



Genex Infosys to build IT infrastructure for Saudi firm

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Genex Infosys, a leading outsourcing IT provider, will build turnkey IT infrastructure for Red Sea Gateway Terminal Bangladesh Limited (RSGT) at the Patenga container terminal.

In a filing to the Dhaka Stock Exchange yesterday, the company said its board approved the deal with RSGT, a Saudi Arabian company assigned to operate the terminal for 22 years under an agreement with Chittagong Port Authority.

A turnkey solution is a type of system built end-to-end for a customer that can be easily implemented into a current business process.

The investment will generate a revenue of Tk 28.5 crore for the next one year.

Shares of Genex rose 4 percent to Tk 72.80 on the DSE yesterday.



KEY POINTS

Mobile operators embracing digital shift

Grameenphone, Robi and Banglalink are diversifying their digital services

GRAMEENPHONE

Launched an app store named AppCity yesterday

It aims to foster innovation and connectivity for a smarter Bangladesh

ROBI

Launched an app store named bdapps in 2014

It is promoting local innovation and entrepreneurship

BANGLALINK

Launched an app store called AppLink in 2022

Enables local developers to earn through their apps

Sri Lanka to lift some limits on rupee conversion

REUTERS, Colombo

Sri Lanka has approved gradually lifting some limits on converting rupees to foreign exchange for outward remittances and the new directions will be presented to parliament for approval, cabinet spokesperson Bandula Gunawardane said on Tuesday.

The island nation's central bank had suspended permission to remit funds for overseas investments by Sri Lankan residents from mid-2020 except under certain conditions.

"Sri Lanka's reserves have gradually improved and limits will be increased under the guidance of the central bank," Gunawardane told reporters during the weekly cabinet briefing.

The country of 22 million people is slowly recovering from its worst financial crisis in decades, which sent the economy into freefall with soaring inflation, currency depreciation and low foreign reserves.

Sri Lanka's official reserves stood at \$4.4 billion at the end of 2023, an increase of 22 percent according to the central bank. About \$1.5 billion of the reserves is a Chinese yuan-denominated swap.

App stores now a part of mobile operators' digital services

GP launched AppCity yesterday

MAHMUDUL HASAN

Mobile operators in Bangladesh are now offering app stores, enabling developers to not only connect with users through secure distribution channels but also giving them the monetisation tools as they continually attempt to diversify their portfolio.

App stores are online platforms where customers can purchase and download various software applications.

Following in the footsteps of Robi and Banglalink, Grameenphone yesterday launched "AppCity", saying it aims to transform the digital landscape.

This platform connects app developers and publishers with both business-to-consumer (B2C) and business-to-business (B2B) customers, promoting innovation, smart solutions, and accessibility in Bangladesh's pursuit of a "Smart Bangladesh", according to the mobile operator.

In response to a predicted decline in traditional voice revenue, mobile operators are strategically diversifying their offerings, with a shift toward digital services, according to industry people.

Grameenphone has already announced itself as a "telco-tech" company whereas Robi Axiata calls itself a "TechCo" while Banglalink a digital operator. All aim to promote digital lifestyles in addition to their connectivity.

With the evolving landscape of technology and customer demands, the operators are also opting for delivering new services to seek new revenue streams.

"AppCity", a pivotal part of Grameenphone's telco-tech journey, is a

unified platform offering a diverse range of applications and software as a service (SaaS) solutions, said the mobile operator.

SaaS allows users to connect to and use cloud-based apps over the internet, such as email, calendaring, and office tools.

"This platform encapsulates our vision of creating a smarter, inclusive, safer, and sustainable ecosystem. Fostering connectivity that empowers society and propelling the 'Smart Bangladesh', our dedication goes beyond conventional telecom services," said Yasir Azman, CEO of Grameenphone.

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With "AppCity", Grameenphone is laying the foundation for a more connected and accessible smart future, he said.

"Grameenphone is reshaping its portfolio to include state-of-the-art ICT and IoT solutions, ensuring we stay ahead in meeting the dynamic needs of an interconnected world," he said.

Functioning as both an app store and API hub, this marketplace connects content providers and application developers with individual and corporate customers, he said.

API is the acronym for application programming interface — a software

intermediary that allows two applications to "talk to each other".

One of the distinctive features of "AppCity" is its built-in Android, iOS, and telco API capabilities offered seamlessly to B2C and B2B platforms, making it the first cross-platform app marketplace in Bangladesh, he said.

Zunaid Ahmed Palak, state minister for telecom and ICT, was present at the launch of "AppCity" at a hotel in Dhaka. Petter-Børre Furberg, chairman of Grameenphone and head of Telenor Asia, and Yasir Azman were also present.

Palak said AppCity was a significant leap towards a "smart future" for the "smart nation", reflecting national aspirations.

Integrating the innovations, the platform creates diverse opportunities for young entrepreneurs to actively contribute and thrive in shaping a "Smart Bangladesh", he said.

Earlier in March 2021, Palak declared bdapps, another platform launched by Robi Axiata Ltd in 2014, as "the national app store of Bangladesh".

Shahed Alam, chief corporate and regulatory officer, Robi Axiata Ltd, said bdapps has now become the largest mobile application monetisation platform in the country.

Serving as both a local app store and API hub, bdapps provides a platform for content providers and application developers to monetise their apps, whether downloadable or non-downloadable, he said.

With over 55,000 developers, some 25 percent of whom are females, it boasts the

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Emerald Oil to invest Tk 400cr on new rice bran oil plant

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Emerald Oil is planning to invest Tk 400 crore on a new plant in the Jamalpur Economic Zone to increase its production of rice bran oil for export.

The company has applied for land in the area and is planning to establish a factory that will ensure the production of 100 tonnes of rice bran oil per day. It plans to begin commercial operations at the factory within March 2025.

As the country is contending with a gas crisis which may impact production, the company has opened a letter of credit (LC) to import husk broilers so it can ensure production, said Miya Mamun, chairman of Minori Bangladesh, a major shareholder of Emerald Oil.

Other than husk, they can also be run using coal, he added.

"We needed funds to finance the project, so we made a deal with Dubai-based Safa Capital," Mamun said.

Minori Bangladesh Ltd inked the deal in order to get funding within three years.

Some of the funding from Safa Capital can be secured by selling them shares and some can be secured through loans by keeping shares in lien, Mamun said.

"It will depend on the situation and the central bank's approval on how many shares we can sell and how much we can get by keeping shares in lien. We have to think about the repatriation of funds in the present situation. So, all the things will depend on the central bank's confirmation," he added.

In a letter last month, the company sought approval from the Bangladesh Securities and Exchange Commission (BSEC) to allow keeping locked-free shares other than the 30 percent held by sponsors and directors as margin or pledge to any institutions.

The BSEC replied on January 23, allowing it to do so. At present, the collective shareholding by sponsors and directors is 59.61 percent of the paid-up capital of the company, including the 39.69 percent stake held by Minori Bangladesh.

Emerald Oil Industries was struggling to continue production for many years until Minori Bangladesh decided to invest in it in 2022.

At present, Emerald Oil is producing around 56-60 tonnes of rice bran oil per day.

The additional rice bran oil from the new project will be exported to Japan as the company has come to an agreement with two Japanese companies, Mamun said.

In FY2022-23, its sales stood at Tk 111 crore, up from the previous year's Tk 43 crore. At the same time, profit rose to Tk 6.6 crore compared to Tk 1 crore the previous year, according to the company's financial statements.

Its stock rose 9.88 percent to Tk 85.6 at the DSE yesterday.

Shahjibazar to stop power supply Feb 9 midnight

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Shahjibazar Power Co Ltd (SPCL) yesterday informed that its plant would be closed soon as its 15-year electricity sales agreement with state-run Bangladesh Power Development Board (BPDB) was set to expire on February 9.

The plant will cease operations at midnight of February 9, meaning electricity supply to the national grid would be discontinued from then on, the SPCL said in a filing on the Dhaka Stock Exchange (DSE) website yesterday.

The SPCL said it had requested the renewal of the agreement for five years under a "no-electricity no-payment" basis.

"The submission is currently under the consideration of the BPDB, and the company is expecting a positive outcome soon," it said.

Google to face US antitrust trial over digital ads

REUTERS, Washington

A US federal judge on Monday set a Sept 9, 2024, date for the start of a jury trial in a lawsuit the US Justice Department and a coalition of states filed last year against Google, that accused the company of abusing its dominance of digital advertising technology.

The lawsuit, filed in January 2023, accuses Google of monopolizing the market for digital advertising and undermining competition. The government has said Google should be forced to sell its ad manager suite.

Google has denied the claims and said if the lawsuit succeeds, it would "slow innovation, raise advertising fees, and make it harder for thousands of small businesses and publishers to grow."

The Justice Department, Virginia and other states had requested a July date for the Alexandria, Virginia, trial. US District Judge Leonie Brinkema said in an order, that a summer trial would have posed logistical problems.

Representatives for Google and the Justice Department on Monday declined to comment about the trial date.

Google separately faces a March 2025 trial in US federal court in Texas, where a similar lawsuit from Texas and other states is challenging its ad tech practices.

In a third case, a US judge in Washington, D.C., is expected to hear closing arguments in May in lawsuits from the US Justice Department, Colorado and other states over Google's web search dominance.

India needs less Tesla, more Toyota

REUTERS, Bengaluru

India is determined to lure Elon Musk's Tesla to set up a local factory to make electric vehicles. Yet slower global demand for pure electric vehicles strengthens the case for the world's third largest auto market to embrace hybrids like those made by Japan's Toyota Motor.

Cars running on a mix of battery and gas are currently treated as luxury items and taxed domestically at over 43 percent, while locally-made made EVs only face a 5 percent charge. India's trade department has privately supported calls from Japanese automakers to lower taxes on hybrids. That looks smart, especially now that Tesla's shares have fallen 24 percent this year and Chinese carmakers are slashing prices to entice buyers.

India needs to accelerate with caution. The fundamental drivers of weak demand - range anxiety and affordability - are far bigger issues in India's nascent market. Last year, only 2 percent of cars sold in the country were electric. Carmakers like Tata Motors, and Mahindra, are scaling up but customers have only a few options to choose from. And for now, there is only one commercial charging point for every 200 electric vehicles, compared to one in 10 for China, per Bain & Company.

Ultimately India is unlikely give up its preference for EVs. It wants to curb emissions but it also wants to cut its crude oil import bill that contributes to its current account deficit. A high deficit can lead to weakness in the rupee and impacts the country's perceived economic stability.

However, EVs are only as clean as the energy grid that powers them. So, while Tata Motors' Chief Financial

Officer PB Balaji is calling for the government to choose which clean car technology it is going to back and opposes lowering taxes on hybrids, the reality is that India's coal-heavy electricity grid complicates the decision.

It might take between seven and ten years before electric vehicles have an emissions footprint as low as hybrids that are strong enough to run on battery power alone, HSBC analysts estimate. That makes hybrids an

attractive option for India.

The shifting global consensus will also vindicate companies earlier seen as EV laggards. The \$38 billion Maruti Suzuki, the largest passenger car manufacturer in India, expects, hybrids will make up 25 percent of its portfolio by the financial year 2031, compared to 15 percent for pure EVs. Tesla may soon be coming to India but hybrids look set to claim a bigger spot on the road too.



Tesla vehicles are seen on a lot at a Tesla dealership in Austin, Texas. While India is trying to lure Tesla, analysts believe hybrid models like those of Toyota's will fare better.

PHOTO: AFP/FILE