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SAMENA TRENDS

EXCLUSIVELY FOR SAMENA TELECOMMUNICATIONS COUNCIL'S MEMBERS

BUILDING DIGITAL ECONOMIES

A SAMENA Telecommunications Council Newsletter

Raising demand for mobile content and cloud services

SAMENA
TRENDS

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Raising demand for mobile content and cloud services and the way forward for the telecom industry stakeholders

The mobile content segment growth is mostly driven by the quick surge in disposable income, development in mobile technology with high end multimedia functionalities and constant product innovations (creative content). Moreover, rise in mobile bandwidth and growing admiration of mobile devices among the senior citizens is also fueling the progress.

Significant aspects that influence the mobile content market while buying mobile content contain content types, advancements in smartphones and tablets in the market. According to a research, mobile music and video revenue is projected to drop with the progress in cloud based services and hence would affect the buying behaviors of consumers. Stakeholders may find the market entry obstacles to be more complex for the mobile content market due to more competition in this sector.
Cloud computing has rapidly grown with the extensive use of the Internet services as well as innovation in mobile devices such as smartphones and tabs. Most of the users carry their portable devices while on the go and effortlessly access their files, important documents, videos and pictures on cloud storage via the Internet. With the expansion in technology market, technology experts are also concerned about the rising security needs for cloud computing.

It's forecasted that by 2020, nearly quarter of all applications will be available via cloud. About 55.8 percent of businesses recommend that cloud has a strategic edge while about 57.7 percent of businesses reserve more than 8 percent of their yearly budget for cloud services. Researchers foresee that there are going to be over 8 billion active smartphones and tabs by 2020 with the tendency of growing applications on the cloud to follow. Software will be on tap via cloud since the cloud makes it likely to quickly develop and deploy applications paving the way to efficient use of technology and quicker response times. It will more likely encourage enterprises to get what they want on-demand.

Enterprises can expect to see bigger integration and better knowhow about which kind of cloud is more efficient for them. More people in higher managements will be working to draw lines when it comes to business-critical assignments and security measures. Businesses deciding to go with shared clouds may have the possibility of inefficient performance and bigger security fears. Consequently, we can expect to see a migration to private clouds in the future.

Yours truly,

Bocar A. BA
Chief Executive Officer
SAMENA Telecommunications Council

Marc Halbfinger
Chief Executive Officer
PCCW Global

Before becoming PCCW Global CEO in 2007, Marc Halbfinger spent over 25 years in media and telecommunications roles, gaining experience in cable TV, directories, mobile, international voice, video, data and the Internet. He joined PCCW in 2000 as Senior Vice President, Business Development for the Pacific Convergence Corporation, covering markets in Europe and North America, where he was involved in now TV's early commercial development. In 2001, he helped establish Beyond the Network, which became part of PCCW Global, covering Europe, the Middle East and Africa as President. Marc was previously a Teleglobe Vice President, addressing Mediterranean and South European markets, after serving Global One, Sprint International and a Southwestern Bell subsidiary. He holds a Master of Science (Econ.) in International Relations from the London School of Economics and Political Science.

Q. What are the remarkable trends in technology that are reshaping the regional telecom market?

A. Convergence of cloud, social media, mobile and information combined with "Internet of Things" is creating new services and business models at an unparalleled rate. These forces are not just transforming the telco and technology sector, they are transforming every industry on the planet. The world is evolving to be 'mobile', and with wireless traffic is starting to exceed fixed traffic, and mobile data traffic continues to grow exponentially. The Internet of Things (IoT) is a new driver and is gaining some momentum, and will to be one of the elements of innovation. Billions of connected devices for consumer applications like home security, wearable devices, and connected home, connected car. In addition, virtualization in the B2B market in industries like manufacturing and transport using M2M applications to drive significant efficiency gains, real time problem solving, machine health monitoring etc. In Hong Kong premier we are perhaps at the forefront of smart home development and we continue to support our knowledge to our service provider partners in other parts of the world.

Q. What are the key factors that are driving the bandwidth utilization and which major services are significant for generating revenue streams?

A. Bandwidth utilization is being driven by the growth in data, particularly video traffic, coupled with the rollout of LTE mobile broadband networks and the availability of increasingly affordable smartphones. Smartphones will drive growing demand for data services in the mobile sector. And, fiber to the home rollouts will further increase access to high bandwidth applications.

Q. With the ever-rising data traffic demand, what steps should be taken by telcos to meet this challenge?

A. To meet the rising demand for data, operators must continually expand their network capacity and roll out new technologies such as high speed mobile broadband. As far as IP infrastructures are concerned, many operators are getting connected internationally via converged IP exchange (IPX) networks, enabling guaranteed end-to-end delivery of high quality voice and mobile data services via a single converged port. PCCW Global recently connected Etisalat to its international IPX network which provides guaranteed end-to-end delivery of voice and mobile data services to more than 50 destinations via a private and managed IP network.

In addition to infrastructure investments, operators in various QoS guarantees are a critical factor for telcos in the future, including the SAMENA region, are seeking to develop new, data-based digital value added services that can limit the impact of eroding revenues from traditional voice business. These include M-Health, M-Education, and M-Banking.

With a shift in viewing preferences taking place, with subscribers seeking to watch video content anywhere on any device at any time, many communications providers are leveraging their broadband and LTE networks and launching their own video on-demand services, taking advantage of platforms such as PCCW Global's fully managed Online Video Platform to enter the market rapidly in a low risk and cost-effective way. In the mobile content sector there have been many partnerships emerging between operators and OTT content providers, with operators using content to drive data uptake and content providers seeking wider viewer distribution. Some operators are investing in Wi-Fi technology to offload their congested cell networks and also to establish new revenue

streams. Operators are also investing more in machine-to-machine (M2M) communication, which is expected to be a growth market in the future.

Q. How do you see the impact of cloud based services in SAMENA region? How telecom operators can exploit this opportunity?

A. Cloud is now a 'given', with the vast majority of small and large enterprises alike now embracing the concept. Operators increasingly need to enter the fast-growing cloud services market, which is opening up opportunities in both consumer and enterprise businesses. Operators are uniquely placed to serve customers in this space as they:

- Own and operate the WAN / Internet / last mile/ data centres
- Have established long term trusted customer relationships
- Understand services and OSS / BSS
- Can assure networks remain secure

Telco Service Providers are now focussing on leveraging their strengths to address private and hybrid cloud demand locally within their own region and globally via partnership models. Most are entering into partnerships with other international cloud providers for off-net public cloud services. They are increasingly becoming 'cloud integrators', seeking to deliver both choice and customization for end users.

Q. How operators should position themselves in order to anticipate the emerging trends in mobile based services across different verticals?

A. Services such as machine-to-machine (M2M) communications, cloud computing, big data, telematics and enterprise mobility are creating new business opportunities for operators. Many are looking to M2M as a means of offsetting slowing growth in traditional consumer mobile services and are adapting their business models in order to serve a range of vertical industries with M2M solutions. Examples of growing investments in vertical applications include: mobile financial services, mobile health, mobile commerce and advertising, mobile education, mobile agriculture and smart homes.

By targeting the right customer segments with customized propositions, operators can generate value. Services are usually more customized and require development. A model of partnerships and cooperation with other industries is often essential for success.

Q. Are you planning to target new markets in other regions/countries or are there any plans for new joint ventures?

A. PCCW Global is constantly expanding its global footprint and capabilities. We currently operate a network that covers more than 3,000 cities in 140 countries, and supports an unrivalled portfolio of integrated communications products. We are investing in the development of new services for the global marketplace in some key areas:

- Managed Network Services -Services that help customers to manage protect and optimize their corporate networks effectively via a self-serve model. A good example of this is our recent investment in managed network security firm Crypteia Networks. Through our integration with Crypteia we are able to provide our customers with a cloud-based new layer of defence that operates in real-time to identify unknown advanced network threats in their infancy. We can predict security breaches or attacks on the customer's network that ordinary firewalls and other perimeter defence systems won't detect.

- Mobile Ecosystem - A suite of wholesale capabilities for mobile operators delivered over our global IPX platform, including voice, data, roaming, signalling and messaging services as well as the development of a marketplace for innovative business applications.

- Media Solutions - PCCW Global and HKT have over 30 years of experience in the media industry and we have been a trusted partner for international broadcasters and service providers. The innovation of the company extends beyond the integrated global satellite and fibre infrastructure to support global video contribution and distribution, as we expand our portfolio of solutions in the video value chain of the fast-moving multi-screen video market. We now offer cloud transcoding solutions that dramatically simplifies the content transcoding process with pre-sets for a wide variety of devices and flexible workflows. We also offer a hosted OTT TV Video Service which offers broadcasters, service providers and content providers a rapid, low risk, cost-effective entry into the OTT TV Video market with a fully managed and integrated hosted solution.

- Connected Cloud - Bundling our secure, global IP network and cloud services with third party cloud services to create an online PCCW Global Connected Cloud Marketplace that can provide customers with a compelling choice of cloud solutions that can be bundled together into single product offerings and automatically provisioned and managed on-demand.

SAMENA Region IP Count - Countrywise

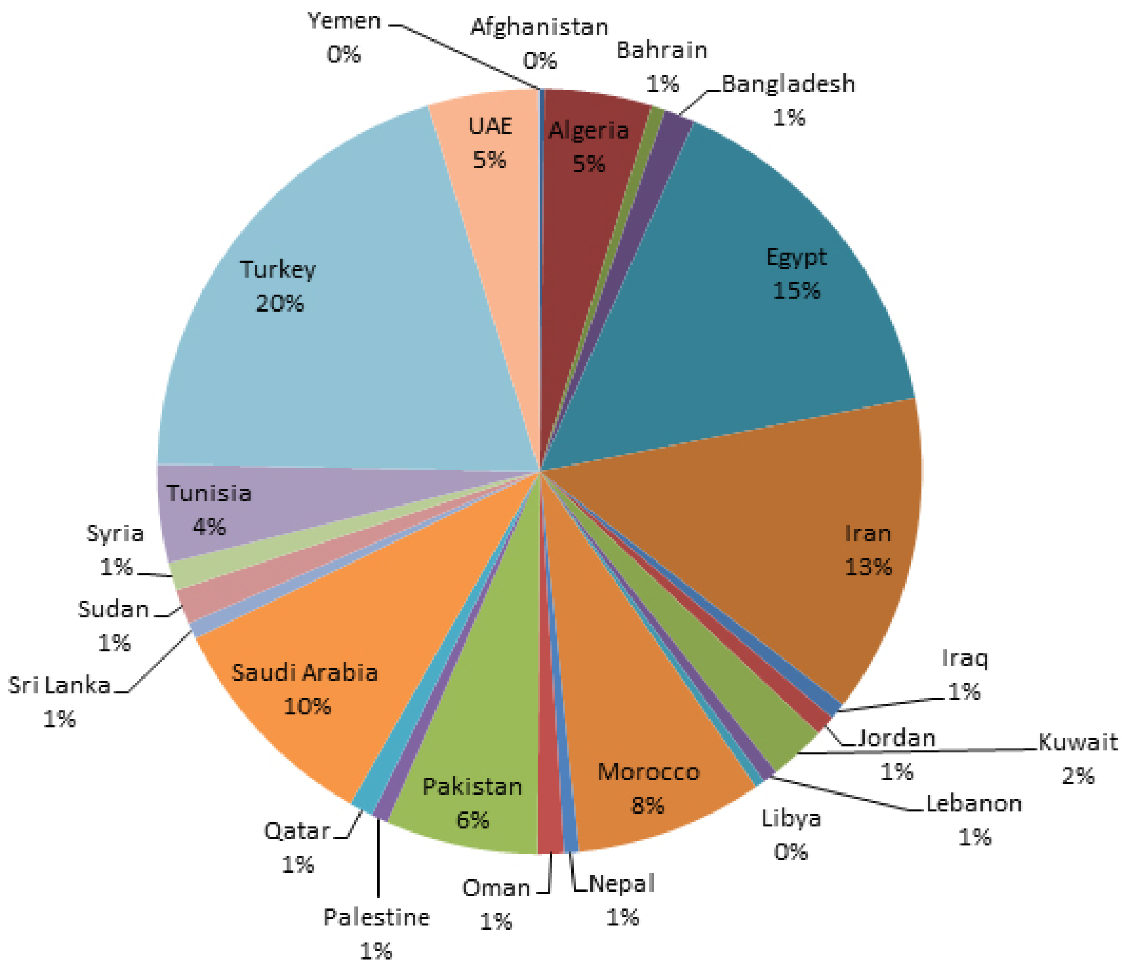


Image Source: SAMENA Telecommunications Council
Data Source: SAMENA Council, WorldDomainStats.com, DomainTools.com.

SAMENA Region IP Count - Regionwise

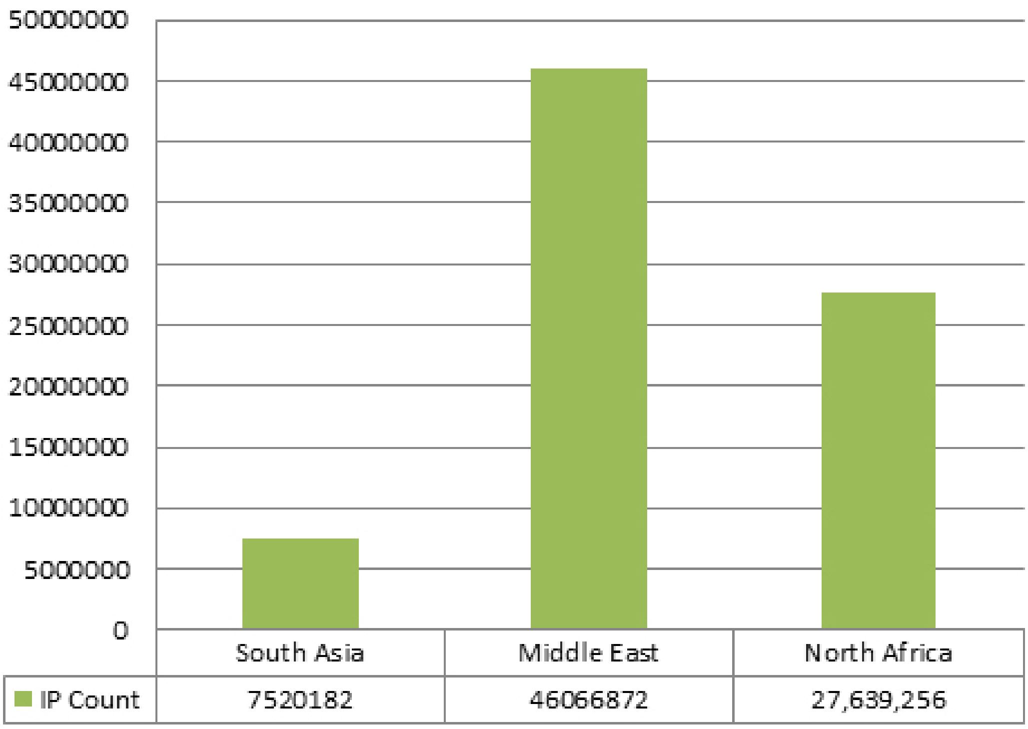


Image Source: SAMENA Telecommunications Council
Data Source: SAMENA Council, WorldDomainStats.com, DomainTools.com.

MEMBERS NEWS

MEMBERS UPDATES

Cisco Releases Free Version of ConfD for NETCONF Implementation

Cisco has released Basic ConfD, a free version of its ConfD management agent framework with a rich set of APIs for developers of physical and virtual networking devices, to accelerate the adoption of programmability for the broader networking industry. ConfD provides the industry-leading implementation of the NETCONF protocol driven by the YANG data modeling language. Tail-f, now part of Cisco, provides two products, ConfD and NCS. NCS, a multi-vendor network service orchestrator for traditional and virtualized networks is transitioning to the Cisco portfolio and will be marketed under the name Cisco Network Service Orchestrator enabled by Tail-f. Cisco claims that by implementing an end-to-end programmable network based on open standards, service providers can reduce configuration and management costs by nearly 50 percent over a five-year period, and currently in use by more than 75 network equipment providers. The no-cost Basic ConfD is feature-rich and will be available for production use without additional fees for NETCONF. The premium version of ConfD, including a complete set of north-bound interfaces including CLI, REST and SNMP, continues to be commercially available.

Batelco Q4 Net Profit Rises 22%

Bahrain Telecommunications Co (Batelco) reported a 22 per cent increase in fourth-quarter profit on Monday, upping its annual dividend thanks to cost cuts and a boost to the bottom line at its domestic and some foreign operations. The former monopoly, which operates in 14 territories, has now posted rising profits in four of the six quarters since its $570 million acquisition of the islands division of Cable & Wireless. Before that deal, its biggest ever, Batelco's profit fell in 16 of 17 quarters to the three months ending June 30, 2013. Batelco made a net profit of BD8.4 million ($22.28 million) in final three months of 2014, up from BD6.9 million a year earlier, Reuters calculated based on a company financial statement published on Monday. SICO Bahrain forecast that Batelco would post quarterly profit of BD15.3 million. Batelco's fourth-quarter revenue was BD97.8 million, down from BD99.4 million a year ago, Reuters calculated. Domestically, Batelco competes with units of Kuwait's Zain and Saudi Telecom as well as about 10 internet providers. Such fierce competition on an island of about 1.3 million people prompted the state-backed operator to expand abroad, completing the Cable & Wireless deal in April 2013, though some parts of its original proposal subsequently fell foul of regulators. The company also owns

Jordanian telecoms operator Umniah, plus minority stakes in Yemeni mobile operator Sabafon and companies in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. Batelco's 2014 annual profit rose 13 per cent year on year to BD49.3 million, it said in the statement. It recommended a dividend of 25 fils per share for 2014, up from 19 fils in 2013, according to Reuters calculations. Annual domestic profit rose 6.4 per cent to BD37.8 million despite falling income, while profits at its Jordan and Maldives units jumped 41 and 47 per cent respectively. Batelco attributed the annual increase to cost cutting across its operations, particularly in Bahrain, though it warned that "revenues continues to be affected by fierce competition across the group, mainly in voice services". Batelco's 2014 revenue rose five per cent to BD389.7 million, with operations outside Bahrain providing 58 per cent of the total. The group's subscriber base rose six per cent year-on-year to about 9.5 million.

PCCW reports financial results for 2014

The directors ("Directors") of PCCW Limited ("PCCW" or the "Company") are pleased to announce the audited consolidated results of the Company and its subsidiaries (collectively the "Group") for the year ended December 31, 2014. Some key figures are as follows:

- Core revenue increased by 24% to HK$32,962 million; consolidated revenue (including PCPD) increased by 22% to HK$33,277 million
- Core EBITDA increased by 29% to HK$10,506 million; consolidated EBITDA (including PCPD) increased by 29% to HK$10,340 million
- Consolidated profit attributable to equity holders of the Company increased by 76% to HK$3,310 million; basic earnings per share amounted to 45.14 HK cents
- Final dividend of 13.21 HK cents per ordinary share

PCCW's financial results for 2014 were attributable to commendable work by all the team members to ensure solid business and operational performance of its core businesses. Core revenue for the year ended December 31, 2014 increased by 24% to HK$32,962 million. Core EBITDA increased by 29% to HK$10,506 million given a strong contribution from HKT and continued growth of the Solutions business. Including PCPD, consolidated revenue for the year ended December 31, 2014 increased by 22% to HK$33,277 million and consolidated EBITDA increased by 29% to HK$10,340 million. After taking into account a gain after tax and non-controlling interests of HK$1,306 million on the disposal of the entire interest in Pacific Century Place, Beijing by PCPD, consolidated profit attributable to equity holders of the Company increased by 76% to HK$3,310 million. Basic earnings per share were 45.14 HK cents. The board of Directors (the "Board") has recommended the payment of a final dividend of 13.21 HK cents per ordinary share for the year ended December 31, 2014.

Workforce cuts impact PTCL bottom line, as profits drop by 74.8%

Fixed line incumbent Pakistan Telecommunications Company Ltd (PTCL), which operates in the mobile sector under the Ufone brand, has booked a 74.8% decline in net profit in the year ended 31 December 2014. ProPakistani writes that the operator registered profit of PKR15.752 billion (USD154.45 million) in 2013, but that figure fell to PKR3.966 billion in 2014 due in part to a voluntary separation scheme (VSS) which cost the telco PKR8.174 billion. Adding to the decline, total revenues dipped from PKR131 billion to PKR129 billion whilst costs expanded by 5.5% to PKR88.72 billion. According to recent statistics published by the sector watchdog, the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA), Ufone ended 2014 with 21.956 million wireless subscribers – down from 23.001 million in September 2014 and 24.352 million at end-June 2014 – of which 1.953 million were 3G users.

Telekom Austria, Eutelsat unveil satellite broadband solution

A1 Telekom Austria, in association with Eutelsat, is now offering a satellite broadband solution in a bid to serve remote locations that are otherwise difficult to reach. The service will primarily be used to serve 'frontier zones and mountain regions' where the nearest A1 switching centre or mobile base station is too far away to enable a satisfactory broadband connection. The new package supports transmission speeds of up to 22Mbps/6Mbps (down/uplink). Around 1% of buildings in Austria currently lack access to DSL services, according to company estimates. Previously, in September 2013 Telekom Austria Group and Eutelsat signed an accord signaling their intention to enable the delivery of TV services via satellite in central and south-eastern Europe. Further satellite rollouts are planned across the group's operating markets later in 2015.

PTCL earns Rs. 129.9 billion revenue with 34% rise in broadband share

Pakistan Telecommunication Company Limited (PTCL), the largest ICT services provider in Pakistan, has seen a 34 percent sharp increase of broadband share in its revenue during 2014. This was revealed in its annual results for the year 2014, riding on the back of its growing fixed and wireless broadband business. Of the total 2014 revenues of Rs. 81.5 billion earned by PTCL, the broadband revenues significantly increased by 34%. The Company's profitability remained stable in spite of extraordinary expenses on account of a successfully completed voluntary separation scheme as well as losses due to fire and floods. PTCL's group revenues for the year stood at Rs. 129.9 billion. The financial results for the year ended 31st December, 2014 were announced at the Company's Board of Directors (BoD) meeting held on 10th February, 2015 in Islamabad. PTCL cash flows remain healthy and stable due to the consistent growth in the subscriber base and strong market position. The Board of Directors has declared 25% final cash dividend inclusive of 10% interim dividend. Mr. Walid Irshaid, President & CEO PTCL commented, "PTCL's revenue growth during the past year is a strong indicator of our dynamic corporate direction as well as our customers' continued satisfaction and trust of our shareholders." "PTCL is in a strong position to lead the telecom industry towards a brighter future, our broadband and corporate services portfolio performed exceptionally well in 2014. To cater to the increasing data needs of Pakistan, PTCL also introduced the next generation wireless broadband in Pakistan." Mr. Irshaid further added. The Company's market share in the fixed and wireless broadband and specialized telecom solutions segments has increased significantly during FY2014.

Qualcomm to pay $975 million to resolve China antitrust dispute

Qualcomm Inc (QCOM.O) has agreed to pay China a fine of $975 million, the largest in the country's corporate history, ending a 14-month government investigation into anti-competitive practices. The deal also requires Qualcomm to lower its royalty rates on patents used in China, likely helping Chinese smartphone makers like Xiaomi Technology Co Ltd [XTC.UL] and Huawei Technologies Co Ltd [HWT.UL]. It removes a major source of concern among Qualcomm investors, sending shares of the U.S. chipmaker up 1.6 percent to $68.18 in after-hours trading. China's expanding high-speed 4G network is driving demand for smartphones with leading-edge technology, but Qualcomm's opportunities have been clouded by the antitrust investigation, which has also contributed to troubles collecting royalty payments from device makers. Qualcomm said in a statement on Monday it would not contest the China's National Development and Reform Commission's (NDRC) finding that Qualcomm violated an antitrust law. Asked whether the resolution in China could affect the outcome of ongoing antitrust probes into Qualcomm in Europe and the United States, Qualcomm President Derek Aberle said, "We fully respect their authority, but we don't believe it's likely that other agencies will necessarily meet similar conclusions."The U.S. chipmaker also cut its full-year earnings estimate because of the fine, which Qualcomm said would cost it about 58 cents per share, but it raised the lower end of its revenue forecast slightly. "It removes a significant source of uncertainly from our business and really positions our licensing group to really participate in the full growth of the wireless market in China," Qualcomm Chief Executive Officer Steve Mollenkopf told Reuters in a phone interview. "It's something we're happy is over." Discussions in Beijing over one of the most contentious cases under China's 2008 anti-monopoly law had intensified in recent weeks, culminating in meetings between Qualcomm senior executives and the NDRC on Friday. Under the terms of the agreement, Qualcomm will offer licenses to its current 3G and 4G essential Chinese patents - widely used by Chinese device makers - separately from other patents. For companies opting for the new agreement, which applies to phones sold for use in China, Qualcomm will calculate royalties based on 65 percent of the selling price of phones, instead of on the whole price. Some on Wall Street have speculated that even limited concessions made to Qualcomm's licensing business in China could affect the technology company's licensing deals in other countries. "That's the first time I've ever seen them in writing agree to that and it begs the question of why 65 percent is the right number in China and it's not the right number everywhere," said Bernstein analyst Stacy Rasgon. As a result of the fine, Qualcomm said it now expects full-year earnings per share of between $3.56 and $3.76 for fiscal 2015, compared with its prior forecast of $4.04 to $4.34. It raised its fiscal 2015 revenue forecast to a range of $26.3 billion to $28 billion, slightly raising the lower end of its last forecast of $26 billion to $28 billion. Excluding the cost of the fine and other one-time items, Qualcomm forecast earnings of $4.85 to $5.05 per share, raising the lower end of its previous forecast of $4.75 to $5.05. On that basis, analysts had expected $4.96 per share, on average, according to Thomson Reuters I/B/E/S. Qualcomm is just one of several overseas companies, including Microsoft Corp (MSFT.O), that have come under investigation in China for allegedly anti-competitive practices.

HKT reports strong annual results for 2014

The directors of HKT Management Limited (the "Trustee-Manager", in its capacity as the trustee-manager of the HKT Trust) and HKT Limited (the "Company" or "HKT") are pleased to announce the audited consolidated results of the HKT Trust and of the Company together with the Company's subsidiaries (collectively the "Group") for the year ended December 31, 2014. Some key figures are as follows:

- Total revenue increased by 26% to HK$28,823 million
- Total EBITDA increased by 30% to HK$10,242 million
- Profit attributable to holders of Share Stapled Units increased by 22% to HK$2,991 million; basic earnings per Share Stapled Unit was 42.20 HK cents
- Adjusted funds flow for the year increased by 16% to HK$3,354 million; adjusted funds flow per Share Stapled Unit was 47.32 HK cents based on the weighted average number of Share Stapled Units during the year of 2014 while adjusted funds flow per Share Stapled Unit was 44.30 HK cents based on the number of Share Stapled Units in issue as at December 31, 2014
- Final distribution per Share Stapled Unit of 23.30 HK cents

HKT's strong financial results were underpinned by solid performance of its various lines of business and also significantly the consolidation of the results of CSL New World Mobility Limited (now known as CSL Holdings Limited, "CSL") since the completion of the acquisition in May 2014.

Google set to boost internet connectivity in DRC

Internet giant Google plans to boost internet connectivity in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and will open an office in Kinshasa in the near future, BizTechAfrica reports. The information was revealed by Google Francophone Africa boss Tidjane Deme, following a meeting with Thomas Luhaka, the DRC's deputy communications minister. Senegal-born Deme said that the move is intended to encourage economic development in the DRC. Deme noted that he and his colleagues were on an exploratory mission to Africa, and the delegation previously held similar discussions with Thierry Lezin Moungalla, the telecoms minister in neighboring Republic of Congo.

BlackBerry Ltd (BBRY) Passport now available In UK

For the U.K. users that could not get the full range of BlackBerry Ltd Passport devices, the wait is over. It is now possible to order any version of the Passport you desire from online retailer known as Clove. The red BlackBerry Passport variant was previously unavailable to U.K. buyers. BlackBerry Ltd continues to expand the availability of its Passport device, which comes in three popular versions, Black, White and Red. From Cloves, U.K. buyers can order the contract-free Passport for £525, inclusive of the VAT. Clove is giving a discount on the devices. One of the outstanding features of Passport is its battery life. The device can give up to 48 hours of average usage. The phone can also push through a whole working days under intensive use. The Passport is bundled with a 3450mAh battery pack, which is larger than the battery in phablets such as Samsung's Note 4 and Google's Nexus 6, which are both powered by 3220mAh battery packs. BlackBerry Ltd's Passport device is also rich in important apps. It comes pre-loaded with apps such as Box, Dropbox, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Adobe

Reader and Docs to Go. Users can also install apps from third-party platforms such as Amazon App Store, giving access to over 500,000 different apps. The large display of Passport makes it suitable for reading books, documents and browsing the Internet. The square screen ensures that users don't need to switch between landscape and portrait views. With the Passport, BlackBerry Ltd (NASDAQ:BBRY) managed to push out a device that has people talking again.

ITU SG Commends Rwanda's ICT Advancement

The Secretary-General of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) Mr. Zhao Houlin on a three-day official visit in Rwanda has commended the Rwandan Government for efforts invested in promoting the use ICT in speeding the country's economic transformation. On the first day of his visit, Houlin toured various government and non-government institutions working in areas of technology capacity building, innovation and projects dealing with ICT development especially the 4G Innovation Center at Carnegie Mellon University – Rwanda and toured the Rwanda's first innovation hub known as KLab. Speaking to the press, Zhao Houlin noted that he is very impressed by the development of the ICT sector in Rwanda, and its contribution to national development. "President Kagame supports the use of ICT as an enabler to foster the continent's development," he said. He encouraged the young generation to embrace the use of ICT. The Minister of Youth and ICT Jean Philibert Nsengimana said that the visit of such a high profile official from the ITU is a strong signal in the ITU-Rwanda relations. He acknowledges that President Kagame has, personally, played an important role by a substantive support to the different activities of the ITU, where he co-chairs the broadband commission on digital development. Lilian Uwintwali, the founder of a Kigali-based software development firm MA-HWII, thanks the Government for its role in helping the youth get access to ICT facilities. "Klab is an innovation center where we are facilitated to get offices and use internet. This instills in us an innovative spirit to create successful businesses," she observes. Rwanda is a member of ITU and has recently been re-elected to be part of its Council for 2014-2018 in recognition of the exemplary leadership of President Kagame both at national and global levels in matters of ICT for Development. In 2007 and 2013, Rwanda co-hosted with ITU the 'Connect Africa Summit' which resulted into more than $70 billion investment in broadband infrastructure in Africa over the five years that followed the conference. In 2013, Rwanda hosted the 'Transform Africa Summit' that spun off the Smart Africa Alliance, a new platform that is shaping the future of ICT for Development in Africa. The next Transform Africa Summit is scheduled for October 29, 2015.

du signs deal to take digital wallet to next level

Telecom operator du has formed a partnership with mobile payment solution Beam Wallet and Majid Al Futtaim Ventures to take smart retailing to the next level. Around 5,000 retail outlets are likely to accept Beam Wallet service by the end of the year. Beam Wallet is an app that allows consumers to conduct retail transactions using smartphones, dispensing with the need to carry wallets. A consumer's credit card details are stored on the app and it works by scanning the QR (Quick Response) code. Majid Al Futtaim Ventures had already purchased a stake in Beam Wallet in December last year. "There is no doubt that mobile commerce will play a significant part in the future of retail. We saw a need in the consumers and created an ecosystem of partners to bring that into reality in a larger case," Jawad Shaikh, executive vice-president of digital business at du, told Gulf News in an exclusive interview. He said mobile technology is at the core of the consumer shopping experience as the UAE has one of the highest smartphone penetration rates in the world. "It is an OTT [over-the-top] service and we want all retailers to have it. We are in discussions with some petrol station chains and some other retailers also," he said. Beam Wallet is currently used by more than 100,000 users and available in 1,200 retail and dining outlets, like Costa Coffee, Tim Horton's, Subway, VOX Cinemas, Carrefour, Cold Stone Creamery, Aldo, Tommy Hilfiger, Kenneth Cole — to name a few. Shezan Amiji, co-founder of Beam Wallet, said that the deal will undoubtedly accelerate the growth of the digital wallet in the UAE. Amiji said the partners are ready to work with anybody to boost mobile commerce in the UAE. When asked about du's role in the partnership, Shaikh said it is a commercial deal right now. "We will be promoting the service by leveraging our channels and customer reach. It is going to have a huge impact in the market as retailers can track their customers' behavior and personalize the offers," Shaikh said. Telecom service providers are actively looking at various innovations and services to boost revenues. Regarding security, Shaikh said the digital wallet service is similar to Apple Pay and "no information" is stored on the phone. Everything is encrypted and tokenised. Tokenisation makes it difficult for hackers to gain access to cardholder's data. Right now, "we are trying to change consumer behavior in bid to start relying on the phone for payments. Eventually, when they [customers] are more [used] to it, we can definitely introduce more active channels, and near-field communication (NFC) services [are] in the pipeline," he said.

Mobily launches Ranan application program interface

Mobily has indicated the possibility of buying Ranan ringtones by launching the Ranan application program interface (API) in an innovative move, aiming to enhance the sales of this service. This API enables websites that host Islamic information, poetry, entertainment or music, and the possibility to customize its content and enable it to be set as a user ringtone or to be sent as gifts to Mobily customers through these platforms without the need for traditional methods such as sending short code activation via SMS or call IVR. This way Mobily users are able to set any tone they want as their ringtone through any website, social media or Mobily application. Ayman Al-Ghamdi, executive manager, content and apps management in Mobily, said: "We spotted the easiest way to use the Ranan API, when the subscriber presses on the 'purchase' button and enters his phone number, he will receive a message containing an activation code to verify the number of the user. Moreover, this platform allows revenue sharing policy which supports the marketing side of the service. Al-Ghamdi added that Mobily focuses on innovation as an important value that can push the company's operations forward. Ranan service is the most prominent of its kind in the region, especially that the company is keen to support it every now and then by innovations and marketing campaigns to promote its market value. Ranan service is witnessing high demands, especially after Mobily introduced the Ranan innovative application, which can be downloaded for free from the Apple store and Google Play store. Mobily Ranan is introducing the all-new and first of its kind the Athan Ranan service, which automatically changes the user's current ringtone with a prerecorded message notifying their callers with prayer time. This service can adjust the prayer times automatically according to the user's location.

BlackBerry recruits though contest in SA

A TOTAL of R1 million of airtime is up for grabs in the Great South African BBM Recruitment Contest BlackBerry Limited has announced. This initiative, the first of its kind for the popular messaging application, is designed to simultaneously express appreciation to South Africa's millions of loyal BBM users while opening the door to thousands more. It intends to give BBM users not only the ability to connect with new friends but also to enable them to experience first-hand BlackBerry's proven track record in privacy and security. BBM, which went cross platform last year, is now available on BlackBerry, iPhone, Android and Windows phones. The competition will run between January 30 and April 30. Participants must recruit new BBM users and add them to their list. Each new recruit must be new to BBM, have a minimum of ten contacts by the end of the contest and send messages regularly. The 1 000 people who recruit the most new BBM users will receive R1 000 of airtime credit applied to their mobile prepaid account.

Accenture to create 200 senior roles in Ireland

The global management consulting, technology services and outsourcing company Accenture is to create 200 new senior roles and 50 graduate jobs in Ireland. The company said its recruitment drive was focused primarily on professionals working in the technology and digital areas and with experience across a number of sectors including financial services, communications, media and food and agriculture. Accenture said recruitment would begin immediately and stressed the graduate roles were in addition to its usual intake of college leavers. "There is a wealth of talent in this country, and we are pleased to offer the opportunity to develop careers with Accenture," said Alastair Blair, Accenture's country managing director in Ireland. "We are seeking highly motivated, skilled individuals who share our passion and commitment to client service. Professionals who join our team will have access to the latest technology and will receive training and professional development opportunities to expand their business, industry and technical skills," he added. Accenture currently employs about 1,600 people in Ireland and 319,000 worldwide. Minister for Jobs Richard Bruton welcomed the announcement.

VIVA ranks the best in 4G network coverage and Quality of Service

VIVA Bahrain reported the widest 4G network coverage and ranked top on Quality of Service according to official independent reports issued by the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) end of last year. Based on the findings, VIVA's 4G network has the widest coverage in the Kingdom reaching 99.7 percent of the population. Additional key indicators were evaluated under the Quality of Services (QoS) report which presents a performance snapshot of voice, data, short messages services (SMS) and video streaming services. VIVA ranked top in voice quality of service, scoring 97.4 percent success rate in setting up and holding a call, it showcased 100 percent data coverage on its 4G network, and 100 percent of successful transfers at an average speed of 35 Mbps. VIVA's 4G network also recorded a 98 percent success rate of setting up and holding a video stream for two minutes. Ulaiyan Al Wetaid, VIVA Bahrain CEO, commented: "Based on the tests conducted by the Telecom Regulator, all three operators are performing well which is further proof of the healthy level of competition in Bahrain. We are pleased with VIVA's positive performance positioning our 4G network with the widest coverage in Bahrain. VIVA's technological advancements and investments in infrastructure have ensured that we meet the communication needs of our customers which demand cutting-edge services and the best customer experience." The assessment was conducted by an independent agency to ensure a reliable, fair and non-discriminatory audit of all 3 networks, Batelco, VIVA and Zain, and hence allow consumers to make informed choice based on quantitative and qualitative data. The detailed audit of mobile service providers on various parameters for mobile telephony and broadband services included network availability, call drop rate and billing. The reports evaluated key quality of service indicators of the operators' mobile networks including network coverage (i.e. how much of the population can access a network) and quality of services available (i.e. the users experience when using each of the 3 networks).

Lincoln to partner with Google app

Lincoln Motor Co. on Monday will announce a partnership with Google that will allow users to schedule remote starts, lock and unlock their luxury cars with a few taps on their smartphones. Ford Motor Co.'s luxury brand will be the first automaker to integrate its own mobile app — called MyLincoln Moblie — with Google Now, an app for Android phones that organizes information like calendars, weather, navigation and sports scores into user-friendly sections called "cards." Have a lunch meeting at noon on Wednesday? The app would alert you at the appropriate time to consider starting your car before you leave. If the remote-start option is selected, the vehicle is then warmed up or cooled off during the remote start based on the in-vehicle temperature settings. It also can be used to locate your car. "Delivering unique experiences for the luxury client throughout ownership is fundamental to Lincoln," Matt VanDyke, director, global Lincoln, said in a statement. "By innovating with leading tech companies, we have an opportunity to personalize the ongoing interaction between the customer and the vehicle." The two apps would be connected via an embedded modem in the vehicle, Lincoln said. Both the MyLincoln Mobile connectivity and Google services are opt-in features, and notifications can be turned off. The features will be available on the 2015 MKC crossover, MKZ midsize sedan and 2016 MKX midsize SUV, Lincoln said.

REGIONAL NEWS

REGIONAL UPDATES

Zain launches Jordan's first LTE network

Zain Jordan commercially launched Long Term Evolution (LTE) services, becoming the first operator in the Kingdom to inaugurate a 4G network. The cellco's new network features approximately 1,000 sites and covers all of the nation's governorates. Announcing the launch, Zain Jordan CEO Ahmad Hanandeh commented: 'Zain's 4G LTE service is a quantum leap in the daily lives of Jordanians, as it provides advanced solutions and enriches the experience of businesses and consumers alike. The technology caters to the growing demand for internet services in several segments and its availability will lead to a positive impact on economic activity, given the ability users will have to do things more efficiently.' The operator invested JOD200 million (USD280.9 million) in 4G in 2014 and plans to spend a further JOD100 million over the next two years. Zain's LTE service offers theoretical download speeds of up to 150Mbps, and is available on a pre- or post-paid basis. Monthly subscriptions cost JOD25 (Silver package, includes 10GB of data and 500 minutes of calls), JOD35 (Gold, 20GB and 1,000 minutes) or JOD50 (Platinum, 40GB and 5,000 minutes). Pre-paid LTE data costs JOD10 for 1GB, JOD15 for 3GB or JOD20 for 7GB.

Omantel FY revenue increases 4.0%, net profit up 2.6%

Oman Telecommunications Company (Omantel), the Sultanate's incumbent telecoms operator, has announced its financial results for twelve months to end-December 2014, reporting revenue of OMR481.2 million (USD1.25 billion), an increase of 4.0% from OMR462.9 million the previous year. The firm said that growth was mainly driven by domestic retail revenues, which grew 4.3% to OMR392.6 million in 2014, spurred by fixed and mobile broadband, as well as corporate data services. However, revenue from national and international calls and SMS continued to decline amid increasing usage of over-the-top (OTT) services, and turnover from Pakistani subsidiary Worldcall (WTL) slumped by 26.2% year-on-year. Omantel said that operating expenses for the period grew by 2.8% year-on-year to OMR350.8 million, while net profit rose 2.6% from OMR119.3 million in 2013 to OMR122.4 million twelve months later, representing the firm's highest net profit in the last five years. Total subscribers (including WTL) reached 4.296 million at the end of December 2014, an increase of 6.8% from 4.022 million a year earlier; Omantel's domestic subscriber base increased 7.9% year-on-year to 3.341 million (excluding mobile resellers). 'Omantel recorded a positive growth across all business lines and was able to close the year with a 4% growth in revenues and 2.6% increase in net profit,' commented CEO Talal Said

Al Mamari, adding: 'We are pleased with the overall performance in Year 2014 and in particular the growth of fixed broadband services, which is the highest recorded to date. This has been achieved despite unfavourable market conditions and increased competition from OTT players.'

Vodafone Egypt spending US$1.25 billion on network upgrade

Vodafone Egypt plans to spend around 9.5 billion Egyptian pounds ($1.25 billion) on upgrading its network over the next three years to keep pace with demand for data services, its CEO said. Vodafone Egypt, majority owned by British mobile operator Vodafone, is the leading communications player by customer numbers in the country of 90 million. "Annual investments will represent more than 30 percent of annual revenues," Chief Executive Officer Ahmed Essam told Reuters in an interview. "By end of this fiscal year in March, we would have spent more than 3 billion (Egyptian) pounds which equals one third of the allocated investments and also more than 30 percent of our yearly revenues in Egypt." Financing the planned investments will come from internal resources, Essam added. He did not give precise revenue figures for a company which has around 39 million subscribers. Investments would cover purchasing equipment, modernizing base stations and creating new coverage areas in Egypt, the most populous Arab country.

UAE places 12th on DHL global connectedness index

DHL said on Monday the UAE is the most connected country in the Middle East & North Africa and the 12th most connected country out of 140 countries evaluated by the logistics company. The UAE climbed six places in DHL's third edition of its Global Connectedness Index (GCI) after having placed 18th in 2013. The GCI evaluated global connectedness by measuring cross-border flows of trade, capital, information and people from 140 countries which it found have recovered most of their losses incurred during the financial crisis. "The UAE is essentially a gateway to the rest of the world and a trade route that has grown immensely over the years. It is becoming one of the world's busiest logistics hubs and given its location between East and West we understand the importance of offering the best in class when it comes to logistics solutions and continue to invest in the UAE and across the rest of the GCC as part of our aggressive expansion plans," stated Frank-Uwe Ungerer, country manager at DHL Express UAE.

Cisco Appoints Govt Affairs Director for Africa

Cisco, a global player in the information technology space has appointed SiyabongaMadyibi to the new position of Government Affairs Director for Africa. This is Cisco's first Government Affairs position for the continent. According to statement, Madyibi, who has over 14 years experience in telecom policy, will lead Cisco's government affairs and public policy strategy in Africa, engaging with top government officials and key policy makers in Africa. His new role will focus initially on South Africa, Kenya and Nigeria, working in close partnership and alignment with Cisco's Africa leadership team, led by Cisco's Vice President for Africa, David Meads, on policies and relationships that will advance Cisco's business in Africa. Speaking on his new position, Madyibi, said: "I look forward to leading Cisco's Government Affairs program in Africa given its important and integral role in Cisco's strategy for growth in Africa. With the technology market currently growing at an exponential rate and governments playing an important role helping to develop the opportunities that are being created, Cisco aims to actively partner with government departments to help drive this growth and build on these opportunities." As the home to nine of the world's fifteen fastest growing economies, Africa is ripe for transformation making it an increasingly attractive environment for global business investments, Madyibi said, adding that technology is at an inflection point, in which it can transform African economies and create many new opportunities, with the increased digitization of countries. Subsequently, governments throughout the continent are now increasingly becoming aware of the importance of growth in Information and Communications Technology (ICT) and the benefits it can offer, Madyibi added. Cisco projects that 50 billion devices will be connected to the internet by 2020, offering a platform for African countries to use this to achieve greater broadband penetration across the continent leading to improvements that will better social and economic prosperity for its citizens. For the past decade Masyibi has led the government and regulatory strategy for Dimension Data in Africa. Before then he worked with the South African Regulator, Independent Communications Authority of South Africa (ICASA), and for MTN, one of the leading mobile operators in the telecoms sector in Africa. He holds a BA Law degree from the University of Cape Town and an LLB degree from the University of Natal.

Zain generates revenues of $4.3 billion in 2014

Zain Group, the pioneer of mobile telecommunications across the Middle East and Africa, announces its consolidated financial results for the year 2014 and fourth quarter ended Dec 31, 2014. Zain served 44.3 million customers at the end of the period, reflecting a 4% decline year-on-year (Y-o-Y). Zain is the market leader by customer base in six of its eight operations. For the year 2014, Zain Group generated consolidated revenues of USD 4.3 billion. Consolidated EBITDA for the period reached USD 1.8 billion, reflecting a healthy EBITDA margin of 41.8%. Consolidated net income amounted to USD 685 million, reflecting Earnings Per Share of USD 0.18. The Board of Directors of Zain Group recommended a cash dividend of USD 0.14 (KD 0.040) per share subject to the Annual General Assembly and regulatory approvals. Additionally, shareholders' equity stood at USD 5.6 billion (KD 1.6 billion) as at 31 December, 2014. For the fourth quarter of 2014, Zain Group recorded consolidated revenues of USD 1.0 billion. EBITDA for the quarter reached USD 406 million, reflecting a healthy EBITDA margin of 40.4%. Net income for the quarter reached USD 115 million.

Key Operational Notes:

1. Group data revenues (excluding SMS and VAS) witnessed a healthy 13% growth during 2014, accounting for 16% of the Group's consolidated revenues.

2. The recent appreciation of the US Dollar against the Kuwaiti Dinar, along with foreign currency revaluation

losses predominantly in the Republic of Sudan and Iraq, cost the Group USD 152 million (KD 43 million) in net income for the full year 2014, substantially higher than USD 88 million (KD 25 million) for the full year 2013. Excluding the currency variance and FX translation impact, net income would have been relatively stable for the full-year 2014.

3. Specifically for the fourth quarter of 2014, currency variance losses cost the company USD 41 million (KD 12 million) in net income, higher than USD 34 million (KD 10 million) in the fourth quarter of 2013.

4. Customer base decline is a result of two major circumstances; one, a new definition of an "active customer" implemented by the regulator in Iraq and second, due to the new registration policy implemented by Sudan's regulator.

5. The escalation of political instability in Iraq during the second half of 2014 has seen several million people displaced internally. Additionally Zain Iraq endured frequent temporary network interruptions and associated higher network operational costs. These unavoidable occurrences had a drastic effect on Zain Iraq's and consequently Zain Group's overall key financial metrics.

6. Zain Iraq entered into an agreement with Iraq's Communication and Media Commission (CMC) on November 10, 2014, earning the right to utilize 3G spectrum following an installment payment of USD 76.8 million representing 25% of the total USD 307 million spectrum fee. Zain Iraq made its first 3G call on New Year's Eve, 2014.

7. Political unrest in South Sudan also affected Zain Group's results as the country also witnessed significant displacement of its people, with access to and repair of many network sites in parts of the country proved to be difficult, causing frequent interruptions and higher maintenance costs.

8. As mandated by its mobile operating license, Zain Bahrain completed an Initial Public Offering of 15% of its share capital and listed on the Bahrain bourse on 4 December, 2014. This milestone was the first IPO in Bahrain since 2010. Additionally Zain Bahrain completed its USD 100 million revamp of the network and now offers nationwide 4G services across the Kingdom.

9. Heavy investment in 3G and 4G network upgrades and expansion across operations sees CAPEX spend for the year amount to USD 730 million (excluding Saudi Arabia), reflecting 17% of Group revenues.

10. In November 2014, the Board of Zain Saudi Arabia recommended a reduction of the company's share capital and awaits final approval by the general assembly and respective authorities. This proposed capital reduction is one of several positive steps being taken by the company to improve its financial position as part of a comprehensive transformation plan, which has been ongoing since the beginning of 2014.

Commenting on the results, the Chairman of the Board of Directors of Zain Group, Asaad Al Banwan said "Despite geo-political challenges and unavoidable currency issues in several markets that have had a dramatic effect on our 2014 financial results, the Board remains confident that management is implementing the right strategy in driving the business forward in this ever-evolving telecommunications industry. We are closely aligned with management in transforming the operating model of all Zain operations in order to cope with and overcome increased levels of competition from rival operators and OTT players combined, implementing numerous initiatives aimed at extracting more synergies between our operations and optimizing efficiency". The Chairman continued, "We have invested significantly in our infrastructure, launching state-of-the-art networks across all our markets in order to improve the mobile experience for our customers. Our investment in capital expenditure reached USD 730 million which represents 17% of our revenues, reflecting Zain's commitment to innovation and quality of service. I remain proud that we have been able to maintain our leadership position in the majority of the markets we operate in, testament to our valued brand reputation". Zain Group CEO, Scott Gegenheimer said "Due to number factors beyond Zain's control, the year proved to be especially challenging and it is disappointing to report declining financial results for the full year considering the sound operational progress and transformation we have undertaken across all our markets. Nevertheless we remain focused on growing the business in all our markets and we are committed to our strategy that will take advantage of our competencies, which include our people, brand, quality networks and geographic coverage, while looking to develop new areas and becoming a diversified and innovative digital operator". Gegenheimer reiterated the promising growth opportunities in the mobile broadband area for all of Zain's operations. "Our digital traffic and revenues continue to advance strongly, recording a healthy 13% annual rise, with data now reflecting 16% of all Zain Group's service revenues. With Zain Iraq rolling out 3G services in January 2015 and Zain Jordan rolling out 4G services during the first quarter of 2015, coupled with healthy growth expected in our other 4G operations in Bahrain, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, the Group will continue to foster and develop this key area of the business and expects it to reflect positively in our future financial metrics". With regard to year-on-year key operational highlights across Zain's footprint, Gegenheimer noted:

Kuwait: The cornerstone of Zain Group continues to perform exceptionally well with customer growth of 6% to reach 2.7 million at the end of 2014, maintaining its market leadership. For the year, Zain Kuwait revenues rose by 2% to USD 1.2 billion. EBITDA and net income increased by 1% and 3% respectively. The operator reported a healthy EBITDA margin of 48% for the year 2014. Notably, with the attraction of its nationwide 4G LTE network, data revenues (excluding SMS & VAS) formed 31% of total revenues, reflecting an annual growth rate of 11%.

Iraq: The escalation of political instability in Iraq in 2014 saw several million people displaced internally coupled with Zain Iraq enduring frequent temporary network interruptions and associated higher network operational costs. These exceptional circumstances adversely affected the operation's financial performance specifically for the 2nd half of 2014. Revenues for the full-year reached USD 1.6 billion, a decrease of 8% on 2013, with EBITDA reaching USD 578 million, down 19%, and net income amounting to USD 256 million, down 29% Y-o-Y. This decline took its toll on Zain Group's overall financial performance.

Sudan: In local currency (SDG) terms, the operator continues to perform well, where revenues grew by 14% Y-o-Y to reach SDG 4.0 billion (USD 669 million) for the full-year 2014. EBITDA increased by 13% to reach SDG 1.6 billion (USD 269 million) while net income was stable at SDG 586 million (USD 98 million). Excluding the forex loss variance, net income would have been higher by 18%. Zain Sudan witnessed a 3% reduction in customers due to the new registration policy implemented by the country's regulator, and ended the year serving 11.4 million customers. Data revenues (excluding SMS and VAS) formed 6% of total revenues, with a remarkable annual growth of 62%.

Saudi Arabia: The operator witnessed an annual 7% increase in customers to now serve more than 9 million. For the full-year 2014, the operator posted improved financial results, recording a significant 24% increase in EBITDA to reach USD 293 million up from USD 237 million in 2013. EBITDA margin rose to 17% in 2014 up from 13% in 2013 while net losses narrowed by 23% Y-o-Y to USD 339 million, down from USD 440 million a year earlier. Impressively, the operator witnessed a 37% rise in data revenues (excluding SMS & VAS) Y-o-Y, which represents 17% of total revenues as the company invests heavily and expands its state-of-the-art 4G LTE network.

Jordan: Despite the heightening of price competition, Zain managed to maintain its lead in the market with 40% customer market share, counting 3.8 million customers at the end of 2014. Y-o-Y revenue, EBITDA, and net income decreased by 5%, 8% and 5% respectively to reach USD 469 million, USD 193 million and USD 114 million respectively. Data revenues (excluding SMS & VAS) represented 23% of total revenues, which grew by 11% as compared with the same period in 2013.

Bahrain: During 2014, Zain Bahrain generated revenues of USD 194 million, a decrease of 9%. EBITDA for the period reached USD 72 million, reflecting a healthy EBITDA margin of 37%. Net income amounted to USD 11 million. Data revenues (excluding SMS & VAS) represented 31% of overall revenues.

South Sudan: The operation is facing challenging times given the social unrest in the country. The local team's focus there is on maintaining and expanding the network. It is pleasing to see data revenues (excluding SMS & VAS) growing significantly by 150% annually, representing 10% of the operation's total revenues for the full year 2014.

Lebanon: The management contract has been regularly extended, awaiting governmental decisions for a longer definite-term agreement. The customer base reached 2.1 million. (February 2, 2015)

UAE Tablet PC market to reach over US$1.2 billion by 2019

Increasing demand for Tablet PCs from education and healthcare sectors coupled with anticipated decline in average selling prices to drive Tablet PC adoption in UAE through 2019, according to a report by TechSci Research "UAE Tablet PC Market Forecast & Opportunities, 2019". Over the past few years, computing technology has undergone radical changes, globally. This has also lead to robust growth in adoption of high-end technology products such as Tablet PCs, smartphones, etc. in the UAE. Working professionals, in particular, are increasingly shifting towards portable devices, which are easy-to-carry and provide seamless connectivity on the go. In consonance with these developments, the market for Tablet PCs in the UAE has been witnessing significant growth since 2011, with the adoption expected to increase over the next five years as well. The report said the market for Tablet PCs in the UAE is forecast to cross $1.2 billion by 2019. Increasing adoption of new technology products in corporate sector coupled with the government's plans to improve the educational infrastructure are among the major factors driving Tablet PC sales in the country. Samsung and Apple are among the most popular Tablet PC brands available in the UAE. Other major players such as Lenovo, Asus, Intex and X touch are launching budget Tablet PCs in the market to attract consumer attention. Presently, Android based Tablet PCs are more popular due to their user-friendly interfaces and high-end features. In terms of display size, Tablet PCs with 7-9 inches displays are the most preferred tablets among consumers as they score high on the mobility aspect. "With increasing penetration of Tablet PCs, a large number of players are expected to foray into the UAE's Tablet PC market and offer cost-effective, portable mobile devices with features comparable to high-end Tablet PC models. This, in turn, is expected to result in sizeable dip in average selling prices of Tablet PCs in the coming years. Detachable laptops introduced in the UAE by a few players are also expected to transform the market dynamics of the country's Tablet PC market over the coming years", said Karan Chechi, Research Director with TechSci Research, a global management consulting firm.

Zain Bahrain 2014 revenues drop 8.1% y-o-y; net income slumps 24%

Zain Bahrain has announced its financial results for the twelve months ended 31 December 2014, generating revenues of BHD71.8 million (USD189.3 million), a decrease of 8.1% on an annualized basis. EBITDA amounted to BHD27.0 million, a 7.8% decline year-on-year from BHD29.3 million, while Zain's net income slumped to BHD4.1 million, representing a 24% drop. Zain's net income was impacted by a number of one-off expenses associated with its initial public offering (IPO) in September, including an 'exceptional penalty' of BHD543,000. In operational terms, Zain's total customer base increased to 788,000 at end-2014, up from around 772,000 in the year-ago period. Chairman Sheikh Ahmed Bin Ali Al Khalifa commented: 'We attained significant achievements during the course of 2014, one of which was listing on the Bahrain Stock Exchange, from where we believe we can continue to drive value for our widened base of shareholders. The environment for telecoms in Bahrain and the region was challenging during the year, though Zain Bahrain successfully leveraged many of its strategic assets in order to record a reasonable performance investing a huge USD100 million in building a new 4G LTE nationwide network.'

Ericsson partners with twofour54 to set up a hub

Ericsson will establish a media hub in Abu Dhabi to serve clients across the Middle East region in partnership with twofour54, the commercial arm of the Media Zone Authority, a top executive of the company said. The hub will provide playout services and act as the local base to eventually leverage Ericsson's leading portfolio of services in content

management, over-the-top (OTT), content discovery, metadata, creative and access services. "Abu Dhabi is a great location to provide those services from. We are excited to be present here. We see a lot of potential in the UAE and adjacent countries," Thorsten Sauer, head of broadcast and media services at Ericsson told Gulf News. He said Middle East offers a number of opportunities for the company. "The population is young and predominantly affluent. They are excited by new means of communication, very high smart phone penetration and open to new platforms." The investment is significant but Sauer refused to divulge details. "We are starting with a small group of eight highly qualified technical people and will expand later on. We see a great demand for our services with more channels coming on air." By 2020 there will be 50 billion connected devices, and of these, more than 15 billion are expected to be video enabled, according to Ericsson's vision of the networked society. "It's the business we have grown over the last couple of years to a significant size. We are responsible for 500 channels every day. We are a global company and our ambition is global. We try to be close to our customers." Rafiah Ibrahim, President Ericsson Region Middle East and East Africa, said the networked society is happening across the Middle East region transforming industries. "Today we see the TV industry in the region witnessing this transformation with strong local and international broadcaster base." "Our role is to help those broadcasters seize the opportunities of this transformation. The partnership with twofour54 is an important milestone in our ambition to provide industry-leading media services in this dynamic region." Ericsson has a significant heritage in the global TV and media market and pioneered the video compression technologies that are driving the worldwide digitalization of TV and enabling new viewing experiences such as HDTV, TV Anywhere and UHDTV. The company's strategy in TV and media is to help content owners, broadcasters and TV service providers evolve to meet consumer demand for video experiences on any device.

KSA remains largest market in MENA for enterprise software

The top three enterprise application software (EAS) vendors hold a dominating market share of 81.8 percent in the Arab Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, according to the latest insights from International Data Corporation (IDC). The research firm said in its "Arab Middle East and North Africa Enterprise Application Software Market 2014-2018 Forecast and 2013 Vendor Shares" study that the large organizations continue to account for the lion's share of overall spending on EAS solutions, with net spend by small and medium-sized businesses (SMBs) rising significantly but remaining relatively small. All MENA markets grew in 2013, with the exception of Egypt, where spending on EAS solutions contracted sharply when compared to 2012. Combined, the OGCC states of Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, and Qatar were the region's fastest growing market, followed by UAE. Saudi Arabia remained the largest market in the MENA region, though, the rate of growth was relatively slower, followed by the UAE in second place. The OGCC countries ranked third, while North Africa placed fourth and Egypt took fifth spot. The Levant grouping was the smallest EAS market in the MENA region in 2013. "Spending on EAS accelerated rapidly in Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, and the UAE in 2013," said Dhiraj Daryani, program manager for software and enterprise solutions at IDC Middle East, Africa, and Turkey. "The next four years will present enormous opportunities for EAS vendors and their channel partners, particularly if they are successful in helping organizations and government departments modernize their business transaction systems. Vendors that bring vertical-focused, mobile-enabled, and cloud-ready solutions to the MENA market stand to gain market share." The region's EAS market continues to be dominated by global giants SAP and Oracle. SAP remained the largest EAS vendor in MENA in 2013, with 39.1 percent share of the market, while Oracle placed second, with 34.4 percent share. Microsoft Dynamics held on to third spot with 8.4 percent share. The top ten vendors together captured 97.9 percent of total EAS spending in the MENA region during 2013, indicating that the dominant vendors in the MENA EAS market are competing aggressively and leaving little room for smaller vendors. EAS license and maintenance (L&M) spending in the MENA region increased 7.3 percent year on year in 2013 to total $537.00 million. The biggest spenders were process manufacturing companies, which accounted for 16.0 percent of the market. The government sector was the second-largest vertical market, with 13.6 percent share, while combined finance ranked third, with 13.2 percent of the total market.

Viva la best 4G coverage!

Mobile operator Viva Bahrain offers the widest 4G coverage in the country according to an audit from the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA). At the end of 2014 Viva's 4G network covered 99.7% of the Bahraini population, ahead of rival operators Zain Bahrain (96.2%) and Batelco (91%). Viva's 4G coverage in capital city Manama was rated at 100%, while the operator offered 99.9%, 99.2% and 99% coverage in the central, northern and southern regions, respectively. The operator also performed well in the TRA's quality of service (QoS) checks, ranking top in terms of voice quality, with a score of 97.4% for setting up and holding calls. Meanwhile, Viva's 4G network recorded a 98% success rate in terms of maintaining a video stream for two minutes.

Broadband Revolution In Pakistan After 3G/4G

Dr. Syed Ismail Shah
Chairman
PTA

Mobile Broadband is an important step toward the modernization of mobile telephone systems. The availability of spectrum plays a fundamental role in carrying out such modernization. With the new spectrum auction and subsequent launch of next-generation mobile services, Pakistan has entered a new phase of communications technology deployment and market development. Now, the industry will witness a new wave of data growth, driven by exciting mobile applications and services on the newly launched 3G/4G networks in the country.

With the beginning of this new era of technology, everyone is excited and is looking forward to the new, bright prospects that exist in the future. It takes years for countries to upgrade from 3G to 4G but Pakistan has cut across this in one giant big leap and now it is right there; in the big league, among markets that boast 4G availability. It is not just high-speed internet access that has been positively affected. The effect on end-users has been very positive as well. Pakistan is on its way to becoming a better Pakistan. The availability of new communications technologies will help to attract big tech companies of the world to launch their applications and services in Pakistan. Google has recently added Pakistan to the List of Supported Countries for Play Store Merchant Accounts and Apple and Lenovo have also established their footprints in Pakistan by launching their products through various telecoms operators and distributors. Pakistan has also made its mark in the international workforce market by becoming one of the largest freelancing communities.

When we see in the background of the auction, the process for the auction of 3G/4G was initiated after the policy directive on Spectrum Auction for Next Generation Mobile Services issued by Government of Pakistan. During the procedure for hiring reputed international consultants to design and manage the auction process Value Partners Management Consulting Limited was selected in a transparent and efficient manner and according to the very best international practices. PTA held detailed consultations with all stakeholders during the entire process to ensure that everyone was on board for this important undertaking. The entire process was appreciated for its transparency, fairness and value so much that the same has now become a benchmark auction, to be followed by other government institutions.

The auction was held on 23rd April, 2014 in which Mobilink was able to secure 10 MHz of 3G spectrum in the 2100 MHz frequency for US$300.9 million. Telenor and Ufone each obtained 5 MHz of 3G spectrum (worth US$147.5 million) at the spectrum auction, while Zong obtained 10 MHz of 3G spectrum (US$306.9 million) and 10 MHz of 4G spectrum (US$210 million). The Honorable Prime Minister of Pakistan, Mian Mohammad Nawaz Sharif awarded NGMS licenses to Zong, Ufone, Mobilink, and Telenor in a ceremony held on 22nd May, 2014 in Islamabad.

Subsequently, mobile broadband services based on 3G and 4G-LTE technologies became commercially available in all the major cities of Pakistan, and the coverage is quickly being expanded to other parts of the country. Warid Telecom, the fifth major market player, launched its LTE-based services in 5 cities of Pakistan.
Mobile phone users are rapidly switching over to latest smart phones, as devices have become more affordable. The growing market for smart phones does not only present a good business opportunity for international brands but Pakistan's own local brands. Q-Mobile, Voice, and G-right have done exceptionally well in introducing new, cost-friendly smart handhelds to the market and these companies are now stepping into foreign markets, thus fast becoming Pakistani ambassadors abroad with their innovative products. With the advent of mobile broadband and the growing smart phone market, apps market is also growing at an accelerated pace and is ready to impact the global mobile aaps ecosystem. Pakistan's apps market is generating millions of dollar for the country and this trend is likely to continue over the foreseeable future, where it could become among the biggest revenue earners for the country, given Pakistan's high-quality human resource (HR) availability. Pakistan is reported as the fourth country on Elance and other such online HR portals. These are healthy signs that indicate a digital boost in Pakistan's economy.

App development is already quite popular in Pakistan and there are many app developers working independently or with app-development firms. A number of Pakistani startups and incubation centers like Plan9 incubator, LUMS Center for Entrepreneurship, PurePush and PlanX accelerator have received recognition at both national and international levels.

Pakistan Telecom Authority's goal of seeing Pakistan as a knowledge-based society and economy can be achieved through growth in

communications technologies and the mobile digital advancements that follow. Pakistan already ranks among the most aggressive and the most expanding mobile markets in the world. Teledensity has touched 80%, telecom investment has already crossed US$ 1,816 million, including US$ 903 million in FDI inflows on account of 3G and 4G license auction and technology deployment. Telecom revenues have touched Rs. 463 billion (US$4.5 billion) and 3G/4G based mobile broadband subscriptions have crossed the 5 million mark and are on the rise.

The availability of mobile broadband has indeed opened many doors of opportunities for Pakistan. The high-speed internet will revolutionize all other industries and sectors in the country in the coming years, i.e., Health, Governance, Banking, Transport, Education, Security, Businesses, and Socio-Politics. The government of Pakistan and the private sector have already started many projects on the basis of advanced communications technologies, and soon Pakistan will make its contributions in the materialization and use of M2M Technology, Internet of Things, and Smart Cities. This would have positive trickledown effect on the economy of Pakistan as well. The government of Pakistan and Pakistan Telecommunication Authority are committed to making the required efforts and tackle all the issues and overcome all hindrances to accelerate the development of ICTs in Pakistan.

While Pakistan may be a late adopter of 3G, high demand for internet access and mobile data services, combined with the increasing affordability of handheld devices that promote data usage and technology savvy among end-users, we shall enable and witness a substantial upshift in the Pakistani mobile market as it quickly grows beyond 2G into 3G and 4G over the near future.

REGULATORY NEWS

REGULATORY UPDATES

FCC boots up new 'Net Neutrality' Internet regulations

At the urging of President Barack Obama, Federal Communication Commission (FCC) chairman Tom Wheeler announced in early February a plan to place the Internet under the control of telecommunications regulators. FCC commissioners are scheduled to vote February 26, after the publication of this article, to regulate Internet service providers (ISPs) as utility companies, under the authority of Title II of the Communications Act of 1934. According to FCC Commissioner Ajit Pai, Wheeler's 332-page plan to regulate Internet networks under Title II is a "solution in search of a problem." "There is no systemic problem to solve," he said in an interview with Budget & Tax News. "Even the FCC implicitly concedes that in this document, or we would have seen that somewhere in these 332 pages." "This proposal to regulate the Internet, which the FCC is poised to adopt, asserts jurisdiction over basically the entire Internet... everything from that relationship between an ISP and a customer, all the way between big companies that interconnect over the Internet, hundreds of miles away from any given customer," Pai said. Net-neutrality activists have been pushing for the new regulations for years, says Steven Titch, a telecommunications policy advisor for the Heartland Institute, which publishes Budget & Tax News. "The big debate is over net neutrality is prioritization and paid prioritization," Titch said. "The best example of paid prioritization is the idea of a 'fast lane' where Netflix can pay Verizon and have its video delivered faster—or with more error protection or correction, or with less latency—than another, smaller video provider," he said. "The thing is, though, this already happens. It's not as if this isn't happening now. Netflix uses a content-delivery service that does exactly that, and it's necessary. "An e-mail can take a while to get to its destination, and when it does, the packets don't necessarily have to be assembled in order. Video's another thing entirely: it's a huge amount of data, it has to be delivered on time and in order, or else you get those digital drop-outs and that fuzziness that you sometimes see," Titch said. "This, paying for additional protocols and data management and error correction, somehow offends groups of activists, and I don't know why," he said.

Instead of adding more regulations to the telecom industry, Pai says removing outdated regulations and returning more radio spectrum bandwidths would improve people's online experience. "Getting rid of some of these legacy regulations that stand in the way of deploying infrastructure, making sure we get more spectrum out there for mobile broadband—those are things that would actually solve the problems that people really have," he said. "Instead, we've gone down this rabbit hole that won't create anything for anyone, other than the trial lawyers and those people who want regulation for its own sake."

GPCA: Innovation agenda a key focus for GCC governments

Regional governments have put innovation front and center on their national agenda, as evidenced by the growing R&D budgets in the Gulf, said the Gulf Petrochemicals and Chemicals Association (GPCA). With Saudi Arabia and Qatar making up the top 40 investors in research and development (R&D) worldwide in 2014, according to a recent study by US research group Batelle, the region's sizable revenues are now being earmarked into significant scientific endeavors. According to data compiled by Batelle, Qatar devotes 2.8 percent of its GDP to R&D, a level similar to that of the United States or Germany. Saudi Arabia, although impressive among its GCC peers, comes in at just 0.3 percent of GDP. "Attempts to drive innovation in the GCC are still at an early stage. But as countries increase R&D spending, the results will have a huge impact on nonoil," said Abdulwahab Al-Sadoun, secretary general, GPCA. "A similar trend can be seen in the GCC's petrochemical industry. To sustain their global competitiveness, GCC chemical producers are striving for technological excellence, building world-class production facilities and nurturing local, innovative capability. The mushrooming of innovation centers and technology parks over the last few years across the GCC states is a positive indication that even the chemical industry is poised for substantial technological development." Patent grants from the GCC in chemistry have seen a five-fold increase in the last decade, as per statistics from the World Intellectual Property Organization; in 2013, as many as 288 chemical patents were granted to applicants from the Gulf, up from 48 patents in 2004. Together with IT and electronics, the petrochemical industry represents the major share of patent activities over the last five years. Between 2005 and 2012, the average share of chemical patents in total patent grants for the GCC was 53 percent, while worldwide the average was 14 percent. "It is possible that the next technological leap for the petrochemical industry is formulated by an engineer in Abu Dhabi, a scientist in Doha or a researcher in Riyadh or Dhahran City," added Al-Sadoun. "In the future, producers will need to focus on providing the funding and into developing the minds behind the research. Scientific innovation, after all, occurs when the finances and brains converge." The strategies that drive research and innovation will be a key focus of discussion at the upcoming 2nd GPCA Research & Innovation Summit. The keynote address at the conference will be delivered by Prince Turki bin Saud bin Mohammed, president of King Abdulaziz City for Science and Technology (KACST). Other speakers include Ernesto Occhiello, executive vice president, technology and innovation, Saudi Basic Industries Corporation; and Ahmad O. Al-Khowaiter, chief technology officer, Saudi Aramco. The Research & Innovation Summit will be held in Dubai, from March 16-18, at the Ritz Carlton, DIFC.

OFCOM commits UK mobile operators to 90% coverage pledge

The UK regulator has varied the licenses of the UK's four mobile operators following the December agreement. OFCOM has committed the UK's four mobile operators to pledges they made last December to improve mobile coverage across the UK. The UK regulator said it has varied the licenses of the UK's four mobile operators following an agreement reached between the government and EE, 3UK, O2 UK and Vodafone UK to provide voice coverage across 90% of the UK's landmass by the end of 2017. As well as the coverage requirement, the operators also have to meet signal strength thresholds that will be monitored by OFCOM in future. In the December agreement, EE, O2, Vodafone and 3UK have agreed to guarantee voice and SMS coverage to 90% of the U.K.'s geographic area, thereby halving the number of partial not-spots and reducing complete "not-spots" by two thirds. The companies plan to jointly spend £5 billion to eliminate these not-spots by 2017. By accepting these new coverage obligations, EE, O2, Vodafone and 3 have also avoided the possibility of being forced to establish national roaming agreements with one another, an idea proposed by the government in November that was unpopular with the operators. OFCCOM also noted that in light of these variations to the licenses, it would shortly consult further on the annual license fees for the 900 MHz and 1800 MHz spectrum bands. The UK government directed OFCOM in 2010 to revise these fees to reflect full market value after the completion of the 4G auction. The two bands are used for 2G and 3G, including voice calls, and some 4G services. Today, operators pay a combined £24.8 million per year for 900-MHz spectrum and £39.7 million per year for 1800-MHz spectrum. In August, OFCOM proposed increasing annual fees for 900-MHz and 1800-MHz to £109.3 million and £137.5 million respectively, giving a total of £246.8 million. While this is still a considerable increase, it is 20% lower than OFCOM's previous proposal: In October 2013 the watchdog suggested hiking the fees to £138.5 million for 900-MHz and £170.4 million for 1800-MHz.

China to Enforce Real-Name Registration for Internet Users

China's government announced sweeping new regulations on Wednesday that would require users of an array of Internet services to register with their real names and avoid spreading content that challenges national interest and the country's socialist system. The new rules apply to users of blogs, microblogs, instant messaging services, online discussion forums, news comment sections and other related services, said the Cyberspace Administration of China, the country's Internet regulator, in a statement posted on its website. "Username chaos" had become a serious problem on the Chinese Internet, the state-run China News Service said in a report on the new regulations, citing an unnamed representative of the regulator. Fake accounts, it said, had "polluted the Internet ecology, harmed the interests of the masses and seriously violated core socialist values." The new regulations come amid a new campaign by the Communist Party to exert control over public discourse, particularly online. Emphasizing the need for more "positive energy" on the Internet, regulators recently shut down dozens of social media accounts for offenses ranging from spreading pornography to distorting history. China's Internet population grew to 649 million in 2014, up from 618 million the year before, the state-backed China Internet Network Information Center said in a report this week. China's government had tried to require real-name registration on social media platforms in the past, but it met with little success. The task of tracking users typically falls on the Internet companies themselves, few of which are willing to spend the money or time to implement effective tracking systems. The Internet regulator didn't immediately respond to requests for comment. According to the China News Service, Internet companies would be required to specially devote staff to implement the requirements. The new regulations, to be enforced starting March 1, require users to submit their real names and personal information in registering with a service. Users will be allowed to select their own usernames and avatars so long as they don't involve banned content. Banned content includes anything that violates the law, harms national security, involves national secrets, incites ethnic discrimination or hatred, or harms national unity. The promotion of pornography, gambling, violence, terror, superstition and rumors are also banned, according to the statement.

EU executive revisits data retention

The European Commission is mulling a new law requiring telecommunications companies to store communications data of EU citizens as part of its efforts to fight terrorism, after a top court struck down the previous one on privacy concerns. The deadly Islamist attacks in Paris last month have focused European Union leaders' minds on how to intensify counter-terrorism efforts at home, such as by creating an EU system for storing airline passenger data. According to minutes from a meeting of the executive European Commission last week, it is also considering whether it should reintroduce a new data retention law that would avoid being struck down by the European Court of Justice (ECJ). EU Home Affairs Commissioner Dimitris Avramopoulos noted "on the one hand, the fundamental role that telecommunications records could play in the fight against terrorism and, on the other, the importance of adopting a cautious and measured approach". In April last year the ECJ ruled that an EU data retention directive requiring telecoms companies to store communications data for up to two years interfered with people's right to privacy by creating the impression that their private lives are the subject of constant surveillance. Avramopoulos intends to launch a consultation on the issue to determine whether a new law on data retention that respects privacy rights could be prepared over the coming year, according to the minutes. In July, Britain rushed through an emergency law requiring telecoms firms to retain customer data for a year to make up for the loss of the EU directive, prompting criticism from privacy campaigners. Telcos such as Orange, Telefonica and BT are already subject to a privacy law, the ePrivacy directive, requiring them to ensure that their customers' communications are confidential and not listened in to without their consent. In Australia, the federal government last October introduced a bill outlining a two-year mandatory data retention period. The proposed scheme has been subject to fierce debate from opponents who claim the scheme is too far-reaching and ill-defined, and from law enforcement agencies who say their ability to fight crime would be degraded without the legislation.

Telecom firms fight over bill altering state powers

Telecommunications companies are required to interconnect their networks with one another. It's what makes, for instance, a cell phone call from a Verizon Wireless customer to a Sprint customer possible. But a bill moving through the General Assembly would eliminate that requirement at the state level—making Indiana the first state to do so. It's a measure opponents say would give big companies more leverage in negotiating interconnection agreements with the smaller companies that pay for access. Mike Leppert, an attorney lobbying against House Bill 1318 on behalf of broadband provider Level 3 Communications, said if companies have to pay more for access it could make them less competitive, and they might pass the costs to customers. "The agreements don't last forever. They all have end dates," said Leppert, a former executive director at the Indiana Utility Regulatory Commission. "At the time to negotiate a new deal, coming to an agreement on a new contract will be very different when one party needs to interconnect more than the other. The state requirement for interconnection levels that negotiation." HB 1318, authored by State Rep. Eric Koch, R-Bedford, passed the House 84-14 on Tuesday. It is the latest in an effort to cut red tape in the telecom industry after the wide-sweeping 2006 Indiana Telecommunication Deregulation Bill. Among other things, the recent bill would standardize and streamline the process for building and repairing cell phone towers at the local level, potentially slashing months or years from the process. Level 3 and others aren't opposed to that. They take issue, however, with the section that proposes striking language that currently allows the IURC to adjudicate interconnection disputes under state law. And it's not just related to wireless carriers, but cable companies, fiber providers and others. Proponents of the bill say the opposition's concerns are overblown. State Sen. Brandt Hershman, R-Buck Creek, said the IURC still has adjudication authority under federal law, and he said the measure is intended to reduce redundancy and simplify laws on the books by removing language written a century ago. "We've engaged in an effort over the past several years to try and streamline our code," Hershman said. "In this case, these are just small legacy elements of the code that, although they're not normally a problem, could be viewed as anti-competitive towards new investment. So we're trying to make sure we've got the cleanest, most streamlined code in the country." Leppert said while Indiana does designate the IURC to arbitrate disputes under federal law, it believes the federal law is insufficient. He questioned why the state would move to limit its powers just for the sake of simplification. "No private-sector entity ever requests a change in Indiana law as a service to the state without benefit to itself," he said. "Ever." The IURC didn't offer a stance on the bill, but officials acknowledged that there have been cases where it found state law governed aspects of an arrangement that federal law didn't cover. One such case in 2010 dealt with an E911 arrangement between INdigital/IWDN and AT&T Indiana. AT&T Indiana supports HB 1318. President Bill Soards said removing the interconnection language as HB 1318 proposes "seeks to make sure that we don't have separate state rules for interconnection." In a statement, IURC officials said: "Under HB 1318, the state requirement for interconnection between communications service providers would be discontinued. Since there would be no interconnection requirement for communications providers, the Commission would no longer have jurisdiction to resolve interconnection agreements. "Federal statute 47 USC 251, 252, and 253 provides similar jurisdiction for states regarding interconnection and arbitration. However, this federal statute is currently under review and may change." The next step for the bill is to be considered by the Senate's utilities committee. Its first hearing will be scheduled in coming weeks.

Regulatory Challenge in Internet of Things

Mustafa Aykut
International Affairs and Policy Coordinator
Türk Telekom

The telecommunications technology is here today embedded in the devices, sensors, cloud services, and data you use. The capability of the Long-term Evolution (LTE) to control items switching on and off remotely is now very effective. Near-field communication (NFC) is used to transmit small-scale information to report. New standards, such as 802.11ad are in the pipeline of the future technologies. Everything will easily be connected in a space soon.

Internet of Things (IoT) is a network of consumer devices designed to communicate without active user input, yet over the Web directly. Today, the most popular ones on the market shelves are wristbands, smoke detectors, home energy management systems. Handsets, vehicles, ATMs, airline check-in machines, household appliances and anything that can host a computer and communications chip-set are quickly becoming part of the IoT. According to the research report published by Gartner in last November, 4.9 billion Internet-connected things will be in use in 2015, up 30 percent from 2014, and will reach 25 billion by 2020. In the same report it is also estimated that IoT will create a business of US$69.5 billion in 2015 and US$263 billion by 2020. There will be a boosting impact on consumers, businesses, transportation, medical services, public authorities and many other entities across all industries and all zones of society.

Regulations lag behind the technology

No doubt, every new technology has faced criticism and fears. IoT is exploding into something new and unlikely. The regulators make plans to keep it safe for consumers, but their knowledge and experience are not adequate to know fully how to do it yet. In the US, the National Fraud Intelligence Bureau recently announced that approximately 70% of the frauds recorded in the last year included cyber-crimes, compared to around 40% five years ago. The crucial point here to be argued is what the regulatory bodies should do if consumers cannot protect their things that are already connected to the Internet. Precautions designed into IoT solutions against data security breaches and misuse of data may not be adequate.

The EU Commission has published a report on the result of its public consultation on the IoT in 2013. The Commission sought views on a policy approach to foster ensuring appropriate protection and trust of EU citizens. It was a matter of fact in the report that the legal framework needs to address IoT to be designed from the start to meet appropriate requirements which underpin the right of deletion, right to be forgotten, data portability, privacy and data protection principles, shortly called "the trust". In order to encourage customers and companies to adopt privacy and security practices in IoT usage, policy makers and regulators should work on strong but flexible and technology-neutral legislation. Otherwise, people could restrict themselves from adding more Internet-connected things to their homes and businesses.

Standardization is needed urgently

Frankly, there is no specific IoT law today in the world and nor will there be one any time in the near future. There is no global consensus among regulatory authorities across the world on the subject of IoT yet. Their mandates may differ vastly from one another in the rights and responsibilities

In fact, the regulators are applying a variety of existing legislations across telecommunications, intellectual property rights, competition, data privacy and security for IoT issues. Additionally, the consumers are faced with a lack of industrial IoT standards, protocols, interfaces and codes of conduct. Data usage with potentially intrusive applications targeting IoT space such as wearables, smart cars, health monitoring devices, home appliances need to be considered from privacy, security and also safety perspectives, seriously. Individual users should definitely be supported with highest possible guarantees for a full auto-control of their personal data throughout the data-lifecycle. In case any organization relies on consent as a basis for post-processing of personal data, the user should be informed fully, specifically and free of charge. On the contrary, today, consumers believe that it is not possible for them to find out easily how much of their data is being generated, saved, and shared.

based on the emerging issues posed by IoT. For instance, the EU approaches the ICT sector defining it as a whole and opens public consultations and debates related to privacy and security. Besides, the US Federal Trade Commission (FTC) issued suggestions for manufacturers to consider while producing IoT-ready devices in the report unveiled in January 2015 and defined the potential security risks as "enabling unauthorized access and misuse of personal information, facilitating attacks on other systems and creating risks to personal safety."

The connected world of the IoT will truly change the way we interact within our life, but a broader universal IoT legislation framework can help build trust in new technologies and services that rely on user data, so consumers feel that their privacy and security are adequately protected and thus they are more likely to buy and use connected devices.

A SNAPSHOT OF REGULATORY ACTIVITIES IN SAMENA REGION

REGULATORY UPDATES

Algeria

President: Mr. Toufik Bessai
[Regulatory Authority for Post & Telecommunication (ARPT)]

Global Telecom (GTH) will sell a 51% stake in Djezzy for US$2.6 billion while keeping operational control of the Algerian mobile operator, Global said in a statement. The sale to the Algerian National Investment Fund (FNI) is the result of a deal reached last April between GTH's Russian parent firm Vimpelcom and Algeria to end a dispute over the country's moves to nationalize Djezzy. Despite holding less than 51%of the company, GTH, formerly known as Orascom Telecom, will continue to exercise operational control over Djezzy through a shareholder agreement that creates a public-private partnership, the statement from GTH and Vimpelcom said. "The deal, on a group level, also releases significant cash amounts to GTH and Vimpelcom to pay down gross debt," Jo Lunder, chief executive of Vimpelcom, said in the statement. Global Telecom's shares were up 5.4% on the Egyptian stock exchange at 0840 GMT at 4.90 Egyptian pounds. Once known as Orascom Telecom Algeria, Djezzy was a prized asset which Vimpelcom bought in 2010 from Egyptian tycoon Naguib Sawiris as part of a more than $6 billion deal as it aimed to diversify outside of Russia. Algeria that year made moves to nationalize Djezzy, hitting the business with back tax claims and restrictions on imports and foreign exchange transactions, creating uncertainty that has weighed on Vimpelcom's shares.

(February 5, 2015) zawya.com

Bahrain

Chairman: Dr. Mohammed Al Amer
[Telecommunication Regulatory Authority (TRA)]

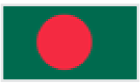
Viva Bahrain is betting on rising data Bahrain's telecom operators could be forced to share telephone masts as part of new government regulations, Transportation and Telecommunications Minister Kamal Ahmed told after the weekly Cabinet session. He also accused telecom companies of putting up masts illegally. "There are still problems with illegal masts that are being set up without required approvals and in wrong locations," said Ahmed. "The Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) is working with the Works, Municipalities and Urban Planning Affairs Ministry and Civil Aviation to resolve all pending issues related to violations, but there has to be commitment from operators to abide by regulations. "The government thinks

organizational, environmental and technical - and it is illogical to set up masts without those factors being taken into consideration. "We are planning to force operators to share masts as we enforce regulatory regulations in a bid to tackle location shortages and accessibility."
(February 24, 2015) TradeArabia News Service

The Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) of Bahrain has initiated a public consultation proposing amendments to the current registration process of pre-paid mobile subscribers. The new regulation proposes to impose a stricter verification process for new pre-paid users, as well as requiring licensees to fully update the registration details of existing customers. Director of the TRA's cyber security department commented that due to the manner in which the current registration and verification processes are being conducted, pre-paid mobile subscribers have been found to have several pre-paid SIM cards registered in their name, without their consent or knowledge. This can pose legal and financial risks … should any misuse with these numbers occur.
(February 20, 2015) telegeography.com

Batelco Group has announced its financial results for the twelve month period ended December 31, 2014, reporting gross revenues of BHD389.7 million (US$1.03 billion), up 5% year-on-year from BHD370.6 million. EBITDA for 2014 increased 20% from BHD120.7 million to BHD144.7 million, while Batelco's consolidated net profit grew 13% y-o-y from BHD43.6 million to BHD49.3 million, boosted by the inclusion of Batelco's recently acquired 'Island Portfolio' assets. In operational terms, Batelco Group's total subscriber base passed 9.5 million, equating to 6% annual growth, with the company reporting increased data demand. In its domestic market, mobile subscriptions increased by 4% y-o-y to pass 900,000, while broadband user accounts grew by 15% y-o-y and fixed line accesses increased 1%. Group chairman Shaikh Hamad Bin Abdulla Al Khalifa noted: '2014 was marked by strong cash generation and growing customer numbers across the Group, particularly in the home market of Bahrain and also at Umniah, Jordan and SURE CIIM (Channel Islands/Isle of Man). Our overseas operations, which become increasingly more central to our strategy, continue to deliver in line with our expectations.' (February 17, 2015) telegeography.com

Bangladesh

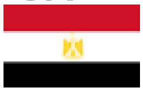


Chairman: Sunil Kanti Bose
[Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC)]

The auction conditions for the sale of additional mobile frequencies in the 2100MHz and 1800MHz bands have been approved with no significant changes by Bangladeshi Prime Minister following their submission by the Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC) in December. The deadline for submitting applications is 26 February, ahead of an auction scheduled for April 30. As reported by Mobile World Live, the regulator's guidelines prevent the country's cellular market leader GrameenPhone from participating in the 4G-suitable 1800MHz license auction under a rule banning operators with 20MHz or more in the 900MHz/1800MHz bands from competing in the first round. In the event of the 1800MHz spectrum being unsold in the first round which appears unlikely GrameenPhone may place a second round bid. The BTRC expects the auction to generate around BDT50 billion (US$630 million). GrameenPhone has said it may challenge the auction guidelines in court.
(February 25, 2015) telegeography.com

The cabinet has approved the draft of National Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Policy 2015, aiming to develop and promote the country's ICT sector and ensure its effective use to achieve the nation's development goals. The draft was approved in a cabinet meeting at the Secretariat yesterday, Cabinet Secretary told the reporters. Prime Minister haired the meeting. Secretary said: "The policy is an updated version of the ICT Policy 2009, which has been revised with the opinions of all stakeholders, relevant ministries, experts and professionals taken into consideration. "It has been made up to date with a view to making the government more skilled and accountable." He further said: "The policy has 10 special objectives, 56 strategic themes and 306 action programs which will be implemented by different organizations under short-, medium- and long-term timeframe – by 2016, 2018 and 2021."
(February 4, 2015) dhakatribune.com

Egypt



Executive President: Eng. Hesham El Alaily
[National Telecommunication Regulatory Authority (NTRA)]

Egypt's long-awaited issuing of unified licenses to those of the country's mobile operators that have opted to expand their concessions could take place within weeks. Responding to a question regarding the timeframe for the awarding of the licenses, Atef Helmy, Egypt's Minister of Communications and Information Technology, said: 'We're talking about weeks, not more, and the fee has been decided and communicated to them – we are asking for [a] fixed line license for EGP100 million (US$13.1 million).' Back in April 2014 it was revealed that Egypt's three mobile network operators – Vodafone Egypt, MobiNil and Etisalat Misr – would each be offered the option to pay for a unified license which would allow them to offer services over fixed line incumbent Telecom Egypt's fixed infrastructure. For its part, Telecom Egypt has agreed to pay EGP2.5 billion for a unified license allowing it to offer mobile services. While the state subsequently announced in September 2014 that the unified license regime had gone live, just a month later it was reported that it had still to come into full effect, with continued delays said to have come about as some issues remained unresolved with regards to the regulatory plans. November 2014 meanwhile saw MobiNil indicate that it was still considering whether it would even enter the fixed line market, with it at that date said to be seeking greater clarity on the concession terms, as well as an improved price.
(February 12, 2015) reuters.com

Information and Communication Technology Minister Atef Helmy asserted that the negotiations over the unified license have entered the dispute free stage, rejecting any disputes over the license within the current period. Rolling out the license with its different elements including the availability of fixed services for mobile operators, granting Telecom Egypt the right of providing

mobile services in addition to allowing the international gateway for mobile companies within days.
(February 5, 2015) zawya.com

Iran

Minister of Communication & Information Technology: Mr. Mahmoud Vaezi
[Communication regulatory Commission (CRC)]

More than 8 million people in Iran are using high-speed ADSL internet, Iran's Telecommunication Minister Mahmoud Vaezi said. Vaezi said that the number of ADSL users was three million in the past year. He added that the country earns 180-200 trillion rials (between $5.1 billion and $5.7 billion) annually from ICT services. He went on to say that the government will just invest in telecommunication projects which will come on stream in the long-term and the project which should be in the hands of the government due to their security aspects. All other projects in the telecommunication industry are implemented by the private sector, he added. Iranian authorities will provide high-speed internet to all the villages of the country, which have more than 20 families living there. Abolfazl Razavi, Vice President for Rural Development Regions, said that the project will be implemented by the end of the next year (March 2016). Earlier, Iranian MP Ramezanali Sobhanifar said some 4,000 villages will be connected to high-speed internet in the current year. (February 7, 2015) bloomberg.com

Iraq

CEO: Dr. Buhan Shawi
[Communication & Media Commission (CMC)]

Iran and Iraq have reportedly agreed to reduce mobile phone roaming charges, and to cooperate more closely on other issues relating to telecommunications. The development follows a visit by Iraqi Minister of Communications, Hassan Kadhim Al-Rashed, to Tehran to meet Iran's Communications and Information Technology Minister, Mahmoud Vaezi. Minister Vaezi said that Iran and Iraq have long borders, so we need to take some measures to reduce frequency mix-ups. On certain days, especially religious anniversaries, a large number of Iranians travel to Iraq, so we need better cooperation on such days. (February 1, 2015) iraq-businessnews.com

Jordan

Chairman of the Board of Commissioners/ CEO: Mr. Mohammad Al Taani
[Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (TRC)]

Zain Group announced that its operation in Jordan officially launched 4G LTE services, making it the first and only operator in the Kingdom to do so. The launch marks the 5th country that Zain has launched 4G LTE services across the region and the ninth country to introduce the technology in the Arab world. The recently launched network covers all governorates in Jordan, with approximately 1,000 sites connected. Zain opted to utilize the same geographical scheme that was undertaken four years previously when it launched HSPA+ services, with the company providing comprehensive coverage to all areas connecting the Kingdom's governorates by the end of 2015. CEO, Ahmad Hanandeh said that Zain's 4G LTE service is a quantum leap in the daily lives of Jordanians, as it provides advanced solutions and enriches the experience of businesses and consumers alike. Zain Jordan's investment in 4G LTE in 2014 amounted to 200 million JOD (US$ 282 million), and the company will dedicate a further 100 million JOD (US$141 million) in the new technology through to 2017. Zain Jordan's 4G LTE features high-speed Internet that reaches speeds of 150 Mbps, contributing to the doubling of the quantity of information available online, in addition to the support of a number of mobile handsets, which opens up further opportunities for new digital deployments. The new technology enables customers to enjoy video calls; communication through social media, high-quality downloads through multimedia, use of business applications on the go, in addition to high-quality integrated services that cater to the evolving needs of customers. Zain intends to add further features to its current services, including IPTV, Machine to Machine (M2M), IP-based television and cloud computing.
(February 15, 2015) zain.com

Bahrain Telecommunications Company (Batelco) has decided to drop plans to sell its Jordanian division, Umniah, valued at up to US$600 million. Citigroup was reportedly hired to explore options for the operator, but preliminary interest in the company was 'limited.' The asking price is understood to have been the main sticking point for potential investors, whilst Jordan's tax structure also reportedly discouraged buyers.
(February 17, 2015) TMT Finance

Kuwait

Minister of Communication: Salem Mutheyeb Ahmed Al-Utheina
[Ministry of Communication (MOC)]

Kuwait and Sudan are in talks to help telecom operator Zain repatriate $280 million worth of Sudanese pounds, the company's chairman said. Zain, which operates in about eight countries in the Middle East and Africa including Sudan and Iraq, has long faced difficulties changing revenue earned in Sudanese pounds into other currencies. "There's communication with the Sudan and Kuwait governments," Zain chairman Asaad Ahmad Al-Banwan told the company's annual shareholder meeting in Kuwait. "The goal of this communication is to see how we can release this money. We're trying during this year (to get the funds released)," he said, adding the amount sought for repatriation was $280 million held in Sudanese currency. The company has also suffered due to the pound's prolonged weakness sparked by South Sudan's secession in 2011, which deprived Khartoum of three-quarters of its oil output and main source of foreign currency. The pound is now trading at 5.95 to the dollar, versus 2.67 in mid-2012. With hard currency tough to come by, Zain Sudan's chief executive told Reuters last September that the company had been buying "local assets" to help offset rampant domestic inflation. Zain Sudan, the country's No.1 mobile operator by subscribers, generated $669 million in revenue in 2014, 16 percent of parent Zain's total revenue. The unit's net profit last year was $98 million, down from $103 million in 2013, although in local currency terms its profit rose slightly. (February 24, 2015) ae.b2.mk

Kuwait-based telecoms giant Zain Group has published its consolidated financial results for the twelve months ended 31 December 2014, reporting a 3.2% annual decrease in revenues to KWD1.20 billion (USD4.06 billion), down from the KWD1.24 million reported in the corresponding period of 2013. In the twelve months under review, EBITDA reached KWD1.8 billion, while the company booked a net profit of KWD194 million in 2014, down 10.4% from the KWD216.4 million reported in the previous year. The company disclosed that the recent appreciation of the US dollar against the Kuwaiti dinar and foreign currency revaluation, predominantly in the Republic of Sudan, affected earnings negatively by KWD43 million in 2014; excluding the currency variance impact, net profits 'would have been relatively stable for the full-2014'. As mandated by its mobile operating licence, Zain Bahrain completed an initial public offering (IPO) of 15% of its share capital on 30 September 2014 – all of the new shares were distributed on 9 October 2014. Further, in November Zain Saudi Arabia recommended a reduction of the company's share capital and awaits final approval by the general assembly; the capital reduction gained the approval of the market authority in January 2015. In operational terms, Zain Group reported a 4% decrease in its consolidated customer base, which reached 44.3 million at 31 December 2014. In Kuwait subscribers increased by 6% y-o-y, to 2.7 million, while Bahrain reported 2% growth in its customer base to 788,000 over the same period. Zain Saudi Arabia's subscriber base increased by 7% to 9.011 million in 2014, up from 8.461 million reported in the previous year, while Lebanon saw a 5% customer growth in the period under review, to 2.142 million. Meanwhile, Iraq saw its customer base decease by 13% to 13.768 million, due to escalation of political instability coupled with frequent temporary network interruptions and associated higher operational costs. Elsewhere, Sudan reported a total of 11.372 million users, down 3% y-o-y due to a SIM registration process, while South Sudan's subscribers decreased by 15% to 692,000. Further, Zain Jordan signed up a total of 3.849 million users, a marginal 1% decrease on the 3.900 million figure reported in 3Q 2013. Zain Group CEO, Scott Gegenheimer noted: 'Due to number factors beyond Zain's control, the year proved to be especially challenging and it is disappointing to report declining financial results for the full year considering the sound operational progress and transformation we have undertaken across all our markets. Nevertheless we remain focused on growing the business in all our markets and we are committed to our strategy that will take advantage of our competencies, which include our people, brand, quality networks and geographic coverage, while looking to develop new areas and becoming a diversified and innovative digital operator.'

(February 2, 2015) telegeography.com

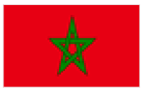
Lebanon

Acting Chairman & CEO: Dr. Imad Hoballah
[Telecommunication Regulatory Authority (TRA)]

The parliamentary Finance and Budget Committee formed a small panel charged with resolving a long-standing row over the distribution of telecom tax revenues to Lebanon's municipalities, frozen since 2009. The decision was made during the panel's meeting in Parliament chaired by MP Ibrahim Kanaan which discussed the municipalities' tax revenues from the mobile phone sector. The committee was briefed by the director general of the Telecommunications Ministry and representatives from the Interior and Justice Ministries on how to allocate the share of the municipalities' tax revenues from the telecom sector estimated at more than $3 billion since 2009. The amount of funds frozen since 2009, according to Harb, has surpassed LL6 billion ($4 million). After the establishment of the mobile phone telecom industry in 1994, a bill was drafted that required 10 percent of revenues to be transferred to municipal governments. But Harb and the FPM disagree over who holds the authority to distribute the funds. Harb maintains that the funds should be transferred to the municipalities via the Finance Ministry. But the FPM in 2009 began holding the funds, arguing that the law was clear in that the Telecoms Ministry should directly transfer revenues to the municipalities.

(February 18, 2015) dailystar.com.lb

Morocco



Director General: M. Azdine El MountassirBillah
[Agence Nationale de Reglementation des Telecommunications (ANRT)]

Maroc Telecom reported 2.1% growth in group revenues in 2014, driven primarily by a strong performance at its international businesses. The telco generated consolidated revenues of 29.14 billion dirhams (€2.69 billion) last year. Its domestic business contributed the lion's share with MAD21.13 billion, down 0.8% year-on-year, while its international operations brought in MAD8.6 billion, up 11.3%. The company's net profit grew by 5.6% to MAD5.85 billion, largely on the back of a one-off tax dispute cost in 2013, while EBITDA slid by 3.2% to MAD15.69 billion. "2014 was characterized by a return to revenue and net income growth," said Maroc Telecom chairman Abdeslam Ahizoune, in a statement. "Maroc Telecom Group is reaping the benefits of its substantial investments in mobile, fixed-line, and high speed and ultra-high speed Internet," he added. "The continuance of such investments will depend on the sustainability of the renewed growth and the efficiency of the market which will depend on the stability and visibility of the regulatory environment." The company predicts that capex in 2015 will be around 20% of revenues, excluding spectrum, licenses and 4G investments in Morocco. Ahizoune also noted that Maroc Telecom is boosting its position in certain fast-growing international markets through M&A. Last month the telco closed the €474 million acquisition of six businesses in West Africa that previously belonged to its parent company, Etisalat. Maroc Telecom's total customer base exceeded 40 million by the end of 2014, up by 8.2% over 12 months. Once again, the growth came from its overseas operations, where customers reached around 20 million, up 17%. The telco's biggest international operation last year was Mali, where its 10.67 million mobile customers and a handful of fixed-line and broadband connections generated €2.93 billion in revenues. Maroc Telecom's group outlook foresees stable revenues and a slight decrease in EBITDA next year. (February 23, 2015) totaltele.com

Nepal

Acting Chairman: Mr. AnandaRaj Khanal
[Nepal Telecommunication Authority (NTR)]

The Nepal Telecommunications Authority (NTA) has ordered fixed-wireless and limited mobility CDMA operator United Telecommunications Limited (UTL) to acquire a unified license within 30 days or risk losing its wireless spectrum. To get the unified license, UTL must pay a one-off licensing fee of NPR357.5 million (US$3.5 million) plus a license renewal fee of NPR20.13 billion, which can be paid in installments over ten years. UTL has already paid NPR107.5 million as part payment of the licensing fee. UTL is 80%-owned by three Indian companies – Mahanagar Telephone Nigam Limited (MTNL), Telecommunications Consultants India and Tata Communications – with 20% held by a domestic firm called Nepal Ventures. A unified license would enable UTL to utilize its frequencies for a full mobile network launch. (February 23, 2015) Republica

The Nepal Telecommunications Authority (NTA) has released its latest statistical bulletin covering the month to December 15, 2014. At that date the country was home to nearly 22.85 million GSM mobile users – up from 21.49 million three months earlier – split between privately owned Ncell (12.09 million) and government-backed Nepal Telecom (NT – 9.76 million). In addition, NT claimed 1.17 million CDMA-based mobile users, up from 1.15 million at mid-September. In the fixed broadband sector, meanwhile, NT had 135,064 ADSL subscribers by December 15, up from 121,570 three months earlier, with gains also being made in the cable modem sector (up from 33,498 to 47,182) and in the WiMAX market (from 9,891 to 11,102), though a decline in other broadband connection types, such as wireless modems and fiber, was registered (from 64,304 to 46,701).
(February 16, 2015) telegeography.com

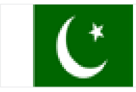
The Nepal Telecommunications Authority (NTA) is all set to introduce standards for telecom towers. The regulator has prepared a draft, which seeks to enforce standards for making the towers less vulnerable to earthquake and less risky to the public health. Telecom operators will be given a set of technical specifications so that the towers, existing or new, are not risky, NTA officials said. NTA has already held discussions on the issue with the National Society for Earthquake Technology-Nepal (NSET). The draft will be finalized after incorporating inputs from NSET and other stakeholders concerned. The telecom regulator also plans to hold a workshop with stakeholders for discussing possible impact of telecom towers on public health. "A draft regarding the minimum standards and conditions to be followed by telecom operators for reducing health issues has already been prepared," NTA Chairman Digambar Jha said. The draft has been forwarded to the Ministry of Information and Communication, Ministry of Science, Technology and Environment and Ministry of Health and Population for their inputs. Jha said the regulator plans to hold a thorough study on the tower issue. "If you ask me how many telecom towers are there across the country, I really cannot answer," Jha said. "If we are not aware about even the number of towers we have, we are largely unaware about other tower-related issues." To address the issue, NTA has issued a Request For Bid to hire a consultant to prepare data of towers being operated by service providers based on the GIS Based MIS Database. "We are expecting proposals by February 13. The consultant selection and appointment will be completed within the next 15 days," Jha said, adding the authority will have a concrete report in place within mid-July 2015. Once the report is prepared, NTA will be aware about the location of towers and it can pressure service providers to increase infrastructure and capacity in places required. The NTA chief said the regulatory body can also look for a possible solution in places where service providers cannot lay optical fiber. "We can look for alternatives like satellite," Jha said. The regulator is also making preparations for establishing an infrastructure-sharing mechanism. It seeks to make at least three telecom service providers operate from a single tower. Meanwhile, NTA has prepared a draft on Quality of Service (QOS) Regulation which will help it specify the minimum service standard and conditions. It is also importing equipment to set up a lab to keep tabs on the quality of service being provided by service operators, Jha said. (February 2, 2015) ekantipur.com

Oman

Executive President: Dr. Hamed Al-Rawahi
[Telecommunication Regulatory Authority (TRA)]

Oman Telecommunications Company (Omantel), the Sultanate's incumbent telecoms operator, has announced its financial results for twelve months to end-December 2014, reporting revenue of OMR481.2 million (US$1.25 billion), an increase of 4.0% from OMR462.9 million the previous year. The firm said that growth was mainly driven by domestic retail revenues, which grew 4.3% to OMR392.6 million in 2014, spurred by fixed and mobile broadband, as well as corporate data services. However, revenue from national and international calls and SMS continued to decline amid increasing usage of over-the-top (OTT) services, and turnover from Pakistani subsidiary Worldcall (WTL) slumped by 26.2% year-on-year. Omantel said that operating expenses for the period grew by 2.8% year-on-year to OMR350.8 million, while net profit rose 2.6% from OMR119.3 million in 2013 to OMR122.4 million twelve months later, representing the firm's highest net profit in the last five years. Total subscribers (including WTL) reached 4.296 million at the end of December 2014, an increase of 6.8% from 4.022 million a year earlier; Omantel's domestic subscriber base increased 7.9% year-on-year to 3.341 million (excluding mobile resellers). 'Omantel recorded a positive growth across all business lines and was able to close the year with a 4% growth in revenues and 2.6% increase in net profit,' commented CEO Talal Said Al Mamari, adding: 'We are pleased with the overall performance in Year 2014 and in particular the growth of fixed broadband services, which is the highest recorded to date. This has been achieved despite unfavorable market conditions and increased competition from OTT players.'
(February 16, 2015) telegeography.com

Pakistan



Chairman: Dr. Syed Ismail Shah
[Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA)]

In a bid to minimize cyber security threats to internet users, the government is framing a comprehensive cyber crime legislation, which is in final stages of enactment, said State Minister for Information Technology and Telecommunication. The Prevention of Electronic Crimes Bill comprehensively addresses some of the most pressing issues related to cyber security, and it is confidence of the end users which will make "internet governance" structure more effective, said the minister while addressing a workshop on the theme: "Internet governance and roles of its stakeholders," organized by the IT Ministry. The purpose of the workshop was to have an integrated gathering of the stakeholders of "internet ecosystem" for the delivery of more convenient, citizen centric and cost-effective public services and sharing information to strengthen relations with citizens, businesses, and other arms of government through secure and stable internet. Internet governance is one of the most heavily debated phenomenon globally which deals with the development and application of standards, shared principles, guidelines, decision-making procedures and programs that shape the evolution and use of the medium of internet. Experts from ICANN, ISOC, APNIC, CEOs & CIOs of ISPs, IT & telecom companies, academia, scholars, and officials of government organizations, civil society and other dignitaries participated in the workshop. The workshop was divided into three sessions; (i) ICANN, domain name system and internet operations & governance, (ii) Updates and new developments (iii) role of internet organizations in the internet ecosystem. The representatives of Internet governing bodies enlightened the audience on latest developments in the internet ecosystem and advancements in "internet governance." State Minister said the government is giving high priority to information and communications technologies (ICT) sector, particularly "Internet Governance system in the country". Internet is playing an important role in the business growth and good governance which leads to better performance of the public and private sectors. Pakistan joined hands with ICANN to streamline its policies and action plans regarding Internet and its usage, in accordance with the guidelines provided by ICANN. Pakistan became an active member of Governmental Advisory Committee (GAC) to take part in the legislative process of ICANN and to get benefit from the guiding principles to be in line with the progress being made in this sphere. The government of Pakistan has applied to ICANN for the IDN ccTLD Dot Pakistan registry in Urdu and has initiated the process. State Minister further commended the role of ISOC in the promotion of the open development, evolution, and use of the internet for the benefit of people around the globe and added that we would like to participate and benefit from its facilities for open development of standards, protocols, administration, and the technical infrastructure for the internet, community development, education and providing reliable information to the people of Pakistan. She emphasized on the cyber security issue and urged ICANN, APNIC, ISOC, relevant regional and international internet bodies, and other stakeholders in private sector to play their role in trust building of the Internet users on "internet governance". The users must have confidence that they are transacting in a digital environment which is free of spoofing, phishing, eavesdropping.

(February 20, 2015) brecorder.com

The five telecom companies have paid total tax of Rs. 31.801 billion in last two fiscal years. The companies had paid Rs 924 million tax in the current fiscal year so far. The source said that volume of tax paid by cellular companies was Rs 20,871 million in fiscal year 2012-13 which decreased in the next fiscal year 2013-14 to the tune of Rs 10,007 million. These companies paid Rs 9883 million as income tax and Rs 21919 million as sales tax. Currently, three kinds of taxes are levied in the country including income tax as per Income Tax Ordinance, 2001 taxes the income earned by a person as per rates prescribed in First Schedule to the Ordinance, Sales Tax; the standard rate of sales tax is 17%, however, the special rates of sales tax are charged on certain commodities as well as the Federal Excise Duty; the excise duty is levied on certain goods and services. "Telenor Pakistan paid Rs 5618 million tax, Pak-Telecom Mobile Ltd paid Rs 3338 million, Warid Telecome Pvt. Ltd paid Rs 1531 million, CM PAK (Zong) paid Rs 4247 million tax while Pakistan Mobile Communication Ltd paid an amount of Rs 6136 million tax in the fiscal year 2012-13" the source said adding that these tax comprised both of the income and sales tax. Out of the Rs 974 million total paid amount of tax in the current fiscal year, Telenor Pakistan paid an amount of Rs 334 million, Pak Telecom Mobile Ltd paid Rs 214 million tax, Warid Telecom Pvt. Ltd paid Rs 113 million tax, CM PAK (Zong) paid Rs 54 million tax while Pakistan Mobile Communication Ltd deposited Rs 208 million as tax in national kitty.

(February 6, 2015) customstoday.com.pk

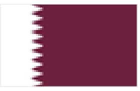
In a bid to keep a control on telecom tariffs and service charges, Pakistan Telecommunication Authority is set to legislate "Telecommunication Services Retail Tariff Regulations, 2015". A deliberated draft of the regulation suggests that PTA will be able to make sure that tariffs of telecom services (mainly the cellular and broadband) are in line with consumers' affordability and are not creating a cartel in the market. Moreover, the regulation is also aimed at bringing more transparency in telecom tariffs to ensure that telecom operators clearly communicate any discounts, validity, allowed quota and end dates of a particular promotion. Not to be mention, at the time of imposition of 10 paisas call setup charges in 2013 PTA had asked operators to withdraw these charges. However, operators didn't listen to PTA and kept charging call setup charges of 10 paisas for each prepaid call by saying that PTA has no mandate to regulate pricing of the telecom sector. This is going to change now. According to the new regulation, PTA will have this authority to make operators reverse any charges imposed if they are deemed anti-competitive or burdensome on consumers. According to the this proposed regulation, SMP (Significant Market Player) will have to get PTA's approval before implementing a tariff change, for which SMP has to communicate clear details to regulator 30 days ahead of actual implementation. According to the new proposed regulation, PTA can reverse any charges imposed if they are deemed anti-competitive or burdensome on consumers Similarly, customers are supposed to be clearly communicated by the SMP for any tariff change. Regulation said that PTA will have this authority to disapprove any tariff proposal from SMP if deemed anti-competitive too expensive for the consumers to bear. Non-SMP, however, would be free to revise tariffs but they must communicate any tariff proposals to PTA 20 days ahead of actual implementation. Not to mention, customers should be notified about any tariff change 7 days ahead of actual implementation. Moreover, PTA will also be given a authority to set tariff ceiling and tariff floor for both SMP and non-SMP telecom operators for their services. Telecom industry, which is about to get hold of draft regulation to study it in detail, told ProPakistani that 30 or even 20 days intimation to PTA for any tariff revision is realistically very long. Industry high-ups were of the opinion that a dynamic market like Pakistan demands quick decisions. "Things are calculated on hourly basis and this is where PTA needs to understand that 30 day window is an impossible proposition", said the official. After input from various stakeholders, this draft is likely to become a regulation with-in couple of months. Here are few other noteworthy elements from the regulation:

- All telecom service providers will have to offer free of cost emergency services.
- Operators will ensure that all Tariff information is complete, clear and simple to understand.
- No part of the advertisement, publication, brochure etc. particularly those related to service offerings and the tariffs shall be in micro fonts. Other than heading for which the font can be as big as licensee want , all the remaining text shall be in one uniform text.
- Operators can not describe a package as being 'unlimited' if there is a limit to the number of calls, minutes, data volume etc being used.
- Operators can not describe a package as being 'free' if there are any charges attached to that package.
- The Operators should not activate automatic renewal of subscription based packages upon the expiry of that package, without soliciting explicit consent of the subscriber/consumer.
- The Licensees shall inform Consumers when they are approaching 80% of their credit balance or credit limit of a package. (February 3, 2015) ProPakistani.com

The telecom sector increased the number of mobile broadband subscriptions by 18% in December 2014, but the industry's overall cellular subscriber base shrank by more than 1% in the same month, the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) revealed. The total number of third-generation (3G) subscriptions increased to 5.7 million at the end of calendar year 2014, up 18% compared to 4.8 million as of November 2014, according to the telecom regulator. The number, however, didn't include 3G subscribers of Ufone, the Islamabad-based technology blog, put the total number of 3G subscribers (Ufone included) at 6.3 million in December 2014. Telenor Pakistan is leading the mobile broadband market with 2.3 million subscriptions as of December 31, 2014. It was followed by Mobilink and Zong with 1.8 million and 1.7 million 3G connections respectively. Ufone had 646,949 subscriptions as of November 2014. PTA didn't release the company's statistics for December. The telecom industry, however, lost 1.6 million subscribers in December on the back of data cleaning (blocking unregistered or inactive SIMs). The overall subscriber base was down by 1% to 135.7 million at the end of 2014 compared to 137.3 million in November. The decline, according to sources familiar with the matter, will continue for another two to three months in the wake of the government's instructions to verify 103 million subscribers in 90 days, ending on April 13 this year. January and February will see a big dip in the number of cellular consumers, sources say. Of the five operators, Zong suffered the most, losing nearly 1 million subscribers in December and finished with 26.3 million subscribers. Ufone also lost half-a-million users to end up with 21.9 million subscriptions during the period under review. The subscriber base of Mobilink and Warid Telecom remained almost flat as both the operators added only a small number of new users to end at 38.4 million and 12.4 million respectively. Meanwhile, Telenor Pakistan also lost some of its subscribers to end at 36.5 million users. The market position, in terms of the subscriber base, of all the operators remained unchanged with Mobilink being the market leader followed by Telenor Pakistan as number two, Zong as number three, Ufone as number four and Warid as the fifth and smallest operator. Unlike 3G, the PTA's data for 4G subscribers reported a small number. Zong, the only operator with a 4G license, had 2,242 4G subscribers at the end of 2014 mainly due to the recent roll out of 4G technology. (February 3, 2015) tribune.com.pk

Mobile broadband subscribers in the country are expected to reach 47 million by 2020 and 79 million by 2025, putting a direct and positive impact on human well-being. The promotion of mobile broadband will also help raise penetration of 35 % by 2025 in this area. The current number of mobile broadband subscribers is around five million. The revenues from connected devices will also surpass both the Voice and Data by 2020 and their combined revenues by 2025. The mobile and related market in the country is also estimated to be over US $ 17 billion per year by 2025 up from the current US $ 4 billion per year. Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) in its Vision 2025 has revealed key service providers in Pakistan will be encouraged to offer extended Over the Top (OTT) services such as Viber, Skype and work with third party digital distributors and vice versa to offer consumers value through product centric services in a collaborative framework. Collaborative framework shall be built around regulatory and technical support systems including availability of additional spectrum, spectrum harmonization, spectrum and infrastructure sharing and other regulatory interventions and facilitations wherever it is applicable and required. PTA envisions affordable and broad based communications access to the consumer irrespective of their location in the country. The Regulator has already successfully awarded the spectrum in 2100 MHz and 1800 MHz bands in April, 2014 for 3G and 4G cellular mobile services and is gearing itself to stay on top of the developments in the 5th Generation Mobile Services Technology so that it may be launched in Pakistan in a timely manner. With regard to broadband subscriptions in the country depicted a growth over 40 percent during last year, reaching 3.79 million subscribers mark as compared to 2.72 million during 2013. This means 1.07 million new subscribers joined broadband networks during the year. The latest statistics further revealed that Pakistan Telecommunication Company Limited (PTCL) remained a major player in providing broadband services and it has been successful in getting major share of broadband market by providing multitude of services and technologies under its umbrella. Ranging from ownership of international optical fiber links to availability of both fixed (DSL) and wireless (EvDO) broadband services, PTCL maintained a stronghold on almost every facet of the broadband market. Currently, PTCL has 80 per cent share of the subscriber base, consisting of 3.03 million subscribers including fixed and wireless broadband services. Moreover, the Vision said the concept of smart cities and towns with extensive use of ICT will improve quality of life of citizens through connected transport, smart energy, contactless payments, mobile government and more. In the next decade, access to affordable broadband is becoming as crucial to socio-economic development as networks like transport, water and power. Mobile technology spearheaded by vibrancy and innovation has just begun to unfold its value for society. (February 2, 2015) samaa.tv

Qatar

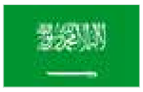


[Communications Regulatory Authority (CRA)]

Radio communication sector representatives from ministries and organizations in Arab countries converged in Doha to officially open the 19th meeting of the Arab Spectrum Management Group (ASMG). The participants will plan for the preparatory conference slated from March 23 to April 2 in Geneva, ahead of the 15th World Radio Communication Conference (WRC-15) that will be held later this year. Hosted by the Communications Regulatory Authority (CRA), the ASMG meeting aims to study the draft report of the preparatory conference which was recently issued by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU). The draft report is a result of four years of extensive studies which included work done in the sector by countries concerned as well as their sub-groups and committees. This work has led to a uniform initial position for Arab countries in relation to the conference agenda items and provides documentation about the unified Arab view for the next conference. ASMG chairman Tariq al-Awadhi, Qatar National Spectrum Steering Committee chairman Saleh al-Kuwari and League of Arab States (LAS) representative Reham el-Mayet led the opening yesterday by delivering their speeches. Al-Kuwari is also the chairman and adviser of CRA. The WRC is considered one of the most significant conferences organized by ITU every four years. It tackles several important issues related to spectrum, including procedures and regulations of the usage of spectrum and its applications in relation with the most advanced technologies and techniques that enhance the growth of the telecom sector. The ASMG meeting in Doha also includes coordination sub-meetings with a number of other regional groups in a bid to exchange views and understand their positions on the conference agenda items before the official participation in the conference. CRA said the meeting will also discuss developments on the process of coordination taking place between the relevant administrations in the Arab countries. These are under the auspices of ITU and the Arab States Broadcasting Union, which are correlated to the conversion to digital terrestrial broadcasting. ASMG was formed based on Resolution No.77 issued by Arab Telecommunications and Information Council of Ministers. It called for the harmonization of stances on the main topics raised and discussed in the international conferences which acted as a permanent task force that would manage all affairs related to frequency spectrum. ASMG convenes periodically prior to and after conferences. The first meeting was organized in December 2001. The meeting in Doha, which will conclude tomorrow, has been organized in coordination with the General Secretariat of the League of Arab States, the Telecom Bureau for Communications under the Secretariat of the GCC, ITU, the International Federation of Amateur Radio, and the International Society for Mobile Networks. A number of Arab telecommunications and satellite companies are also participating in the meeting.

(February 17, 2015) gulf-times.com

Saudi Arabia



Governor: Eng. Abdullah A. Al Darrab
[Communication & Information Technology Commission (CITC)]

The Communication & Information Technology Commission (CITC) has slashed call termination fees by 40 percent, a move which is seen as mostly benefiting Zain Saudi, the smallest of the kingdom's three mobile network operators. Termination fees are those charged where a call originating on one network terminates on another network, with the caller network charged by the operator of the network on which the call is received. The Communications and Information Technology Commission, has cut these fees to 0.15 riyals per minute from 0.25 riyals, it said in a statement issued on its website. It did not say whether this would be with immediate effect. High termination fees benefit the larger network operators, which have a bigger market share and fewer calls going "off-net" to other providers. In Saudi Arabia the former monopoly Saudi Telecom Co (STC) and Etihad Etisalat (Mobily) between them have 83 percent of the kingom's mobile subscribers, according to Zain, owner of 37 percent of Zain Saudi. "This decision is a huge win for Zain Saudi and should pose a catalyst for the shares," Riyad Capital said in a note. "In practical terms, this means STC cannot charge Zain Saudi more than 15 halalas per minute when a Zain KSA mobile customer calls (an) STC mobile number. The idea is that cost savings from lower network charges will be passed onto the end customer." Smaller operators spend relatively more on termination fees, a situation that has contributed to loss-making Zain Saudi's struggles since launching operations in 2008. Zain Saudi, which did not respond immediately to requests for comment, has been lobbying the CITC to have the charges reduced, arguing it is unfairly penalised with higher network charges due to its smaller customer base. "The likelihood of a Zain Saudi customer making an off-net call is substantially higher than both Mobily and STC - this limits Zain Saudi's pricing power for its customer base, while the competitors can enjoy greater flexibility," Riyad Capital added. "Zain Saudi's voice proposition will now look more appealing as customers can expect lower cost." Zain Saudi's shares were up 2.5 percent at 0803 GMT, while STC and Mobily were down 3.3 and 2.2 percent respectively. (February 23, 2015) english.alarabiya.net/en

Tunisia

President: Mr. Hassoumi Zitoune
[National Telecommunication Commission (INTT)]

Tunisia could see its first commercial 4G mobile service by the end of 2016, the country's newly appointed ICT and digital economy minister, Noomene Fehri, said in an interview. Studies on deploying the new standard have begun and licenses could be awarded before the end of the year. LTE is viewed as a key component of the very high-speed broadband services Tunisian citizens must access fully to guarantee the success of the Digital Tunisia, national development strategy, as reported by sources. (February 20, 2015) Agence Ecofin

Turkey

Chairman & CEO: Dr. Tayfun Acarer
[Information & Communication Technologies Authority (BTK)]

There has been a new amendment to the recent legislative proposal ("Proposal") on amendment to the Law No. 5651 on Regulation of Broadcasts via Internet and Prevention of Crimes Committed through Such Broadcasts ("Law No. 5651"), which is known as "Internet Law". The amended Proposal is submitted to the Turkish Grand National Assembly ("TGNA") on January 23, 2015. The amended Proposal is currently pending at the TGNA's Planning and Budget Commission's ("Commission") agenda and it is expected to be discussed at the Commission soon. The amended Proposal introduces an Article to the Law No. 5651, i.e. Article 8/A, which may be subject to changes as it has not been enacted yet. Among the provisions the proposed article introduces, paragraph 3 of the proposed Article 8/A particularly and contradicts with laws. As of February 16, 2015, paragraph 3 of the proposed Article 8/A states that access ban decisions within the scope of the article shall be given by access ban to the content method, only for the part, section, broadcast where the personal right violation occurs (URL, etc.) and clarifies the scope of the access ban decision given under the first two paragraphs of the Article. However, the proposed provision also proposes that an entire website may be access banned in cases where it is technically possible to access ban the allegedly illegal content or the violation may not be prevented through access ban of the relevant content. Access ban of an entire website for any reason, constitutes a serious intervention to freedom of speech and information since it will also result in access banning millions of contents millions of users share and it is clearly against the Constitutional Court's recent decisions.

The Turkish Constitutional Court, which is the highest court in Turkish jurisdiction, rendered two important decisions in 2014 on this matter. In its decision rendered regarding the access ban of an entire Twitter website, the court states that: "Internet has an essential instrumental value for exhaustion of fundamental rights and freedoms, especially the freedom of expression in modern democracies. The social media ground the internet provides is indispensable for people to express, mutually share and disseminate their information and thoughts. Therefore, it is clear that the states and administrative authorities must be extremely sensitive in the regulation and practice for internet and social media instruments, which became one of the most effective and widespread methods to express thoughts." After emphasizing the special status of social media ground of the internet, the Constitutional Court also decided that access ban of entire Twitter violates freedom of expression, which is a fundamental human right by stating that: "Taking the rules of Law No. 5651 into consideration, it is clear that the complete access ban by TK of the entire social media network twitter.com with millions of users, by overlapping the Court orders, which are shown as the basis for TIB's order, has no legal grounds, and the access ban of this social network with no legal grounds, and with an order of prohibition with vague limits is a serious intervention to freedom of expression, and it must be decided on a violation of the applicants' freedom of expression secured in Article 26 of the Constitution." The Constitutional Court also certifies its position regarding the access ban of an entire website regarding the websites having countless URL addresses and content in its order regarding the access ban of an entire video sharing platform having millions of content under it. The Constitutional Court, in its decision, emphasized that access ban of an entire website having countless URL addresses also causes access ban of users or content, which have no relation to the contents subject to the order by stating that: "...without even searching for a less restrictive method, implementation of a general access ban to a great amount of URL address which is numerically incomparable and irrelevant to the contents subject to the measure, leads broadening the measure by access banning users who are not content providers or hosting providers of the contents which are subject to the order." The Constitutional Court decided that access ban of entire website violates the freedom of expression, which is a fundamental human right by stating that: "...the administrative act which constitutes a serious intervention to freedom of speech of all the users of the website, is in violation of freedom of speech which is protected under Article 26 of the Constitution." Moreover, the provision allowing the access ban of an entire website in certain situations paves the way for access ban of entire news websites or websites of national newspapers. Therefore, such provision will not just cause violation of freedom of speech and information; it also creates the possibility for violation of freedom of press.

As per Article 28 of the Constitution, "the press is free and cannot be censored". In case this sanction provided by paragraph 3 of Article 8/A is applied to a website having news related contents, dissemination of news will be ceased and the freedom of information will be excessively restricted. Constitutional Court stated in its decision with case number 1996/70 and decision number 1997/53 that: "A distribution institution, whose distribution activity was ceased for a specific period, will not be able to distribute any published work for that period. Therefore, for readers to reach the news, their right to information will be removed for a specific period. Legislator cannot take precautions, which restrict or remove the freedom of press and freedom of information."The Constitutional Court further expresses that the penalty to cease distribution "conflicts with the purpose of providing right to information to the individual by obligating distribution" and "it cannot be defended that such a penalty, which is not in accordance with reaching the purpose, is necessary". Finally the

Constitutional Court emphasized that "Excessive restriction of an individual's right to reach news even for a short period, conflicts with the necessities of a democratic social order."

Considering the foregoing legal framework, a provision, which may result in access ban of an entire website even it is for a short period, will result in restriction of freedom of expression in a way to create conflict with the necessities of a democratic society and will be against the Constitutional Court decisions. The proposed provision grants a wide authority to administration to intervene to the online contents, accordingly to freedom of speech and information, and to impose excessive administrative fines based on vague grounds, which may also make the new and current market players hesitate from investing in this jurisdiction. (February 17, 2015) mondaq.com

United Arab Emirates

Chairman TRA Board of Directors
Mr. Mohamad Ahmad Al Qemzi
[Telecommunication Regulatory Authority (TRA)]

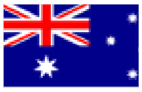
The United Arab Emirates could have a competitive fixed-line telecoms market within months, after local operator du said a deal had been agreed with larger rival Etisalat following negotiations that have dragged on since 2009. Incumbent operator Etisalat had expected to launch a bitstream access product, which would let rivals gain access to its network with a view to launching fixed services of their own, by the end of 2014, but a deal was delayed again by technical issues. "We are not there yet," du's chairman, Ahmad Bin Byat, told reporters on the sidelines of a conference in Dubai, Reuters reported. "It's just a matter of a couple of months I guess at the maximum. The agreement is in place, the legality has been sorted out." Du does offer some fixed-line broadband and pay TV services, but is restricted to newer areas of Dubai, Reuters said previously, and as a result has been unable to build a significant presence. Etisalat, meanwhile, had 1.05 million fixed-line subscribers at the end of 2013, which gave it a market share of 86%. Reuters noted that there has been little real competition in UAE telecoms to date, but that could change with the new network-sharing arrangement. Byat also told the news agency that the UAE might also consider licensing ISPs and MVNOs, allowing further competition still. We don't want more fiber and networks because it is expensive and it is inefficient," Byat said. "What we want is to get more services to the public in more competitive and seamless ways." (February 10, 2015) totaltele.com

The Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) invited all UAE government entities and authorities to participate in the 2015 World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), which will be held at the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) headquarters in Geneva from May 28-30, with wide participation from all countries across the world. The TRA has sent a formal invitation with all details related to the participation process and requirements. The invitation also stressed the deadline, set on February 5, to receive participation requests for the WSIS Project Prizes, which includes 18 different categories. However, applications for participation in the Forum will be accepted until April 1. "The UAE National Committee for Information Society is working diligently to coordinate with government entities and provide them with the necessary support, in order to showcase best national initiatives, technical and electronic projects to submit in this significant annual international forum. This step demonstrates the National Committee's keenness to highlight the UAE's commitment to develop the information society and its ongoing efforts to implement the WSIS recommendations identified in its previous editions," commented Hamad Obaid Al Mansoori, Director General of TRA. "This initiative comes as part of our ongoing commitment to reinforce the country's position on the global information society map, through submitting a number of leading UAE initiatives and projects in this field. All these efforts fall under the wider vision adopted by the federal and national government entities, to accomplish the transformation process towards a smart government, in order to exemplify a unique experience in providing public services to clients in the region," he added. UAE Government entities have a variety of opportunities to take part in WSIS 2015, including participation in the National Committee annual report which will be showcased regularly at WSIS. This report includes leading initiatives and projects related to this field and it will be discussed and distributed to delegations participating in the Summit. Moreover, a number of entities will be nominated to participate in WSIS workshops, through organizing a special panel discussion to highlight the initiative or project of one entity or a number of participating entities. This involvement focuses on the initiative, goals, difficulties and challenges facing its implementation to achieve tangible results. The National Committee urges all government entities to submit their participation requests and prepare a comprehensive portfolio containing all projects and initiatives implemented in this area, to send them to the Committee, ensuring an outstanding representation and strong participation of the UAE in this global forum. (February 5, 2015) zawya.com

REGULATORY ACTIVITIES BEYOND THE SAMENA REGION

REGULATORY UPDATES

Australia



The telecom regulator will move forward a proposal to auction off spectrum in the regional 1800 MHz band to telcos for enhanced 4G LTE services. The Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) released the terms of a draft recommendation it proposes to make to the minister for communications about the reallocation of radiofrequency spectrum in the regional 1800 MHz band for long-term spectrum licenses. The ACMA said it will seek comments on the terms of the draft terms before making a formal recommendation to the communications minister, Malcolm Turnbull. If Turnbull accepts the recommendation and makes a reallocation declaration, the ACMA plans to allocate the spectrum by auction. Interested parties must submit comments by March 11, the ACMA said. The full discussion paper is available on the ACMA website. The ACMA had earlier floated the idea of changing spectrum licensing and regulatory arrangements for the 1800 MHz band in a spectrum issues paper released in December 2012. Australian mobile operators use the 1800 MHz band for 4G LTE services in major cities. With demand for 4G increasing in regional areas from telcos, railway authorities and mining and energy companies, the ACMA said it's now time to reallocate 1800 MHz spectrum in these rural places as well. "Spectrum-licensed access to the 1800 MHz band would benefit various industry sectors in Australia and, ultimately, citizens and consumers, who would enjoy the flow on economic and social benefits from international harmonization of this band and equipment economies of scale," said ACMA chairman Chris Chapman. The 1800 MHz spectrum, which is located in the ranges 1725-1785 MHz and 1820-1880 MHz, is currently subject to apparatus licensing and is used mainly for fixed links. "Those licensing arrangements in the band are not able to accommodate potential future uses of the band, such as the delivery of mobile services to regional Australia," Chapman said. "The release of the terms of the draft reallocation recommendation marks the first legislative step in reallocating the regional 1800 MHz band for new uses." The Australian Mobile Telecommunications Association (AMTA) CEO Chris Althaus said the announcement will be very relevant to three big telcos – Telstra, Optus and Vodafone.

(February 10, 2015) computerworld.com.au

Brazil

Telecom Regulatory Authority ANATEL has reportedly given America Movil (AM) subsidiary NET Servicos 90 days to vacate the 2500MHz band, which it utilizes for Multichannel

Multipoint Distribution Service (MMDS) pay-TV services. The return of the spectrum was necessitated following NET Servicos' merger with sister company Claro Brasil, which acquired 2×20MHz blocks in the same band in the regulator's June 2012 spectrum auction. In related news Sao Paulo-based Time Division-Long Term Evolution (TD-LTE) operator ON Telecom has expressed an interest in acquiring the vacated 2500MHz frequencies covering Recife, the fifth largest metropolitan area in Brazil. ANATEL will make a decision regarding ON Telecom's application when the spectrum has been returned. (February 10, 2015) Teletime

Telecom Regulatory Authority has reportedly approved a 2G and 3G network sharing agreement between Oi SA and TIM Participacoes (TIM Brasil). The agreement is restricted to towns with a population of less than 30,000 inhabitants. The two parties signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in March 2014 regarding shared radio access network (RAN) infrastructure. Prior to that the duo inked a 4G Long Term Evolution (LTE) network tie-up in April 2013; the deal covered 45 cities by October 2014, a figure which will rise to 88 locations later this year. (February 2, 2015) TeleTime

Bulgaria

The Commission on Protection of Competition (CPC) has determined that telecoms operator Vivacom (registered as Bulgarian Telecommunications Company [BTC]) had violated Article 21 of the Law on Protection of Competition. The anti-trust regulator disclosed that fixed line operator Eastern Telecommunications Company (ITC) accused BTC of abusing its dominant position by terminating an interconnection agreement between the two companies and imposing a contractual clause which aimed to only amend the relationship with ITC, thus putting ITC at a disadvantage to its competitors. The CPC pointed out that an analysis has shown that BTC had acted differently in similar cases and that BTC's decision to amend the interconnection agreement was dictated by its dominant market position. The watchdog highlighted that BTC has the right to submit written objections and provide evidence within 30 days in order to gain access to the case file; the company may also request a hearing in open court. However, CPC's Determination is not subject to appeal. (February 9, 2015) telegeography.com

Canada

Telecoms ministry Industry Canada has published the full list of ten applicants for the upcoming auction of spectrum licenses for Advanced Wireless Services (AWS-3) in the bands 1755-1780MHz and 2155-2180MHz, namely: Rogers Communications, Telus Communications, Bell Mobility, Wind Mobile, Videotron, Data & Audio-Visual Enterprises Wireless (Mobilicity), Bragg Communications (Eastlink), MTS, Saskatchewan Telecommunications (SaskTel) and TBayTel. Publication of the list of qualified bidders is set for February 13, with the sealed bid deadline on March 3. Announcement of provisional AWS-3 license winners will take place on March 6. Simultaneously, Industry Canada published the official list of eleven applicants for the auction of Broadband Radio Service (BRS) spectrum licenses in the 2500-2690MHz band, namely: Rogers Communications, Telus Communications, Bell Mobility, Wind Mobile, Videotron, Bragg Communications (Eastlink), MTS, TBayTel, Xplornet Communications, Corridor Communications (CCI Wireless) and SSi Micro (affiliated to companies including Northern Broadband, Northern Space Link, Broadsky Communications, SSi Connexions and others). The final list of qualified 2600MHz bidders will be published on February 13, ahead of an auction which opens on April 14. Provisional 2600MHz license winners will be announced within five days following cessation of bidding. (February 6, 2015) telegeography.com

China

The Ministry of Industry and Information Technology (MIIT) will soon issue licenses for Frequency Division Duplex Long Term Evolution (FDD-LTE), with the latest reports indicating that the concessions will be handed out as early as the Spring Festival. Neither China Telecom nor China Unicom had received official notification by the end of last week. More recently, Zou Xueyong, the Secretary General of the China Virtual Network Operator Alliance, had repeated the claim on social media. Concerns are mounting that further delays to the licensing of FDD-LTE technology will serve to reinforce China Mobile's dominance in the market. China Mobile uses the home-grown Time Division (TD)-LTE platform for 4G, which was licensed in late 2013, whilst Unicom and Telecom are both keen to use the FDD standard for their 4G services. So far, the MIIT has permitted the duo to trial the technology as part of hybrid TD/FDD-LTE networks in a limited number of cities. Mobile represented 62.5% of the nation's cellular subscribers at the end of 2014, with more than 800 million users, 90.1 million of which were 4G customers. At that date Unicom and Telecom were estimated to have signed up a combined total of fewer than eight million LTE subscribers. (February 18, 2015) News Portal C114

China had 649 million internet users by the end of 2014, with 557 million of those using handsets to go online, said a government report, as the world's biggest smartphone market continues its shift to mobile. While growth is slowing, China's total internet population still rose by 31 million in 2014, said the report by the China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC). Growth in mobile internet users was faster, at 57 million. Riding this wave are some of China's, and the world's, biggest technology companies. These include e-commerce groups Alibaba and JD.com Inc, social networking and video games firm Tencent Holdings Ltd, search giant Baidu Inc and smartphone maker Xiaomi Inc [XTC.UL]. For these companies a huge part of China's potential remains untapped, much of it in smaller cities and rural areas. The country's internet penetration rate is 47.9 percent and rural users only account for just over a quarter of China's total, said the CNNIC. By comparison, in the United States 74.4 percent of households reported internet use in 2013, according to the United States Census Bureau. In good news for Alibaba and JD.com people shopping online increased by 20 percent in the year to the end of 2014. Users of online payment services, operated by Alibaba and Tencent, increased by 17 percent. Instant messaging, which is dominated by Tencent's WeChat and QQ, saw users increase by 10 percent. However, microblog use, a market dominated in China by Weibo Corp, was down 11 percent. Last year, CNNIC reported a 9 percent decline in users, triggering a sell-off in shares of the then-unlisted company's parent, Sina Corp. But smartphone sales are flagging. Shipments in China were 389 million phones in 2014, down from 423 million the previous year, according to China's Ministry of Industry and Information Technology. Foreign internet companies have also been denied an opportunity to compete in China. Some of the world's biggest online services, like those run by Google

Inc, Facebook Inc and Twitter Inc have been severely disrupted or simply blocked. Nevertheless, domestic tech firms have weathered regulatory scrutiny and the onus of self-censorship to account for more than $600 billion in total share market values. (February 4, 2015) reuters.com

Colombia

Communication Regulation Commission (CRC) is evaluating the implementation of fixed number portability (FNP) during 2015. The regulator is currently conducting feasibility studies on FNP, with a decision expected soon. Colombia began technical trials of mobile number portability (MNP) in April 2011, with the service seeing a commercial launch on 29 July that year. Around 3.5 million mobile numbers have been ported to date, with some 1.6 million users changing provider in 2014 alone. (February 18, 2015) El Tiempo

Costa Rica

The internet service provider (ISP) Japi has launched a fresh legal challenge against telecoms regulator Superintendencia de Telecomunicaciones (Sutel), calling into question the extent of the watchdog's authority. Japi has claimed that some of the powers attributed to Sutel – specifically, the right to withdraw or cancel concessions – have no legal basis and are unconstitutional. Further, Japi added that Sutel lacked the expertise to effectively manage the country's spectrum resources. Only the state, acting through the executive branch has the right to control and manage spectrum, the operator argued, whilst the regulatory authority only has the power to monitor usage. Japi's battle with the regulator was sparked by an August 2013 ruling from Sutel which claimed that the WiMAX operator's concession did not cover the provision of wireless internet services and as such, Japi was ordered to cease the offering. Japi was given a reprieve later that year, however, when the Administrative Court accepted its application for an injunction against Sutel's decision and the case has lain dormant ever since. (February 2, 2015) El Financiero

Ecuador

The Government has concluded negotiations to award 4G LTE mobile licenses to the country's two private sector cellcos, America Movil-backed Conecel (Claro Ecuador) and Telefonica subsidiary Movistar Ecuador, for a total price of US$330 million, telecoms regulator CONECEL reports on its website. Following confirmation from Minister of Telecommunication & Information Society Augusto Espin Tobar, on February 2, 2015 CONATEL approved terms and technical, economic and legal conditions for the allocation of an additional 60MHz of frequencies to largest operator Claro for US$180 million, and a 50MHz spectrum allocation costing rival Movistar US$150 million, with the watchdog confirming that the license awards include 'a portion of spectrum to improve the quality of 3G services.' Minister Espin last month disclosed that the portions of spectrum included the AWS (1700MHz/2100MHz) band – to be utilized for LTE – and the 1900MHz band – for expanding 3G, while an expansion of import quotas for LTE smartphones was also negotiated. State-owned Corporacion Nacional de Telecomunicaciones (CNT) currently operates Ecuador's only 4G LTE service, utilizing the AWS band. Ecuador's National Secretary of Telecommunications, Ing Ana Proano, was quoted in Conecel's press release as saying: 'The additional allocation of spectrum for advanced mobile service is a direct benefit for citizens, since it will improve the quality of 3G and 4G, deliver[ing] new services across the territory,' whilst noting that licensed operators of advanced mobile services must roll out new voice and data coverage across specified territory ('990km highway'). Claro and Movistar currently offer 2G/3G services in the 850MHz and 1900MHz bands, and the new AWS and 1900MHz frequencies will be added to their 15 year licenses which were renewed in 2008 (expiring in 2023). (February 4, 2015) telegeography.com

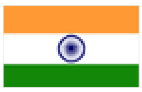
Germany

Federal Cabinet has approved an amendment to regulations to allow frequencies in the 700MHz band to be used for the rollout of high speed mobile broadband in rural areas of the country. The move paves the way for the Federal Network Agency's (FNA) auction of mobile spectrum in the 700MHz, 900MHz and 1800MHz frequency bands, which is scheduled to take place during May and June. Minister of Transport and Digital Infrastructure Alexander Dobrint said in a press release that the change to the frequency regulation has created all legal requirements for the upcoming spectrum auction, the proceeds of which will be invested in the development of high speed broadband and the digitization of Germany. The sale will feature spectrum in the 900MHz and 1800MHz bands, the current licenses for which expire on December 31, 2016, while Germany will become the first European nation to auction off frequencies in the 700MHz range for mobile broadband. Last month the FNA's Advisory Council agreed that winning bidders must provide mobile broadband of at least 50Mbps (download) to a minimum 97% of all households in each federal state and 98% of homes nationwide. (February 12, 2015) telegeography.com

Telecoms regulator, the Federal Network Agency (FNA) has opened the admission procedure for all companies interested in participating in its upcoming auction of spectrum in the 700MHz, 900MHz and 1800MHz frequency bands. In a statement on its website, the watchdog says it has set a deadline of March 6, 2015 for the submission of applications, with the auction scheduled to take place during May and June in Mainz. The sale will feature spectrum in the 900MHz and 1800MHz bands, the current licenses for which expire on December 31, 2016, while Germany will become the first European nation to auction off frequencies in the 700MHz range for mobile broadband, in a move aimed at accelerating the deployment of high speed services in rural parts of the country. Last month the FNA's Advisory Council agreed that winning bidders must provide mobile broadband of at least 50Mbps (download) to a minimum 97% of all households in each federal state and 98% of homes nationwide.

(February 2, 2015) telegeography.com

India



India's three largest mobile operators plan to petition authorities to postpone the planned auction of spectrum in the 2.1 GHz band, it emerged this week. Bharti Airtel, Vodafone and Idea Cellular will appeal to India's Telecom Disputes Settlement and Appellate Tribunal (TDSAT) either together or separately. The telcos are seeking a postponement of the sale of 5 MHz of 2.1-GHz spectrum until interference issues are resolved. They could make their appeal this week, the newspaper claimed. The Indian government plans to sell 5 MHz of 2.1-GHz spectrum in 17 circles at its broader auction of frequencies next month. The decision to do so has drawn controversy, with many interested parties, including the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI), urging the government to delay the sale until more 2.1-GHz spectrum becomes available; the military is due to free up another 15 MHz of 2.1-GHz frequencies. However, late last month the cabinet gave the go-ahead for the sale to take place as part of the auction of 800-MHz, 900-MHz and 1800-MHz spectrum that is due to begin on March 4. It also approved a reserve price of 37.05 billion rupees (over €500 million) per MHz, again disappointing the TRAI, which had campaigned for a lower rate. The regulator is concerned that the limited amount of spectrum and a high base price will lead to artificially high prices for the airwaves. According to the Financial Express, India's operators are concerned that the regulatory authorities have not addressed problems related to interference in the 2.1-GHz band. Specifically, the 1900-MHz band used by operators in Pakistan interferes with India's 2.1-GHz band in circles on the border, the paper explained. The report referred particularly to the Jammu and Kashmir, Punjab, Rajasthan and Gujarat circles, where interference results in poor quality of service on 3G. While 2.1-GHz spectrum is not available for all of those circles in the March auction, the telcos are still keen for the state to address the interference issue before any sale takes place. (February 16, 2015) totaltele.com

Auction of telecom spectrum due March 4 may burn a hole in the pockets of the operators and may increase call and data charges, experts have opined. "This will be a very big and interesting auction. Operators whose licenses are expiring will be bidding hard to secure their position. Though Bharti Airtel, Vodafone and Idea Cellular managed to secure some airwaves in the 1800MHz and in last year's auction in some of the circles where their licenses are expiring, they might have to bid hard to secure their position in circles where they don't have sufficient spectrum in 1800MHz band," The total spectrum put to auction is 103.75MHz in 800MHz band, 177.8MHz in 900MHz band and 99.2MHz in 1800MHz band - a total of 380.75MHz in 800, 900 and 1800MHz. The government will also put on sale 5 MHz in the 2100MHz band, which is used for 3G services in 17 out of 22 telecom areas. The reserve price approved is 3,646 crore pan-India per MHZ in 800MHz, 3,980 crores for 900MHz band pan-India ; and 2,191 crores pan-India in 1800MHz band. The government also approved a reserve price of 3,705 crores per megahertz for third generation services. (February 10, 2015) siliconindia.com

The telecoms minister has reportedly rejected a request from UK-based Vodafone Group for an additional 15MHz of 3G spectrum currently being held by the armed forces to be included in the upcoming frequency sale scheduled to take place next month. The minister was said to have told Vodafone Group CEO Vittorio Colao at a meeting earlier this week that 'the department cannot auction airwaves it doesn't possess'. Meanwhile, Mr. Colao is also said to have raised concerns over the reserve price for 3G-suitable spectrum, India's cabinet approved a reserve price of INR37.05 billion (US$603.21 million) per MHz for spectrum in the 2100MHz band in the upcoming frequency auction, set to take place on March 4. A person privy to the meeting between the Vodafone chief and the telecoms minister was cited as saying: 'Colao said that while world over the base price of spectrum was falling, India was on an opposite path of increasing the base price.' As such, Mr. Colao was said to have argued that high spectrum prices would mean that operators would not have enough resource left to invest in infrastructure, leading to lower-quality infrastructure across the country. (February 6, 2015) The India's Economic Times

Italy

A mobile merger could be in the offing in Italy, with discussions between two major players reportedly ramping up. Hutchison Whampoa, owner of 3 Italia, has been holding talks with Wind parent Vimpelcom regarding a possible combination of their mobile assets for some time and the pair have now stepped up negotiations. One of the newswire's sources added that the telcos have made progress in resolving a number of disputes, including disagreements over the ownership structure of the merged entity. Talks are now focusing on a deal that would see 3 Italia, the smaller of the two, acquiring Wind. Previous talks between Hutch and Vimpelcom fell apart last year because the former wanted to control the merged company, while Vimpelcom was seeking a 50:50 joint venture. However, despite the progress the operators have made since then, there is still no guarantee that the negotiations will result in a deal, it said. A tie-up between Wind and 3 would reduce the number of mobile network operators in Italy to three from four and therefore would attract the scrutiny of national regulators and the European Union. However, Wind and 3 are the third and fourth largest mobile operators in Italy by subscribers, together controlling a third of the market. Therefore, their merger would leave three strong network operators, something that would doubtless appease competition bodies to a certain extent. Based on the latest figures from Italian regulator AGCOM, Wind and 3 together would have held a 33.3% share of the mobile market as of the end of September. At the same date market leader Telecom Italia had a 32.1% share, while Vodafone claimed 27.5 %.
(February 17, 2015) totaltele.com

The telecoms regulator AGCOM has approved a draft resolution on wholesale access to Telecom Italia's (TI's) fixed network for the period 2014-2017. The watchdog has submitted two proposals for public consultation; the first would maintain the current regulatory approach across the whole Italian market, while the second would split the country into 'A' and 'B' areas. The B areas would be regions where at least two rival operators had achieved substantial coverage with next-generation access networks, while the A areas would be the regions still dominated by former monopoly TI. AGCOM says it would be able to take a lighter regulatory approach in the B areas, where a decent level of competition already exists. A full unbundled local loop (ULL) connection would cost EUR8.69 (US$9.80) under the first scenario, as well as in the A areas under the second plan, while the ULL price in the B areas would be fixed at a higher level no greater than EUR9.40. (February 2, 2015) telegeography.com

International Telecommunication Union

The New Year is characterized by a crop of telecom predictions from many research firms and major consultancies. This short article briefly summarizes a few key trends apparent from this year's projections. For 2015, many of the forecasts coming from major research companies include the growth of mobile and next-generation software, cloud computing, the Internet of Things, and of course, social media and big data. A number of analysts have also concentrated on the impact of technological changes on firms or on consumers. Convergence is strongly evident, with many forecasts for telecom crossing over into the domain of information technology (IT), while telecom network issues are increasingly feeding back into the IT and Internet domains (consider the ongoing debate over net neutrality). The International Data Corporation (IDC) projects that global IT and telecom spending together will grow by 3.8% over the course of 2015 to around USD 3.8 trillion for the year. Indeed, many of IDC's 2015 telecom predictions focus on the changing role of the telco in a converging industry, exploring how telcos will move into API business, value-added services, precision mobile advertising, managed security services, and adopt network virtualization to improve their profit margins. This is in line with many of the outcomes from ITU's Leadership Summit: The Future in Focus, where one keynote speaker suggested that every company may effectively become a software company in one way or another in future (see the separate article on ITU Telecom World 2014). Both Ovum and Infonetics explore the slowdown in telecom revenues, especially in Europe. According to Infonetics, global mobile service revenue for the first half of 2014 rose barely 0.5% over the same period in 2013. However, Infonetics injects a positive note insofar as mobile data services (text messaging and mobile broadband) rose in every region, thanks to the increasing use of smartphones, and forecasts that the datacom market should continue to be healthy in 2015. According to Ovum (the research arm of Informa), mobile subscriptions will grow to 8.5 billion by the end of 2019. ITU predicts the number of Internet users will exceed 3 billion in 2015. WeAreSocial/Internet World Stats forecasts that mobile will help push Internet penetration beyond 50% of the world's population during late 2016, with some 2.7 billion smartphone "connections" worldwide (it is not altogether clear whether this means subscriptions or actively used phones). In their authoritative "Technology, Media and Telecommunications (TMT) Predictions report", Deloitte predicts that 1.4 billion smartphones will sell worldwide in 2015, with smartphone sales exceeding the sales of the PC, television, tablets and game console sectors combined in terms of both units and revenues. As mobile devices proliferate, Gartner predicts a shift in focus towards serving the needs of users in diverse contexts and environments, rather than just the features and functionality of devices. Gartner foresees that phones and wearable devices will form part of an expanding computing environment (including consumer electronics and connected screens). And it is not just humans who are getting connected. Many analysts agree that the Internet of Things (IoT) is coming of age, and foresee strong growth in IoT in their predictions. Deloitte forecasts that, in 2015, one billion wireless IoT devices will be shipped, up 60% on 2014, resulting in an installed base of 2.8 billion connected devices by the end of 2015. IDC predicts that IoT spending will exceed USD 1.7 trillion, up 14% from 2014 (and may reach USD 3 trillion by 2020). In contrast to many analysts who foresee a large part of the IoT as comprising wireless sensor networks, IDC sees the "industrial Internet of Things" as a mainly fixed-line phenomenon for the immediate future, forecasting that fixed-line networks are expected to carry over 90% of traffic for the industrial IoT. Ericsson ConsumerLab's annual report considers IoT from a consumer's perspective, suggesting that consumers want technology and connectivity to be integrated into all facets of their daily life. Ericsson also sees 2015 as a pivot point between streamed video and broadcast TV, and predicts that, for the first time, consumers will watch more streamed video than broadcast TV in 2015. PC Mag expects wearables to become "probably" the most popular category in tech in 2015. "Intelligence" is another widely used word, although opinions differ as to who — or more accurately, what — is becoming more intelligent. For IDC, it is the networks. For others, it is our entire connected environment. For GP Bullhound, a boutique investment bank specializing in technology companies, it is the smart devices in IoT which are becoming more intelligent, thanks to innovation in software and better utilization of data. From GP Bullhound's point of view, wearable devices (such as Fitbit and Jawbone) have proven helpful in tracking real-world activity and generating data, but they generally require too much input from consumers to make them genuinely "intelligent". More advanced devices will run always-on, context-aware applications in the background, which will automatically collect data from multiple sources, adapt, learn, update and, in some cases, take action without inputs or guidance from users. Some commentators take this a step further, suggesting that mobile traffic patterns and network loads are altering in response to network-initiated service requests (as found with smartphones via Long-Term Evolution (LTE) networks, for example). Mobile operators may need to review their network architecture, topology, and functionality to carry 4G traffic successfully, while providing good customer experience, and bolstering their profit margins. Two things are certain — innovation and evolution in telecommunication/ICT networks continue at an exciting pace, and no one can get bored watching or working in telecoms! (February 2015) itunews.itu.int

Lithuania

The Competition Council has cleared the acquisition of all shares in cable network operator Cgates by Motis Shipping Lithuania Limited, after determining that the transaction would not have a negative impact on competition in the market. Dormant company Motis Shipping is a subsidiary of Estonian cable TV subsidiary Starman, itself owned by Swedish investment group East Capital. As announced in December, Starman agreed to acquire Cgates from Advanced Broadband (43.6%), SEB Venture Capital (39.9%) and SEB Stiftelsen (16.5%) in a deal valued at EUR56.3 million (USD68 million). As part of the same deal, East Capital is to invest a further EUR23 million into Starman, raising its equity stake from 51% to 62%. Cgates is one of Lithuania's largest cable network operators, providing cable and digital television, fixed telephony and fiber-optic broadband internet to around 200,000 customers in the country's largest cities, including Vilnius, Alytus, Marijampole, Vilkaviskis, Silute, Lentvaris and Kaunas. (February 5, 2015) telegeography.com

Malta

The Malta Communications Authority (MCA) is to carry out a feasibility study into whether there is a need for a new submarine cable to link the island to mainland Europe and beyond. The authority says that 'Malta's broadband internet readiness is becoming increasingly pivotal in influencing the nation's global competitiveness,' with international connectivity being 'fundamental to the economy'. Although Malta does have existing international submarine links, the MCA says there is a need to enhance the resilience and quality of its international connections.

(February 3, 2015) telegeography.com

Nigeria

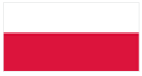
The Nigerian telecoms market is expected to generate revenue of $10.9 billion in 2019, up from a total of $9.2 billion in 2013 according to latest figures from Pyramid Research. The research company noted that service revenue was $9.8 billion in 2014, a 6.8% increase over 2013. It commented that although growth in the market will be slightly reduced in 2015, as the market recovers from the large number of fixed-line disconnections, long-term growth of the telecommunications sector would not be affected. Indeed, telecoms growth in the country is dominated by the mobile sector: with revenue of $7.3 billion, the mobile voice segment was the largest contributor towards overall telecoms revenue in 2014 - an increase of $219 million from 2013. Pyramid Research noted that Nigeria will remain the biggest market for mobile subscriptions on the African continent. As the largest economy on the continent, it will also play an important role in defining future mobile trends. Pyramid Research forecasts that mobile data and pay-TV will grow at compound annual growth rates (CAGRs) of 16% and 5.2% respectively from 2014 to 2019, to reach $3.8 billion and $647 million respectively. The number of mobile subscribers is expected to reach 182 million by the end of 2019, up from around 136 million active connections in November 2014, according to figures from the Nigeria Communications Commission (NCC). LTE subscriptions will account for around 8.1 million by this point, or 4.5% of total mobile subscriptions. The research company added that the NCC plans to auction spectrum in 2015, and said a number of operators have expressed interest in the opportunity. "Other countries in Africa are likely to follow Nigeria when it comes to mobile technology developments. The increasing demand for mobile data will offer service providers, as well as new entrants to the market, ample opportunity to test and grow their service offerings in Nigeria," said Severin Luebke, analyst at Pyramid Research. The top two operators, MTN Nigeria and Airtel Nigeria, which provide fixed-line, mobile and Internet services, accounted for 68% of overall service revenue in 2014. Both operators are investing in 3G and fiber networks to cater to the increasing demand for data and pay-TV services, Pyramid Research said.

(February 13, 2015) totaltele.com

The Broadband Council chaired by the minister of communications technology, Dr. Omobola Johnson, has ordered the Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC) to release 2.6 Gigahertz (GHz) in the first quarter of 2015 as well as ensure that Bitflux Communications Limited accelerated the pace of rollout nationwide to deepen broadband penetration. The Broadband Council which held its regular quarterly meeting on the February 3, 2015, evaluated the outlined milestones of the broadband plan and called for accelerated implementation. The minister acknowledged the progress made on the implementation of the Broadband Plan in the last 18 months, especially the increased capacity rolled out by telecom companies and other infrastructure providers which had resulted in a two per cent increase in broadband penetration in 2014. It also noted the successful auction of the 2.3GHz spectrum, licensing of the first two Infracos for metro fiber rollout and called on successful bidders to quickly rollout to improve the pace of implementation. She said that the council commended the trial of the television (TV) White Spaces approved by the NCC/Nigeria Broadcasting Commission (NBC) geared at reducing cost of internet access. It also commended the telecoms operators for their leadership in the area of base station infrastructure sharing and deployment and resolved that this needs to be extended to fiber. Of particular concern to the council, and the subject of extensive discussion during the meeting, was the need to increase the landing points of international submarine cables beyond Lagos to other coastal states. Additional landing points in the country would not only reduce vulnerability and risks associated with a single point of failure but would make it faster and cheaper to lay terrestrial cable from these points to other parts of the country. The council called on the NCC and the Universal Service Provision Fund (USPF) to look into the possibility of providing financial incentives to accelerate this and acknowledged that some milestones were missed due to schedule delays.

(February 10, 2015) leadership.ng

Poland



The Office of Electronic Communications (UKE) has completed a consultation into four fixed line market segments, including: market 3/2003 – the provision of domestic calls for consumers; market 4/2003 – the provision of international calls for consumers; market 5/2003 – the provision of domestic calls for businesses; and market 6/2003 – the provision of international calls for businesses. The regulator has found that competition is healthy in all four sectors and there is no operator with significant market power (SMP). It is therefore proposing to withdraw regulation in all four markets.

(February 5, 2015) telegeography.com

The Office of Electronic Communications (UKE) has announced that its auction of 800MHz and 2600MHz Long Term Evolution (LTE) 4G mobile spectrum is to begin on February 10. Six firms have already pre-registered as bidders: existing cellular providers Orange Polska, T-Mobile Poland, P4 and Polkomtel, plus Hubb Investments, which is controlled by broadcast infrastructure firm Emitel, and NetNet, which is owned by the son of a senior Polkomtel executive and business partner of Polkomtel shareholder Zygmunt Solorz-Zak.

(February 5, 2015) telegeography.com

Russia

The total number of mobile number portability (MNP) applications in Russia reached 1.462 million on 1 February 2015. However, of this figure, only 1.002 million numbers have successfully been ported to date. The article notes that most of the rejected applications relate to incomplete applications or a user's ineligibility to port their number. MNP was soft-launched in Russia on December 1, 2013 and went live on April 15, 2014.

(February 4, 2015) ComNews

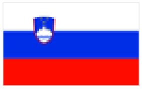
Serbia

State-backed incumbent Telekom Srbija has invited bids for an adviser to consult on the company's privatization. The telco issued the request in early February with the deadline for bids set at March 6 and a winner to be named by March 31. The candidate with the most economically favorable bid will be awarded the contract. The consultant will advise the company on the preparation and implementation of the privatization process, draft a valuation of its capital, find a strategic partner, prepare tender documents and carry out the sale process. Telekom is owned by the state (58.11%), itself (20.00%), private shareholders (14.95%) and employees (6.94%). (February 18, 2015) SeeNews

Slovakia

The Office for Regulation of Electronic Communications & Postal Services (RU) has awarded three wireless broadband spectrum licenses in the 3600MHz-3800MHz band for a combined EUR1.17 million (US$1.34 million). The nationwide concessions each offer 40MHz of frequencies and have been acquired by O2 Slovakia, SWAN and BENESTRA, which was formerly known as GTS Slovakia. The regulator is also selling spectrum in the 3400MHz-3600MHz band, with bids due by 18 February. (February 5, 2015) telegeography.com

Slovenia



Slovenian telcos Amis and Tusmobil have been ordered to cease the practice of 'zero rating', which offers users free access to certain websites or services as part of their tariff. Last month the Agency for Communications Networks & Services (Agencija za komunikacijska omrezja in storitve, AKOS) ruled that cellular operators Telekom Slovenije and Si.mobil had also been violating the country's net neutrality laws. Amis has been offering subscribers free access to its own website, webmail portal and its Amis MobiaTV services, while Tusmobil is offering free content from its Tuskabin portal.

(February 25, 2015) telegeography.com

South Africa

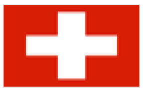
Work is beginning on a R84 billion "smart city" project in Modderfontein, South Africa, just east of Johannesburg. The developer, Chinese investment firm, Shanghai Zendai, plans on developing 1,600 hectares of land into an international commercial hub that it hopes will one day rival New York, Hong Kong, and London. Urban planners and developers are increasingly conceptualizing "smart cities" as they seek innovative ways to address population growth and the attendant increase in urbanization. The term "smart city" remains somewhat undefined but, at its core, it generally involves urban areas that incorporate emerging technologies to do everything from administering city services to improving education. Shanghai Zendai plans on developing the Modderfontein "smart city" over the next 15-20 years and will incorporate the "smart" concept by building digital connectivity directly into the development. According to Anthony Diepenbroek, CEO of Zendai Development SA, the developer is focused on more than world-class information and communications technology. It envisions the use of smart technology to reduce congestion, pollution, and energy consumption, as well as to deliver services such as health care, water, waste, and education. PCCW Global, the Hong Kong-headquartered international operating division of telecommunications service provider, HKT, will provide the technology. The Modderfontein development will include between 30,000 and 50,000 housing units, and may include a convention center, shopping, and a theme park, as well as educational, medical, and sports facilities. Located between the central business district of Sandton in Johannesburg and the OR Tambo International Airport, the site is on the Gautrain route and will add a Modderfontein station. It is currently projected to house 100,000 residents and will likely become a hub for Chinese firms investing in sub-Saharan Africa. Shanghai Zendai purchased the 1,600 hectares of land for the development from South Africa's chemicals and explosives company AECI for R1.06 billion in 2013. It plans on investments of approximately R84 billion over the next fifteen years. The transaction represents one of the largest single foreign direct investments in South Africa. Zendai anticipates that the completed development will create between 100,000 to 200,000 white- and blue-collar jobs. Based on the 15-year development period and developer data, the Bureau for Economic Research (BER) anticipates that the construction phase will contribute R13.5 billion to the economy and more than 21,000 jobs annually.

(February 24, 2015) natlawreview.com

Sweden

Post and Telecom Agency (PTS) issued twin final decisions which ease regulation in wholesale broadband access markets, driven by positive competition developments as well as recent European Union (EU) recommendations. In the market for 'central access' (market '3b', including bitstream access) the existing regulatory obligations have been repealed altogether, whilst in the market for 'local access' (market '3a', including local loop unbundling [LLU]) price regulation has been eased on fiber-based connections. In the market for local access (3a) the PTS has enhanced the 'obligation of non-discrimination' (or EoI – Equivalence of Input). This means that the incumbent PSTN operator, TeliaSonera, will provide the same services and information externally and internally and on the same terms, within the same time frame and with the same systems and processes. Under the new rules, on December 1, 2016 TeliaSonera will have implemented an 'enhanced obligation of non-discrimination' alongside the easing of price regulation for fiber access. Price regulation will subsequently be replaced by an obligation on economic replicability, meaning that TeliaSonera must not price discriminate on the wholesale market or unfairly squeeze retail market prices; other players may then compete on commercially reasonable terms. The PTS notes that its decision to discontinue regulating the market for central access (3b) is based on the effective competition in the market, with TeliaSonera no longer deemed to hold the status of a dominant player. Director General of the PTS, stated that Sweden has a strong development in fiber deployment where multiple operators are investing. With these new rules we want to stimulate market competition and customer choice and provide conditions for continued investment. (February 20, 2015) telegeography.com

Switzerland



Swiss regulator ComCom has given its approval to Xavier Niel's planned takeover of Orange Switzerland. "Neither the license conditions nor competition in the mobile telephony market will be adversely affected by this takeover," ComCom, or the Swiss Federal Communications Commission, said in a statement late last week. Doubtless the deal sailed through the regulatory process since it does not involve multiple operators. French businessman Niel agreed to acquire Orange Switzerland – via his NJJ Capital investment vehicle – from Apax Partners late last year for 2.8 billion Swiss francs (€2.3 billion). Apax bought the unit from Orange group three years ago after the French firm deemed it a non-core asset. Specifically, ComCom has given the green light for the transfer of Orange's spectrum licenses to Xavier Niel. The parties involved in the deal applied for the regulator's permission to transfer the licenses in January and, after an investigation, ComCom ruled that the move will not impact on competition and that Orange Switzerland will continue to comply with the conditions of the licenses. (February 16, 2015) totaltele.com

Tanzania

The Tanzania Communications Regulatory Authority (TCRA) is set to take measures against Tanzania's three largest mobile operators by subscribers, namely Vodacom, Airtel and Tigo, for 'substantially' reducing the prices and data allowances relating to their daily, weekly and monthly voice, SMS and data bundles earlier this month, without prior regulatory consent. All Africa cites TCRA communications manager as saying that the TCRA is not regulating promotional tariffs, but the law directs [telecoms providers] to notify us prior [to introducing changes] … [changes should be] gradual and not abrupt, to avoid shocks in the markets. The TCRA has issued a public notice, indicating it will: 'take the necessary regulatory measures to ensure that service providers comply with the law. Section 5(2) and 12(2) of the Electronic and Postal Communications (Tariffs regulations) of 2011 require service providers to file their new tariff plans with the authority prior to their being used. The authority shall impose penalties as shall be necessary.' (February 25, 2015) telegeography.com

Bharti Airtel has finally agreed to sell its 35% stake in Tanzania Telecommunication Company Limited (TTCL) to the Tanzanian government, it has been reported. The shares will be sold for TZS14.0 billion (US$7.7 million), bringing the company under full state control for the first time since its part-privatization back in February 2001. Makamba, deputy minister for communication, science and technology, noted that the government will now be better placed to invest in developing the company's fixed line and CDMA mobile operations, also noting that despite media claims to the contrary, TTCL is not going bankrupt; Makamba stated that the telco's revenue increased from TZS80 billion in 2010 to TZS93 billion in 2013. Bharti Airtel rejected a TZS5 billion offer from the government in November last year, with the Indian firm said to be holding out for TZS21.5 billion at that time. (February 2, 2015) The Tanzania Daily News

Thailand

National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission (NBTC) has tasked its legal advisory panel to study the feasibility of auctioning off an idle 25MHz block of 1800MHz spectrum currently held by Digital Total Access Communication (DTAC). The study will focus on three key issues: whether DTAC could hand over the dormant spectrum to the NBTC without the need to ask for permission from state-owned spectrum owner CAT Telecom; whether the NBTC could reclaim the spectrum; and whether the NBTC could auction off the spectrum before DTAC's concession expires in September 2018. DTAC was founded in August 1989 and awarded a build-transfer-operate (BTO) contract by CAT Telecom the following November, giving it 2×50MHz in the 1800MHz frequency band, alongside 2×10MHz in the 850MHz range. The contract was originally set to run for 15 years but was extended in 1996 until the start of 2018. Under the agreement, DTAC pays CAT 30% of revenues (increased from 25% in September 2011 and 20% in September 2006). November 2014 saw the NBTC confirm plans to stage an auction for 4G mobile spectrum permits in the 900MHz and 1800MHz spectrum bands by September 2015, following the one-year postponement of its original plans imposed by the military government in June last year. True Corp and AIS subsidiary Digital Phone were allowed to continue using their 1800MHz frequencies to serve 2G mobile users for an extended period after the concessions expired in September 2013, while AIS's 900MHz frequencies are due to expire in September 2015.

(February 16, 2015) Nation Multimedia

Uganda

Telecoms regulator the Uganda Communications Commission (UCC) has warned that it could shut down access to social networking sites for national security reasons, if the websites are misused. Speaking at a press conference marking the recent launch of Vodafone Uganda, UCC Executive Director Godfrey Mutabazi told reporters that social media is a 'very good invention' that would 'transform' Uganda but warned that if it is abused, the government would be forced to take drastic measures, adding that it 'has the capacity to shut it down.' The official went on: 'I can assure you, if you destabilize the country through social media, it will be taken away.' (February 12, 2015) NTV

Ukraine

Ukraine's big three mobile network operators this week won licenses to offer 3G services. An auction of spectrum in the 1900-2100 MHz band on Monday raised a total of 8.77 billion hryvnia (€274 million), based on separate announcements from the operators. Turkcell-owned Life was the biggest spender in the contest, securing lot one for UAH3.36 billion (€105 million). MTS won lot two for UAH2.72 billion and Kyivstar said it paid UAH2.7 billion for lot three. Under the terms of their 15-year licenses, the telcos are required to launch services within six months and cover the Ukraine's regional centers within 18 months. Ukraine is behind much of the rest of the world when it comes to launching 3G services, but the country's mobile operators are confident they will be quick off the mark now licenses have been awarded. "Over the last three years MTS has invested over US$500 million towards the modernization of our networks throughout Ukraine, which will enable us to quickly launch 3G networks," said Andrei Dubovskov, MTS group CEO, in a statement. "The licence will allow us to quickly offer customers access to high-speed mobile Internet and value-added services," he added. "In the coming years, mobile data will become the key driver of revenue growth for our business in the region." Similarly, Kyivstar said it hopes the spectrum allocation will help bring Ukraine into line with the rest of the world. Meanwhile, company president Petro Chernyshov said he was pleased to have won a 3G license at the base rate set by the regulator. As a result, "we can concentrate our efforts on building the network," he said. "The more we invest in the network, the better the communication quality and coverage will be." For its part, Turkcell said that securing lot one in the auction is evidence of its commitment to the market. "As a global leader in technology, Turkcell is looking forward to bringing its know-how and leadership to Ukraine on its journey to 3G," said the Turkish operator's acting CEO Ilker Kuruoz. Kuruoz, who also serves as chief technology officer of Turkcell, took on the top job after the resignation of longtime CEO Sureyya Ciliv late last month. The operator is in the process of recruiting a new chief executive.

Ukraine 3G spectrum allocations: Life 1920-1935 MHz/2110-2125 MHz; MTS 1950-1965 MHz/2140-2155 MHz; Kyivstar 1965-1980 MHz/2155-2170 MHz.

(February 24, 2015) totaltele.com

The initial bids lodged in the Ukraine's long awaited auction of 3G frequencies have been opened at a meeting of the National Commission for the State Regulation of Communications and Informatization (NCCIR) and its tender commission. MTS Ukraine offered the highest bids, committing to pay UAH2.708 billion (US$101.1 million) for Lot 1, UAH2.715 billion for Lot 2 and UAH2.705 billion for Lot 3. Rival operator Kyivstar reportedly offered UAH2.705 billion, UAH2.710 billion and UAH2.700 billion, respectively, for three spectrum lots, while Astelit lodged identical UAH2.703 billion offers for all three concessions. The paired frequencies up for grabs are in the bands: 1920MHz-1935MHz and 2110MHz-2125MHz; 1950MHz-1965MHz and 2140MHz-2155MHz; and 1965MHz-1980MHz and 2155MHz-2170MHz. Going forward, the regulator plans to decide on the spectrum allocations on February 23. The license winners will be required to provide 3G services in every regional centre of Ukraine within 18 months of the concessions being issued. Within six years 3G connectivity should be offered in all villages with a population of over 10,000. (February 18, 2015) Interfax-Ukraine

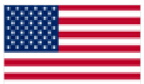
United Kingdom

Telecoms regulator OFCOM has published a consultation on whether a recently announced obligation for the nation's mobile network operators to boost coverage should affect how much they will pay for their revised annual license fees. Earlier this month, OFCOM announced it had varied the licenses of all UK cellcos – EE, O2 UK, Vodafone UK and Hutchison 3G UK – with a view to improving mobile coverage across the country. As per the license variations all four cellcos have committed to providing voice coverage across 90% of the UK's territory by the end of 2017. At the time of announcing the license variations, OFCOM said it would consult further on the annual license fees for the 900MHz and 1800MHz spectrum bands, noting that the Government had directed it in 2010 to revise the charges to reflect full market value after the completion of the 4G auction. Now, in launching the consultation OFCOM said its initial view is that while there could be incremental costs incurred by the mobile operators in meeting the coverage obligation, this is 'unlikely to have a material effect on the market value of the spectrum', though it said it is 'open to considering alternative views before reaching a final decision'. Provisional decisions on the revised license fees have been set out, though these are subject to consulting on the impact of the geographic coverage obligation on them. According to the proposals, total fees payable by the UK's operators would be GBP223 million (US$343 million) per year, a figure which it noted was 10% lower than earlier proposals it had made in August 2014. The lower fees, it said, reflected: a reduction in the discount rate that OFCOM considers to be appropriate when converting a 'lump-sum value' (of the type paid by licensees when they acquire a license in an auction) into an equivalent annual payment; and a reduction in the assessment of the market value of the 1800MHz band (expressed as a lump-sum value). (February 19, 2015) telegeography.com

OFCOM has given the go-ahead for mobile broadband to make use of TV white spaces following the successful outcome of extensive tests and trials with Google, Microsoft and other public and private organizations across the UK. The UK regulator said it is now putting in place the foundations for industry to use these white spaces, defined as gaps in the radio spectrum in frequency bands currently used for digital terrestrial TV and wireless microphones, among other services, in the 470 MHz–790 MHz spectrum band. It added that commercial applications could emerge by the end of the year. Essentially, the decision by OFCOM allows new technology called white spaces devices to access the unused parts of the radio spectrum in this frequency band. The white spaces devices will share the band with the existing uses, Digital Terrestrial Television (DTT), including local TV, and Program Making and Special Events (PMSE), including in particular wireless microphone users. To avoid harmful interference being caused to existing spectrum users, databases will apply rules, set by OFCOM, to put limits on the power levels at which these devices can operate. "This decision helps ensure the UK takes a leading role in the development of innovative new wireless technology," said Steve Unger, acting CEO of OFCOM. "It is also an important step in helping the UK's wireless infrastructure evolve effectively and efficiently." OFCOM added that the UK is among the first countries in Europe to provide spectrum specifically for this technology, which it said will form a major part of the "Internet of Things" (IoT). The regulator said it is also exploring how the white space in other spectrum bands could be used for similar innovation in the future. OFCOM has already issued a statement outlining an appropriate regulatory framework that it hopes will foster the development of the IoT. In January, the regulator said that 40 million IoT devices are already up and running in the UK, and it expects an eight-fold increase in this figure by 2022. (February 12, 2015) totaltele.com

Telecoms regulator OFCOM has published a draft decision following the conclusion of its review of the wholesale mobile call termination markets for the period April 1, 2015 –March 31, 2018, saying that in reaching its final decision on the matter it had 'considered the significant developments that have occurred in the mobile market in the last three years, recognizing that the UK mobile sector has changed in ways that are relevant to this market review'. Back in June 2014 OFCOM unveiled plans to reduce mobile termination rates (MTRs) further, despite saying that the rate had fallen 'significantly' in recent years on the back of its previous intervention. Now, in a draft statement following that consultation, the watchdog has confirmed that all of the nation's mobile network operators from April 1, 2015 MTRs will remain capped at the current level of GBP0.0817 (US$0.12) per minute (at 2012/13 prices) until May 1, 2015, at which date the rate will be reduced to a maximum of GBP0.657 per minute. Looking further ahead, two further reductions are scheduled, with cellcos able to charge no more than GBP0.491 per minute from April 1, 2016, and GBP0.477 per minute from April 1, 2017. OFCOM noted that the European Commission (EC) has been notified of the draft decision, and once this notification process is complete it said it expects to publish a final statement to bring its decisions into effect. (February 9, 2015) telegeography.com

United States



Tom Wheeler, the chairman of the Federal Communications Commission, confirmed that he will be submitting tough new rules on net neutrality to the FCC this week and will propose using Title II authority to implement and enforce open Internet protections. Writing in an op-ed in Wired, Wheeler said he is submitting "the strongest open internet protections ever proposed by the FCC. These enforceable, bright-line rules will ban paid prioritization, and the blocking and throttling of lawful content and services." Importantly, Wheeler plans to propose that the rules are also fully applied to mobile broadband for the first time. He also said his proposal will modernize Title II of the Communications Act, which would reclassify broadband providers as common carriers, rather than information services, subjecting them to stricter rules governing prices and how they manage traffic on their networks. "For example, there will be no rate regulation, no tariffs, no last-mile unbundling. Over the last 21 years, the wireless industry has invested almost $300 billion under similar rules, proving that modernized Title II regulation can encourage investment and competition," Wheeler added. The FCC is due to vote on the matter on February 26. Lobbyists on both sides of the debate have made their voices heard loud and clear. Consumer advocates and over-the-top (OTT) companies want the FCC to use Title II to prevent big players from paying ISPs to prioritize their services and squeeze smaller players out of the market. Meanwhile, telcos have repeatedly pointed out that they support the open Internet, and therefore using the Communications Act – drawn up in 1934 – is unnecessary, overbearing, and may hamper investment. (February 5, 2015) totaltele.com

For the last year, Tom Wheeler, chairman of the Federal Communications Commission, has been working on new rules to ensure so-called net neutrality, or an open Internet. Over that time, his hints and comments have shown a steady shift toward stronger regulation — and a more direct confrontation with the cable television and telecommunications companies that provide high-speed Internet service to most American homes. But on Wednesday, Mr. Wheeler went further than some industry analysts had expected and even beyond the recommendations of President Obama, who in November urged the commission to adopt the "strongest possible rules," in a surprising public admonition to an independent agency. First, Mr. Wheeler proposed regulating consumer Internet service as a public utility, saying it was the right path to net neutrality. He also included provisions to protect consumer privacy and to ensure Internet service is available for people with disabilities and in remote areas. Mr. Wheeler's plan would also for the first time give the F.C.C. enforcement powers to police practices in the marketplace for handling of data before it enters the gateway network into people's households — the so-called interconnect market. For good measure, he added a "future conduct" standard to cover unforeseen problems. Some industry analysts expected Mr. Wheeler to leave some rules out of this order, partly to create a narrower target for legal challenges. Yet he chose to add the other provisions to the main thrust of his plan, which is to reclassify high-speed Internet service as a telecommunications service, instead of an information service, under Title II of the Telecommunications Act. "Once you've decided to take the bold step — apply Title II — and open yourself up to attacks from the industry and in court, it makes sense to put in everything you want," said Kevin Werbach, a former F.C.C. counsel and an associate professor at the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania. Mr. Wheeler announced the basics of his plan in an op-ed article on Wired's website Wednesday morning. Senior F.C.C. officials elaborated at a briefing later in the day. The open Internet order, the F.C.C. officials said, will give the commission strong legal authority to ensure that no content is blocked and that the Internet is not divided into pay-to-play fast lanes for Internet and media companies that can afford it and slow lanes for everyone else. Those prohibitions are hallmarks of the net neutrality concept. Mr. Wheeler was widely expected to take the Title II approach after President Obama urged the commission to do so. And the politics surrounding net neutrality were influenced by the nearly four million public comments the F.C.C. received last year, the vast majority urging forceful action. Mr. Wheeler also plans to place mobile data service under the open Internet order and its Title II powers. Since the 1990s, mobile voice service has been regulated under Title II, using the light-touch model Mr. Wheeler intends to apply to broadband Internet service. That approach, for example, has shunned the regulation of pricing decisions made by cellphone operators and most business dealings between private companies to manage their mobile networks. Mr. Wheeler has taken an ambitious step to forge a net neutrality policy, but its path ahead is anything but certain. Mr. Wheeler will circulate his proposal to other F.C.C. commissioners on Thursday, and the plan could be modified. The proposal is subject to a vote by the full commission on Feb. 26. The commission typically decides major decisions by 3-2 votes, with the two other Democrats joining Mr. Wheeler. If the proposal is approved, as expected, the cable and telecommunications companies have vowed to fight it in court. "The agency is reaching for very broad powers here," said Justin Hurwitz, an assistant professor at the Nebraska College of Law. "Whether Title II applies to the Internet is very open to debate." In Congress, Republicans are circulating draft legislation that embraces the essence of net neutrality by prohibiting content blocking and the creation of fast and slow lanes on the Internet. But their proposal would prevent the F.C.C. from issuing regulations to achieve those goals. The opponents of utility-style rules, led by the cable and telecommunications companies, view the approach as opening a door to heavy-handed regulation that will deter investment and innovation, ultimately harming consumers. Michael Powell, F.C.C. chairman in the Bush administration and president of the National Cable and Telecommunications Association, said in a statement that Mr. Wheeler's plan would place a "heavy burden" on broadband services and go "beyond the worthy goal of establishing important net neutrality protections." Supporters of the Title II model include major Internet companies like Google, Facebook, Amazon and Netflix, as well as start-up companies and many public interest groups. They view the strong rules as a necessary safeguard because the Internet is increasingly the essential gateway of communication and commerce in modern life. A robust regulatory framework, they say, will ensure continued business innovation and diversity of expression. Gene Kimmelman, president of Public Knowledge, a public advocacy group that backs Title II rules, called Mr. Wheeler's proposal a "historic initiative" to preserve an Internet system of innovation and free expression. But Mr. Kimmelman, a former antitrust official in the Obama administration, said Mr. Wheeler's proposal represented a "natural progression" as government tries to find an appropriate regulatory framework for rapid technological change, powerful corporations and the public interest.

(February 4, 2015) nytimes.com

The Federal Communications Commission will put its legal weight behind a petition that would preempt laws in North Carolina and Tennessee that restrict the ability of community broadband networks to expand operations. FCC Chairman Tom Wheeler will urge his fellow commissioners — and is expected to obtain support from a majority of them — to vote against restrictions on municipality-supported networks in Chattanooga, Tenn., and Wilson, North Carolina. "After looking carefully at petitions by two community broadband providers asking the FCC to pre-empt provisions of state laws preventing expansion of their very successful networks, I recommend approval by the Commission so that these two forward-thinking cities can serve the many citizens clamoring for a better broadband future," Wheeler said in a statement. Wheeler intends for the agency to take the action at its open meeting on February 26, 2015. The proposed preemption of state restrictions will be limited to the laws of North Carolina and Wilson, agency officials said, because those were the state putting forward a petition for preemption. According to a fact sheet released Monday by the agency, "the proposed order finds that certain provisions of the state laws are

barriers to broadband investment and competition and that preemption is warranted." Agency officials said in a conference call that Congress and the FCC have the power to regulate interstate commerce and interstate communication. Because internet access crosses state lines, these officials said, the FCC has the authority to preempt state laws when acting pursuant to a specific grant of authority. Agency officials said that FCC will take the action under Section 706 of the Telecommunications Act, which directs the FCC to remove barriers to broadband competition. Agency officials distinguished the new preemption from a 2004 Supreme Court decision, Nixon v. Missouri Municipal League, upholding states' authority to limit telecommunications competition from municipalities. "While states retain authority to grant or withhold the ability of their cities and towns to enter the broadband market, once states have granted that authority, they may not impose on community providers regulatory burdens that act as barriers to infrastructure investment and competition," the agency said in a fact sheet released Monday. The move by Wheeler comes less than three weeks after President Obama announced efforts to end laws that harm broadband competition, steps to support a growing national movement of local leaders for Gigabit Networks, and new federal funding and a new initiative to support community broadband. Next Century Cities, a new group designed to foster ultra-high-speed connectivity by cities reacted favorably. "Any move to expand choices for towns and cities is good for innovation, competition, and for the country," said the group's Executive Director Deb Socia. "Just last week, mayors and elected officials from 38 of our member communities wrote urging the FCC to respect the principles of local choice and self-determination. We applaud the Chairman on his response, and this draft decision is a key step forward."
(February 3, 2015) broadbandbreakfast.com

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) is set to fine AT&T US$640,000 for operating point-to-point (PTP) microwave sites in unauthorized spectrum bands for the last five years. PTP microwave is typically used to backhaul traffic at cell sites that are not linked through wired backhaul facilities. During its investigation, the FCC's Enforcement Bureau examined the licensing history of approximately 250 AT&T sites and found AT&T was illegally using spectrum at 26 of those sites and failed to notify the FCC regarding minor modifications of an additional eight stations within the past year. The FCC report notes that AT&T has acknowledged that it operated sites using spectrum bands outside those for which it is licensed. Many of the sites are believed to have been inherited through acquisitions, including AT&T's purchase of Centennial Communications, and the purchase of wireless assets from Verizon Communications following required divestitures from its purchase of Alltel. The Centennial deal, which was announced in 2008, included assets covering portions of the mid-west and south-east US, as well as Puerto Rico and the US Virgin Islands. The Alltel asset acquisition in question was completed in mid-2010.
(February 2, 2015) telegeography.com

Vanuatu

Telecommunications and Radiocommunications Regulator (TRR) has issued regulatory authorization exceptions to three major wholesale telecoms providers – InterChange Limited (ICL, operator of the InterChange Submarine Cable), Fidelity Communications Corporation (FCC) and Speedcast – in accordance with the TRR Act of 2009 which specifies that telecoms services are only to be provided 'under or in accordance with a license or exception'. The regulator has determined that ICL, FCC and Speedcast do not need licenses to provide their respective wholesale services, as the three companies do not provide retail services directly to end-users. The exceptions came into effect on February 11. (February 23, 2015) telegeography.com

Venezuela

National Telecommunications Commission (CONATEL) has launched a public consultation to determine its wireless frequency auction agenda in 2015 and beyond, aiming to establish the segments of spectrum available and decide which of these will be sold at public auction or granted directly by the government for national projects. Under scrutiny is the draft Administrative Order for the National Table of Frequency Allocations. In December 2014 Venezuela awarded 4G LTE licenses worth a total of US$729 million to state-owned Movilnet, Spanish-backed Movistar and DirecTV (which in the process of being acquired by US giant AT&T). CONATEL also launched a public consultation on the operation of telephony services nationwide, as part of a scheduled series of consultations which seek to define strategies for telephone service quality, telecoms security, customer prices and internet access. The initial telephony consultation goal is to identify problems facing users nationally and design solutions to address them. The results will be published on the regulator's website and disseminated to all stakeholders in the sector. (February 5, 2015) Telesemana

Vietnam

Vietnam is set to introduce a new numbering plan for landline and mobile phones on March 1, in a move aimed at standardizing existing numbers to make room for future growth. Under the changes, all eleven-digit mobile numbers will be shortened to ten digits, while new fixed line area codes will be assigned to 59 of the country's 63 provinces. 'Over these 50 years, the environment of telecoms business and telecoms technology has changed swiftly,' the news agency quotes Le Nam Thang, Deputy Minister of Information and Communications, as saying in a January directive announcing the changes. According to Vietnam Briefing, the old numbers will remain in operation for the next two years to give businesses time to make the switchover.
(February 2, 2015) reuters.com

Zimbabwe

The ICT ministry has effectively cancelled Telecel's operating license. The move by the official was due to the mobile operator's alleged failure to settle its outstanding debt. The debt incurred, according to Nehan Radio, is currently at USD 137.5 million – which was initially for the license fee. According to ICT Minister Supa Mandiwanzira, the authority has confirmed the cancellation of Telecel's license. Vimpelcom owns 60 percent of Telecel Zimbabwe while exiled businessman James Makamba, and politician Jane Mutasa, own the remaining stake. In addition to the cancellation Mandiwanzira stated that: "The ICT Ministry is cancelling the agreement Telecel made with government to pay the $137,5 million license over time." According to the report, Econet Wireless remains the only telecommunications company to have paid the R1.6 billion license. Telecel was the second largest operator and has more than 2,2 million subscribers against the country's total population of 11,4 million subscribers. According to Mandiwanzira Telecel has been operating without a license since the expiry of their license. They need to have paid US$ 137,5 million, which is the license fee due to Government. They failed to pay, they asked for payment terms and they were granted payment terms through an agreement with the Ministry of ICTs, and they have even reneged on that agreement; therefore, the ministry, or Government, has cancelled that agreement." "Effectively this means that they are operating without a licence – in fact they have not had a license anyway. The reason why we are allowing them to operate is simply because we acknowledge that as a business, they employ Zimbabweans; they have subscribers who, if we take drastic action, will be inconvenienced," Mandiwanzira said. Mandiwanzira further stressed the point that if Telecel attempts to sell off company assets, it runs the risk of said transactions being perceived as fraudulent. This is due to the operator failing to settle debt regarding its license. Mandiwanzira added that: "Potential investors in the business should engage Government since it was the licensing authority. Government will engage investors to negotiate for the value of the shareholding with a potential view to buy them out." (February 24, 2015) itnewsafrica.com

Firstel Cellular, a Zimbabwean mobile retailer, has been ordered to pay US$8 million to state-owned cellular network operator NetOne for unpaid royalties. Firstel had inked an agreement to sign up new subscribers for NetOne services, with Firstel to be paid by way of commission on each customer it attracted. With the crash of the Zimbabwean currency and the subsequent introduction of a multi-currency system, Firstel struggled to collect the monies owed from subscribers. While Firstel argued that it should not be liable to cover the unpaid bills as it could receive no commission on a defaulted payment, the Supreme Court has now upheld an earlier court ruling which said that it must pay NetOne regardless of whether the subscriber settled the initial bill or not. (February 2, 2015) The Herald

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WHOLESALE NEWS

WHOLESALE UPDATES

East Africa sets July deadline to harmonize roaming rates

Communications ministers in the five East African Community members states have been given up to July to harmonize roaming rates in the region. The directive was issued through a joint communiqué signed by the presidents of the five countries following the 16th heads of state summit held in Nairobi, yesterday. Tanzania and Burundi finally agreed to join the drive for common roaming rate to cut the cost of calling across borders in the bloc. It was started by Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania. "The summit directed the council to expedite implementation of the framework for harmonized roaming charges, including the removal of surcharges for international telecommunications traffic originating and terminating within the East African Community by July 15, 2015," the statement read. Present at the summit were presidents Pierre Nkurunzinza (Burundi), Jakaya Kikwete (Tanzania), Uhuru Kenyatta (Kenya) Yoweri Museveni (Uganda) and Paul Kagame of Rwanda. High call rates across borders has been cited as one of the biggest hindrance to economic integration in the region, as countries imposed high taxes for international calls terminating within their borders. Under the northern corridor infrastructure summit last year, Kenya, Uganda and Rwanda agreed to limit the maximum roaming charges in the three countries at about Sh9 ($0.10) per minute for retail and Sh6.21 ($0.069) for wholesale. On September 1, the three States published gazette notices to implement roaming tariffs within the one area network. The plan is expected to spur international trade with the community, which has been on the decline over the past few years. On Thursday, manufacturers in Kenya said they were concerned that the contraction of trade between Kenya and the countries in the East African Community could hurt their revenues. Trade between Kenya and Tanzania, Rwanda, Uganda and Burundi declined by Sh10 billion in 2013 and the gap could be bigger when the 2014 statistics are out. "The government has focused too much on what happened in the few years to 2012 when there was tremendous growth in the value of trade with the region. But if you look at 2013, you will see that there is a crisis. A lot needs to be done for this to change because the community is a very important market for us," Kenya Association of Manufacturers chief executive Betty Maina said. Ms. Maina noted that the trend is worrying given that manufacturers have always found their biggest export market in East Africa. She was speaking during a forum on market expansion, Kenya's foreign trade policy and challenges facing the regional market. "It is a big concern for us and we are reaching out to our counterparts in the regional governments to see if there are interventions we can make at policy level as well fast-tracking the implementation of already established initiatives," Mr. James Kiiru, a director at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Trade said. Kenya Association of Manufacturers said it was ready to host a meeting with government officials to help check the decline in trade.

MCMC to launch review of retail rates

The Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) has welcomed a call from the country's communications minister Dato' Sri Ahmad Shabery Cheek for telcos to reduce prices of communications services. With the minister having argued that such a move would benefit end users in the long term, in a press release commenting on the matter, MCMC chairman Dato' Sri Dr. Halim Shafie supported such an assertion, saying that affordable prices for services such as fixed broadband would not only ease the financial burden on the general public, but also increase take-up, ensuring that lower income citizens are not 'left behind in this digital era'. Further, it was suggested that affordable prices for broadband packages would likely create more demand for content, which in turn would help stimulate the development of the local content industry. With a view to realizing the goal of lowering the cost of access, the MCMC chairman has said that the regulator plans to carry out a review of retail rates, and will work together with the industry to develop broadband packages for the long term benefit of end users. '[The] MCMC is also planning to have series of discussion with the industry in the second quarter of this year regarding the retail price regulation to ensure that the regulations remain current in view of the fast evolving Communications and Multimedia sector,' Dr. Halim confirmed.

APT and Taiwan Mobile fined over roaming alliance

Asia Pacific Telecom (APT) and Taiwan Mobile have each been fined TWD300,000 (USD9,548) by the National Communications Commission (NCC) for failing to report their 4G roaming alliance to the regulator as required by administrative policy, the Taipei Times reports. In handing out the penalty, the NCC said it had found that the two operators had signed a roaming partnership agreement on 25 September 2014, though it noted that this did not include any financial terms, with a supplementary agreement inked on 12 December agreeing the costs of the partnership. With APT said to have then submitted details of the agreement to the authorities on 17 December, NCC spokesperson Yu Hsiao-cheng argued that the telco should, in fact, have made the regulator aware of the deal within a month of the signing of the initial agreement in September. For its part, APT has argued that it fulfilled its legal requirement, as the complete agreement was not reached until mid-December. Commenting on the matter, Yu said: 'It is customary in the industry for two telecoms to forge a roaming partnership without settling on an exact cost first ... It was decided that such agreement should be reported within one month after it is first signed; on 25 September in this case. Each carrier was fined TWD300,000 for violating the Regulations Governing Mobile Telecommunications Businesses.'

Further punishment may yet be forthcoming, however, with Yu cited as saying that the NCC is now planning to address other alleged violations of the nation's telecoms regulations by APT. Such violations are said to include the operator's failure to construct as many base stations as it had promised in its business plan; according to the regulator's spokesperson, APT had said it would build some 2,000 base stations nationwide to offer 4G services, a target it has been claimed it has not achieved. Meanwhile, it has also been suggested that another area of examination relates to the fact that APT had allegedly made a unilateral decision to change from utilising voice-over-LTE (VoLTE) technology to offer voice services over its network, with it instead having opted to use circuit-switched fallback. Failure to fulfill the commitments it had made in its business plan could lead to fines of anything between TWD300,000 and TWD3 million, the NCC has said.

Syniverse brings LTE roaming to Switzerland

Syniverse announced a multiyear agreement with Sunrise, enabling one of the largest telecommunications providers in Switzerland to provide its subscribers and visiting roamers with unparalleled LTE quality and speed anywhere in the world. The agreement to support Sunrise's LTE roaming launch includes Syniverse's globally interconnected IPX Network Solution – the network backbone that makes LTE roaming possible – as well as the critical Syniverse Diameter Signaling Service. "Syniverse's portfolio of LTE enablement solutions advances our mobile service offerings to meet users' demands for quality service at home and abroad," said Mariateresa Vacalli, Executive Director, Wholesale, Sunrise. "With the worldwide connectivity that Syniverse provides us, our subscribers enjoy seamless access to all of their services, regardless of our roaming partner's network, while also supporting services in the future like VoLTE." The enhanced roaming capability Sunrise achieves through Syniverse's IPX network is supported in part by Syniverse's Diameter Signaling Service, which enables signaling routing and interoperability. Together, these solutions deliver multiple class-of-service levels to support voice, data and video with guaranteed security. "Through a single connection to Syniverse's IPX network, Sunrise gains connectivity to Syniverse's vast customer base of nearly 1,000 mobile service providers worldwide," said John Wick, Senior Vice President and General Manager, Mobile Transaction Services, Syniverse. "Syniverse's one-connection-to-multiple-services approach is a cost-effective way for Sunrise to boost operational efficiencies by reducing the number of network connections it must manage on its own." For the past 25 years, Syniverse has provided interoperable solutions for SS7 to C7, CDMA to GSM, and 2G/3G to LTE and VoLTE. Additionally, Syniverse signaling experts helped write the industry's LTE roaming standards, which have played a critical role in helping mobile operators conduct end-to-end LTE roaming trials and commercial launches. The company's LTE solutions currently process more than 6 billion LTE transactions per month on behalf of more than 23 million monthly LTE roamers. This is made possible by the Syniverse IPX network that provides more than 500 connections to mobile providers worldwide. Examples of the company's LTE leadership include Syniverse's agreement to provide IPX to Softbank Mobile and to enable The Alaska Wireless Network to launch LTE roaming with a major Tier 1 North America operator.

OECS calls for removal of roaming rates

The St Lucia-based Organization of Eastern States (OECS) Commission is calling for the removal of roaming fees attached to mobile calls between the nine-member sub-regional grouping. "We're not talking about the fancy marketing glitz of something called home roaming or anything like that. We want the removal of roaming," said OECS Director General Dr Didacus Jules. The OECS countries have been arguing that since they have formed a

single economic union, they should not have to pay roaming charges between Antigua and Barbuda, Dominica, Grenada, St Lucia, St Vincent and the Grenadines, St Kitts-Nevis, Montserrat, Anguilla and the British Virgin Islands. Jules, speaking prior to leaving here for the OECS summit that opens in the French island of Martinique later on Wednesday, said that "if the OECS is a single economic space, the same way you can make a call from Castries to Vieux Fort, the same way you should make a call from Castries to St Georges or Castries to St John's. "It cannot be a roaming call," he added. The OECS position comes also against the backdrop of efforts by the sub-region to make Information Communication Technology more accessible and affordable to consumers in the sub-region. Telecommunication service providers have been calling on government to tax Voice over Internet Protocol applications such as Skype and Viber, which they say are impacting negatively on their businesses. But Jules said such a position by the service providers is not feasible. "What these facilities have brought in terms of value for money proposition to the use of the internet and to the cost of doing business especially for small business people and even at a family level for families being able to keep in touch with their loved ones in the Diaspora. "It cannot be subject to taxation and so on because it is a real material benefit," he added. Earlier this week, Grenada's Prime Minister Dr Keith Mitchell said roaming charges pose a challenge to an integrated Caribbean platform and are too costly. Mitchell, who is also the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) head of government with responsibility for Information, Communication and Telecommunication (ICT), told delegates attending the Caribbean Telecommunications Union (CTU) 25th anniversary ICT Week in Trinidad that his government incurred an exorbitant phone bill due to roaming charges. "The phone is not roaming. For the first two months, when all of us got into office and I saw the bill I said 'cut it'. Something is fundamentally wrong. I have to use my own personal phone and don't feel in conscience I should allow the taxpayers to do so (pay for it). "If I call my friend in London or New York and call Jamaica and go on Cable & Wireless, the cost is extremely high. You can call India for a few cents. Why should we be able to have to spend all that money? We are late. We are behind and we don't have time," Mitchell added.

LIME to pay Digicel USD12.8m in interconnect dispute

Jamaican integrated telco LIME has been ordered to pay its rival Digicel Jamaica more than JMD1.5 billion (USD12.8 million) for wrongly withholding payments due for fixed-to-mobile calls between their respective networks. The ruling relates to two lawsuits brought against LIME's owner Cable & Wireless Communications by Digicel in 2007 and 2009. The country's Supreme Court had given a decision in favor of Digicel in July last year, but has now completed an accounting exercise to determine the full sum to be repaid. The court has also dismissed an appeal by LIME, the Jamaica Gleaner reports. The payments relate to disputed interconnect fees due on calls between LIME's fixed line network and the mobile networks of Digicel.

Agency, telecoms to confer on Ambit roaming alliance

The National Communications Commission is scheduled to meet before the Lunar New Year holiday with fourth-generation (4G) telecom service providers in anticipation of an administrative hearing over the roaming alliance between Asia-Pacific Telecom Co and Ambit Microsystems Corp, commission Chairman Howard Shyr said, adding that the ruling in the case would be used to settle such disputes in the future. Shyr previously said that the commission would hold an administrative hearing over the roaming alliance, as it might violate the Telecommunications Act or the Fair Trade Act. To prepare for the hearing, Shyr said the commission would invite representatives from the nation's 4G carriers, including Ambit chairman Terry Gou. Ambit — a subsidiary of Gou's Hon Hai Group — merged with Asia-Pacific Telecom last year, becoming the latter's largest shareholder with 14.99 percent of its shares. Ambit formed a strategic alliance with Taiwan Mobile Co, selling 5MHz of its bandwidth to it. Taiwan Mobile became a main Asia-Pacific Telecom shareholder through a share-swap deal with Ambit. Shyr said that the firms followed the rules when bidding for 4G licenses, and Ambit followed regulations by keeping its shares in Asia-Pacific Telecom at less than 15 percent. While Ambit has yet to launch its 4G service, Asia-Pacific Telecom launched its service by building 290 base stations and forming a roaming deal with Taiwan Mobile. "The purpose of the meeting is to determine whether Asia-Pacific Telecom's actions are permissible. If what it did is permissible, then all the carriers should be able to do it as well," Shyr said. "From the commission's perspective, we care only about whether consumers will be happy with this arrangement, when they have to share the use of a single network and [possibly] put up with poor mobile phone signals and slow Internet transmission rates," he added. Shyr said the commission did not foresee such a circumstance occurring when drafting the rules, adding that Ambit has skillfully exploited regulatory loopholes. However, some telecoms reported the potentially illegal practice to the commission, he added. Shyr said that the nation did not set specific regulations on roaming, as it is a customary practice and a tacit agreement in the telecommunications industry. He added, however, that the international 4G service standards organization has clearly defined roaming service as between different service areas and between telecom services. The service cannot be called "roaming" if the carrier offers the service in its licensed service area, he said.

MP slams government over Interconnect Clearing House

Deputy Ranking member of Parliaments Select Committee on Communications, Mr. Kwaku Kwarteng has accused government of conniving with its cronies posing as some Interconnect Clearing House (ICH) company to make undeserved money from subscribers and users of telecommunications services. According to the Member of Parliament (MP) for Obuasi West Constituency, the Electronic Communications Act, 2008 (Act 775) requires every telecommunications service provider to interconnect with every other telecommunications service provider. He explained that it was to ensure that subscribers of one network can communicate easily and seamlessly with subscribers of other networks. The MP said all telecommunications service providers in Ghana have invested in the necessary infrastructure and complied with their interconnectivity obligations. Mr. Kwarteng noted that interconnectivity between different networks in Ghana is excellent, and as a result, the National Telecommunications Authority, the industry regulator, has, therefore, not had reason to sanction any service provide for failure to interconnect. "Then out of the blue, government announces that it intends to appoint an ICH operator to connect calls from each network to another at a price to be quoted by the operator." "Most disturbingly, government says it would make it mandatory for each telecommunications service provider to subscribe to the commercial interconnect services of the ICH operator," he said. According to Mr. Kwarteng, the Wireless Applications Services Providers and the Internet Service Providers are wholly Ghanaian-owned operators in the telecommunications industry. He said they have said earnestly that they have already invested in interconnect arrangements and don't need any ICH. He noted that at a meeting with the Parliamentary Select Committee on Communications on December 13, 2014, they were clear that if they were compelled to subscribe to the commercial services of this ICH, many of them could go out of business. "As for the bigger multinational telecommunications companies, their only point is that if government went ahead and imposed this unnecessary ICH, they would have no choice but to pass the consequential cost on to subscribers and users of their services," he stated. The MP for Obuasi West Constituency said the first sign that government had wrong motives in introducing this ICH is the unreasonable rush to set it up. According to him, on November 26, 2014, government published literature about the ICH on the internet claiming it was the beginning of public education and consultation in which they were looking to receive comments and inputs from all Ghanaians. He said within 10 working days, government claimed it had finished doing the media and public education and had received millions of comments from the general public. He explained that government further claims that within five working days beginning from November 19, 2014, it reviewed and incorporated into its work the millions of comments. Mr. Kwarteng noted that on November 26, 2014, government invited applications for license to operate the said ICH and the deadline for applications was within just 11 working days. He said government is now set to announce the chosen ICH operator by Friday, the February 7, 2015. He charged government to show Ghanaians what form the public education took and in which media the publicity was done. "Why the rush to set up the ICH as though there was some urgent need for it? Why the strange urgency? This is obviously a naive attempt to quietly smuggle in the ICH," he added. Mr. Kwarteng noted that, perhaps, the strangest of all government conduct is the attempt to justify the ICH by presenting it as an answer to SIM box fraud, adding that not only is this deceitful, it is also laughable. He noted that SIM box fraud is the practice of routing international calls through the internet in order to bypass the legitimate route for international calls, saying this is done to avoid taxes. "There is nothing about an ICH that can check this bypassing, and government knows this. This justification is most deceitful," he said. He warned government to back off this Interconnect Clearing House project as it can serve no honest purpose. "The greed of people in government who seek to pocket illegitimate money should not be permitted to roll back the gains of Ghana's telecommunications industry. "In the end, this greed will translate into higher call rates and data usage rates for ordinary Ghanaians and Ghanaian businesses," he said.

Ireland still performing well on compliance with the EU roaming regulation

The 13th wave of Irish and EU aggregated data for the period 1 October 2013 to 31 March 2014 was published by ComReg on 8 December 2014. There are no significant changes from the previous report but some 'ups and downs'. A useful summary of the key points for voice calls, SMS and data is set out at pages 4 and 5 of the report. Highlights include:

Voice calls

- Irish average retail roaming prices for calls made / received continue to indicate compliance with the regulatory price ceilings.
- A change in experience regarding Ireland's average "Eurotariff" (price per calls made / received and price for the rest of the world for calls made while outside the EU/EEA) – although Ireland's average Eurotariff has tended to be below the EU/EEA average over most of the reported periods, the average price per calls received went up in this reporting period, taking it above the EU/EEA average.
- As per previous reports, talking less – or at least less than 30 seconds - is still costing us more due to the 30 seconds billing threshold. As such, the surcharge for Ireland's billed prices for retail "Eurotariff" calls made continues to have increased in the relevant period and remains significantly above the EU/EEA average (ie, Ireland's billed price in Q1 2014 was around 11% compared to the EU/EEA average of 5.0%).

Text Messages (SMS)

- The average retail price for sending a text message remained 7 cents in the relevant period (1 cent below the regulated cap of 8 cents). lexology.com

Data

- Ireland's average "Eurotariff" retail data prices at 22 cents continue to be significantly lower – around half – of the regulated price cap of 45 cents and EU/EEA average.
- Unsurprisingly, volumes of retail data traffic continue to grow strongly.

Telecoms operators need to maintain relevance in M2M/IoT by building on their strengths

Tom Rebbeck
Partner
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Telecoms operators could find their role in the Internet of Things (IoT) reduced to that of a managed connectivity provider because they lack expertise in the 'things' – that is, products. In this article, Tom Rebbeck looks at how operators can fill this knowledge gap and build on their own unique strengths to maintain relevance.

Telecoms operators could be marginalised in the IoT market if the 'things' are more critical than the Internet

"What makes smart, connected products fundamentally different is not the Internet, but the changing nature of the 'things,'" claim Michael Porter and James E. Heppelmann in a recent article for Harvard Business Review (HBR).[1] Telecoms operators face a significant challenge if the Internet of Things (IoT) is more about the 'thing' than the Internet. They may aspire to increase machine-to-machine (M2M) and IoT revenue – particularly by selling more than just connectivity – but they know and understand the Internet, and not 'things'.

The risk for telecoms operators is that companies with a background in 'things' will marginalise their role in the IoT market to little more than the provision of managed connectivity. They will be competing with companies like PTC, whose CEO co-authored the HBR article with Porter. PTC develops product design and product lifecycle software, and has

spent about USD300 million since 2013 acquiring two IoT platform companies – Axeda and ThingWorx. Other than Verizon, and possibly Vodafone, no telecoms operator has spent more on
IoT acquisitions.

To play more than a peripheral role, operators need to focus on their unique strengths

First and foremost, operators need to decide and articulate what role they aim to play in IoT. Many are unable to articulate their aims in this market clearly, other than the generic ambition of increasing revenue. They have two broad choices, outlined below. Operators should be clear about which choice they have selected and communicate this choice clearly both to the market and internally.

Become a 'thing' company, at least in certain vertical markets: Operators can opt to provide an end-toend solution to customers. For example, they could provide a fleet tracking solution that includes the device, application, connectivity and ongoing support for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) that run a small vehicle fleet. The operator would need to have specific knowledge of a vertical – either internally (typically through acquisitions, as Verizon and Vodafone have done) or through a partner (as Telefónica is doing for fleet management with Geotab and Masternaut).

Provide 'horizontal' solutions for IoT to support a range of vertical markets: Operators can provide the supporting capabilities for IoT, such as offering an application platform that can be applied to multiple industrial sectors. For example, the operator could provide the tools with which a partner or reseller could create a fleet tracking tool, but the operator would not sell or support this tool. Many operators are selling managed connectivity as a horizontal tool, but few are doing more than this (few are providing application support, for example). Again, this route can be taken through partners – PTC is one of several application platform providers[2] – or through acquisition (Telenor Connexion bought a small integrator, iOWA, to build its horizontal capabilities).

Operators also need to invest in networks that are fit for the IoT. Cellular operators have focused on building networks for smartphones – that is, devices that demand ever higher bandwidths and whose batteries can be recharged daily. Many, if not most, IoT devices need only very low-speed connections (1Kbps is often acceptable), but need the battery to last a year or more. Operators in all countries (and not just developed countries) should look at investing in low-power, wide-area networks, such as Sigfox, Semtech, Weightless or LTE-MTC, that cater for the specific needs of IoT devices.[3] If they do not, operators risk losing the connectivity revenue and, in so doing, possibly lose the opportunity to gain other IoT revenue.

Telecoms operators have extremely strong assets beyond networks that can be applied to M2M and IoT, as we argued in a recent article. Few other organisations can complete with a typical operator's networks of stores, 24/7 support capabilities and the ability to bill millions of customers. These assets may be more valuable than network ownership because many IoT devices need little more than a Wi-Fi connection and no quality of service guarantee for some IoT services.

Telecoms operators may not have the same background expertise in products as some other organisations involved in IoT, but they can gain these capabilities – either through partnership or acquisition – and have other unique strengths on which to build.

1. Harvard Business School Publishing (Boston, MA, 2014), *See How Smart, Connected Products Are Transforming Competition. Available at https://hbr.org/2014/11/how-smart-connected-products-are-transforming-competition.*
2. Others include Bosch, Cumulocity, Digi and Xively.
3. For more on LPWA, see Analysys Mason's report *Low-powered wireless solutions have the potential to increase the M2M market by over 3 billion connections. Available at www.analysysmason.com/LPWA-Sept2014.*

TECHNOLOGY NEWS

TECHNOLOGY UPDATES

Samsung and SK Telecom to demonstrate 7.5Gbps "5G" technology

The two Korean companies are always at the forefront of the latest technology, and that trend looks set to continue thanks to a 5G research and development partnership formed in October last year. The dynamic duo believes they have created a standard which is capable of wireless data transmission at speeds of 7.55Gbps. In order to achieve this, the transmission will use a millimeter wave frequency which is higher than current frequencies used by cellular and Wi-Fi networks. Millimeter wave frequencies are widely-considered to be those above 6GHz, and as a result have both advantages and disadvantages. To get the bad news out the way first, high frequencies suffer from poor propagation meaning they cannot penetrate walls and other objects as easily as lower-frequencies and require a fairly unobstructed path. The good news is that a much faster speed is possible. In an attempt to avoid pitfalls, Samsung and SK Telecom are using "3D beamforming" which senses where a smartphone is, and directs the narrow transmission beam towards it. Future base stations will no longer wastefully transmit a signal over a wide area, and instead only send the signal to where it's needed. Equipment makers and cellular carriers are hoping that 3D beamforming will help relieve crowded situations such as in sports stadiums where the outside of the building will prevent interference with the same frequency being used just outside of the stadium. This allows for more efficient-use of spectrum. This technology looks set to form the basis of 5G. Japan's NTT DoCoMo is also targeting a similar demonstration network to go live in time for the 2018 Tokyo Olympic Games to help alleviate inevitable capacity issues with such a large-scale event.

Opinion: Going over-the-top, or not

Why do over-the-top (OTT) communication applications such as Skype, Viber, Line and WhatsApp exist? If the world already had a service which provided ubiquitous, seamless communication with anybody, anywhere, at any time, across multiple media at a nominal cost, then there would be no need for OTT communication applications. In the mobile world, applications have been created to provide services that users want but the traditional Mobile Network Operators (MNOs) were not ready to provide. However, as an overlay, there are numerous challenges that OTT communication services have to deal with including brand, coverage, handset compatibility, directory services, interoperability, and monetization. All these challenges can only be comprehensively addressed by the mobile network operators, because they have all the pieces of the puzzle. MNO's dominate the voice and text market, and as price comes down and coverage improves their leading position will be sustained.

Furthermore, the deployment of IMS and Voice over LTE (VoLTE) will enable seamless WiFi calling, improve coverage and effectively increase network capacity whilst reducing the cost of bearing calls. This technology also supports a mutually-beneficial symbiosis with the handset vendors as they start to embed WiFi calling into the handset dialer. However, voice and SMS is only part of the equation. WhatsApp, Viber, and Skype show that consumers want more. They want enhanced phonebook and directory services with additional features such as presence. They want enhanced messaging to include chat and file-sharing. They want enriched calls to include video and video sharing. The MNO's greatest fear is that they become a "dumb pipe" as all the communication services move up the stack and the MNO's simply become the commoditized connectivity provider. But a lot of poor decisions would have been made on the part of the MNOs for that to happen. The fact is that the MNO's hold most of the cards and the barriers to become an MNO are enormous. The barriers to creating Rich Communication Services (RCS) are comparatively small. Google's recent decision to enter the carrier services market by partnering with Sprint and T-Mobile in the USA is a key part of a strategy to provide a fully-blown mobile service. Not even Google, with effectively unlimited resources, would consider building a global or even national wireless network. So what are the MNO's options? Some partnering are seeing between OTT players and the MNOs which is predominately driven by the MNO's desire to understand the market. There is a fundamental conflict in this type of partnering, as both organizations want to "own" the customer experience and as a result will become uncomfortable bed fellows. Inevitably, this accolade will be won by the OTT owner as they become the customer interface relegating the MNO to "dumb pipe" status. This threat means that the approach will fail to receive sufficient support from the MNO stakeholders who will resist the conscious absolution of value to the OTT partner. There is no question that we are entering a very disruptive time in the global communications market. It is interesting to note that the mass consumerization of communication technology is also forcing an uncomfortable pace of change in global enterprise as rigid corporate IT departments are being disintermediated by their employees. I think we are going to see a polarization of the MNO market. In the main, the Tier 2 players who do not have the bandwidth to build their own rich communications service will ultimately be forced down the partnering route. A clear illustration of this strategy is Google's partnership with Sprint and T-Mobile – if they can get the value sharing formula right – they have a real chance of challenging the Tier 1 networks. The Tier 1 Networks, in a bid to retain value, will have to buy and/or build their own platforms. Traditionally, the MNOs have failed at this as their biggest barrier is themselves. When WhatsApp were bought for $19bn by Facebook, they had 55 employees. 55 employees created $19bn of value! They did this because they were so few; they were agile, and unencumbered by monolithic corporate structures. T-Mobile's acquisition and ultimate disposal of Bobsled and Telefonica's lackluster experiences with Tu Me are testament to big MNO's agility phobia. The idea of rapidly-integrating an innovative acquisition into the larger organization just decimates value as the incumbent old guard looks to establish ownership and control and sterilizes the value which the acquisition was trying to capture in the first instance.

The big global banks share many of the challenges and strengths of the global mobile operators. As a way of catalyzing change, many of the global banks are establishing technology incubators as a way of tapping into innovative talent without stifling creativity and growth. We are yet to see how the results of these initiatives can be successfully productized into the big banking technology world, however I can't help thinking this approach has merit. Cloud services also have the potential to provide the speed to market that the MNOs desperately need. The greatest barrier to this approach is internal perception and paranoia. The long established custodians of infrastructure and data within the traditional MNOs will expertly establish a huge amount of fear, uncertainty, and doubt as a defense against adopting cloud. This is archaic-thinking, and needs to be put to one side. Jibe, backed by Vodafone Ventures, is a very interesting company providing an open communications platform to enable the integration of traditional standards-based telecommunications, and the OTT platforms. Nexmo are also in this new mould, and represent an innovative and interesting approach. The GSMA's Joyn initiative is looking to accredit Rich Communication Service providers such as Jibe, and support the collaboration of its members to ultimately develop interoperable communication services which challenge the OTT players. Traditionally these types of collaboration projects have struggled in the MNO world, but this time the threat might be so significant that the adage of "my enemy's enemy is my friend" might make it work.

Etihad debuts A380 equipped to allow in-flight roaming

An Etihad Airways' Airbus A380 has become the first of the type to be fitted out with UK mobile service provider AeroMobile's in-flight communications service. The UAE carrier now has AeroMobile connectivity on 59 aircraft serving worldwide destinations from the Middle East. The service is also fitted to Etihad Airways' Airbus A330-200, A330-300, A340-500 and A340-600 aircraft. AeroMobile enables airline passengers to roam in-flight, by providing technology and services that allow the safe use of passengers' own mobile phones on board aircraft. The inaugural flight of Etihad Airways' 498-passenger A380 with AeroMobile services was from Abu Dhabi to Heathrow earlier this month. The maiden flight paves the way for future superjumbos to be fitted with AeroMobile services. Kevin Rogers, chief executive of Etihad, said: "It's very exciting to kick off 2015 with our first AeroMobile-connected A380. "With demand for in-flight connectivity increasing year-on-year, we're looking forward to continued momentum in installed aircraft and passenger demand in 2015."

Avanti, Chemring Technology Solutions, Spectra Trial Secure Cellular Over Satellite

Avanti Government Services, in collaboration with Chemring Technology Solutions and Spectra Group, conducted a series of secure cellular communications over satellite trials for defense and security applications in remote areas. The tests used both Spectra Group's Spectra Hostile Area Deployment Environment

(SHADE) and μSHADE solutions to connect to Chemring Technology Solution's SmartLink "cellular network in a box" through Avanti's Ka-band satellite system. The companies trialed services including push-to-talk, video streaming, Voice Over IP (VoIP) and Web browsing. SmartLink is designed to provide secure connectivity in remote locations for military units and Mobile Network Operators (MNOs).

T-Mobile CEO criticizes the FCC over AWS-3 auction

From an outside viewpoint, it would appear the FCC's recent AWS-3 spectrum auction was an unprecedented success. The telecoms regulator added a record $44.9 billion to the US treasury, and all the major players left with some valuable assets for their current and future networks. T-Mobile's outspoken CEO, John Legere, wasn't so pleased with the apparent lack of fairness shown in the auction. Despite strategically winning 157 licenses in the 5x5MHz paired spectrum in various blocks across the country, to aggregate with its existing AWS-1 holdings, Legere believes the results were "a total disaster" for consumers. In a blog post, Legere wrote: "The rules for the next auction should be focused on fostering competition in the US wireless industry and doing what's right for the American consumer. If the government wants a competitive wireless market, they need to establish auction rules to reflect that." T-Mobile's spectrum winnings cost the company just $1.8 billion. This might seem a lot to you or I, but is miniscule when compared to other market players;

AT&T - Spent $18.2 billion on J Block (paired spectrum at 1770-1780, and 2170-2180MHz) in major markets like New York, Chicago, Boston, Atlanta, San Antonio, and others for a total of 251 licenses.

Verizon - Spent $10.4 billion on 181 licenses in J Block, as well as in H Block (1760-1765 and 2160-2165MHz) and I Block (1765-1770 and 2165-2170MHz.)

DISH Network - Spent $13.3 billion through two joint ventures for potential access to 702 licenses, but exact details are unknown at this point.
Such a small spend in comparison to competitors appears concerning, but it's worth remembering that T-Mobile already holds a lot of spectrum in the mid to high frequencies which have allowed them to roll-out their wideband LTE network over the past year.

It is for this reason that Legere and T-Mobile are looking to the 2016 auction where valuable low-band spectrum will be up-for-grabs which allows for better penetration in homes and offices to reach more customers. AT&T and Verizon already hold over 70% of the low-band spectrum in the US, so Legere is making noise to ensure fairness at the next auction. Legere is worried that the two companies will spend big at the next auction - despite not needing to do so - just to keep T-Mobile from acquiring what it needs. "We too require low-band spectrum," Legere admits. "And a lot of it." T-Mobile is saving its cash for the 2016 spectrum as it will enter at a major financial disadvantage up to AT&T and Verizon if the FCC doesn't tighten its rules to ensure fair competition in the market (over how much the auction can bring into the bank.)

5G World Alliance to launch at MWC

The new 5G World Alliance (5GWA) will officially launch during the upcoming Mobile World Congress in Barcelona next month. The alliance wants to provide key platforms for 5G development across new technologies and ensure seamless interoperability with systems of the future, including an all-IPv6-based M2M, the mobile IoT, mobile cloud computing, SDN, NFV, Fringe and Tactile Internet. IPv6 Forum president Latif Ladid will be the founding chair of 5GWA. Ladid has also been a board member of 3GPP PCG since 1999. The alliance will work closely with the ETSI IPv6 ISG and try to get the telecom and internet worlds to integrate and share best practices with principal SDOs such as 3GPP, ETSI, IETF and the ITU. It will also develop across other industry sectors set to gain from the 5G future. The 5GWA is currently establishing its founding members. Companies and other organizations are invited to contact Ladid for more details. In terms of concrete objectives, the alliance wants global harmonization and synergies of telecom and internet worlds, the creation of large-scale worldwide interoperable test beds, the promotion of end-user empowering applications and global systems, the promotion of interoperable implementation of converging and integrated standards, the development of Educational and "5G Ready" programs, and the resolution of any issues that could create barriers to 5G deployment. "Our collaboration allows us to address immediate demand for a number of use cases, most notably with highly secure applications for the defense, security and emergency responder sectors. This capability complements and builds on Avanti's pioneering deployment of 3G backhaul in 2013," said Paul Feenan, director of Avanti Government Services.

ABI Research: LTE-A has reached 100m people, set to cross 1bn by 2018

We might be looking ahead to what 5G should look like, but the current priority is to get LTE-Advanced technology out to as many users as possible. According to ABI Research, LTE-A has now reached 100 million people around the world just four years after its creation. ABI highlights that at the end of 2014 there were 49 commercially-available LTE-A networks around the globe. 20 operators in Western Europe offer LTE-A access, and a further 13 in the

Asia-Pacific region. North America, however, is leading the way in terms of population coverage. In America, all four of the major operators have either deployed or are in the process of deploying - their LTE-A networks. This leading roll-out has achieved a coverage of 7.8% with the number set to rise much further over the coming years in-part due to auctions such as the spectrum auction hosted by the FCC for AWS-3 spectrum which finished earlier this month. For a quick AWS-3 spectrum auction roundup; AT&T splashed the cash with J Block (paired spectrum at 1770-1780, and 2170-2180MHz) in major markets like New York, Chicago, Boston, Atlanta, San Antonio, and others for a total of 251 licenses at a cost of $18.2bn. Verizon came second and spent $10.4 billion on 181 licenses in the aforementioned J Block, as well as in H Block (1760-1765 and 2160-2165MHz) and I Block (1765-1770 and 2165-2170MHz.) T-Mobile meanwhile won 157 licenses in the 5x5MHz paired spectrum in various blocks across the country to aggregate with its existing AWS-1 holdings for $1.8bn. Further spectrum auctions are being held elsewhere, including India, where The Telecom Regulatory Authority has confirmed an LTE spectrum auction on the 25th February. In France, the government has re-assigned the 700MHz spectrum for use by telecoms services. "As heavy subscribers' data traffic growth has exploded, ABI Research anticipates fierce competition for more spectrum, as well as an active migration to VoLTE and higher data modulation schemes such as LTE and LTE-Advanced, which has higher spectral efficiency," comments Jake Saunders, VP and Practice Director of Core Forecasting. These spectrum auctions are important to support the 1 billion LTE-Advanced users which ABI Research expects by 2018 - an increase of 900%.

2020 vision: Chinese think tank, Ericsson developing 5G

Swedish technology giant Ericsson and China's national ICT think tank Chinese Academy of Information & Communications Technology (CAICT) have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to launch joint research and development of 5G mobile platforms. In a press release, Ericsson says it aims to join hands with CAICT to speed up the research and standardization of 5G technologies towards its commercialization around 2020. Cao Shumin, president of CAICT, said: 'CAICT is as committed as Ericsson to the international standardization of technologies through cooperation. We believe this is essential for achieving global economies of scale and fostering innovation. China, with a fledging ICT industry infrastructure and the world's largest number of mobile subscriptions, will continue to be a vigorous driver of ICT innovation and sustainable growth.' Ulf Ewaldsson, CTO of Ericsson, added: 'We are very excited to be embarking on this new journey with CAICT towards the development of global 5G standards. Ericsson and CAICT have a long history of successful cooperation and we share the belief that mobile broadband technology benefits society by lifting productivity and the quality of life, and thereby contributing to sustainable development for all.' Ericsson and CAICT have pledged mutual cooperation and support in promoting 5G standardization, and agreed to mutual cooperation in 5G technology research covering key areas such as radio access technology, core network architecture and 5G application scenarios. The two have also agreed to share information in the areas of convergence in vertical industries, industry transformation, applications, and ecosystem development.

BT to start two G.fast city pilots this summer

BT plans to test G.fast in two pilot locations in summer 2015 and hopes the technology will allow it to deliver up to 500 Mbps speeds to most of the UK by 2025, CEO Gavin Patterson announced. If the new technology proves successful, deployment will start in 2016-2017 and initial services offering a few hundred Mbps will be available to millions of homes by 2020. Speeds will rise to 500 Mbps as more industry standards are agreed and new equipment developed. Patterson said the upgrade "will depend however on their continuing to be a stable regulatory environment that supports investment." Connecting Cambridgeshire superfast broadband program welcomed the announcement that one of the pilots will be in Huntington. The other will be in the Gosforth area of Newcastle. Around 4,000 homes and businesses will be able to take part at both locations. The pilots will build on recent tests at BT's innovation centre at Adastral Park, Suffolk. These have shown that G.fast has the potential to deliver significant speed increases from existing and new fiber street cabinets as well as from other points closer to the customer. BT is likely to deploy G.fast from various points in the network, with the pilots allowing it to assess different roll-out options. The company is also planning to develop a premium fiber broadband service for residential and business customers who want up to 1Gbps. BT's FttC passes nearly 22 million premises at present, or about three-quarters of the UK. It is open to alternative operators on an equal basis.

China Mobile sets its sights on 5G

China Mobile, the world's largest wireless operator by subscribers, has begun work on developing 5G technology to follow on the heels of its success with 4G, Xinhua reports. Xi Guohua, the chairman of the cellco's board made the announcement at the China Enterprise Development Forum, but did not give further details on the

project. The move has been taken to suggest that the company is looking to maintain its leading position in China, whilst it could also leverage its massive customer base to steer the development and standardization of the new technology. According to TeleGeography's GlobalComms Database, China Mobile has quickly grown to become the largest 4G provider in the year since it launched its Time Division Long Term Evolution (TD-LTE) network. Mobile inaugurated its network in December 2013 and by mid-2014 it had made it into the top ten providers, having overtaken several entrenched Japanese and Korean cellcos. By September 2014, and with 40.95 million LTE subscribers, the cellco was the second largest provider of 4G services in the world behind US-based Verizon, which counted 59.4 million users at that date. In the subsequent three months Mobile more than doubled its 4G user base to 90.06 million, racing ahead of the former market leader.

How many dead mobile applications are out there? Is yours alive?

Dr Osama Mostafa
CEO
Tawasol IT

We've moved from the era of "every business has to have a website" to the era of "every business has to have a mobile application". Not only big companies like telecom operators, automotive agencies, hospitals, and fashion distributors have mobile apps, also restaurants, GYMs, clinics, supermarkets, travel agencies, and different service providers have their own mobile applications now.

As of July 2014 there are 1.3 M applications on Google Play and 1.2M on App Store, and total applications downloads is 128bn on both stores worldwide (Statiscta.com). Your app is competing with all these apps to win your customers' attention, do you think this is easy? Are you up to this?

Do you know that more than 55% of apps are not used more than 11 times? (ComeScore)
How often do you think your users should use your app to consider it a live app?

Let's put ourselves in the user's shoes, he/she has a small room for too many applications; games, IM, video and photo sharing, social networks, news, service providers and business applications. Some applications are used on daily basis and others on demand. So for what reasons does the user keep some apps and delete others? And what does make him/her use some applications on daily or weekly basis while he/she totally forgets about some other apps?

I am not mentioning these numbers and asking these questions to make you disappointed, on the contrary, my goal is to make it clear for you that if you want your app to be alive you need to understand your audience along with their behavior, design and adjust accordingly to be able to give them what they are looking for. In addition, you need to determine - based on your business - how often they should use the app to consider your app a live app.

Now I have some good news for you; mobile users spend 85% of their time on applications compared to 15% on mobile web (readwrite.com), so you made a good decision to have a mobile app. Also you will feel happy to know that the percentage of the applications that have been used only once has dropped by significant percentage in the last two years. And to make you happier I will tell you that smartphones penetration to hit 39% by 2015 in the Middle East (Go-Gulf.com). So it's obvious that users now are more into mobile apps, and willing to spend more time checking and evaluating your and other apps.

I don't want you here to neglect the percentage of applications that are being used only once, because if your app was one of them then you've wasted your money on marketing the app, and lost them because you had failed to convince them to stay.

So how to convince your users to stay, and to use it so often? The answer is; it's all about value and follow up.

mechanism, and publish authentic content related to your business; for example if you're a restaurant you can have a recipes corner, if you're a beauty salon it would be great to have skin and hair care advice section.

Follow up is the second essential part, if you forget about your customers they forget about you, if you show them how much you care they would feel special and will keep using your app. Keep on sending notifications announcing special offers and news about your business, about the authentic content you're creating just for them. Keep track of their behavior and communicate with them accordingly; for example if you notice that specific users use the app to book on weekends and it has been two weekends and they haven't booked then send them gently to invite them to book with extra 15% discount.

sign up for emails from a brand make a purchase based on what they receive? (SalesForce 2014 Mobile Behavior Report)

Again it's about value and follow up, so don't just publish "an app", publish "the app" that's customized for your customers so they find what they are looking for, and make them feel that you're around all the time.

Once you get your users' attention and succeed to retain them you can look at your app as tool to increase your revenue, world wide mobile revenue was $34bn in 2014 and expected to be $45bn in 2015 (Statistca.com), so get ready to claim your share.

The value that your application offers, the benefits your users get and the easier you make their life. Offer special discounts for booking or buying through the app, make a click-to-call & get directions buttons, include a loyalty feature and points redemption

Also use some other communication tools other than the app push notifications; for example send them SMS and Emails reminding them of special treatment they can get when they use the app features, do you know that 8 out of 10 customers who

With greater productivity comes greater responsibility

For businesses today, mobility means productivity and productivity spells growth. Despite all the good they can do for the bottom line, the prevalence of cloud and mobile technologies, and the rise of things like BYOD (bring-your-own-device), have turned enterprise IT security on its head.

With greater productivity, however, comes greater responsibility. In the region, some of the telco market's best and most promising features – mind-blowing smartphone penetration, a huge appetite for data, and multiple SIM ownership – work against it in the mobile security space, leaving businesses more exposed in the face of rising threats.

Over the past few months, a wave of high-profile hacking incidents involving personal devices and cloud networks should have highlighted the importance of implementing appropriate security policies - but there is a lot more to do. In the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), a recent survey estimated that around 95% of companies still don't have a fully-implemented mobile device security policy.

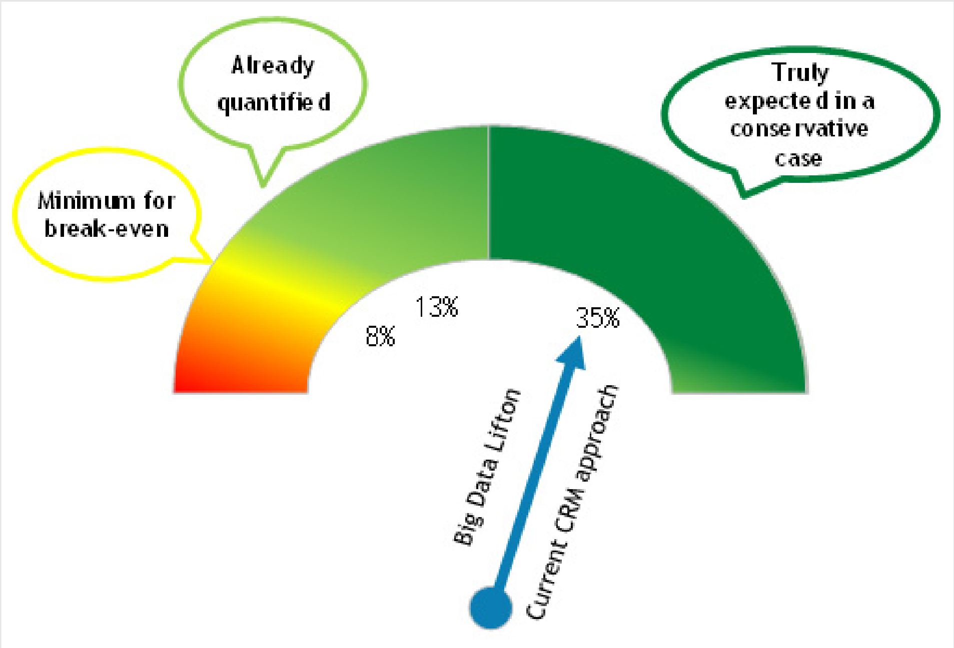
George Galica
Head of Managed Services
Vodafone Qatar

Spending to secure the region's IT infrastructure introducing items such as Two Factor Authentication, biometrics and facial recognition – runs into billions of dollars. In the Managed Security Services segment, which holds particular importance for telecommunication companies, the GCC market is worth about $60 million annually and is expected to reach more than $200 million by 2020.

While the economic case stands on its own, I believe the greatest challenge for our industry will be to develop and deploy solutions that accelerate businesses to change their direction. Governments in the Gulf are betting big on the private sector to drive economic transformation in knowledge sectors and telcos will have an increasingly important role to play in the region's remarkable growth story. Even WhatsApp, a highly favored communications platform across MENA, just executed the largest ever deployment of end-to-end encryption at the end of 2014.

Vodafone was the first company in Qatar to offer Secure Device Management to help businesses better protect their company data. Device agnostic, it enables IT managers and administrators to remotely manage all of their smartphones and tablets across all platforms and operating systems. This means that these devices can be remotely locked and wiped if they have been stolen, can be tracked via their GPS locator if they are lost or can have their mobile apps remotely managed to ensure employees have all of the tools they need to get their job done whilst out of the office, all in a secure manner.

Turnkey solutions built to keep enterprises confident and agile – while breaking down barriers to implementation – will win the day.



'Big data' is one of the hottest buzzwords in our industry. Although the potential comes across intuitive to anyone, current initiatives often fail to show the ROI behind the approach, with a clear risk to pour resources with no payback. The article shows an actual business case in Europe proving the value behind Big Data.

Achieving stronger ROI in marketing campaigns in the age of Big Data

Big data CASE STUDY

Mr. Jose Centeno
General Manager
Advval

London, December 2014.

Sheltered from the cold outside, the conferences event on telco analytics was taking place, putting together some of the leaders in the telco sector, from Telefónica or EE to some of the largest providers in analytics such as IBM.

Impressive initiatives were presented based, among other, on the ability to process the geographic position of the entire customer base, but remarkably enough, no dollar sign '$' was displayed in any presentation until the middle of the last day of conferences.

At the same time, we had great ideas on what Big Data and Cloud computing could enable us, but we were required to show the organization how the investment on Big Data was going to generate financial profit.

In a first attempt, we tried to answer the question "How much value will Big Data

At a European telco, we decided to focus solely on how big data capabilities, i.e.,

- New information available, often in the Cloud
- Real-time availability of existing and new data

could improve the ROI of direct marketing campaigns: retention, cross-sell and upsell.

As a starting point, we quantified the value of Y2014 CRM activity at €7 extra margins per customer in 36 months, based on 150 individual business cases for 900+ campaigns (this is automatic output of ADVVAL's tool that can be rolled-out in 6 weeks at any telco).

With this figure & the costs of the Big Data approach, we found out:

- A bare 8% improvement of current CRM activity would payback Big Data in 3 years
- Concrete campaigns were quantified where Big Data will generate a 13% improvement
- Other campaigns devised makes us expect in a conservative case over 35% improvement of the CRM activity through Big Data enabled capabilities.

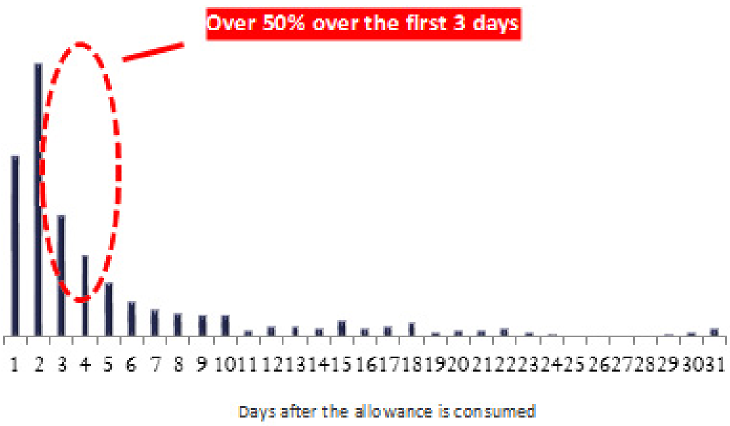
Essentially, Big Data provides two capabilities:

1. The capacity to generate new data through the massive processing of huge data sets
2. The ability to provide these pieces of data real time

Applied to CRM, these capabilities allow new possibilities like addressing customers in the right moment based on triggers generate?"... but soon this approach became unfeasible. The number of assumptions we needed to make was too wild. It quickly turned out to be like a crystal ball, and not even working with brackets of estimates would make us comfortable enough.

Therefore we tackled instead the question "How much do I have to improve my current CRM approach so that Big Data pays back?" and "Is the resulting percentage amount credible?". As a starting point, we had quantified the extra margins that the CRM activity conducted in Year 2014 would generate, from retention, cross selling and upselling propositions.

Upgrades in function of days elapsed since the allowance is exhausted



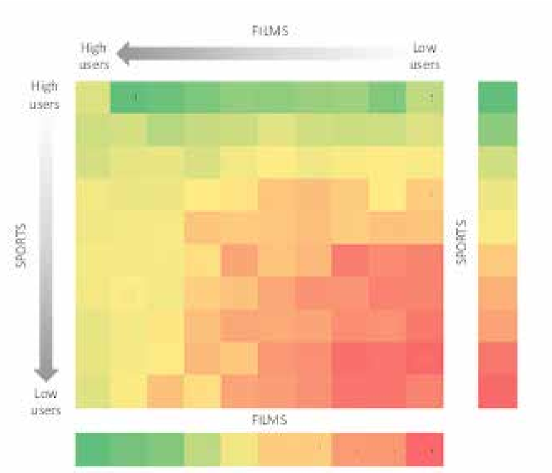
Although this would normally be a very time consuming exercise, ADVVAL's campaigns analysis software provides this figure automatically and validated by the finance department.

So with a simple calculation, we found out that the investment on Big Data would be totally paid back in just 3 years – and generate profit thereafter – if it could improve our CRM approach just by 8%.

In the light of all the possibilities that Big Data would bring us – new campaigns, better segmentation of the existing campaigns, the ability to process massive amounts of data real-time to trigger campaigns based on complex behavior ... this certainly looked like an attainable mark.

otherwise unavailable, new campaigns such as "your favourite series is about to start a new season", or improve existing campaigns segmenting the message e.g. for those whose consumption of sports content is declining.

In fact, it looked conservative that Big Data could improve the ROI of our current CRM approach by one third. So, finally, we picked up a number of concrete examples where could quantify how much the lift in campaign response would be through Big Data Enabled capabilities and how many extra margins this would bring us, and just with these few examples we calculated an increase of 13% over the current approach. For instance, we knew that customer response to upsell campaigns was significantly higher when customers run out of their allowance, so if we could process all the information and address those customers real-time, we knew what we could expect in terms of response (see figure 1). Likewise, we knew that customers who declined use of content were much more likely to churn their content packs, so if we could detect these trends timely and be able to process all the information to ascertain their viewing patterns, we knew how much we would be able to generate.



Churn of content packs is highly correlated with usage, with sports driving slightly more the churn behavior. Detecting use evolution and encouraging usage with personalized recommendations based on customer preferences is essential to keep and grow revenues

Article based on an actual Business Case of Big Data conducted at a European 4P telco player, with data disguised and transformed for confidentiality.

SATELLITE NEWS

SATELLITE UPDATES

Yahsat on track for deployment of Al Yah 3

Satellite operator Yahsat, a wholly owned company of the Mubadala Development Company, and Orbital Sciences Corporation announced that they have completed the Preliminary Design Review (PDR) for the Al Yah 3 spacecraft and payload. Al Yah 3, which is based on Orbital's GEOStar-3 platform, is an all Ka High Throughput Satellite to be designed, manufactured and tested at Orbital's satellite manufacturing facility in Dulles, VA. The PDR was a comprehensive review that validated Orbital's design approach to the physical and functional requirements of the spacecraft. The review is the first step toward confirming that the satellite will operate effectively on orbit. Marcus Vilaça, Acting Chief Technical Officer said, "The Preliminary Design Review is an industry standard process where our engineers review and confirm the overall architecture and design of our Al Yah 3 satellite. This is a significant step forward in the development phase of Al Yah 3 and ensures that we are on track to launch as scheduled for Q4 2016.While progress is underway with developing our third satellite, we are actively engaging with potential partners in Africa and Brazil enabling us to deploy much needed connectivity to underserved markets." Once operational, Al Yah 3 will enable the delivery of affordable broadband, to over 600 million users, specifically covering more than 95% of the population in Brazil and 60% of the population in Africa. "This important milestone is a key step towards the Al Yah 3 launch", said Mr. Christopher Richmond, Orbital's Senior Vice President. "Al Yah 3 will be the first hybrid electric propulsion GEOStar-3-based spacecraft to be launched by Orbital at the end of 2016. It provides the benefits of higher power and greater payload capability while still maintaining advantageous launch costs."

SpeedCast CEO Describes HTS Opportunities

SpeedCast, a Hong Kong-based global satellite communications provider with a large presence in the Asia-Pacific is evaluating ways to leverage capacity from new High Throughput Satellite (HTS) systems coming online around the world. In January the company partnered with O3b Networks to provide Ka-band HTS capacity to Papua New Guinea. Other HTS partners include Intelsat with its EpicNG HTS debut slated for early 2016, and Inmarsat with its three-satellite Global Xpress constellation, which is now two thirds complete. Speaking to Via Satellite, SpeedCast CEO Pierre-Jean Beylier highlighted mobility markets where the company sees value in adding HTS services. "[We are] certainly interested to look at HTS for cellular backhaul applications," he said. "In countries like Pakistan, Afghanistan Indonesia and Malaysia, we're keen to see what we can do with HTS capacity."

US Army Awards Exelis $7.6 Million Contract for SOTM Antennas

ADS on behalf of the U.S. Department of Defense through the Defense Logistics Agency (DLA) Tailored Logistics Support (TLS) program has ordered $7.6 million of Exelis satellite products for the U.S. Army. Exelis is delivering antennas and ground station satellite hubs, as well as providing training and installation services for the Global Network on the Move-Active Distribution (GNOMAD) system. The U.S. Army and the Department of Homeland Security have deployed GNOMAD, using an open system architecture requiring low profile antennas for domestic emergency response missions. The recent award supplies satellite gear for undisclosed worldwide deployments.

SatLink Communications Orders 'Sizeable Quantity' of NovelSat Modems for Maritime Customers

SatLink Communications has purchased what it described as a "sizeable quantity" of NovelSat's NS3000 satellite modems. The equipment is targeted for maritime communications customers. SatLink plans to replace existing Ku-band based systems with the NS3000 equipped with NovelSat's software based band reuse technology, NovelSat DUET Channel Echo Cancellation (CeC). Band reuse, coupled with smart Automatic Coding and Modulation (ACM) to adjust for rain fade, optimizes maritime communications to stay effective during poor weather. According to NovelSat, the NS300 modem enables the use of smaller, lighter, lower gain antennas and an increase in satellite coverage footprints, even when reception is impeded by 2 to 5 dB more than other systems, thanks to its higher reception quality and throughput at significantly lower Signal to Noise Ratios (SNR). "Mobility, weather fluctuations and power limitations make maritime satellite communications particularly challenging," said Dan Peleg, NovelSat VP of Research and Development (R&D). "By selecting the NovelSat NS300 satellite modem, SatLink will easily overcome these challenges."

Aireon Inks ADS-B Agreement with Central, West African ANSP

Aireon has signed a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with the Agency for the Security of Aviation Navigation in Africa and Madagascar (ASECNA) to provide Automatic Dependent Surveillance-Broadcast (ADS-B) capabilities to the West and Central African regions. ASECNA, the Air Navigation Service Provider (ANSP) for 17 African states, plans to use Aireon's satellite aircraft tracking services to improve Air Traffic Management (ATM) across the airspace under their control. Aireon plans to provide its global air traffic surveillance services as early as 2017. Under the MOA, the companies will collaborate to assess the requirements and benefits of space-based ADS-B services in their airspace, which covers six Flight Information Regions (FIR) including the Dakar oceanic FIR that connects Western Africa and Europe to South America and the Caribbean. This agreement includes evaluating the coordinated use of the service in neighboring regional airspace. "We're particularly interested in surveillance coverage over remote terrestrial routes within Niamey, Ndjamena and Brazzaville, as well as the oceanic routes in Dakar and Madagascar, and expect that enhanced surveillance in the ASECNA FIR will not only generate efficiencies for the airlines but will also generate significant safety improvements for Africa while reducing the costs of infrastructure for ASECNA," said Amadou Ousmane Guitteye, director general of ASECNA, who believes the technology may also work to drive international cooperation with regions such as Brazil.

Mustang Project Set to Create Hybrid Satellite-Terrestrial M2M Network

Airbus Defense and Space has started work on the Mustang project for machine-to-machine (M2M) communications, in partnership with the SMEs Sigfox and Sysmeca, and the CEA-Leti research center. The project focuses on low-cost exchange of short messages in the fast-growing M2M market, with the aim to develop a global, hybrid terrestrial/satellite access solution for the Internet of Things (IoT). Satellite links will use a dedicated communication protocol to ensure coverage using a small form factor terminal, while 868 and 915 MHz Industrial, Scientific and Medical (ISM) band will be used to communicate with the Sigfox terrestrial network. The dual-mode satellite/terrestrial terminal will enable automatic switching between the two communication channels in response to resource availability in the areas where connected devices are located. The three-year project will involve the development of the terminal's modem chipset, the optimization of communication protocols and the validation of the system through an aircraft application demonstration. Supported by the French Government's General Directorate for Enterprise (DGE), the Mustang project will receive public funding through the Future Investments Program (PIA) run by the General Investment Commission (CGI) and the French Ministry for the Economy, Industry and Digital Affairs.

Aviation, Government Possible Markets for Telenor

Telenor Satellite Broadcasting is in the early stages of an entrance into the markets of aviation and government connectivity. Morten Tengs, CEO of Telenor Satellite Broadcasting, told Via Satellite that the company is having a number of discussions around ways to capitalize on these new verticals.

"Aviation is one of the markets we think and believe will be an interesting market going forward. We are discussing with our partners and with our service distributors around aviation. It is certainly a market we are looking into," he said. Neither aviation nor government is the primary focus of Thor 7, Telenor's newest satellite, which Space Systems/Loral (SSL) recently completed manufacturing. The satellite instead emphasizes maritime connectivity, along with broadcast and television services. Nevertheless, Tengs said aviation and government are segments Telenor is looking into. With In-Flight Connectivity (IFC) becoming increasingly popular, a number of satellite and terrestrial operators have laid out and acted on plans for services. ViaSat launched its IFC service in December 2013, and has risen to become one of the top contenders in North America. Inmarsat, a leading operator in the maritime space, has seen considerable growth in IFC, and is planning to ramp up capacity over Europe through an Air to Ground (ATG) network supplemented by an S-band satellite in partnership with Hellas Sat — each company will own half the satellite to serve different markets. Also, SmartSky last year announced partnerships to build an ATG network across the United States, and AT&T planned a U.S. ATG network for some time before deciding to focus on other markets. Overall, satellite operators have been striking up new partnerships, as well as designing footprints, specifically for IFC. The government sector, on the other hand, has been less of an enthusiastic focus for many operators, but still one that has potential. Telenor is considering a northern entrance in the long term. "We are working with partners and other stakeholders to see if it is possible to put together a business plan for the arctic area. That's probably where we will, at some point, discuss with some state government agency," said Tengs. While it is not unfeasible for Thor 7 to contribute to the aviation market, Tengs said the company does not have plans to discuss government services with this satellite. Slated for an April 15 launch with Arianespace aboard an Ariane 5 rocket, Thor 7 is Telenor's first High Throughput Satellite (HTS). The operator will be able to offer a different product portfolio, along with more managed bandwidth services using iDirect's Velocity platform. Tengs expects to be able to meet demand for higher broadband speeds for the entire spectrum of maritime customers. "The average bandwidth consumption today is very low, and it just can't continue, so there is an increasing need for much higher bandwidth. With new high throughput satellites, prices are going down. We expect and are absolutely sure that the bandwidth per vessel or per customer will increase dramatically," he said. Thor 7 carries 25 Ka-band spot beams, 11 Ku-band transponders and one steerable Ka-band beam. The satellite's Ku-band payload will serve as restoration for Thor 5 and 6 satellites, while also providing room for expansion over Central and Eastern Europe. The Ka-band HTS payload will cover the North Sea, the Norwegian Sea, the Red Sea, the Baltic Sea and the Mediterranean Sea. Thor 7will be located at 1 degree west.

Intelsat and Azercosmos Team up to Expand Global Coverage

Intelsat and Azercosmos, the national satellite operator of Azerbaijan, have signed a strategic agreement at the 45 degrees east orbital position. The two companies will collaborate on the design, manufacture and operational phases of development for the Azerspace 2/Intelsat 38 satellite. The new satellite, slated for launch in 2017, will provide continuity of service for the Intelsat 12 satellite currently stationed at 45 degrees east, an orbital location which hosts Direct-to-Home (DTH) TV platforms and provides connectivity for corporate network services in Africa. The new Intelsat 38 satellite will also provide services across Central and Eastern Europe, Asia and Africa. For Azercosmos, the new satellite offers enhanced offerings to support the growing demands in the region for DTH, government and network services currently supported by Azerspace 1.

Milano Teleport Adds Three New Regional C-band Beams

Milano Teleport has increased its C-band services with the addition of three regional beams for its iSeaglobal maritime product. The expansion follows a 35 percent increase in available C-band capacity the company made in December 2014. Milano Teleport now offers four regional C-band beams and three global beams. "[The] four more large regional beams reinforce coverage in Europe, Africa, the Middle East and Asia, where mainly oil and gas operations take place. As of today, top customers can extend the above-standard global coverage by adding two more regional satellite beams, one for the East Hemi Asian region and the other for the West Hemi Americas region," said Nicola Mossino, board member, Milano Teleport. Additionally, Milano Teleport has developed a customized automatic beam switching that choses the strongest satellite available when presented with a signal failure or blockage angle. Created in 2006, iSeaglobal connects more than 250 vessels though Ku and C band on 25 geostationary satellites. Milano Teleport anticipates continued increase of its C-band capacity this year to support new and existing customers.

AssetLink Global Picks Iridium's Satellite Network for M2M Device

AssetLink Global, a Machine-to-Machine (M2M) and Internet of Everything (IoT) solutions provider, has selected Iridium to connect its AssetPack 3 solar rechargeable monitoring and tracking device. According to Iridium, the partnership will improve AssetLink's end-to-end asset management for customers in remote areas, even for High

Data Rate (HDR) communications. AssetLink provides customized remote monitoring and tracking devices and services for unpowered assets such as containers, storage tanks and railcars. The company cited access to global, low-latency two-way data satellite communications network as primary reasons for choosing Iridium.

Futuresource Analyst: OTT Vendors Could Lead 4K Adoption

Over-The-Top (OTT) operators could overtake satellite as the frontrunner for next generation video, according to analysts at Futuresource. While the satellite industry has been zealous in its pursuit of 4K, OTT operators are facing fewer barriers in bringing higher definition content to viewers, potentially positioning them to supplant satellite as the harbingers of the latest in video. "I think from an actual capacity issue, if you look at the migrations to high definition, satellite was one of the first to come to market with multiple channels, because satellite transponder capacity was easier to grow than the pipe that's in the ground," Carl Hibbert, associate director of entertainment content and delivery at Futuresource told Via Satellite. "I think satellite will be prominent, but when you look at who has got the first-to-market advantage here, it's the non-traditional operators, the OTT vendors like Netflix and others. We've almost seen a shift in the race for the finishing post."

Eutelsat extends Telekom Austria, United Group deals

In a flurry of activity, leading satellite operator Eutelsat has announced a number of contract extensions with TV operators in Middle and Eastern Europe. Firstly it has consolidated its long-standing commercial relationship with United Group that boasts over half a million subscriber homes in Serbia, Slovenia, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and FYRO

Macedonia. The new deal will see the long-term extension of agreements for capacity on the EUTELSAT 16A satellite, increasing the reach of United's Total TV premium pay-TV platform. In addition to securing capacity requirements at the leading video neighbourhood in South East Europe, Total TV is preparing the ground for the complete migration of its multi-channel platform to MPEG4 and DVB-S2 in order to optimise capacity and increase its HD channel offer. The transition will start later in February 2015 month and is expected to be completed by mid-2016. "We are delighted that United Group has renewed its confidence in EUTELSAT 16A and that we can plan for many years into the future," commented Apostolos Triantafyllou, CEE regional vice president of sales at Eutelsat. "With its acceleration of HD content, Total TV will continue to set the pace in the region and to anchor EUTELSAT 16A as the home of diverse content delivered with exceptional signal quality to millions of viewers across Europe." In the second move, Telekom Austria Group (TAG) will also tap the EUTELSAT 16A satellite to offer triple-play services to any home in a region covering Central and Eastern Europe using a single dish. In September 2013, the two companies announced an agreement to host Telekom Austria Group's white label DTH platform on the EUTELSAT 16A satellite to broadcast television services to Central and Eastern Europe.

Telekom Austria offers satellite broadband for remote locations

Austrian operator expands existing alliance with Eutelsat to achieve 100% broadband coverage. Telekom Austria has started to sell high-speed satellite broadband services under the A1 brand in Austria after it expanded an existing alliance with Eutelsat in order to "round off" the incumbent operator's fixed and mobile Internet services. The Austrian group said the satellite service would complement its existing broadband services to ensure 100% broadband coverage in Austria. It added that the expanded cooperation with Eutelsat will also enable it to sell triple-play services including broadband, voice telephony and TV: the two companies originally formed a partnership in September 2013 to deliver TV services via satellite in Central and Eastern Europe. In Austria, the satellite service will be used primarily to serve frontier zones and mountain regions where the nearest A1 switching centre or the closest mobile base station is too far away to enable broadband Internet. Around 1% of buildings in Austria have no access to DSL services, the company said. "We are delighted to be able to announce the expansion of our partnership with Eutelsat. Based on these broadband services, we are now in a position to reach those remotely located areas across our operating footprint, which have not had access to our Internet infrastructure to date. SAT broadband is therefore a perfect supplement to our existing network infrastructure as it allows us to meet this additional demand for Internet coverage," said Stefan Amon, director of wholesale at the Telekom Austria Group. Later in 2015, the company also plans to roll out the satellite broadband services to other Telekom Austria markets in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE): it estimates that one out of three households have no Internet access in some of its markets in this region. The satellite broadband is expected to provide download and upload speeds of up to 22 and 6 Mbps respectively.

NBN Co facing delay for satellite launches

NBN Co, the company overseeing Australia's National Broadband Network (NBN) project, is reportedly facing a three-month delay for the launch of its two Ka-band broadband satellites, according to ZDNet. It is understood that the delay comes as a result of Arianespace's inability to find an appropriate launch partner for the first satellite, with NBN Co's satellite director Matt Dawson cited as saying in a note to NBN Co staff: 'As a result, Arianespace has assigned a new co-passenger, and anticipates launch in October-November 2015. This ensures NBN Co remains on track to launch its first satellite prior to the end of 2015 … While the company is keen to launch earlier and will continue to prepare for readiness early in the second half of the calendar year, NBN Co has acknowledged the later departure of NBN Co-1A could result in a delayed launch of its second satellite, NBN Co-1B, into 2016.' As noted in TeleGeography's GlobalComms Database, Optus and IPSTAR were selected to provide interim satellite broadband services in rural and remote areas of the country in May 2011, while in February 2012 an AUD620 million (USD475 million) contract was awarded to Space Systems/Loral to construct two Ka-band broadband satellites, while US-based ViaSat was selected to provide ground equipment for the Long Term Satellite Service (LTSS) in July that year. Once launched, the two Ka-band satellites will be used to provide broadband services to roughly 3% of the population not within the NBN's fixed network footprint, with the LTSS expected to be introduced in 2016.

Boston Consulting Group becomes a member of SAMENA Telecommunications Council

SAMENA Council has announced that The Boston Consulting Group (BCG), a global management consulting firm and the world's leading advisor on business strategy, has joined as its newest member .

SAMENA Council boasts an extensive roster of members comprising South Asian, Middle Eastern, and North African telecoms operators, global technology providers, Internet companies, and professional consulting firms. The Council also works proactively with regulatory bodies to voice industry issues and extends its support to help foster growth within the industry.

"The Boston Consulting Group has vast experience working with leading local and international telecoms players on a broad spectrum of business areas, including strategy, pricing, sales, go-to-market approach, capital expenditure optimization, merger synergies, procurement, regulations, market entry, and the tailoring of sales methods to local needs," said Bocar BA, CEO, SAMENA Telecommunications Council. "The company's in-depth knowledge of the telecommunications market and sector-specific expertise make it ideally suited to the purposes of providing resourcefulness to SAMENA Council's membership. We look forward to the possibilities that lie ahead in our collaboration."

Hermann Riedl, Partner and Managing Director at BCG Middle East, echoed that statement, adding: "We are proud to become a member of SAMENA Telecommunications Council, a pioneering industry association in the region that actively promotes collaboration and knowledge-sharing in the SAMENA region. BCG has, over the years, collaborated with high profile clients in the region and worldwide on a number of successful telecom-company transformations. Together with our fellow members of SAMENA Council, we hope to help widen and deepen the expertise pool on emerging telecommunications trends and topics."

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The Boston Consulting Group (BCG) is a global management consulting firm and the world's leading advisor on business strategy. We partner with clients from the private, public, and not-for-profit sectors in all regions to identify their highest-value opportunities, address their most critical challenges, and transform their enterprises. Our customized approach combines deep insight into the dynamics of companies and markets with close collaboration at all levels of the client organization. This ensures that our clients achieve sustainable competitive advantage, build more capable organizations, and secure lasting results. Founded in 1963, BCG is a private company with 81 offices in 45 countries. For more information, please visit bcg.com. BCG also runs Bcgperspectives.com, which features the latest thinking from BCG experts as well as from CEOs, academics, and other leaders. It covers issues at the top of senior management's agenda.

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