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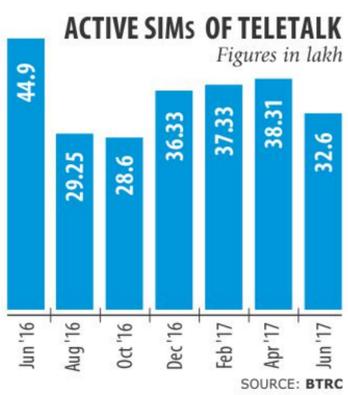
star BUSINESS

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Govt worried as Teletalk is losing customers

MUHAMMAD ZAHIDUL ISLAM
Teletalk's customer base is fast shrinking as the state-run mobile operator continues to lag far behind the private carriers in terms of network quality and product offerings. In the first half of the year, Teletalk lost about 10.27 percent, or about 3.73 lakh, of its active customer base, when the other three operators added 99.63 lakh users, according to data from the Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission. The government is concerned about the operator's standing in the industry, said Shyam Sunder Sikder,

secretary of the telecommunication division. "I have already directed the top management to take necessary actions to get back our customers," said Sikder, who is also the chairman of the Teletalk board. Earlier in August last year, Tarana Halim, state minister for telecom, had fixed Teletalk a target of acquiring 30 lakh new connections in fiscal 2016-17. In reality, during the course of the fiscal year, the operator shed about 12.30 lakh active connections, which is 27.72 percent of the subscribers it had on July 1 last year.



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Foreign aid surges in July

STAR BUSINESS REPORT
The government has received \$368 million as foreign aid in the month of July, which is almost three times the amount that flew in a year earlier. The development comes as the government set an ambitious foreign aid utilisation target for the fiscal year. The foreign aid utilisation target for fiscal 2017-18 has been set at \$7.6 billion (Tk 60,817 crore), which is more than double the last fiscal year's. The ambitious target comes as the government feels it has augmented its foreign aid utilisation efficiency sufficiently in the past several years and some individual countries have also made commitments to large projects. Traditionally, Bangladesh has been getting large sums of assistance from the World Bank, the Asian

Development Bank and Japan. If one-fifth of the aid in the pipeline can be utilised in a year it is assumed that the utilisation is at a satisfactory level, and in recent years the ministries and divisions have almost reached that level. In fiscal 2008-09, the amount of aid utilisation was less than \$2 billion, which crossed the \$3-billion mark in fiscal 2013-14. And for the next three years, more than \$3 billion was expended in each of them. For instance, last fiscal year, \$3.56 billion was used. As of January, total foreign aid in the pipeline stood at \$36.54 billion, according to planning ministry statistics. Of the amount, Russia committed nearly \$12 billion in the Rooppur nuclear power plant, meaning it would not be too difficult for the ministries to

fulfil the ambitious target set for the current fiscal year. In the aid utilisation plan for the current fiscal year, more than \$2 billion has been earmarked for the transport sector, whose live projects include the Dhaka Mass Rapid Transit, Karnaphuli tunnel, Dohazari-Cox's Bazar-Gundum rail line and the Padma bridge rail line. About \$1.5 billion of foreign assistance will be utilised for construction of various power plants, including the Matarbari ultra-supercritical coal-fired power plant. Another project is the Rooppur nuclear power plant, where the government plans to use about \$1 billion of foreign assistance. China has committed about \$5 billion for the Padma rail link project and the Karnaphuli tunnel construction project.

Banglalink starts investing \$500m in 4G network

STAR BUSINESS REPORT
Banglalink has started investing a significant amount of money to upgrade its network to offer 4G services and provide seamless connectivity to its customers. Over the next three years, the country's third largest mobile operator will invest around \$500 million for this segment, it said in a statement yesterday. The operator is all set to launch its 4G network and it has already started converting its existing SIMs to make those compatible with the fourth generation data services. "We look forward to launch 4G as we continue to transform our network to make it affordable for our customers and help in reducing digital divide," said Pierre Boutros Obeid, chief technology officer of the operator. There has been successful testing of

KEY POINTS

- \$500m to be invested in 3yrs
- Last year's 4G network test was a success
- Parent company Veon willing to invest \$1b

Banglalink's network for 4G a year back by one of the partners of the operator, according to the statement. "Banglalink has been in the forefront in terms of introducing the latest technologies when it comes to serving the needs of our customers," Obeid said. "We believe offering digital services is the path to the future and 4G technology is the key to enabling us to offer the services. We are committed to offer the best in 4G to ensure a digital life for all," he added.

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Kushiara power plant adds 110MW

DWOHA CHOWDHURY, Sylhet
Kushiara Power Company Ltd, a power plant located in Sylhet's Fenchuganj, has started to supply 110 megawatts of electricity to the national grid. Max Infrastructure Ltd, a local company, is implementing the project and is also carrying out the engineering, procurement and construction (EPC) work of the gas-based plant. The single unit of the gas-based plant added the power to the national grid in the first week of August. The construction began in February last year and after 17 months the single-cycle plant went into operation. The combined-cycle plant is about to add another 53MW power to the grid by November this year. In total, the plant will supply 163MW of power for 22 years as per Max Infrastructure's agreement with Bangladesh Power Development Board. The EPC cost of the plant is Tk 1,080 crore. Eighty engineers, most of them Bangladeshi, and 950 workers are working at the plant.

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BB relaxes loan rules for flood-hit farmers, SMEs

STAR BUSINESS REPORT
Bangladesh Bank has relaxed its loan rescheduling rules and suspended loan recovery for six months for the farmers and small entrepreneurs in the country's flood-hit areas. The central bank issued a circular in this regard yesterday, including a set of measures favouring the agricultural and SME loan borrowers. The decision was taken to support the farmers and small entrepreneurs who may fail to clear their loans in time because of the recent floods, the banking regulator said. "It will be impossible for such borrowers to pay down payment which will cause default loans and interrupt fresh loan disbursement."

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AT A GLANCE

- Rescheduled loan's instalment can be delayed for 6 months
- Relief from dues for fresh loan seekers
- Certificate case suspension if needed
- Relaxed policy active till Jun 30, 2018

If these borrowers do not get fresh loans due to being defaulters, there will be a slowdown in the economy, the circular read. According to the circular, banks will relax the conditions for down payments in case of rescheduling farm loans, SME and cottage loans and micro credit.

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