

Re-registration of 42pc of SIMs completed: Tarana

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The telecom operators have completed biometric registration of 5.45 crore mobile SIMs as of April 3, which is around 42 percent of the total active connections of 13.11 crore in February, State Minister for Telecom Tarana Halim said yesterday.

As of March 23, the number of re-registered SIMs though biometric process was 4.59 crore.

"As a warning, the unregistered connections will remain switched off for a few hours after the end of the April 30 deadline for re-registration," Tarana said.

"They will be notified through texts. The SIMs will be deactivated finally if they remain unregistered after the warnings."

She spoke at a press meet at the National Press Club in Dhaka after attending a roadshow organised by mobile operator Banglalink.

The rate of re-registration is increasing every day as the deadline nears, she said.

The state minister also urged the subscribers to dial 2872 to reach Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission if they face any difficulty during re-registration.

"Hand over the people to the police who are taking money to register mobile connections. It is your social responsibility."

BTRC Chairman Shahjahan Mahmood and Telecom Secretary Faizur Rahman Chowdhury were also present.

Fuel queues back with a vengeance stalling Nigerian economy

AFP, Lagos

Nigeria's financial capital Lagos is running on fumes again.

A fuel scarcity reached a climax this week with cars in lengthy queues clogging traffic, stoking tempers and dampening investor confidence in a top oil producing country.

Things got violent. Local newspapers reported paramilitary officers shooting dead gas sellers on the black market, as the Lagos state governor announced a ban on "indiscriminate queues", a Kafkaesque attempt to get traffic flowing.

Hoping to beat the crowds, some spent the night in their vehicles waiting in the queue outside a filling station. "I slept in the car, in the back seat. I need fuel," Kenny Giwa, a 26-year-old taxi driver, told AFP.

Giwa's determination paid off. Just after dawn on Wednesday, his battered blue Volkswagen Golf was first at the gate of a station selling petrol for 86.50 naira (43 US cents, 38 euro cents) per litre.

But his victory will be short-lived. "If I buy today it will last two days, then I'll queue again," Giwa said with a sigh. "The price of the black market fuel is too much."

Nearby, black market fuel hawkers stand holding pieces of hose and yellow jerry cans waiting for richer -- or more desperate -- drivers willing to fork over twice the amount of cash per litre to avoid the mind-numbing wait.

"We're the largest oil producing country in Africa, this is poor management, greed and

corruption," said Muyiwa Oke, a pharmaceutical researcher buying black market gas for 250 naira per litre.

"The traffic is crazy. At half a tank I start looking. I don't want to get stuck."

Nigeria is no stranger to fuel scarcity. Despite its massive oil wealth, years of mismanagement have left state-owned refineries working at a fraction of their 445,000 barrels per day capacity, according to Bloomberg News.

Yet this latest round is particularly bad, a situation analysts attribute to the crash in global oil prices and President Muhammadu Buhari's stubborn insistence on pegging the naira at 197 to 199 to the dollar through capital controls and import restrictions.

"The downstream marketers are probably in genuine financial distress right now," Alan Cameron, a London-based economist at frontier markets firm Exotix, said.

With dollars in short supply, fuel importers are forced to go to the black market, where the naira is hovering around 220 per dollar. In the end, the importers end up paying the difference without any compensation.

In response to the fuel crisis, Nigeria's Petroleum Minister of State Emmanuel Kachikwu wrangled a deal with international energy companies working in the country to provide about \$200 million to help fund fuel imports.

"This is probably the most challenging issue since I took over," Kachikwu said in a speech posted on his Facebook page Thursday, promising "by the second week of April we should be out of the queue situation."



Tawfique Imam, general manager for loyalty and winbacks at Robi, and Regina Naseer, director of DuSai Resort and Spa, pose at the signing of an agreement. Robi's Platinum Ace, Platinum, Diamond, Gold and Silver category customers under Dhonnobad programme will enjoy 33.3 percent discounts on room tariff and 12.5 percent discounts on food and beverage along with priority check-in benefit at the resort.

More than 80pc telecom complaints resolved: BTRC

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"We need to strengthen the process to empower subscribers."

"Users can currently approach the BTRC for resolution only if the mobile operators fail to address the complaints."

During the eight-month period, there were about 200 complaints about online harassment through Facebook, for which the BTRC notified the authorities of the social media platform. But the regulator did not receive much of a response from Facebook, officials said.

Users also had grievances about SIM re-registration, SIM blocking, mobile packages and data use.

There were some 145 complaints lodged in July 2015, of which the BTRC resolved

115. Till date, the highest number of complaints, 288, were received in February, of which some 270 were dealt with.

The BTRC usually writes to mobile operators for clarification against any complaint received, and directs them to pay compensation whenever appropriate, officials said.

Once the automated complaint management system is operational, it will be easier for all stakeholders to find the real number of complaints, they said.

The BTRC will also use the system to assess the quality of voice, data and video services offered by operators.

There are 13.11 crore active SIMs in the market and more than 5.83 crore active internet connections as of February 2016.



Muhammad A (Rume) Ali, chief executive of Bangladesh International Arbitration Centre, and Shah A Sarwar, managing director of IFIC Bank, pose at the signing ceremony of a memorandum for alternative resolution to commercial and money loan disputes, at the bank's head office in Motijheel, Dhaka.



Shafiqul Islam Kamal, chairman of Navana Group, launches Navana Petroleum's "scratch and win" campaign. Faisul A Chowdhury, country director, was also present

Robi-Airtel merger may take more time

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The parent companies of Robi and Airtel opened talks on a possible merger at the end of August last year and formally applied to the BTRC later. In February this year, a deal was signed on the merger.

In the merged entity, Axiata, the parent company of Robi, will hold a 68.7 percent controlling stake, Bharti Airtel will have 25 percent and NIT DoCom of Japan 6.3 percent.



Amin Khan, brand ambassador of Marcel, opens an exclusive showroom of Marcel--Sahi Telecom and Electronics--at Khoksa Bazar in Kushtia. Md Humayun Kabir, executive director for PR and media at Marcel, was also present.

Allocate more for social safety nets

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"The government employees' pension scheme should not be counted as part of the social safety net."

Khan cited the goals laid out in the planning ministry's national social protection strategy or NSPS and the finance ministry's medium-term budgetary targets and said the objectives of the two vary.

For example, the NSPS aims to bring 55 lakh senior citizens under the elderly allowance scheme by 2018, whereas the finance ministry puts the number at 30 lakh in its medium-term budgetary targets.

A similar difference is also seen in budgetary allocation and allowance.

"This indicates a lack of coordination between finance and planning ministries," he added.

Shaheen Anam, executive director of Manusher Jonno Foundation, stressed the need for improved management of social safety nets so that an increased number of the poor benefit from those schemes.

Rasheda K Chowdhury, director of Campaign for Popular Education and convener of NFSP, urged the government not to increase the allocation for unproductive sectors.

Corruption eats up 2 percent of GDP and violence against women also costs a similar percentage of GDP, she said. "We can increase allocation for social safety nets by reducing corruption and violence against women."

Chowdhury called for introducing mid-

day meals in schools, as it helps improve the quality of education.

"It will be very beneficial. It should be seen as an investment and we will get a return in future."

Benedict Alo D' Rozario, executive director of Caritas Bangladesh, said the beneficiary selection process should be made participatory at grassroots level.

He also called for allocation for the poor in hilly areas under the safety net schemes.

Shafiqul Islam, country director of ADD International Bangladesh, said political consideration determines selection and allowance under the social safety nets.

"You still have a poverty gap because of wrong targeting," said Goran Jonsson, senior programme adviser to the UNDP Bangladesh.

"It is very important that you have to have enough allocation. Allocation in social protection is an investment. It should not be seen as a cost."

Naved Chowdhury, poverty and social protection adviser of DFID in Bangladesh, said the total allocation for social protection should be raised gradually from 2.2 percent of GDP to 4 percent and later to 6 percent.

"Our country is on the way to becoming a middle-income country. We should also aspire for a change in budgetary allocation and for increased allocation for social safety nets."

Palash Kanti Das, assistant country director of Poverty Reduction at UNDP

Bangladesh, said policymakers should keep in mind the poverty pockets in the country during budgetary allocations.

Planning Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal, however, denied the allegation of widespread wrong targeting of beneficiaries under the safety net schemes.

"People are more conscious today," he said, adding that the government has taken 20 projects to reduce poverty and increase the capacity of the poor.

He said it would not be possible to register development in a real sense if anyone remains excluded. "Economic progress here means progress of all. We will leave them in such a position that they do not look behind."

"Our tax to GDP ratio is very low. We can do more for the poor if we can raise the revenue collection," he said, while stressing the need for concerted efforts from all stakeholders to stop leakage and improve coordination.

Tofayel Ahmed, co-convener of NFSP, said the government should link tax payment with a universal pension scheme to encourage people to pay tax.

He said the government can transfer a portion of the tax receipts towards the pension scheme for taxpayers.

Taxpayers currently do not see any benefit from paying taxes because they take various services such as healthcare from the private sector, he added.

Abdul Quayum, associate editor of Prothom Alo, moderated the discussion.

New violence in protests over French labour reforms

AFP, Paris

Sporadic violence erupted as tens of thousands of people took to the streets in dozens of French cities on Saturday in the latest protests against labour reforms seen as threatening workers' rights.

Police and protesters clashed in western Rennes and Nantes as well as Paris, leaving several injured, as demonstrations across the country aimed to keep up pressure against the reforms, which will make it easier for struggling companies to fire workers.

From Paris to northern Lille, to eastern Strasbourg and southwestern Toulouse, some 200 cities saw protests over "The Bosses' Law", as it was dubbed on a marcher's banner in Toulouse.

"We're starting the second month (of protests)," Jean-Claude Mailly of the Force Ouvriere trade union said in Paris as the sixth in a relentless series kicked off. "We're not afraid of losing steam."

Turnout however was far lower than a peak on March 31 when 390,000 people took part, according to police, while the total of organisers' estimates was 1.2 million nationwide.

The interior ministry estimated Saturday's crowds at 120,000 nationwide and said 26 people were arrested. It said up to 20,000 marched in Paris, while organisers said there were five times as many.

Police in Rennes used tear gas and stun grenades in clashes with protesters, with three members of the security forces needing emergency care and unconfirmed reports of another 19 people injured.

In Nantes, hundreds of youths erected barricades and threw stones, bottles and eggs at security forces who responded with stun guns and tear gas.

Paris police also used tear gas against several dozen masked protesters throwing bottles and firecrackers, leaving one officer wounded.

The labour reforms, which have already been diluted once in a bid to placate critics, are considered unlikely to achieve their stated goal of reining in unemployment, which stands at 25 percent among young people.



Shahid Hamid, executive director of Dhaka Regency, poses with the officials of the hotel during its annual corporate night in the capital on Thursday.

GULSHAN BRANCH HAS BEEN SHIFTED

We are pleased to inform all our valued customers, patrons and stakeholders that the IDLC Gulshan Branch has been shifted to new premises located at Bay's Galleria (4th Floor), 57 Gulshan Avenue, Gulshan-1, Dhaka-1212 on April 11, 2016.

All arrangement to serve our valued patrons in the aforementioned location have been made. We welcome you to visit our new premises and experience our services

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