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SAMENA TRENDS

EXCLUSIVELY FOR SAMENA TELECOMMUNICATIONS COUNCIL'S MEMBERS

BUILDING DIGITAL ECONOMIES

A SAMENA Telecommunications Council Newsletter

Articles

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Chief Executive Officer
Omantel

Building Customer Loyalty through VAS

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Building Customer Loyalty through VAS

The ICT industry in the SAMENA region is expanding at an exceptional pace, driven progressively by the accessibility of mass market smartphones and tablets with low costs. Mobile data traffic and network capacity in SAMENA is likely to propagate the fastest in the world in the forthcoming years. Therefore, data services will have a vital role to play among operators' revenues. Prominent telcos in the region are already gearing up to transmute their strategies from voice-centric to data-centric. They recognize the fact that, efficiently dealing with operating margins and increase data profitability, they have to focus across the value chain from volume-based to value-based data offerings. In this perspective, capitalizing on cloud services becomes more vital. This is an untouched area for many telcos. Practices from advanced markets, though, indicate that in the "data era," rivalry comes not just from other telcos, but largely from over-the-top content (OTT) and other renowned Internet-based players. To defend their market position and prospects in the future, telcos in Africa should further enhance their business strategies and increase familiarity about the cloud business, their end user market offerings and services based on a profound study of their end users' requirements, expectancies and usage patterns.

Mobile and fixed broadband networks as well as data centers in which telco's in the region have great abilities will have a key role in the shift to the cloud. The brand value and end user ownership puts telcos in a good spot to shift their profits models into the digital services terrain. On the other hand, there is a constant research by media organizations to observe how they can get a larger chunk of the revenue pie. For example, many news companies are looking to develop their own SMS delivery systems to sidestep third-parties as well as networks.

Voice is a traditional, lucrative and low-risk business. End user trends are foreseeable and market breakdown is simple. For many years, telcos did great by providing few good voice plans and a handful of value added services, while the data business is a whole lot different game. Consumers of broadband-enabled smart phones, tabs and other devices get extensive access to a diverse range of online services and mobile apps. In the "data era," reproducing voice market plans does not work anymore.

To offer distinguishing customer experience via personalized cloud offerings and to generate new data revenues, telcos have to first of all have to know their customers well than in the "voice era."

Yours truly,

Bocar A. BA
Chief Executive Officer
SAMENA Telecommunications Council

Talal Said Marhoon Al Mamari
CEO
Omantel

Mr. Talal Said Al Mamari is the Chief Executive Officer of Omantel since 29th June 2014. He has 22 years of experience in telecom sector working for Omantel. Prior to his appointment as CEO, he held several leadership positions including his last stint as Chief Financial Officer of Omantel.

Talal Al Mamari has had played instrumental role in different initiatives and projects carried out by the Company including the IPO in 2005, the restructuring of Omantel by bringing the mobile and fixed operations together and later the full legal merger of Oman Mobile with Omantel. He sits on the boards of several companies and investment funds including Worldcall Telecom, Infoline, United Securities Investment Fund and Al Roya Fund (Al Khair Investment Fund compatible with Sharia).

He holds a degree in Business Administration from Duquesne University, Pittsburgh – Pennsylvania.

Q. What are some of the most critical factors that define the success of fixed line operators such as Omantel, particularly with the onslaught of OTT services and with digital service adoption levels rising?

A. As we all know, Oman is relatively large country with a small population of around 4 million, which results in a number of challenges in rolling out affordable high-quality services available for all. Omantel never stopped investing in fixed line business, as we believe that it is the most important infrastructures to provide, not only for fixed voice, but more today importantly for high-speed data services. In fact, Omantel had for years one of the highest capex to revenue ratios and today we can see the result of that investment strategy in a world-class standard fixed, mobile and international network. With regards to our fixed line

network, we have invested heavily in enhancing this network and now we are able to provide up to 24 Mbps using ADSL and 60 Mbps through VDSL technology. We have also deployed FTTH networks in various parts of the country and all our new deployments in new areas are fiber based.

We understand that the content is increasingly getting richer and therefore we are very focused on providing high-speed with lowest latency to our customers, both at retail and wholesale levels. Instead of OTT players being a threat, they are more of a partner with Omantel whereas the OTT players, and global content companies, are utilizing the robust international connectivity infrastructure of Omantel, and the geographical location of Oman, to serve Oman as well as Middle-East region by hosting their content and applications with Omantel. This results in substantial improvements in the Internet quality and speed for our customers, domestically and internationally. We believe that our strategy of being proactive with our customers and partners is helping us not only in reviving the fixed infrastructure but it has also created one of the most growing areas for Omantel.

Q. Omantel received the Excellence award from Emir of Kuwait. What were the core areas that Omantel focused on and which enabled the organization in achieving this recognition across the border?

A. Omantel received the award as a key partner in supporting youth and sports in the Sultanate. Omantel, which provides considerable support to many youth activities, is a role model and a leader in social responsibility.

The award crowns the efforts made by Omantel over the past few years and our support to the initiatives made to achieve sustainable development. Sports are one of the key focus areas in our sustainability strategy.

Omantel has a clear-cut and transparent strategy to serve the community. This has been evident when we partnered with Oman Football Association (OFA) to sponsor the premier league (Omantel League) throughout the past six years. We also sponsored the Omani Football National Team that won the first Gulf Cup in the history of the Omani sports and partnered in sponsoring the 2nd Asian Beach Game and many other sports events'.

Q. How bright does the future appear for international data roaming in the Middle East?

A. International data roaming is on the rise, and is increasing exponentially. The trend in the Middle East and globally is a cannibalization of the SMS business by data, and social networking applications are paving the road for such cannibalization. In addition, with the launch of LTE, locally and during roaming, we see further uptake by our customers in their data usage. With the upcoming Voice over LTE (VoLTE) we realize that the voice business would also slowly turn into data in many countries, thus, the data business is certainly what the future will be dependent on.

Q. Please tell us about Point of Presence (PoP) deal between Omantel and TeliaSonera International Carrier. What value has Omantel been able to realize through this partnership?

A. Ranked one of the top two global IP backbone providers by Internet intelligence authority Renesys, TeliaSonera International Carrier (TSIC) owns and operates an award-winning global fiber network. Omantel is honored that TSIC selects Omantel as a partner to host their first PoP in the region. Partnering with Omantel is a natural step for TSIC given Oman's strategic location as the gateway landing point for multiple international cable systems coming into the region. Having TSIC as a major international voice aggregator and one of the top worldwide providers of Internet backbone hosted with us gives us a position as the true link between the East and the West whereas TSIC partnership with us provides them with access to large untapped markets such as Iran, Yemen and Pakistan, countries that we have extensive connectivity with. It has expanded our visibility and positioned Omantel as the go-to provider for international carriers and service providers seeking to do business in the Middle East. Offering services in the region in partnership with a global top Tier 1 carrier has of course given us a competitive edge in the region.

Q. Omantel was selected as one of the Top Three Wholesale Operators in the World. What were the key strategic factors behind this success?

A. The recent international recognition and success of Omantel Wholesale can be summarized in three important factors:

1. Proactive, Transparent, Efficient and a Positive Force in the Marketplace – Thanks to the proactive support to the interconnectivity and development of the region while delivering double-digit growth in wholesale revenues. This has been achieved by capitalizing on Oman's geographic location, political stability and openness to develop one of the most connected and efficient wholesale businesses in the world. From this strategic location, as the gateway to the Middle East, Omantel Wholesale is driving the development of communications infrastructure across the region and beyond in a transparent and open manner. One example on the national market is our strategic approach towards MVNOs where we have actively worked with our partners Renna and Friendi to create even further choice and service in

the market, and at the same time grown our network market share and, of course, our revenues.

2. Connecting Global Hubs with the Lowest Latency – Omantel has used its position as the bridge between East and West to deliver the lowest latency service from Frankfurt to Singapore. It has invested in the operation and development of both the Bay of Bengal Gateway (BBG) and Europe-Persia Express Gateway (EPEG). Together these cable systems offer the lowest latency ever achieved between the two global hubs with RTD latency of 160 milliseconds, which is unchallenged. In addition, these systems give the Middle East and Asia much needed diversity, which guarantees the reliability and resiliency of Omantel's network services. These cable systems give Omantel's customers connectivity from Frankfurt to Singapore without passing through Egypt or the Singapore Strait.

3. First Landing Party in Europe from the GCC – Omantel was able to get the trust of the 16 other parties of the Asia Africa Europe-1 (AAE-1) cable to land the cable in Europe which is a crucial landing in the business case of all the investors. Omantel could see that there was an opportunity to bring its open and neutral business model to landing station facilities in Europe and give operators new choice and competitive pricing when connecting to other undersea cables. Traditionally, dominant players in the market are able to charge high prices for backhaul and interconnection to undersea cable landing stations that operators have no choice but to pay. For Omantel, this was a case of seeing an opportunity to open up a European market with new competition and ensure the success of the AAE-1 cable.

Q. How has Omantel strived to maintain the position of a Best Company for Investor Relations; a position that has been awarded by Annual Middle East Investor Relations for three years in Oman?

A. This is the third time in the last five years, Omantel has been voted as the best company for Investor Relations in Oman. The awards were presented to Omantel at the ME-IR Society Annual Conference. The awards recognize the efforts of those regional companies and IR professionals who play a critical role in developing best Investor Relations practices across the Middle East.
The Finalists for the award were selected using feedback from a Thomson Reuters Extel Survey, which gathered votes from 336 individuals from 139 organizations, based in the Middle East, United States, the UK and continental Europe. The individuals include sell-side analysts covering stocks in the region and buy-side analysts who invest in the region.

Omantel Investor Relations program is built on 'Trust' and 'Transparency' values of the company. Omantel management strives to continuously raise disclosure and investor communication standards to the levels required by local, regional and global investors. This award recognizes the leadership position of Omantel in the field of Investor Relations in the Omani market and it complements recent initiatives undertaken by the company such as obtaining high Corporate Rating by two of the largest credit agencies in the world (S&P and Moody's).

Q. Are there any new investments that Omantel is carrying out with regards to international capacity enhancements, to facilitate both domestic and transit traffic?

A. Despite being one of the most well connected carriers in the Middle East, we are continuously investing to expand our international network, and our facilities, making us even more attractive as preferred partner for the region. More connectivity and more partners create numerous spin-off effects that accelerate an already virtuous cycle for Omantel. One very exciting new investment is the AAE-1 cable which is going to be one of the largest cable systems in the world and brings together 17 operators from around the world to create a new high capacity cable system linking Hong Kong to France via Southeast Asia, the Middle East and Europe. With no new cable systems linking these regions together in nearly 10 years, the AAE-1 will deliver much needed capacity and diversity for operators around the world.

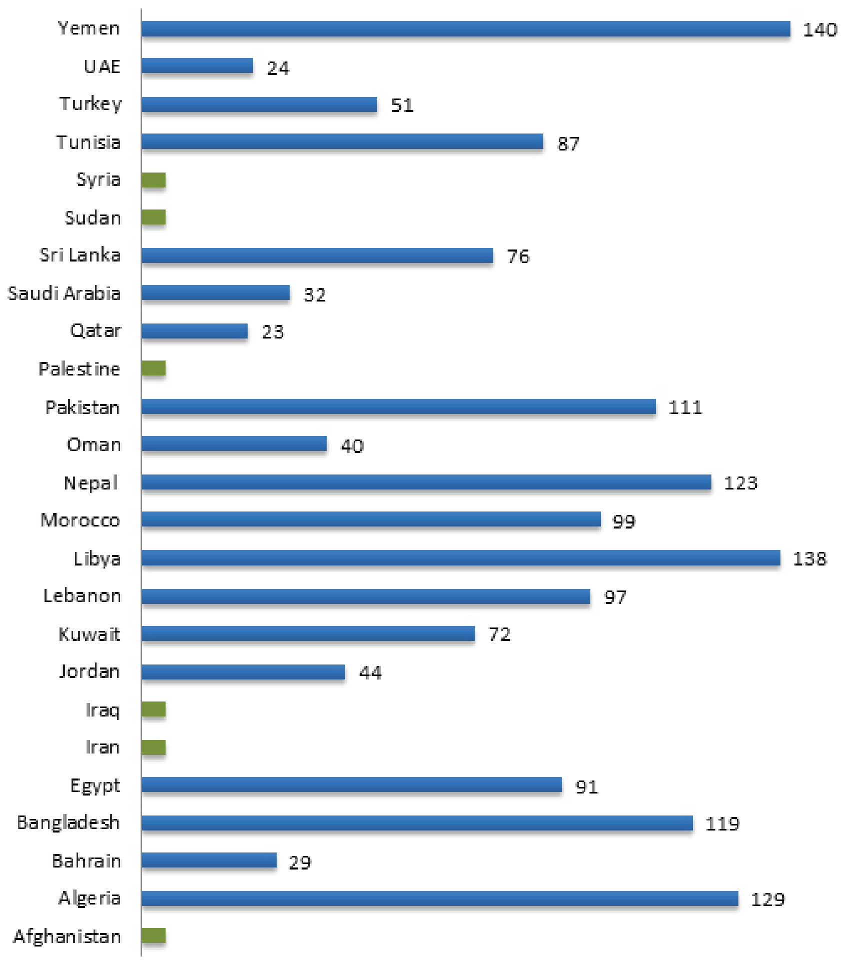
AAE-1 will be a strong complement to our BBG cable that is the first cable where the main trunk is directly between Singapore and the Middle East, main landing in Oman, resulting in RTD latency of less than 68 milliseconds.

We are also in the process of expanding our connectivity to eastern Africa, in addition to increasing our capacity between our PoPs in Europe over to North America, and between Asia and North America. This will enable us to have ample capacity for our customers, domestic and international, and a reach around the globe with redundant access and connectivity to not only the major Internet and traffic exchange hubs of the world, but also the most important global business hubs.

Q. How do you view the current wholesale market, keeping in view the ever rising international traffic as well as the growing number of roaming agreements?

A. Omantel has surpassed more than 1,300 roaming agreements with operators in 199 countries and will continue to grow further its offering across all services and agreements from pre-paid to LTE. Wholesale market is under pressure and with the upcoming potential GCC roaming regulation, the pressure will further increase. Hence, a balance between the wholesale and retail revenues will have to strike. We believe that with the uptake of prepaid as well as LTE data roaming, and with the reduction of wholesale rates, a drastic increase in traffic will occur that will compensate for the decrease in rates.

The Networked Readiness Index 2014 Regional Rank of SAMENA Countries

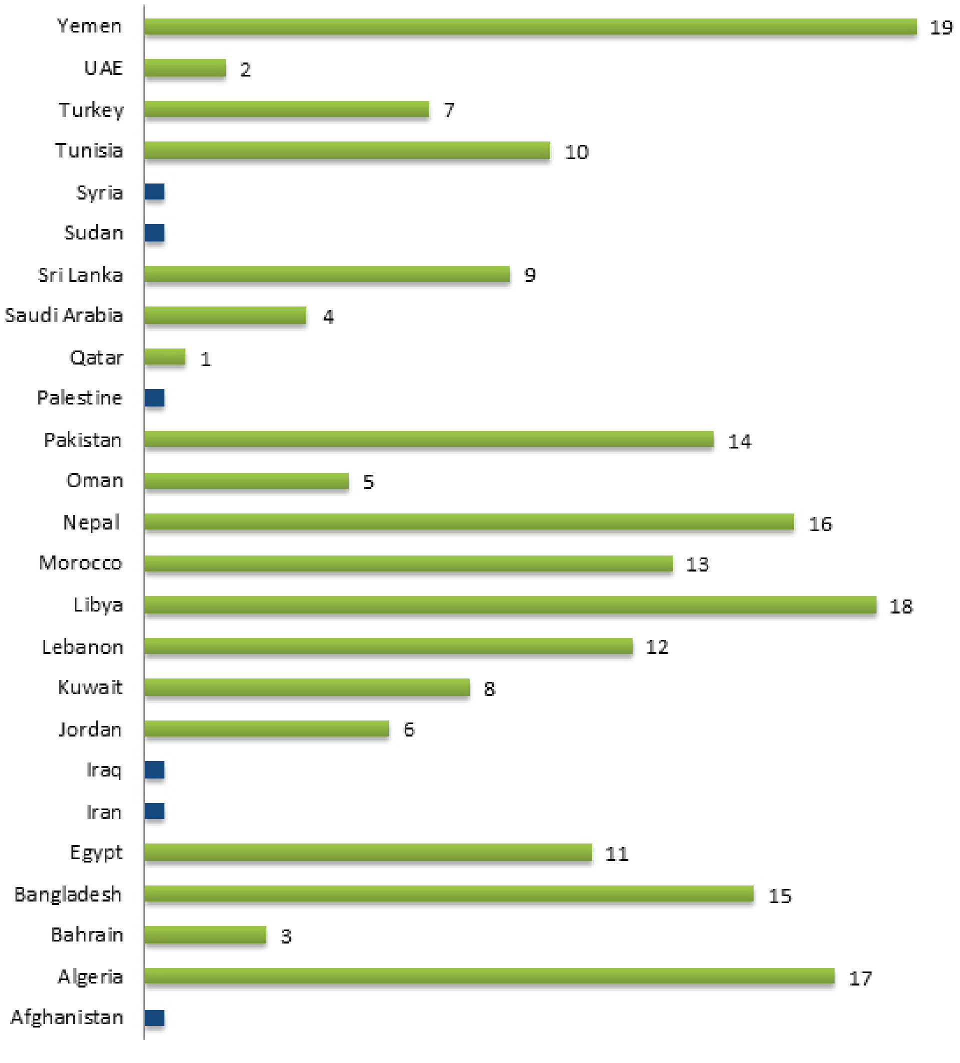


Researchers Note:

Network Readiness Index measures the propensity for countries to exploit the opportunities offered by information and communications technology. The NRI seeks to better comprehend the impact of ICT on the competitiveness of nations. It is composite of three components: the environment for ICT offered by a given country or community (market, political and regulatory, infrastructure environment), the readiness of the community's key stakeholders (individuals, businesses, and governments) to use ICT, and finally the usage of ICT amongst these stakeholders. Data for Afghanistan, Iran Iraq, Palestine, Sudan and Syria is not available.

Image Source: SAMENA Telecommunications Council
Data Source: World Economic Forum

The Networked Readiness Index 2014 Global Rank of SAMENA Countries



Researchers Note:
Data has been extracted via The Global Information Technology Report 2014 by World Economic Forum and analyzed by SAMENA Council. The Network Readiness Index (NRI) is valued between 1 to 7 with 1 being worst and 7 being best. Within the SAMENA region Qatar, UAE and Bahrain are the highest ranked whereas Yemen, Libya Algeria are the lowest ranked countries with respect to Network Readiness Index.

Image Source: SAMENA Telecommunications Council
Data Source: World Economic Forum

MEMBERS NEWS

MEMBERS UPDATES

Dubai Tram to have du WiFi connection for commuters

Telecom provider du will offer WiFi connectivity on the newly-launched Dubai Tram service. As the Smart City Official WiFi proffered in Dubai, du's provision of broadband on Dubai Tram is yet another step towards realizing the Smart City future envisioned by the UAE's leadership, and falls under the company's WiFi UAE initiative. Also Read: Dubai Tram has commuters excited Osman Sultan, CEO, du, said: "On the occasion of the opening of the Dubai Tram, we would like to congratulate the leaders of the UAE for their visionary achievements, and the RTA for the implementation of this landmark development. We join the UAE's residents in celebrating this newest addition to the strong Dubai infrastructure, and are exceptionally proud to be supporting connectivity as the exclusive provider of WiFi to all Dubai Tram commuters." Commuters can enjoy complimentary WiFi by following the simple steps to log in to the service. Full details will be available through a landing page that is automatically opened upon connection. On the special occasion of the inauguration, du will offer complimentary high speed broadband on the Dubai Tram from November 12-13. WiFi service will be rolled-out across the entire length of the Dubai Tram network in phases. Recently, du was announced by Dubai Smart Government as the Smart City Official WiFi Provider, through which the company is expanding its existing WiFi coverage in public areas to give the Dubai community a seamless connectivity experience, with one login and one portal in all public places.

PTCL, CAA sign nationwide online connectivity agreement

Pakistan Telecommunication Company Limited (PTCL), the largest Information Communication Technology (ICT) services provider in the country, has inked an agreement with Pakistan Civil Aviation Authority (PCAA) to provide ICT services, as managed model nationwide. Kamal Ahmed, Chief Digital Services Officer, PTCL and Air Vice Marshal Khawar Hussain, Deputy Director General, PCAA, signed the agreement for establishment of the state-of-the-art communication system at Civil Aviation headquarters in Karachi. The project will facilitate Air Traffic Controllers in transmitting and receiving data in real time over the redundant last mile connectivity for PCAA radar sites and airports in a faster and reliable manner. The implementation of new system will also help in enhancing audio communication between Air Traffic Controllers and Pilots in a manner that all the communication will take place in real time without any distortion. The setup will provide an efficient, scalable, reliable communication system to meet all the operational and business requirements of Civil Aviation Authority. Air Vice Marshal Khawar Hussain, Deputy DG PCAA said at the occasion, "the new system will not only make Pakistan Air Space more secure and safe, but it will also help in setting the benchmark by having state-of-the-art technology in place". Kamal Ahmed, Chief Digital Service Officer, PTCL while commenting at the signing ceremony said, "We are delighted to partner with Civil Aviation Authority and would like to appreciate CAA for its trust in PTCL's sophisticated ICT infrastructure and services. PTCL possesses full capacity to deliver such a strategic and innovative communication system to Civil Aviation Authority.

Ooredoo launches unique Goodwill bundle for customers with disabilities

Ooredoo has introduced a new specifically designed prepaid Mousbak package called 'Freedom' in support of the Ministry of Social Development and the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) initiatives to improve the quality of life for people with disabilities in the Sultanate. Customers with an Omani Disability Card issued by the Ministry of Social Development can enjoy reduced call rates of 19 Baiza per minute for national voice and video calls at any time of day, more than 50% less than regular Mousbak tariffs, and 100 MB of mobile data every month. "The new 'Freedom" packs aim to bring a new sense of independence to people facing challenges in their daily life. Designed specifically for customers with physical disabilities and those with vision and hearing impairments, our new bundle is to help empower people with disabilities, keeping them as connected as anybody else to their families and friends and up to date with the latest technology" said Feras Al Shaikh, Ooredoo Director of Sales. The bundle is available across all Ooredoo 29 stores countrywide. To activate the new service, customers are required to bring their Disability Card to any Ooredoo store, where they will receive priority service and a Customer Champion will be available to assist. More information on the full range of Ooredoo products and services can be found online by visiting the Ooredoo website at www.ooredoo.om

Etisalat reinforces technology leadership with network upgrades and expansions

Etisalat announced today technological upgrades and expansions in its networks, reinforcing its position as the leading telecommunications service provider in the region. Major enhancements in 4G LTE network include enhancing of Etisalat's indoor coverage to improve customer experience. Etisalat's 4G network extensively covers 88 percent of the country's populated areas. During 2014, a large number of base stations were deployed for indoor coverage and to enhance customer experience. The total number of indoor base stations has reached 6000. This will further boost indoor coverage capabilities in buildings, malls, and airports. Having established the region's most solid, future-ready 3G and 4G LTE networks to meet the growing needs of the UAE's highly connected environment, the company upgraded the country's fastest mobile Internet at speeds of 150Mbps, reaching 300 Mbps recently. A phased upgrade to 4G LTE (A) is now making way for ultra-speeds for Etisalat's mobile customers. In line with the economic growth and demand of the UAE's western regions, Etisalat's plans of network expansion in the Western Region, are on track. Etisalat also added up on top of more than 300 base stations on the boarder and desert areas of the country to enhance its coverage. A per the latest UAE TRA Cellular Mobile Networks benchmarking report, Etisalat maintained its leading position in the market in terms of quality of 4G LTE mobile services. To meet strong surge in data consumption in the UAE, Etisalat's fiber-to-the-home network (FTTH) has also enabled an ultrafast residential Internet network speed of up to 1Gbps. The company's extensive FTTH network has helped rank UAE a global leader in terms of fiber-optic penetration, which covers more than 85 percent of the country's populated areas. Having invested tens of billions in the FTTH network, Etisalat continues to develop its fiber optic infrastructure and ranked Abu Dhabi as the world's first Capital to be fully fiber-connected. As the first in the region to have successfully tested Voice over LTE (VoLTE) and enhanced Single Radio Call Continuity (eSRVCC) implementation back in May 2013, Etisalat is well on track to launch the service to customers in the UAE depending on handsets availability. VoLTE will allow customers to use 4G LTE technology for both data and voice services on a single device. In support to the UAE government's SMART initiatives, Etisalat will deliver the needed solutions on its vast fiber and cellular 3G and 4G LTE capabilities as well as in-depth machine-to-machine (M2M) experience. As the company undertakes network development projects, another major focus area for Etisalat is delivering on its promise to reduce carbon footprint in the UAE. Among several recent initiatives undertaken by the company to reduce environmental impact of traditional energy sources, it collaborated with the UAE's electricity utility providers to connect grid power for more than 100 mobile network sites, which were operating on diesel generators. Etisalat has also switched to more efficient cooling systems for its mobile sites, substantially reducing the electrical load requirement and consumption. Furthermore, to ensure highest network efficiencies with lower power consumption, Etisalat has undertaken modernization of its legacy network with advanced high-end equipment. Fulfilling its corporate responsibility towards a green future of the UAE, Etisalat has teamed up with global and local energy efficiency leaders to develop jointly renewable energy products and solutions that are also environmentally sustainable. Etisalat offers distinguished IPTV services, equipped with the latest techniques of digital broadcasting to enrich the viewing experience for Etisalat customers by broadcasting high-definition through a variety of compatible devices including smart phones, tablets and PCs. As a first in the region, Etisalat introduced Plug and Play to its network for the connectivity of Customer Premises Equipment (CPE). This unique approach is a built-in auto-detection/auto-configuration mechanism to ensure faster service provisioning to Etisalat Customers for CPE. In coming months, Etisalat plans to launch its first owned state-of-the-art private and public clouds for customers in the UAE for efficiently processing data through a common infrastructure connected to the Internet.

STC Regional Managers Convene for Quarterly Meeting

Saudi Telecom Company (STC) regional managers from across the Kingdom held their 2014 third quarter meeting at STC headquarters in the King Abdul Aziz Communication Complex in Riyadh. Eng. Abdul Aziz bin Abdullah Alsugair, STC Chairman, attended the meeting, as well as the STC General Director. Chairman frequently underscores the importance of these quarterly meetings and applauds regional senior management and regional managers for their efforts to strengthen STC's presence across the Kingdom. At the gathering, he commented that a key function of these meetings is to forge a strong connection between headquarters and regional offices to ensure that the company's policies are effectively implemented on the local level. Eng. Alsugair encouraged attendees to actively seek innovative ways to offer the highest levels of service to both fellow employees and customers. He emphasized the importance of knowledge and experience sharing, and strengthening communication and cooperation between regions. Regional managers exchanged opinions, expertise, and experiences, as well as discussed ways to strengthen cooperation between regional offices to enhance productivity. Collaboratively, regional managers have developed innovative strategies to increase sales and maintain STC's competitiveness in the market.

Google Launches Donation Campaign to Fight Ebola

Google has joined the fight against Ebola and pledged to give US$2 for every dollar donated through its site, its CEO announced on Monday. Larry Page wrote in a blog post that Google will also immediately donate $10 million to support nonprofits "doing remarkable work in very difficult circumstances," including Medicins Sans Frontiers (Doctors Without Borders), International Rescue Committee and the U.S. Fund for UNICEF. Page also said the family foundation would give $15 million in a separate donation. Google's public-giving campaign follows a similar initiative by Facebook, which recently placed banners at the top of News Feeds that asked users to donate to similar nonprofits. While the Google campaign distinguishes itself with the company's double-matched donation, the Facebook campaign focuses on user donation and providing services like spreading key information and assisting communications for health workers in Ebola-stricken countries in West Africa.

CITC consults on interconnection, access to physical facilities guidelines

Saudi Arabian telecoms regulator the Communications and Information Technology Commission (CITC) has opened a public consultation on draft Interconnection Guidelines and new Guidelines for Access to Physical Facilities. The watchdog highlighted that the decision was taken in order to reflect 'the technological and market developments in ICT since the current Interconnection Guidelines were issued in 2003'. The CITC said that the updated Guidelines for Access to Physical Facilities will establish rules governing access to physical facilities, including collocation and sharing of physical facilities; provide a framework for access to physical facilities and networks in a technologically neutral manner; foster investment in and deployment of next generation networks (NGN); and establish a process for dealing with access disputes, among other things. The draft Interconnection Guidelines, meanwhile, seek to ensure that all service providers are treated fairly and in a non-discriminatory manner, with respect to the provision of interconnection services, to ensure good practice with respect to interconnection services between service providers and to promote the provision of high quality services for interconnection through technical and economic efficiency. The CITC has invited all interested parties to provide their feedback on the draft documents by February 2, 2015.

Vodafone announces unlimited data plan at half price for life

Vodafone Qatar is introducing its new Data Plans with increased data allowances and special promotional offers which include Unlimited data and discounts for life. The new Data Plans range from Vodafone Data Plan 50 with 1 GB data bundled to Data Plan 400 with an Unlimited data bundle. Additionally, existing and new Postpaid customers will get 50 per cent off for life on Data Plans. Customers, who are not on a Vodafone Postpaid plan, will get 30 per cent off for life on all Data Plans except Data Plan 50. The promotion offers customers a life-time discount promise if they subscribe to a Vodafone Data Plan up to 31st December 2014. Existing Postpaid customers and those who take it along with a new Postpaid line get 50 per cent discount for life in the new Data Plans promotion, which include the: Data Plan 50 offering 1 GB of data at QR 25/ month instead of QR 50; Data Plan 70 offering 2.5 GB of data at QR 35/ month instead of QR 70; Data Plan 100 offering 7 GB of data at QR 50/ month instead of QR 100; Data Plan 200 offering 15 GB of data at QR 100/ month instead of QR 200; Data Plan 300 offering 25 GB of data at QR 150/ month instead of QR 300; and Data Plan 400 offering unlimited data at QR 200/ month instead of QR 400. As a part of this promotion Customers who don't have a Vodafone Postpaid line can enjoy 30 per cent monthly discount for life on these fantastic Data Plans, except Data Plan 50, with the following fees: Data Plan 70 at QR 49; Data Plan 100 at QR 70; Data Plan 200 at QR 140; Data Plan 300 at QR 210; and Data Plan 400 at QR 280. Customers can use these data plans to power their tablets, smart-phones, USB hotspots and other smart devices with high speed internet including 4G network. Vodafone Qatar said: "This is a fantastic data offer offering Vodafone customers lifetime discounts. Our customers' data demand is significantly increasing, especially following the launch of Vodafone 4G, and they're looking for real value that allows them to enjoy their favourite music, videos, games or simply stay in touch with family and friends. Our new discounted Data Plans are the perfect solution to that. Each plan is packed with data at greatly affordable rates and are available to everyone in Qatar."

Qualcomm LTE Direct Coming in 2016

Qualcomm's LTE Direct proximal discovery service is expected to become commercially available in 2016. Speaking at the Open Mobile Summit, Mahesh Makhijani, senior director for Qualcomm Research, fit the technology in with Release 12 and said it is currently undergoing trials with Deutsche Telekom and KT. He said Qualcomm has LTE Direct partnerships in place with Yahoo, Control Group, R/GA, the Sacramento Kings and Radius Networks, in addition to the Facebook partnership Qualcomm announced in September. Makhijani wants us to think of LTE Direct as a "digital 6th sense" for mobile devices. The device-to-device technology works a little like a beacon on a phone. It puts out two basic messages, called expressions. Public expressions are app agnostic and any proximal device can decode them. Makhijani said they're suited for advertising. Private expressions are app specific and only proximal devices with a "key" can decode them. Makhijani said relevance and filtering occurs at the modem layer and that communication is accomplished via traditional LTE or Wi-Fi—meaning the technology only works under network coverage. Qualcomm places LTE Direct above Bluetooth LE in a couple of areas. The company says LTE Direct has 10x the range of BLE, which reaches out approximately 50 meters. The company also touts the scalability of the technology, which allows for always-on discoverability and promises not to drain device batteries just because the number of users increases. Makhijani also stressed that LTE Direct is a horizontal platform that works across applications.

Huawei to Establish Smartphone R&D Center in Korea

Huawei is planning to set up a research and development (R&D) center for Smartphones in Korea. On November 12, a representative of Huawei Korea confirmed by saying, "We are working to establish an R&D center, and we are finalizing our plan soon." However, the Android device manufacturer did not elaborate on the location or size of the building. The official remarked, "We haven't decided on the size of the R&D center yet," adding, "We will be able to increase the size if Korea provides support." The Chinese company revealed that it is running R&D centers in 16 countries, including the U.S., the U.K., Germany, and India. The Huawei associate said, "When buying Smartphones, Korean consumers carefully examine the design, hardware specification, software functions of devices," adding, "If we open up an R&D center in Korea, it will be of benefit to us." When asked about its decision about the takeover of Pantech, the official said, "I cannot comment on the issue at the moment." Huawei is planning to set up a research and development (R&D) center for Smartphones in Korea.

BlackBerry Eyes Emerging Markets For Growth, BES10 Strong

BlackBerry delivered positive earnings surprises in three quarters last year, with an average beat of 46.89%. The company reported narrower-than-expected loss in the second quarter of fiscal 2015 wherein the bottom line surpassed the Zacks Consensus Estimate while the top line was on par with the same. By offering a convenient, reliable and secure way of accessing email in real time, BlackBerry has been able to successfully differentiate its products from the other offerings in the communications market. The company enjoys a strong brand value in the wireless PDA market, leveraging the popularity of its push email system. Further, BlackBerry holds 2,033 patents ranging from mobile security to push email in high-end Smartphones. Its extensive patent portfolio is also expected to help in further innovation. A major growth product for BlackBerry is its BlackBerry Enterprise Service 10 (BES10) solution. This is a cross-platform product interoperable with Apple Inc.'s iOS and Google Inc.'s Android. BES10 provides flexibility, scalability, high security and cost-effectiveness to its customers. Recently, the company also launched the BES12 platform. BlackBerry is actively targeting the highly populated markets of China and India. The company expects its enterprise service business to witness strong growth in these countries owing to the high demand for efficient communication system security in the corporate sector. The company also initiated the shipping of budget friendly full-touch Z3 Smartphones. Z3 is a joint effort by BlackBerry and Foxconn Intl Hldg (HK:2038) – which will supply cheaper inventories for the manufacturing of the Smartphones. Such a strategic move will help the Canadian device maker to improve margins along with capitalizing on the booming Smartphone market of Indonesia and other emerging nations. Recently, BlackBerry received a phenomenal 200,000-order for its latest large screen Smartphone, Passport. However, in the second quarter of fiscal 2015, BlackBerry sold 2.4 million smartphones, down 44% year over year and also significantly below Samsung's 78 million and Apple's 39 million. This indicates that the company's trouble in the high-end smartphone business persists. BlackBerry is rapidly losing its leadership position in the corporate segment which is characterized as high-margin since business executives generally opt for expensive smartphones. BlackBerry is also striving to cater to the retail consumer segment but has failed to do so as its software remains uncompetitive with respect to application-friendly features of iOS and Android. BlackBerry currently has a Zacks Rank #2 (Buy). Another well-performing company worth considering in this sector is SK Telecom Co. Ltd. with a Zacks Rank #1 (Strong Buy).

Qualcomm Launches Gobi 9x45 LTE Modem With Download Speeds Up to 450Mbps

Qualcomm has announced its fifth-generation LTE solution called the Gobi 9x45 modem, alongside the second-generation Qualcomm RF360 envelope tracker, the QFE3100. The chipmaker says that the new Qualcomm Gobi 9x45 modem and QFE3100 are currently sampling with customers and are expected to be commercially available in 2015. The company touts that the Gobi 9x45 modem as the "first announced Category 10 LTE cellular modem." It comes with download speeds of up to 450Mbps and upload speeds of up to 100Mbps across the TDD and FDD spectrum.

Sudatel Group reported strong performance in the first half of 2014 comparing to the previous years

Net Income grew by eight times to reach USD 28 million Gross profit margin reached 71% during the 1st half 2014, EBIDTA Margin reached 32%, Indicating improvements across all group operations

SUDATEL Telecom Group (STG) announced the company's results for the period ending at 30 June 2014 (6 months), approved by the Board of Directors.

Total Active Subscribers: 11.2 million
EBIDTA: USD 75 million
EBIDTA Margin: 32%
Net Income: USD 28 million
EPS: USD 0.024

H1 2014 vs. H1 2013
STG generated consolidated revenue of USD 233 million for the period January 1, 2014 through June 30, 2014. The consolidated EBIDTA for the same period is USD 75 million. EBIDTA Margin is 32% at the end of the period against 27% for the same period 2013 reflecting operational efficiency. Earnings Per Share for the period is USD 0.024, significant increases from USD 0.003 for the same period 2013.

Key Notes for H1 2014

- Signing MoU to fund expansions in Mauritania with USD 50 million,
- STG operation in Guinea Conakry entered agreements to invest around Euro 20 million in network expansion to improve network coverage;
- Improvement of Group financial indicators due to net profit, payments and restructuring of debts,

STG Chairman of the Board of Directors, DR. Abdelrahman Mohamed Dirar commented on H1 2014 results: "H1 2014 results were good achievement for the group moving from net losses in previous years to net profits with great momentum, and hope for even better revenue number in the coming period.

STG is strategically considering smart investments in Sudan and West Africa operations to continue business improvements, and enhance position in all markets.

Data, on both fixed and mobile platforms, is the strategic direction and focus for our future, utilizing the good infrastructure that Sudatel owns"

STG President and CEO, Eng Tarig Hamza Zainelabdin stated:
"The results of 2014 1st half reflected an excellent effort being made by all group operations as part of strategic direction to strengthen the financial outlook of the group, on both, top and bottom lines.

Sudatel West Africa operation recorded its first positive net income since the start up of the investment, due to high level of efficiency in Mauritania, change of the marketing strategy in Senegal, stabilization effort in Guinea Conakry.
Despite the high inflation rate and local currency devaluation in the main operations of Sudan, reported EBIDTA is USD 48 million, while net income is USD 24 million. Sudan operation represents 66% of group active Subscribers and 56% of group revenues for H1 2014.

The group managed to maintain an acceptable operating cost compared to the same period last year, additional efforts and measures are being taken to further control and reduce cost, without compromising quality, and improving the bottom line.

Eng. Tarig also added, "STG is adopting a transformational strategy moving from a traditional mobile telecom operator towards an integrated ICT services and solutions enabler across all markets serving Business, Consumers segments and other operators

We are strategically focusing on enhancing performance through maximizing operation efficiency while keep focusing on delivering better customer experience to provide convenient services across all touch points throughout the whole customer life cycle.

Through the investments made on Submarine cables and capacities in SAS-I, SAS-II, EASSY, ACE, Data Centres and Landing stations, STG will continue to improve on our returns from the wholesale and corporate business."

He concluded: "We strongly believe that the results of the 1st half 2014 are very strong evidence to our shareholders and investors of the positive group growth and future potentials."

REGIONAL NEWS

REGIONAL UPDATES

DSO to Highlight Smart City Initiatives at 17th TechForum

Dubai Silicon Oasis (DSO), the integrated free zone technology park, is set to host its 17th TechForum focusing on smart city technology and its social and commercial implications for the GCC region. The event will take place on 11 November from 6:30pm-9:00pm at DSOA headquarters bringing together technology professionals, experts, academics and students. In the opening session, Eng. Muammar Al Katheeri, Vice President - Engineering Management and Chairman of the Smart City Committee at DSOA will highlight the organisation's contribution to the Dubai Smart City vision with a special focus on the newly launched AED1.1 billion Smart City project - the Silicon Park. Dr. Mazen Zein, Business Development and Strategy Director, Schneider Electric, Dr. Philippe Bouvier, Adjunct Professor, RIT Dubai, and Fatih Simsek, Product Manager, Philips Lighting are some of the eminent speakers that will headline the event. Ahead of the event, Eng. Muammar Al Katheeri said: " Dubai Silicon Oasis TechForum provides a platform for local and global experts to come together in a knowledge incubation space. With the recent launch of the Silicon Park project in Dubai and other smart cities around the world, we believe this is an opportune moment to focus on the topic. "The upcoming knowledge session will highlight the role of digital technologies that make cities truly smart and sustainable. The event will also reiterate the importance of introducing smart living aspects with its quantitative and qualitative criteria." The 17th edition of TechForum is supported by Silicon Oasis Capital and Silicon Oasis Founders, a technology incubation centre owned by DSOA that encourages local entrepreneurial talent in the promising mobile application space and related technologies. The earlier editions of TechForum focused on topics such as wearable technology, data processing, mobile payments, cloud computing, augmented reality and social media with speakers from Du, Microsoft, SAP, IDC, Oracle, Facebook and Linked-In among others. A wholly-owned entity of the government of Dubai, DSO operates as a free zone technology park for large enterprises, medium and small companies looking to set up their offices in Dubai.

Nepal unveils new broadband policy

The government of Nepal has unveiled its new National Broadband Policy 2014, under which it hopes to spur the development of high speed internet services in the country. The document, which has been prepared by sector regulator the Nepal Telecommunications Authority (NTA), aims to have at least 30% of households subscribing to a broadband service by 2018, up from around 5% currently, with networks passing at least 45% of premises by that date. In addition, the NTA wants to see the price of entry-level services brought down to below 3.5% of per-capita income, or NPR208 (USD2.10) a month, from the existing level of 17% of income. According to a report from the Himalayan, other targets set by the policy include expanding broadband internet service to 70% of village development committees within three years of implementation of the policy, connecting 20% of public secondary schools with a service of at least 1Mbps, and introducing broadband access to all state-owned hospitals and at least 15% of health posts by 2018.

Morocco kicks off 4G spectrum contest

The Moroccan telecoms regulator has begun the process that will lead to the allocation of 4G mobile licences by creating a pair of documents that will govern the contest. The country's National Telecommunications Regulatory Agency (ANRT) on Monday announced that its 'call for competition' documents will be published on 17 November. One covers the regulatory, technical and financial conditions that 4G licensees will be required to adhere to, as well as coverage and quality of service obligations. The second sets out the rules regarding the 4G licensing process itself. "The explosion of mobile data usage on 4G, seen at a global level over the coming years, is expected to grow at rates of above 50% and will provide opportunities to be seized in Morocco and Africa as a whole," the ANRT said in a statement. It added that in addition to facilitating an increase in mobile data usage, 4G will also pave the way for new services, such as m-commerce, e-government, media, education and health offerings. Morocco's mobile market is served by three main operators: market leader Maroc Telecom, which was acquired by Etisalat in May; Meditel, which counts Orange among its shareholders; and smaller player INWI. Mobile penetration in Morocco is around the 130% mark, according to a report published by Paul Budde in mid-2014.

Egypt To Bolster ICT Sector, Puts Out Call For More Investors

GrameenPhone, the Bangladeshi Atef Hemly, Egypt's communications and information technology minister says that progress within other sectors relies on reform within the country's ICT sector, CCTV Africa reported. In addition to bolstering Egypt's education and health sectors, creating jobs is on the top of the list for the country, which is working hard to rebuild its political and infrastructural landscape. "There's no doubt that the technology and communications sector is one of the [most] competitive when it comes to investment," Hemly told CCTV Africa. "As part of building our new Egypt and modern Egypt, ICT is a cornerstone to do that."

5.7 million Internet users in Jordan

Eighty Jordanian experts from both public and private sector on Tuesday discussed risks of cyber crimes at a two-day forum, titled "Cyber Crimes - Challenges and Solutions", being held in Amman. In the forum's opening speech, Director of the Public Security Department (PSD) delegate Major General Abdul Hadi Al Dmour said that statistics indicate that the number of Internet users in Jordan has reached 5.7 million, accounting for 73 percent of the Kingdom's population. He explained that the revolution in transport, telecommunications and information technology reflected on humanitarian activities both positively and negatively. Criminals also exploit such technologies and software to carry out traditional crimes with modern electronic methods. He added that the PSD adopted a royal vision in putting up scientific and well thought out strategies to combat crime during the 2013-2016 period, based on community partnership, international cooperation and legislative axis to form an integrated security system.

The forum will present 10 working papers focused on the types of cyber crimes, technology and malicious software used to commit them, the threats these pose, and modern techniques and standards that can be followed to avoid and reduce cyber crime.

Maroc Telecom to upgrade mobile network in several locations

Maroc Telecom is planning to upgrade its mobile network in several locations, including Tangier, Kenitra, El Jadida, Laayoune and Ouarzazate, during the month of November, domestic news source Le Matin reports. The cellco aims to expand and improve the coverage and quality of its 3G networks in these locations and prepare the infrastructure for a potential migration to 4G Long Term Evolution (LTE) technology. The network expansion is part of Maroc Telecom's modernization program, which was launched back in 2012; the operator has signed four investment agreements with the Moroccan government for a total of EUR3.9 billion (USD4.86 billion) to carry out the work.

IT Ministry keen to revamp business environment

GSMA delegation led by Mr. Chris Zull spectrum Director Asia Pacific called on the Minister of State for Information Technology and Telecom Ms Anusha Rahman in her office today Federal Secretary IT Mr. Azmat Ali Ranjha was also present in the meeting. The Minister apprised the delegates regarding the role of current government reflecting most visible positive change in Pakistan. She also appreciated the GSMA for coming up with best practice policy and regulatory advice, which is always welcomed. Minister further said that development of ICT sector remained our focused area since beginning because it can bring immediate positive impact in people's lives through improved socio economic development. Spectrum auction through a transparent and open process is a testimony. Both GSMA and the industry have witnessed the inclusive and consultative approach adopted for concluding this important initiative. We are now ready for the next cycle of growth, which obviously has to now focus on "Delivering the benefit of broadband to masses through innovative services". Establishment of 500 telecenters is in the offing and I would ask to the industry to come forward and participate in the bidding processes of these tele centers, Minister added. Minister further added that steps are being taken to resolve industry issues on priority particularly improvement of business environment (Taxation etc.). Minister shared with the delegation that after the inception of 3G/4G, our focus is on local smart phone manufacturing. We are preparing a policy package for incentivizing investment in local mobile manufacturing industry, while discussing new telecom policy; Minister said that we have adopted fully participative and inclusive process. All stakeholders have been consulted and this Process would remain accommodative till the last draft is concluded by end of this year. Final executive round of mutual consultation with telecom industry leaders would be held before issuance of the final policy draft. The Minister shared that after new spectrum auction we are on the road of technological advancement with focus on the provision of e-services to the people i.e., e-agriculture, e-learning and e-health. Currently more than 1100 indigenous companies are registered with PSEB and we are inviting these telecom companies to come forward and concentrate on applications development and content development to help in building the eco system in our rapidly thriving telecom market. The Minister said that accelerated digitisation is our ultimate goal and asked for continuous support and help from GSMA and industry in making digital Pakistan a reality. Together we can take all the benefits of the broadband revolution to the people. We need more collaborative work between industry and Government to rollout services that benefit the people and increase utility of the 3G/4G for the masses. GSMA delegation appreciated the determination of the government of Pakistan for initiation of dynamic measures to strengthen the ICT industry. they emphasized the evolution witness in Pakistan within short span of one year.

ICASA publishes mobile spectrum roadmap

Telecoms watchdog the Independent Communications Authority of South

Africa (ICASA) has published the Final International Mobile Telephony (IMT) Roadmap, which outlines plans for freeing up additional spectrum for mobile broadband services by migrating a number of current licensees out of or within bands. The document seeks to 'ensure universal availability of broadband services, as well as [promoting] a vibrant and competitive telecommunications industry'. With regards to the 694MHz-876MHz frequency band, the regulator proposes that Neotel, which currently holds 2×5MHz paired spectrum in the 827MHz-832MHz/872MHz-877MHz bands, should be migrated to 825MHz-830MHz/870MHz-875MHz band. The operator may also be required to implement mitigation measures (i.e. filters) in order to minimize GSM-R interference and be restricted to use 2×3.75MHz for CDMA voice services in areas with GSM-R coverage. Further, ICASA discusses several options for potential spectrum allocations in the 450MHz-470MHz band, which will be used to boost coverage in underserved areas. In order to release spectrum for the 'SA Connect' initiative, the migration process for rural areas could start as early as 2015, with existing spectrum holders required to vacate the band in rural areas no later than the end of 2018. For urban areas, existing licensees will be obliged to migrate out of the band by the end of 2022. ICASA has also opened a public consultation on its draft Radio Frequency Spectrum Assignment Plan (RFSAP) for IMT. The Draft RFSAP seeks to specify the technical conditions on the use of the frequency bands and is aimed at soliciting views from stakeholders on the Rules for Services operating in each frequency band. All interested parties are invited to submit their comments on the topic within 14 days of the document's publication. Although the regulator is planning to adopt the new frequency assignment plan by July 2015, the issuance of licenses before that date has not been ruled out.

Ministry of Information and Communications Technology partners with Microsoft Jordan to implement three national projects

Microsoft Jordan has partnered with the Ministry of Information and Communications Technology (MoICT) to establish a centralized data exchange platform that will enable the development and launch of 19 electronic services for 11 government entities. This step corresponds with the royal vision of His Majesty King Abdullah II to deliver a national e-government program that fosters socio-economic growth across Jordan. Microsoft Jordan has begun implementing three projects that will enhance data security, efficiency and productivity at all governmental organizations and departments throughout the Kingdom, in addition to providing a unified system that manages their performance on a national level. Microsoft Jordan is currently in the process of finalizing the marketing plan for the National Could platform - launched at the beginning of the year in cooperation with the MoICT - in order to educate government entities on the project's mechanism and many benefits. During the first phase, government entities were provided with a consolidated Data Center that is powered by cloud technologies. The Data Center is located in the National Information Technology Center (NITC) and is linked to over 90 government entities via a private network. In later stages, the platform will serve as a virtual Data Center for startups and small and medium enterprises (SME). Microsoft Jordan is also working towards integrating the Enterprise Project Management (EPM) platform into the operations of over 40 government departments and organizations in order to facilitate project monitoring and supervising procedures. In turn, Microsoft Jordan Country Manager, Hussein Malhas, said, "It takes a lot of dedication, time and effort to create change and set up an e-governance environment that is capable of benefiting all social segments. That's why we're committed to working hard towards ongoing development in line with our goal to support the national plan. We're proud of our partnership with the MoICT and of our collaboration with the Government of Jordan, which is one of the first in the region to sign multiple deals with Microsoft, proving yet again its genuine interest in implementing laws and legislations related to intellectual property rights."

ICT fund invests Dh1.6 billion in projects in the UAE

ICT Fund, which works under the realm of Telecom Regulatory Authority (TRA) has invested more than Dh1.6 billion in the last six years in various projects in information and communications technology sector including in education and space technology. Abu Dhabi based federal body said that the rate of investment has increased exponentially as the sector has been growing. "We have seen 171 per cent increase in the investment in the last two years. Our investment is primarily driven by ICT strategy of the UAE government," said Omar Al Mahmoud, CEO of ICT fund while speaking to reporters on the sidelines of Abu Dhabi Media summit. He said the fund is being used in setting up a number of projects including smart government initiatives, research and development and building a national telescope and space technology. "Our goal is to build a knowledge based society. UAE has moved beyond oil and gas sector to service sector. We have a small population and can be easily connected with technology." The fund established in 2007 has been working to strengthen the UAE ICT sector including nurturing incubators, supporting research and development projects, educational institutions and providing scholarships for the development of the sector. "We are converting into a smart based society, smart based initiatives. We have teachers and students utilising latest technology in educational systems." He said one per cent of the telecom operators revenue is paid towards ICT fund.

Major mobile groups interested in running Lebanese networks, says minister

Lebanese telecoms minister Boutros Harb told the Daily Star Newspaper on Monday that major international mobile operators such as Saudi Telecom Company (STC), Orange Group, Zain Group and Etisalat are interested in bidding in an upcoming process which he hopes will see two-year contracts awarded to manage Lebanon's two state-owned cellular networks, in place of the short-term rolling contracts currently held by Zain and Egypt's Orascom Telecom. Harb said that 'great interest' was confirmed by various potential bidders within the framework of the minister's recent visits to Dubai, South Korea and China. In October Harb extended the management contracts for Touch (Zain) and Alfa (Orascom) for six months to give the telecoms ministry time to finalize terms and conditions and gain state approval for the longer-term contracting process. During the mooted two-year management period, Harb intends to push for implementing delayed telecoms sector reforms as per Law 431 of 2002, which stipulates the transformation of state-owned incumbent fixed line operator Ogero into Liban Telecom, an integrated telco licensed for all mobile/fixed services and earmarked for privatization. Harb explained that the government would look to attract a major international strategic partner 'such as Vodafone or Orange' to take a 40% stake in Liban Telecom, thereby significantly boosting competition.

REGULATORY NEWS

Regulatory News

Iraq's cellphone operators to pay $307 mln for 3G airwaves-regulator

Iraq's mobile phone network operators have agreed to pay $307 million each for radio spectrum, enabling them to launch higher-speed 3G mobile internet services in the war-torn country in two months, a senior official at the national regulator told Reuters. Iraq is one of the few Middle East countries still reliant on 2G networks, which mostly carry voice calls and SMS texts and only the most basic online services, while fixed line internet connections are expensive and unreliable. The three mobile network operators Zain Iraq, the Ooredoo, and Orange have been waiting for several years to begin 3G services. In October sources familiar with the matter said the government wanted the companies to each pay $307 million for the spectrum, much to their dismay. But the companies have now agreed to this fee and made downpayments of $73 million a few days ago, Ali al-Khwaildi, chief of the commissioners' council at the Communications and Media Commission (CMC), told Reuters. The companies will settle the remainder in four installments over the following 18 months, the first of which will be paid at the signing of the 3G contract on Nov. 10, said Khwaildi. There will be a two-month testing period before the commercial launch of 3G, he said. "We hope that this service will offer job opportunities for a high number of people," said Khwaildi. The operators each paid $1.25 billion for 15-year licenses in 2007. These permits were technology-neutral, meaning they did not require a separate 3G license, only the spectrum, so the operators were opposed to paying extra fees, especially when their profits are in retreat. Zain Iraq's nine-month profit to Sept. 30 fell 14 percent to $224 million, outpacing a 4 percent drop in revenue to $1.24 billion, as it suffered from temporary network shutdowns and higher network operating costs due to the civil war. Zain's subscribers are concentrated in Baghdad and southern Iraq, so the company has suffered less in the tumult since Sunni Muslim militant group Islamic State seized much of the north and west of the country this year. Asiacell grew from its base in the Kurdish city of Sulaymaniyah. Its fuel and security costs have increased, transmitter tower maintenance is more difficult and the government's periodical blocking of social media and some websites has affected its data business, parent Ooredoo said in reporting its third-quarter results. Asiacell's nine-month revenue fell 9.5 percent to 4.8 billion Qatari riyals ($1.32 billion) and its net profit dropped 38 percent over the same period to 868 million riyals.

Government authorizes NCCR to announce tender for obtaining 3G license

Ukraine's Cabinet of Ministers has authorized the National Commission for Communications Regulation (NCCR) to announce a tender for obtaining licenses for the UMTS (3G) standard communications, Minister of the Cabinet

Ostap Semerak has told reporters. "According to the document we have approved today [the conditions of the tender], the NCCR will have the possibility of announcing a tender, it will last 60 days. In January we will sum up the tender," he said. Semerak added that the conditions of the tender for obtaining the license, which the government approved on November 5, will allow maximum competition and the most transparent conducting of the tender. He also noted that the process of frequency conversion would take place without the elements of corruption.

ACCC should give up telecom regulatory powers, says former head

A former chairperson of the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) has supported spinning off the agency's telecom regulatory role to a specialist entity. At the Charles Todd Oration in Sydney, Graeme Samuel – chair of the ACCC from 2003 to 2011 – backed recommendations from the Vertigan NBN review and Harper competition review on the future role of the ACCC in telecom regulation. While Samuel said the ACCC could retain its role enforcing competition laws, he recommended the establishment of an "essential services commission" that would bring all utility regulators into one agency, "working on analytical issues, mainly focused around the pricing and conditions of access to monopoly and quasi-monopoly services." The commission would bring together regulatory functions of the ACCC and the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA), as well as energy regulators, he said. "There are compelling reasons for this," said Samuel. "The pricing and access analyses of determinations require a specific regulatory economic expertise and culture. That culture is directed to solving market distortions through the complex process of regulation as directed by legislative agreement. It is a culture with secondary focus on competition and its application to market structures and behavior." However, Samuel criticized other aspects of the Vertigan review, and utterly condemned a separate Coalition government-commissioned review by Bill Scales that slammed Labor's National Broadband Network. "Unfortunately much of the review analysis has had a political tarnish, which diminishes its value in forward planning for this important infrastructure planning," Samuel said of the reviews commissioned by the Coalition government. The Vertigan reports "rely on prognostications as to the demand of broadband well into the future," he said. "Recent history in this area demonstrates one certainty: those prognostications in the area of telecommunications technology can at best only be classified as guesstimates." The Scales report was the "least valuable," as well as "insulting and offensive" to the experts consulted by the previous government, he said. "Scales' report is factually wrong on the role of the ACCC as attested by both ourselves, the current chair of the ACCC and others in the organization." Also on the NBN, Samuel said he didn't see a problem with TPG rolling out fiber-to-the-basement services that could compete with NBN infrastructure. NBN Co has said this practice would hurt the business model under which it can sell services to higher-cost regional areas at the same price as urban areas. The ACCC has ruled that it won't take action against TPG. But afterward, Communications Minister Malcolm Turnbull announced a license condition that would force telcos such as TPG to functionally separate their retail and wholesale arms. "I doubt that [TPG] will cause any more aggravation to NBN Co than the flea on the elephant's back," said Samuel. "But the fact that such rollouts can be economically sustained should lead one to the conclusion that in the interests of facilities-based competition, they should not be opposed. Unless ... the preservation of the NBN Co's business case is the primary driver rather than that of competition." Samuel blamed past policy decisions for allowing the TPG situation to become a problem at all. He said the reason that TPG can offer the FTTB service was "the adoption by policymakers of distorted pricing mechanisms and non-transparent cross subsidies to resolve the uniform pricing across urban, regional and rural Australia. "The hidden cross subsidy inevitably leads to distorted pricing in urban areas, which enables – indeed it encourages – cherry picking ... If efficient pricing practices were adopted, cherry picking would be a sparse if not a fruitless exercise." Also in the talk Samuel slammed Optus chairman Paul O'Sullivan for calling for a break-up of Telstra, a statement that was quickly rebuked by Telstra. "Paul laments the fact that Telstra has and will derive substantial financial strength flowing from its commercial agreements with NBN Co ... Forgive me if I begin to sound like my former nemesis, [ex-Telstra head of public policy] Phil Burgess, but Telstra has already had its wings heavily clipped with its legislative structural separation." Telstra competitors have an opportunity to win customers by providing better content, Samuel said. Optus, Vodafone, iiNet and others "all have got capacity to enter into arrangements on content, and they ought to do it, and not just sit back and wait and see if some government can put a squeeze on the big Telstra and say stop."

France's 700MHz auction expected in 2015

French president Francois Hollande has reportedly announced that telecoms regulator the Autorite de Regulation des Communications Electroniques et des Postes (Arcep) will initiate the process of auctioning frequencies in the 700MHz band for telecoms services in 2015, Advanced Television reports. Addressing previously expressed concerns of Digital Terrestrial Television (DTT) broadcasters that the allocation would interfere with the plans to migrate the DTT platform to MPEG-4 AVC by 2015 and DVB-T2 by 2023, President Hollande said that France needed an audiovisual sector that could broadcast broadly, effectively and securely, adding: 'This is the objective of transferring the 700MHz band to the telecom sector. The state will ensure that the available resources are guaranteed for broadcasting'. As such, Arcep is expected to launch a tender for the 700MHz spectrum band in November 2015, with projections that the auction could generate up to EUR3 billion (USD3.8 billion) for the treasury.

Telecom Commission to meet Nov 7 to discuss spectrum auction

The Telecom Commission is scheduled to meet Nov 7 to discuss the next round of spectrum auction and the National Optical Fiber Network project, according to sources. Apart from the November 7 meeting, Telecom Secretary Raksh Garg will hold his first round-table meeting with the industry players Wednesday to discuss industry related issues, confirmed a source. The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI)

October 15 recommended around 10 percent hike in the reserve price for 1,800 MHz band spectrum auction compared to the last winning price in the February 2014 sale. In December 2015, seven each licenses of Idea Cellular and Reliance Communications, four licenses of Bharti Airtel and six licenses of Vodafone are scheduled to complete their 20-year term after which they require renewal. "In the 900 MHz band, only the spectrum held by them is available for the auction. These licensees will have to win back this spectrum to ensure business continuity in a license service area (LSA); if they don't, it places the large investment made in the LSAs in jeopardy," the TRAI said. It has set a price of Rs.3,004 crore per mega hertz for bandwidth to be auctioned in 18 service areas for the more efficient 900 MHz band and Rs.2,138 crore per mega hertz for the 1,800 MHz band. The auction is expected to take place in February 2015. In the 1,800 MHz band, 20 circles are going for auction, while in the 900 MHz band, 18 circles will be up for sale. The recommendations said spectrum should be put to auction in a block size of 2x200 KHz in both the 900 and 1,800 MHz bands. The revenue target set by the government in 2014-15 budget from spectrum auction is to the tune of Rs.45,471 crore. In 2013-14, the total receipts from auction were of the order of Rs.40,847.06 crore. In February 2014, in a 10-day auction of 900 MHz and 1,800 MHz, the government mopped up Rs.61,162 crore.

Telecom Commission agrees to spectrum allocation for cordless telephony

Inter-ministerial panel Telecom Commission has approved free allocation of 20 MHz of spectrum for cordless telephone system that can be used for communication within a premise or a similar small area for non-commercial purpose. Telecom regulator TRAI in 2012 had recommended that a 20MHz of spectrum in a band should be de-licensed for low power operations of cordless telecommunications system (CTS) for private and indoor use but not for commercial use. The implementation of the move will reduce telecom bills of business houses within their premises and provide more flexibility at work with cordless phones as well as boost development of cordless telephone systems in the country. "The Commission has said that implementation of the TRAI recommendations would advance the objectives behind Digital India. Therefore, the commission decided to accept recommendation of TRAI and it should be placed before competent authority for final decision," an official source said. The Defense Ministry had objected to the recommendation as the 20MHz frequency spot lies in the band which it uses for its communication services. The Ministry has raised security concern on freeing up spectrum for general public. The Telecom Commission suggested that DoT and Defense can continue their discussion for an amicable solution but did not favor sending the recommendation back to Trai because of objection from Defense.

Curbing cybercrimes: Ministry rejects cyber security council bill

The much awaited proposed National Cyber Security Council (NCSC) Bill has failed to get the nod of Ministry of Information Technology, Pakistan, which has termed it 'anti-state' and 'against national security'. The NCSC bill was moved by Senator Mushahid Hussain Sayed. State Minister for Information Technology Anusha Rehman told a Senate panel on November 10 that after consultation with all the stakeholders including the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), the ministry has forwarded a summary [a separate piece of legislation] to the prime minister for approval. In its written reply to a parliamentary panel, the ministry termed the bill impractical. "It may not adequately address the issue of cyber security and falls short of addressing the key problems linked with cyber security – personal data protection and unauthorized interceptions," it said. It is also observed that institutional mechanism proposed in the bill appeared to be in contradiction with the trichotomy of the organs of the state given in the Constitution. "The bill does not even provide guidance to the proposed council in light of which the council may devise policy to ensure that the fundamental rights of citizens of Pakistan are protected. "The bill also does not require the operators of critical information systems in government, financial, e-commerce, social networks, etc, sectors to report major security incidents on their core services. [It] also falls short of imposing a positive obligation on the operators in the said sectors to adopt risk management practices," the ministry said. However, the Senate Committee – which oversees the ministry's affairs – did not approve the ministry's move and termed it against the parliamentary norms. "You cannot reject the bill in an outright manner and if there were some issues with its clauses, the ministry needed to share its input to improve the same," said a member of the committee, Senator Zahid Khan. "How you can set aside the proposed bill with one stroke of your pen for the sake of a separate piece of legislation?" Zahid asked the minister. In clarification, the minister said the issue of cybercrimes had already been taken up by Ministry of Information Technology and Telecommunications under the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Bill. She said the ministry moved a summary for prime minister on February 19, 2014 for placing the draft bill before the federal cabinet for its approval and subsequent placement before the parliament for deliberations and promulgation. The committee was further informed that the policy directives on establishment of cross border terrestrial links was suspended till date. "Ministry of IT is at an advanced stage in terms of reviewing telecom sector policies and the matter of cross border links/connectivity has been duly addressed therein after getting recommendations of Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA)," the ministry said.

OFCOM to expand 4G in the UK with new spectrum auction next year

The UK's four main carriers may steadily be building up their 4G coverage, but regulators don't want to leave the future of Britain's superfast networks to chance. UK communications regulator OFCOM today announced that it intends to auction more 4G spectrum late next year (or early 2015), giving operators to opportunity to expand their LTE networks with more high data capacity spectrum. It expects to raise between £50 and £70 million from the sale, which will then line the pockets of the government. The two bands in question are the 2.3 GHz and 3.4 GHz frequencies. The former is supported in handsets old and new, including the iPhone 5 and iPhone 6, Samsung's Galaxy phones and HTC's One devices, while the 3.4 GHz band is primarily utilized by wireless broadband provider Relish in the UK. To keep things fair, OFCOM says it will limit operators' mobile holdings to 37 percent of each spectrum, giving carriers like Three and O2 (and even BT) the chance to achieve some parity with their bigger rivals.

DoT to clean muddy regulatory waters

India's Department of Telecommunications (DoT) has been instructed by telecom minister Ravi Shankar Prasad to provide clarity on a number of issues persistently harming investor confidence in the sector, the Economic Times writes, citing a senior DoT official. Matters including spectrum sharing and trading, terms for mergers and acquisitions and the rationalization for penalties are all set to be considered by the DoT. Whilst the minister is keen to clear up some of the sector's muddier regulatory waters, the DoT's deliberations will not delay the upcoming spectrum auction, scheduled for February 2015, despite calls from the industry to put the sale on hold until more frequencies are available. According to the DoT official guidelines on spectrum sharing are already in the works but the regulator has yet to look into spectrum trading, so guidelines on those two areas are unlikely to be released by the end of 2014, as previously stated by Mr. Prasad. Meanwhile, contentious elements of the existing merger and acquisition rules will be reconsidered, including the requirement for the buyer to pay the government a market-linked price for the frequencies changing hands. Although not highlighted by the official, in the wake of the failure of Bharti Airtel's takeover of Loop Mobile, the DoT is also expected to consider M&A norms alongside the rules for mobile number portability (MNP). The takeover was delayed by, amongst other things, opposition from the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI), which claimed that the transfer of customers from Loop to Airtel violated the rules for MNP. Clarity on M&A rules is one of the highest priorities for the sector, as many of the nation's larger operators are increasingly looking towards consolidation in the crowded market. Elsewhere, telcos have been clamoring for the DoT to impose a graded penalty system that will determine the levels of fines based on the severity of an operator's transgression. Having come under greater scrutiny from other government agencies after the 2G crisis shed light on corruption in the department, DoT officials have levied maximum penalties on telcos for infringements, lest any leniency be taken as graft. The Economic Times pegs the amount owed in penalties by the nation's telcos to be in the region of INR21.17 billion (USD344.3 million), most of which is currently being disputed in the courts: INR11.33 billion worth of fines were dished out in the 2011-2012 year, but the amount collected was just INR2.06 billion, equating to around 18.2% of the total. Subsequent years have yielded similarly poor results, with the DoT realizing 15.0% of the INR7.19 billion levied in 2012-2013 and 1.6% of the INR79.23 billion charged in 2013-2014.

Regulator publishes draft ruling on TDL contributions

New Zealand's Commerce Commission has issued its draft decision on the proposed contributions to the country's NZD50 million (USD39 million) Telecommunications Development Levy (TDL) for 2013/14. The government uses the fund to pay for telecoms infrastructure, including the relay service for the deaf and hearing-impaired, broadband for rural areas, and improvements to 111 emergency services. Under the draft ruling, Spark (formerly Telecom New Zealand) will be liable to pay 38.17% of the total (NZD19.1 million), while Vodafone will contribute 27.82% (NZD13.9 million) and Chorus 22.92% (NZD11.5 million). The remainder will be divided among 17 smaller telcos and internet service providers (ISPs). The draft decision is now open for submissions until 28 November, with a final ruling due to be published in late December.

TRA launches SafeSurf

The Kingdom of Bahrain's Telecommunication Regulatory Authority (TRA) will organize the Child Internet Safety Orientation "SafeSurf" Program termed "The Challenge" on November 20. Organized in collaboration between the TRA and the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) and the General Organization for Youth and Sport (GOYS), the event coincides with the International Child's Day (November 20) celebrated by the UNGA for the first time in 1954. Also, on November 20, 1958, the UNGA adopted the Universal Child Rights Declaration. The Cyber Security Division at the TRA is responsible for SafeSurf with focus on orientation of parents and children on the subject of child internet safety.

NBTC to go ahead with 4G auctions

The telecom regulator is pushing ahead with the planned 4G spectrum allocation next year, saying 4G licenses could boost the telecom infrastructure to serve the government's digital-economy policy as well as increase GDP. The regulator will start revising all auction details for the 1800 and 900 megahertz spectrum in January and draw up a new schedule for the auction in July, said Col Settapong Malisuwan, vice-chairman of the National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission (NBTC). Although several impractical sections of the Frequency Allocation Act (FAA) are being amended by the government that may affect the NBTC's authority, the regulator will move ahead with the planned 4G auctions in parallel with the amendment of the FAA. The NBTC must be responsible for allocating spectrum for optimum benefit of the industry and the country in line with the rapid growth in data demand from both telecom and broadcasting, said Col Settapong. Previously, the NBTC set the auctions for the 1800 and 900 megahertz in August and November, according to the Information Memorandum (IM) of the 1800 and 900 MHz allocations. For the 25 megahertz of bandwidth on the 1800 MHz spectrum, the NBTC has allowed concessionaires True Move and Digital Phone to take care of their 2G mobile users for another year after their concessions expired last September. The 17.5 megahertz of bandwidth on the 900 MHz spectrum is now being used by Advanced Info Service (AIS), whose concession will expire in September 2015. The NBTC hired the International Telecommunication Union to jointly study details and design the auction process, including the reserve price and the number of licenses. The IM of the 1800 MHz has had public hearings in April and approval by the telecom committee in May. It is still pending approval by the NBTC board. The junta in June ordered the suspension of the planned 4G license auctions for one year. If the new IM of the 1800 and 900 MHz allocation passes all procedures including public hearings, approval by the NBTC board and the Royal Gazette announcement, the government can no longer put the brakes on the 4G auctions.

Regulator charts mobile, broadband growth

According to the latest market indicators from Bahrain's Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA), by the end of Q3 2014 there were around 2.41 million mobile subscriptions in the country, up from 2.21 million at the beginning of the year and representing a mobile penetration rate in excess of 180%. The figure is ten times the approximately 246,000 fixed lines in Bahrain reported by the TRA at end-September, down from 251,000 at the start of the year. The watchdog also reported that at the end of September 1.44 million of these mobile users also subscribed to mobile broadband services (pay-per-use, add-on or bundled), a figure representing nearly 60% of all mobile subscriptions. The TRA added that at end-3Q14 there were approximately 1.84 million active broadband subscriptions in Bahrain, of which mobile broadband represented 91% (including standalone mobile broadband services), with fixed services accounting for just 9%, although it noted that fixed (wired) broadband subscriptions have begun to increase in volume for the first time in a number of years, following the TRA's decision to deregulate the residential/SME fixed broadband market and provide greater flexibility at the retail level.

OFCOM finds 4G is over twice as fast as 3G mobile broadband speeds

OFCOM has published some new research into mobile surfing speeds, in its first look at the mobile landscape since the 4G auction and subsequent super-fast rollouts across the UK. The report looked at relative 3G and 4G performance on smartphones in Birmingham, Edinburgh, Glasgow, London and Manchester, on the major networks: EE, O2, Three and Vodafone. It consisted of some 210,000 speed tests, undertaken indoors and outside, by OFCOM engineers between March and June earlier this year. The results showed that the average 4G download speed was 15.1Mbps (slightly higher than some other recent stats we've seen, but still around the same ballpark), which was considerably faster than the 3G average at 6.1Mbps, as you'd expect. Actually, that's a pretty solid figure for normal 3G surfing… Results varied between networks of course, with EE boasting the fastest 4G speeds at 18.4Mbps, followed by O2 with 15.6Mbps. Vodafone (which topped another survey for 4G) was a little behind O2 on 14.3Mbps, but still fast enough – only Three lagged behind on 10.7Mbps. When it came to 3G, the operators were all pretty tightly grouped, with EE top of the tree at 6.8Mbps, followed by Vodafone on 6.7Mbps, O2 on 5.6Mbps, and Three was unfortunately last again on 5.2Mbps. It would seem Three's speeds aren't the best if you're in a major city, though it has fared better in other performance metrics for 3G across the country as a whole. When it came to the cities themselves, the highest average download speed across all operators was recorded by Edinburgh at 16.8Mbps on 4G and 7.8Mbps on 3G, with London being the slowest on 13.1Mbps and 4.1Mbps (doubtless due to the volume of 4G users in the capital).

IMT broadband roadmap published

The Independent Communications Authority of South Africa (ICASA) announced that a Final International Mobile Telephony (IMT) Roadmap has been issued. The IMT Roadmap for broadband seeks to "ensure universal availability of broadband services, as well as a vibrant and competitive telecommunications industry and promote investments". The IMT Roadmap follows public consultations with relevant stakeholders in recent weeks. "It is our view that the growing demand for mobile broadband in South Africa indicates a need for more mobile broadband bandwidth capacity in general," Icasa said. "It is generally known that many rural areas do not have access to mobile bandwidth indicating a need for a more universal mobile broadband coverage, a need best served by deploying lower frequencies that propagate a wider market." The regulator added that the roadmap also involves the migration of a number of current licensees out of (or within) bands identified for IMT services. "For bands where costs and benefits of the migration were not straightforward the Authority conducted further feasibility studies to determine the appropriateness of the migration," the regulator said. ICASA also published the Draft Radio Frequency Spectrum Assignment Plan (RFSAP) for IMT. The Draft RFSAP seeks to specify the technical conditions of the use of the frequency bands and is aimed at soliciting views from stakeholders on the "Rules for Services" operating in each frequency band.

TRA revokes licenses of companies

The Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) has revoked Al Zubara International Trading's telecommunication license. This is further to the TRA's notice published on May 1 in the Official Gazette and on its website, whereby it informed all stakeholders of its intention to revoke the Individual License for International Telecommunications Services (ISL) awarded to Al Zubara on November 25, 2007 pursuant to the Telecommunications Law promulgated by Legislative Decree No (48) of 2002, asking for comments on the proposed revocation. Whereas TRA has not received any comments from the stakeholders, the license has been revoked from the date of its publication in the gazette. The TRA also revoked the licenses awarded to Ali Almusallam Company. This was further to the TRA notice published on August 21 in the Official Gazette and on its website, whereby it informed all stakeholders of its intention to revoke the licenses, asking for comments on the proposed revocation. The TRA has not received any comments from the stakeholders and the licenses are revoked from the date of their publication in the gazette.

U.S. auction of AWS-3 airwaves reaches $10 billion reserve price

The U.S. airwaves auction of so-called AWS-3 frequencies on Tuesday breached its reserve price of $10.1 billion, according to the Federal Communications Commission, less than a week after bidding began. Bidding went on to reach a total of $14.2 billion, though some bidders had applied for various discounts that require a careful calculation to conclude that the reserve price is met. The auction is the largest opportunity for wireless carriers to get access to new airwaves since 2008 and although the bidding is anonymous, the largest U.S. wireless carrier Verizon Communications Inc, No. 2 AT&T Inc, No. 4 T-Mobile US Inc and satellite provider Dish Network Corp were expected to be the biggest bidders.

EU leans towards broader net neutrality rules

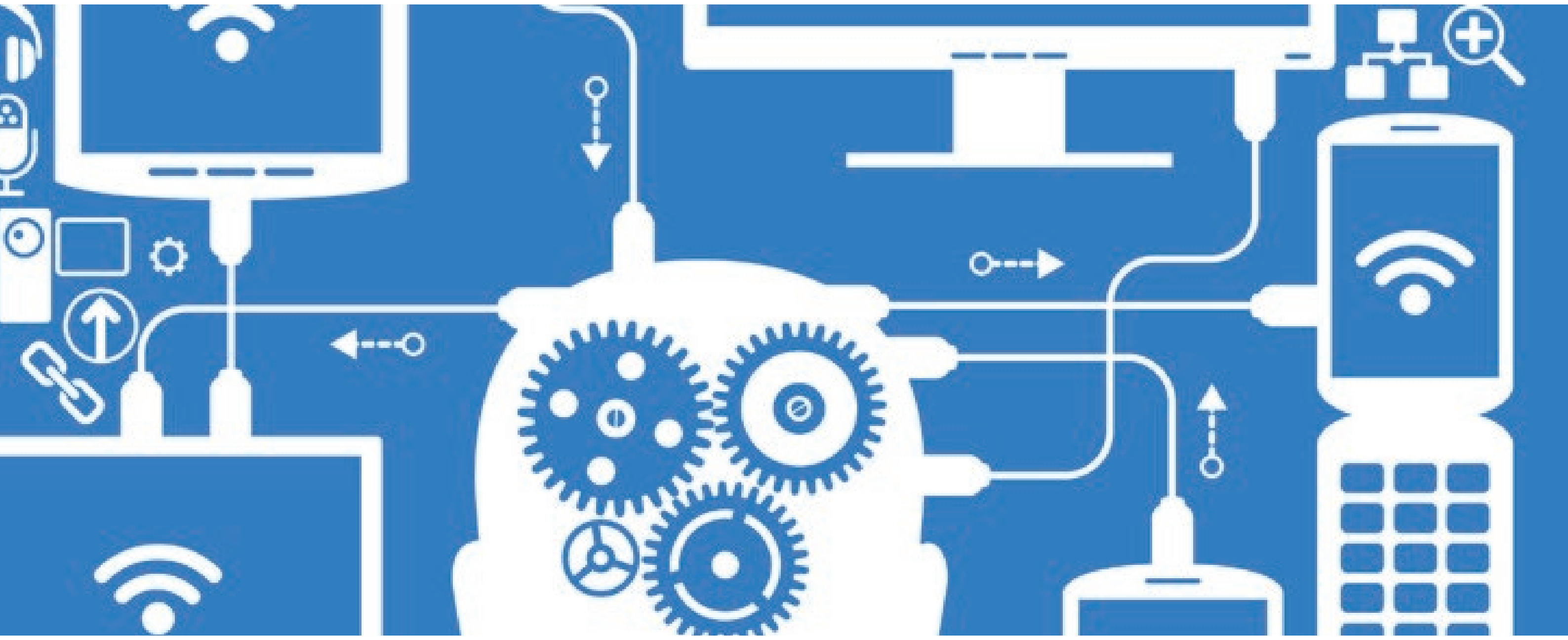
European Union governments are considering less stringent rules on how internet service providers manage traffic on their networks, according to a draft seen by Reuters, a move that could be welcomed by Europe's large telecoms operators. These so-called net neutrality rules are part of the European Commission's proposed overhaul of Europe's telecoms industry to help it to compete against rivals the United States and Asia. Net neutrality is the principle that all content providers should have equal access on networks. It has become a hot topic in the United States where President Barack Obama has said internet service providers should be banned from striking paid "fast lane" deals with content companies. EU lawmakers voted in April for strict net neutrality rules that barred telecoms operators like Orange and Telefonica from prioritizing some internet traffic over others. But the latest draft of the reform proposal shows that member states are leaning toward a looser approach which only bars internet service providers from applying traffic management measures which "block, slow down, alter, degrade or discriminate against specific content." It does not define net neutrality or so-called "specialized services," which would have specified the types of content that operators could prioritize over others. Large telecoms companies have said they want to be allowed to provide quicker internet access to bandwidth-hungry services like Google's YouTube and Netflix. The draft text also includes provisions on roaming charges paid by consumers when using their mobile phones abroad. The Commission and the European Parliament had pushed for an end to such charges by the end of next year. But regulators and member states are concerned about what effect an end to roaming charges would have on domestic rates and wholesale prices telecoms operators pay each other when their customers travel abroad. The latest text does not specify a date for the introduction of "roam like at home," where someone using, say, a British mobile phone in Italy would pay the same as if they were still in Britain. But it acknowledges the need for a specific date to send a positive signal for consumers at a time of widespread discontent with Brussels. Member states will discuss the text on Thursday and Friday, and if agreed it will go to ministers when they meet in two weeks.

TRA chief says new business models needed in ICT sector

New business models are needed to make ICT (Information and communications technology) sector vibrant and sustainable, Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) Director General, Mohammad Naser Al Ganem, said at the Abu Dhabi Media Summit. He said the media is transforming. "It is impossible to assume that media industry is melting into thin air and losing its charm and significance. On the contrary it has become one of the most demanding commodities of our time." He added that new business models are needed considering the new wave of advancement in broadband networks and the power of internet, which has fuelled the media sector. "Let us not forget to modernize the regulatory framework that will support the new business model and let us think regional and global in these new models and unlock the potential for our local markets," Al Ghanim said. "The challenges ahead not just to encourage investment but we must contribute towards innovative initiatives." A large number of media professionals and investors participated in the three-day media summit that ended on Thursday. Queen Rania of Jordan gave a keynote address on Tuesday and launched a powerful attack against extremists for misusing social media to propagate their agenda.

Canada telecom regulator starts review of fixed-line services

Canada's telecom regulator began the last of three major policy reviews on Monday as it seeks to strike a balance between ensuring consumers have broad access to new technologies while avoiding rules that would discourage investment. The hearing by the regulator, the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC), on the wholesale telecom services market will consider whether big telephone and cable companies should be forced to share so-called "last mile" wiring, which brings services directly to the retail customer's door, with smaller rivals. Due to improved fiber-optic connections, this wiring allows consumers to enjoy greater volumes of streaming online video and to place video calls over the Internet, among other benefits. The CRTC said on Monday its focus is on choice and sustainable competition, and it will have decide whether to give small players greater access to these lines to foster that competition. Big players such as BCE Inc's Bell Canada and Rogers Communications Inc are expected to argue they should be allowed to maintain control over high-speed fiber-to-the-premises lines so that they can recoup their investments in these expensive-to-build networks. Quebecor Inc, Shaw Communications Inc and Telus Corp are other companies that are dominant in the market for these services despite the presence of many smaller competitors. In recent months, the CRTC has also held hearings on the future of television and the future of wireless. Following the TV hearings, it has stopped telecoms charging customers cancellation fees for not giving enough notice that they are ending service. On wireless, it is considering mandated tower-sharing and roaming rules.



ICT Trends in Jordan

Mohammad Izzat Al Taani
Chairman of the Board of Commissioners/ CEO
The Telecommunications Regulatory Commission (TRC) - Jordan

Ever since its establishment in 1996, the Telecommunications Regulatory Commission (TRC) of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan has maintained an outstanding track record of actively pursuing the development and modernisation of the Telecommunications and Information Technology markets in the Kingdom. Such pursuit has always been in the form of ensuring that sufficient regulatory instruments are readily available and applied in the relevant markets, and that the market players are treated fairly and firmly in their observance of such regulations. Among the most recent endeavours of the TRC in these markets are two notable achievements; the facilitation of the introduction of 4G Mobile services, and the Licensing and Accreditation of Electronic Authentication Entities.

Introduction of 4G Mobile Services.
After having facilitated the introduction of 3G mobile services by the three incumbent Jordanian mobile operators (Zain-Jordan, Orange-Mobile and Umniah) in 2009/2010, the TRC worked hard at ensuring the availability of the requisite radio frequency spectrum that can be used for the provision of 4G services in Jordan.

This endeavour resulted in the licensing of two lots of 10+10 MHz spectrum in the 1800 MHz band to Zain-Jordan in May 2014. Ever since, Zain-Jordan has been diligently working at deploying the necessary network elements, and the 4G services are expected to be available throughout the country in the first quarter of 2015.

TRC believes that the other two mobile operators (Orange-Mobile and Umniah) will also be keen to follow suit in the deployment of mobile high speed data services.

The introduction of 4G services in Jordan is expected to further enhance the use of mobile broadband communications throughout the country and to contribute to the social and economic development of Jordan.

Electronic Authentication

In performance of a specific provision in the Electronic Transactions Law of Jordan, the TRC worked together with other concerned parties on drafting a by-law that addresses the details and procedures for licensing and accreditation of specialized entities that issue and verify electronic signatures in Jordan. The by-law, which identifies the TRC as the official Certification Authority (Root CA) for electronic authentication in Jordan, was issued by a decree of the Council of Ministers in July 2014.

Currently, the TRC is working on the practical steps for the implementation of the provisions of the said by-law in regulating the selection and licensing/accreditation of qualified entities that will undertake the function of Electronic Authentication in Jordan. For that purpose, the TRC prepared a draft regulatory document (Instructions) and launched a public consultation process through which comments and suggestions would be received and discussed in order to arrive at the best possible draft of the said "Instruction", which will be subsequently approved and issued by the Board of Commissioners of TRC. The consultation process is expected to be concluded before the end of 2014, and the "Instructions" to be issued in early 2015.

Telecom Indicators

The TRC maintains a regular tracking and follow up of the developments in the telecommunications sector in Jordan. This is published in the form of quarterly bulletins covering the latest indicators in the fields of fixed and mobile telecommunications markets. The latest set of indicators for Q1 and Q2, 2014 is as follows:

Penetration	Q1 2014	Q2 2014
Fixed telephony	5.2%	5.1%
Mobile Active subscriptions	143%	146%
Internet Users	73%	73%
Internet Sub-scriptions	21%	21%

A SNAPSHOT OF REGULATORY ACTIVITIES IN SAMENA REGION

Regulatory Updates

Algeria

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

The government has reportedly refused an offer by French telecoms giant Orange Group to acquire a stake in mobile operator Mobilis, which is currently a wholly owned subsidiary of state-backed telco Algerie Telecom (AT). Secretary General of the Ministry of Post and Information Technology and Communication, said in a letter to the French group: 'after consulting with [the country's] leaders, it has been concluded that [the injection of] capital is inappropriate in the current circumstances.' In October 2013 local media reports suggested that the Conseil des participations de l'Etat (CPE), the agency in charge of managing the Algerian government's stake in state-owned business entities, was planning to sell the shares of ten nationalized companies, including AT, to the public. Further, in April 2014 it was suggested that the government was planning to put 20% of Mobilis' share capital up for sale on the country's bourse. Orange Group has long harbored ambitions to enter the Algerian market, with Elie Girard, the French group's head of strategy and development, disclosing in January 2013 that Algeria – as a large, underdeveloped market – was strategically interesting, noting that any progress would be slow.

(November 27, 2014) Algerie Focus

The International Telecommunication Union (ITU) adopted the proposals presented by Algeria on behalf of the Arab countries during the 19th plenipotentiary conference, held in Busan (South Korea) from October 20 to November 7, 2014. It is about, according to Ministry of Post and Information and Communication Technologies, amendment of Resolutions 130 and 174. The Resolution 130 focuses on "the strengthening of ITU's role in the establishment of trust and security relationship when using information and communication technologies." According to the communiqué, this amendment aims at "establishing a trust framework in terms of exchanging electronic data at the regional and international levels between the administrations and individuals and taking the necessary measures to secure infrastructures and fight against cybercrime." "The developing countries are called to set up frameworks of trust in the exchange of information on the basis of appropriate criteria, use the best practices adopted by ITU and benefit

from the resources and services offered by the public sector and regional and international organizations." Resolution 174 deals with the ITU's role concerning the international political issues related to the dangers of the illicit use of information and communication technologies. This resolution aims at "establishing high-level international cooperation relations under ITU's chairmanship, allowing to assess the potential risks on the national and international security by using these technologies for illicit and non-peaceful purposes."
(November 12, 2014) aps.dz

Bahrain

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

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(November 19, 2014) gulf-daily-news.com

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(November 17, 2014) telegeography.com

Bangladesh

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

The telecom regulator has sought public opinion to introduce the mobile number portability (MNP) system for cell phone customers, what it claims the initiative as customers friendly. Issuing a statement recently the Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC) asked the customers to provide their feedback regarding the issue by December 20, 2014. Currently, some 72 countries including the neighboring India and Pakistan have already adopted the popular system for their customers, whereas Singapore is the pioneer in the field. By middle of the last calendar year, the regulator had urged the country's telecom operators to introduce the MNP system within next seven months that ended in January, 2014. However, the operators failed to make any progress within the deadline to implement the system.
(November 19, 2014) thefinancialexpress-bd.com

Egypt

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

Egyptian mobile telecoms firm Mobinil said it might reject the government's offer of a landline services license, aimed at boosting competition in the telecoms market, unless it is allowed to build its own fixed-line infrastructure. The government approved in September a new unified licensing which would allow the state fixed-lined monopoly Telecom Egypt (TE) to enter the mobile market while in return allowing the three mobile network operators to enter the landline market.
(November 25, 2014) reuters.com

Communications and Information Technology Minister said that progress within other sectors relies on reform within the country's ICT sector. In addition to bolstering Egypt's education and health sectors, creating jobs is on the top of the list for the country, which is working hard to rebuild its political and infrastructural landscape. "There's no doubt that the technology and communications sector is one of the [most] competitive when it comes to investment," Minister told. "As part of building our new Egypt and modern Egypt, ICT is a cornerstone to do that." (November 11, 2014) afkinsider.com

Iran

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

MTN Irancell has launched the country's first 4G Long Term Evolution (LTE) network in the city of Mashhad. The launch comes in the wake of Irancell's recent introduction of 3G networks in more than 60 cities, following the government's relaxation of restrictions on internet access for private users. At launch, 4G services are available via dongles, with very few LTE-enabled handsets available in Iran. Irancell's CEO said in a statement that 4G users can expect real-world download speeds ranging from 10Mbps to 40Mbps upload speeds from 1Mbps to 15Mbps, and latency from 50 to 150 milliseconds. (November 25, 2014) telegeography.com

Iraq

Chairman: Dr. Saffa Al Din
[Communication & Media Commission (CMC)]

Zain's Iraqi subsidiary has been granted a 3G license by the telecoms regulator. Zain Iraq recently paid the first installment fee amounting to US$76.75 million representing 25% of the overall 3G spectrum fee of US$307 million. In anticipation of receiving the 3G spectrum license, Zain Iraq commissioned Ericsson, Huawei and Nokia Networks to expand and upgrade the network with Single-RAN technology, thus allowing Zain Iraq to quickly roll-out 3G commercial services across the country. Commenting on the award of 3G spectrum, Zain Group CEO said, "Zain views the launch of 3G services in Iraq as a complete game-changer for the country, which today measures less than 15% broadband penetration. We have already invested heavily in making the network 3G ready and our target is to be commercially operational by January 2015, allowing Iraqi customers to enjoy and benefit from widespread 3G coverage." As of today, data related revenues (excluding SMS and Value Added Services) represent only 4% of Zain Iraq's total revenues reflecting an annual growth rate of 12%. Zain Iraq employs over 3,000 staff and is the largest operator in the country with over 4,000 mobile network sites serving 13.3 million customers.
(November 16, 2014) cellular-news.com

Iraq's mobile phone network operators have agreed to pay $307 million each for radio spectrum, enabling them to launch higher-speed 3G mobile internet services in the war-torn country in two months, a senior official at the national regulator told Reuters. Iraq is one of the few Middle East countries still reliant on 2G networks, which mostly carry voice calls and SMS texts and only the most basic online services, while fixed line internet connections are expensive and unreliable. The three mobile network operators Zain Iraq, the Ooredoo, Asiacell, and Orange have been waiting for several years to begin 3G services. In October sources familiar with the matter said the government wanted the companies to each pay US$307 million for the spectrum, much to their dismay. But the companies have now agreed to this fee and made down payments of US$73 million a few days ago. The companies will settle the remainder in four installments over the following 18 months, the first of which will be paid at the signing of the 3G contract on November 10. There will be a two-month testing period before the commercial launch of 3G. CMC hope that this service will offer job opportunities for a high number of people. The operators each paid US$1.25 billion for 15-year licenses in 2007. These permits were technology-neutral, meaning they did not require a separate 3G license, only the spectrum, so the operators were opposed to paying extra fees, especially when their profits are in retreat. Zain Iraq's nine-month profit to September 30 fell 14 percent to US$224 million, outpacing a 4 percent drop in revenue to US$1.24 billion, as it suffered from temporary network shutdowns and higher network operating costs due to the civil war. Zain's subscribers are concentrated in Baghdad and southern Iraq, so the company has suffered less in the tumult since Sunni Muslim militant group Islamic State seized much of the north and west of the country this year. Asiacell grew from its base in the Kurdish city of Sulaymaniyah. Its fuel and security costs have increased, transmitter tower maintenance is more difficult and the government's periodical blocking of social media and some websites has affected its data business, parent Ooredoo said in reporting its third-quarter results. Asiacell's nine-month revenue fell 9.5 percent to 4.8 billion Qatari riyals (US$1.32 billion) and its net profit dropped 38 percent over the same period to 868 million riyals. (November 6, 2014) dailymail.co.uk

Jordan

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

Eighty Jordanian experts from both public and private sector discussed risks of cyber crimes at a two-day forum, titled "Cyber Crimes - Challenges and Solutions", being held in Amman. In the forum's opening speech, Director of the Public Security Department (PSD) delegate Major General Abdul Hadi Al Dmour said that statistics indicate that the number of Internet users in Jordan has reached 5.7 million, accounting for 73 percent of the Kingdom's population. He explained that the revolution in transport, telecommunications and information technology reflected on humanitarian activities both positively and negatively. Criminals also exploit such technologies and software to carry out traditional crimes with modern electronic methods. He added that the PSD adopted a royal vision in putting up scientific and well thought out strategies to combat crime during the 2013-2016 period, based on community partnership, international cooperation and legislative axis to form an integrated security system. The forum will present 10 working papers focused on the types of cyber crimes, technology and malicious software used to commit them, the threats these pose, and modern techniques and standards that can be followed to avoid and reduce cyber crime. (November 7, 2014) www.zawya.com

Lebanon

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

Lebanese Telecoms Minister Boutros Harb told that major international mobile operators such as Saudi Telecom Company (STC), Orange Group, Zain Group and Etisalat are interested in bidding in an upcoming process which he hopes will see two-year contracts awarded to manage Lebanon's two state-owned cellular networks, in place of the short-term rolling contracts currently held by Zain and Egypt's Orascom Telecom. Harb said that 'great interest' was confirmed by various potential bidders within the framework of the minister's recent visits to Dubai, South Korea and China. In October Harb extended the management contracts for Touch (Zain) and Alfa (Orascom) for six months to give the telecoms ministry time to finalize terms and conditions and gain state approval for the longer-term contracting process. During the mooted two-year management period, Harb intends to push for implementing delayed telecoms sector reforms as per Law 431 of 2002, which stipulates the transformation of state-owned incumbent fixed line operator Ogero into Liban Telecom, an integrated telco licensed for all mobile/fixed services and earmarked for privatization. Harb explained that the government would look to attract a major international strategic partner 'such as Vodafone or Orange' to take a 40% stake in Liban Telecom, thereby significantly boosting competition. (November 19, 2014) Daily Star

Morocco

Director General: M. Azdine El MountassirBillah

[Agence Nationale de Reglementation des Telecommunications (ANRT)]

Telecommunications Regulatory National Agency launched a competitive bidding process on November 17, calling for applications for licenses for the establishment and operation of telecommunications networks using 4th generation mobile technologies (4G). Maroc Telecom, Meditel, and Inwi will be able to compete in this long-awaited auction, the key to Morocco to begin benefiting from 4G technologies advantages and maintain its position as an African leader in the communications space. In parallel with the auction, all the operators have started their testing on 4G-LTE (Long Term Evolution). Maroc Telecom conducted a successful test in Rabat, Meditel profited from the Global Entrepreneurship Summit 2014 held in Marrakesh to provide participants a 4G roaming service, and Inwi announced that it has conducted tests carried out in the region of Mohammedia using LTE. The goal of these tests for the operators is to validate their technological choices, and demonstrate their readiness to rapid implementation once their license has been granted by the ANRT. 4G-LTE is a mobile broadband technology capable of delivering a peak download rates up to 100 Mbit/s and upload rates up to 50 Mbit/s depending on the user equipment category, and it offers low data transfer latencies of less than 5ms. This efficient technology will provide a better user experience to customers. 4G LTE mobile networks offer faster Internet connections on mobile devices, including streaming music, video conferencing, video chat, multiplayer gaming, and network sharing. They also provide application developers more options on mobile devices for gaming, banking, socializing, shopping and watching videos. Economically speaking, the introduction of 4G is expected to revive the telecom industry in Morocco. 500 million euros is expected to be invested in the deployment process of 4G-LTE, and the increased usage of mobile network services should increase operators' revenues and consolidate competition between them. The increased cost of deploying 4G-LTE network necessary will affect the tariffs for such services, which will be undoubtedly higher than the rates for 3G. With an expanding customer base, it is expected that 4G will eventually be available in cheaper packages, but their availability will take time. Most likely it will be around 3-5 years before Moroccans can easily make use of this technology. (November 25, 2014) moroccoworldnews.com

ANRT has announced that the country's long-anticipated auction for 4G Long Term Evolution (LTE) mobile licenses will be launched on November 17, 2014. The ANRT began preparing for the 4G licensing process in 2012 by launching a tender to select an adviser for the process. The watchdog set a deadline of August 23, 2012 for the submission of bids, and the winner's main responsibility was outlined as assisting ANRT with the setting of terms and conditions, including deciding on how many concessions are to be made available. The regulator initially planned to award 4G licenses at the start of 2013 with commercial launches following by the end of that year at the latest, although the tender has since been postponed on several occasions. Last week incumbent operator Maroc Telecom, which was authorized to trial LTE technology in Rabat, achieved maximum download speeds of 140Mbps over its test network.
(November 11, 2014) telegeography.com

Nepal

Acting Chairman: Mr. AnandaRaj Khanal

[Nepal Telecommunication Authority (NTR)]

Nepal's Parliamentary Development Committee has called on the country's telecoms regulator, the Nepal Telecommunications Authority (NTA), to take over the management of mobile phone towers in the country in order to facilitate network sharing between operators, as well as to curb public fears over health risks caused by radiation from mobile masts. The Ministry of Information and Communication is being urged to push ahead with fiber-optic network rollouts in areas not yet reached by broadband infrastructure, while also ensuring that the country's Rural Telecommunications Development Fund (RTDF) is managed and utilized efficiently. There is currently around NPR10 billion (US$100 million) available in the RTDF, but there have been complaints that the fund is not being used effectively.
(November 13, 2014) eKantipur.com

The government of Nepal has unveiled its new National Broadband Policy 2014, under which it hopes to spur the development of high speed internet services in the country. The document, which has been prepared by sector regulator the Nepal Telecommunications Authority (NTA), aims to have at least 30% of households subscribing to a broadband service by 2018, up from around 5% currently, with networks passing at least 45% of premises by that date. In addition, the NTA wants to see the price of entry-level services brought down to below 3.5% of per-capita income, or NPR208 (US$2.10) a month, from the existing level of 17% of income. According to a report from the Himalayan, other targets set by the policy include expanding broadband internet service to 70% of village development committees within three years of implementation of the policy, connecting 20% of public secondary schools with a service of at least 1Mbps, and introducing broadband access to all state-owned hospitals and at least 15% of health posts by 2018. (November 11, 2014) telegeography.com

Nepal's government has collected a total of NPR4.76 billion (US$47.8 million) in spectrum fees and royalty payments for the 2014/15 financial year. NPR3.42 billion of the total came from the 4% of revenues which 19 firms must pay as a royalty each year; the two main wireless operators Ncell and Nepal Telecom (NT), paid the lion's share of the total at NPR1.96 billion and NPR1.40 billion respectively. The government has also collected NPR1.34 billion in spectrum fees from four firms: Ncell, NT, United Telecom Ltd (UTL) and Nepal Satellite Telecom (NST).
(November 10, 2014) The Himalayan

The government has not been able to collect Rs 3.27 billion royalty that Nepal Telecom had committed to pay. Neither Nepal Telecommunications Authority nor the Ministry of Information and Communications seem serious to recover the dues, which will directly go to the government coffers. The outstanding revenue is the royalty which NT had agreed to pay while obtaining the license to operate cellular mobile service in the country 15 years ago. Going by the government provision, NT and two private sector companies Ncell and United Telecom Ltd are responsible to pay the committed royalty each year during the first 10 years of service operation. Both NT and Ncell were required to pay Rs 3.90 billion each as royalty. The state-owned company did pay Rs 635 million in the first 10 years under a separate provision of four per cent of annual income as royalty. But it is yet to clear the remaining dues for fiscal years 1998-99 to 2007-08. The state-owned telecom service provider has been claiming that it is not required to pay the committed royalty like other companies that entered the market through competition. “From a legal point of view, we do not have to pay this revenue and NTA has also been informed about this,” said Budhi Acharya, managing director of NT. But NTA said NT had to pay the dues as agreed earlier. Initially, NTA failed to pressure NT after Ncell moved the Supreme Court against the committed royalty provision. However, in 2012 Ncell lost the case. “NT is reluctant to clear the dues despite many instructions from us,” said an official at NTA, seeking anonymity. The official said since MoIC is the line ministry, it had to direct NT to pay the revenue, as the secretary of MoIC is also chairman of NT board. Sushil Ojha, joint secretary at MoIC and a member of NT board, said, “Being the regulator, it is the duty of NTA to collect the committed royalty, if there is any.” Ncell, after losing the case, cleared its committed royalty by paying its last installment of one billion rupees to the government this year. Each year many companies don’t clear royalty on time and despite a provision in Telecommunications Act to impose a fine of Rs 50,000 on those who fail to uphold NTA’s instruction and Rs 5 lakhs for not obeying rules mentioned in the license, NTA hasn’t been strict with its licensees, said the official. (November 7, 2014) thehimalayantimes.com

Oman

Executive President: Dr. Hamed Al-Rawahi

[Telecommunication Regulatory Authority (TRA)]

Mobile phone subscriptions in the sultanate have increased by 6.8 per cent to reach 6mn till September 2014, against 5.6mn registered at the end of 2013. According to a report titled, ‘Number of Telecom Subscriber Service by Type’ released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI), 383,815 subscribers registered in the first nine months alone this year. Breaking down the subscription types, the number of postpaid mobile subscribers reached 515,431 by the end of September 2014 when compared to 495,703 at the end of 2013, registering an increase of four per cent. During the same period, pre-paid mobile phone subscribers also increased by 7.1 per cent reaching 5.4mn as compared to 5.1mn by the end of 2013. The report also states that the number of Internet subscribers increased to 169,434, a growth of 6.8 per cent when compared to 158,678 by the end of 2013. This figure comprises fixed broadband and dial-up Internet subscribers. Breaking down the figures, the total number of fixed broadband subscribers increased by 7.8 per cent reaching 166,257 as compared to 154,290 registered at the end of 2013. Meanwhile, Internet dial-up subscribers rate declined by 27.6 per cent at the end of September 2014 to 3,177 compared to 4,388 registered by the end of 2013. The total fixed telephone lines also saw an increase of 3.5 per cent by the end of September this year with 363,610 lines when compared to 351,411 by the end of last year. However, the number of fixed post-paid telephone lines declined by 0.5 per cent from 271,400 by the end of 2013 to 270,025 by the end of September 2014. The fixed pre-paid telephone lines, however, increased significantly by 52.9 per cent to 39,480 when compared to 25,829 by the end of 2013. Meanwhile, there was no change in the number of public phone lines at 6,801. The NCSI report ‘Main Telephone Lines by Governorate’ states, Muscat governorate registered the highest increase in number of fixed telephone lines by the end of September 2014 totaling 177,880 compared to 168,676 by the end of 2013, an increase of 5.5 per cent. Other governorates also witnessed increases with the total number of fixed lines going up in Dhofar to 27,571 by the end of September 2014 in comparison to 26,679 by the end of 2013, reflecting an increase of 3.3 per cent. Dakhliyah also recorded an increase in the number of fixed lines by 1.9 per cent to 22,286 when compared to 21,872 by the end of 2013. (November 17, 2014) zawya.com

Pakistan

Chairman: Dr. Syed Ismail Shah

[Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA)]

Chinese-backed mobile provider China Mobile Pakistan (CMPak), which trades under the Zong name, has been issued a show cause notice by the Pakistan Telecommunications Authority (PTA). The PTA has accused Zong of illegally accepting 2.2 million international calls – amounting to around eleven million minutes of traffic – through IPs that were originally intended for the provision of GPRS/EDGE services. The watchdog claims to have identified the calls through its Grey Traffic Monitoring System, which was installed under the International Clearing House (ICH) policy at a cost of USD30 million. The cellco faces a potential fine of up to PKR350 million (USD3.44 million) if found guilty. (November 24, 2014) pro pakistani.com

Pakistan Telecommunication authority has established a dedicated cell to handle complaints relating to SIM issuance and related matters, a statement just issued by the authority said. It may be recalled that PTA had announced that no new SIM will be issued without biometric verification after August 1st, 2014. SIM replacements are also issued after biometric verification. This rule is now in place throughout Pakistan and no cellular SIM can be issued without biometric verification of the the subscriber. Not to mention, maximum of five SIMs on one CNIC rule is also in place. Meaning that if a customer has more than 5 SIMs registered on his/her name then he/she can’t be issued a new SIM. In order to get any new SIM the subscriber will have to get his/her earlier SIMs blocked to bring the total count of SIMs on a CNIC to below five. Newly established monitoring Cell is aimed at enhancing the efficacy of the SIM issuance process. The Cell shall receive complaints from Law Enforcement Agencies and the general public through various channels. The complaints shall be investigated and results shall be shared with relevant quarters for taking remedial measures. General public is encouraged to come forward and inform PTA regarding any complaints and violation observed in issuance of SIMs. (November 21, 2014) propakistani.pk

Qatar

Executive Director: Mr. Graeme Gordon

[Communications Regulatory Authority (CRA)]

The Information Technology sector of Qatar is likely to clock a healthy growth of around 14-15 percent in the current year, mainly driven by software sales. The growth in spending was around 10-11 percent in the last couple of years. "As per IDC (International Data Corporation), the growth in IT spending in Qatar is likely to be around 14-15 percent in 2014. This kind of growth is healthy considering the growth in previous years in IT spending was around 10-11 percent," Habib Mahakian, Regional General Manager, Gulf and Pakistan, EMC Corporation told The Peninsula on the sidelines of conference on information technology held recently in Doha. He added that software and services have contributed most to the sector's growth. The growth in Qatar's IT market is in line with growth in the GCC countries. The IT sectors in neighboring countries have grown in the range of 12-15 percent in the last few years. Qatar's IT market growth is driven by high private consumption and government spending. The prospects of IT sector are bright according to industry watchers. The computer hardware sale is likely to be around QR4.34bn in 2018 showing a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 9 percent, said Business Monitor International in a report. Despite high PC penetration, high incomes will foster multiple device ownership as tablets and other new touch form factors make up a larger share of sales. Software Sales is likely to be QR2.16bn in 2018, showing a CAGR of 13.2 percent while IT Services sales likely to be around QR3.8bn in 2018 reflecting a CAGR of 14.4 percent. According to Business Monitor International, services are expected to perform well in the IT market in the medium term due to demand for cloud computing, smart systems and security services from the public and private sectors. "ICT has been a major beneficiary of government policies to diversify Qatar's economy away from hydrocarbons, notably through ictQATAR's ICT-2015 strategy and the government's push to build smart cities," said Business Monitor International in its Qatar Information Technology Report. "These government initiatives have led to ambitious investments in network infrastructure which will encourage broader take-up of IT services as well as development of innovative IT systems," it said. (November 5, 2014) zawya.com

Saudi Arabia

Governor: Eng. Abdullah A. Al Darrab

[Communication & Information Technology Commission (CITC)]

The Communications and Information Technology Commission (CITC) has opened a public consultation on draft Interconnection Guidelines and new Guidelines for Access to Physical Facilities. The watchdog highlighted that the decision was taken in order to reflect 'the technological and market developments in ICT since the current Interconnection Guidelines were issued in 2003'. The CITC said that the updated Guidelines for Access to Physical Facilities will establish rules governing access to physical facilities, including collocation and sharing of physical facilities; provide a framework for access to physical facilities and networks in a technologically neutral manner; foster investment in and deployment of next generation networks (NGN); and establish a process for dealing with access disputes, among other things. The draft Interconnection Guidelines, meanwhile, seek to ensure that all service providers are treated fairly and in a non-discriminatory manner, with respect to the provision of interconnection services, to ensure good practice with respect to interconnection services between service providers and to promote the provision of high quality services for interconnection through technical and economic efficiency. The CITC has invited all interested parties to provide their feedback on the draft documents by 2 February 2015.

(November 12, 2014) telegeography.com

Saudi Arabia and Finland signed a memorandum of understanding in the telecommunications sector. Krista Kiuru, Finland's minister of education, science and communications, signed the agreement with Mohamed Jamil bin Ahmed Mulla, Minister of Communications and Information Technology. "It is a wide ranging agreement in Information and Communication Technology to further enhance bilateral cooperation," Kiuru said. This includes broadband, digital media and cyber security. Nokia has already done a great deal in facilitating further cooperation between the two countries, she said. Kiuru said her visit was "an effort to seek wide-ranging cooperation of mutual interest." Her priorities are education and communication because Finland is one of the world's leaders in these sectors. She said Finland has agreements on education in the Kingdom, with the Technical and Vocational Training Corporation (TVTC) and a kindergarten program. "We believe in quality education. We would like to make sure that our sources are reliable and ensure vocational training faces up to the challenges of the growing Saudi market." Kiuru is accompanied by a huge delegation comprising senior officials and technical experts in education and telecommunications. She said that many countries are seeking to follow the model of the Finnish education system, which is free for citizens, as it is in Saudi Arabia. The minister visited several institutions of higher learning in Riyadh including King Saud University, the TVTC, King Abdullah Project for Public Education Development (Tatweer) and Princess Nora bint Abdulrahman University, which "impressed" her. She also met with members of the Shoura Council to discuss further cooperation including a student exchange program. Kiuru said that Finland has invited the Saudi telecoms minister to Helsinki to bolster cooperation in the field. (November 6, 2014) zawya.com

telecom sector remains a key concern, he said. Despite the expected growth of revenues, key strengths of the sector come from attractive valuations and high dividend yield, he said. He gave preference to STC based on its strong balance sheet, potential of higher dividends and attractive P/E of 12.0X for next year (2015), the paper said. The report said frequent and high dividend yields are the sector's key strength. The current dividend yield for the telecom sector is 4.3 percent compared with nearly 2.6 percent for the Saudi stock market (TASI). STC and Mobily are among few companies in the market that pay quarterly dividends, the report said. The analyst expected that growth in the telecom will continue in the next two years driven by the data sector and, further, by the growing penetration rates of the low-cost Smartphone sets. (October 5, 2014) arabnews.com

Turkey

Chairman & CEO: Dr. Tayfun Acarer

[Information & Communication Technologies Authority (BTK)]

4G Long Term Evolution (LTE) services are likely to be introduced in Turkey in 'early 2015', Turkcell CEO Sureyya Ciliv told, noting that the exponential growth of data traffic in the country has made the evolution from 3G to 4G a necessity. Ciliv claimed that data use has increased 100% year-on-year since 3G services were introduced in Turkey in 2009. Further, Ciliv claimed that Turkcell's competitors had previously been opposed to the idea of introducing 3G services in the country, despite Turkcell's enthusiasm for the technology. Turkcell's LTE tests date back to 2011, with the cellco also trialing LTE-Advanced (LTE-A) technology in August 2013.

(November 13, 2014) Today's Zaman

Turk Telekom has reported revenue of TRY3.512 billion (US$1.574 billion) for the three months ended September 30, 2014, up 4.4% year-on-year. EBITDA increased 4.4% to TRY1.362 billion, while operating profit for the third quarter edged up 0.7% on an annualized basis, to TRY869 million. Meanwhile, net profit (before minority interest) jumped 35.2% from TRY229 million to TRY310 million in the period under review, chiefly due to 'less severe foreign exchange conditions' compared to the year-ago period. CAPEX for the third quarter of 2014 decreased 20.7% to TRY511 million. In operational terms, Turk Telekom's broadband customer base rose 4.4% to 7.5 million by October 1, 2014, of which 715,000 were said to be fiber-to-the-home (FTTH) customers, an annual increase of 60.4%. Meanwhile, the telco's mobile unit Avea saw its subscriber base grow 15.0% y-o-y to 16.2 million; of these, 7.6 million were on post-paid plans, up 21.6% y-o-y. Finally, the number of Turk Telekom fixed voice subscribers fell 8.3% y-o-y to 11.7 million.

(November 4, 2014) telegeography.com

United Arab Emirates

Director General: Mr. Mohamed Nasser Al Ghanim

[Telecommunication Regulatory Authority (TRA)]

The UAE has made the biggest change in country rankings by jumping 14 places to 32 as per International Telecommunication Union's 2014 ICT Development Index (IDI) released. The measurement ranks 166 countries according to their level of ICT access, use and skills. In terms of regional comparisons, Europe's average IDI value of 7.14 remains well ahead of the next best-performing region, the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS — 5.33), followed by the Americas (4.86), Asia & the Pacific (4.57), the Arab States (4.55), and Africa at 2.31. The CIS and the Arab States showed the highest improvement in regional IDI averages over the past 12 months. The report identifies a group of 'most dynamic countries', which have recorded above-average improvements in their IDI rank over the past 12 months. These include (in order of most improved): UAE, Fiji, Cape Verde, Thailand, Oman, Qatar, Belarus, Bosnia & Herzegovina, and Georgia. Bahrain is ranked 27th, followed by UAE at 32nd, Qatar at 34th, Saudi Arabia at 47th and Oman at 52nd. IDI values are on average twice as high in the developed world than in developing countries. Dr Hamadoun I. Touré, Secretary-General of ITU, said that over three billion people are now online and ICT growth remains buoyant in just about every country worldwide. "The number of internet users in developing countries has doubled in five years (2009-2014), with two thirds of all people online now living in the developing world. Of the 4.3 billion people not yet using the internet, 90 per cent live in developing countries. In the world's 42 Least Connected Countries (LCCs), which are home to 2.5 billion people, access to ICT remains largely out of reach, particularly for those countries' large rural populations. An estimated 450 million people worldwide live in places which are still out of reach of mobile cellular service. Encouragingly, the report notes substantial improvements in access to international bandwidth in poorer countries, with developing nations' share of total global international bandwidth rising from just 9 per cent in 2004 to over 30 per cent today. But lack of sufficient international internet bandwidth in many of the LCCs remains an important barrier to ICT uptake in these countries, and often limits the quality of internet access. "It is precisely in poor and rural areas where ICTs can make a particularly significant impact," said Brahima Sanou, Director of ITU's Telecommunication Development Bureau. By the end of this year, Sanou said that almost 44 per cent of households globally will have internet access at home, up from 40 per cent last year and 30 per cent in 2010. In the developed world, 78 per cent of households now have home internet access, compared to 31 per cent in developing countries, and just 5 per cent in the 48 UN Least Developed Countries.

(November 25, 2014) zawya.com

New business models are needed to make ICT sector vibrant and sustainable, Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) Director General Mohammad Naser Al Ganem said. He said the media is transforming. "It is impossible to assume that media industry is melting into thin air and losing its charm and significance. On the contrary it has become one of the most demanding commodities of our time."He added that new business models are needed considering the new wave of advancement in broadband networks and the power of internet, which has fuelled the media sector. "Let us not forget to modernize the regulatory framework that will support the new business model and let us think regional and global in these new models and unlock the potential for our local markets," Al Ghanim said. "The challenges ahead not just to encourage investment but we must contribute towards innovative initiatives." A large number of media professionals and investors participated in the three-day media summit that ended on Thursday. Queen Rania of Jordan gave a keynote address on Tuesday and launched a powerful attack against extremists for misusing social media to propagate their agenda. (November 21, 2014) gulfnews.com

REGULATORY ACTIVITIES BEYOND THE SAMENA REGION

Regulatory Updates

Argentina

Argentina has begun awarding the spectrum it auctioned last month, naming America Movil's Claro as the first recipient of airwaves earmarked for 3G and 4G services. Claro won spectrum in the 1800 MHz and 1900 MHz bands designated as 3G spectrum and two blocks of 1700-MHz and 2100-MHz 4G spectrum, Argentina's regulator SeCom announced. The regulator did not say how much Claro had agreed to pay for the frequencies. SeCom announced on 31 October that it had concluded the auction of 10 lots of spectrum, raising US$2.23 billion in the process. Demand for the three available lots of 4G spectrum drove up the price. Claro was one of four companies to take part in the auction. Rival mobile network operators Movistar, owned by Telefonica, and Telecom Argentina's Personal also submitted bids, as did broadband provider Arlink. SeCom has yet to disclose how the other companies fared in the process.

(November 27, 2014) totaltele.com

In its 9M14 earnings announcement, Telecom Argentina (Personal) has disclosed that it successfully bid US$658 million for 3G and 4G-suitable spectrum in the recent auction staged by the regulator SeCom. The telco has confirmed that it bid on the following spectrum blocks: 830.25MHz-834MHz paired with 875.25MHz-879MHz (Lot 2); 1890MHz-1892.5MHz paired with 1970MHz-1972.5MHz (Lot 5); 1862.5MHz-1867.5MHz paired with 1942.5MHz-1947.5MHz (Lot 6); and 1730MHz-1745MHz paired with 2130MHz-2145MHz (Lot 8). On October 31 SeCom confirmed that it received offers totaling US$2.23 billion for the 4G spectrum, equivalent to a 13% premium on the floor price of US$1.97 billion. The watchdog is not expected to formally unveil the winners of the concessions until later this month. Meanwhile, the telco has announced consolidated revenues of ARS24.183 billion (US$2.842 billion) for the nine-month period ended September 30, 2014, representing a rise of 22.0% against the corresponding period of 2013. Meanwhile, net income for the period under review increased to ARS2.684 billion, a rise of 13.7% year-on-year. As of September 30, 2014, Personal claimed a total of 19.8 million mobile subscribers, down slightly from 19.9 million one year earlier; post-paid clients represented 32% of the operator's user base.

(November 6, 2014) telegeography.com

Bahamas

The Government of Bahamas' Cellular Liberalization Task Force has issued a Request for

Proposals (RFP) inviting interested parties to apply for the nation's second mobile operator license. The license will be allocated via a two stage competitive selection process, involving a technical and financial assessment, followed by a spectrum auction. An evaluation committee comprising members of the Task Force and other industry experts will assess the bids in phase one, whilst sector regulator the Utilities Regulation and Competition Authority (URCA) will conduct the spectrum auction in phase two. Regardless of scores in the initial phase, only operators that meet certain minimum criteria will be eligible to participate in the auction. Scores from the two stages will be combined and the bidder with the highest overall score will be granted the new authorization, including an Individual Operating License and an Individual Spectrum License. Spectrum in the 700MHz, 850MHz, 1700MHz/2100MHz and 1900MHz bands has been made available for the new entrant, although it was not clear what quantum of spectrum would be awarded. The government is accepting proposals until February 11, 2015 and the selection process is expected to be completed by the end of April that year. In related news, fixed line incumbent and cellular monopoly holder Bahamas Telecommunication Company (BTC) has reduced the average number of calls dropped per day from 70,000 to 40,000 as part of efforts to modernize the cellco in preparation for the liberalization of the sector. Tribune 242 cites BTC CEO Leon Williams as saying that the operator is planning to invest a total of US$65 million on network improvements in the coming months. Of that total, US$26 million will be spent on enhancing its cellular network, Mr. Williams added, commenting: 'We are on a mission to refocus and put [cell sites] in areas where we still have dropped calls…So that should take away the problems that we experienced with dropped calls.' By Christmas BTC aims to install 20 new sites throughout the country and upgrade with LTE technology eleven sites each in New Providence, Abaco, Grand Bahama and Eleuthera. Williams went on to say that BTC was concentrating on 'winning the hearts and minds' of Bahamians. (November 14, 2014) telegeography.com

Canada

Canada's telecom regulator began the last of three major policy reviews as it seeks to strike a balance between ensuring consumers have broad access to new technologies while avoiding rules that would discourage investment. The hearing by the regulator, the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC), on the wholesale telecom services market will consider whether big telephone and cable companies should be forced to share so-called "last mile" wiring, which brings services directly to the retail customer's door, with smaller rivals. Due to improved fiber-optic connections, this wiring allows consumers to enjoy greater volumes of streaming online video and to place video calls over the Internet, among other benefits. The CRTC said on Monday its focus is on choice and sustainable competition, and it will have decide whether to give small players greater access to these lines to foster that competition. Big players such as BCE Inc's Bell Canada and Rogers Communications Inc are expected to argue they should be allowed to maintain control over high-speed fiber-to-the-premises lines so that they can recoup their investments in these expensive-to-build networks. Quebecor Inc, Shaw Communications Inc and Telus Corp are other companies that are dominant in the market for these services despite the presence of many smaller competitors. In recent months, the CRTC has also held hearings on the future of television and the future of wireless. Following the TV hearings, it has stopped telecoms charging customers cancellation fees for not giving enough notice that they are ending service. On wireless, it is considering mandated tower-sharing and roaming rules. (November 25, 2014) reuters.com

Canada approved the sale of majority control of Wind Mobile Canada to an investor group that includes the company's chairman, saying the transaction will bolster competition in the domestic wireless market. The Canadian government's approval came with a number of conditions, among them a pledge by Wind Mobile's new ownership to "significantly invest" with the purpose of acquiring additional spectrum and expanding Wind Mobile's presence across Canada. News that Global telecom giant VimpelCom Ltd. planned to sell its stake in Wind Mobile Canada to a Toronto-based investment firm emerged in September. Toronto-based Globalive Capital, which is controlled by Wind Chairman Anthony Lacavera, would partly finance the transaction with funding from an investor group led by Canadian hedge fund West Face Capital Inc., according to people familiar with the transaction. The value of the deal was roughly 300 million Canadian dollars ($264 million) including debt, those people said. Now approved, the deal looks to shore up Wind Mobile's future in Canada, and offer a boost to the Canadian government's plan to boost competition in the wireless market -- which the governing Conservative Party hopes translates into lower prices and increased choice for consumers, just as the party seeks a fourth-straight mandate in a national vote expected no later than October 2015. Industry Minister James Moore, who is responsible for telecommunications policy, said the deal was reviewed under the country's foreign-investment guidelines as some of the investors were from abroad. "I concluded that this acquisition will contribute to a more robust and competitive wireless industry in Canada," he said in a statement. Besides Mr. Lacavera's Globalive Capital, other members of the consortium are West Face; Tennenbaum Capital Partners of Santa Monica, Calif.; LG Capital Investors; Serruya Private Equity; and Novus Wireless Communications. Industry Canada has also approved the spectrum license transfer to the consortium, which goes by the name AAL Acquisitions Corp. Wind Mobile last week promoted Pietro Cordova to the post of chief executive, taking the helm from Mr. Lacavera, who remains as chairman. Wind Mobile, which launched service in late 2009, had 741,000 subscribers during the second quarter, up 20% over the same period in 2013. That was still well below Canada's dominant wireless players, Rogers Communications Inc., BCE Inc.'s Bell Canada unit and Telus Corp.

(November 5, 2014) online.wsj.com

China

China's Ministry of Industry and Information Technology (MIIT) has launched a public consultation regarding proposals to open the fixed broadband market to competition from private companies during a three-year trial period. Telecom Asia writes that under the plans, Chinese firms with a capitalization of at least CNY20 million (US$3.26 million) and more than three years' experience in the telecoms market could apply to take part in a trial to provide fixed broadband services, including fiber-to-the-home (FTTH), to end-users. Successful applicants will be permitted to either roll out their own infrastructure or to lease access to the networks of China Telecom, China Unicom or China Mobile. The trial is set to take place in 16 cities, namely: Taiyuan, Shenyang, Harbin, Shanghai, Nanjing, Hangzhou, Ningbo, Xiamen, Qingdao, Zhengzhou,

Wuhan, Changsha, Guangzhou, Shenzhen, Chongqing and Chengdu. The proposals mark another step towards greater levels of liberalization in the Chinese market, and follow the decision to open the wireless market to mobile virtual network operators (MVNOs), again on a trial basis. MIIT allocated a further eight MVNO licenses earlier this month, bringing the total to 33.
(November 28, 2014) telegeography.com

Ministry of Industry and Information Technology (MIIT) has issued a fourth batch of mobile virtual network operator (MVNO) licenses, allocating concessions to eight companies and bringing the total number of MVNO licensees to 333. Video sharing site Youku Tudou was one of the highest-profile companies to receive a license, whilst other licensees included: clothing manufacturers Hongdou Group; TV and radio broadcasting firm Shenzhen Media Group; electronics retailer Qingdao Gooday Network Technology (Haier); communications and software providers Beijing ChannelSoft Technology and 263 Network Communications; smartphone manufacturer Beijing Xiaomi Technology; and Zhengzhou Xunjie Trade. (November 24, 2014) C114

China Mobile is considering refarming spectrum in the 900MHz and 1800MHz bands to maintain service quality as its 4G subscriber base expands. The cellco is expecting to have a 4G customer base of more than 150 million by the end of next year, and 300 million by end-2016, with Time Division Long Term Evolution (TD-LTE)-enabled base stations increasing to 700,000 and one million by those dates. China Mobile currently uses the two bands for 2G services, but sees greater potential for them to be used for 4G or 3G networks. (November 21, 2014) Sina Tech

China Mobile, the world's largest cellular provider by subscribers, achieved its end-year target for 4G customers by the end of October, signing up more than 50 million users to its Time Division Long Term Evolution (TD-LTE) service by that date, Reuters writes, citing the State-owned Assets Supervision and Administration Commission (SASAC). The cellco added around ten million net new 4G subscribers per month in August, September and October and is on track to sign up more than 70 million 4G users by the end of the year. The cellco has made the most of its early lead on rivals China Unicom and China Telecom, both of which have been far more conservative in their deployment of TD-LTE networks, banking instead on Frequency Division (FD)-LTE technology – full licenses for which have yet to be allocated – over the home-grown TD standard favored by China Mobile and sector regulator the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology (MIIT).
(November 14, 2014) telegeography.com

Costa Rica

Telecoms regulator SUTEL has created a new registry for pre-paid mobile users to help protect subscribers against identity theft and extortion. The service launches on December 1, and registration is voluntary. To register, customers must go to www.registroprepago.sutel.go.cr and provide their personal details. Once these have been verified against the database of the Tribunal Supremo de Elecciones (Supreme Electoral Tribunal, or TSE) – which manages the civil registry – the user is sent a four-digit code to confirm the registration and complete the procedure. In addition to the additional security, SUTEL said that subscribers that register their number with the new database will be able to access special promotions and will be able to port their number between operators more easily. (November 19, 2014) telegeography.com

Denmark

Denmark has overtaken South Korea as the world's top country for cellphone and Internet use, a study released said. In third place was Sweden, followed by Iceland and Britain, emphasizing European dominance in the connectivity stakes, according to the International Telecommunication Union, a leading analyst for information and communication technologies, or ICTs. Hong Kong led Asia, in ninth place in the world rankings, and the United States came 14th. The Central African Republic was last, part of a long list of African countries bringing up the tail of the list. The International Telecommunications Union's ICT development index takes into account Internet and mobile phone access and use, and the population's competence with the technology. "Over three billion people are now online and information and communication technology growth remains buoyant in just about every country worldwide," the report said. Developing countries are well behind, but catching up, with Internet usage in 2014 growing 8.7 percent, compared to 3.3 percent in the richer nations. However, of the 4.3 billion people still unconnected, 90 percent of them are in developing countries, the study found. That should change, according to the organizers. "ICTs have the potential to make the world a much better place -– in particular for those who are the poorest and the most disenfranchised, including women, youth, and those with disabilities," said the Telecommunications Union Secretary General, Hamadoun Toure.
(November 24, 2014) phys.org

El Salvador

Telecoms regulator SIGET plans to re-open an auction for mobile spectrum in the 1900MHz and 1700MHz/2100MHz frequency bands, after the process was suspended late last year. SIGET head Blanca Coto said that the watchdog has not yet issued a call for applications from companies interested in taking part in the auction, but revealed that SIGET has started the process of re-examining the rules of the tender procedure, which will see a total of 20MHz in the 1855MHz-1935MHz range sold off, alongside a further 20MHz in the 1765MHz-2165MHz band. In October 2013 El Salvador's competition regulator the Superintendencia de Competencia (SC) suspended the auction, on the grounds that the rules would put potential new players at a disadvantage as they face barriers to market entry, thus inhibiting the development of competition. The SC objected to the fact that the spectrum would be awarded to the highest bidder, regardless of how much spectrum the company already has, or its current market share. The auction was subsequently suspended a second time by the Constitutional Chamber of the Supreme Court of Justice. (November 5, 2014) La Prensa Grafica

European Union

European Union governments are considering less stringent rules on how internet service providers manage traffic on their networks, a move that could be welcomed by Europe's large telecoms operators. These so-called net neutrality rules are part of the European Commission's proposed overhaul of Europe's telecoms industry to help it to compete against rivals the United States and Asia. Net neutrality is the principle that all content providers should have equal access on networks. It has become a hot topic in the United States where President Barack Obama has said internet service providers should be banned from striking paid "fast lane" deals with content companies. EU lawmakers voted in April for strict net neutrality rules that barred telecoms operators like Orange and Telefonica from prioritizing some internet traffic over others. But the latest draft of the reform proposal shows that member states are leaning toward a looser approach which only bars internet service providers from applying traffic management measures which "block, slow down, alter, degrade or discriminate against specific content." It does not define net neutrality or so-called "specialized services," which would have specified the types of content those operators could prioritize over others. Large telecoms companies have said they want to be allowed to provide quicker internet access to bandwidth-hungry services like Google's YouTube and Netflix. The draft text also includes provisions on roaming charges paid by consumers when using their mobile phones abroad. The Commission and the European Parliament had pushed for an end to such charges by the end of next year. But regulators and member states are concerned about what effect an end to roaming charges would have on domestic rates and wholesale prices telecoms operators pay each other when their customers travel abroad. The latest text does not specify a date for the introduction of "roam like at home," where someone using, say, a British mobile phone in Italy would pay the same as if they were still in Britain. But it acknowledges the need for a specific date to send a positive signal for consumers at a time of widespread discontent with Brussels. Member states will discuss the text on Thursday and Friday, and if agreed it will go to ministers when they meet in two weeks. (November 19, 2014) reuters.com2014) telegeography.com

Germany

The German government has played down speculation that it plans to reduce its stake in a number of state-owned companies, including incumbent telecoms operator Deutsche Telekom (DT), after a leak of the proposals was reported by Reuters earlier this week. The news agency writes that Chancellor Angela Merkel's cabinet had been expected to approve yesterday a document proposing the privatization of stakes in firms such as DT, Deutsche Post and Deutsche Bahn, but the cabinet delayed approval after Reuters reported its contents, and a spokesman for Finance Minister Wolfgang Schaeuble said changes to the text needed to be made. 'What I can say overall is that there are no concrete plans for privatization at Deutsche Telekom, Deutsche Bahn or Deutsche Post,' a government spokeswoman said after the cabinet meeting. The Federal Republic owns a 14.3% stake in DT, which operates under the brand Telekom Deutschland in its domestic market, while a further 17.4% is held via state-owned development bank KfW Bankengruppe. (November 13, 2014) telegeography.com

Germany's Federal Network Agency published a draft market analysis on bitstream access for national consultation. Two markets were defined: layer 2 bitstream access and core networks layer 3 bitstream access. The network agency integrated xDSL and fiber infrastructures in both markets, with layer 3 bitstream access also including the cable network infrastructure. Deutsche Telekom was found to be dominant in all the markets. However, for the first time, the regulator also looked at the markets on a regional level. As a result it concluded that layer 3 bitstream access regulation is no longer needed in 15 cities with sufficient competition: Bochum, Bottrop, Bremerhaven, Gelsenkirchen, Herne, Karlsruhe, Kiel, Cologne, Leipzig, Leverkusen, Mannheim, Osnabruck, Pforzheim, Recklinghausen and Reutlingen. However, this applies only under the condition that the complementary Layer 2 bitstream access product is available. Comments on the decision can be submitted until December 12 in a public consultation, after which the proposal will be sent to the European Commission for clearance. (November 13, 2014) telecompaper.com

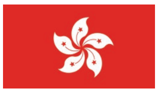
Ghana

Telecoms regulator NCA has opened a public consultation into the potential award of three new licenses for mobile virtual network operator (MVNO) services, international wholesale carrier (IWC) services and unified services. The regulator is seeking stakeholders' views on the eligibility criteria, scope and conditions of the licenses and award processes, as outlined in the published papers. According to the draft documents, the NCA has proposed that the MVNO license is awarded for a maximum term of five years, subject to the expiration of the authorization of the cellular mobile licensee involved. Eligible applicants, which must be 70% Ghanaian-owned, will be required to pay a non-refundable application fee of GHS150,000 (US$46,985), a license fee of GHS1.2 million and all levies applicable to mobile network operators (MNOs), including annual regulatory fee, universal access contributions, communications service tax (CST) and value added tax (VAT). For its part, the unified service license is targeted at existing MNOs wishing to provide fixed telephony, broadband and other value added services (VAS) to customers. Broadband Wireless Access (BWA) license holders may also be eligible for the concession and can apply for the license upon meeting the rollout conditions outlined in their concessions. The successful bidder for a unified service license must pay a GHS150,000 application fee, a license levy of GHS600,000 for each year of the remaining term of its cellular mobile license, a regulatory fee equivalent to 1% of its net revenues, and several additional fees (e.g. CST, VAT). Meanwhile, the IWC license will allow its holder to carry and route incoming and outgoing international telecoms traffic to and from any of the country's licensed international gateway facilities. The NCA has disclosed that, following the review of the results of the three public consultations, a process which is scheduled to take place on December 9, 2014, and invitations for the license auctions will be published on December 16. (November 25, 2014) telegeography.com

Following MTN Ghana's decision to terminate its Interconnect Agreement with smaller domestic rival Expresso (formerly Kasapa Telecom) from November 1, 2014, due to 'uncontrollable circumstances', local telecoms watchdog the National Communications Authority (NCA) has taken steps to mediate the dispute between the two operators. The watchdog disclosed that it 'has since the beginning of the year made consistent and intensive efforts to help Expresso address its difficulties by managing various crisis situations and to ensure that the network is able to meet all its obligations'. Whilst the NCA disclosed that it is still monitoring the issue, and will take the appropriate action after a comprehensive review of the situation, it has reminded Expresso's subscribers that, if they so wish, they can make use of the mobile number portability (MNP) service and change to another provider. Last week MTN Ghana blocked incoming calls from Expresso's networks due to the cellco's inability to settle its debts. MTN Ghana's CEO, Serame Taukobong said that unfortunately, it is a combination of financial and regulatory issues, so we've tried as much as possible to minimize the impact on MTN costumers ... We hope the issue will be resolved as soon as possible. It can only be resolved if Kasapa shows [a] commitment to honour its financial obligations.' According to the executive, the main challenge is Expresso's affiliation with Sudatel, which 'has made it difficult to raise capital locally and internationally and deal with vendors'.

(November 10, 2014) Spy Ghana

Hong Kong



Hong Kong's Communications Authority has formally announced the registered bidders in the upcoming auction of 2×49.2MHz of mobile spectrum in the 1900MHz-2200MHz (2100MHz) frequency band scheduled for December 2014, namely three of the territory's existing cellcos: China Mobile Hong Kong, Hutchison Telephone Company (3) and SmarTone. Bidders must declare if they are bidding in collaboration by submitting a declaration form by 18 November 2014. Largest mobile operating group by subscribers PCCW (including CSL) cannot participate in the auction under merger conditions. The unified carrier licenses will be valid for 15 years from October 22, 2016, i.e. following the expiry of the existing operators' 2×118.4MHz allocations in the 2100MHz band, previously issued under 3G UMTS licenses. (November 17, 2014) telegeography.com

India

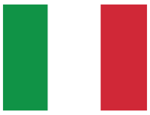
Sectoral regulator TRAI is likely to submit its views within 15 days on some clarifications sought by the DoT over pricing and valuation of the spectrum for the proposed auction in February next year. The Department of Telecom (DoT) has sought clarifications from the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) regarding pricing and valuation of 800 MHz, 900 MHz and 1800 MHz airwaves. "We (TRAI) have received a reference from Department of Telecom on Friday and will try submitting the reconsidered recommendations within the 15 day time-frame or even earlier," an official source said. The final comments received from TRAI on the matter will then be placed before inter-ministerial panel Telecom Commission for a final call. The next round of spectrum auction is proposed to be held in February 2015 from which government is estimated to garner at least Rs 9,355 crore. TRAI had last month given its recommendations on valuation and pricing of 1800 MHz and 900 MHz spectrum bands, being used for 2G services, for the next round of auction. The regulator had suggested about 10 per cent higher price for spectrum in 1800 MHz over the final bid price that was received in the February auction. The Authority had given its recommendations for 800 MHz (CDMA) spectrum band in February. It had suggested CDMA spectrum reserve price of Rs 2,685 crore per megahertz for auction, which is around 50 per cent higher than the previous pan-India base price. The regulator had also recommended selling radiowaves in the 2100 MHz band along with the proposed auction in February next year. Part of spectrum in 2100 MHz band is held by Defense and DoT is in discussions to get some frequencies vacated for 3G mobile services in this band. Most of the spectrum which is proposed to be put up for sale is being used by Airtel, Vodafone, Idea Cellular and Reliance Communications across various parts of the country. (November 17, 2014) indiatvnews.com

Department of Telecommunications (DoT) has been instructed by telecom minister Ravi Shankar Prasad to provide clarity on a number of issues persistently harming investor confidence in the sector, the Economic Times writes, citing a senior DoT official. Matters including spectrum sharing and trading, terms for mergers and acquisitions and the rationalization for penalties are all set to be considered by the DoT. Whilst the minister is keen to clear up some of the sector's muddier regulatory waters, the DoT's deliberations will not delay the upcoming spectrum auction, scheduled for February 2015, despite calls from the industry to put the sale on hold until more frequencies are available. According to the DoT official guidelines on spectrum sharing are already in the works but the regulator has yet to look into spectrum trading, so guidelines on those two areas are unlikely to be released by the end of 2014, as previously stated by Mr Prasad. Meanwhile, contentious elements of the existing merger and acquisition rules will be reconsidered, including the requirement for the buyer to pay the government a market-linked price for the frequencies changing hands. Although not highlighted by the official, in the wake of the failure of Bharti Airtel's takeover of Loop Mobile, the DoT is also expected to consider M&A norms alongside the rules for mobile number portability (MNP). The takeover was delayed by, amongst other things, opposition from the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI), which claimed that the transfer of customers from Loop to Airtel violated the rules for MNP. Clarity on M&A rules is one of the highest priorities for the sector, as many of the nation's larger operators are increasingly looking towards consolidation in the crowded market. Elsewhere, telcos have been clamoring for the DoT to impose a graded penalty system that will determine the levels of fines based on the severity of an operator's transgression. Having come under greater scrutiny from other government agencies after the 2G crisis shed light on corruption in the department, DoT officials have levied maximum penalties on telcos for infringements, lest any leniency be taken as graft. The Economic Times pegs the amount owed in penalties by the nation's telcos to be in the region of INR21.17 billion (US$344.3 million), most of which is currently being disputed in the courts: INR11.33 billion worth of fines were dished out in the 2011-2012 year, but the amount collected was just INR2.06 billion, equating to around 18.2% of the total. Subsequent years have yielded similarly poor results, with the DoT realizing 15.0% of the INR7.19 billion levied in 2012-2013 and 1.6% of the INR79.23 billion charged in 2013-2014. (November 13, 2014) The Economic Times

The Telecom Commission has rejected recommendations on pricing for spectrum in the 800MHz, 900MHz and 1800MHz bands from the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI), sending the regulator back to the drawing board to draft fresh proposals, the Business Standard writes. The Commission dismissed the TRAI's recommendations, which suggested that the government free up additional airwaves from the ministry of defense and state-owned telco Bharat Sanchar Nigam Ltd (BSNL) and only begin the sale when enough spectrum was available. The regulator has been given 15 days to submit new recommendations. A senior official from the Department of Telecommunications (DoT) and a member of the Commission was quoted as saying: 'Since freeing up additional spectrum from the sources that the TRAI has suggested ... will not be possible now, the quantum of spectrum to be auctioned will change. Pricing is linked to the quantum of spectrum to be auction, [so] we need fresh suggestions from the TRAI.' The unnamed official also confirmed that the government is determined to hold the next frequency auction in February, despite the limited spectrum available. Industry stakeholders have voiced their concerns over the urgency for the sale, claiming that the shortage of spectrum would needlessly inflate prices, making incumbent players vulnerable to aggressive bidding from rivals.

(November 11, 2014) telegeography.com

Italy



The Italian government has opened a public consultation into its previously announced plans to create a EUR6.2 billion (US$7.7 billion) high speed network to cover areas of the country currently outside the footprint of fixed broadband infrastructure. Funding for the project will come from national, regional and European Community (EC) sources. The government hopes to have a minimum 30Mbps connection available to all Italians by 2020 to help it meet European Union (EU) digital agenda targets, with well over half of the population able to access 100Mbps fiber-based services by that date. The proposals are open to public comment until 20 December. (November 26, 2014) telegeography.com

Jamaica

Telecoms regulator the Office of Utilities Regulation (OUR) has launched a public consultation process to set standards for quality of service (QoS) guidelines and to develop other consumer protection rules. Responses to the document are to be submitted by December 8 and the watchdog will submit a final report to parliament on February 23. The OUR has proposed the operators be obliged to report how many complaints they receive per 100 customers and how many of those complaints were resolved within periods of 15 and 30 working days. Elsewhere, the OUR is urging internet service providers (ISPs) to use applications to measure the speed of their broadband connections. (November 14, 2014) TeleSemana

The government has said it plans to closely monitor the proposed US$3 billion acquisition of Columbus International by Cable & Wireless Communications (CWC), which was announced last week. The two firms both claim a sizeable chunk of Jamaica's fixed line and broadband markets, with CWC operating under the LIME banner and Columbus owning cable TV and broadband operator Flow. The Minister of Science, Technology, Energy and Mining said that he is going to be very vigilant and watchful about what happens going forward, and we are going to be clear and certain that appropriate measures, appropriate agreements (and) appropriate additions will have to be done to enable that ... We will safeguard competition going forward. Columbus, which generated revenue of US$505 million in the year ended December 31, 2013, has around 700,000 residential customers in the Caribbean, Central America and Andean region. It offers services under the Flow brand name in Trinidad & Tobago, Jamaica, Barbados, Grenada and Curacao, and also serves Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent & the Grenadines and Antigua & Barbuda under the brand name Karib Cable. Columbus also provides corporate data and cloud based services under the brand Columbus Business Solutions. Meanwhile, through its wholly owned subsidiary, Columbus Networks, the company provides capacity and IP services, corporate data solutions and data centre hosting throughout 42 countries in the greater Caribbean, Central American and Andean region. The telco presides over a fully protected, ringed submarine fiber-optic network spanning close to 42,300km and a 26,400km terrestrial fiber and coaxial network. (November 13, 2014) The Jamaica Observer

Kenya

The Universal Service Advisory Fund has formed a committee drawn from telecom operators and the Fund to iron out thorny issues. The committee is expected to address differences which have emerged since the formation of USAC. Communications Authority of Kenya Director General Francis Wangusi says all players will be issued with operating license subject to contribution to the Fund. This followed a silent row that has been simmering pitting telecommunication service providers and the Communications Authority of Kenya over the formation of the Universal Services Advisory board in August this year. Players have been demanding representation in the USAC board to oversee the management of the cash they are supposed to contribute. This has seen some players withholding their levies to the fund until the request is heard. CA Director General Francis Wangusi says any player who fails to remit the levy will not have their license renewed next year. Wangusi says the CA board has resolved to be contributing 800 million shillings to fund every year to finance the operations of the universal service fund. According to USAC chair Catherine Ngahu, so far the fund has received remittances totaling to 1.45 billion shillings falling short of the 2 billion shillings target. ICT players in the country are expected to remit 0.5 percent of their gross profit to the fund every year. The funds raised will go towards rolling out ICT infrastructure in remote and commercially non-viable areas in the country. (November 14, 2014) kbc.co.ke

Macau

Two prospective new entrants submitted applications to compete with Macau's four incumbent mobile operators for the four 4G licenses on offer by deadline. China Mobile Hong Kong and start-up telecoms venture Yu Hang are the two new bidders alongside Companhia de Telecomunicacoes de Macau (CTM), China Telecom Macau, Hutchison Macau (3) and SmarTone Macau. Four concessions with eight-year duration will become valid early next year, following the tender launched in September by Macau's Bureau of Telecommunications Regulation (Direccao dos Servicos de Regulacao de Telecomunicacoes, DSRT), which is opening the bids today; license winners will be expected to launch 4G LTE (FDD and/or TDD) mobile broadband services covering 50% of Macanese territory by the end of 2015, rising to 100% in 2016. In a report accompanying the bidding announcement, China Telecom Macau – the territory's sole CDMA-based mobile provider told that the prospects for short-term return on start-up 4G network investment in Macau are 'not very promising' as the considerable cost of deploying the 4G network cannot be readily passed on to consumers as price competition will remain keen. Vice general manager of China Telecom Macau, Song Tong, admitted to the paper that he did not expect significant revenue growth 'anytime soon' as market competition is 'fierce', but on the other hand noted that his company was 'eyeing the tremendous potential of the [LTE] technology and the possibility that it could bring in a large increase in the number of users,' adding that 'we have to evolve with the market'. The China Telecom representative also highlighted the fact that business risk would be lowered via infrastructure sharing agreements with fellow 4G licensees; whilst the expanding fiber transmission infrastructure of Macau's fixed network newcomer MTel – an alternative to former monopoly CTM – may also help reduce rollout/operating costs. CTM previously stated that it was already technically prepared to launch 4G LTE services as soon as a license is issued, whilst anticipating that LTE usage will raise monthly average revenue per user (ARPU), in contrast to China Telecom's expectations. (November 19, 2014) Macau Business Daily

Mexico

Mexican fixed line operator Telmex has been fined MXN 657 million for monopolistic practices against rival operator Axtel. The fine was imposed by the country's Federal Telecommunications Institute (IFT). The IFT's decision cannot be appealed by the operator, according to the report. In September, the IFT had fined Telmex MXN 49.3 million for monopolistic practices. In its ruling, the regulator established that Telmex acted with the goal of setting obstacles to the operations of Axtel in the long distance market. (November 10, 2014) Terra

Moldova

Telecoms regulator ANRCETI has announced that the tender for the allocation of frequencies in the 3600MHz-3800MHz frequency band, suitable for broadband wireless access (BWA) services, has failed to attract any bids. In November 2010 Moldova's Ministry for Information and Communication Technologies (MTIC) adopted a program to develop broadband internet access for 2010/13, including the allocation of frequencies in the 2.5GHz-2.69GHz and 3.4GHz-3.8GHz bands. In December 2012 interested parties were invited to submit their applications by February 18, 2013; however, the sale process of 50MHz of spectrum between 3750MHz and 3800MHz generated no interest. The ANRCETI pledged to re-launch a tender in October-December that year, although the date came and went with no further announcements. It was September 2014 before the watchdog revealed that it would award four BWA licenses, each encompassing 50MHz of spectrum in the 3.4GHz-3.8GHz band; the ANRCETI invited all interested parties to submit their bids by November 19, 2014, with a potential auction due to be held on December 10, 2014. (November 24, 2014) telegeography.com

New Zealand

New Zealand's Commerce Commission has issued its draft decision on the proposed contributions to the country's NZD50 million (US$39 million) Telecommunications Development Levy (TDL) for 2013/14. The government uses the fund to pay for telecoms infrastructure, including the relay service for the deaf and hearing-impaired, broadband for rural areas, and improvements to 111 emergency services. Under the draft ruling, Spark (formerly Telecom New Zealand) will be liable to pay 38.17% of the total (NZD19.1 million), while Vodafone will contribute 27.82% (NZD13.9 million) and Chorus 22.92% (NZD11.5 million). The remainder will be divided among 17 smaller telcos and internet service providers (ISPs). The draft decision is now open for submissions until November 28, with a final ruling due to be published in late December. (November 13, 2014) telegeography.com

Nigeria

Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC) has shut down telecom provider Owntel Communications. The shutdown is due to the company allegedly offering telecommunications services to customers, without obtaining operational license. NCC enforcement team confiscated some of its equipment as evidence for illegal operation. Owntel is offering telecommunications services on vehicle tracking, as well as sales and installation of fixed and mobile telecommunication terminals, without operational license, which NCC described as an offense amounting to defrauding of the Federal Government. (November 21, 2014) itnewsafrica.com

OTT Providers

OTT (over the top) video offers strong growth opportunities in the Middle East, and the collaboration between telco operators and content distribution networks can boost revenue for both, industry experts said. OTT is the delivery of content like Netflix, icflix, etc, over the internet direct to home over telecom operators' network infrastructure without paying fees. "Telco operators are facing challenges because of the growth in OTT services due to the big drain in their network," said Christophe Firth, senior manager at the management consulting firm A.T. Kearney. He said the OTT video market in the Middle East will be worth $1 billion by 2020. "OTT is here to stay. Video compression rates are improving, broadband rates are dropping, devices are becoming more affordable, so OTT will continue to grow," said Ali Ajouz, managing partner at Sawa Media. HBO, Verizon and Dish are expected to announce OTT video services in the US next year. In the region, Firth said that telco players do not have much in terms of OTT. OSN has OTT service like OSN Go targeted at non subscribers and beIN Sports has OTT services in parallel with DTH (direct to home) services. "Telcos can strike deals with OTT players and that is the only way to go as they [operators] have invested huge money on their network infrastructure," he said. "IPTV [internet Protocol television] has dedicated line but OTT does not, so quality of the transmission is not great. In the US, Comcast has signed a deal with Netflix to guarantee quality of service across the network. We can see more of these happen here [region] as more telco players are expected to strike deals with big OTT players to guarantee quality of service," Firth said. Ajouz said that expensive internet charges and limited broadband speeds are challenges to consumers, so collaboration with telco operators are a must. Free-to-Ai r channels are still the king in the region despite the growth of Pay-TV market. There are 800 free-to-air and 237 pay-TV channels in the region. "People in the region do not like to pay for the online content. Getting the revenue from these people are quite difficult as they don't have credit cards and bank accounts," Firth said. According to Ovum, the number of pay-TV subscribers in the Mena region will increase from 10.6 million in 2013 to 15.2 million in 2019 and revenues will increase to $3.8 billion in 2018 from $2.6 billion in 2013. He said that 27 million watch pay-TV services in this region but only seven million actually pay for them. "The game is still open and there is potential for all types of companies to be winners," he said. According to Informa Telecoms and media, UAE has 1.06 million IPTV subscribers as of second quarter of this year and 494,000 DTH subscribers. (November 6, 2014) www.zawya.com

Poland

The Office of Electronic Communications (UKE) has announced that six companies have submitted preliminary bids in its auction of 4G-capable spectrum in the 800MHz and 2600MHz bands. Offers were received from the country's four main cellcos – Orange Polska, T-Mobile Poland, P4 and Polkomtel – plus Hubb Investments, which is controlled by broadcast infrastructure firm Emitel, and NetNet, which Gazeta Prawna says is owned by Szymon Ruta, the son of a senior Polkomtel executive and business partner of Polkomtel shareholder Zygmunt Solorz-Zak. The bids will be assessed by December 24. 19 packets of 2×5MHz frequencies are being made available in the 800MHz range (791MHz-816MHz paired with 832-857MHz) and 2600MHz band (2500MHz-2570MHz paired with 2620MHz-2690MHz). No entity is allowed to bid for more than two lots in the lower band and four lots in the higher range. A minimum price of PLN250 million (US$75.6 million) has been set for each packet of 800MHz spectrum, while the minimum bid for lots in the 2600MHz band is PLN25 million. The concessions will be valid for 15 years. (November 26, 2014) telegeography.com

Slovenia

Slovenia's Agency for Communications Networks and Services (AKOS) has begun the process of selling off spare radio frequencies in the 700MHz, 1400MHz, 1800MHz, 2100MHz, 2300MHz, 3500MHz and 3700MHz frequency bands. The watchdog has initiated the search for a consultant to oversee the auction process, with further details of the sale to be released in due course. (November 25, 2014) telegeography.com

South Africa

Telecoms watchdog the Independent Communications Authority of South Africa (ICASA) has published the Final International Mobile Telephony (IMT) Roadmap, which outlines plans for freeing up additional spectrum for mobile broadband services by migrating a number of current licensees out of or within bands. The document seeks to 'ensure universal availability of broadband services, as well as [promoting] a vibrant and competitive telecommunications industry'. With regards to the 694MHz-876MHz frequency band, the regulator proposes that Neotel, which currently holds 2×5MHz paired spectrum in the 827MHz-832MHz/872MHz-877MHz bands, should be migrated to 825MHz-830MHz/870MHz-875MHz band. The operator may also be required to implement mitigation measures (i.e. filters) in order to minimize GSM-R interference and be restricted to use 2×3.75MHz for CDMA voice services in areas with GSM-R coverage. Further, ICASA discusses several options for potential spectrum allocations in the 450MHz-470MHz band, which will be used to boost coverage in underserved areas. In order to release spectrum for the 'SA Connect' initiative, the migration process for rural areas could start as early as 2015, with existing spectrum holders required to vacate the band in rural areas no later than the end of 2018. For urban areas, existing licensees will be obliged to migrate out of the band by the end of 2022. ICASA has also opened a public consultation on its draft Radio Frequency Spectrum Assignment Plan (RFSAP) for IMT. The Draft RFSAP seeks to specify the technical conditions on the use of the frequency bands and is aimed at soliciting views from stakeholders on the Rules for Services operating in each frequency band. All interested parties are invited to submit their comments on the topic within 14 days of the document's publication. Although the regulator is planning to adopt the new frequency assignment plan by July 2015, the issuance of licenses before that date has not been ruled out. (November 14, 2014) telegeography.com

South African operator MTN has reportedly lodged an objection with telecoms regulator ICASA and the Competition Commission (CompCom) regarding rival Vodacom's proposed acquisition of second national operator (SNO) Neotel. The alleged bone of contention is the transfer of Neotel's spectrum assets to Vodacom; MTN is reportedly seeking to have the frequencies handed back to ICASA for reassignment. CEO of MTN SA, meanwhile confirmed the development by saying: 'We have to do what is right'. In May 2014 Vodacom agreed to acquire the smaller operator from its majority-owner Tata Communications of India for ZAR7 billion (US$676 million); the deal is currently open for public comments as part of the CompCom approval process. Neotel has 15,000km of fiber-optic cable, including 8,000km of metro fiber in Johannesburg, Cape Town and Durban and is authorized to use 2×12MHz in the 1800MHz band and 2×28MHz in the 3.5GHz band. If Vodacom's takeover of Neotel is approved, it will also gain access to 2×5MHz in the 800MHz band, as the SNO is the sole operator authorized to use spectrum in the 'digital dividend' band for telecoms services. Meanwhile, Vodacom's CEO has revealed that the operator is planning to connect 250,000 homes and businesses to its fiber-to-the-home (FTTH) and fiber-to-the-business (FTTB) services within the next three years. The telco is targeting 3,600 fiber connections by 31 March 2015 and has set aside roughly ZAR500 million for fiber deployments in 2015.

(November 14, 2014) TechCentral

South Korea

South Korea ranked No. 2 in development of its information and communications technologies (ICT), a U.N. agency said Tuesday, giving up its first place to Denmark. The International Telecommunications Union (ITU) said Asia's fourth-largest economy ranked second among 166 countries surveyed. It marked the first time for South Korea to miss the top spot since 2010. Sweden came in at third, followed by Iceland, Britain, Norway, the Netherlands and Finland. Hong Kong and Luxembourg also made the top 10 list. By sector, South Korea took the top spot in the percentage of households with Internet access and second place in secondary gross enrollment ratio. It took sixth and ninth place for fixed (wired)-broadband Internet subscriptions per 100 inhabitants and active mobile-broadband subscriptions per 100 inhabitants, respectively. (November 25, 2014) koreaherald.com

Spain

Bitflux Communications, the winner of a national Telecoms regulator the CNMC has revealed that turnover from mobile broadband services has for the first time surpassed revenues generated by fixed line broadband. In a blog post highlighting data for the three month period ended 30 June 2014, the regulator noted that in that quarter revenues of around EUR889 million (US$1.11 billion) had been generated by mobile broadband services, up around 10% year-on-year. By comparison, in the same period fixed broadband service revenue totaled some EUR882 million, down from more than EUR900 million in the previous quarter.

(November 7, 2014) telegeography.com

Thailand

The telecom regulator is pushing ahead with the planned 4G spectrum allocation next year, saying 4G licenses could boost the telecom infrastructure to serve the government's digital-economy policy as well as increase GDP. The regulator will start revising all auction details for the 1800 and 900 MHz spectrum in January and draw up a new schedule for the auction in July, said Col Settapong Malisuwan, vice-chairman of the National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission (NBTC). Although several impractical sections of the Frequency Allocation Act (FAA) are being amended by the government that may affect the NBTC's authority, the regulator will move ahead with the planned 4G auctions in parallel with the amendment of the FAA. The NBTC must be responsible for allocating spectrum for optimum benefit of the industry and the country in line with the rapid growth in data demand from both telecom and broadcasting, said

Col Settapong. Previously, the NBTC set the auctions for the 1800 and 900 megahertz in August and November, according to the Information Memorandum (IM) of the 1800 and 900 MHz allocations. For the 25 megahertz of bandwidth on the 1800 MHz spectrum, the NBTC has allowed concessionaires True Move and Digital Phone to take care of their 2G mobile users for another year after their concessions expired last September. The 17.5 megahertz of bandwidth on the 900 MHz spectrum is now being used by Advanced Info Service (AIS), whose concession will expire in September 2015. The NBTC hired the International Telecommunication Union to jointly study details and design the auction process, including the reserve price and the number of licenses. The IM of the 1800 MHz has had public hearings in April and approval by the telecom committee in May. It is still pending approval by the NBTC board. The junta in June ordered the suspension of the planned 4G license auctions for one year. If the new IM of the 1800 and 900 MHz allocation passes all procedures including public hearings, approval by the NBTC board and the Royal Gazette announcement, the government can no longer put the brakes on the 4G auctions.

(November 17, 2014) thephuketnews.com.

Ukraine

The starting price of licenses in Ukraine's upcoming 2100MHz 3G auction is likely to rise, according to a report by Capital.ua. Sources from the regulator, the Cabinet and the mobile industry indicated that the government has returned once more to the 'finalization' of the draft terms of the UMTS license tender. A member of the National Commission for the State Regulation of Communications and Informatization (NCCIR) was quoted as saying: 'We are asked to change the value of the lots in relation to the new [US] dollar [exchange rate].' According to a Cabinet decree of September 5 (the text of which was published in November), a 2×15MHz nationwide UMTS license would cost a minimum UAH2.443 billion (US$158 million), but the Cabinet has since referred to the fact that this figure should be adjusted 'according to the approved methods of calculation', as the price was designed to be pegged to the US dollar, rather than in local currency. As a result, the report said the license price may grow by another UAH439 million to UAH2.882 billion. (November 25, 2014) telegeography.com

Ukraine's Cabinet of Ministers has authorized the National Commission for Communications Regulation (NCCR) to announce a tender for obtaining licenses for the UMTS (3G) standard communications, Minister of the Cabinet Ostap Semerak has told reporters. "According to the document we have approved today [the conditions of the tender], the NCCR will have the possibility of announcing a tender, it will last 60 days. In January we will sum up the tender," he said. Semerak added that the conditions of the tender for obtaining the license, which the government approved on November 5, will allow maximum competition and the most transparent conducting of the tender. He also noted that the process of frequency conversion would take place without the elements of corruption. (November 6, 2014) en.interfax.com.ua

United Kingdom

Mobile operators will soon have another opportunity to bolster their network capacity after regulator OFCOM announced plans to allocate the 700-MHz band for mobile broadband. The watchdog said it aims to make the frequencies available by 2022 at the latest, although it said it is tentatively hoping to free them up by 2020. The announcement was made less than two weeks after OFCOM shared plans for auctioning spectrum in the 2.3-GHz and 3.4-GHz bands in late 2015 or early 2016. "This is a crucial next step in the development of the U.K.'s communication infrastructure. This decision ensures that we are making the raw materials available with which investors and companies can build the services which will support the digital economy of the future," said outgoing OFCOM CEO Ed Richards. Indeed, in a report commissioned by OFCOM, Analysys Mason predicted that demand for mobile data could increase by a factor of 45 between now and 2030. The 700-MHz spectrum is currently used for digital terrestrial TV (DTT), and program making and special events (PMSE). OFCOM said next year it will inform the PMSE community which frequencies will be available to it. As for TV signals, the watchdog said the vast majority of households will be required to retune their existing equipment, while approximately 0.5% will need a new roof-top aerial. "The U.K. will retain a competitive terrestrial television platform," insisted Richards, who is leaving his post at the end of the year. In a separate statement, OFCOM named Steve Unger interim CEO until a permanent replacement for Richards is appointed in 2015. (November 19, 2014) totaltele.com

OFCOM announced plans to auction a swathe of new frequencies for 4G services. The U.K. regulator has invited prospective bidders to comment on its proposal to sell spectrum in the 2.3-GHz and 3.4-GHz bands. It aims to carry out the process in late 2015 or early 2016. OFCOM has proposed a reserve price of £2 million-£2.5 million per lot of 2.3-GHz spectrum, and £1 million per lot of 3.4-GHz spectrum. The total reserve price for the entire spectrum would be between £50 million and £70 million. "Today marks an important step in ensuring that the U.K. has sufficient spectrum to support our wireless economy," said Philip Marnick, OFCOM's spectrum group director, in a statement. "It comes in response to the fast pace of change and innovation taking place in the communications sector, which is placing increased demands on how spectrum is used by all industries. One important way of meeting this demand is making new spectrum available and its use as flexible as possible," he said. No specific uses for the frequencies has been prescribed, but OFCOM said they are well suited to mobile broadband "Many existing mobile handsets from major manufacturers including the Apple iPhone 5 and 6, HTC Desire and Samsung Galaxy are already compatible with the 2.3-GHz spectrum in other markets," OFCOM said, adding that the band is also used for 4G services in 10 countries outside Europe, including China, India and Australia. Meanwhile, the 3.4-GHz band is currently used for mobile broadband in six countries, including the U.K. - where it is used by UK Broadband for its 'Relish' TD-LTE service – as well as Canada and Spain. In all, 190 MHz of spectrum will be up for grabs, equivalent to approximately three quarters of the 4G spectrum auctioned in 2013. To promote competition, OFCOM has proposed that no single operator can hold more than 37% of all the airwaves currently used for mobile services. (November 7, 2014) totaltele.com

United States

Bids in the U.S. Federal Communications Commission's (FCC) AWS-3 auction have reached $18.57 billion, comfortably exceeding the $10 billion target set by the regulator. The running total is also higher than the $18 billion predicted by Fitch Ratings earlier this month. Bidding got underway last week and by Friday the process had already raised $2.43 billion. 16 auction rounds have been completed so far; round 17 is due to begin later on Wednesday. 1,614 licenses are up for grabs in the 1695-1710-MHz, 1755-1780-MHz and 2155-2180-MHz bands. Of the frequencies being auctioned, J-block spectrum, which consists of 10 MHz of 1700-MHz spectrum paired with 10 MHz of 2100-MHz spectrum, is proving particularly popular. Bidding for J-block spectrum covering Long Island, New York reached $1.43 billion at the end of round 16. Bids for J-block airwaves in Orange County, California are up to $1.01 billion. In all 176 J-block licenses are available. 70 companies qualified to participate in the auction, including big names AT&T, Verizon, T-Mobile US and satellite TV provider Dish Network, which is bidding under the name American AWS-3 Wireless. Conspicuous by its absence is Sprint, which in September opted not to take part. (November 19, 2014) totaltele.com

AT&T raised pressure on the US telecom regulator's work on new net neutrality rules, saying it would stop investing in new high-speed internet connections in 100 US cities until the web traffic rules are settled. The statement from AT&T chief executive officer Randall Stephenson is the first business move by an internet service provider in response to US president Barack Obama's unexpected call on the Federal Communications Commission on Monday to regulate such companies more like public utilities. The industry and Republican lawmakers have been protesting Obama's proposal, saying stricter internet traffic regulations would stifle growth and investment. "We can't go out and invest that kind of money deploying fiber to 100 cities not knowing under what rules those investments will be governed," Stephenson said at an analyst conference. In April, AT&T said it would deploy its high-speed fiber network in 100 cities, including Chicago, Los Angeles and Miami. Ensuring access to quality internet for all Americans has been the FCC's major focus. Telecommunications companies plan to fight Obama's call for utility-style regulations in Congress and the courts. More than three dozen congressional Republicans on Wednesday wrote to FCC chairman Tom Wheeler that Obama's proposed regulatory changes were "beyond the scope of the FCC's authority." AT&T, whose $48.5 billion bid for DirecTV is under government review, said on Friday that it would also pay $1.7 billion to acquire Mexican wireless operator Iusacell. It trimmed its 2015 capital spending outlook to $18 billion from $21 billion.

(November 13, 2014) timesofindia.indiatimes.com

President Barack Obama called on the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to adopt the strongest possible rules to protect net neutrality. In a video message, Obama said the FCC should adopt Title II of the Communications Act as the legal framework for regulating the Internet as opposed to the lighter-touch approach afforded by section 706 of the Telecommunications Act. Implementing Title II would reclassify Internet service providers as common carriers, subjecting them to much stricter rules governing charges and the treatment of traffic on their networks. "The idea of net neutrality has unleashed the power of the Internet and given innovators the chance to thrive. Abandoning these principles would threaten to end the Internet as we know it," said Obama, in the video. "For most Americans, the Internet has become an essential part of everyday communication and everyday life," he said. "That's why I'm urging the Federal Communications Commission to do everything it can to protect net neutrality for everyone." More specifically, Obama said an ISP should not be allowed to block legal content, or intentionally throttle some content or speed up access to others based on its preferences. He also said the FCC should consider applying net neutrality rules to points of interconnection between ISPs and transport networks to prevent Web services being discriminated against. In addition, Obama also called for an explicit ban on paid prioritization. "The FCC is an independent agency, and ultimately this decision is theirs alone, but the public has already commented nearly 4 million times asking the FCC to make sure that consumers, not the cable company, gets to decide which sites they use," he said. FCC chairman Tom Wheeler welcomed the President's input. "The Internet must not advantage some to the detriment of others. We cannot allow broadband networks to cut special deals to prioritize Internet traffic and harm consumers, competition and innovation," he said. Consumer advocacy group Public Knowledge applauded Obama, and said that adopting Title II represents "the simplest and strongest mechanism to prevent discrimination of traffic online, and promote investment in broadband". However, the announcement received short shrift in some quarters. "Reclassification under Title II, which for the first time would apply 1930s-era utility regulation to the Internet, would be a radical reversal of course that would in and of itself threaten great harm to an open Internet, competition and innovation," said Verizon, in a statement. The telco also warned that such a move would likely be successfully challenged in court. Lobby group Broadband for America (BfA) said adopting Title II "would lead to unprecedented interference" in the Internet. "We urge FCC chairman Wheeler to exercise his independent authority and reject this extreme proposal," the BfA said. (November 11, 2014) totaltele.com

Vanuatu

The Telecommunications and Radiocommunications Regulator (TRR) has announced that it has decided to assign frequencies in the 700MHz band for Long Term Evolution (LTE) use via a spectrum auction. The watchdog disclosed that, in order to assess the level of demand for 4G-suitable spectrum in the aforementioned band, it will call for Expressions of Interest (EoI) prior to the auction, with potential service providers required to state their frequency preferences and requirements in their applications. The TRR also stated that it may opt to skip the auction if the level of demand for spectrum could be met without a competitive tender process. Further, the watchdog has highlighted that a 2×5MHz spectrum block could be set aside for a new market entrant. TRR opened a public consultation on the potential allocation of the 694MHz-803MHz frequency band for LTE or LTE Advanced (LTE-A) wireless broadband services in May 2014. According to the document, the spectrum currently available for distribution in the 700MHz band comprises of 2×45MHz frequency division duplex (FDD) blocks.

(November 20, 2014) telegeography.com

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WHOLESALE NEWS

WHOLESALE Updates

Windstream wants ILECs to price IP-based wholesale special access services fairly

Windstream is not opposed to AT&T (NYSE: T) or any traditional telco's migration from TDM to IP-based services, but it is calling for regulators to ensure that it and other competitors can get last-mile circuits for equivalent prices. Serving as both an ILEC and CLEC in the markets it serves, Windstream has built out an extensive fiber and copper network, but as it extends its services to more multi-site customers, it can't reach every location it needs to serve by building out its own network. The service provider says that the FCC should "ensure 'last-mile' facilities, connecting competitors' extensive fiber networks to individual customer locations, do not become an anti-competitive bottleneck or strategic leverage to force dramatic price increases on consumers." "Despite all of the investments competitive carriers like Windstream make, we also rely to a certain extent on the ILEC's last mile," said Eric Einhorn, senior vice president of government affairs for Windstream, in an interview with FierceTelecom. "It's not possible from an economic perspective to overbuild that infrastructure that was built in a monopoly era." In particular, Windstream wants incumbent telcos to provide next-gen IP services that will replace lower speed T-1 access lines at equivalent prices. While Windstream is certainly an advocate of IP-based services and the overall transition, executives are concerned that the FCC needs to make sure that the transition won't affect competition. "Our concern is if left unchecked, the transition as proposed by the incumbents would be used as a back door to deregulate and as an excuse to hinder competition," Einhorn said. "Our understanding is that the chairman is proposing to tentatively conclude that carriers seeking to discontinue a service used as a wholesale input should be required to provide competitive carriers with equivalent wholesale access and pricing going forward." By not being able to provide similarly priced services a competitive carrier can offer today via TDM, a small business owner would have to pay for a much higher speed service it may not need to run its business. One of the fears competitive providers have is if the FCC does not put pricing controls on special access services, it could mean higher prices for small businesses. "We want to migrate our customers to IP, but we can't do so if the pricing required of a comparable IP offering is multiple times greater than the pricing for the TDM input they are seeing today," said Jennie Chandra, vice president of public policy for Windstream. "That is the case for lower bandwidth connections, which are critical input for communications services used by small businesses and smaller sites of non-profit or government entities." Windstream's comments come in the wake of FCC Chairman Tom Wheeler citing "Emerging Wireline Networks and Services" as one of the items on its Nov. 21 meeting agenda. Wheeler said the commission will consider a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, Declaratory Ruling and Order to facilitate the transition to next-generation networks by promoting and preserving the commission's public safety, consumer protection and competition goals. "To protect competition, this item includes proposals to ensure that small- and medium-sized businesses do not have the benefits of competition yanked away from them," wrote Wheeler in a blog post. "The mere change of a network facility or discontinuance of a legacy service should not deprive consumers or businesses of competitive choices. That would only lead to higher telecommunications prices that are passed along to consumers." Besides Windstream, a number of non-profit organizations like Boston-based Children's Trust, which currently uses a CLEC for service, have written to the FCC asking them to ensure they keep the playing field level so they can continue to get services at competitive rates. "As the FCC works to develop and administer public policy in the IP transition, we applaud efforts now underway to consider how vital entities like ours do not lose their ability to rely on competitive alternatives in the telecommunications market," wrote Suzin Bartley, executive director of Children's Trust in a letter to the FCC. "It is our hope that the Commission will act in the near term to ensure incumbents do not diminish wholesale access needed to make it economically feasible for competitors to establish last-mile connections."

Level 3's enterprise revenues offset weaker wholesale results

Level 3, which has just completed its acquisition of tw telecom, reported that Core Network Services (CNS) revenue rose 5.8 percent to $1.48 billion, helping to offset ongoing declines in its wholesale business. Driven by data and Internet services growth, enterprise was the key revenue driver in CNS, rising 12 percent year-over-year to $992 million. Likewise, wholesale carrier revenue grew $4 million, or 5.3 percent year-over-year, reflecting growth in Ethernet services. However, wholesale growth was somewhat offset by churn and re-pricing for contract renewals, primarily in network services. From a regional perspective, North America was once again the leader, growing 8 percent year-over-year to $1.06 billion. While Latin America CNS revenue grew 9 percent to $200 million, EMEA declined 5 percent to $219 million. tw telecom, which is now part of Level 3, reported that it grew total revenues 8 percent year-over-year and 1.2 percent sequentially to $425 million. Similar to earlier quarters, the service provider reported that it saw gains in enterprise and data and Internet revenues. Enterprise revenues grew 8.4 percent, while data and Internet revenue grew 15 percent year-over-year. From an overall financial perspective, Level 3's total revenue was $1.62 billion, up year-over-year from $1.56 billion in the same period a year ago. "Level 3's and tw telecom's results reflect both companies' strong focus on execution in the enterprise market," said Jeff Storey, president and CEO of Level 3. "Given the combined company's broad product portfolio, extensive network reach and customer-first mindset, we believe we are well-positioned to continue to capture enterprise market share." Shares of Level 3 were listed at $46.58, down 67 cents or 1.42 percent, in Wednesday morning trading on the New York Stock Exchange.

Government 'will impose' national roaming on mobile firms if required

The government has reinforced its stance on mobile national roaming plans, despite an angry response from operators. Speaking exclusively to V3, culture minister Ed Vaizey said that the government sees national roaming as a "very serious option" and one it will force on operators if they do not come up with a viable alternative. The proposal has already been vigorously opposed by mobile operators such as Vodafone, which said that national roaming would actually "make coverage and quality significantly worse from the customers' perspective". But Vaizey explained that the government had given operators the scope to find alternatives to its national roaming plan, but if they fail it will be implemented. "So we have set this challenge to the operators, but we have said if you can't come up with a solution we're going to look at imposing national roaming," he said. Vaizey added that the government is in consultation with mobile operators and other related organisations to get their views about the practicalities of national roaming. "People have suggested alternatives - passive mast sharing, easing the rules on planning and so on - which are all very much part of the mix, but national roaming is a serious option which we are consulting," he said. V3 asked Vaizey how the government intends to respond to the mobile operators' objections to national roaming. "It is to say 'Fine, if you say you don't want national roaming, we set the policy challenge, you come up with the solution. If you can't offer a solution we will impose national roaming'," he answered. The minister claimed that the need for national roaming is down to the changing demands and expectations of the public when it comes to mobile use. "25 years ago you were just amazed to have a phone that you could walk around with and get a signal. Now it is ubiquitous and people are dropping their landlines," he said. "People do expect, whether you think it's fair or not, to get good coverage pretty much wherever they are." With national roaming currently in the limelight, V3 asked whether the government's £150m plan to bring mobile coverage to areas where none exists has been pushed to one side. Explaining how the two plans address different issues to a certain extent, Vaizey's reply indicated general optimism for the plan. "It's now a project that is gaining momentum. It's taken a while to get off the ground," he said. "It's the first time mobile operators have worked with government and there was a lot of learning in terms of analyzing coverage and infrastructure challenges." Broadband and mobile infrastructure is a hot topic for the technology industry. Major companies such as BT, ARM and Fujitsu have called for the next government to make infrastructure a core part of its agenda.

VIVA Bahrain hosts workshop on international roaming market for Bridge Alliance group

As one of the newest alliance members of the Bridge Alliance group, VIVA Bahrain hosted a workshop on the international roaming market, which attracted participation from delegates from STC KSA, VIVA Kuwait, Bridge Alliance, and Syniverse. The Bridge Alliance (originally the Bridge Mobile Alliance) is a business group that brings together 36 major mobile telecommunications companies from Asia, Australia, Africa and the Middle Eastwith a combined customer base of over 670 million subscribers. With an aim to leverage collaboration in regional enterprise mobility and M2M services, the alliance is built on seamless service connectivity and a suite of integrated value-added services for all alliance members' subscribers while roaming on each other's networks.

U.K. Eyes National Roaming to Eliminate Mobile Dead Zones

The U.K. government has set out to eliminate mobile "not spots" by improving coverage from the country's four major carriers. Part of a long-term economic plan, the administration aims to eliminate poor mobile coverage by allowing users to hop on to another carrier's network when stuck in a dead zone. Similar to mobile coverage in the U.S., there are pockets of the U.K. where only one carrier provides service. So in some cases, a Vodafone, EE, Three, or O2 user might be out of luck if they stumble into one of these dead zones, or not spots. "It can't be right that in a fifth of the U.K., people cannot use their phones to make a call," Culture Secretary Sajid Javid said in a statement. "The government isn't prepared to let that situation continue." What it is prepared to do is investigate options for moving forward. One proposal is the idea of national roaming: Phones would automatically move onto another network's signal when theirs is not available, similar to international roaming services. Also up for debate: Shared infrastructure that would put transmitters on each other's masts; extending mobile deals that companies like Tesco and Virgin Media have with one carrier to all four; and coverage obligations that force networks to cover a certain percentage of the country. Talks between government officials and mobile companies have already begun. "Businesses have been clear about the importance of mobile phones and improved coverage will help deliver jobs and economic security," Javid said. Javid's legislative ideas, however, may be facing opposition from his own party. According to a leaked letter published by The Times newspaper, Home Secretary Theresa May is resisting her fellow Tory's motions. In the letter, hidden behind a paywall, May warns that allowing people to roam between networks could compromise efforts to track criminals, BBC News reported. "[It] could have a detrimental impact on law enforcement, security and intelligence agency access to communications data and lawful intercept," the letter said. May suggested further research to ensure a change would not impede on police action "crucial to keeping us safe." Similar worries have arisen in the U.S., though officials here are worried about encryption rather than roaming. The U.S. dealt with roaming in 2012, when the FCC enacted rules that let wireless users connect to another provider's network when they travel outside their own network's coverage areas. Verizon sued, arguing that the commission does not have the authority to establish such restrictions, among other things, but lost that fight in December 2012.

Policy 'will aid transparency on mobile costs'

South Africa Department of Telecommunications and Postal Services is preparing for a new policy aimed at encouraging transparency on user costs and the lowering of prices, says Telecommunications and Postal Services Minister Siyabonga Cwele. Dominant players in the mobile telephone industry are unlikely to respond favorably to competition on pricing, as evidenced in the recent mobile termination rates saga where the larger players pushed to protect their revenues. This was after the Independent Communications Authority of SA (ICASA) cut call termination rates — fees that mobile network operators and fixed-line companies pay to carry each other's calls.

International costs of roaming stray into overpriced territory

It is quite astounding in this era of It is quite astounding in this era of technological advancement that cellular providers are still unable to significantly lower their rates for international roaming, for calls made and received, as well as for data usage. But cellular providers profess otherwise. Take a look, for example, at the copy of what looks at first glance to be a dream advertisement from MTN: "A first in South Africa from MTN-introducing Pay As You Go Data Roaming – Now you can surf the internet for as little as R2/MB while roaming." Well… "a first in South Africa" relates to prepaid airtime and data, and the R2 charge is mainly applicable to African countries. The debate on roaming charges has been ongoing for several years now, but how much progress has really been made in the area of curtailing these charges? The fact is that the roaming charges that are being billed to subscribers' accounts are still exorbitant and it is mystifying that overseas telecom networks are able to justify such over-the-top charges to local cellular providers, who also look as though they may even be deriving a handling fee of some description from this source. Or is it that the local cellular providers are not putting enough pressure on all the overseas telecoms to reduce their charges? Most recently, I travelled to the US and Alaska. Being aware of the severity of these charges, I took great care to limit the usage of my smartphone to a bare minimum. I turned off data roaming, only turning it back on when accessing data which I did very conservatively, for a few minutes at a time over a period of three weeks and this still elicited a charge by MTN of almost R4 000 to my account. On querying this scandalous charge, I was sent what looks to be their standard and most frequently used e-mail template in which they advise: "… that data bundles, [of which I am allocated 200MB per month], are not applicable to roaming. That "data usage, while roaming, is billed in volume [how much data is used] and not duration [how long you are connected for]". MTN then contradicts this by adding that "data is billed per session and not [the] total amount of data used for that specific period". And so their diatribe goes on: "In South Africa, using data, you are billed for total volume use, but when roaming, the billing per 25KB is: R3.50 including VAT [value-added tax] in North America and R2.70 including VAT in Europe." At first glance, these charges look to be of little materiality. However, 25KB is a very small amount of data and when applying the above rates, it is evident that the high costs that could be incurred are being camouflaged. Let's take 100MB which is half the data bundle that I receive every month, as a reasonable example for minimal overseas usage for a three-week period. And here's the punchline – when roaming, on the basis of a 50/50 usage in each of the above continents, the charge would equate to R12 698. By comparison, one gigabyte of data currently costs R149 back home in South Africa and on a current special it comes with one free gigabyte as well. Then there's the connection fees "which are charged by the roaming network irrespective of whether there has been a data transfer to the phone or not". This is all very confusing to say the least, suggesting to me that the basis that is being used to bill roaming charges is in need of a radical overhaul. By way of some examples of inconsistency – my statement reflected that for 2.26 minutes of data usage I was billed R359.19; for 4.28 minutes the charge was R500.41; 9.15 minutes attracted a cost of R22.80; 3.16 minutes cost R20.52; and for usage totaling 12.11 minutes, which is another of the rare occasions that I spent more than a handful of minutes on my smartphone, the charge was R540.32. Then there were the ludicrous durations of 2 hours 19 minutes, 1 hour 43 minutes and 1 hour 27 minutes during which time I was purportedly accessing data, which certainly was not the case, but these charges turned out to be minimal. The overseas telecoms concerned were the Cingular Genesis, Maritime Communications and Manx telecom networks in Norway and the US, and I was advised that "all charges have been verified as correct and charged according to interim network agreements". It seems that employees of the cellular group are determined to toe the party line, so to speak, in strongly defending these charges. Given the one available channel to voice an objection which has been exhausted, where one might ask, does all this leave users who believe, as I do, that they have been wronged? This is not the first instance that I have been forced to object to roaming charges. Previously, while overseas, I was forced to dial the voicemail number repeatedly as my messages were in distinct and breaking up, attracting a high roaming charge. In this instance MTN did agree to pass a partial credit but only "in good faith", so they informed me in their e-mail at the time, as their roaming department had advised them not to generate the credit as there was no discrepancy. It is fair to say that cellular companies do caution against the use of smartphones while roaming given the veracity of these charges, but there is not nearly enough publicity being sent to their subscribers in this respect. Take the above-mentioned MTN advertisement which actually encourages roaming for reasons of low rates. It is evident that warnings of excessive billings need to be generated on cellular phones frequently during roaming. In this day and age it is not so easy to forego communication, so what are the current alternatives? Well... one could buy a local SIM card in the country being visited, but this is an inconvenience as there would then be the need to advise everyone back home of the new number and one does need to receive e-mails. However, this is the better option than the prepaid choice from MTN, which even with the advertised savings still looks frightfully expensive. Cellular providers show huge profits and there is an absolute need, if they haven't already done so, to make it a top priority to find a solution to the roaming-charge crisis. And should I dare venture to add that they ought to dig deep into their ever-growing pockets, if necessary, in order to support their customers on the principle of a fair distribution of wealth. Irving Schlosberg is a chartered accountant and works as a business management consultant.

Government 'will impose' national roaming on mobile firms if required

The UK government has reinforced its stance on mobile national roaming plans, despite an angry response from operators. Speaking exclusively to V3, culture minister Ed Vaizey said that the government sees national roaming as a "very serious option" and one it will force on operators if they do not come up with a viable alternative. The proposal has already been vigorously opposed by mobile operators such as Vodafone, which said that national roaming would actually "make coverage and quality significantly worse from the customers' perspective". But Vaizey explained that the government had given operators the scope to find alternatives to its national roaming plan, but if they fail it will be implemented. "So we have set this challenge to the operators, but we have said if you can't come up with a solution we're going to look at imposing national roaming," he said. Vaizey added that the government is in consultation with mobile operators and other related organisations to get their views about the practicalities of national roaming. "People have suggested alternatives - passive mast sharing, easing the rules on planning and so on - which are all very much part of the mix, but national roaming is a serious option which we are consulting," he said. V3 asked Vaizey how the government intends to respond to the mobile operators' objections to national roaming. "It is to say 'Fine, if you say you don't want national roaming, we set the policy challenge, you come up with the solution. If you can't offer a solution we will impose national roaming'," he answered. The minister claimed that the need for national roaming is down to the changing demands and expectations of the public when it comes to mobile use. "25 years ago you were just amazed to have a phone that you could walk around with and get a signal. Now it is ubiquitous and people are dropping their landlines," he said. "People do expect, whether you think it's fair or not, to get good coverage pretty much wherever they are." With national roaming currently in the limelight, V3 asked whether the government's £150m plan to bring mobile coverage to areas where none exists has been pushed to one side. Explaining how the two plans address different issues to a certain extent, Vaizey's reply indicated general optimism for the plan. "It's now a project that is gaining momentum. It's taken a while to get off the ground," he said. "It's the first time mobile operators have worked with government and there was a lot of learning in terms of analysing coverage and infrastructure challenges." Broadband and mobile infrastructure is a hot topic for the technology industry. Major companies such as BT, ARM and Fujitsu have called for the next government to make infrastructure a core part of its agenda.

UK telcos not too enthused over national roaming

Plans to improve patchy mobile coverage across Britain through "national roaming" have been criticized by industry and political figures but all agree that more can be done to improve services. Mobile coverage reaches more than 98 per cent of premises but about a fifth of the country is without a signal from all four operators. Under the terms of existing mobile licenses, 90 per cent of UK homes need to be covered by 3G and an operator is obliged to cover 98 per cent of the UK with 4G. However, the coverage does not overlap precisely, creating areas where only one or two networks provide a signal. Operators erect masts where there is a commercial reason to do so — not where there are no or few customers. Planning restrictions also hamper mobile coverage, with the industry seeking help from the government to make it easier to build bigger masts capable of carrying signals further. But Sajid Javid, UK culture secretary, is also considering allowing customers of one network to "roam" on to another — in effect sharing networks to help customers find a signal. His proposals do not target the places where there is no reception, so-called not spots, but instead the 20 per cent of the UK where there may be a signal from one or two operators but not all. However, as simple as national roaming sounds, technical and legal problems have been raised. Ed Richards, chief executive of Ofcom, the communications regulator, has said he shared some of the operators' concerns about the impact on competition and investment. However, national roaming was technically and commercially feasible, he said, even if there were "things we need to work through". Mobile phone groups are, however, united against the concept of national roaming.

BT Plans to Close Wholesale Division

BT Group plc has appealed to UK regulator OFCOM for permission to fold its Wholesale division into Openreach , the BT-owned unit that controls access to the UK's telecom infrastructure, according to a Daily Telegraph report. BT Wholesale reported revenues of £2.4 billion (US$3.7 billion) in its last financial year, and if BT's plan goes ahead, Openreach would become its biggest division in terms of turnover. Nokia Networks has used its Capital Markets Day to raise its margin targets, aiming for long-term operating margin in the 8-11% range, compared with its previously stated target of 5-10%. In a statement, Nokia CEO Rajeev Suri pointed to the advent of the Internet of Things as a reason for optimism on the vendor's part -- "we have a powerful role to play in this world," he said. French conglomerate Bouygues raised its full-year sales forecast on the strength of its third quarter, but this had little to do with the performance of its telecom unit, reports Reuters. Bouygues Telecom 's operating profit fell to €420 million ($522.1 million) from €531 million ($660 million) a year earlier, and is expected to do little more than break even over the year. Ofcom has published its latest piece of research into 4G and 3G mobile broadband speeds in the UK market, revealing that the average downlink speed on 4G is 15.1 Mbit/s, more than twice as fast as 3G (6.1 Mbit/s) across all the networks. Joint venture EE had the fastest 4G average speed, at 18.4 Mbit/s. Telefónica SA (NYSE: TEF)'s acquisition of pay-TV company Distribuidora de Television (DTS) (which trades under the Canal+ brand in Spain) has attracted the attention of Spain's competition watchdog, reports Reuters. Telefónica closed the €750 million (US$1.02 billion) acquisition in June.

T-Mobile fires back at AT&T in war of words over data roaming

T-Mobile US questioned AT&T Mobility's claim that it buys more in data roaming than it sells, and continued to push for changes to the FCC's rules that would more clearly define what constitutes a "commercially reasonable" data roaming agreement. In a detailed response to a recent AT&T filing on the topic, Andrew Levin, T-Mobile's senior VP of government affairs, continued the war of words between the two carriers over data roaming. Levin wrote the FCC "should be skeptical of AT&T's claim" that it is a "net payer" of data roaming fees. He noted that in the third quarter of 2014, T-Mobile sent more than 2,000 times the volume of data traffic to AT&T than it received from AT&T in terms of megabytes of usage. "And more importantly, however, assuming that AT&T's 'net payor' [sic] claim is accurate, it should wholeheartedly support adoption of the benchmarks T-Mobile has proposed, since it would stand to save the most on roaming costs," he wrote. fiercewireless.com

Mobile Data Will Account for Half of Roaming Revenues by 2019

Mobile data roaming with account for up to 56 per cent of global roaming revenues by 2019, generating approximately $50bn (£31.8bn) as data use grows, according to global analyst firm Ovum. Europe continues to be the largest contributor to global roaming revenues, accounting for 46 per cent of global roaming, according to the latest forecasts, with much of the revenue growth coming from within the EU. Revenue contribution is also on the grow in Asia, particularly central and southern Asia, which is expected to grow at a compound average growth rate of 12 per cent over the next five years, one of the highest rates globally. As voice revenues begin to stagnate, mobile data will experience greater and greater growth, as data heavy services like streaming video and data sharing grow in popularity. The increasing penetration of smartphones and SIM-enabled tablets, alongside the deployment of LTE networks, is driving the growth of mobile data usage, with users expecting the same services everywhere, whether at home or abroad. "To meet these expectations, operators are extending the reach of their LTE networks through agreements with operators in other markets," said Nishi Verma Nangia, senior analyst at Ovum. "In doing so, [they] are laying a solid foundation to allow travelers to maintain the same high-speed access to the Internet they have while in their home markets."

Cost-cutting options improve for U.S. roaming

Roaming in the United States with your smartphone can be very expensive without some form of protection to keep costs down before crossing the border, and the options to do so are growing. Rogers' Roam Like Home went live this month, allowing customers with Share Everything plans to use their existing airtime and data buckets stateside at a flat rate of $5 a day. After 10 days, customers are no longer charged for the remainder of the month, adhering to the $50 roaming cap mandated by the new wireless code of conduct that went into effect a year ago. As convenient as the service is, it's still limited to a subset of Rogers customers, leaving everyone else to seek alternatives. Toronto-based KnowRoaming uses a unique SIM sticker that can be affixed to your existing SIM card. When you're home in Canada, the sticker is dormant, but once you connect to a U.S. carrier, it kicks in and switches over. Unlimited data is $8 a day. Sending text messages is just $0.11 and making calls is $0.09 per minute. Those numbers compare to the standard roaming rates of $0.75 and $1.45, respectively. Using the SIM sticker requires an unlocked phone and BlackBerry handsets currently aren't supported. Since the SIM uses its own local phone number, an optional ReachMe feature allows calls to your regular number in Canada to be forwarded over. The only catch is that carriers usually charge for call forwarding minutes unless you have them as part of your plan. Vancouver-based Roam Mobility uses the T-Mobile network in the U.S., and its service includes calls and texts to both American and Canadian numbers. A 10-day period costs $40 and includes 4GB of data. The one caveat is that you would need a different SIM card and a unique number that goes with it. Getting data only for a hotspot you can use with a phone or tablet starts at $8 for 300MB over three days and up to $60 for 5GB over 30 days. The Liberty Hotspot device that would be used for that is a standalone cost of $100. Not as well-known in Canada is Karma, which only offers data, not talk and text. It's a small hotspot device that costs $150 US and includes 1GB of data that never expires. Each additional gigabyte you want to add costs $14. Up to eight devices can connect to it at one time, and for each person that connects and signs up for an account, you get an extra 100MB, while they get 25MB. The newest model shipping in December uses LTE with a fallback to 3G in coverage areas across the 300 supported cities in the U.S. that don't have the faster connection. The device is small enough to fit in any pocket and is easy to use. While it doesn't include talk and text, you can use Skype, Viber, WhatsApp, BBM and iMessage as alternatives to make calls and message contacts.

Interconnect Clearing House to reduce communications problems

The Interconnect Clearing House will provide a common, independent mechanism, to resolve disputes and the settlement of interconnect accounting traffic for all the existing and future Operators in Ghana. Dr. Edward Kofi Omane Boamah, Minister of Communications said, when established in Ghana, the Interconnect Clearing House would, for instance, help to resolve disputes such as was made to his office by MTN against Expresso for transiting and terminating international traffic, using masked or blank Caller Line Identification (CLI) on its network. He said Cabinet has already approved the policy for the implementation of the Interconnect Clearing House, and that consultations had already been held with stakeholders, including the telecom service providers. Dr. Omane Boamah made these remarks on Wednesday in Accra in a speech read on his behalf by Mr. Issah Yahaya, Chief Director of the Ministry, during a public forum on Interconnect Clearing House System in Ghana, organized by the National Communications Authority (NCA). He said government had taken policy decisions as part of regulatory enhancements, to improve telecommunications oversight in Ghana, which include the establishment of Interconnect Clearing House License system for regulation of telecommunications. The rest are the introduction of International Wholesale Carrier License, the implementation of Unified Access Service License and Renewal of Mobile Telecom licenses, and the introduction of Mobile Network Operations License. He said the Communications sector in Ghana had witnessed tremendous improvements since its liberalization and reforms undertaken in the middle nineteen-nineties. Dr. Omane Boamah observed that Ghana is recognized by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) as one of most dynamic ICT countries in the world. He said this was in recognition of a supportive enabling environment for investment relying on a forward-looking national ICT for development policy, pro-business, telecommunications regulatory regime, abundance of broadband capacity, Applications technology, and the increasing deployment of Value Added Services. He said modern telecommunications and technology development are key instruments in the transformation of the country, and the expansion of the national economy to achieve a lower middle income status. The Minister said substantial investments in terrestrial optic fiber infrastructure, the introduction of LTE Four Generation technology, and the competition in the submarine optic fiber cable infrastructure market, have ensured widespread availability of broadband and massive bandwidth for data transmission and adequate capacity for internet connectivity. He said the country possesses 12.3 Terabits capacity for international connectivity, nearly a quarter of the sub-region's total capacity. He noted that with the fast pace of technological developments in the industry, especially in the era of convergence, it was now possible for the same medium to be employed for the transmission of both voice and data, for which reason communications regulations require periodic review to cover the deployment of Next Generation Network (NGN) infrastructure.

Digital Innovation for Market Leaders: Disruption minus the disruption

The digital age presents business leaders of well-established companies with a stark dilemma. On the one hand, they have ample opportunities to introduce innovation and realize huge market impact through the use of disruptive technologies. On the other hand, they cannot afford to let this search for innovation detract from the constant process of honing and optimizing the company's core business upon which it still relies. Moreover, they cannot let this quest for innovation be unduly influenced by an existing corporate culture which prizes refinement over transformation. The good news is that there are proven ways to balance these two potentially contradictory objectives so that innovation can be prioritized while always keeping the existing business running smoothly.

The Digital Dilemma

The advance of technology is predicted to be, by some distance, the most important trend affecting businesses over the next five years. Companies are in the midst of designing and implementing their strategic response to the opportunities and threats brought about by technological disruption. According to the 2013 Global Innovation Study by Strategy&, the world's thousand largest corporate R&D spenders allocated about $52 billion to procuring, deploying, and supporting digital enablers.

However, market leaders still depend on their established and optimized business models to generate continual value. The danger is that such companies will pay lip service to the need for innovation while they continue to allocate the overwhelming proportion of their resources and executive attention to what are currently the most profitable markets and customers.

After a while, the current business model may be disrupted by innovative players and become less profitable, or even obsolete. This eventuality may leave the company playing a desperate game of catch-up with competitors that have already gained a significant first-mover advantage by embracing important disruptive innovations.

When, for example, the iPhone was first launched in June 2007, Nokia's credit rating was rated as AAA by Moody's. However, the company failed to invest

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quickly enough in the development of smartphones, and its competitiveness suffered greatly as a result. Five years later, in June 2012, Moody's had downgraded Nokia to junk status.

Even if the company does commit properly to innovation, it can make the mistake of doing so within the limiting confines of its traditional operating model.

First, the marketing team could focus excessively on existing customers, leading to incremental product improvements, rather than attempting to re-imagine the whole business. Second, when measuring the feasibility of a digital innovation, executives might impose the same strict timeframe and return on investment requirements as they do for core products, ignoring the fact that a new business idea might need the nurturing and experimentation which render it unprofitable in the shorter-term. Third, the company could subject the project to its existing, strict governance policies, thus unnecessarily impeding its progress with an inflexible bureaucracy that could involve, among other things, lengthy approval processes and strict branding guidelines.

The Digital Innovation Group

Leaders can avoid such potential pitfalls by creating an autonomous "Digital Innovation Group." The company's own internal, but independent, team will have the mission to reimagine the business for the digital age, even while the existing business continues to deliver healthy returns. The group should be provided with adequate survival capital and direct access to the senior-level sponsor, with a clear scope to experiment with digital products and business models outside the limitations of the normal corporate structure and routines. Some companies opt to complement their internal teams with external talent to boost their digital capabilities. Facebook, for example, has bought more than 40 companies, such as Instagram or Whatsapp, since its foundation in 2004. It allows the acquired companies continued independence and freedom to innovate before any attempt to integrate them formally within the corporate structure.

The mode of operation within the Digital Innovation Group should involve a trial-and-error learning process and constant iteration until the product eventually meets a market demand. This sort of experimentation is usually associated with start-ups in the experimental phase before they reach the desired product-market fit. Failure and risk must be tolerated to a significant degree if innovative solutions are to be found.

In early 2014, for example, IBM announced investment of US$1 billion in the formation of a business unit, the Watson Group, built around its Watson-branded cognitive computing technology, which will remain separate from the rest of the company's operations. IBM's CEO, Ginni Rometty, has stated that the objective is for the Watson Group to generate annual revenue of $10 billion within ten years. The Digital Innovation Group can only progress properly once it has a direct line to the senior-level (ideally, chief executive) sponsor. This would ensure that the innovation agenda is adequately promoted among the organization's key decision-makers. Our Global Innovation Study emphasised the need for "innovation champions" within the company.

The precise nature of this senior-level contribution is also key to project success. Leaders must provide a robust strategic framework within which innovation can flourish. Without such clear direction and ambition, ideas that are generated will stand less chance of being executed. Alternatively, an unorthodox but promising idea may be dismissed without due consideration because management is unable to relate its potential to the overarching innovation strategy. As a consequence of this lack of clarity and support, the company's innovation team cannot see how it can make a difference.

The Digital Innovation Group should also be able to leverage the capabilities and resources of the organization without being restricted by its dominant culture, processes or control mechanisms, which may negatively impinge on the ultimate goal of innovation. It should adopt agile development methods to test new products in a quick and effective way, making use of flexible budgets and schedules.

Throughout the experimentation process, the Digital Innovation Group should abandon some of the cherished marketing principles that have served the company well in the past. For example, marketing orthodoxy states that companies constantly need to be asking customers what they want if products are to remain relevant and popular. However, this principle does not work well when the team is trying to re-imagine the business where customers would not know what to expect. In this era of disruption, a new technology can completely change their expectations.

The Digital Innovation Group should therefore avoid any bias towards currently fashionable products from dictating the scope of innovation. The team always need to be thinking afresh. A quote attributed to Henry Ford makes this point: "If I had asked people what they wanted, they would have said faster horses."

Finally, once the innovation team establishes a fit between a product and a market—that is, when the business model is proven and the innovative product becomes commercially viable—the integration with the rest of the organization will need to be considered.

Conclusion

We live in a digital age, and all companies—from micro-enterprises to huge corporates—need to adapt. Market leaders know that they have to innovate and respond to disruptive technology, but they also need to preserve their core businesses and endure stability. The Digital Innovation Group is the proven vehicle for organizations to innovate and disrupt the market without disrupting their business. With the right senior support and survival capital, the Group can re-imagine the business and deliver future-proof digital innovations that fit with the ever-evolving expectations of the digital generation.

[1] Strategy&, "The Global Innovation 1000: Navigating the Digital Future", 2013, (http://www.strategyand.pwc.com/media/file/Strategyand_2013-Global-Innovation-1000-Study-Navigating-the-Digital-Future.pdf)
[2] Wall Street Journal, "IBM set to expand Watson's reach", January 9, 2014 (http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB10001424052702303754404579308981809586194)

TECHNOLOGY NEWS

Technology Updates

Fiber to the Home (FTTH) Technology on the rise in the MENA region

The Fiber to the Home (FTTH) Council MENA has announced the launch of a new research on the FTTH market in the MENA region at their upcoming 6th annual conference, which will be held under the patronage of the Telecommunication Regulatory Authority (TRA) on 24 - 25 November 2014 at the Dubai World Trade Center. The study, coordinated by the Council's research Partner - IDATE, is set to reveal the latest findings on the state of FTTH in the region. "With the rise in development of MENA region's ICT sector, FTTH is leading the new generation and the way to innovation and technology. In this era of change, our region is in great need for a future-proof infrastructure in order to answer the requirements of the new emerging perspectives," said Dr. Suleiman Al Hedaithy, Chairman at FTTH Council MENA. "The next biggest challenge for developers would be to deliver 1GBPS internet speed to every household along with maintaining commercial success," he added. According to the preliminary findings from IDATE, the UAE is by far the most mature market for Fiber to the Home technology in the MENA region, with a penetration of Subs/HP of more than 65 percent, penetration rates that are probably the highest worldwide. The study also found that Saudi Arabia has strong potential to develop FTTH technology, with a current FTTH/B penetration of around 30 percent. Currently, KSA is making progress, with STC and Mobily having decided to deploy FTTH extensively around the country. Qatar, where FTTH/B penetration rate is currently at over 55% percent, has also made great progress in covering most of the country's territory, with a very fast adoption by the leading operator, Ooredoo.In the North African countries, FTTH/B is still in its infancy. Nevertheless, there is a strong potential for this technology to develop in countries such as Egypt, Morocco and Algeria in the next 10 years to come.

Tibco and Ericsson Form Global OSS/BSS Partnership

Tibco Software and Ericsson have formed a global partnership whereby Tibco middleware will be included in the portfolio of OSS BSS software and consulting and systems integration services offered by Ericsson. The Tibco software will complement Ericsson's own OSS/BSS portfolio of services in the area of charging, billing, order management, product catalog, customer relationship management and customer experience management. This is another example of an Ericsson consulting and system integration engagement in which partnering with OSS/BSS software suppliers has been integral to achieving the results desired by the customer. Raj Verma, EVP of Worldwide Sales, Tibco, says: "Tibco is a leader in infrastructure and business intelligence software and Ericsson is the leader in telecom services. Together we can present a portfolio of software and services that meets the changing needs of communications service providers." Paolo Colella, Vice President and Head of Consulting and Systems Integration at Ericsson, says: "We believe there is value in developing global partnerships to help deliver a more comprehensive set of commercial offerings to our customers. Tibco is a trusted name in software solutions for this industry and we have the global scale, skills and consulting and systems integration expertise. Together we can transform operators' OSS/BSS solutions and enable communication service providers to become more cost-efficient and agile."

A Billion Holes Can Make a Battery

Researchers at the University of Maryland have invented a single tiny structure that includes all the components of a battery that they say could bring about the ultimate miniaturization of energy storage components. The structure is called a nanopore: a tiny hole in a ceramic sheet that holds electrolyte to carry the electrical charge between nanotube electrodes at either end. The existing device is a test, but the bitsy battery performs well. First author Chanyuan Liu, a graduate student in materials science & engineering, says that it can be fully charged in 12 minutes, and it can be recharged thousands of time. A team of UMD chemists and materials scientists collaborated on the project: Gary Rubloff , director of the Maryland NanoCenter and a professor in the Department of Materials Science and Engineering and in the Institute for Systems Research; Sang Bok Lee, a professor in the Department of Chemistry and Biochemisty and the Department of Materials Science and Engineering; and seven of their Ph.D. students (two now graduated). Many millions of these nanopores can be crammed into one larger battery the size of a postage stamp. One of the reasons the researchers think this unit is so successful is because each nanopore is shaped just like the others, which allows them to pack the tiny thin batteries together efficiently. Coauthor Eleanor Gillette's modeling shows that the unique design of the nanopore battery is responsible for its success. The space inside the holes is so small that the space they take up, all added together, would be no more than a grain of sand. Now that the scientists have the battery working and have demonstrated the concept, they have also identified improvements that could make the next version 10 times more powerful. The next step to commercialization: the inventors have conceived strategies for manufacturing the battery in large batches.

Teleste : Brazil's Arganet selects Teleste's platform

Finnish network equipment maker Teleste and its partner, Digital Designers TV, have provided a solution for content acquisition and delivery of live streaming IPTV for Brazilian operator Arganet. The solution includes Teleste's digital headend platform Teleste Luminato. Arganet provides internet services in the north of Sao Paulo state. The company's core business is to provide fibre-based internet access for the business and residential market. The Teleste Luminato headend platform comes with an ISDB-T digital terrestrial receiver.

Global mobile phone penetration to hit 90% by 2020

Ericsson predicts tenfold increase in mobile video traffic over coming five years.90% of the world's population above the age of six will have a mobile phone by 2020, according to Ericsson's latest Mobility Report, published on Tuesday. India and China are currently showing the fastest growth, with third quarter net additions of 18 million and 12 million respectively. "The falling cost of handsets, coupled with improved usability and increasing network coverage, are factors that are making mobile technology a global phenomenon that will soon be available to the vast majority of the world's population," said Rima Qureshi, chief strategy officer at Ericsson, in a statement. The Swedish equipment maker said smartphones accounted for 65%-70% of all phones sold in the third quarter, compared to 55% in Q3 2013, and predicted that smartphone sales will reach 800 million this year. Despite the impressive figures, smartphones "currently account for just 37% of all mobile phone subscriptions", Ericsson said, so there is still plenty of room for growth. Indeed, the company expects the number of smartphone-based mobile connections worldwide to grow from 2.7 billion today to 6.1 billion by 2020. In terms of mobile data traffic, video will continue to dominate, Ericsson said. Driven by improvements in the overall mobile video experience, it currently accounts for 45%-55% of mobile traffic. By 2020, Ericsson expects mobile video traffic to have increased tenfold, accounting for 55% of mobile data.

Ericsson partners with IBM to create tiny antennas

5G standards are still undefined, but the companies involved in 5G research and standardization are already creating tools for next-generation networks. Today Ericsson said it is collaborating with IBM to design phased-array antennas for 5G networks. Phased-array antennas can increase bandwidth by multiplying the number of sectors per cell site. Ericsson said that the goal of its research with IBM is to develop services that will enable a multitude of new services on the same frequency and offer data speeds that are competitive to existing cable and wired internet access speeds. The companies envision roughly 100 antennas and radios on a chip no bigger than a credit card. "We are ... working to solve the size barrier and look forward to developing antenna technology with IBM that will open up possibilities for new uses," said Thomas Norén, head of product management for Ericsson's radio unit, in a written statement. "We recently launched the industry's most flexible small cell, which allows for concurrent use of multiple technologies. Even with its tablet-sized footprint, the form-factor was limited by components inside. This research collaboration will help us enable mobile network builds that provide the right coverage and capacity even in the densest urban environment." "We have accumulated over 10 years of experience in developing radio frequency integrated circuit and packaging solutions, demonstrating highly integrated phased arrays for various applications," said IBM Research's Dr. Mehmet Soyuer, manager of the group's communication and computation subsystems department. "We look forward to collaborating with Ericsson to help shape the future of mobile communications." Even though Ericsson does not expect adoption of 5G standards until 2020, the wireless network equipment giant says that some network needs are already clear. Advanced antennas will help support more mobile devices, as well as increase the data capacity of each device.

End to end 5G for super, superfast mobile

Collaboration between NEC Electronics Samsung and several academic centers in China and Iran, is investigating how software-defined cellular networking might be used to give smart phone users the next generation of super-superfast broadband, 5G. They provide details in the International Journal of Communication Networks and Distributed Systems. Currently, the fourth generation of mobile phone connection technology, 4G, in as far as it has been adopted provides broadband-type connectivity for enabled devices such as smart phones, tablet computers, laptops and other gadgets through two standards: the Mobile WiMAX standard (first used in South Korea in 2007), and the first-release Long Term Evolution (LTE) standard (in Oslo, Norway and Stockholm, Sweden since 2009). Peak speeds were set in the standards at 100 megabits per second (Mbit/s) for mobile users and ten times that for static, domestic 5G users, 1 gigabit per second. 100 Mbits/s is three times faster than the earlier 3G system but users commonly do not see data transfer at such high rates, downloads are usually at best 10 Mbits/s. As yet there is no single standard for 5G although various systems are being touted based on rebuilding the cellular networks to be super-efficient and exploiting different frequencies with their capacity for greater data rates. The hope is to be able to achieve download speeds of perhaps 10 Gbits/s. Ming Lei of Samsung Research and Development Institute China, Lei Jiang of NEC Laboratories, both in Beijing are working with colleagues at the University of Electronic Science and Technology of China in Chengdu, Beijing Jiaotong University and the University of Kurdistan. They have assessed the latest developments aimed at 5G systems and have proposed their own novel end-to-end (E2E) software-defined cellular network (SDCN) architecture which they say offers flexibility, scalability, agility and efficiency. Moreover, it will be sustainable for providers as well as profitable. They are currently building a demonstration system that will allow them to utilize several promising technologies in their architecture for 5G including cloud computing, network virtualization, network functions virtualization and dynamic service chaining. The approach, they suggest could overcome bandwidth shortage problems, improve quality of service so avoiding delays and data loss, as well as reducing the vast number of error-prone network nodes needed for such a system.

Huawei targets 2018 as year of the 5G

The prediction of a 2020 roll-out for 5G appears to have been revised after an agreement between Huawei and Russian mobile operator MegaFon to deploy trial networks in time for the 2018 World Cup. It's certainly a bold claim, considering no-one in the industry has a clue yet what the final standard will look like... Despite this hurdle, Huawei expects pilot projects to be completed by June 2017 which could be a testament to the company's research being much further along than anticipated. In the UK, Huawei recently opened a £5 million 5G research center alongside the University of Surrey to ensure the firm is at the forefront of mobile technology. It is expected that by 2020, 90% of the world's population above six years of age will have a mobile device. It's little surprise then, as we reported last year, Huawei is investing $600 million into 5G research which will help such a vast amount of people be connected with faster speeds and more reliability. Ryan Ding, president of Huawei products and solutions, said, "With the help of MegaFon, we are confident of turning science-fiction-like service into 5G reality for citizens in Russia and soccer fans around the world, two years ahead of the industry's estimated 5G introduction date of 2020." Japan and South Korea are expected to launch 5G services in 2020.

BT wants O2 back for quad-play effort

Nearly a decade ago, BT sold off O2 to Telefónica for £17.7 billion. Now it looks like the two are set for a re-union after reports that BT are in talks with Telefónica to buy the mobile operator back after showing interest in re-entering the mobile space as part of a quad-play effort. BT, with the help of O2, could be the only provider able to offer a true quad-play solution consisting of home phone, broadband, mobile, and TV services. The telecoms giant is also in the unique position of having an army of broadband routers all over the country to help supplement their coverage and reduce the amount of cellular blackspots. Imran Choudhary, senior analyst at Kantar Worldpanel, says: "Acquiring one of the largest networks in the country would give BT instant access to an established customer base, allowing it to tap into and cross-sell its internet, TV and landline packages. O2 would be a good fit as nearly a third of its customers already source their home broadband from BT." In the Ofcom-led 4G auction last year, BT won a bid for spectrum in the 2.6GHz band which is ideal for providing capacity and high-speed. O2 meanwhile won a bid for spectrum in the long-range 800MHz frequency which could lead observers to the conclusion this deal has been on the cards for well over a year... The news becomes even more interesting when you consider that BT struck a deal with O2's biggest rival, EE, to use its vast 4G network last month. This is something which isn't likely to have been agreed upon had EE known this deal was on the cards, and BT could now see itself in a position where it has access to both O2 and EE's assets as well as its own. In a statement, BT says it is "assessing the merits of an acquisition of a mobile network operator in the UK." The combination of the companies' spectrum - combined with BT's existing assets - could lead to a comprehensive and attractive proposition for customers. BT however notes that the company has received interest from shareholders in two UK networks to acquire their business.

Open Digital Roadmap for Growth and Innovation

Dr. Mustafa AYKUT
International Affairs and Policy Coordinator
Turk Telekom Group

Internet traffic accounts for an increasing proportion of total communications traffic and now has a major impact on the increase in total traffic carried by telecom network operators. The vast majority of traffic on operators' networks is now pure data, but the lion's share of operators' revenue comes from voice. Even the big data-subscription fees operators are collecting aren't making up for the decline in voice revenues. Telecom companies need to create and foster a common ecosystem that should be stable, predictable and rewarding for all participants. In fact, network neutrality poses large risks for telecom network operators, consumer privacy, and even—potentially—national security in general in the form of disclosure, adjudication, and discrimination.

Telecom network operators should be changed. How?

Today the industry is quite different: explosive growth in Internet traffic has put operators under intense pressure to increase communications network capacity. At the same time, operators are facing downward pressure on their revenues and profits, particularly from services offered "over-the-top" of the Internet by edge players, making further investment at current levels of price and cash flow both difficult and unattractive. Investment in the core of the network is crucial in sparking the rise of the "data-driven economy".

Network owners need to be allowed to manage traffic on their networks so as to protect networks from harm and handle congestion effectively. Given the need for increased massive expansion of the Internet, regulators should consider implementing approaches that lower the cost of inputs controlled by government policies, such as the cost of spectrum and rights of way.

Allowing network sharing is another means of increasing network capacity. Such measures will allow operators to expand their networks faster and at lower cost. Operators need to price services flexibly to achieve the levels of cash flow that will allow them to make the infrastructure investments required to meet surging demand. Regulators could create a favorable environment supporting infrastructure investments, such as granting regulatory exemptions to fiber investments.

Giant Internet players are too dominant in their markets. This affected the telecoms sector.

Thanks to the Internet, the network has become an ideal platform, a new marketplace, to share goods and services. In this fiercely competitive and highly fragmented marketplace, the battle for Internet dominance promises to be an interesting one. Telecom companies are faced a new scenario: network providers are offering services not only to customers but to content editors and now even players without a network have the resources to access and serve hundred millions of users. In this scenario, not all men are created equal. Additionally, the roles of network and content providers intertwine. Today, ''anyone" can sell content or as many have come to expect, give it away for free.

Some giant Internet companies have become too dominant, giving them the power to control what applications are developed and used by consumers. Telecom companies are heavily burdened by regulation, taxation, spectrum and roaming rules that are stripping the industry of funds required for investment. Today, Internet players are taking revenues away and leaving the operators, regulators, investors, and ultimately the consumers to deal with the consequences.

Which services use the most bandwidth on your networks?

The rapid growth of Internet-connected devices is changing the way broadband services are consumed. In 2013, the percentage of households with four or more devices accessing the web increased from 32 to 43 percent. At the same time, the amount of bandwidth consumption per home is growing and is expected to grow to four times the current amount by 2015. The 1.9 billion connected devices today, are expected to reach 9 billion by 2018. This is roughly equal to the number of smartphones, smart TVs, tablets, wearable computers, and PCs combined. The growth in mobile smartphones and tablets represents the fastest growing sector of connected devices, and offloading data traffic to Wi-Fi networks is further driving the growth of networking.

Video services are the main driver for bandwidth consumption. Right now, every day, one out of ten mobile users is watching video content on their devices. This accounts for a 38% of all data volume on mobile networks. While video content accounts for nearly 40% of data on mobile networks, web data makes up around 34%. According to Cisco figures, all of the emerging market regions experienced a doubling of mobile data traffic in 2013. The Middle East and Africa grew 107 percent, Latin America grew 105 percent, and Central and Eastern Europe grew 99 percent. There is a strong trend towards unlimited capacity and higher speed packages.

Telecommunications providers are spending to upgrade their networks, investing in high-capacity fiber broadband and faster and more efficient fourth-generation wireless networks. They are pursuing new business models to get content providers to share the financial burden of carrying the traffic.

How much stress and strain is put on networks by providing video?

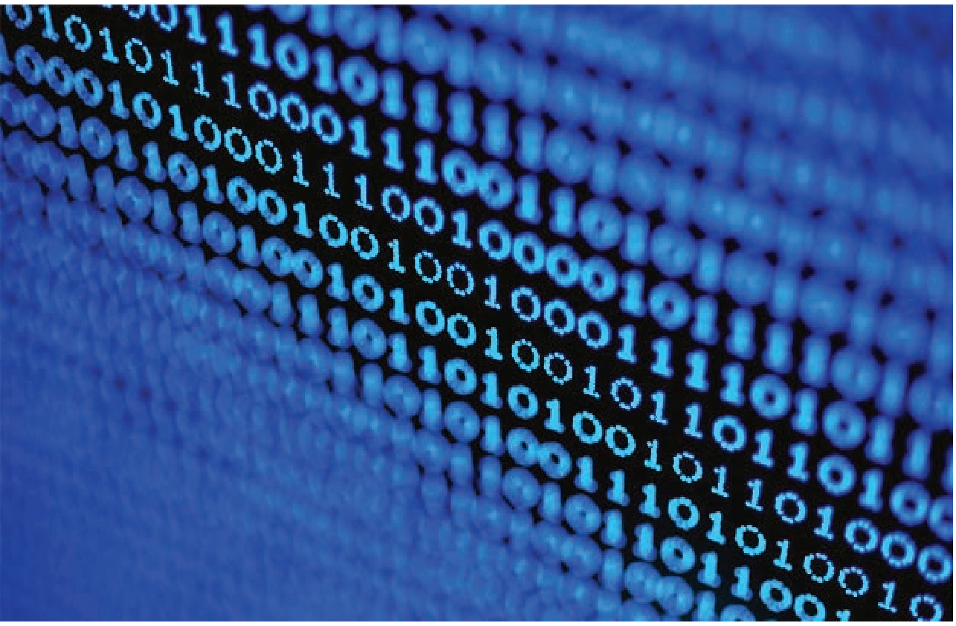
Just to give you a recent example, in Germany, Europe's largest market for video content, revenue from on-demand services will grow an average of 21%a year to reach $506 million by 2020 as more customers adopt the technology. Video consumption is the key driver for increase in data usage with a traffic share of nearly 50 percent in fixed broadband (end of 2013) and it is mostly driven by OTTs. Their services worldwide grow rapidly by using infrastructure of operators while operators' growths are much lower. Between 2013 and 2015, global OTT revenues are expected to grow at a rate of 14%, where Telco operator revenues are forecasted to experience a much lower growth rate of 3%. Traffic increase on the network results in additional CAPEX and OPEX for telecom operators.

Net Neutrality Rules and New Business Models are keys to a sustainable ecosystem

Operators will be able to recoup their investment in improved performance and capacity from both traditional Internet access revenues and new differentiated services, thus being able to earn a return on investment that justifies continued investment.

A formal net neutrality policy with these key points in place would be a win-win outcome: operators would be encouraged to invest in their networks, Internet players would be free to innovate and deliver services to a global user base, and governments would benefit from the impact of upgraded networks on the economy and society in general.

Telecom companies need to focus on what's important for all players which is preventing an absolute decline in the welfare of content providers and preserving incentives to invest. By doing so, they can nurture the Internet ecosystem at both the edge and the core. The Internet ecosystem will only flourish once the industry develops and designs new and sustainable business models.



Start with the data, not the problem

The appetite and interest in Big Data globally seems to grow almost as fast as the data itself. We no longer measure data in gigabytes, but in zettabytes. Moreover, the amount of data generated around the world is expected to double every two years according to the Big Data Readiness Survey recently commissioned by Vodafone. In the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), some estimates indicate that the Big Data and analytics market is set to grow five-fold – to USD 636 million - by 2020.

In the telecommunications sector and certainly at Vodafone, the operational opportunities presented by Big Data, across the value chain, have been known for some time, in part because we are among the largest single sources of information. The tendency has been for operators to adopt a top-down approach, whereby a business problem is identified and then data is sought to fix it. At Vodafone Qatar, we have had success with this approach, using analytics to improve service and network efficiency and market to customers more effectively. Several years ago, Big Data was nice to have – now it's intrinsic to our business.

George Galica
Head of Managed Services
Vodafone Qatar

However, attitudes toward Big Data in the Middle East are notably different. Rather than adopting a "me too" approach to Big Data – looking only at what's been done in Europe or the United States - operators in the Middle East are increasingly interested in staying a step ahead, using Big Data insights to innovate and drive product development.

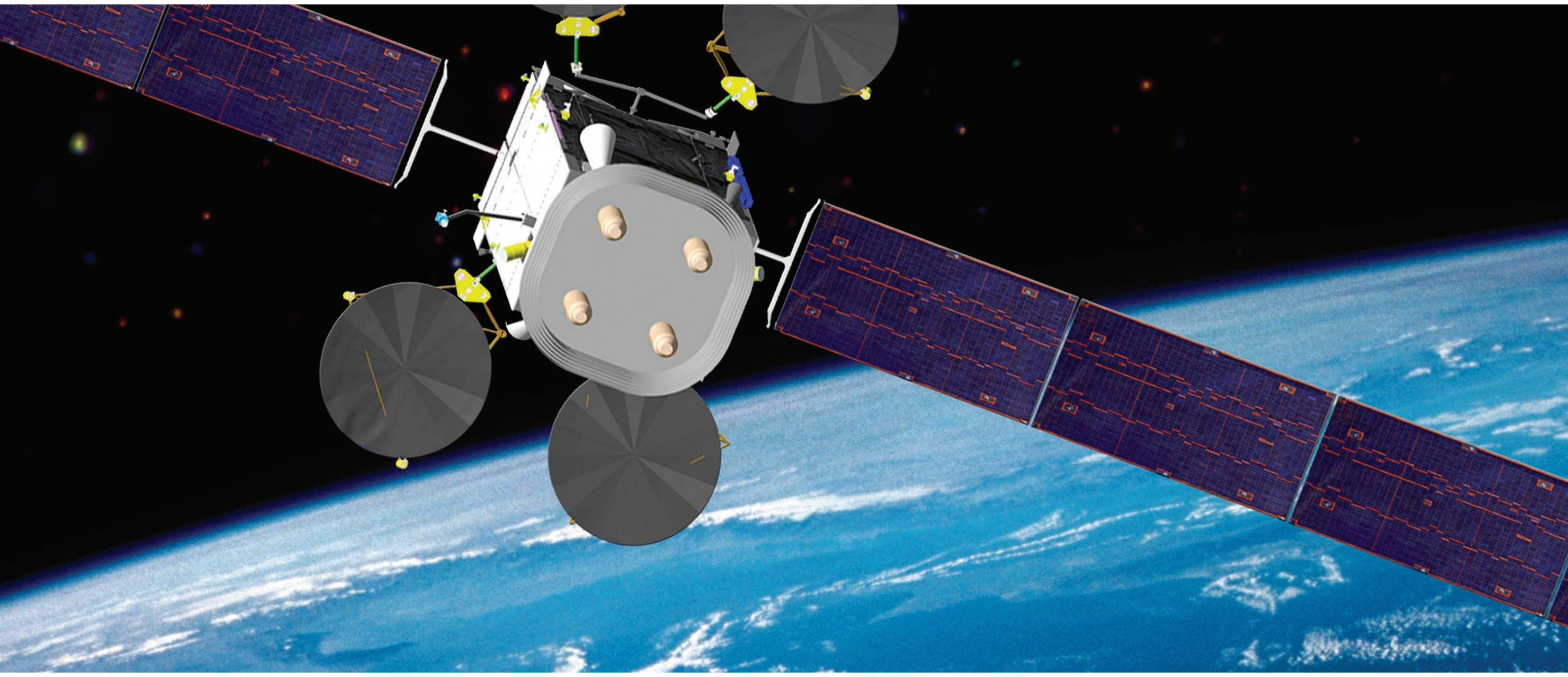
Whether a response to stagnant industry growth or ambitious Smart City and ICT development agendas across the region, one thing is clear: we need to use data differently. Monetizing Big Data has taken on new urgency and, in turn, requires a new approach.

Rather than seek data to solve a problem, we must start with the data. A recent report by strategy&, formerly Booz and Company, advocates for telecom operators to start with the data they have on hand, experiment, and see what correlations are revealed.

Vodafone Qatar is in a unique position to leverage insights from Vodafone's Big Data leadership and networks globally to become a laboratory and live case study for this reverse approach to Big Data.

Using expertise and algorithms from our networks, we are looking at new ways of enhancing our customer experience to be more personal, more informed, and people-centric. We are additionally looking to Big Data insights to engage and connect with customers in new ways to ensure that the launching of new products and services take into account spikes in data consumption and content creation.

For telecom operators, the opportunities to monetize Big Data by creating new revenue streams are boundless. However, it requires a fundamental shift in approach. Instead of asking how we can use Big Data to market to customers or improve network efficiency, which we have been largely successful at, we must ask how we can use information in a way that benefits customers and gives them more of what they want, when they want it.



SATELLITE UPDATES

Satellite Updates

Satellite to remain dominant as MENA TV penetration rises to 94.3%

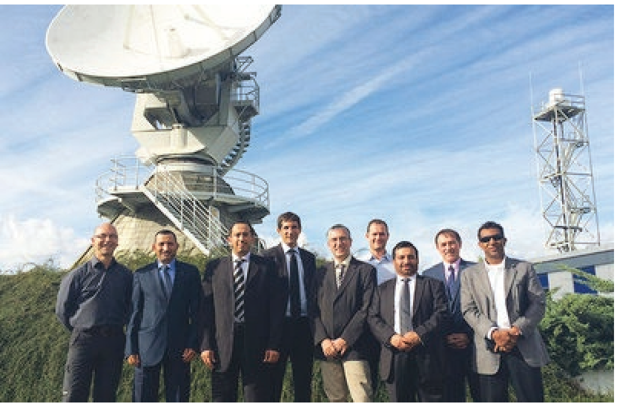
Satellite TV will reach 60.9 million viewers in the Arab world by the end of 2018, with free-to-air (FTA) households accounting for 87.5% of this figure, according to Dataxis. Digital satellite pay-TV subscribers will rise 83.1% in Arab-speaking Middle East and North Africa (MENA), from 4.13 million at the end of 2013 to 7.6 million at the end of 2018, the analysts forecast. The number of regional homes receiving FTA terrestrial analogue signals will fall by 87.7% from 12.4 million to 1.53 million, while FTA digital terrestrial television (DTT) reception will rise 155% from 4.3 million homes to 11 million during the same period. Pay-DTT subscriptions will number 440,000 by 2018, says Dataxis. Regional IPTV subscription is likely to witness growth of 123.12%, jumping to encompass three million households at the end of 2018, from 1.21 million households at the end of 2013. Analogue cable services will fall 17.30 % from 890,000 to 736,000 across the MENA region. As a whole, Dataxis believes pay-TV penetration is forecast to jump from 11.1% to 17.5% – up from 6.3 million subscriptions in 2013 to 11.4 million at the end of the period, with total TV penetration reaching 94.3%, or 66.4 million, Total TV penetration of households across the MENA region will rise from 93% to 94.3% over the forecast period – equivalent to 66.4 million households.

Thuraya satellite services launch in twelve Airtel Africa countries

Airtel Africa, subsidiary of Indian telecoms company Airtel, and mobile satellite services (MSS) operator Thuraya Telecommunications Company, have announced the commercial launch of the latter's satellite products and services throughout twelve African countries. Airtel consumers in countries including Congo Republic, Gabon, Ghana, Kenya, Zambia and the Democratic Republic of Congo are now able to buy Thuraya satellite phones and IP+ broadband terminals, with the telco emphasizing its commitment to delivering 'innovative products that offer 100% coverage.' Andre Beyers, CEO at Airtel Africa, said: 'The partnership brings convergence to the forefront of our business by ensuring we are able to provide mobile and fixed telecommunications services even in the most remote areas in Africa.' Meanwhile Bilal Hamoui, the MMS operator's vice president, is cited as saying: 'Thuraya recognizes the importance of connecting Africa's most remote regions, which will enable businesses and communities to thrive and grow.' Airtel plans to extend the services into its remaining African markets, although a timeframe has not been given.

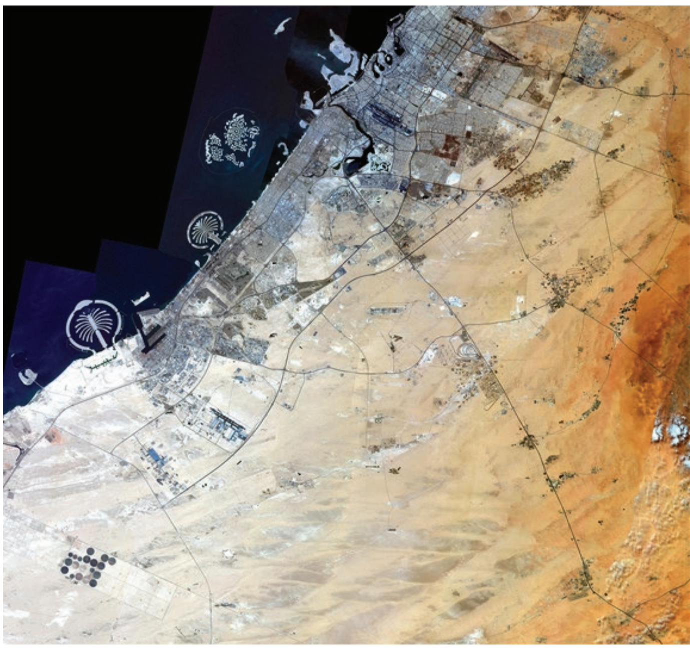
Oman plans facility to detect interferences in satellite frequencies

Oman is planning to develop a one-of-its-kind satellite monitoring station in the region with an aim to monitor the frequency spectrum allocated to various users of radio communication services and to detect interference in satellite frequencies. Tasked with guaranteeing reliable satellite services and interference-free operation, the Telecom Regulatory Authority, represented by Spectrum Management Unit (SMU), is in the preparatory stage to set up a satellite monitoring station in the sultanate. To gain working knowledge in the field to ensure efficient frequency management, a team from SMU recently visited the Leeheim Satellite Monitoring Station in Germany that provides monitoring services to entire Europe. According to the International Telecommunication Union's (ITU) Radio Regulations, the rise in number of radio communication networks is congesting the spectrum. Hosting more radio signals in same bands will raise the probability of harmful interference if no action is taken. In a continuously growing satellite telecom environment, transmissions and networks are increasingly subject to interference from a variety of ground-based transmitters. This has become the major cause of service impairment and degradation. According to ITU, careless transmission of radio signals in same frequency bands, time and geographical locations by independent networks will produce interference. Spectrum management, in case of long-range communications in air and international waters, such as aeronautical and maritime communications, is a much more sensitive and complicated task compared to short-range national applications. Coordination of spectrum utilization around the national border-line is another issue which needs special care. A statement from SMU said that the visit was part of preparations to begin work on the Satellite Monitoring Station Project in the sultanate and to examine the operational equipment and systems before TRA selects a bidder to implement the project. The delegation was headed by Eng Yousuf Abdullah al Balushi, vice president, Spectrum Management Affairs, SMU. During the visit, the delegation observed the key technical measurements carried out by the station, as well monitoring systems and antennas used, where one was noted to have a 12m diameter. The delegation also discussed components of station buildings, number of staff operating the station, besides routine maintenance of antenna and systems. Furthermore, a live demo of monitoring and geo-location systems was presented to the delegation to identify the system's quality and effectiveness. Eng Balushi thanked the German administration and Kratos Integral System Europe for the arrangement of the visit. He also disclosed the intent of TRA to sign the contract to implement the Satellite Monitoring Station project very soon.

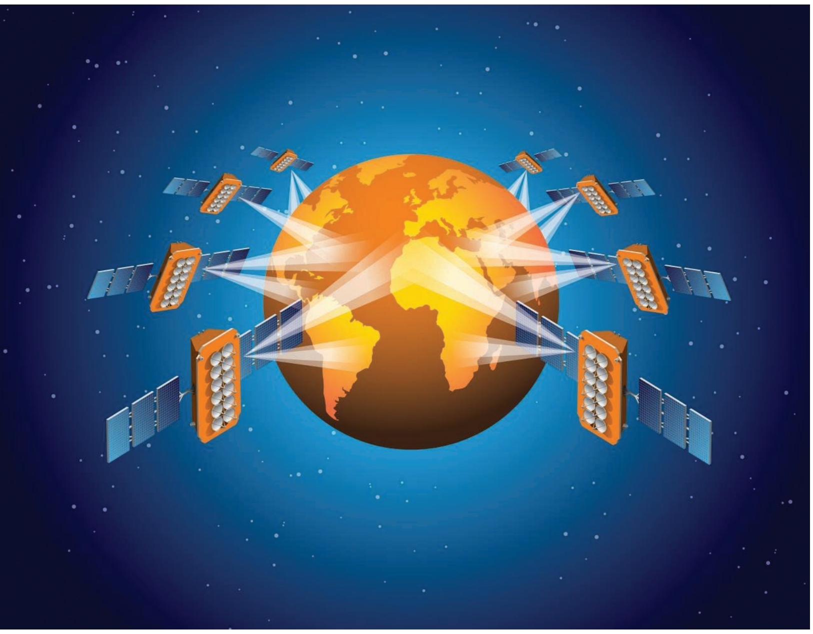


DubaiSat-2's Dubai Imagery Released By EIAST On Satellite's First Anniversary

The Emirates Institution for Advanced Science and Technology (EIAST) celebrates on Friday, November 21st, 2014, the one year anniversary of the launch of DubaiSat-2 from the Yasny Launch Base in Russia, using the Russian Dnepr rocket launcher in cooperation with the Russian International Space Company (Kozmotras). On this occasion, EIAST released a mosaic image of the entire Emirate of Dubai at a resolution of one meter. The mosaic image is comprised of 10 satellite photos taken by DubaiSat-2 as it passed over Dubai when conditions were optimal and under varying circumstances. The image will be updated every six months to track the development of environmental projects, urban planning, infrastructure and other projects. DubaiSat-2 consists of two main segments—the DubaiSat-2 Space Segment, which consists of a spacecraft bus and an electro-optical payload that contains a push-broom camera with TDI sensors to provide space images, while the DubaiSat-2 Ground Segment includes the Main Mission Control Station (MCS), Subsidiary MCS, Main Image Receiving and Processing Station (IRPS), and Antenna system. Dubai Sat-2 weighs 300kg and is 2 meters high and 1.5 meters wide. The satellite is equipped to provide space imagery of the entire world throughout its lifetime and can take multiple images of the same area in one day, as well as receive and process these images from anywhere in the world within one day. The satellite is equipped with innovative technology to enhance the maneuvering capability and increase its agility by 300 percent, as compared to Dubai Sat-1. It is equipped with a propulsion system that allows the control of its altitude above ground level and modifies it automatically in the event of any deviation from the orbit through a set of predetermined and saved commands sent from the control station. The satellite makes one full orbit around the Earth in 96 minutes, with 60 percent of its time facing sunlight. The satellite aims to provide electro-optical images at a resolution that reaches one meter to be used in several civilian applications,



such as providing 3D images, update project development in various fields including urban planning and urban development, scientific research, civil engineering and environmental projects, construction and geological mapping and research, in addition to providing specialized reports. EIAST was established by the Dubai Government in 2006 to encourage scientific innovation and technological progress in Dubai and in the UAE. It also aims to develop the scientific skills and knowledge of Emiratis. It is mainly involved in outer space research and development; satellite manufacturing and systems development; space imaging; and ground station services and support for other satellites.



O3B Networks, RCS Communications Bring Connectivity to South Sudan

RCS Communications has initiated commercial service in South Sudan using O3b Networks' High Throughput Satellite (HTS) constellation. The Internet Service Provider (ISP) signed a long-term capacity agreement in 2013 to extend the reach of its broadband services. RCS clients received access to satellite broadband on Oct. 1, 2014. The ISP is using O3b's service for new high performance services, such as RCS-WiMAX, in and around South Sudan's capital city, Juba, which has a population of more than 300,000. RCS tested O3b's service internally prior to integrating into its WiMAX network. The company is the second O3b Trunk customer with commercial service in the world, and second in Africa.

Dubai Police Start SOS Texting Service with Thuraya

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) Dubai Police has launched a new emergency service for the Thuraya XT handset. The Thuraya SOS service enables users to send a preprogrammed Short Message Service (SMS), or text message, by pressing the soft key on the right side of the keypad for two seconds. The Dubai Police will then receive an SMS with the users' Global Positioning System (GPS) coordinates from Thuraya's primary gateway office. In remote emergency situations, users can send the automated message to receive help in areas lacking in connectivity. "Our collaboration with Thuraya has enabled us to save the lives of many people who were lost or required emergency care in remote areas. Although the UAE is a highly connected nation, people still need to be aware that there will always be areas such as the desert and the sea that do not have mobile connectivity. When traveling in such areas, having a Thuraya XT handset can save their lives if they encounter any emergency," said Maj. Gen. Khamis Mutar Khamis Al Muzainah, commander-in-chief of Dubai Police.

ADVVAL Becomes Member of SAMENA Telecommunications Council

Dubai, UAE, October xxx, 2014 - SAMENA Telecommunications Council has announced that multinational firm ADVVAL, a company that offers an advanced campaigns analysis and planning tool has joined its membership, which includes top-tier telecom operators and technology providers from across the South Asia, Middle East, and North Africa region.

As a member of South Asia - Middle East - North Africa (SAMENA) region's sole operator-driven industry association that represents telecommunications service providers from around the region, and beyond, ADVVAL will benefit from numerous opportunities to participate in industry meetings and conferences organized by the Council, exchange ideas and collaborate with other fellow members of the trans-regional consortium.

Mr. Bocar BA, CEO of SAMENA Telecommunications Council, said, "We welcome ADVVAL to the membership of SAMENA Council. With ADVVAL's very specialized value-creation tools and techniques for improving upon revenue-generation strategies, we believe, additional marketing value will be created for SAMENA members on a mutual basis. We look forward to seeing ADVVAL contribute actively to SAMENA members' collaborative efforts."

Jose Centeno, GM of ADVVAL, said, "We feel privileged to be a part of SAMENA. ADVVAL would like to take SAMENA members one step beyond the next generation of marketing campaign analysis, planning, and reporting. ADVVAL is keen to increase the ROI of the campaigns launched by SAMENA's telecommunications operators and other members through its proprietary tools and methodologies. With SAMENA's support, we hope to contribute tangibly to the revenue interests of our colleagues at SAMENA Council"

ADVVAL generates immediate financial value by helping optimize the return on investment (ROI) of campaigns whether it is retention, cross-sell and upsell. This is achieved through an advanced, telco-specific, proprietary software that automates the calculation of the financial impact of campaigns and provides tools for their in-depth analysis, based on ADVVAL's 20+ years' experience in the telecom industry.

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