



Star BUSINESS

DHAKA FRIDAY DECEMBER 18, 2015

EU eases rules for shrimp exports from Bangladesh



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The European Union has eased the rules of entry for shrimps from Bangladesh due to a significant decrease in the number of non-compliant consignments. Exporters have been exempted from attaching analytical test reports with the shrimp consignments, which had been mandatory since 2008. Analytical tests are carried out at government labs to make sure that shrimps are free from antibiotic and chemical hazards and safe for human health. Now the tests will continue as before, but the exporters will no longer be required to attach the analytical reports with the shipments. The EU carried out an audit in Bangladesh in April to evaluate the country's control mechanism against "residues and contaminants" in shrimps. The EU team also examined controls on veterinary medicinal products. The audit report concluded that the system in place for aquaculture offers guarantees equivalent to the requirements

laid down in the EU legislation, the EU said in a notice on December 3. The relaxation came seven years after the EU had slapped a condition that export consignments from Bangladesh must be accompanied by analytical test results to ensure that the consignments did not present a danger to human health. It had detected residues of veterinary medicinal products and unauthorised substances in shrimp consignments. Exporters said they had to give various analytical tests reports related to the presence of antibiotics such as chloramphenicol, metabolites of nitrofurans and tetracycline with the shipped consignments to EU, where nearly 70 percent of Bangladesh's shrimp exports go. "We will no longer need to provide such test certificates," said SM Amzad Hossain, president of Bangladesh Frozen Foods Exporters Association. But the government inspections will continue to ensure that only shrimps safe for human consumption are going to European markets, he said.

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Smartphone imports rise as 3G internet spreads

MUHAMMAD ZAHIDUL ISLAM

Smartphone imports rose 28.25 percent year-on-year to 40.45 lakh units in the first nine months of 2015, keeping up with the rapid spread of 3G internet services, according to Bangladesh Mobile Phone Importers' Association. Symphony, the market leader and a local brand, brought in some 17.77 lakh handsets during the period, firmly holding on to its lead in market share at 44 percent this year. This was, however, lower than its 54 percent market share in 2014, when it imported 17.09 lakh smartphones in the first nine months of the year. Walton, another local brand, imported some 4.4 lakh smartphones, grabbing an 11 percent market share, according to the association. All the smartphone brands of Bangladesh, though registered as local companies, have no production facilities in the country. They mostly import their products from China. "Local smartphone factories will appear as soon as two years from



now, as market growth will make it necessary for sustainable supplies," said Rezwanaul Haque, general secretary of the importers' platform. Samsung, a Korean brand, brought in 6.3 lakh handsets till September.

The first half of the year was sluggish for business due to political turmoil, but sales picked up later, Haque added. Increasing use of the internet also boosted smartphone sales, he said. "Smartphone imports will reach

about 60 lakh by the end of this year, compared to 40 lakh in 2014," Haque said. "The numbers may hit one crore next year, according to our calculations." During January-September this year, Lava imported 1.91 lakh handsets, with a 5 percent market share. Microsoft, Maximus and Okapia brought in 1.57 lakh, 1.14 lakh and 1.01 lakh handsets respectively. Winmax, Smile, Micromax and other brands imported 4.76 lakh devices. The sector has imported some 1.91 crore feature phones till September -- Symphony took the lead with a 38 percent market share and imports of 72.17 lakh handsets. Winmax imported 15.97 lakh sets, with an 8 percent market share, while Samsung took the third position with a 5 percent share. The sector imported some 2.59 crore smart and feature phones last year, and the number is poised to cross three crore this year, Haque said. "Feature phone may not see any growth, but it will still remain significant in numbers in the next few years," he added.

No separate pay scale for central and state bankers: Muhith

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Finance Minister AMA Muhith yesterday ruled out the possibility of a separate pay scale for the employees of Bangladesh Bank and state-run banks, much to the frustration of bankers. "They will never be given a separate pay scale because they do not need it," he told reporters at the

secretariat when asked his views on the central bank governor's comments earlier in the day. Speaking at a programme at Bangladesh Bank Training Academy in the capital, BB Governor Atiur Rahman expressed shock over the exclusion of central and state bankers from the latest pay scale. "It's my sorrow that I could not put together a separate pay scale for

you. I am disappointed over this. I am embarrassed," Rahman told bankers at the programme. Muhith said the governors and the deputy governors are contractual employees, and their salaries and perks are different. "We have reviewed the salaries and perks of the bankers and employees below the positions. They do not need any separate pay

scale," Muhith added. Rahman said a separate pay scale for the employees of the BB and state banks had been approved by the prime minister and vetted by the law ministry. When the work for the latest pay scale for all public servants rolled out in 2013, it was decided that the two pay scales would be given simultaneously, he said.

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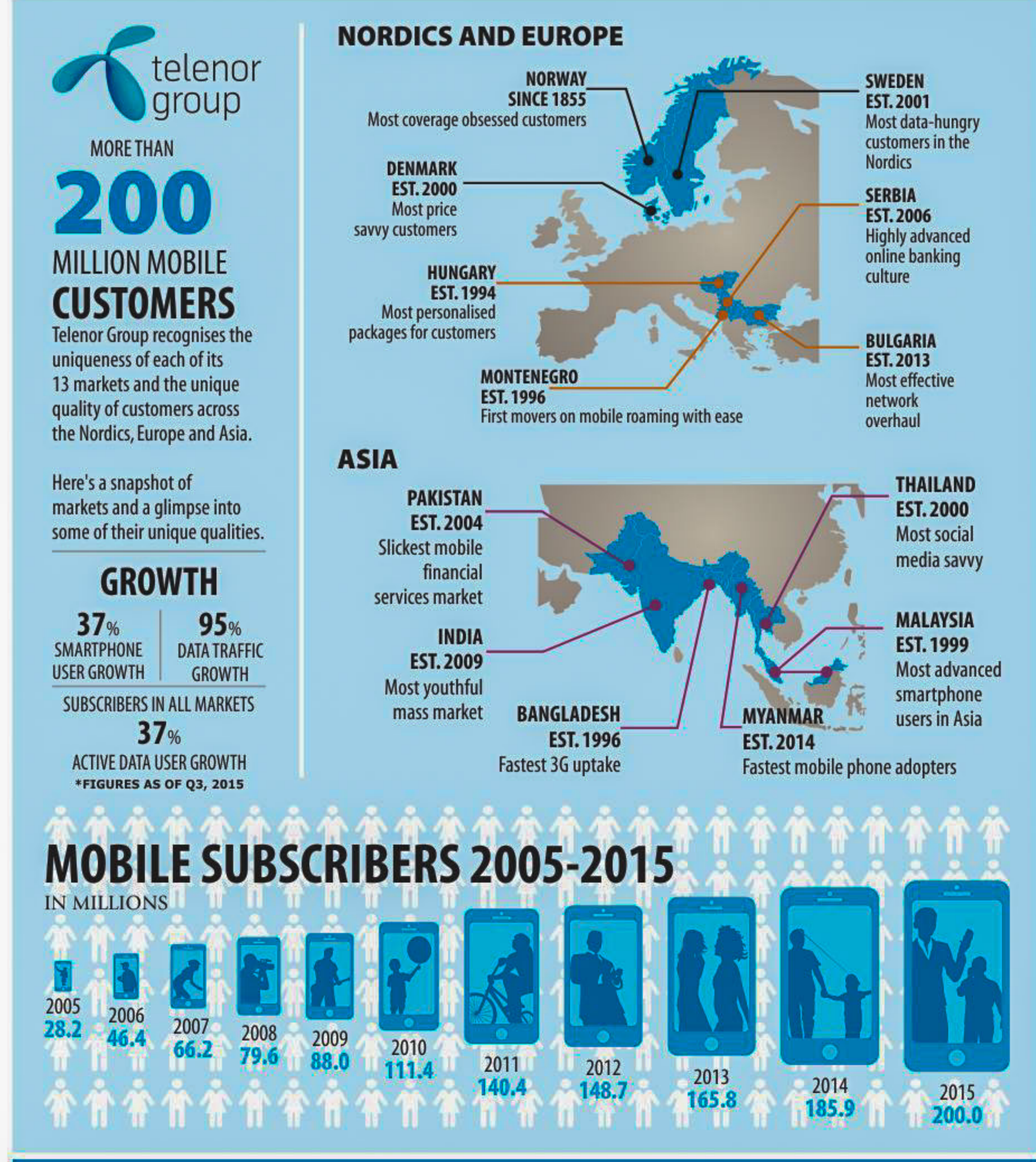
Online service for salaries of govt staff

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Government employees can now get their salaries confirmed online, thanks to a new service launched yesterday. Earlier, they had to do it manually and flit from office to office for the process. Now, they would be able to do it from the comfort of their homes. They will have to log into the web portal and key in personal details such as name, national ID number, date of birth, date of joining the government job and last salary. Their salary will then appear on screen and they would have to confirm it. Finance Minister AMA Muhith was the first to use the service to get his pension confirmed. Muhith went into self-retirement in 1981 as a secretary after completion of 25 years in public service. The following year, he became the finance and planning minister in the HM Ershad government. From then on Muhith has been drawing pension that now stands at Tk 4,309 a month. But under the new pay scale, his monthly pension increased to Tk 6,463, which was confirmed online yesterday. After Muhith, Finance Secretary Mahub Ahmed used the system for his pay. As a senior secretary, his salary stands at Tk 82,000. Ahmed said the system will make the preparation of the national budget easier. "It is an epoch-making step," said MA Mannan, state minister for finance and planning. Thanks to the system, on the day the defence staff goes into retirement they can take home their retirement benefit cheques, he said. The system needs to be put in place for civil service as well, so that they do not face hassles, he said. Mannan said he has seen many teachers going from one office to another carrying umbrella after going into retirement to get their retirement benefits sanctioned.

TELENOR REACHES A GLOBAL MILESTONE

Telenor Group yesterday announced that it has surpassed the 200 million mobile subscriber mark. The company, which is present in 13 markets across Asia and Europe, established its first Asian operation in 1996 through Grameenphone in Bangladesh. As of the third quarter of 2015, Telenor Group's six Asian operations generated more than 50 percent of the group's total revenues, and Norway and the rest of Europe about 20 percent each. "Today, our vision goes beyond putting a phone in every hand. We envision an internet for all, and with it all the opportunities that a digital life brings," says Sigve Brekke, president and CEO of Telenor Group.



British insurance giant eyes Bangladesh

SAJJADUR RAHMAN

After the Life Insurance Corporation (LIC) of India, British insurance giant Prudential has set its sights on Bangladesh. A team of Prudential has already visited Bangladesh to explore business opportunities here. "Prudential has expressed interest in Bangladesh. We will write to them next week asking for further talks," said M Shefaque Ahmed, chairman of Insurance Development and Regulatory Authority or IDRA. The paid-up capital of the proposed joint venture will be a minimum of Tk 100 crore. IDRA has agreed to offer Prudential a controlling stake of

58 percent, with 2 percent stakes for local sponsors. The remaining 40 percent shares will later be given to stock market investors through an initial public offering. "Prudential's entry into Bangladesh will benefit the overall insurance industry. There will be knowledge transfer." Prudential has emerged as a leading international life insurer in Asia with operations in 14 markets, serving the emerging middle-class families of the region's outperforming economies. The company serves over 2.5 crore insurance customers and has assets worth over \$753 billion as on June 30.

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WTO members agree to reduce fishing subsidies

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Policymakers in the 10th WTO Ministerial Conference in Kenya yesterday decided to bring effective discipline in subsidies on fishing to conserve the fish resource worldwide. WTO members agreed to reduce subsidies on fishing and recognise the crucial role of fisheries in ensuring food security, employment and livelihoods, the World Trade Organisation said in a statement. The WTO recognised that fisheries subsidies contribute to economic losses in the fisheries sector and leave serious impact on food security and livelihoods, particularly in developing coun-

tries. The leaders took such decisions as, in many cases, subsidies encourage overfishing and illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing. "We will continue to seek appropriate enhanced WTO transparency and reporting to enable the evaluation of the trade and resource effects of fisheries subsidies programmes," according to the statement. However, India is set to up the ante at the WTO meet to ensure that its interests are adequately taken care of after a draft text on agriculture did not address its concerns, news agency TNN reports.

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