DHAKA THURSDAY MAY 12, 2022, BAISHAKH 29, 1429 BS ● starbusiness@thedailystar.net

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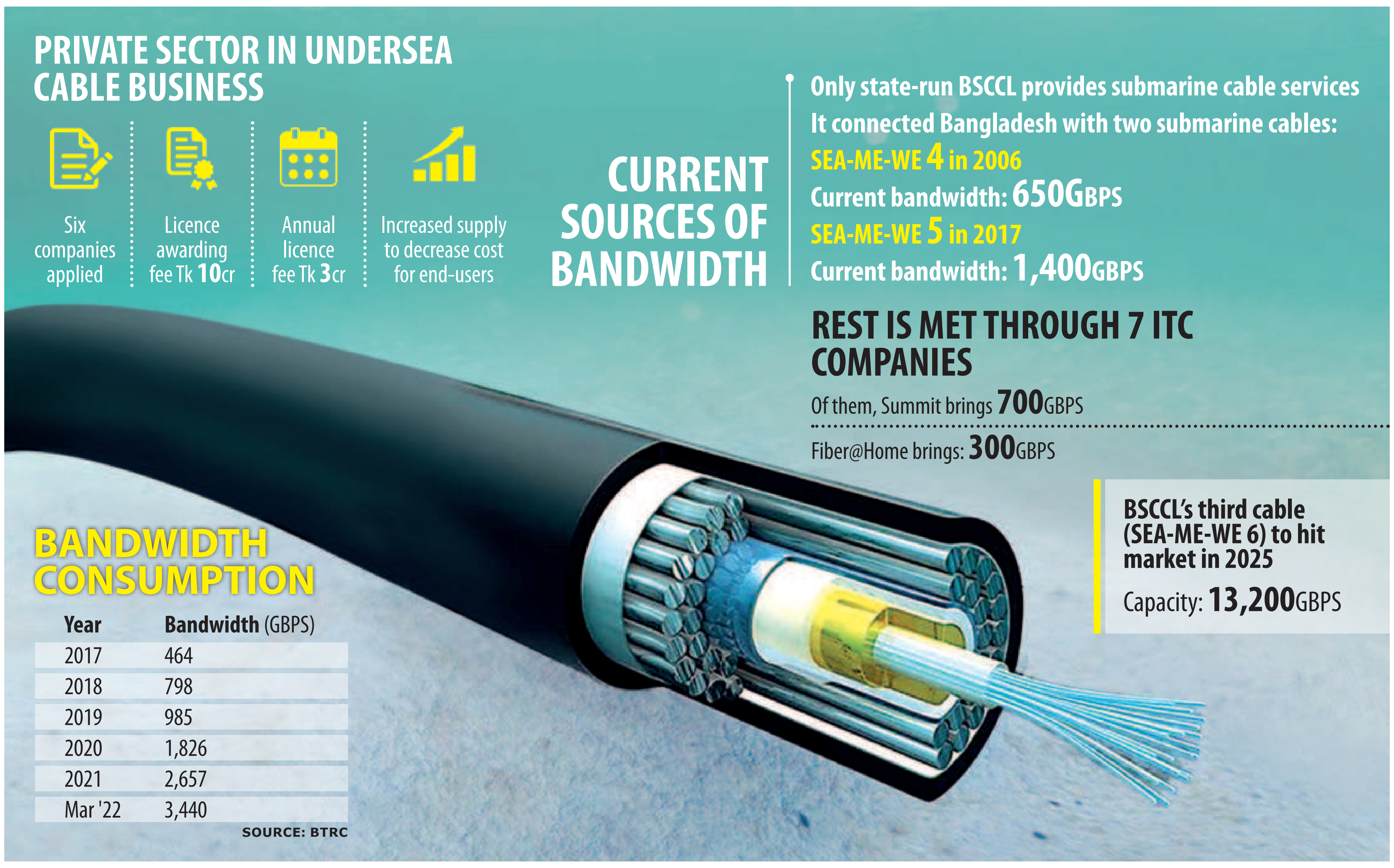

Year	Bandwidth (GBPS)
2017	464
2018	798
2019	985
2020	1,826
2021	2,657
Mar '22	3,440

Govt to open up submarine cable business to private firms

Aims to meet surging bandwidth demand

MAHMUDUL HASAN

Private companies in Bangladesh are set to get licences to establish, maintain and operate submarine cables, in a shift that will break the state monopoly and pave the way for a smooth supply of bandwidth amid a surge in internet use.

The state-run Bangladesh Submarine Cable Company Ltd (BSCCL) is the lone entity permitted to connect the country with the rest of the world through undersea cables.

But in order to attract private investment to the telecommunication industry to support the growth in bandwidth consumption, the Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC) has floated a tender to grant licences. Six companies have applied.

According to the BTRC, the companies, including Summit Communications, Fiber@Home, and Mango Teleservices applied for the licence as of May 10, the deadline for the submission of the application.

"We have applied for the licence," said Md Arif Al Islam, managing director of Summit Communications.

It has signed a memorandum of understanding with an international consortium, and the final deal will be inked after obtaining the licence.

Once the private companies enter the market, there will be more supply of bandwidth, which will drive prices down and benefit end-users, said Islam.

The licensee will have to establish its submarine cable systems and offer services within two years from the date of securing the approval.

The licence will cost companies Tk 10 crore, and the annual licence fee will be Tk 3 crore.

The government will decide how many licences will be issued, according to a BTRC guideline.

"Our policy is to create opportunities for the private sector, so we are now allowing private companies to establish submarine cables," Mustafa Jabbar, telecom minister, told The Daily Star yesterday.

Private entities have presence in all areas of the telecommunication sector, including telecom, tower, internet service, and transmission network.

The minister said the government has initially connected the country through the state-run company since a huge investment was needed and there was uncertainty about the benefit of the investment.

"Now we have done the groundwork, and the business case is lucid to private entities."

Sumon Ahmed Sabir, chief technology officer at Fiber@Home, said: "We are ready to form a partnership to establish a submarine cable for the local market. This will enhance competition and bring down the price."

Abu Saeed Khan, senior policy fellow at Colombo-based think-tank LIRNEasia, said the private companies should have been allowed to establish submarine cables much earlier.

"Bangladesh is the only country in South Asia and Southeast Asia where the state-owned monopoly in the submarine cable business is prevailing. There is competition in other countries, including Myanmar, Sri Lanka and the Maldives."

Mohammed Shahedul Alam, chief corporate and regulatory officer at Robi, welcomed the government decision and called for awarding the licence to competent companies so that they can arrange the landing of submarine cables within the shortest possible time.

The move from the government comes as the use of bandwidth is growing at a break-neck pace in Bangladesh.

At the end of December 2008, the use of bandwidth was only 7.5 gigabytes per second (Gbps), serving 7.7 lakh people, according to the telecom minister. It was 600 Gbps in 2016.

The bandwidth consumption witnessed a remarkable rise during the coronavirus pandemic as people turned to

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Colombo port resumes operations

Bangladeshi shippers, exporters relieved for now

DWAIPAYAN BARUA, *Ctg*

Operations and navigation at the Port of Colombo resumed yesterday following a two-day hiatus for ongoing political unrest in Sri Lanka, albeit bringing temporary relief to Bangladesh's exporters, freight forwarders and shipping firms.

Apprehensions remain as the island nation is still going through turmoil.

Stakeholders believe any future disruption would badly hit Bangladesh's foreign trade, especially exports, since almost 50 per cent of export cargoes pass through this transshipment hub.

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Nationwide clashes led to the prime minister and his cabinet to resign on Monday, following which trade union workers at two container terminals embarked on a strike, halting loading and unloading of cargo.

All vessel movement at the port remained suspended since Tuesday.

That day the Ceylon Association of Shipping Agents conveyed their deep concern to the chairman of Sri Lanka Ports Authority.

The platform, comprising 135 members representing all shipping lines calling on Sri Lankan ports, in a letter requested to convince the trade unions to resume operations.

The stalemate generated anxiety among the six feeder vessel operators currently plying at least 22 ships on the Chattogram-Colombo route.

MTT Singapore, a vessel carrying around 500 TEUs (twenty-foot equivalent unit) of export containers from Chattogram, was able to berth at a jetty on Monday but since then was forced to remain idle.

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STOCKS

DSEX ▼	CASPI ▼
1.10%	1.03%
6,591.99	19,329.64

COMMODITIES

Gold ▲	Oil ▲
$1,842.52 (per ounce)	$103.05 (per barrel)

ASIAN MARKETS

MUMBAI	TOKYO	SINGAPORE	SHANGHAI
▼ 0.51%	▲ 0.18%	▼ 0.25%	▲ 0.75%
54,088.39	26,213.64	3,226.07	3,058.70

EDIBLE OIL CRISIS

Blame game continues

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Companies, wholesalers and retailers are blaming each other for the disappearance of edible oil from the market ahead of Eid-ul-Fitr.

Wholesalers and retailers say mill owners have not provided supplies in adequate quantities. On the other hand, companies say that some wholesale and retail shopkeepers have created an artificial crisis through hoarding with hopes of inflating prices.

The Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI) held a views-exchange meeting at its Motijheel office yesterday to review the import, stock, supply and price situation of edible oil. There businesspeople blamed each other.

But the traders agreed on one thing – to take in learnings from this oil crisis so that such a situation does not recur.

Abu Taher, a retailer in Dhaka's New Market, said no distributor provided a single bottle of soyabean oil to a retail trader like him for several days before Eid.

Companies artificially created a crisis in the market to raise the price, he said.

"We have been doing business for long, we have fixed customers. I couldn't give an answer to them. Those who were turned away from my shop before Eid got a negative impression about me," he said.

"But we didn't cut the supply. We delivered the same amount before Eid as I used to supply in the market in normal times. We assume there will be a stable market. But before Eid, the market became unstable," said Kazi

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Although this view of the Sujanagar wholesale market in Pabna gives one the impression that there is an abundance of onion in the country, the government's recent decision to suspend onion imports is pushing up prices on almost a daily basis. Farmers and traders are seeing the development as a blessing, but consumers may take it as a curse. PHOTO: AHMED HUMAYUN KABIR TOPU

Fresh spike in onion price irks consumers

But growers happy

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Onion prices shot up in Bangladesh after the plant quarantine office of the agriculture ministry stopped issuing import permits for the popular cooking ingredient in a bid to protect the interest of local growers.

Onion prices, including that of imported varieties, began to slump since the second week of March amid increased imports and local supply, falling as low as Tk 20 to Tk 35 per kilogramme at retail.

Locally grown bulbs are usually sold at higher rates compared to imported onions because of their longer shelf-life.

Against this backdrop, many farmers stopped selling onion as they had to sell their produce at around Tk 22 per kilogramme, which

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