



# BUSINESS

DHAKA TUESDAY JANUARY 15, 2019, MAGH 2, 1425 BS • starbusiness@thelystar.net

## MNP tax-free

Mobile users exempt from VAT, SD for switching to any operator

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Mobile users will no longer have to bear the SIM tax of Tk 115 for switching operators while retaining their existing 11-digit numbers after the revenue authority waived the charges with a view to popularising the mobile number portability (MNP) service.

Subsequently, users will now have to count just the service charge of Tk 57 for availing the MNP service.

The tax waiver comes more than three months after the government opened the scope for mobile users to switch operators without changing their numbers with the view to increasing competition and egg-ing on operators to improve their service quality.

"We think this new initiative will make more people interested in switching operators while retaining their existing number," said Mohammad Zulfikar, chief executive officer at Infozillion Teletech BD, the lone MNP service provider in the country.

After much delays Bangladesh finally introduced MNP on October 1 -- more than a decade after the service became available globally -- becoming the 72nd country to do so.

Initially mobile users rushed to change carriers, but the service progressively lost

lustre thanks to the charges of Tk 172.

As of yesterday, 1.05 lakh subscribers have swapped operators, with Robi being the biggest beneficiary. In the first three weeks after the introduction, Robi pulled in 16,916 customers to its network from its three rivals, according to a report of the telecom regulator.

Shahed Alam, head of regulatory and corporate affairs at Robi, expects the trend would reverse following the waiver of VAT and SD on MNP by the National Board of Revenue. "It is a very positive step," he added.

Meanwhile, the Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC) yesterday published a report that showed 11,676 Grameenphone customers left the market leader by taking up MNP service. On the other hand, it drew 4,041 new customers from its competitors.

Robi, the second largest operator, lost 5,973 customers since the MNP was introduced on a trial basis.

To avail the VAT and SD waiver, operators will have to furnish reports on the first week of the following month to the field office of NBR and BTRC on the total number of SIMs that were ported in and ported out during the month that passed.

Similarly, MNP service processing firms will have to submit the names of ported in and ported out subscribers, their mobile phone numbers and the names of the existing and previous operators to the field office of VAT and the BTRC.

READ MORE ON B3

01713656565



## BB sells \$1.22b in 6 months to prop up taka

AKM ZAMIR UDDIN

The central bank has continued to sell dollars to banks to meet their soaring demand thanks to a spike in import payments.

As of yesterday, the Bangladesh Bank sold \$1.22 billion to banks this fiscal year to arrest the depreciation of the local currency against the greenback.

In fiscal 2017-18 the central bank had injected \$2.31 billion -- the highest since fiscal 2009-10.

Economists and bankers said the country's foreign exchange market might see more turbulence in the days ahead because of the rising trend of imports.

Despite the bulk injection of the greenback, the taka continues to depreciate; the inter-bank exchange rate stood at Tk 83.95 per USD yesterday, up from Tk 83.90 on January 3.

The interbank exchange rate was Tk 82.80 a dollar on January 14 last year.

The lenders were also forced to revise the selling rate for bills for collection (BC) -- which is the rate at which banks make import payments -- several times in the last five months with a view to avoiding losses from the foreign exchange business.

In October last year, banks set the BC selling rate at Tk 80.80, which shot up to Tk 83.95 this month.

READ MORE ON B3

## DSE turnover hits 14-month high

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The Dhaka stocks went through a price correction yesterday while the turnover hit a 14-month high.

Turnover, one of the important indicators of the market, rose by 17.7 percent from the previous day to Tk 1,146.32 crore. On November 20 of 2017, the figure was Tk 1,158.49 crore.

Investors took home some profit, as most of the stocks gained in the last few days and the rising turnover means there is liquid money in the market, industry insiders said.

The DSEX, the benchmark index of Dhaka Stock Exchange, gained 642 points or 12.30 percent in the last one month.

Yesterday, the index dropped 23.98 points or 0.40 percent to close the day at 5,836.23.

Olympic Industries dominated the turnover chart with 14.58 lakh shares worth Tk 39.58 crore changing hands, followed by Khulna Power, BBS Cables, Singer Bangladesh and JMI Syringes.

The top three negative index contributors were Brac Bank, Square Pharmaceuticals and Islami Bank Bangladesh, according to data of IDLC Securities. Of the traded issues, 122 advanced, 197 declined and 21 closed unchanged.

Chittagong stocks also declined with the bourse's benchmark index, CSCX, falling by 35.51 points or 0.32 percent to finish the day at 10,800.78. The bourse traded 1.15 crore shares and mutual fund units worth Tk 36.22 crore.

READ MORE ON B3

## Tech trends that will rule 2019

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

People will witness commercial advances of 5G (fifth generation) mobile technology in 2019 along with six others that will together dominate the technological industry and consumption of digital services across the world.

This year people will spend more time on screens, the usage of artificial intelligence will increase largely, and industrial customers of internet of things will witness transition from prototypes, according to a report of Telenor Research, an arm of Telenor Group.

Mobile-driven green technology has been creating awareness among consumers, it said.

Telenor Group is the parent company of Bangladesh's largest mobile phone operator Grameenphone.

The report points out that transition from text-based chatbots to voice-activated ones and advanced

### SEVEN TECH TRENDS

- » Deepfake (tech to alter video content)
- » Artificial Intelligence
- » 5G
- » Industrial IoT
- » Voice chatbots
- » Tech awareness factors
- » Mobile-driven green tech

algorithms will enable the creation of doctored photos and videos or deepfake content so advanced that it would be difficult to differentiate between what's real and what's fake in the digital world."

"2019 will also see internet service providers, operators and regulators look seriously into mitigating deepfake content and widespread public awareness campaigns against it."

As Bangladesh continues its journey in attaining its vision of a Digital Bangladesh, the country is expected to experience these new global trends, said a panel of speakers yesterday at a programme while unveiling the report at Grameenphone office in Dhaka.

Speakers said the world of technology is constantly evolving and they think that the tech pendulum is swinging in that direction in 2019.

"Telenor Research believes that

READ MORE ON B3



Visitors try to find pots and pans of their choice at Dhaka International Trade Fair in Sher-e-Bangla Nagar. The photo was taken on Sunday.

## Le Méridien issues Tk 1,200cr bond to pay off loans

JEBUN NESA ALO

market and not short-term loans."

Though the hotel has been making profit from its first year of operation it is not enough to pay off the high-cost loans, he said, adding that the interest rate on the syndicated loans go up to 16-17 percent.

Best Holdings registered profits of Tk 54 crore in the financial year 2016-17, its first full year of operation. The following year profit leapt to Tk 90 crore, according to the company's financial statement.

Le Méridien Dhaka has 304 rooms and its occupancy rate is more than 50 percent, according to the company.

As of now, the company has raised Tk 1,050 crore, with the full amount to come within February,

according to the deadline given by the Bangladesh Securities and Exchange Commission (BSEC).

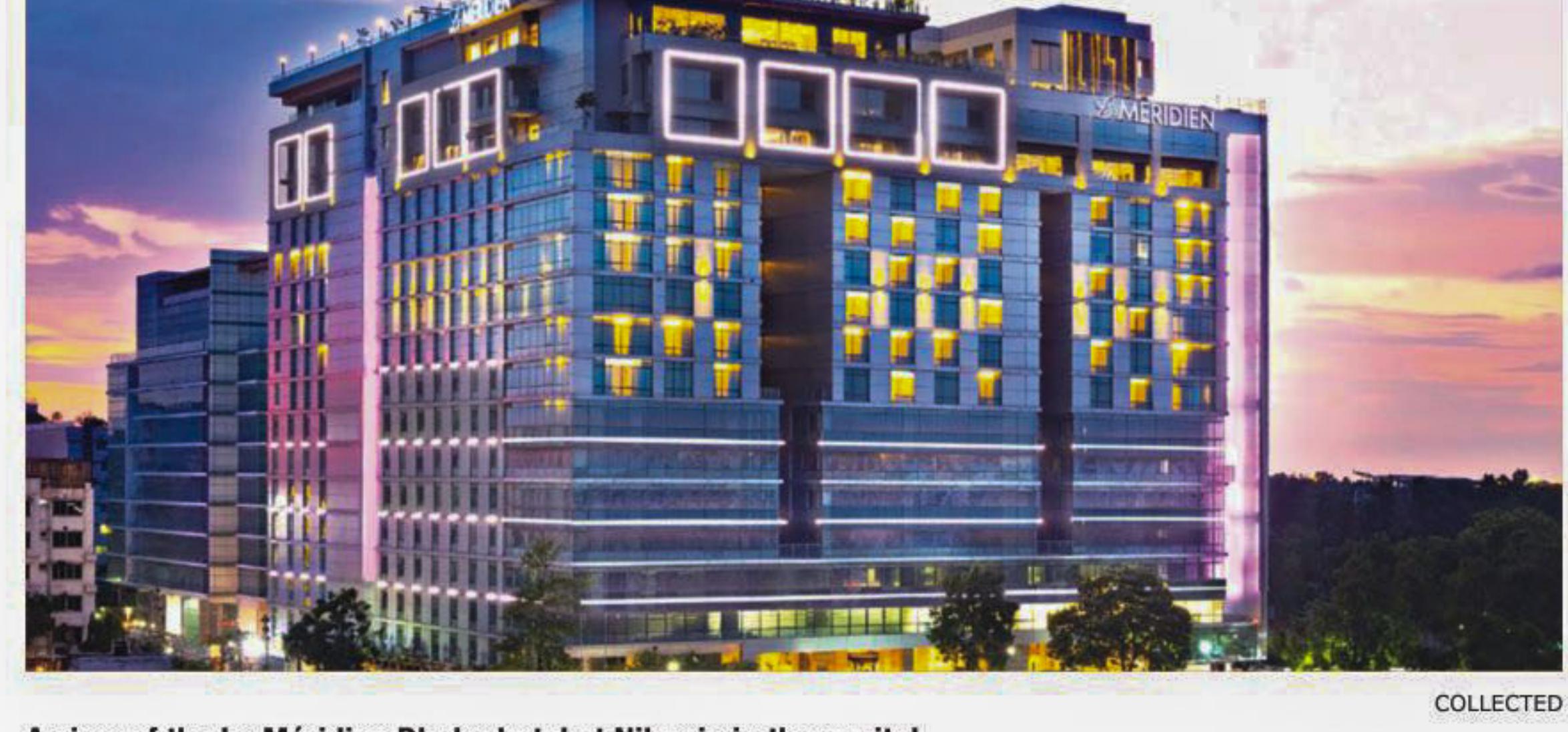
The amount came from six banks -- Agrani, Southeast, Mercantile, UCB, Trust and NCC -- IDLC Finance, the Investment Corporation of Bangladesh and Race Asset Management.

The company is also planning to go for initial public offering to raise a fund of about Tk 2,000 crore through private placement, accord-

ing to Ahmad. The proceeds will be used to pay off the interest for the bond and set up another resort.

Banks are making profit from international hotel chains as the hospitality sector has good prospects in the country, said Mohammad Shams-Ul Islam, managing director of Agrani, which put in Tk 125 crore in the bond.

As of June 2016, the property value of Le Meridian is about Tk 3,000 crore.



A view of the Le Méridien Dhaka hotel at Nikunja in the capital.

## Bandwidth usage goes up 94pc

Expansion of broadband, 4G play the major role

MUHAMMAD ZAHIDUL ISLAM

Bandwidth consumption in Bangladesh soared 94 percent year-on-year to 970 gigabits per second (Gbps) in 2018 thanks to the expansion of fixed broadband and rollout of 4G telecom services.

The figure stood at only 300 Gbps at the end of 2016.

Bandwidth is a measure of how much data a network can transfer. Internet providers denote bandwidth speeds in millions of bits per second, or megabits (Mbps), and billions of bits per second, or gigabits (Gbps). The higher the bandwidth, the faster the speed.

"This is big news that Bangladesh's total bandwidth use is close to one terabyte," said Sumon Ahmed Sabir, chief technology officer of Fiber@Home Global, one of the leading wholesale bandwidth suppliers of the country.

But about 75 percent of the bandwidth is used for browsing Facebook and YouTube -- in most cases for unproductive activities, he said.

## NEWS IN brief

### 3 in, 3 out from blue chip index

Al-Arafah Islami Bank, HeidelbergCement and Orion Pharma have been dropped from the index of blue chip stocks, DS-30, for declines in turnover, while Pubali Bank, BBS Cables and Confidence Cement are set to be included in the index of the high-quality securities after they met all prerequisites.

### Nahee Aluminum adds capacity

Newly listed Nahee Aluminum is set to increase its annual production of aluminium false ceilings from January 15 by 83 lakh square feet. The new capacity is expected to increase its revenue by 30 to 40 percent.

The company, which has market value of about Tk 50 crore, has installed new machinery purchased with the proceeds from its initial public offering in 2017 when it raised Tk 15 crore from stock investors.



STAR