

# Licences of 14 ISPs cancelled

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC) recently cancelled the licences of 14 internet service providers (ISPs) after they failed to renew their licences within the specified time.

The telecom regulator directed the ISPs to surrender their licences to the commission within 10 days, according to the BTRC documents.

The ISPs are Bornil Network System Ltd, IT Next Technology, Cyber Communication, New Generation Internet Services Ltd, Asian City Online (BD) Ltd, Apon Enterprise, Sparking World, Reign ICT, Segun Bagicha Safenet Online, Speed Online, Vestel Cable TV Networks Ltd, Web Solution, Chandpur Net and Ainet Communication.

The regulator declared all activities of these ISPs illegal and punishable under the Bangladesh Telecommunication Act 2001.

It also warned all concerned not to enter into any deal or engage in financial transactions with these ISPs.

Earlier in May, the BTRC cancelled the licences of 228 ISPs after they failed to convert their licences in accordance with guidelines.

According to the regulatory and licencing guidelines for the ISPs in Bangladesh published in December 2020, existing ISP licensees had to convert their licences to four new categories by December 2021.

In July 2022, the regulator directed the international internet gateway service providers to disconnect bandwidth connections of 286 ISPs after they failed to convert their licences in accordance with guidelines.

## India's palm oil imports set to jump

REUTERS, Mumbai

India's palm oil imports are set to jump 26 percent to a record high in the 2022/23 year ending on October 31, as a recovery in consumption and competitive prices prompt refiners to increase purchases, the country's top palm oil buyer told Reuters on Wednesday.

Higher purchases by the world's biggest importer of palm oil could help to lower inventories in top producing Indonesia and Malaysia and support benchmark futures.

"Refiners are increasing their purchases for the upcoming festivals. We could see imports of around 1.8 million metric tons in the next two months," said Sanjeev Asthana, chief executive officer at Patanjali Foods Ltd.

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If India imports 1.8 million tons in the next two months, the total shipments for the 2022/23 marketing year ending on October 31 would be 10 million tons, surpassing the previous high of 9.5 million tons made in 2014/15, he said.

In the first 10 months of 2022/23, India imported 14 million tons of edible oils, consisting of 8.2 million tons of palm oil, 3.2 million tons of soyoil and 2.5 million tons of sunflower oil, dealers estimate.

India's edible oil consumption has been subdued in the past three years, with record high prices weighing on 2022 use and Covid-19 on the previous two years, he said.

"We are expecting a growth 2 percent-4 percent in this year's consumption," he said.

India fulfils more than two-third of its edible oil requirement through imports.

A consumption revival would also see higher sunflower oil imports in the current year, raising the total imports of edible oils by 18 percent to a record 16.5 million tons, said Rajesh Patel, managing partner at GGN Research, an edible oil trader and broker.

Sunflower oil imports could jump 44 percent from a year earlier to a record 2.8 million tons as the oil was cheaper than soyoil, he said. Soyoil imports could fall 11 percent from last year's record high of 4.1 million tons to 3.7 million tons this year, he added.



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PHOTO: COLLECTED

# Digital literacy, awareness main focus

bKash chief marketing officer tells The Daily Star

MAHMUDUL HASAN

The primary role of bKash involves continuous efforts to promote digital literacy and educate individuals about the benefits of digital financial products. And with this, bKash plays a significant role in the digitalisation of Bangladesh.

"As a pioneer and market leader in the mobile financial service (MFS) industry, we always put digital literacy at the forefront of our agenda," said Mir Nawbut Ali, chief marketing officer of bKash Limited, in an interview with The Daily Star recently.

Digital literacy is not universal, so bKash has taken on the task of teaching many individuals how to use these digital services, he said.

The goal is to assure them that digital transactions are not only convenient but also simpler than traditional methods, he added.

He said they have become one of the most widely used digital payment methods in Bangladesh, serving millions on a range of needs, from mobile top-ups to remittance and various purchase payments.

In the world of the MFS, there is a unique niche that sits at the intersection of traditional banking and fast moving consumer goods (FMCG) companies, he said.

It is a space where companies like bKash operate, dealing with customers much like FMCG giants do, he said.

Drawing an interesting analogy, Ali likened their role to that of companies like Unilever.

"Unilever introduced handwash products in Bangladesh. To habituate people with such hygiene products, it has to run massive awareness campaigns," he said.

"Just as Unilever had educated people about the importance of handwashing after using the toilet, bKash has a similar responsibility for pioneering MFS among educated people over digital payment services," he said.

"Our mission isn't just to provide a product; it's also about teaching people the value and benefits of using it. This responsibility comes with a hefty price tag, as it involves extensive awareness campaigns and educational efforts," he said.

When it comes to marketing financial products, bKash takes a different approach, he said.

Before launching a product, bKash dives deep into understanding customer behaviour such as their likes and dislikes and the implications of the product, he said.

"The goal is to know everything about customers, and this comprehensive approach allows us to work closely with various industries, a rare opportunity in the business world," he said.

The marketing campaigns are designed by bKash in a strategic way such that it is not limited to the publicity of products and services, rather enlightening and gaining the confidence of the customers on the use of MFS, he said.

According to him, one of the challenges they've encountered is enabling the transition of people from long-standing practices.

"For example, traditionally electricity bills are paid with cash and the customers receive receipts in paper. So, we had to assure that digital receipt is available in bKash payment," he said.

Changing these ingrained habits is a gradual process, and bKash is doing it with utmost care and patience, he said.

Behind the scenes, bKash puts strong emphasis on research and meticulous planning before introducing any new product or feature to their app, he said.

"This approach helps us avoid faulty products and provides a seamless experience for users," Ali said.

Ali started his career with New Zealand Dairy as a sales executive in 1997. He also worked for British American Tobacco, Grameenphone, Bakcell in Azerbaijan, Airtel and Marico Bangladesh in key marketing roles.

He joined bKash in 2017 as chief marketing officer and bKash became the best brand of Bangladesh for four consecutive years from 2019 to 2022 under his stewardship.

He said one of the remarkable aspects of bKash's services was how they manage to provide customers with a consistent experience despite the complexity of the backend processes.

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# EU hits tech titans with tougher market restraints

AFP, Brussels

The European Union on Wednesday unveiled the list of digital giants -- including Apple, Facebook owner Meta and TikTok parent ByteDance -- that will face tough new curbs on how they do business.

Brussels is working through a dense legislative agenda to build tougher regulation of big tech, arguing it needs to protect European consumers online and to encourage competition in an industry dominated by US giants.

The latest announcement is a milestone in the application of the Digital Markets Act (DMA), which will force the largest firms to change their ways under a checklist of dos and don'ts and, regulators hope, create a fairer market.

Observers say the law could open a new battlefield between digital titans and the European Union as some companies consider launching legal challenges.

The European Commission, the EU's powerful antitrust body, named 22 "core platform" services belonging to five US tech behemoths identified as "gatekeepers" -- Google parent Alphabet, Amazon, Apple, Meta, Microsoft -- and China's ByteDance.

The services included Apple's App Store; Meta's Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp; Google's YouTube video platform and Chrome browser, as well as Apple's Safari.

Others included operating systems run by Apple, Microsoft and Google as well as Alphabet's Google Maps, Play and Shopping. They must fully comply with the DMA by March 6, 2024.



The "gatekeeper" status applies when a service has more than 45 million monthly active users and more than 10,000 yearly active business users established in the EU.

Apple on Wednesday said it was "very concerned about the privacy and data security risks the DMA poses for our users" and said it would seek to "mitigate these impacts".

There will be fines of up to 10 percent of a firm's global revenues for breaking some of the most serious competition rules, and even up to 20 percent for repeat offenders.

One major change under the DMA is the rule that forces interoperability between messaging apps, making it easier for users to share links and images.

"With today's designation we are finally reining in the economic power of six gatekeepers, giving more choice to consumers and creating new opportunities for smaller innovative tech companies," said the EU's top tech enforcer, industry commissioner Thierry Breton.

Apple and Microsoft argued parts of their businesses should not be classified as a "core" service, and the commission said it launched probes to assess Apple's claims regarding iMessage, and Microsoft for Bing, Edge and its advertising platform.

A Microsoft spokesperson welcomed the decision to launch an investigation into the three services which the company said, "operate as challengers in the market".

Meanwhile, Apple said it looked "forward to explaining to the commission why iMessage is outside the scope of the DMA".

The EU has led the way globally for taking on big tech.

The DMA, alongside its sister law, the Digital Services Act (DSA), gives the commission sharper teeth against tech behemoths that critics say have for too long been given free rein to act to the detriment of users.

# Saudi, Russia extend oil output cuts

AFP, Riyadh

Saudi Arabia and Russia said on Tuesday they would extend voluntary oil cuts until the end of the year, sending the price of Brent crude to a 10-month high.

The Saudi production cut of one million barrels per day which first took effect in July will continue "for another three months until the end of December 2023", the kingdom's energy ministry said in a statement.

Russia's export cut of 300,000 bpd will continue for the same period, Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak said in a separate statement.

Brent crude rose above \$90 per barrel on the news for the first time since November, while West Texas Intermediate, the main US futures contract, jumped 1.9 percent to \$87.16.

Riyadh, the world's biggest crude exporter, first announced its cut after a June meeting of the 23-nation Opec+ alliance, which also includes Russia.

A statement in early August revealing the cut would last through September included a warning that it could be "deepened", but Tuesday's announcement has kept it at the same level for now.

That decision "will be reviewed monthly to consider deepening the cut or increasing production", the energy

ministry statement said.

The unilateral Saudi cut followed a decision in April by several Opec+ members to slash production voluntarily by more than one million bpd -- a surprise move that briefly buttressed prices but failed to bring about lasting recovery.

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Last October, Opec+ agreed to reduce output by two million barrels per day.

That decision riled the United States, which at the time accused Saudi Arabia, a security partner, of siding with Russia in the war in Ukraine.

Oil prices increased in July, the first month the Saudi-only cut took effect, clearing the \$80 per barrel threshold analysts often say Riyadh needs to balance its budget, though the various production cuts could push that threshold higher.

Brent crude traded at \$88 per barrel at the end of August, Riyadh-based firm Jadwa Investment said in a

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An employee refuels his car at a fuel station in Riyadh. Saudi Arabia, the world's biggest crude exporter, first announced its cut after a June meeting of the 23-nation Opec+ alliance.

PHOTO: AFP/FILE