

Banglalink allows users to check registered SIMs against NIDs

All operators asked to launch the service on July 7

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Banglalink has become the first mobile phone operator to start sending texts to its customers to help them find out how many connections have been registered against their national identification cards.

Last week, State Minister for Telecom Tarana Halim directed the mobile phone operators to send messages to their customers so they can exactly know the number of connections registered using their fingerprints or NID.

Tarana instructed to send such SMS on July 7, but mobile phone operators say people will be busy with Eid festival on the day this year. Even the

Eid day might fall on the day.

Banglalink started sending such texts on July 2 to avoid the hectic schedule during Eid days, and the operator is getting tremendous response, said a senior executive of the company. Banglalink users can immediately check the information by dialing *1600*2#. Other operators, however, are yet to take decision on the issue.

An operator said the state minister needs to reconsider the issue of Eid. "If she compels us we can send SMS to the customers, but it will be useless," said a senior executive of a leading operator.

On Eid days, mobile phone users are normally flooded with messages from relatives, friends and others who

wish them a good festival. As a result, they may ignore any SMS from mobile phone operators this time.

"Then, the main objective of the initiative may not give any desired result," said the executive.

Tarana directed the operators to run a checking after the issue of fake registered SIMs using duplicated fingerprints came to the fore.

Last week the minister told reporters: "Customers can easily find out how many SIMs are registered against their NIDs. And if they found any unwanted SIM, they can immediately deactivate those numbers."

The SIM re-registration dateline ended on May 31 with 11.7 crore SIMs being re-verified.

Oil prices edge up as Brent pushes further above \$50

AFP, London

Crude prices edged up on Monday, building on recent gains with Brent holding above \$50 after Nigerian militants claimed fresh attacks on the country's oil infrastructure.

Prices see-sawed last week, plunging in the immediate aftermath of Britain's shock decision to leave the European Union but rallying after central banks worldwide vowed support to financial markets.

At about 1045 GMT, US benchmark West Texas Intermediate was up 13 cents at \$49.12, while Brent rose 16 cents to \$50.51. Analysts said trading was light Monday owing to the Independence Day holiday in the United States.

Plastic buckets, broken printers shine light on Hanoi's poor

REUTERS

Vietnamese families living in slums along the Red River in Hanoi are using red plastic buckets and old printers to help light homes, cook meals and slash electricity costs by as much as a third.

The recycled goods form the blades and motors of electrical generators that power old motorcycle batteries to illuminate lamps with a brightness equivalent to a 45-Watt light bulb.

Though the output generated is small, it makes a significant difference for families previously denied power because they lived too far from a power station or had to ration supply because of the expense, at an average cost of \$9 a month.

"It is enough to light the home of my family and other families around here," said Bui Van Ha, who earns about \$4.50 a day on average by trading pottery to feed his family of four.

"Even for only a few hours after dark, it helped us to save on our monthly spending and bring profit to my family."

The clean energy innovation on the floating village about 5 km (3 miles) from Hanoi's central business district is the brainchild of Le Vu Cuong, a lecturer at a Hanoi university. His wind-powered generator makes use of materials that are cheap and easy to replace and works with a wind speed of just 0.4 metres (1.3 ft) a second.

"We want to support the low-income community," Cuong told Reuters. "Now they can use more electricity without any extra costs, with energy coming from renewable sources."

Vietnam produces just 140 MW of solar and wind power each year, but officials say it has the capacity to produce 500 times more.

Cuong hopes to boost energy production, and is looking for donors to help lighten the electricity costs of other low-income families.

Digital nomads land dream jobs thanks to Estonian startups

AFP, Tallinn

Upwardly-mobile, tech-savvy young professionals across the globe are swapping their briefcases and brogues for backpacks and sneakers, setting themselves up as digital nomads who can operate from wherever their laptops can go.

Jobbatical and Teleport, two recent tech startups, promise to take the guess-work out of digital job hunting on a global scale.

Both hail from tiny tech titan Estonia and are part of a crop of cutting-edge online sites catering to digital nomads, typically young males who work remotely and move around regions like Southeast Asia every few months.

Their creators insist the startups have the potential to shake things up on the global job market, similar to how Estonians previously transformed global communications with Skype and digital international money transfers via Transferwise.

Tallinn-based entrepreneur Karoli Hindriks said she launched Jobbatical two years ago to fill the growing gaps she noticed in global recruiting.

With employment offers from Greece, to Thailand and Costa Rica among others, it takes just a few clicks of the mouse for product or account managers, programmers and other tech professionals to land a dream job, whether programming in Malaysia's tropical paradise of Penang or managing an adventure travel operation in Bali. Jobbatical targets "adventurous tech, business, and creative professionals with over five years of working experience," Hindriks told AFP at the Latitude59 technology conference in Estonia's capital Tallinn.

She points to "a generational mindset shift" as key to her client base of 70,000 unique users each month across 150 countries. "The Millennial's view of success isn't necessarily a house, a well-paying job and a picket fence. "There's a huge shift towards defining success as working in terms of things that one truly believes in, and appreciating experiences over material possessions."

New technologies, less expensive international travel and communications mean that moving around to work is "becoming smoother and cheaper than ever," she added. Most Jobbatical offers involve positions that, like sabbaticals, last around 12 months, creating a revolving client base. The company takes a "success" fee of five percent of the annual salary upon hiring.

Vicente Gracia, a much-travelled 28-year-old business strategist from Chile, has been surfing more than just the Internet since he began using Jobbatical. Dissatisfied with the terms he was being



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offered by South American companies, Gracia used it to find a job based in Bali.

"New generations are looking for more than just a paycheck," Gracia told AFP via Skype.

A keen surfer, he now enjoys riding the waves on a Bali beach every morning during a break in his commute to work. "For me, being able to prioritise my career and a healthy lifestyle is crucial."

Insisting that Jobbatical is unique, Hindriks shuns comparisons to online job sites like Monster, insisting that "it's like comparing Craigslist to Airbnb."

Describing Jobbatical as a "matchmaker for companies", Hindriks insists that short-term "jobbaticals" encourage professionals to choose countries off the beaten path -- like her own Estonia -- that they may not have considered were the positions permanent.

"If you look at the reality, there are no permanent jobs any more, so in that sense we're bringing honesty to the conversation," she said.

Teleport meanwhile takes stock of the personal preferences and expectations of digital job-seekers and then suggests ideal places for them to live and work.

Teleport "scouts", or local experts, are just a click away to iron out any wrinkles. For a modest

fee, they can help with everything from visas to finding the right apartment or the nearest vegan restaurant.

A veteran tech entrepreneur who headed up Skype's Estonia operations from 2005-12, Teleport CEO Sten Tamkivi insisted his startup goes further than competitors like NomadList, which essentially works like a traditional travel guide. Tamkivi told AFP that aside from calculating ideal locations based on personal preferences and its "scouts", its "flock" service also locates the nearest coworking spaces.

Anthony Lapenna, a Frenchman working in New Zealand, is one happy Teleport user.

The service meant he could keep his job, but change hemispheres, shifting from Paris to Auckland, New Zealand, where he continues his role as a software engineer.

"I wanted to go to an English-speaking country in order to improve my English, plus I was kind of sick of the big city of Paris," he told AFP via email.

"New Zealand is located at the world's end, which is pretty exciting. I also had a curiosity about the landscape, because I'm fond of hiking."

"I'll probably move again, but not before I've explored as much of New Zealand as I can."

UK construction battered in June by Brexit fears: Markit

REUTERS, London

Britain's construction industry suffered its worst contraction in seven years in June as concern grew about a referendum on European Union membership, according to a survey that was mostly conducted before Britain voted on June 23 to quit the EU.

Financial data company Markit said on Monday its construction Purchasing Managers' Index plunged to 46.0 in June from 51.2 in May, its lowest level since June 2009, in what could be a sign of worse to come. It was the first time since April 2013 the index had fallen below the 50 level that separates contraction from expansion, and sterling GBP= briefly turned negative on the day after the result.

"This is an absolutely dire survey that fuels serious concern over the construction

sector ... (and) can only intensify concern as to just how much the construction sector will be hampered by the Brexit vote," Howard Archer, chief UK economist at IHS Global Insight said.

Some investors are already pulling out of commercial property deals in London, though the picture is mixed as the sharp fall in sterling makes the city cheaper for foreigners. But the construction industry is likely to face cost pressures from Brexit, as many materials are imported from elsewhere in the EU.

Many construction workers also come from Europe and may find Britain a harder place to work in future.

"The extent and speed of the downturn in the face of political and economic uncertainty is a clear warning flag for the wider post-Brexit economic outlook," said Tim Moore, a senior economist at Markit.

Rise in cross-border trade to benefit businesses in South Asia: ADB

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The countries had already agreed to allow exchange of export declarations for specific commodities with a value of \$15,000 or more at five border crossings.

The crossings are: Benapole, Bangladesh-Petrapole, India; Banglabandha, Bangladesh-Kakarbita, Nepal; Panitanki, India-Kakarbita; Phuentsholing, Bhutan-Burimari, Bangladesh; and Phuentsholing-Jaigaon, India.

"If both sides of a border accept documentation of each other it will cut both time and transaction cost," said Khondaker Golam Moazzem, an expert of trade facilitation.

"It will help trade facilitation," Moazzem, also an additional research director of the Centre for Policy Dialogue, told The Daily Star yesterday.

The economist also said if the value of the cargo able to use export declarations comes down, businesses on both sides of borders would benefit as they largely trade small amounts. Moazzem said all land ports linking Bangladesh and India should be allowed to trade more commodities and in small chunk.

South Asia is one of the most dynamic regions in the world, but it is also one of the least economically integrated ones.

Intra-regional trade accounts for just 5 percent of total trade, compared with 25 percent in the Association of Southeast Nations. The ADB report said it is clear that getting customs officials from the six countries of the SASEC programme together reaps benefits.

Another project of the SASEC Customs Subgroup has agreed that field-level customs officials should meet at least once in every six months to talk about and decide the next steps in improving cross-border coordination and cooperation.

"Boosting trade between the SASEC countries would be a boon for all."

The ADB report said countries in the sub-region trade amongst each other much less than they trade with countries outside South Asia, and much less than countries within other sub-regions.

Access to more markets throughout the region provides opportunities for businesses to grow, create jobs and ultimately helps create international economic ties that can outweigh geopolitical differences.

Bottlenecks for trade at the borders are common, cumbersome and expensive in

much of South Asia.

The number of import/export documents and the time it takes to complete them is high in the SASEC countries compared with global trends.

It takes an average 60 hours and costs \$345 to export a standard container in the region, and 112 hours and \$569 to import.

Time-consuming inspections and testing at borders delay cargo clearance, often meaning the loss of perishable goods like food and agricultural produce, and cause unnecessary congestion. The ADB report said there has been some progress too.

Officials from India and Nepal at the Maldives meeting reported good progress in automating their customs systems to allow electronic sharing of customs transit data between the two countries. They expect to test this system by end of 2016.

Making sure that each checkpoint along the route taken by the cargo receives the data electronically means truck drivers waste less time waiting for often numerous documents to be processed in several offices.

This automated data sharing is likely to be extended to Bhutan as well.

India and Bangladesh also plan to pilot the electronic exchange of data between their respective customs administrations.

This means, among other things, they can ensure that cargoes declared for export are the same as the goods that are actually imported on the other side of the border.

This increased transparency will ensure the right tariffs are charged and give customs officials more time to target potentially illicit cargoes.

"Easier customs procedures mean that countries will be well placed to make the most of the landmark Motor Vehicles Agreement between Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal, as it is gradually being operationalised over the coming months."

The agreement will allow a specific number of passenger and freight vehicles to travel even more easily between countries along certain routes.

In addition to these bilateral and multi-country projects, the six countries of the SASEC Customs Subgroup are also working on 20 national projects.

The national projects are supported by the ADB training in areas such as customs valuation, risk management, trusted traders programs, national single window and post clearance audit.

Most banks have sound capital base

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Eight banks -- Sonali, Rupali, BASIC, Krishi Bank, Rajshahi Krishi Unnayan Bank, Bangladesh Commerce Bank, Premier and ICB Islamic Bank -- failed to maintain minimum capital.

At the end of March, the total capital of the banks was Tk 75,612 crore, which was Tk 75,352 crore in the previous quarter, according to central bank statistics.

At the end of March, the overall capital requirement was Tk 74,528 crore, meaning the total surplus capital during the period was Tk 1,084 crore.

The capital shortfall of the six state banks was Tk 4,736 crore.

The private banks did not have any shortfall; rather, their surplus was Tk 8,478 crore. The foreign banks' surplus was Tk 5,156 crore.

Operators of mobile value-added services gear up before Eid

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People are also using mobile applications for their entertainment, using video on demand technology, which just hit the market. These are also being provided by the VAS providers.

VAS providers currently collect entertainment items and mobile phone users get those through the operators' network. Their total earnings are distributed with the content generators, VAS providers and mobile phone operators.

VAS providers said mobile phone operators take a major share of their earnings.

In case of Grameenphone, VAS operators and content generators get around 50 percent of the total earnings, and the operator takes the rest. At Robi, VAS providers and content generators get 35 to 40 percent.

In Malaysia, mobile operators get 30 percent and VAS operators 70 percent. In India, VAS operators used to get only 20 percent a few years back and they increased it to 70 percent now.

Japanese firms assess work prospects after attacks

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Last month, the New York-based advertising giant Ogilvy & Mather named Bangladesh one of the 12 "velocity" markets with prospects for enormous consumer growth over the next decade, along with India, Pakistan, Myanmar, Indonesia and the Philippines.

In 2015, Japan exported products

including steel, cars and machinery, worth \$1.37 billion to Bangladesh, up from \$1.16 billion the year before.

It also imported goods worth \$1.08 billion from the country, the majority of which was clothing and footwear.

A total of 986 Japanese were living in Bangladesh as of last year, according to the Foreign Ministry in Tokyo.