



Telenor shrinks Asian footprint, puts GP in spotlight

MAHMUDUL HASAN

Over the past month, two major developments have stood out in the Asian telecommunications market. Telenor, the Norwegian telecom company, has finalised the sale of its Pakistan operations, nearly two years after announcing its exit, and reached an agreement to sell its stake in Thailand, further shrinking its presence in Asia.

With these moves, Telenor has exited most of its Asian markets through a series of divestments, leaving only Malaysia and Bangladesh – where the company began its Asian journey nearly three decades ago – as its remaining major presence in the region.

These developments raise an obvious question: what lies ahead for Telenor's operations in Bangladesh, particularly Grameenphone, as the company continues to reassess its exposure to Asia?

Last week, Telenor signalled that even its remaining Asian assets could be involved in future transactions. According to Reuters, the company said its assets in Asia, including Grameenphone, where it holds a 55.8 percent stake, "could also become subject to deals."

"It's business as usual until such time that any opportunities present themselves," Torbjorn Wist, chief financial officer of Telenor Group, told Reuters in a telephone interview.

ASIA TIMELINE

- Telenor entered Asia with the 1997 launch in Bangladesh
- Expanded into Thailand, Malaysia, Pakistan, Myanmar and India
- Exited India in 2017
- Ended operations in Myanmar in 2022
- Finalised sale of Pakistan stake in Dec 2025
- Sold stake in Thailand in Jan 2026
- Current operations remain in Bangladesh and Malaysia

Asked specifically about Bangladesh, Jon Omund Revhaug, head of Telenor Asia, expressed the same view. "I would reiterate what Torbjorn, our Group CFO, has said. We continue business as usual with full focus and commitment in Bangladesh until such time that any opportunities present themselves," Revhaug told The Daily Star.

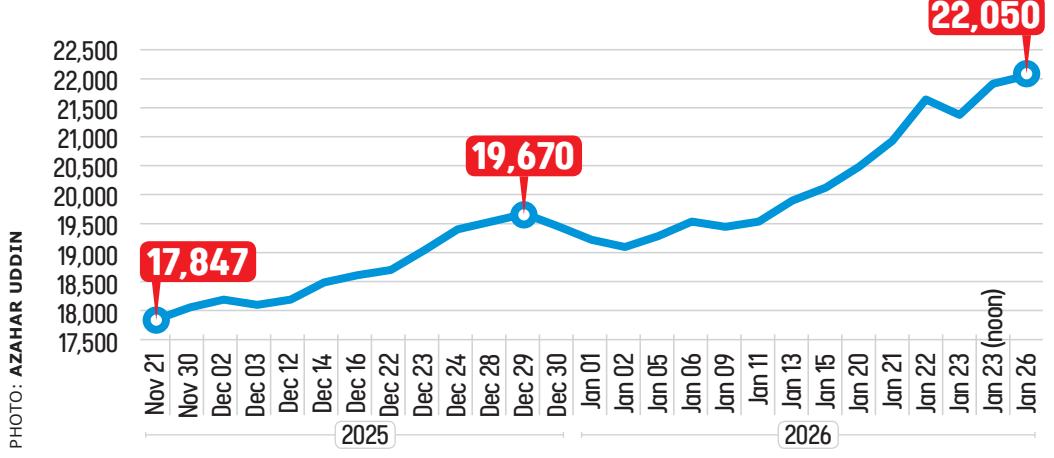
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Glittering gold draws both buyers and sellers

PRICES OF 22-CARAT GOLD IN BANGLADESH

In taka per gramme



SUKANTA HALDER

Dilruba Akter, a private jobholder in Dhaka, had been closely tracking the ups and downs of gold prices for several months. On January 22, when the price of the precious metal reached a historic high of Tk 2.52 lakh per bhoru, she decided the moment was right to invest.

She spent a portion of her savings to buy one bhoru of gold jewellery from a shop at Bashundhara City Shopping Complex in the capital. She told The Daily Star that she plans to sell the jewellery later, once prices rise further, to make a profit.

With that amount, it is possible to earn a good return within a short period, she said, adding that the risk is relatively low as she believes prices are unlikely to fall sharply.

The latest trend shows that she was right on the money. Domestic gold price broke its previous record and reached Tk 2.62 lakh per bhoru.

Akter is not alone in her investment choice as gold's rise appears seemingly unstoppable. Against the backdrop of the highly anticipated national election and persistent stress in the banking sector, more people are turning to gold as a safe-haven investment.

THE GREAT GOLD RUSH

An official at Venus Jewellers' Bashundhara

City branch said a growing number of customers are buying gold with the expectation that prices will continue to rise.

The domestic gold price surged in line with the rising cost of pure gold in the market, according to the Bangladesh Jewellers Association (Bajus), which sets the metal's price in Bangladesh.

According to a Reuters report, spot gold reached \$5,089.78 per ounce on Monday, after earlier touching an all-time high of \$5,110.50. The metal soared 64 percent in 2025, its biggest annual gain since 1979, driven by safe-haven demand, US monetary policy easing, robust central bank purchases, including China's fourteenth straight month of buying in January, and record inflows into exchange-traded funds.

Bajus President Enamul Haque Khan, also the owner of Diamond and Divas, said the gold market in Bangladesh has remained buoyant for years, with prices climbing steadily.

He said, has prompted many to view gold as an alternative investment.

Gold first crossed Tk 50,000 per bhoru in January 2018. By July 2023, the price had surpassed Tk 100,000. It rose to Tk 150,000 in February 2025 and crossed Tk 200,000 later that year.

Liton Paul, manager of JCX Gold and Diamond at Bashundhara City Shopping Complex, said interest in gold investment picked up noticeably after prices crossed Tk 2 lakh per bhoru.

Around 30 percent of his customers now buy gold primarily as an investment, he estimated.

Gold's liquidity is a key attraction, according to Paul, as it can be sold quickly in times of need and often yields a reasonable return.

Many of the new buyers are private sector employees or business owners, while female students are also increasingly purchasing smaller items priced between Tk 20,000 and Tk 40,000.

WHEN ALL FAILS, IN GOLD PEOPLE TRUST

Paul noted that confidence in other investment avenues like banks has weakened, which has pushed some customers towards gold.

The banking sector is going through a turbulent period. By the end of 2025, default loans had reached record levels, depositor confidence had eroded, and reforms remained constrained by old power structures.

Five weak banks – First Security Islami, Social Islami, Union, Global Islami and EXIM

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PHOTO: EASTERN BANK

Winners of the EBL Climate Change Action Awards 2026 pose for a photograph with Bangladesh Bank Governor Ahsan H Mansur, EBL Managing Director Ali Reza Iftekhar, ambassadors of Germany, Denmark, France, Sweden and the European Union, along with jury members at the Radisson Blu Water Garden Hotel in Dhaka yesterday.

Five organisations win EBL Climate Change Action Awards

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Five organisations have been honoured for innovative and scalable climate solutions at the second edition of the EBL Climate Change Action Awards 2026, hosted by Eastern Bank PLC (EBL).

The awards ceremony, held at the Radisson Blu Water Garden Hotel in Dhaka yesterday, brought together policymakers, diplomats, business leaders and development partners.

At the event, Bangladesh Bank Governor Ahsan H Mansur stressed the private sector's critical role in advancing climate resilience and

sustainable finance. He noted that many leaders in the readymade garment sector are transforming their factories into green facilities, while a growing number of private industries are generating power from solar energy and investing in renewable sources.

Mansur also said Bangladesh is ahead of many neighbouring countries in terms of early response to climate change, adding that the BB is actively promoting sustainable finance.

Banks, he said, have responded very positively to these initiatives.

As a regulator, he said the BB

remains committed to supporting sustainable finance to mitigate climate-related risks, while seeking continued support from the international community for environmental sustainability.

However, stressing that Bangladesh cannot rely entirely on external assistance, he said strengthening domestic capacity by engaging local communities and promoting innovation is crucial to address climate change.

The annual awards, organised by EBL in partnership with the embassies of Germany, France,

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Jan-Jun 2025	Jul-Dec 2025
Rescheduled Tk 14,441 Cr.	Tk. 2,991.28 Cr.
Cash Recovered Tk 847 Cr.	Tk. 336.84 Cr.
NPL Reduced 27%	78%
51.8%	

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Disclaimer: All data presented are based on the Bank's internal management reports and provisional unaudited figures as of 31 December 2025, and are subject to regulatory review and approval.

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