

জীবনে প্রয়োজন আরো বেশি স্বাচ্ছন্দ্য
 সর্বাধুনিক প্রযুক্তি সম্বলিত ব্যাংকিং সেবায় মাসিক আয়ের সাথে বাড়তি আয় যোগ করুন আর জীবন করুন সুসমৃদ্ধ।

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Star BUSINESS

DHAKA THURSDAY SEPTEMBER 10, 2015

Robi, Airtel in merger talks

MUHAMMAD ZAHIDUL ISLAM
 Robi and Airtel opened talks on a possible merger to become the country's second largest mobile phone operator after Grameenphone. Malaysia-based Axiata Group, the majority owner of Robi, and India's Bharti Airtel, owner of Airtel Bangladesh, yesterday released a joint statement on the matter. Robi is the number three operator by subscribers but the second largest in terms of revenue. Airtel is the fourth largest mobile operator in Bangladesh in terms of subscribers and revenue. Axiata Group and Bharti Airtel signed an agreement about the merger talks in the last week of August in Kuala Lumpur, according to a senior official of Robi. The merged entity, which will

AT A GLANCE	ROBI	AIRTEL
Owners	Axiata (Malaysia) 91.59% DOCOMO (Japan) 8.41%	Bharti Airtel (India) 100%
Subscribers	2.79cr	90.8 lakh
Market share	25%	7%
Gross revenue	Tk 4,942.3cr (2014)	Tk 1,714.8cr (FY2013-14)
Net profit	Tk 439.6cr (2014)	Undisclosed

operate under the brand name of Robi, will be 70 percent-owned by Axiata Group, Malaysia's largest carrier. Bharti Airtel will have 25 percent stakes in the new company. Shares of Japan's NTT DOCOMO in Robi will be diluted to 5 percent from 8.41 percent now. The merger is expected to be complete by January, the Robi official said. Before that, approval must be taken from the Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission. "Before giving it the go-ahead, we will examine what the market

situation will be after the merger," said BTRC Chairman Sunil Kanti Bose. In fiscal 2013-14, Robi's gross revenue was Tk 4,672 crore and Airtel's Tk 1,713 crore, according to the telecom regulator's annual report. Robi has been logging in profits for three consecutive years now. As of July, Robi's customer base stood at 2.79 crore and Airtel's approximately 91 lakh. The combined entity will have the second largest subscriber base in Bangladesh. Grameenphone, the largest operator, has 5.3 crore subscribers. If the deal gets through, Banglalink, the second largest operator with 3.2 crore subscribers, will come under tremendous pressure from competitors.

US retailers express satisfaction over workplace safety

REFAYET ULLAH MIRDHA
 The National Retail Federation (NRF), the world's largest retail trade association, has expressed satisfaction over improvements in workplace safety in the garment sector in Bangladesh. Headquartered in Washington, NRF represents discount and department stores, home goods, specialty stores, main street merchants, grocers, wholesalers, chain restaurants and internet retailers from the US and more than 45 other countries. "We saw first-hand in the past few days that significant progress has been made in improving the condition in the factories in Bangladesh and that work is on track to see more improvements in the future," David French, NRF senior vice president for government relations, said in a statement on Tuesday. NRF is the largest private sector employer in the US, supporting one in four US jobs -- 42 million working Americans, the association said in a statement. Contributing \$2.6 trillion to annual GDP, NRF is a daily barometer for the US economy.

A majority of the companies that buy garment products from Bangladesh and are members of the Accord and Alliance, are also members of the NRF. The garment sector in Bangladesh underwent massive reforms as the government, retailers and brands took up quite a few safety initiatives after the twin fatal industrial disasters -- Tazreen Fashions fire and Rana Plaza building collapse. "The Alliance is doing important work to ensure the safety of Bangladeshi workers, who make clothing worn by millions of Americans and other consumers around the world," French said. "Worker safety is a top priority for the US retailers, whether those workers are here in our stores or in a factory on the other side of the world," said Jonathan Gold, NRF vice president for supply chain and customs policy. "That's why we went to Bangladesh to see for ourselves what is being done." French and Gold spent two days in Dhaka last week, as part of a trip that also included visits to factories, warehouses and trade associations.

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US firm gets more time to complete satellite work

REJAUL KARIM BYRON
 The cabinet committee on purchase yesterday agreed to a three-year extension in the tenure of the American consulting firm that is supervising the launch of Bangladesh's first satellite. The extension to June 2018 came in a meeting chaired by Finance Minister AMA Muhith. Maryland-based Space Partnership International (SPI) will receive an additional Tk 35 crore for working beyond the stipulated time, which is a 49 percent increase on the original cost of Tk 71.99 crore. SPI was appointed in 2012, and its tenure expired in March this year. The company is responsible for feasibility and market studies for the satellite service, preparation of business plan, exploration of orbital slots and frequency coordination, and architectural design of the satellite system. It will also supervise the evaluation of bids for the satellite's launch, negotiation with the bidders, the testing activities during and after handover of the spacecraft to launch vehicle provider and testing of the satellite ground station equipment. SPI could not finish some of its assigned work due to the delay in project approval, according to the Telecom Division's proposal. The purchase committee also agreed to award a part of the project to set up railway lines from Khulna to Mongla port to Delhi-based Iron International for Tk 1,149.89 crore. The project is being implemented under an Indian line of credit, which is conditional on only Indian companies getting the work. Mumbai-based Afcons KPTL-JV and Kolkata-based Simplex Infrastructure also bid for the project. The total cost of the project is Tk 3,802 crore, of which Tk 2,371 crore is under the Indian line of credit.

Separate pay scale for state bankers on way

REJAUL KARIM BYRON
 Bangladesh Bank and state-owned financial institutions will get a pay scale different from other public servants after the cabinet on Monday approved the finance ministry's proposal. The bankers' pay scale, the discussions for which have been ongoing for six years now, will be slightly higher than other government employees but will have the same number of grades, said a finance ministry official. The government employees' new pay scale has 20 grades. The new pay scale may not take effect immediately; the bankers will continue to draw salaries under their existing pay scale until their dedicated one is finalised. The pay scale will now need to be approved by the respective institutions' boards, after which the finance ministry will give it the all-clear for implementation. In 2013, the banking division under the finance ministry had proposed a total of 11 grades for the staff of both the central bank and state banks. The basic salary for those in the highest grade will be Tk 52,000 and the lowest grade Tk 5,000. In the existing 20-grade scale, the highest basic salary is Tk 33,500 and the lowest is Tk 4,100. The cabinet though is yet to take a decision on the public university teachers' demand for a separate pay scale. The state banks are run under the Companies Act, so their payrolls are not drawn from the government budget. The salaries of public university teachers are provided from the state coffers, so if they are given a dedicated pay scale, employees of many other government agencies will demand one too. So the government is taking time to take a decision on that one, the official added.

Alliance happy with upgrades in garment factories

STAR BUSINESS REPORT
 The Alliance, a platform of 26 North American retailers for factory inspection, expressed satisfaction over the progress in remediation work. As of July, most factories have completed 21 to 80 percent of repair work, while six have already passed their final inspections, Alliance said in its second annual report that came out yesterday. Formed after the twin industrial disasters of Tazreen fire and Rana Plaza collapse, the Alliance and the Accord have been working to upgrade fire, electrical and structural safety in the garment sector.

NBR to organise tax fair at upazila level

STAR BUSINESS REPORT
 The National Board of Revenue plans to organise tax fair at the upazila level for the first time this year to bring more people under the tax net. The event will take place in 29 upazilas for two days and 57 upazilas for a day between September 16 and September 22, an NBR official said yesterday. Weeklong tax fairs will take place at divisional cities, including the capital, he added. The NBR has been organising such fairs since 2010. Currently, around 12 lakh people submit tax returns out of 17 lakh who have taxpayer identification numbers (TIN), according to the tax administrator. But the NBR thinks the number should be higher, given the steady economic growth of the country, rising income and a growing middle-class. Officials said there are many potential taxpayers at the upazila level, where many remain out of the tax net due to the absence of tax offices there. The NBR will also organise the fair for four days between September 16 and September 22 in district towns. In Dhaka, the show will take place at Officers' Club.

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