



Mobile operators in Bangladesh have long wanted to sell 4G-enabled handsets in cooperation with manufacturers on instalments. The photo was taken from Chattogram city on Tuesday.

PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

Indo-Bangla dialogue between think-tanks begins today

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

A two day dialogue between one think-tank from India and another from Bangladesh will begin in Delhi today in order to discuss a wide range of bilateral issues.

The "India-Bangladesh Strategic Dialogue" is being jointly organised by the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) of Bangladesh and the Ananta Aspen Centre in New Delhi, said a press release.

The event will bring together high-level policymakers, experts and partners from both countries.

Participants will deliberate on water sharing, and multimodal connectivity, including road, rail, water, coastal shipping, energy and digital connectivity, said the press release.

Bilateral cooperation will be explored in novel areas such as monetary cooperation and technology transfer. The evolution of bilateral relations will also be assessed in the context of emerging geo-strategic circumstances."

It is anticipated that at a time when the two countries stand at important crossroads and are heading towards national elections,

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Mobile operators' handsets now in instalments

A SIM will be locked with the set until payment is cleared

MAHMUDUL HASAN

Customers now can avail handsets in instalments when purchasing connections as the telecom regulator has finally decided to give the greenlight to mobile network operators in this regard.

The phone will have to have at least two or more SIM slots. One of these slots will be dedicated for the SIM of the operator selling the phone and it would be locked to that specific operator.

In the other slots, customers have the freedom to use SIM cards from any operator of their choice, without any restriction, according to a document of Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC).

Customers will have to pay a down payment of 20 per cent to 40 per cent of the price and the period for instalments can run anywhere from a minimum of 3 months to a maximum of 12 months.

"After the payment of the instalment, the locked one will get unlocked," Shyam Sunder Sikder, chairman of Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission, told The Daily Star.

The operators will be able to sign deals with mobile manufacturers to provide such handsets to customers, he added.

The customers cannot switch operators without paying the price of the smartphone.

A SIM (subscriber identification module) lock or network lock is a technical restriction built into mobile phones by manufacturers to restrict the use of the devices in specific countries or networks.

Operators in Bangladesh have long wanted to sell 4G-enabled handsets in cooperation with manufacturers on instalments.

A few years back, the Association of Mobile Telecom Operators of Bangladesh and handset manufacturers jointly placed a proposal to the telecom regulator to introduce it.

"There are many individuals who lack the ability to purchase a phone by paying the full price in a single payment. So, it will be a very positive thing for them as they have paid no interest despite paying the price in instalments," said Telecom Minister Mustafa Jabbar.

Customers will have to make a down payment of 20 per cent to 40 per cent of the price and the period for instalments can run from 3 months to 12 months

"We want to increase the penetration and this instalment facility will boost the country's overall mobile phone penetration rate," he said.

Besides, handset manufacturers will be able to sell their phones and operators can boost their customers base, he added.

Grameenphone has been advocating to enhance the accessibility of smartphones to the masses for quite some time, said Hossain Sadat, spokesperson at Grameenphone.

"This will not only increase smartphone penetration but also increase internet usage," he said.

"While we wait to receive the BTRC directive, we welcome the regulatory initiative as this will bridge the digital divide

in our country and will accelerate our journey towards 'Smart Bangladesh,'" he said.

Robi appreciates this initiative to introduce device locking in Bangladesh which is long pending, said Shahed Alam, Robi's chief corporate and regulatory officer.

"It will directly support the increase in smartphone users which is just over 50 per cent now," he said.

"It will also enable device manufacturers and MNOs to offer smartphones to marginalised populations through convenient ways to fast-track the smartphone adoption by mass people," he said.

Operators now sell phones mostly in collaboration with banks and customers must pay phones in equal monthly instalments, according to industry people.

But it was limited to very few customers, who were selected through rigorous document verification. Customers have to pay a big down payment in such cases.

"But this is different. Since the SIM will be locked into the device till all the payments are made, we will have the confidence to offer it to more customers in greater flexibility," said Alam.

"Even, we can now provide it to the customers living in the remote areas," he added.

However, Banglalink, the third largest operator, expressed apprehensions, saying that the significant amount of cash available to the operators could attract a larger customer base.

"We have always requested the regulator that before taking any regulatory action, they should take the competitive environment into account," said Taimur Rahman, chief corporate & regulatory affairs officers.

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Musk eyes big India investment

REUTERS, San Francisco/New Delhi

Tesla chief executive Elon Musk said India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi was pushing the car maker to make a "significant investment" in the country, adding that such an announcement was expected soon.

His comments came after a meeting with Modi on Tuesday during the Indian leader's state visit to the United States. A source previously told Reuters that Musk would brief Modi on plans to set up a manufacturing base in India.

India has strong potential for a sustainable energy future including solar power, stationary battery packs and electric vehicles, Musk said, adding that he hopes to bring SpaceX's Starlink satellite internet service to India as well.

"He (Modi) really cares about India because he's pushing us to make significant investments in India, which is something we intend to do," Musk told reporters after the meeting.

"I am confident that Tesla will be in India and will do so as soon as humanly possible." Later, India's foreign ministry spokesperson tweeted saying Modi had invited Musk to "explore opportunities in India for investments in electric mobility and rapidly expanding commercial space sector." The South Asian country is now looking to allow some U.S. companies to initially collaborate with Indian firms for investments in its space sector, a source familiar with the matter told Reuters.

India opened the way for private launches in 2020 and wants its private space companies to increase their share of the global launch market by five-fold within the next decade. Executives of Tesla visited India and held talks with Indian bureaucrats and ministers last month on establishing a manufacturing base for cars and batteries in India.

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European businesses in China fight post-Covid blues

AFP, Beijing

A faltering recovery, regulatory headaches and an increasingly politicised business climate are hammering European business confidence in China despite the country reopening its doors, according to a survey published on Wednesday.

Two thirds of European companies operating in China say it has become more difficult to do business in the country, according to an annual survey of 570 companies by the European Union Chamber of Commerce in China.

One in 10 are either planning to move their Asia headquarters out of the country or have already done so, said Jens Eskelund, president of the Chamber, with many choosing Singapore.

"Eleven percent of our members have already shifted investments out of China," he added in a briefing to journalists.

For nearly three years, the world's second-largest economy cut itself off with harsh lockdowns and travel restrictions intended to keep the Covid-19 pandemic at bay but which also disrupted factories and supply chains.

Chinese authorities abruptly announced the end of zero-Covid policies last December, raising hopes of an economic recovery after a rapid

massive wave of infections.

But six months on, the post-Covid economic rebound has faded and problems are mounting for foreign firms in China.

Of the companies surveyed, 60 percent said China's increasingly politicised business environment was an issue.

A vague anti-espionage law due to take effect in July, as well as the threat of war with Taiwan, which China considers a part of its territory, are among the top concerns.

There is "more and more government interference in business" since the end of Covid curbs, the manager of a French industrial group operating in east

China's Shandong province told AFP. Officials often target foreign firms with stricter regulatory enforcement while giving Chinese companies more lenient treatment, he said.

"Port charges are up 300 percent" from 2019, while local authorities have "signed favourable agreements with two Chinese groups that are setting up their factories next door," the manager said, asking to remain anonymous for fear of repercussions.

His company would keep their operations in China for now, as "the investment is too big".

But the uncertainty of working in China "undermines the confidence of customers, investors, and the board of directors", he told AFP.

The sudden about-turn on Covid also rattled the foreign business community.

China has created the impression that it is a country where things are "ultimately uncontrollable, as it can decide to close down overnight", a Beijing-based executive at a European company told AFP, also requesting anonymity.

Since the reopening, he has observed a "tightening of the rules" for foreign companies.

"They asked us to put people from the Party in our company, but we refused," he said, referring to China's ruling Communist Party.



PHOTO: AFP/FILE

Bonds: reliable source of capital and income

SHIBLY AMRAN

Nowadays, bonds are a widely discussed term in the investment fraternity. It is considered a good source of capital for issuers and a widely accepted tool for fixed-income groups around the globe. Bangladesh is not out of this league.

Numerous government, corporate and Islamic bonds are available for investments and some are publicly traded as well.

Bonds can be a reliable source of capital and income generation. Bonds are debt instruments that offer fixed interest payments over a period and are issued by businesses, communities, and governments to raise money. To make informed investment decisions in the bond market, it is essential to follow certain guidelines.

We should start by defining our investment objectives. Are we looking for regular income, capital preservation, or diversification? Clarifying our goals will help us determine the appropriate bond types and maturities that align with our investment needs.

We should familiarise yourself with various types of bonds available, including government bonds, municipal bonds, corporate bonds, sukuk, and high-yield bonds.

We should evaluate our risk tolerance level. Fixed-income securities or bonds generally offer more stability than equity investments, but some bonds may carry higher risks than others. High-yield bonds, for example, offer higher yields but are associated with incremental default risk. We should choose a bond that matches our loss absorption level or risk appetite.

Credit rating agencies assign ratings to bonds based on their assessment of issuers' ability to repay debts. Higher-rated bonds are generally safer but offer lower yields, while lower-rated bonds may carry higher yields but involve increased credit risk. Types of credit ratings and their implication are available online.

We should monitor interest rates and assess their impact on bond prices. Bond prices move inversely to interest rates -- when interest rates rise, bond prices fall and vice versa. Consider the current interest rate environment and have some idea of where interest rates can move when making investment decisions.

Diversification is essential to mitigate risk. We should allocate our bond investments across various issuers, sectors, and maturities. This helps reduce the impact of any single bond's default or interest rate changes on our overall portfolio.

Duration is a measure of a bond's sensitivity to interest rate changes. Longer-duration bonds are more sensitive to interest rate fluctuations, while shorter-duration bonds are relatively less affected. Choose bonds with durations that align with our investment horizon.

We should understand the tax implications of bond investments. Zero-coupon bonds are typically tax-exempted for a specific group of investors in higher tax brackets. However, interest from corporate and government bonds is generally taxable.

We need to follow economic news, market trends, and issuer-specific developments. Monitor financial indicators, such as GDP growth, inflation rates, and central bank policies. These factors can affect bond prices and market conditions.

If we are uncertain about bond investments or lack the time to conduct thorough research, consider consulting a financial adviser. A professional can provide personalised guidance based on our financial situation, goals, and risk tolerance.

Now the question comes to how someone can invest in bonds in Bangladesh. Investing in bonds is very easy. Anyone can invest in bonds through exchanges with their beneficiary accounts account or can take privately placed bonds from issuers that are available to the public.

Bond investment requires careful analysis and proper due diligence. By following these guidelines, we can make informed investment decisions and build a well-diversified bond portfolio.

The author is chief executive officer of Community Bank Investment Ltd.