts had been pencilling in a decline of around 5,000.

The unemployment rate -- which measures the jobless total against the working population as a whole -- stood at 6.4 percent in June, unchanged from May and the lowest level since west and east Germany reunited in 1990 after the fall of the Berlin Wall the previous year.

In raw or unadjusted terms, the jobless total decreased by 50,500 to 2.711 million and the jobless rate fell to 6.2 percent in June from 6.3 percent in May, the labour office said.

Growth of German gross domestic product (GDP) slowed in the first quarter, but data so far appear to suggest that the momentum will pick up slightly in the second quarter, the labour office said.

"Looking ahead to the second half of 2015, economic expectations have clouded over somewhat. But the trend on the labour market remains favourable, albeit somewhat slower than in the first quarter," it said.

# Plastic money keeps growing

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The use of credit cards in withdrawing funds from ATMs, for shopping and e-commerce rose 3.24 percent during the quarter to Tk 1,432 crore. Debit card holders spent Tk 21,386 crore using ATMs, point of sales and e-commerce in the third quarter, up 3.68 percent from a quarter earlier.

Pre-paid card holders spent Tk 59.8 crore in the third quarter in the country, which was Tk 58.8 crore in the second quarter. However, their spending outside the country dropped to Tk 11.3 crore from Tk 14.9 crore a quarter ago.

In digital payments, cheques worth Tk 359,096 crore were cleared using the magnetic link character recognition technology during the January-March period, which was Tk 356,376 crore in the second quarter.

The number of internet banking customers also saw a jump: their number rose to 20.91 lakh in the third quarter from 20.69 lakh a quarter ago.

Internet banking transactions in money terms rose more than 35 percent to Tk 4,929 crore in January-March.

Mobile banking transactions also increased significantly: it was Tk 34,556 crore in the third quarter, up 22.36 percent from the October-December quarter.

The number of mobile banking customers stood at 2.69 crore from 2.52 crore in the second quarter. Agent banking transactions went up 62 percent to Tk 75.5 crore, according to the central bank's latest statistics.



Meghna Bank Vice-Chairman Abdul Alim Khan Selim opens an ATM booth at the bank's Motijheel branch in the capital recently. Managing Director Mohammed Nurul Amin was also present.

# WB gives \$473m for financial sector, disaster resilience

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The urban resilience project will address seismic risk and reduce structural vulnerability of future building constructions in Dhaka and Sylhet.

The project will strengthen the capacity of government agencies to respond to emergency events by equipping them with response resources, including emergency operations centres, inter-operable communication systems, and search and rescue equipment.

The project will also contribute to improved building construction practices through certified training programmes and development of online permitting systems in Dhaka and Sylhet.

"The two projects will contribute to building a prosperous and resilient Bangladesh. The financial sector support project will help make doing business in Bangladesh easier by providing eligible private sector firms with access to long-term financing. This will help to create more jobs," said Christine Kimes, acting country head of the World Bank Bangladesh.

The lender is currently investing about \$1.2 billion to build resilience to coastal flooding and cyclones, the statement said.

"Promoting urban resilience is a greater challenge, as rapid urbanisation and population density are making Bangladeshi cities more vulnerable to disasters. The urban resilience project will help improve emergency management and building construction practices," Kimes said.

Mohammad Mejbahuddin, senior secretary of Economic Relations Division, said Bangladesh needs a transparent, inclusive, efficient and effective financial sector to realise its dream of becoming a middle-income country.

"Enhancing resilience to disasters like earthquakes in the major urban centres is necessary not only to save human lives but also to undergird the development gains of the past years," he said. Credits from the IDA have a 38 year term, including a six-year grace period, and a service charge of 0.75 percent.

# Alibaba Group in talks to buy stake in India's Paytm

REUTERS, New Delhi/Mumbai

Chinese e-commerce giant Alibaba Group Holding Ltd is in advanced talks to invest in Indian online payment platform and e-commerce firm Paytm, two sources with knowledge of the matter said on Tuesday.

Alibaba's financial arm Ant Financial, which runs the Alipay online payment platform, is already an investor in Paytm's parent, having agreed in February to buy a 25 percent stake.

One source with direct knowledge of the matter said the new deal would see Alibaba directly invest around \$600 million for a share in Paytm that could take the Chinese group's total holding to around 40 percent of the Indian payments firm.

The fresh investment would value Paytm at around \$4 billion.

The sources declined to be named as negotiations are not public.

A spokesperson for Alibaba declined to comment on the development. A spoke



Nehal Ahmed, director of marketing at Grameenphone, and Ahmed Najmul Hossain, a representative from Brac, pose at the signing of an agreement at the head office of GP yesterday to collect used internet-enabled handsets from the operator's customers to donate to the underprivileged through the development organisation.

# GP, Brac launch handset donation campaign for the underprivileged

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Grameenphone and Brac have launched a special '#theirkhushi' campaign to widen internet access for the underprivileged.

Under the campaign, Grameenphone will collect used internet-enabled handsets from customers and entities at customer care centres and donate them among the country's underprivileged through Brac.

Grameenphone will refurbish the devices before handing them over to Brac, and the mobiles will then be gifted to young, aspiring entrepreneurs or community role models with one-year free internet subscription. The campaign will

be initiated with 500 handsets donated by Grameenphone.

"Grameenphone wants to help those who cannot afford to own internet-enabled handsets. The internet can bring immense positive changes in people's lives and their surrounding communities," said Nehal Ahmed, director of marketing at Grameenphone.

The campaign will run until Eid-ul-Fitr and customers can donate their old phones at Grameenphone Centres along with a photocopy of their NID/passport/driving licence. Grameenphone representatives will also visit different universities and corporate offices to collect handsets.

# Turkey ready to help Greece out of economic crisis

AFP, Ankara

Turkey on Tuesday said it was "ready to help" Greece out of its escalating financial crisis as its embattled neighbour edged closer to default.

"We are ready to help Greece survive its economic crisis with cooperation in tourism, energy, trade," Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu said in the capital, Ankara.

"We want Greece to be strong... Therefore Turkey will be positive toward any proposal for cooperation," he said in televised comments.

Davutoglu added that a Turkish delegation would travel to Greece for a high-level cooperation meeting as soon as possible to consider joint steps on the financial crisis.

If no deal is reached, Greece is set to default on an IMF debt payment of about 1.5 billion euros (\$1.7 billion) due Tuesday, risking an exit from the eurozone and even the European Union.

On Tuesday Greek Finance Minister Yanis Varoufakis said Athens will not make the IMF payment.

Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras asked for Greece's bailout programme be extended for one month to allow a referendum on austerity demanded by Athens' creditors to be carried out Sunday, but his request was swiftly rejected by eurozone leaders.

Turkish Economy Minister Nihat Zeybekci said on Monday if an official proposal for financial aid is made by Greece, "we will evaluate it."



Syed Mohammad Kamal, country manager for MasterCard, and Sanjoy Mukherjee, chief operating officer of Compustar, attend a press event yesterday to announce a zero percent interest EMI offer of up to nine months on purchase of iPhone (6 and 6 Plus) handsets for MasterCard customers from its partner retail outlets.



Motiur Rahman, a director of South Bangla Agriculture & Commerce Bank, opens the bank's 39th branch on RN Road in Jessore yesterday. SM Amzad Hossain, chairman, and Md Rafiqul Islam, managing director, were also present.

# Budget passed with small tweaks

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In his wrap-up speech, Muhith criticised those who termed the budget an ambitious one. The government wants to take the GDP growth to 8 percent by the end of its current tenure, due to which the budget size will progressively get bigger, he said.

In fiscal 2009-10, the size of the budget was 14.3 percent of GDP and in fiscal 2015-16 it was 17.2 percent.

The government will take several steps from next fiscal year to ensure that the allocations for the ministries and divisions are properly utilised.

The minister also said a permanent secretary level committee will be formed for implementation of various projects.

A project directors' pool will also be formed with skilled and experienced officials for quick implementation of the development projects, he added.

The budget, which will take effect from today, has outlined a gross expenditure of Tk 415,308 crore and net expenditure of Tk 295,100 crore.