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Star BUSINESS

DHAKA MONDAY MARCH 28, 2016

One-third SIMs verified so far

MUHAMMAD ZAHIDUL ISLAM
Mobile operators have biometrically verified and re-registered about 35.06 percent of their total active SIMs in the first three months since the scheme was launched in December last year.

Bangladesh's six mobile operators have 13.11 crore active SIMs as of February and they verified 4.6 crore connections till March 20. Some 80.41 lakh users failed the process due to fingerprint mismatch during verification, officials of the telecom division said.

State Minister for Telecom Tarana Halim yesterday said she is more or less satisfied with the progress in the SIM verification process. The state minister also re-registered two of her SIMs at customer care centres in the capital, and talked to other customers.

"The main purpose of the process is to heighten security of people, and I request all mobile phone users to come and re-register their SIMs," she said. She reiterated that it is technically impossible to store fingerprints scanned under the verification system. "People should willingly come and get their SIMs verified."

All mobile operators together have so far attempted verifications 5.4 crore times, of which 85.17 percent cases were successful. The operators must complete verifications by April 30, and any unregistered SIMs after the date will be blocked.

The unregistered SIMs will initially be blocked for a few hours, to notify the users and make them re-register, but the connections will be blocked permanently in case of continued unregistered use, Tarana said. Market leader Grameenphone is ahead of all, having

completed verification for 45.36 percent of its total active SIMs.

As of February, Grameenphone has 5.61 crore active SIMs, 2.55 crore of which have been re-registered, while some 59.12 lakh failed the verification process.

The company has seen a decline in the rush of clients seeking re-registrations, said BM Zahidur Rahman, manager for regional sales distribution and retail sales at Grameenphone, and also in-charge of the company's customer care centre in the capital's Farmgate.

The centre is currently doing an average of 500 re-registrations a day, about half the usual number a few days ago, he said. In the first week of March, a lawyer challenged the legality of the biometric registration process.

Tarana said they will present the facts and figures before the High Court. "The propaganda against the process will not be successful."

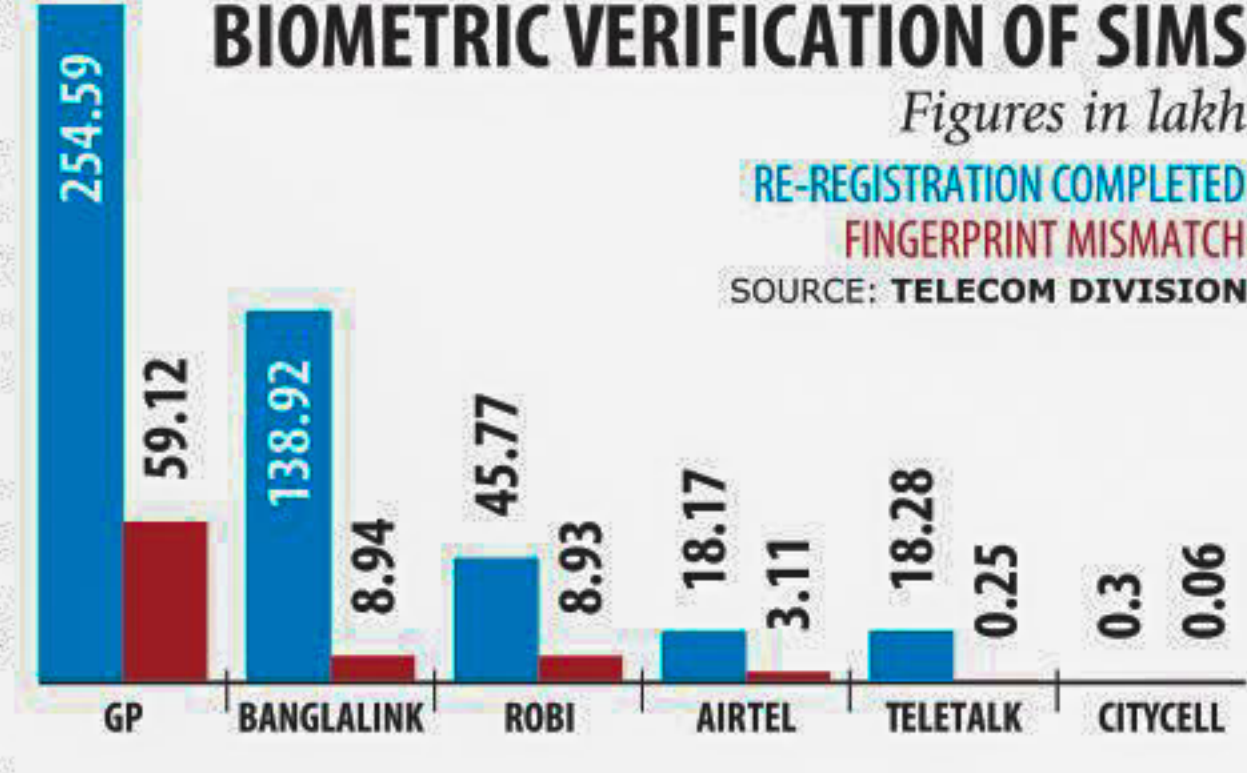
Banglalink, the second largest operator in terms of subscribers, has also completed checking 43.47 percent of their total 3.2 crore active SIMs, of which 1.39 crore were re-registered successfully, and some 8.94 lakh users could not be verified with the national ID database.

State-owned Teletalk completed verification of 42.92 percent of its SIMs, with 18.28 lakh successful verifications, and 2.5 lakh unsuccessful cases.

Robi checked 16.61 percent of its SIMs as of March 20. The third largest operator verified 45.77 lakh SIMs, while 8.93 lakh of its users could not be verified.

Airtel, now waiting for a merger with Robi, had 17.55 percent of its SIMs checked. Of the total 1.04 crore active connections, 18.17 lakh were verified, and 3.11 lakh failed the process.

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20 indicted in nine cases over Hall-Mark scam

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

A Dhaka court yesterday framed charges against Hall-Mark Chairman Jasmine Islam, Managing Director Tanvir Mahmud and 18 others in nine cases filed in connection with swindling Sonali Bank out of Tk 2,249 crore.

Rejecting the discharge petitions submitted by eight accused, including Jasmine and Tanvir, Judge Md Kamrul Hossain Mollah of the Senior Special Judge's Court framed the charges yesterday and fixed April 21 for the beginning of the trials.

Jasmine and seven others pleaded not guilty. Jasmine and another accused were on bail while six others, including Tanvir and Tushar Ahmed, are now in jail. The

rest are on the run.

Earlier on February 17, the same court framed charges against 19, including Jasmine and Tanvir, in two cases that involved Tk 437 crore.

Bangladesh Bank unearthed a loan scam of Tk 3,500 crore at the Ruposhi Bangla Hotel branch of Sonali Bank in May 2012.

In connivance with some bank officials, the little known Hall-Mark alone took Tk 2,686 crore in loans using forged documents. The Hall-Mark bosses used forged inland bills, meaning the group opened letters of credit for purchase and sold them to the bank which paid Hall-Mark without verification and documentation.

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Exporters irked by slow air shipments

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Garment exporters yesterday reiterated their concerns over delays in the screening of exports from Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport due to a shortage of scanning machinery.

More than 300 tonnes of goods are backlogged every day due to the delay in screening at the airport, said Siddiqur Rahman, president of Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association.

Exporters send 800 tonnes to 1,000 tonnes of goods by air a day; they have to wait for a long time for screening due to the airport's low scanning capacity. The Civil Aviation Authority of

Bangladesh introduced a new screening system at the airport after the UK banned direct air cargo from Dhaka to London.

Cargo screening has slowed with the implementation of the new scanning system since Saturday, said an exporter.

The screening capacity has been cut by half due to the new measures and implementation of new rules at the airport, according to the exporter.

"I suggested the government purchase two more scanning machines immediately to reduce the pressure," Rahman told The Daily Star by phone, after a meeting with Civil Aviation Minister Rashed Khan Menon at the latter's office in Dhaka.

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NBR wins case against Jamuna Group

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The National Board of Revenue intends to realise about Tk 700 crore from Jamuna Group for a case over the evasion of value-added tax and supplementary duty by its now-defunct unit, Aromatic Cosmetics, between 1996 and 2000.

In a statement yesterday, the NBR said its Dhaka North VAT office had originally issued claims of Tk 174.49 crore after inspections of Aromatic Cosmetics' factory in Gazipur.

The NBR, citing the VAT law, said 2 percent interest is applicable if any firm does not deposit the VAT to the coffers in due time. So, the total amount of dues will come to about Tk 700 crore, according to the NBR. Jamuna Group disputed the number.

The NBR found that Aromatic Cosmetics had dodged VAT and supplementary duty by not declaring prices of some products, showing lower prices of products and taking fake rebate.

The revenue authority said its VAT office could not realise the evaded amount as Jamuna took the matter to court and the trial dragged on for years.

In 2003, the company filed two petitions with the High Court, both of which were later dismissed.

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India should be more liberal toward neighbours: Tofail



Commerce Minister Tofail Ahmed speaks at a discussion on cooperation between Bangladesh and India, at Bangla Academy in Dhaka yesterday.

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

India should show liberal attitude toward its neighbouring countries such as Bangladesh on trade-related issues, Commerce Minister Tofail Ahmed said yesterday.

Although all Bangladeshi goods, except for tobacco and alcohol, get duty-free access to the Indian market at present, exporters are unable to reap full benefits of trade privileges for tariff and non-tariff barriers, he said.

For instance, garment, Bangladesh's main export item, is subjected to 12.5 percent countervailing duty for entry to the Indian market.

"If India is mindful of such issues, small neighbouring countries like us will

be benefitted," Ahmed said at a discussion on trade, commerce, industry and connectivity.

Bangladesh Itihas Sammilani and Kolkata-based Research Centre for Eastern and North Eastern Regional Studies jointly organised the event on cooperation between Bangladesh and India, at Bangla Academy in Dhaka.

Ahmed said he raised the issue of withdrawing the countervailing duty with his Indian counterpart Nirmala Sitharaman.

Other than that, some new barriers have been imposed, Ahmed said, while citing India's investigations into whether Bangladeshi traders have been dumping jute goods.

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Champion, First Runner-up and Second Runner-up teams of the Bangladesh finale will receive trophies of honour and cash prizes worth BDT 75,000, BDT 50,000 and BDT 35,000 respectively. The Champion team will attend the Regional Grand Finale in the Hong Kong SAR*.

How to participate

- Contact your university / institution's student activity authority and submit your name / team's name
- Universities can select and register maximum four teams made up of 4 members each
- Team registration open from **22 – 29 March 2016**
- Competition is open to full-time undergraduate business school students studying in Bangladesh

For more details on this competition, Click www.hsbc.com.bd/bcc Email communication.club@iba-du.edu

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Al-Jazeera to cut around 500 jobs

Broadcaster Al-Jazeera said on Sunday that it is to shed around 500 jobs, most of them at its Qatar headquarters, as part of a "workforce optimisation initiative".

Al-Jazeera said that after a management review it was "expected that around 500 positions worldwide will be impacted, the majority of which are in Qatar".

According to one Al-Jazeera manager, up to 60 percent of the job cuts - 300 positions -- could come at the broadcaster's Doha base. -- AFP