

Lives to change with 4G

Says president of Ericsson in Bangladesh, Malaysia and Sri Lanka

MUHAMMAD ZAHIDUL ISLAM

A major digital transformation is coming up in Bangladesh with 4G changing citizens' way of life alongside uplifting the economy, said a top official of Ericsson.

Todd Ashton, president of the mobile technology provider in Bangladesh, Malaysia and Sri Lanka, said rolling out fourth generation mobile technology would further the transformation of the country into Digital Bangladesh.

"Launching 4G technology in the country can contribute a lot in Bangladesh's economy while this technological development will also help to uplift citizens' way of life," he told The Daily Star in an interview on Tuesday.

The Swedish company launched its business in Bangladesh two decades back and is celebrating its 20th anniversary here today with a daylong programme in a city hotel showcasing cutting-edge technology.

Ashton said Ericsson Bangladesh has been working to improve the skills of the local workforce to the international standards.

And in the last 20 years, it has groomed more than 10,000 skilled employees who are now working in the global arena both in and outside Ericsson.

He said their study shows that every 1,000 new broadband connection generates 80 new jobs in the market. If machine intelligence is introduced, production will increase along with jobs as per the ratio, he added.

"If you add more technology into your business, especially internet, that will also help to increase business," said Ashton, who has been with Ericsson for over 19 years and was based out of Sweden till 1998.

After 1998, he held leadership roles in various parts of the world, including Europe and North America and is now also the acting head of Ericsson's Axiata Global Accounts.

About new innovation, he said in Malaysia they put sensors in mangroves and the technology gives them information about the soil and other components, helping to get better results in agricultural outputs.

He suggested Bangladesh adopt the same thing and bring changes with different agricultural applications which would ultimately increase production.

Ashton said they are working with robotics and artificial intelligence machines that could help increase domestic production dramatically.

Last year, Ericsson established an Internet of Things portal in Chittagong and its service will be available within a short time, the company said.

Ericsson, one of the leading mobile technology vendors in the world, also estimates to generate huge business from the 4G segment and targets a twentyfold increase in year-on-year revenue through it.

They, however, denied revealing their earnings in Bangladesh, only saying that 3G had increased their earnings fourfold.

Ashton said a major digital transformation is coming up in Bangladesh as smartphones were reaching the farthest corners of the country and even people who are just above the poverty line.

"Two top mobile operators tested their network with our 4G equipment and maybe we will get their business," said Ashton.

The Ericsson boss said they started 3G service on trial in Bangladesh in 2008, especially in hospitals and educational institu-



Todd Ashton

tions, although it was made commercially available five years later.

Ashton also said Bangladeshi customers were getting more services than expected on 3G.

About the market's 4G readiness, he said Bangladesh has demand for new technology.

People are now using more and more social media platforms, including Facebook, Whatsapp, Viber, and enjoying YouTube, he said.

"We are also seeing that the ecosystem is getting ready for the launch of the service."

However, he also mentioned some challenges on the part of devices and content.

"I cannot mention how much time it will take to bring all the benefits to the end users after the launch of 4G services but it will absolutely give customers much faster internet speed, which will ultimately change their lives."

Of its 20 years journey in Bangladesh, the company has faced ups and downs in business, he said.

In the last 10 years, the company's market share has probably

gone down but the absolute value of Ericsson's market share has gone up thanks to the tremendous growth of the economy, the Ericsson boss said.

He said Ericsson was carrying around 30 to 35 percent of the total traffic because they were working with two of the biggest operators.

However, every customer of the country is "touching" Ericsson technology both at the front or back-end.

Ericsson recently cut down their manpower in Bangladesh as its business declined after completion of the Robi and Airtel merger.

Due to the merger, they no longer need to provide services to Airtel and for this Ericsson let go 1,000 people.

"Letting go is always a tragedy – because we know about their hardships and their families but we need to adapt to changes in the business scenario."

Ashton also said this downsizing was not really related to any global strategy. "Our business has just changed."

Safety monitoring cell in apparel must be independent

Says Alliance chief

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

THE Remediation Coordination Cell (RCC), formed to monitor workplace safety in the garment sector, should be independent and credible so that it can take sound decisions to avert further industrial accidents.

"If there is a good system in place and if the retailers and brands continue sourcing from Bangladesh, it is expected that there will not be any disaster in the garment sector," said Jim Moriarty, executive director of the Alliance, the factory inspection platform of 28 North American retailers.

For instance, no disaster like Rana Plaza collapse took place after Alliance started working in July 2013 to fix the structural, electrical and fire loopholes in the garment factories.

Moriarty's comments came at a press conference yesterday to unveil the platform's fourth annual report.

The platform will leave Bangladesh in July next year after the completion of its five-year tenure.

The government has formed the RCC under the labour ministry involving the International Labour Organisation, the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association, the Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association and other stakeholders to monitor workplace safety once Accord and Alliance leave.

Any monitoring system has to be independent and credible, he said.

Independent monitoring means it has to be clear that no outside force can interfere in the technical decision.

"When I said credible, it means it has to have the technical capacity to make good decision," said Moriarty, who is also a former US ambassador to Bangladesh.

Meanwhile, 85 percent of all required factory repairs, including 80 percent of high-priority remediation works, have been completed, the report said.

A total of 234 Alliance-affiliated factories have completed all material items in

their Corrective Action Plans (CAPs) and 162 non-compliant factories have been suspended from Alliance factory list for delays in upgrading of their CAPs.

More than 1.3 million workers across 941 Alliance and non-Alliance factories have access to Amader Kotha, the Alliance's confidential worker Helpline.

Democratically elected Worker Safety Committees that give workers a seat at the table in monitoring safety issues have been established in 171 factories.

More than 1.4 million workers have been trained in basic fire safety, and 1.3 million have participated in refresher courses.

Nearly 27,000 security guards have been trained in fire safety leadership while about 20,000 have received refresher training.

The Alliance has designed a safety training workshop for senior factory managers and partnered with the Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology on a graduate-level short course for Bangladeshi engineers, both designed to build in-country capacity on safety.

Overhauling safety in hundreds of factories is a massive undertaking, Moriarty said.

"We are incredibly proud of what the Alliance has accomplished together with our partners in just four years. Until we achieve our mandate, fortifying safety in Alliance factories and equipping workers with empowerment tools will remain our laser focus."

The factories are demonstrably safer today than when the Alliance started working -- and the hard work that factory owners have undertaken since 2013 is now paying off, as hundreds of factories are reaching CAP closure.

This achievement represents a starting line for these factories, for whom maintaining rigorous safety standards must remain an ongoing priority, he said.

"We are committed to transitioning our programme in a way that paves the way for sustainable progress beyond 2018," he added.

Japan's GDP grows for seven straight quarters, outlook remains solid



Newly manufactured cars await export at port in Yokohama, Japan.

REUTERS, Tokyo

JAPAN'S economy grew faster than expected in the third quarter due to strong exports, posting the longest period of uninterrupted growth in more than a decade.

The economy expanded at a 1.4 percent annualized rate in July-September, slightly above the median estimate for annualized growth of 1.3 percent, Cabinet Office data showed on Wednesday.

That followed revised annualized growth of 2.6 percent in April-June.

Consumer spending fell for the first time in seven quarters but this is expected to be temporary because the economy is near full employment, which should bolster domestic consumption in the future. Rising capital expenditure and exports are also expected to keep the economy growing, which should ease some concerns about sluggish inflation.

"Japan's potential growth rate is around 1 percent, so the results for the third quarter show the actual rate of growth is quite high," said Hidenobu Tokuda, senior economist at Mizuho Research Institute.

"The jobs market is doing so well that consumer spending is sure to pick up in the future. Capital expenditure still looks healthy. The economy is doing well."

Gross domestic product (GDP) grew 0.3 percent compared to the previous quarter, which matched the median estimate and followed a 0.6 percent quarter-on-quarter expansion in April-June, Cabinet Office data showed on Wednesday.

The results show that Japan's economy

has grown for the seventh straight quarter, the longest period of expansion since an eight-quarter run from April-June 1999 to January-March 2001.

External demand - or exports minus imports - was the biggest reason for expansion, adding 0.5 percent to growth. Shipments of cars and electronic parts to the United States and Asia were strong in the third quarter, reflecting improving global demand, a Cabinet Office official told reporters.

In comparison, negative external demand subtracted a revised 0.2 percentage point from GDP growth in April-June.

Private consumption, which accounts for about two-thirds of GDP, fell 0.5 percent from the previous quarter, more than the median estimate of a 0.3 percent contraction to mark the first decline since October-December 2015.

The decline was driven by lower spending at restaurants and hotels, as well as reduced spending on cars and mobile phones, the official said. Bad weather during the quarter may have hurt spending, the official said.

"There's no change to our view the economy is recovering moderately as a trend," Japanese Economy Minister Toshimitsu Motegi told reporters.

"We need to make the recovery a durable one, so we'll proceed with reforms to boost Japan's productivity."

Capital expenditure rose 0.2 percent in July-September from the previous quarter, less than the median estimate for a 0.3 percent increase but still up for the fourth straight quarter.

Apple to help India develop anti-spam app after face-off with regulator

REUTERS, New Delhi

APPLE Inc has agreed to give limited help to the Indian government to develop an anti-spam mobile application for its iOS platform, after refusing to do so based on privacy concerns, according to sources and documents seen by Reuters.

The US tech giant has been locked in a tussle with India's telecoms regulator for more than a year. Officials complained Apple dragged its feet on advising the government how to develop an app that would allow iPhone users to report unsolicited marketing texts or calls as spam.

The government app was launched on Google's Android platform last year, but an industry source with direct knowledge of the matter said Apple pushed back on requests for an iOS version due to concerns that a government app with access to call and text logs could compromise its customers' privacy.

Facing public criticism from the regulator, Apple executives flew to New Delhi last month and told officials the company would help develop the app, but only with limited capabilities, according to a government official aware of the matter.

Apple's executives have told India that its current iOS platform might not allow for some of the government's requests, such as making call logs available within the app that would allow users to report them as spam, the official said.

"They (Apple) will help develop an app which, to an extent, can solve the requirements," said the official.

An Apple spokesman confirmed that the new iOS features to combat spam text messages would help the government build the app, but did not comment on the app's potential inability to access call logs for reporting spam, as the Android version does.

The spokesman said Apple had not changed its stance on privacy.

Apple's stand-off with the regulator comes at a time when it is seeking greater access in India, the world's third-largest smartphone market. The company has been lobbying the government for tax breaks to expand its phone assembly operations in the country, where it reported doubling its revenue versus the previous year for the quarter ending Sept. 30.

Balancing growth and market share with protecting customer privacy has become a defining challenge for global tech companies such as Apple, which regularly clash with governments over allowing access to content on their devices, especially for law enforcement needs.

"This has now become more of an ego tussle between Apple and the regulator," said Neil Shah of Hong Kong-based technology research firm Counterpoint Research. He



A man speaks on his mobile phone as he walks past an Apple iPhone advertisement billboard on a street in New Delhi, India.

REUTERS/ FILE

added that Apple was unlikely to agree to any requests specific to India because of the precedent that would set.

The chairman of the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) R.S. Sharma said he was unhappy with Apple for not responding swiftly to the government's requests.

"We've told them they are harming their consumers," Sharma told Reuters in an interview. "I hope good sense prevails upon them."

Apple did not comment on TRAI's criticism, but said that it had taken time to develop a privacy-friendly solution.

Pesky marketing calls and unsolicited commercial text messages have become a big problem in India.

Despite mobile users having the option to register themselves under a so-called "do not disturb" service to block marketers, businesses have gamed the system by using multiple phone numbers for promotions.

TRAI's anti-spam mobile application, also called Do Not Disturb, has been downloaded more than 100,000 times from the Google Android app section.

Before the app launches, it asks the user to allow it access to contacts and view text messages. Users can then start reporting numbers as spam.

A spokesman for Google, a unit of Alphabet Inc, did not directly comment on the app, but said: "We believe in openness and in the abil-



ity of users to make purchasing and downloading choices without top-down enforcement or censorship. Users are prompted with requests for permissions that they can choose to accept or decline."

Apple, however, has been worried. "The app can peep into logs, Apple had conveyed that their (privacy) policy does not allow this," said the industry source familiar with the matter.

TRAI said the app does not raise any privacy concerns.

Apple has flown in several overseas-based executives to resolve the dispute with the Indian regulator, including its senior director for global privacy, and former Google executive, Jane Horvath.

At least seven meetings have been held between the two sides and dozens of emails exchanged since last year, according to government officials and documents reviewed by Reuters.

In August this year, months after the talks began, Apple wrote to TRAI saying that a technical meeting would help them establish "what is possible and not possible".

"The whole exercise in organizing the proposed meeting would be a waste of resources ... please share concrete solutions that have a likelihood of addressing the issues we have been discussing over the past one year," the regulator wrote in September.