



Analysts attend a roundtable on "Connecting evolving consumers with meaningful communication", at The Daily Star Centre in Dhaka yesterday. Kantar Millward Brown and The Daily Star jointly organised the event.

Multinationals now depend more on research: analysts

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

A balance between gut feeling and research is required to connect with bigger number of consumers at present day marketplace, analysts said.

They spoke at a roundtable on "Connecting evolving consumers with meaningful communication" at

The Daily Star Centre in Dhaka yesterday.

Kantar Millward Brown and The Daily Star jointly organised the event.

Multinational clients are now becoming too reliant on research due to lack of guidance from their agents, said Nigel Hollis, executive vice-president and chief global analyst at

Kantar Millward Brown.

However, there are plenty of evidences that companies get substantial return of investment on marketing thanks to the discipline in their approach to the market, he said.

Top officials of renowned local and multinational brands and business outlets attended the roundtable.



Mohammad Javed Patwary, additional inspector general of the Special Branch (SB) of Bangladesh Police, and Selim RF Hussain, managing director of Brac Bank, exchange the signed documents of a deal at SB headquarters in Dhaka. The bank will provide the law enforcing agency with different services, including salary disbursement, ATM booth facility and retail loans.

Unilever prepares 6b pound sale of food brands: reports

REUTERS

Unilever is preparing a 6 billion pound (\$7.44 billion) sale of some of its food brands, British newspapers reported on Saturday.

The Anglo-Dutch company is planning to sell Flora margarine and Stork butter brands, the Sunday Times said.

The Sunday Telegraph, which also cited a 6 billion pounds figure, cited sources as saying private equity firms Bain Capital, CVC and Clayton Dubilier and Rice have started working on offers for the "spreads" business, citing sources. Unilever did not immediately respond to a Reuters request for comment.

Unilever rebuffed a surprise \$143 billion takeover offer from Kraft Heinz last month.

The company has launched a business review to consider returning cash to shareholders, making medium-sized acquisitions and more aggressive cost cuts, the Financial Times reported on Wednesday.

Rejoinder, our reply

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There has also been no notification from the telecom regulator that forbade the two operators from commencing their network integration work, according to the rejoinder.

"The BTRC letter issued to Robi on 12 February 2017 does not anywhere mention that our ongoing network integration has violated the merger conditions."

Robi said there was no condition in the approval letter it had received from the BTRC on October 26 last year that stated that joint operation of the two companies cannot start before the receipt of the Order of Merger licence.

"In the four corners of the telecom regulations, there is no requirement that we have to have Order of Merger Licence. BTRC simply has stated that after receipt of all documents it will issue the Order of Merger of Licence."

Robi also disagreed with the report on the issue of merger fees and spectrum charges.

The operator said it is willing to pay the value-added and advance income taxes as soon as the BTRC is in a position to issue "an appropriate VAT receipt certificate".

OUR REPLY

The Daily Star has prepared the report based on the copy of the BTRC letter sent to Robi on February 12, where it pointed out the five conditions that the merged company has

yet to fulfil.

The BTRC directed Robi to comply with all the conditions within 10 days; otherwise, the operator will face legal action.

The conditions mentioned in the letter are: 1. Robi has to pay Tk 427.35 crore as merger fees and other charges to the BTRC.

Of the sum, the operator has so far paid Tk 318.52 crore, on November 20 2016. The BTRC is yet to receive the remaining Tk 108.83 crore from the operator.

2. BTRC directed Robi to return 5 Megahertz spectrum from the EGSM band, which the operator is yet to do so.

3. Both Robi and Airtel had to clear all the dues to the government or any other entities, if any, before the merger. The two operators have not updated the BTRC on this matter.

4. The merged entity did not share any information on Airtel's employees already absorbed by Robi.

5. Information on ensuring Voluntary Separation Scheme/ Voluntary Retirement Scheme of Airtel employees who would not join Robi are also missing.

"After fulfilment of the conditions imposed by the government or the commission and receiving all the documents, the final 'Order of Merger of Licence' will be issued and this will complete the merger procedure," the BTRC letter said.

This is also mentioned in the final approval letter for the merger that the

BTRC issued on October 26 last year, a copy of which The Daily Star has obtained.

Besides, The Daily Star contacted Robi over telephone and email for its comments on the BTRC letter but got no response.

On February 18 the correspondent called in to Robi's headquarters but its officials declined to provide any comment on the matter.

But after the report was published Robi contacted The Daily Star and a meeting was held last week.

Robi furnished a copy of its response to the BTRC letter it had sent on February 14.

Of the five conditions Robi has complied with three of them, The Daily Star deduced from the operator's letter.

Robi provided information on the status of the Airtel employees. It provided the number that were absorbed into the newly merged company and the number that were given voluntary separation/ retirement.

The operator in the letter informed the BTRC that it has no amount "outstanding to any individual or entities outside the course of the business".

About the merger fees and spectrum charges and 'Order of Merger of Licence' issues, Robi is yet to comply with the regulator's conditions -- and the BTRC is also not accepting the operator's arguments.

Financial services elude half of rural households

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In the last two decades, the share of landless households in the credit market improved from 38 percent to 54 percent, while it went from 40 percent to 42 percent for landowning households, according to the study.

The research also shows that the share of the poor taking loans from banks decreased but that from NGOs marked a rise.

In 1988, about 5 percent of poor households obtained credit from banks that almost halved in 2014. At the same time, the share of households taking loans from NGOs increased 12 times from 3.7 percent to 43.8 percent.

The seminar was organised to mark

Brac Day that is going to be held on March 21.

Brac, the largest NGO in the world, has a significant contribution to poverty alleviation, bringing 1.8 million households out of ultra poverty between 2002 and 2016.

Currently, Brac micro-credit has reached 5 million clients, said Bayes.

The NGOs have built up huge institutional capacity and the government should use the capacity to solve new problems growing in Bangladesh, said Prof Wahiduddin Mahmud, a former adviser to the caretaker government.

He suggested the government collaborate with the NGOs by using their vast network to rein in religious extremism and militancy, the new

crisis growing here.

Rehman Sobhan, chairman of Centre for Policy Dialogue, said the government and NGOs should work together to help achieve the country's Sustainable Development Goals.

Rasheda K Chowdhury, also a former adviser to the caretaker government, said there is a perception that NGOs are becoming commercial.

Keeping this in mind, the NGOs should evaluate whether they are deviating from their main objective, she added.

She said the NGOs should not contribute to social development in exchange for money. She requested the Brac authorities not to charge the poor for primary education and rather, bargain with the donors.

Mercantile Bank to form new unit for MFS

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Each share of the bank was traded at between Tk 17 and Tk 18 before closing at Tk 17.1 on the Dhaka Stock Exchange yesterday.

Sponsors hold a 39.54 percent stake in the bank, while institutional investors own 7.32 percent and retail investors 53.14 percent, according to DSE data.

Govt hints loss-making state banks may be privatised

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Muhith said the bank has sufficient information on the debtors and the size of their debt. But it is not clear what the government will do about it. "We will have to ascertain it."

On the capitalisation demand from BASIC Bank, Muhith however said, "It is impossible. It can't be. The capitalisation of a bank this size can't be what they are asking for." "We will have to think how its requirement can be met in a different way," he said, adding that the finance ministry would come up with recommendations for BASIC Bank.

BASIC Bank has a capital shortfall of Tk 2,684 crore. The government would allocate Tk 2,000 crore next month as budget-

ary support set aside for all state banks in the current fiscal year to help them meet capital shortfalls.

On punishing the bankers involved in the irregularities at BASIC Bank, the minister said, "The Anti-Corruption Commission has documents about it. It will take steps as per its laws."

The minister also said taxpayer money going to BASIC Bank is not being thrown away.

The meeting also discussed whether the state banks have the power to issue bonds and whether they have the capacity to do so. The minister said it will have to be further considered before a decision is taken on it.



Sophie Aubert, French ambassador to Bangladesh; Fahmida Khatun, executive director of the Centre for Policy Dialogue; Farah Kabir, country director of ActionAid Bangladesh; Khushi Kabir, coordinator of Nijera Kori, and Ali Reza Iftekhar, managing director of Eastern Bank; and Ziaul Karim, head of communication, attend an event for the women banking customers of the bank, at Gulshan in Dhaka yesterday. Eastern Bank organised the programme.

US-Bangla to fly to Bangkok from May

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The return fare, including taxes and surcharges, will start from Tk 23,999 on Dhaka-Bangkok route, while the minimum fare on Chittagong-Bangkok route will be Tk 26,599.

A one-way ticket will cost Tk 15,599 on Dhaka-Bangkok route and Tk 16,999 on Chittagong-Bangkok route.

US-Bangla now operates on Dhaka-Kathmandu, Dhaka-Kolkata, Dhaka-Muscat, Dhaka-Kuala Lumpur and Dhaka-Singapore routes. The airline also plans to

expand international flights to Doha and Guangzhou this year.

At present, it has three Boeing 737-800 and three Dash-8Q400 aircraft. US-Bangla, which started its journey in July 2014, also plans to add another Boeing 737-800 and Dash-8Q400 to its fleet within August.

On the domestic front, US-Bangla flies to Chittagong, Cox's Bazar, Jessore, Sylhet, Saidpur, Rajshahi and Barisal.

The airline has so far operated more than 22,000 flights with 98.7 percent punctuality, according to the statement.



Shib Kumar, head of expert at V-Guard Industries of India, launches voltage stabilizer of Indian V-Guard brand at a programme in Dhaka yesterday. Syed Ashhab Zaman and Tahmid Zaman Rashik, directors of Best Electronics Ltd, sole distributor of V-Guard in Bangladesh, also attended the event.



Arifur Rahman, managing director of Esquire Electronics, sole distributor of Sharp, General and Mitsubishi appliances in Bangladesh, attends the company's annual retail conference 2017 at Sayeman Hotel in Cox's Bazar.



Syed Abu Abed Safer, director for marketing and sales at HeidelbergCement Bangladesh Ltd, and Arefin Shuvo, an actor, attend a get together programme for the channel partners of ScanCement, at Hotel Momo Inn in Bogra.