BTRC sets base price for lower-band spectrum

MAHMUDUL HASAN

The Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC) has proposed a base price of Tk 214 crore per MHz for a block of E-GSM spectrum with limited interference, a lower-frequency band that helps mobile operators extend network coverage and improve indoor connectivity.

It has also proposed a price of Tk 178 crore per MHz for another block with higher interference.

The telecom regulator has decided to seek government approval for the proposed prices before holding the auction, which it intends to conduct this year.

For customers, the additional spectrum could improve network coverage and capacity, particularly in areas where mobile networks face congestion or coverage gaps. It could also support more reliable mobile internet services as operators deploy additional capacity.

A total of 8.4MHz of E-GSM spectrum will be up for auction.

According to BTRC documents, the 3.4MHz block with limited interference has a proposed base price of Tk 214 crore per MHz for 15 years, down 10 per cent from the benchmark price of Tk 237 crore.

The other 5MHz block, which faces higher interference from neighbouring India, has been priced at Tk 178 crore per MHz, a 25 per cent reduction from the same benchmark.

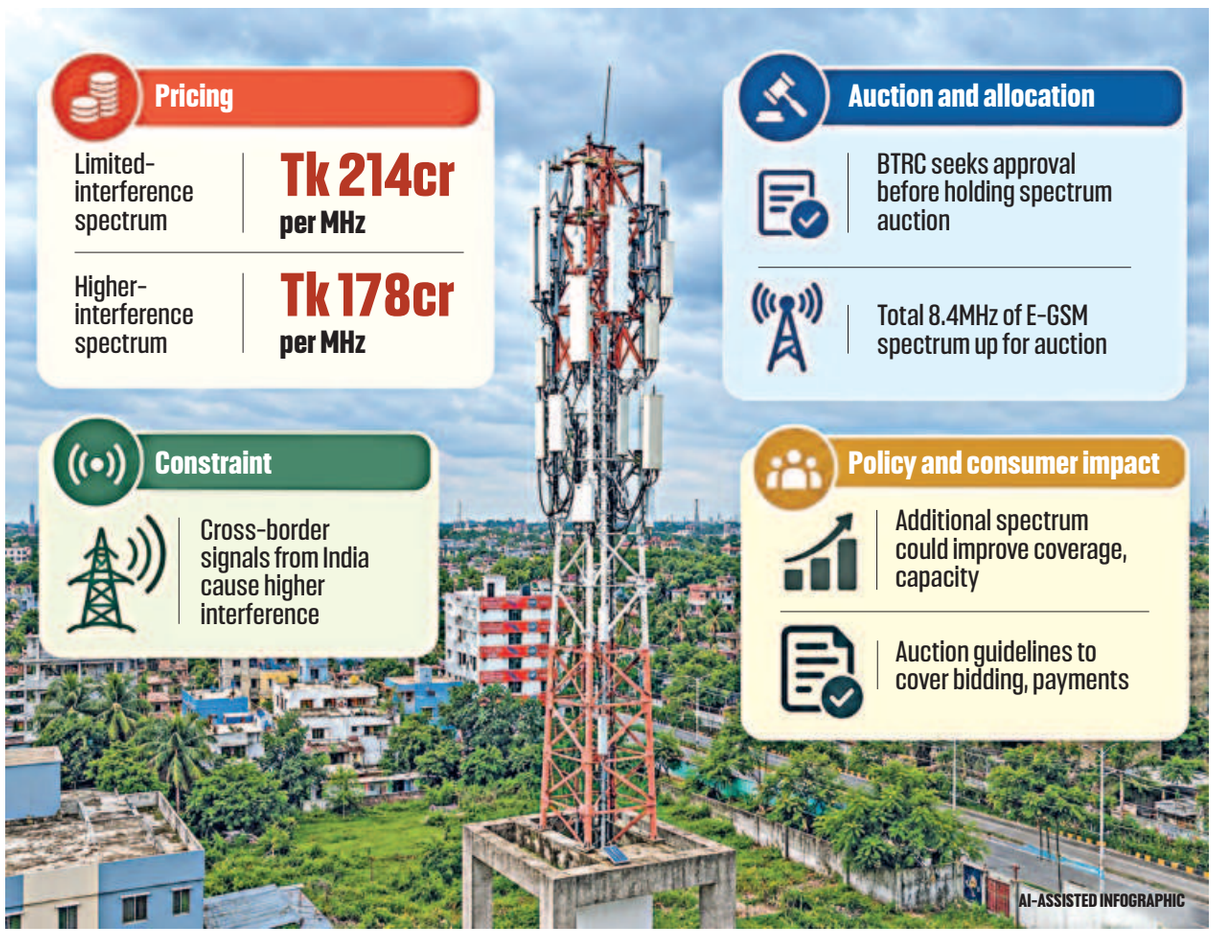
The commission has also formed a committee to prepare auction guidelines covering the bidding process, bid increments, spectrum tenure, payment arrangements, application processing fees, bid earnest money and annual spectrum charges.

The pricing decision comes as the telecom regulator seeks to make additional lower-band spectrum available to mobile operators to improve network quality and expand coverage, particularly in remote areas.

The proposed rates reflect differences in interference levels and the limited period for which the spectrum would be available. Both blocks are expected to be allocated only until 2030.

After 2030, spectrum allocation from this band would shift to the 850MHz band in coordination with neighbouring countries to achieve a lasting resolution.

The 3.4MHz block covers the paired frequency ranges of 885–888.4MHz and 930–933.4MHz. The 5MHz block covers 880–885MHz and 925–930MHz.



According to the BTRC, the latter block experiences significantly higher interference across substantial parts of the country because of cross-border signals from India. As a result, it cannot be used as effectively nationwide as the other block.

The regulator believes the proposed discounts would account for these technical limitations and the short allocation period while ensuring that the spectrum benefits consumers and generates revenue for the government.

The pricing proposal follows consultations among the BTRC, the Posts and Telecommunications Division and the Finance Division of the Ministry of Finance.

In a letter dated September 7, the Posts and Telecommunications Division asked the BTRC to proceed with the auction in line with the Finance Division's opinion, as well as recommendations from the Spectrum Management Committee and applicable laws, regulations and guidelines. The division also instructed the regulator to obtain government approval wherever required.

The Finance Division said determining the base price of spectrum for auction falls within the BTRC's statutory management process under the Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulation Act, 2001, and does not constitute the fixing of rates, charges, tariffs or fees that would require its consent on that basis.

Since the actual spectrum price would be determined through competitive bidding, the Finance Division had no objection to the BTRC addressing technical interference issues in accordance with applicable standards recommended by the International Telecommunication Union.

"The Finance Division and the Posts and Telecommunications Ministry have already opined that setting spectrum prices falls within BTRC's jurisdiction. Despite that, we have decided to seek government approval, specifying the proposed price for the spectrum," said BTRC Chairman Major General (retd) Md Emdad Ul Bari.

Of the 10MHz E-GSM band under consideration, 1.6MHz has already been allocated to Robi Axiata PLC, according to BTRC documents. The regulator is now preparing to auction the remaining 8.4MHz.

The Spectrum Management Committee recommended auctioning the available spectrum after finding that multiple operators had expressed interest in the same blocks.

The BTRC has argued that additional lower-band spectrum is urgently needed to improve mobile network quality and expand coverage.

The commission has also formed a committee comprising officials from its spectrum management, legal, engineering and finance-related departments to prepare the auction guidelines.

Airlines business and procurement of aircraft

AF NESARUDDIN

Operating an airline is not just a business or a service; it also represents a country as its flag carrier. Over the past several years, Bangladesh has seen significant growth in air traffic, exports and per capita income, which is now close to $3,000. Non-resident Bangladeshi passengers account for a significant share of this traffic. Many reputed international airlines operate successfully in Bangladesh, some with more than one daily flight, alongside cargo services.

The airline business is highly technical, risky, complex and globally competitive. It is capital-intensive, with many factors, including fuel prices and airport charges in different countries, beyond an airline's control. Many airlines worldwide operate at a loss, and bankruptcies are common among private operators. Some rely on government subsidies because air services are integral to economic activity. Passenger and cargo operations require different strategies, while reputation and efficiency are vital to attracting passengers and cargo customers.

Much of the business that Bangladesh could capture goes to others because of our weaknesses. Given its geographical and strategic advantages, Bangladesh could become an airline hub, following the examples of Singapore, Dubai and Turkey, and generate additional revenue.

A feasibility study and a realistic business plan are essential for any business, and airlines are no exception. Fleet size is a crucial factor in an airline's viability. Usually, 20 percent to 25 percent of aircraft remain out of operation for regular maintenance. Since fixed costs, including overheads, remain constant, determining the number, capacity and quality of aircraft requires careful consideration. Ultimately, a sizeable fleet is necessary to minimise operational disruptions and manage crises before they damage passenger confidence and the airline's reputation.



A feasibility study, a realistic business plan, proper technical assessment, risk evaluation, sound financing, good governance and competent management are essential for aircraft procurement.

Aircraft selection, particularly in terms of capacity and category, is equally important. It should reflect country-specific requirements, including routes, passenger mix, demand and funding availability. Risks associated with aircraft must also be properly assessed and mitigated. Contractual terms, including post-delivery services, require careful evaluation to ensure aircraft can operate smoothly throughout their estimated useful lives, if not longer.

Financing under a well-designed business plan is fundamental, particularly in a country facing challenges in managing funds, financing and the payment and repayment of foreign loans, where applicable.

Public concern and frustration cannot be overlooked. Bangladesh has witnessed the siphoning off of huge sums of money from public procurement, particularly in mega projects, under the previous government. White papers on the matter were published in 2024. Past experience points to a lack of transparency and good governance, inefficient deal-making and decisions sometimes driven by ulterior motives rather than professional scepticism. Public procurement rules must be followed without compromise. All transactions must be conducted at arm's length, with full transparency, accountability and compliance, leaving no scope for corruption.

There is no doubt that Bangladesh needs to procure more aircraft to give Biman a sizeable fleet. At the same time, it must ensure satisfactory due diligence, a convincing feasibility study, a realistic business plan, proper technical assessments, risk evaluation, funding that matches inward remittances and domestic resources, an effective marketing and branding strategy, good governance and competent management.

Modernising airports, improving immigration procedures, speeding up passenger and baggage transfers, providing spacious lounges across classes, expanding food options and duty-free shopping, and ensuring efficient overall management are prerequisites for establishing Bangladesh as an aviation hub in South Asia. With these measures in place, the country could enter a new era of aviation and fulfil its ambition.

The writer is a senior partner of Hoda Vasi Chowdhury & Co and past president of ICAB

US consumer sentiment dips as cost worries mount: survey

AFP, *Washington*

US consumer sentiment ticked down in October, survey data showed Friday, with sharp declines seen among those with lower incomes as cost of living worries in the world's largest economy soar.

The University of Michigan's consumer sentiment index stood at 46.3 this month, down from 48.1 in September.

While this marked just a small monthly dip, the preliminary report flagged that "sentiment for lower-income consumers and those with smaller stock portfolios dropped steeply."

Survey director Joanne Hsu added that those groups have fewer resources to withstand price hikes.

"Frustration over cost-of-living continues to mount, as consumers across the political spectrum believe that the trajectory of the economy has weakened since the beginning of the year," she said.

October's consumer sentiment reading was 13.6 percent below the same period last year.

Meanwhile, expectations of inflation ticked up, bolstered by rising costs due to war in the Middle East.

Year-ahead inflation expectations rose from 4.6 percent to 4.7 percent this month, Hsu said.

This is substantially higher than the 3.4 percent reported in February, before US-Israel attacks targeting Iran sparked Tehran's blockage of the Strait of Hormuz, sending energy costs rocketing.

Prices at US gasoline pumps have since surged, with steeper costs cascading through the US economy.

Trump's trade wars sting US manufacturers ahead of midterm elections

AFP, *North Jackson*

For Doug Rende, who runs an aluminum product manufacturer in the US state of Ohio, President Donald Trump's tariffs have meant millions of dollars more in annual costs -- and recently, the Iran war has made shipments even more expensive.

Rende is chief executive at Shapes Unlimited, one of many American producers smarting from Trump's economic policies as midterm elections approach.

"Frustrating would be one word," Rende told AFP.

"And I think that we're sensing a lack of trust in not only the administration but the governmental process, the role of Congress to rein in executive power," he added.

Since returning to the presidency in January 2025, Trump has wielded executive authority to slap tariffs on various products and countries.

Besides aluminum, the duties hit steel and autos too, while US trading partners face additional tariffs that vary by country.

Even as some American manufacturers have benefited as their foreign competitors encounter higher barriers, others struggle with ballooning costs and persistent uncertainty.

Trump's spiraling trade fight with Canada and war with Iran have only deepened worries.

Grievances over Trump's trade policies are among fault lines that Democrats hope will work in their favor as they push to flip control of the Senate and House of Representatives in November's vote.

Rende's company in North Jackson, Ohio, makes and distributes aluminum building products used in fixtures like fences.

Trump's tariffs on aluminum have steadily climbed, from 10 percent during his first presidency to 25 percent and then 50 percent last year, and Rende has felt the impact.

"This year alone, it's upwards of $4.5 million to $5 million in additional costs," Rende said.

"There's only so much that the end consumer is willing to eat," he added. "So, we absorb a healthy portion."

These added costs include steeper transportation fees, as fuel prices surged with the US-Israel war on Iran. Surcharges are "upwards of $6,500 per container" of goods from suppliers, Rende said.

As a result, he has paused recruitment for new jobs while investing in more robotic assembly.

Sam Miller, another Ohio manufacturer who makes kitchen and bathroom products, has been hit on both fronts in Trump's trade wars, paying tariffs on imported materials from Asia while finding it harder to expand into Canada because of trade tensions.

"It's been difficult for businesses to manage," Miller told AFP from his factory floor in Warren as a machine hummed nearby, cutting countertop material. "I do think that there will be a shift away from Republican views."

Although Miller received refunds after the Supreme Court struck down many of Trump's duties, the US leader has since reinstated many of them.

Deteriorating US-Canada ties add to his challenges, with Washington and Ottawa slapping tariffs on each other's products after trade negotiations collapsed in August.

"We're selling into Canada and it is particularly straining on both us and our customers," Miller said.

He originally planned on opening a distribution facility in Canada this year, but progress has slowed.

Guy Coviello, president of the Youngstown Warren Regional Chamber, told AFP he is monitoring tariffs, the Iran war and immigration very closely.

These are a "mixed bag" for firms but negative overall, said Coviello, whose business group has some 3,000 members.

Some firms have lost customers or had to downsize, he said. Canada is also Ohio's biggest export market, with a third of Ohio's exports going to the country.

"Where it gets even more complicated is that there are some goods that go back and forth across the border multiple times," he said.

The Iran war adds to stresses, raising freight costs and hitting aluminum supplies due to drone attacks in the Middle East.



An overview of aluminum profiles and building materials stored at Shapes Unlimited, a US manufacturer facing millions of dollars in additional costs due to President Donald Trump's aluminum tariffs, in North Jackson, Ohio. PHOTO: AFP/FILE

Gold hits one-week high

REUTERS

Gold rose for a second straight session on Friday, touching a one-week high, as bargain buying emerged after bullion fell to two-month low earlier this week, while traders assessed the likelihood of further US Federal Reserve interest rate hikes.

Spot gold rose 1.5 percent to $4,194.36 per ounce by 03:29 p.m. EDT (1929 GMT), heading for a weekly gain of about 1.3 percent.

The metal fell to a two-month low on Wednesday as a stronger dollar and rising US Treasury yields weighed on the non-yielding metal.

US gold futures for December delivery gained 1.4 percent to settle at $4,216.3. Bullion gained due to "bargain hunting at the lows, as a floor has been building in the $4,000-region," said Rhona O'Connell, head of market analysis at Stone X.

"It is arguable that a further Fed hike is already priced in but so is the expectation for continued official sector net purchases. Without any Black Swan event I find it hard to see gold breaking convincingly higher."

US 10-year Treasury yields were off over two-decade highs hit on Wednesday.

St. Louis Fed President Alberto Musalem said on Thursday the US central bank [will need to hike rates again to bring inflation back to its 2 percent target](https://www.reuters.com/world/india/gold-rises-softer-dollar-easing-yields-fed-outlook-focus-2026-10-09/).

Traders are pricing in a 19 percent chance of a rate hike in October and an 84 percent probability of at least one 25-basis-point increase by December, according to the CME's FedWatch tool.

Gold tends to lose its appeal compared to yield-bearing assets in a high interest-rate environment.

"The coming week's CPI release may act as a catalyst for gold's next big move... Still-stubborn inflation that pushes the Fed into a steeper rate-hike cycle may force spot gold to re-test the psychological $4,000 support once more," said Han Tan, chief market analyst at Bybit.

Meanwhile, gold demand in India was sluggish this week as prices rebounded, while trading in top consumer China was subdued during the holiday-truncated trading period.