



Market analysis shows that 15 per cent to 20 per cent of mobile subscribers move from one operator to another or come back every month, said an official of a mobile operator.

PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

Mobile phone subscriber numbers decline

GP SIM ban took a toll on overall subscriber base

MAHMUDUL HASAN

The country's mobile subscriber base witnessed a decrease in November last year as top operator Grameenphone lost a big chunk of customers due to a SIM sales ban.

In November, the number of mobile subscribers decreased by 8 lakh from that in October to reach 18.08 crore, according to the latest data of Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC).

Grameenphone alone lost about 11 lakh customers, taking its total to 8.03 crore.

Earlier on June 29, the telecom regulator, on instruction from the posts and telecommunications division the previous day, banned Grameenphone's SIM sales until it "improves its quality of service including bringing down call drop rate".

The ban was finally lifted six months later on January 2 this year, with the regulator expressing satisfaction over "improvement of service quality".

Grameenphone lost about 37 lakh

customers in the first five months of the ban.

An official of Grameenphone said it took some steps to improve its service quality, for which its call drop ratio has dropped to 0.3 per cent while the average internet speed all over Bangladesh stands at 1Mbps.

On a year-on-year basis, the operator's subscriber numbers dropped by 4.40 per cent in November.

Third place operator Banglalink continued to draw customers, with about 2 lakh joining its network month-on-month to take the total to 3.94 crore in November. The number had gone up by 9 lakh in October.

The operator said this was backed by its massive network expansion and utilisation of new spectrum from the 2.3 GHz band to ensure faster internet.

The growth momentum in mobile subscriber numbers had been prevailing over the last couple of months, it said.

"This happened due to our consistent efforts on network expansion and also

the broadcasting of the Fifa World Cup through the Toffee digital platform," said Ankit Sureka, head of corporate communications and sustainability.

Last year, the operator installed 4,000 base transceiver stations (BTS), popularly

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known as mobile towers, taking its total to 14,000.

On a year-on-year basis, its subscriber numbers increased by 6.04 per cent in November.

Robi, the second largest operator, added about 60,000 customers month-on-month in November, taking its total to 5.43 crore.

Market analysis shows that 15 per cent to 20 per cent of subscribers move from one operator to another or come back every month, said Mohammed Shahedul Alam, chief corporate and regulatory officer.

"Value added tax and other taxes have increased for new connection sales in the current financial year. Besides, the minimum recharge amount has increased by Tk 10 to Tk 20 while the number of packages and offers has gone down," he said.

"So, many customers who kept their second or third connections active with low recharge amounts are either not using them at all or using them as the primary connection," he said.

"These factors have reduced the fierce competition in the sales of new connections," said Alam.

On a year-on-year basis, the number of subscribers of Robi increased 1.15 per cent in November last year.

State-owned Teletalk lost about 20,000 customers month-on-month in November.



Md Mehmod Husain, managing director of National Bank, and Syed Mohammad Kamal, country manager of Mastercard in Bangladesh, cut a ribbon to launch a LoungeKey™ programme at the former's head office in Dhaka recently to provide bank's Mastercard platinum cardholders the opportunity to access over 1,100 airport lounges in 120 countries. Syed Rois Uddin, Hossain Akhtar Chowdhury, deputy managing directors of the bank, and Sohail Alim, director of Mastercard, were present.

PHOTO: NATIONAL BANK



Chattogram-based steel manufacturing company GPH Ispat organised an annual dealer conference titled "GPH Maharaj Darbar-2022" at a convention centre in Dhaka recently. Attended by more than 300 dealers of the company and their family members, the two-day event was held in two phases, where top dealers were recognised as "Moha Bir" and "Bir Bahadur" with gifts. The board of directors of the company and top management were present.

PHOTO: GPH ISPAT

Worker outflow hits record high but

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Prof Rahman suggested the central bank allow a market-oriented exchange rate and beef up surveillance and monitoring to rein in the transfer of remittances via informal channels.

The government should also break hundi cartels and raise awareness among the people at home and abroad by running campaigns about the importance of sending money through formal channels, added Rahman.

Tasneem Siddiqui, founding chair of the Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit, a think-tank focused on migration workers,

says the labour market has always had ups and downs.

"This year, the outflow of migrant workers grew as their demand rose. It's not such a way that we have developed a system or ensured technical assistance."

Siddiqui, also the chairperson of the political sciences department at the University of Dhaka, credited increased access to information and people's aspiration to elevate their social and economic status for the higher outflow of migrant workers.

"Bangladesh would reap the benefit of the higher outflow of migrant workers in the coming years."

She urged the government to raise

the incentive to at least 10 per cent for a few months.

The overall lack of skills for Bangladesh's workers is posing a threat to remittance earnings, said Sayema Haque Bidisha, research director of the South Asian Network on Economic Modeling.

"We need at least moderate skilled manpower to raise earnings," she said, adding that steps should be taken against hundi operators as they facilitate the illicit outflow of black money.

Prof Bidisha called for steps so that workers can send money to their beneficiaries directly through the mobile financial service.

"That is why production is being hampered. Apart from this, there is a shortage of dollars," he added.

The government also needs to prevent the misuse of bonded warehouse facility by a section of businesspeople so that competitiveness is not lost in the local market, said the BPMA. Moreover, product prices are set to increase for a technical evaluation committee of Bangladesh Energy Regulatory Commission recommending raising power prices by 15.43 per cent on January 8, it said.

Why National Bank won't

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60 days relevant documents regarding the alleged LC issued in the names of Santana Enterprise and Inter-Asia Group PTE to import products.

The HC bench of Justice Md Nazrul Islam Talukder and Justice Khizir Hayat Lizu issued the rule and order following a writ petition filed by Supreme Court lawyer Chowdhury Hasan Mahmud Abdullah seeking necessary directions on this issue.

The writ petitioner's lawyer, Md Munsurul Hoque Chowdhury, told The Daily Star that National Bank's board of directors and their family members have reportedly misused their positions and powers.

They used dummy organisations Santana Enterprise and Inter-Asia Group PTE in the LC to launder money in the excuse of importing products from Singapore, he said.

Lawyer Shah Monjurul Hoque appeared for National Bank while Deputy Attorney General AKM Amin Uddin Manik represented the state during the hearing of the petition.



Farman R Chowdhury, managing director of Al-Arafah Islami Bank, and Md Abul Kalam Azad, director of the agriculture credit department of Bangladesh Bank, exchanged signed documents of an agreement on disbursement of agriculture loans under a refinancing scheme worth Tk 5,000 crore for food security of the country at the latter's headquarters in Dhaka recently. Abdur Rouf Talukder, governor of Bangladesh Bank, AKM Sajedur Rahman Khan, deputy governor, and Anwarul Islam, executive director, were present.

PHOTO: AL-ARAFAH ISLAMI BANK

Paper export doubles

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Bashundhara, which pioneered paper mills among the private sector here, is the biggest exporter out of more than 20 mills that export writing paper, facial tissue, toilet paper and packaging materials to about 40 countries, according to industry insiders.

Bangladesh is doing very well in the competitive international market because of its lower prices, said Abdul Matin Khan, managing director of Lipi Paper Mills.

The opportunity is there to do

much better if more policy support is made available, he said.

Prices need to be more competitive, especially for the US and Eurozone markets, said an official of an exporting company requesting anonymity. One concern is a rise in the price of pulp stemming from low supplies.

Bangladesh has to import some 90 per cent of the pulp it uses and at times it is not readily available, he said.

Now each tonne costs \$1,000 whereas six months ago it was around \$450 to \$500, said the official.

"That is why production is being hampered. Apart from this, there is a shortage of dollars," he added.

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