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BUILDING DIGITAL ECONOMIES

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EMERGENCE OF FTTH AND FUTURE OF TELECOMS INDUSTRY

Mr. Brahima Sanou
Director ITU
Telecommunication Development Bureau

EDITORIAL

Perpetuating the Growth of the ICT Industry in the SAMENA Region

This year, the celebration of Ramadan occurs for most of the month of July. This so-called "quiet" month in Dubai does afford us the propensity to overtake and ensure that our planning is current and up to schedule. Our organization is very busy working on multiple strategic projects with members and partners. We have recently issued a white paper in collaboration with Qualcomm, to give operators, broadcasters and regulators across the region, insights into a technology solution called SDL (Supplemental Downlink) which could increase the capacity and QoS (Quality of Service) of mobile broadband networks using HSPA+ and LTE-advanced standards. On the same context, the SAMENA Council continues its efforts in promoting one harmonized efficient band plan for the 800-700MHz, where another position statement on that matter will be published in the coming few weeks.

To add to this, the SAMENA Council, in coordination with ictQatar and ICANN,is issuing a paper on the importance of domain names industry as new revenue stream for telecos. The paper will highlight the importance domain names for the regional telecom operators and regulatory bodies amid the announcement of the new gTLDs program to be announced by ICANN this year. We are highly supportive of the idea that the regional regulatory bodies, telecom operators, and ISPs should collaborate and work together with the Council and ICANN to highlight the significance of domain name industry. Qatar's telecom regulatory body, ictQatar has already initiated the process by participating in our study by providing detailed insights on their roadmap and vision as well as engaging Qatari accredited registrars into the SAMENA Council conducted survey "Assessment of the domain name industry in the SAMENA region".

I would especially like to mention that we have recently signed an agreement with ITU for the promotion of 'ITU Telecom World 2013' which will be held in Thailand 19-22 November 2013. The ITU's interest in using our platform to effectively support its events in the region is a positive one and augurs well for our member base that stand to benefit. We are excited about this program and look forward to seeing strong representation and participation from the regional ICT community at the ITU Telecom World 2013 in Thailand. The global ICT industry is on the threshold of a digital revolution, and this event with high-level discussions on regulations and policies, innovations and strategies, and business models, between industry and government experts, will provide ICT players in the SAMENA region with the opportunity to exchange ideas collaborate on industry issues and identify solutions with far-reaching benefits.

In parallel, our organization retains its focus on broadband which is by far the key enabler of digitization. Broadband development on both fixed and mobile basis, as we know, is essential and extremely costly. What is important, however, is that, while devising digitization strategies and ICT policies, and while building futuristic broadband network infrastructure, appropriate and at the same time innovative business models are considered through the use of investment concepts that'd incentivize greater participation of all the key stakeholders. Nonetheless, broadband, convergence and innovation are on the rise in the SAMENA region and beyond. Many countries in the region have taken strong measures to ensure that prompt broadband proliferation policies are put into effect, supported by regulatory environments most conducive to achieving the desired effect.

However, for the time being, it appears that the exact trends in broadband are less visible in this part of the world, that is, South Asia-Middle East-North Africa. Telecom industry has experienced the introduction of numerous new technologies which somehow have impeded the growth of the industry in general. This is because industry's development pace may be significantly affected when technologies that are meant for almost the same purpose emerge too quickly. When new technologies are introduced for the purpose for which other technologies already exists in the market is found to have left less room for existing technologies to reach maturity level in a particular market.

New services are being launched aggressively to increase subscriber base, generate more revenues and to pull off important economies of scale. Convergence in the telecom industry has been there giving rise to true competition which will wipe out the differences such as wireless and wireline, mobile and wireless, multimedia and telecom, roaming and local, local and international, technology neutral and technology specific, and so on.We are witnessing that traditional copper access networks worldwide are largely being replaced by a fiber access network because these networks will soon no longer be able to meet the ever-growing consumer demand for bandwidth, driven mainly by the convergence and innovative applications. At the same time, convergence of telecoms and media is leading the service providers to conclude that they must be first to deploy fiber, anticipating imminent competition. FTTx is emerging into the mainstream and is set to transform the telecom landscape in the Middle East over the next decade.

When we speak of digitization and futuristic national broadband network, the ability to boost broadband, and the need to connect regions with greater efficiency, we think of the perceivably isolated submarine fiber cables. I believe that the increasing deployment of fiber in the region, fuelled by the requirements for high bandwidth will expedite industry's progress thereby ensuring enhanced QoS and enabling the real convergence.

Yours truly,

Bocar A. BA
Chief Executive Officer
SAMENA Telecommunications Council

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Editor-in-Chief
Bocar A. BA

Contributing Editors
Zakir Syed
Javaid Akhtar Malik
Ali Tahir

Contributing Member
The Rights Lawyers
SAMENA Telecommunications Council

Publisher
SAMENA Telecommunications Council

Subscriptions
subscriptions@samenacouncil.org

Advertising
ads@samenacouncil.org

Legal Issues or Concerns
legal@samenacouncil.org

SAMENA TRENDS
#304, Alfa Building, Knowledge Village
PO Box: 502544, Dubai, United Arab Emirates
Tel: +971.4.364.2700

EDITORIAL








INDUSTRY LEADER'S VISION

Mr. Brahima Sanou was elected Director of the ITU Telecommunication Development Bureau by the Plenipotentiary Conference in October 2010 in Guadalajara, Mexico. He took office on 1 January 2011.

Mr. Sanou has more than 30 years experience in the telecommunication and ICT sector, both at a regional and at an international level.

During his ten years as Head of the ITU Regional Office for Africa and Liaison Officer to the African Union and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), from 2000-2010, he contributed to the development of the African telecommunication/ICT sector by helping to establish policy and regulatory frameworks, both nationally and regionally, that fostered growth, especially in mobile telecommunications. He assisted in establishing regional associations of regulators and encouraged the setting up of a continental association of regulators, so as to facilitate the harmonization of policies and regulation thereby fostering the development of the region's telecommunication and ICT markets. He played a key role in the organization of the Connect Africa Summit, held in Kigali, Rwanda in October 2007 and in its follow-up.

As Coordinator, African regional project on telecommunication reform and General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS), from 1997 – 2000, he was a co-author of the first report on the impact of General Agreement on Trade in Services on Africa's telecommunication sector. He also emphasized the need for human resource development and capacity building to prepare African countries for negotiations on multilateral liberalization of telecommunication services at the level of the World Trade Organization (WTO).

Prior to working for the ITU, Mr. Sanou held several high-level positions in the Posts and Telecommunication Services in Burkina Faso. He was a key player in the separation of the Posts and Telecommunication services and in the liberalization of the telecommunication sector in Burkina Faso.

Mr. Sanou has served as Head of Burkina Faso's delegation to various international and national conferences and as Governor representing 15 African countries on the Board of INTELSAT, as well as representing his country in the ITU Council for almost 10 years. He was made Knight of the National Order of Burkina Faso (Chevalier de l'Ordre National). In recognition of his commitment and dedication in the Telecommunication field he was given the award of "Best Public/Private Manager" by Africa Telecom People in 2007.

A national of Burkina Faso, Mr. Sanou holds an Engineering degree from the Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Télécommunications (ENST) in Paris and a post-graduate diploma from the Centre for Financial, Economic and Banking Studies in Paris. He speaks fluent French and English and is learning Arabic. He is married and has three children.

Mr. Brahima Sanou
Director ITU
Telecommunication Development Bureau

Q. Having covered a variety of highly important areas within the ICT industry over the past several months, what are ITU's operational plans for the near future?

A. We intend to pursue our attention at the same – intense and productive – pace! This industry and the role it plays in socio-economic development doesn't allow for any pause in our will to attain the Millennium Development Goals. Our action in the months to come will focus on three main axes.

First, we will give full attention to the next generations and involve the Youth in discussions, both at ITU and UN levels. We have launched two important challenges. The "Young Innovators Challenge" will culminate during ITU Telecom World 2013 from 19 to 22 November in Bangkok, Thailand. The "Crowdsourcing Great Ideas" Challenge – where we make an intensive use of social media to ensure the widest possible participation, will bring 500 young talented people to Costa Rica from 9 to 11 September for the Beyond 2015: Global Youth Summit.

Second, we will pursue our "Connect the World" Initiative. Thailand will be host to the Connect Asia-Pacific Summit on 18 November. The purpose is to mobilize resources on priority development projects in the region and to foster public-private partnerships. We are also organizing with the Government of Rwanda a follow-up summit to Connect Africa: Transform Africa – Africa's Future Delivered, Today will take place from 28 to 31 October in Kigali. We want to analyze the progress done since Connect Africa and ensure that the objectives set at that time are properly implemented.

Third, I have launched two new global initiatives: "M-Powering for a Better Tomorrow" and "Smart Sustainable Development Model". M-Powering aims at extending the benefits of mobile telephony to all strata of society, with special focus on remote rural and underserviced areas. SSDM aims at linking rural telecommunications development for general communications, business, education, health and banking to disaster risk reduction and disaster management initiatives, to ensure and optimal use of technology and avoid duplication of efforts and investments. The first meeting of the Advisory Boards of these initiatives will take place in October at ITU Headquarters in Geneva.

In the meantime we are also continuing our institutional work. In addition to the implementation of our four-year operational plan, which covers various important areas such as enabling environment, infrastructure development, capacity building and digital inclusion, emergency telecommunications and disaster relief, we are running this year the six Regional Preparatory Meetings (Africa, Americas, Arab States, Asia-Pacific, CIS, and Europe) to the World Telecommunication Development Conference that will take place next year inSharm el-Sheik, Egypt to set the priorities of the Telecommunication Development Sector for the four years to come.

Q. Does the pace of innovation in ICT Industry favor a shift from regulatory oversight towards a legal rules-based policy model?

A. Indeed, as ICT markets become more competitive and bring about innovative and often disruptive new technologies and applications, the rationales for exclusiveex ante regulation no longer hold. Regulators need to transition from ex ante to ex post regulation and this involves gradual fine-tuning or, in some cases, even full withdrawal of targeted ex ante regulation to better reflect competitive conditions in the market and serve consumer interests. This is particularly true in the case of broadband markets, where the various links in the value chain may be subject to different degrees of competitive pressure. Due to the fast pace of technological advances and an increasing recognition of the value of robust competition, policymakers increasingly have implemented ex post rules to foster innovative markets while imposing targeted ex ante regulation to address specific market failures, particularly with respect to the physical layer of the broadband ecosystem.When market conditions warrant the phasing out of ex ante regulation, regulators should consider, on a case-by-case basis, the need to establish sunset provisions or transition periods to ensure a smooth shift into an ex post regulatory environment.

In this context, an effective regulator is certainly needed to juggle competing interests, ensure a level playing field, promote transparency and create an environment that nurtures the technological and service innovation that's at the very heart of the ICT sector. Regulators however increasingly need not only to understand engineering and to carry out complex economic and legal analysis, but to have the foresight to quickly recognize and adapt to shifting technology paradigms. They need to be ready to question previous approaches in a fast-evolving market, while nevertheless applying consistent regulatory principles. Regulators face the challenge of judging when market failure requires regulation, and where regulation is no longer required and can be removed.

Q. What distinguishes Africa's telecoms sector from the rest of the world?

A. I would identify with no doubt four aspects that characterize our industry in Africa. The positive aspects are growth and innovation. The characteristics we need to put more efforts on are regulation and capacity building.

The latest figures confirm that the African market is growing at a faster pace than any other continental market. This has been facilitated by the deployment of mobile communications and the adaptation of mobile operator business models to the characteristics of the African market. More work is still necessary to repeat the same success with Internet deployment and particularly broadband. As Secretary of the Broadband Commission, I work with commissioners to ensure the benefits of broadband can also be extended to the continent.

The second characteristic is creativity and innovation. Young African entrepreneurs have entered the Applications market and are developing local services, applications and content to better serve the needs of local communities. Access to markets is facilitated for African businesses and producers, who can get first-hand information and direct access to potential customers. E-health, m-banking, m-learning applications, and other e-service are being deployed to facilitate daily lives. We are particularly sustaining theses efforts with our M-Powering initiative and we are confident on the continuation of the good trendswe observe.

Still, more needs to be done to harmonize policies and regulations in the continent. We have been working intensively with regulators and governments in Africa to address this issue. Different regulatory and telecommunication policy regimes hinder investment and infrastructure development. On the other hand, harmonized regulation not only facilitate network deployment, but also permit the creation of common markets and better international cooperation and cohesion, circulation of devices, etc.

Finally, I will never insist enough in the need to train our people to the use of ICTs. We need to ensure that telecommunication networks and services are deployed, maintained and operated by local technicians and engineers. We need to educate our

Youth to the use of ICTs so that they can get access to the new value-added and highly ICT-dependent jobs. ICTs not only bring direct jobs, but also sustain the economy as a whole and a large majority of the new jobs created require digital articulation.

Q. What is the primary need that is driving the perceived or real need for creating a new sustainable Internet business model?

A. The answer fits into one word: bandwidth. With the Internet of things, e.g. with the multiplication of devices connected to the Internet, traffic is generated while the owners of these devices even notice it. The next generations will progressively rely on permanent connections, and the tools, services and applications they will be using on a daily basis will constantly exchange data with distant servers.

This will require a transformation of the Internet business model. What will be charged? Data volumes? They will soon as obsoleted a communication minutes in traditional telephony. Flat charges for speed and bandwidth seem to be the right approach. Still, they need to be adapted to customer usage: telephony, instant messaging, web surfing, social networks (including exchange of photos, videos and possibly music), music and video streaming, mobile TV, on-line gaming and other services that haven't reached the market yet.

Q. Ever-rising traffic and relatively flat revenues are a major economic challenge faced by all network operators. Are there any distinct strategy dimensions that telecoms operators should attend to?

A. Your question addresses the issue of "over-the-top" stakeholders (OTTs) who have specialized in the aggregation and delivery of content. They are facing criticism from a variety of actors: telecommunication operators consider that they are not investing enough in network and infrastructure deployment, thus avoiding heavy investments and getting better ROIs. Content creators – such as the film and literature industry or the press – consider that they are making profit on content they have not created. OTT argue that a lot of the content wouldn't be accessed at all without the value they add, by archiving, tagging, indexing, sorting, etc. all the content generate every day.

The role of the ITU is to help all actors discuss on a neutral platform, to facilitate understanding between the parties by providing statistics, studies and reports, and by giving a voice to all stakeholders. I have recently created a new forum, the Private Sector Chief Regulatory Officers Meeting, held in conjunction with our Global Symposium for Regulators, so that all parties involved, including businesses, regulators and policy makers can collaborate and find best practices in this domain.

Q. What progress has ITU made to safeguard cyber space?

A. The main challenge for the international community in terms of cybersecurity was the lack of international cooperation, the duplication of efforts at domestic level while cyber threats ignore national legislations and borders. With the creation of the ITU-IMPACT alliance, the International Multilateral Partnership Against Cyber Threats, we have developed the first truly global multi-stakeholder and public-private alliance to foster cybersecurity. Through this alliance, we share expertise and resources to better respond to attacks on a global scale and at a speed that only international cooperation allows.

The President of Burkina Faso, who is currently chairing ITU-IMPACT will host a meeting of the Assembly of Parties to the alliance next October in Ouagadougou. We intend to use this meeting to further enlarge the reach of the alliance, currently comprising 136 members, to most of the 193 Member States of the ITU.

We are also progressing on protecting the most fragile potential victims of cyber threats: children. We have made great progress on our Child Online Protection Initiative. I am pleased that H.E. Dame Patience Jonathan, First Lady of Nigeria, has accepted my invitation to become ITU's Champion for Child Online Protection (COP).

We are addressing all aspects of COP: legal, technical, organizational and procedural, as well as capacity building and international cooperation. It is therefore essential to foster public-private cooperation on this sensitive issue. The security of our children is at stake.

Q. With the evolution of Internet and content industry and the appearance of innovative mobile applications, do you see that digitization would be asignificant driver of sustainable economic growth?

A. Definitely. Digitization allows for an expansion of services and applications within the limited spectrum resources. The gain between digital and analog services can be twentyfold. After having witnessed two decades during which the creation of new applications and services was limited by technology, we are now in an era where digitization has transform the technological landscape. Digitization allows creators to develop new ideas, new services that better respond to modern realities, styles of life, and economic models. We must expand digitization and make digital communications accessible to all citizens of the planet. Further, we have to develop broadband, since modern services, from e-government to day-to-day applications, including health, education and banking and commercial services consume huge volumes of data and require proper bandwidth to really make a difference.

Q. What is required by the digital ecosystem to sustain itself on a symbiotic basis, especially when statistics and perceptions point to the notion that some industry players are leveraging others' successes more so than contributing to them?

A. The key is in proper and harmonized regulation and in international cooperation. As you indicate, the ecosystem is symbiotic and we can't simply have a category win while others are struggling to maintain the network operating and interconnected. On the other hand, operators also need to adapt to the change in types of traffic. Some have well understood the situation and their turnover has increased while the voice traffic was sinking. They have obviously invested in data, the Internet, but also in IT services, cloud computing and video and TV streaming. The nature of traffic has changed, so must the operators.

Still, they can engage heavy investments without any promise of returns. This is where business models have to adapt, where all players have to discuss around the same table, and where regulators have to devise proper regulatory frameworks adapted to a digital era.

We, at ITU, offer the right balance, the neutral platform that is required for these discussions to take place. Further, we represent also the interests of those Member States that are less advanced and can't take part to these discussions. We moderate, facilitate and guarantee that the solutions devised serve the entire ICT community.

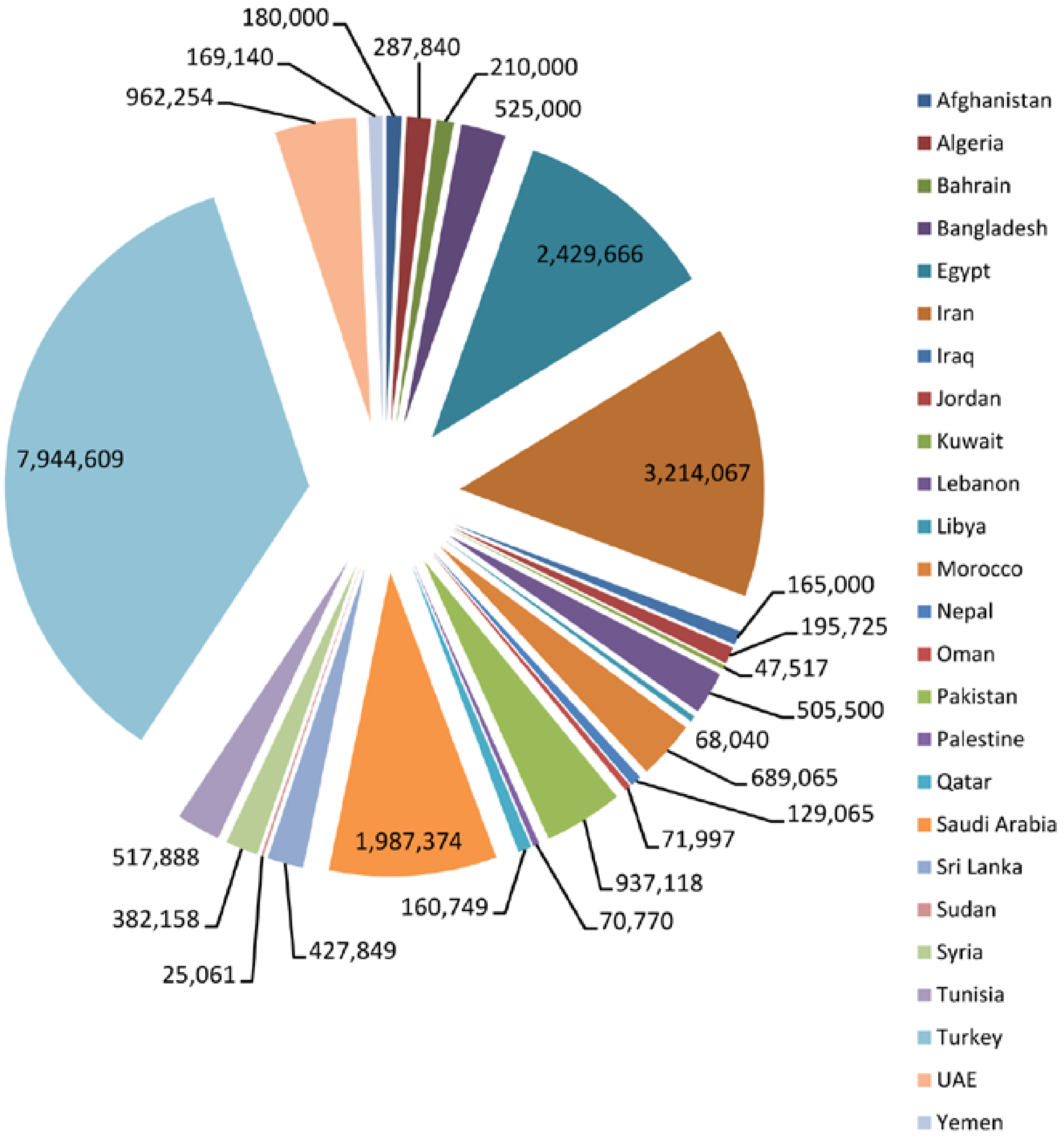
Q. What future inspirations can we expect from ITU, especially since a dire need exists to trigger ICT policy change in the SAMENA region?

A. What stroke us during the Connect Arab States Summit in Doha, Qatar last year was that a whole part of the population was considered not to be employable – a tough word to hear, because of their lack of digital articulation, as if while focusing on technology enhancements, our industry has forgotten its main goal: serving the entire community and supporting socio-economic development, and making sure that networks, services, applications and information are accessible by all.

So you can be sure that the ITU, and particularly the Telecommunication Development Bureau, will continue giving a voice to the less favored and the underserved. We will raise awareness at all levels of our Member States about the need to invest in broadband, in capacity building, in regulatory reforms. We will support these efforts at the best of our capacities.

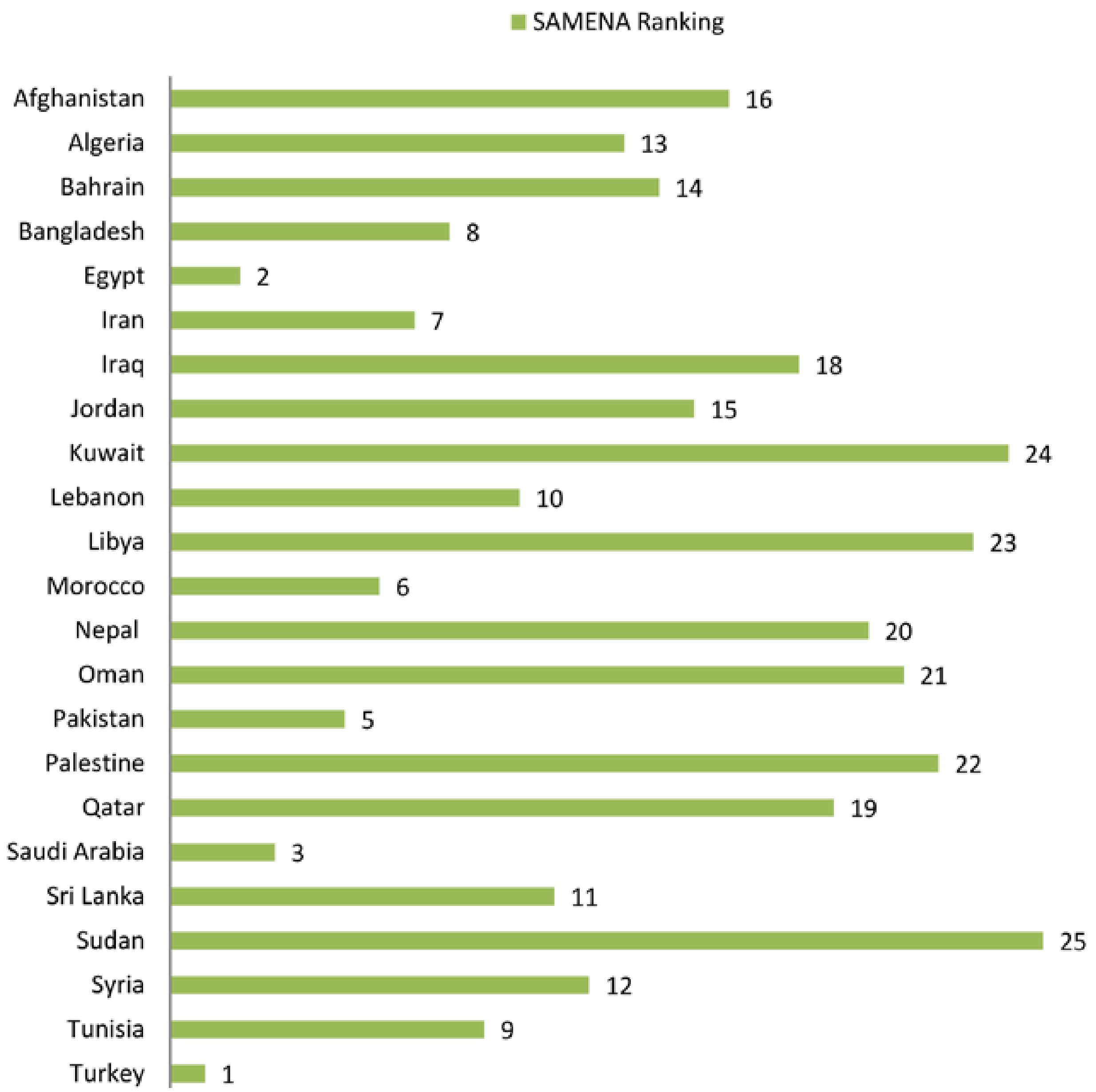
We can simply not let aside any citizen of this world on the digital road. Technology doesn't wait. This is the reason why we are always attentive to the societal impact of this industry, to make sure it provides the most, the best, for the good of mankind, without forgetting anyone.

Fixed Internet Subscribers



Research Note: Data has been taken from regulatory sources regarding the fixed line internet subscribers within the SAMENA Region. Turkey has by far the most number of fixed line internet subscribers. SAMENA Region has around 23 million fixed line internet subscribers out of which Turkey has an overwhelming 35 percent of internet users.This is due to the sophisticated FTTH infrastructure in the country.
Image Source: SAMENA Telecommunications Council
Data Source: Regulators

SAMENA Ranking - Fixed Internet Subscribers



Research Note: Ranking has been done based on the total number of fixed broadband users within the SAMENA Region. Ranking shows that Turkey, Egypt and Saudi Arabia occupy the top 3 positions. The bottom 3 positions are occupied by Libya, Kuwait and Sudan. Regionally Middle East has the most number of fixed broadband users due to better telecom infrastructure.
Image Source: SAMENA Telecommunications Council
Data Source: SAMENA Telecommunications Council

REGIONAL NEWS

Five additional graduates to join du as part of "Mubadara", HH Sheikh Majid Bin Mohammed UAE National Training Initiative

As a demonstration of its dedication to the UAE community and to furthering the career prospects of Emiratis, du has welcomed a fresh wave of UAE nationals into the fifth edition of its summer training program. The trainees include high school, Diploma and Bachelor degree students, as well as university graduates.Throughout the 2 month summer training program, trainees will join various divisions within du, including Human Resources, IT, Operations, Corporate Affairs and Enterprise Sales. They will each have individual Training Plans that will be overseen by du's National Development team and their Line Manager. Yaser Obaid, Senior Vice President of Human Resources, du, said: "Our summer training program is in line with our mission to empower young UAE nationals. We wish them every success on the program."In addition to its summer training program, du continues to provide internship opportunities to 30 students annually from Universities across the UAE. Du is honored to support the Majid Bin Mohammed UAE National Training Initiative, which the company has participated in as a strategic partner since 2012.

Nawras CEO opens pleasingly different store in Al Buraimi

Nawras is excited to announce the official opening of its 29th store nationwide in the prime location of Lulu Hypermarket in Al Buraimi. The new store featuring the signature vibrant Nawras colors and retail environment, is showcasing a fun and innovative approach to communications and bringing the full range of pleasingly different Nawras products and services to the Al Buraimi Governorate.Feras Al Shaikh, Nawras Consumer Sales Director, said, "This is an exciting opportunity for Nawras to reach more people in Al Buraimi and across the entire Governorate. With this new store, we are able to cater for the growing needs of customers by providing a one stop shop for all our customers' communications requirements, especially the very popular Home Broadband and Nawras Mousbak packages. Naturally, all Nawras customers can also enjoy caring after sales service from our Customer Champions."Opened by Ross Cormack, Nawras CEO, and Said Al Shamsi, Nawras Premium Distributor in the region, the latest dynamic store offers customers the 'zonal' design first introduced at the Muscat Grand Mall flagship store which has since set the benchmark for all new Nawras stores.

Etisalat poised for influx of Hot Technology

Etisalat Group and Samsung recently signed a deal that will lead to an influx of some of the most sought after telecommunications technology in Etisalat's 15 operating countries in the Middle East, Africa and Asia."By securing this innovative partnership, we are benefiting communities in our operating countries and helping provide a richer communications experience," said Rainer Rathgeber, the Chief Commercial Officer at Etisalat Group. "Our customers will have a plentiful supply of Samsung's cutting-edge mobile technology and some products will get to the market quicker than before."Mr. Rathgeber signed the memorandum of understanding at a ceremony in Seoul, South Korea, earlier this week with Sunghak Jang, Vice-President, Samsung Mobile business, Middle East and Africa. The agreement promises cooperation in areas such as product release, pricing, sales, public relations and marketing, distribution and joint events.

As a result of the deal, Samsung will deliver a wider range of products to Etisalat that will give customers more choice and priority access to popular models. The partners will also team up for roadshows, workshops and product launches.

STC renews warning of calls deluding customers of winning financial prizes

STC has renewed warning customers of illusive local and international calls from anonymous persons claiming that the customer has won a financial prize from the company. Such people would require the customer remit a credit to a certain number in order for him to receive the prize, send the number of a recharge voucher or disclose some personal information such as the credit transfer PIN, AC number or credit card number. STC called on those who receive such messages to report via a text message to 800825 showing the calling number and will be handled and tracked by concerned authorities.It is worth mentioning that STC warning was a result of several reports it had received from some customers especially in this specific time of the year where contests and offers are provided by most organizations. These reports indicated that the customers have been subject to abuses by unknown caller who contacts the customer telling him that he has won a big financial prize putting forward financial requirements of the customer in order to get that illusive prize.

Mobily launches new roaming packages at competitive prices

Mobily launched new roaming packages which allow subscribers to make phone calls and send SMS in addition to receiving phone calls and surfing the internet at competitive prices. The company said it launched this offer which expires on October 22nd to keep up with Eid Al Fiter and Eid Al Adha seasons reflecting the company's commitment to meet customers' needs and to allow them to keep in touch with the friends and families while traveling outside the Kingdom.The launch of these packages is consistent with the 55 halalas offer previously launched by Mobily to receive the phone calls and use the Internet while roaming.The reliable roaming services Mobily provides reflect the company's leadership where it held a number of agreements with global operators to offer the best services to its customers at the lowest possible prices around the world.

Intelsat GVF training program surpasses milestoneof 1,000 sponsored trainees

Intelsat, the world's leading provider of satellite services, announced that more than 1,000 industry professionals have undergone training in the Intelsat-sponsored Global VSAT Forum (GVF) training program. Primary and subcontractor bandwidth customers, third-party installers, field service organizations and operators supporting customers are eligible for free or discounted Intelsat-sponsored GVF online training. The training is offered as one of several elements of the Intelsat Interference Mitigation Initiative (I3), an effort aimed at reducing radio frequency interference (RFI). Intelsat supports the GVF Product Quality Assurance Framework, which sets guidelines to improve manufacturers' equipment used by its customers.As a founding member of the Space Data Association, Intelsat has a strong history of emphasizing leadership on initiatives to mitigate signal interference and improve space situational awareness. Intelsat has partnered with several satellite operators and industry groups, as well as dozens of customers and equipment manufacturers, to make RFI mitigation a top priority.

Omantel launches 4G Speedtestcompetition

Omantel launched a unique competition to all its 4G customers to test the high speeds that Omantel 4G network provides. The speed testing results to be shared on two of the most-famous social media platforms "twitter and Instagram". The competition allows customers of the first and fastest 4G network in the Sultanate to share snapshots of the speeds they experienced in different areas covered by Omantel extensive 4G network and win valuable prizes including a fully-paid trip to the Abu Dhabi F1 grand prix along with other stunning 4G LTE devices. Captured images to be shared on twitter and Instagram and winners will be divided into two categories, first most liked and re-tweeted picture, and the second one with highest speed captures.
The first winner with the most liked and re-tweeted picture will be winning a fully-paid trip for two persons to the Abu Dhabi F1 Grand Prix in November 2013, whereas the second to the sixth winner will be awarded Samsung Galaxy S4 LTE smartphones. Moreover, the first highest speed entry will be winning the new Sony Xperia Z LTE Tablet, and the second to fourth winners will be awarded LTE MiFi Modem.

STC reduces calls and messages to Egypt by 50%

STC offered postpaid and prepaid and Lana mobile customers 50% discount on the occasion of the national day of Arab Republic of Egypt. The discount covers voice and video calls SMS and MMS messages placed to Egypt on Tuesday July 23 2013 throughoutthat day. STC offer in one of the many similar offers to several countries via STC international gateway with its superior capacity and its high capabilities of accommodating and transiting all international calls from and to Saudi Arabia and the outside world. The aim is to enable STC customers being expatriates or nationals who have contacts with the people of those countries enjoy the discounts offered on making calls to their relatives and friends in their home countries for half the actual cost.

REGULATORY & POLICY NEWS

NTA issues latest market report for June

The Nepal Telecommunications Authority (NTA) has published its latest Management Information System (MIS) report on the local market for the period 15 May 2013 – 14 June 2013, showing that there were a total of 18.557 million mobile users in the country at that date, up from 17.395 million at mid-March, a cellular penetration of 70.04%.Of the total, some 10.346 million were signed up with GSM market leader Ncell, while state owned incumbent Nepal Telecom (NT) had 7.380 million GSM and 829,447 CDMA-based customers.In the fixed line sphere, the watchdog reported that Nepal was home to a total of 835,437 PSTN and wireless in the local loop (WiLL) subscribers at mid-June, a fixed teledensity of 3.15%, of which NT claimed 754,862 (639,968 PSTN and 114,894 WiLL), United Telecom Limited (UTL) had 71,797 (WiLL), Nepal Satellite Telecom had 2,950 (WiLL), STM Telecom Sanchar had 5,230 (PSTN) and Smart Telecom claimed 598 (PSTN). There were also a total of 1.498 million Limited Mobility Services (LMS) subscribers at the same date, the NTA said, mainly attributable to UTL (638,037) and Smart (713,302).Furthermore, the watchdog reported that data and internet services reached a total of 6.841 million subscriptions at mid-June 2013, including 112,869 ADSL lines (all NT), 1,886 WiMAX connections (NT), 18,374 cable broadband (all internet service providers [ISPs]) and 56,896 fibre-optic and wireless broadband (ISPs). Finally, 2.912 million users are hooked up via mobile internet connections based on GPRS/EDGE/W-CDMA technology and 136,573 through CDMA2000 1xEV-DO.

New telco practice notifications to benefit Australian customers

Key guidance on how the telecommunications industry can comply with new requirements to notify customers about their monthly usage has been published by Australia's Communications Alliance.Publication of the Industry Guidance Note coincided with confirmation from the industry regulator, the ACMA that Telstra, Optus and Vodafone are demonstrating a high level of compliance with new, tougher, complaint handling rules.The upgraded usage notification and complaint handling requirements both form part of the upgraded Telecommunications Consumer Protections (TCP) Code, which was created by Communications Alliance and stakeholders, and registered by the ACMA late last year.From 1 September 2013, large service providers will be required to provide usage notifications to residential customers who are using included-value mobile plans and internet post-paid plans with an included data allowance (where the included value or data is not unlimited or shaped/throttled) and where the plan was introduced to the market after 1 March 2012.Similar requirements will be placed on small providers from 1 September 2014, although many providers have already moved to introduce the notification system in advance of the deadlines.The usage notifications are required where the customer has reached 50%, 85% and 100% of their monthly included allowance or expenditure, and must be sent no later than 48 hours after the Customer has reached those usage points.Communications Alliance CEO, John Stanton, said the notifications were an important tool for industry to help customers manage their monthly spend and avoid unexpectedly high bills.

NMHH reports strong take-up for DOCSIS 3.0

Hungary's telecoms regulator the National Media and Telecommunications Authority (NMHH) reports that by 30 June 2013, 332,782 of the country's total of 907,802 cable broadband subscriptions were hooked up via DOCSIS 3.0-based technology.Further, the watchdog notes that the total number of xDSL subscriptions stood at 767,341 compared to 767,606 at 31 March 2013, while FTTx connections climbed to 337,473, from 330,526 three months earlier. As at 30 June, the NMHH estimates that Magyar Telekom's T-Home division was the leading domesticprovider of high speed internet services, with a market share of 35.4%, followed by UPC Hungary (21.9%) and DIGI with 13.8%.

Ecuadorian number portability accelerates

Ecuador's National Telecommunications Secretariat (Senatel) has issued a report showing that the cumulative total of ported mobile phone numbers reached 573,269 at the end of June 2013, since the introduction of mobile number portability (MNP) in Q4 2009. Senatel's data also showed that MNP take-up has accelerated, reports TeleSemana, as in the first six months of this year alone there were 268,696 ports, or nearly double the total recorded in the first two years of the service.

Telecom regulator pushing for network sharing to boost competition in UAE markets

The telecom regulator in the UAE is set to implement new regulations allowing the two local operators access to each other's network infrastructure, a move that will likely boost competition and lower retail prices in the Gulf state, according to a draft determination seen by Zawya Dow Jones.The Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) has sent the determination to Abu Dhabi-based Emirates Telecommunications Corp (Etisalat) and Dubai's Emirates Integrated Telecommunications Co (du) for feedback after months of discussions and consultations involving both the companies.The regulator expects to have the document approved by its board before the end of the year, according to a person familiar with the matter, who declined to be named. It will however implement the "new remedies" - offering consumers across the UAE a choice on broadband and phone services - only after consultation with the stakeholders, according to the determination. Etisalat was not immediately available for comment, while a du spokesperson declined to comment.Currently du offers broadband and fixed-line services in certain parts of the country, while Etisalat has a far wider reach. The TRA draft determination pushes for better terms of interconnectivity between the two operators in terms of fixed and mobile calls, as well as bitstream access for broadband services.

CMT begins consultation on future broadband regulation for next gen networks

Spanish telecoms regulator the Comision del Mercado de las Telecomunicacinoes (CMT) has announced the launch of a public consultation regarding the development of the country's broadband sector. In publishing the consultation the CMT said that it was aiming to obtain the views of the industry on new regulations related to next generation networks (NGNs) that are expected to be implemented during the period 2014-2016.Among the topics up for discussion is a proposal that would allow the regulator to set different access obligations dependent on the level of competition in a given geographical area, while the CMT is also looking to examine whether fixed line incumbent and market leader Telefonica Espana's should be obliged to provide a wholesale service over its fibre-optic infrastructure in a similar manner to those which it provides over its copper network. Further, questions have been posed over whether to revise the current regulation under which Telefonica is only required to offer wholesale access for broadband services with downlink speeds of 30Mbps or less, be it over copper or fiber.

NCA penalizes operators for breaching QoS parameters

Ghana's telecommunication regulator the National Communication Authority (NCA) has imposed a fine of GHS960,000 (USD461,000) on the country's six mobile operators, Ventures Africa reports, after they fell foul of its Quality of Service (QoS) standards.The indicators measured by the NCA include the Call Congestion Rate (CCR), Call Setup Time (CST), Call Drop Rate (CDR), and Stand-alone Dedicated Control Channel (SDCCH) Congestion Rate. MTN Ghana received the highest fine of the six firms, and was penalised GHS350,000 for breaches of its CCR and CST obligations in four of the country's ten regions in March and April 2013. Meanwhile Tigo was fined GHS250,000 for defaulting on its CST commitments in six regions, while Expresso received GHS200,000 for breaching the CCR obligations in four regions.Elsewhere Glo was slapped with a GHS100,000 levy for not meeting the quality standards in the Brong Ahafo region, while Airtel and Vodafone Ghana were fined GHS50,000 each, for defaulting on their respective CCR and CST commitments in the Northern region.

Ofcom to permit 4G refarming

Having concluded a consultation on proposals to amend the country's 900MHz, 1800MHz and 2100MHz mobile licenses, UK telecoms regulator Ofcom has issued a statement setting out its final decisions on the matter. To that end, the watchdog has confirmed that it will proceed with the variations that permit the use of LTE and WiMAX technology in all three of the aforementioned bands, while it also said it will increase the maximum permitted power in the 900MHz licenses by 3dB. Further, Ofcom will update a number of terms and conditions in these concessions 'in order to align them more closely with the equivalent terms and conditions in the recently awarded 800MHz and 2.6GHz licenses'.While only Vodafone UK and Hutchison 3G UK (H3G UK) had actually requested licence variations prior to the publication of Ofcom's consultation, the regulator confirmed that both O2 UK and EE have since called for their licenses to be amended. As such, Vodafone and O2 have both had their respective 900MHz and 1800MHz licenses updated, while the 2100MHz concessions held by Vodafone, H3G UK, O2 UK and EE have also been varied.Commenting on the development, Ofcom said in statement detailing the plans: 'This decision delivers a long standing objective to liberalize all mobile licenses so as to remove the regulatory barriers to deployment of the latest available mobile technology.

A SNAPSHOT OF REGULATORY ACTIVITIES IN THE SAMENA REGION

Active Consultations & Invitations for Feedback

Oman

The Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) invites all interested parties for their views and comments on the Public Consultation on Draft Decision in Regard to Dealing with Telecom Equipment & Activities. TRA seeks through the Public Consultation to give a chance to all stakeholders and interested parties to give their views and comments on the new decisions which aim to regulate the telecom sector. Interested parties are requested when providing their comments to specify contact details and to support their comments with analysis and comparative studies. All comments would be taken into consideration. The Authority is however not bound to accept any or all received comments. August 10, 2013 has been fixed as the last date for submission of comments. (July 10, 2013) tra.gov.om

Country-wise Policy & Regulatory Developments

Afghanistan
Board Chairman: Mr. Abdul WakilShergul
[Afghanistan Telecommunication Regulatory Authority (ATRA)]

Afghanistan's Ministry of Communications and IT (MCIT) has signed an agreement, the seventh of its kind, with cellcos to extend wireless networks to un-served areas. Afghan Telecom (Aftel), Afghanistan Wireless Communication Company (AWCC) and Roshan were selected to roll out 240 new base stations in areas not yet covered by telecoms services. The deployment will be bankrolled by the Telecommunication Development Fund (TDF) and will see the new towers installed in 173 districts across 34 provinces, covering approximately 480,000 people in total, within the next 18 months. (July 25, 2013) telegeography.com

Algeria
Chairperson: Ms. Zohra Derdouri
[Regulatory Authority for Post & Telecommunication (ARPT)]

Minister of Posts, IT and Communications has confirmed that 3G services will be introduced to the country in November 2013, with the regulator ARPT scheduled to launch an auction of 3G/3G+ licenses on August 1. In April 2013, the Algerian government postponed the long-awaited tender in order to complete the acquisition of local mobile operator Djezzy. The Algerian government has instead found a way to bypass current legislation, which prohibits companies from participating in license auctions if they are currently undergoing a change in their ownership. Minister stated that the watchdog ARPT is a sovereign authority, and as such, it will have the final say whether or not Djezzy's application is

accepted. Although negotiations between Djezzy's current owner, Russian-backed Vimpelcom group, and Algeriers regarding the planned purchase have reportedly stalled on numerous occasions, Minister noted that discussions between both sides are 'currently ongoing and on track'.
(July 29, 2013) La Liberte News Agency

Four of Algeria's public sector companies Algerie Telecom, Sonatrach, Sonelgaz and National Rail Transport Company (SNTF) have signed a MoU for the management of the country's fiber-optic network. The document outlines the establishment of a joint venture the Company of Telecommunications Infrastructure Algeria (CITA) with a capital of DZD500 million (US$6.33 million), and shareholding distribution as following: Algerian incumbent telco Algerie Telecom will have 55% of the shares; national oil company Sonatrach and electricity and gas distribution company Sonelgaz will have 20% of the stake each, while SNTF will account for the remaining shares. CITA's main responsibilities will include the implementation of the strategy for sharing and interconnection of alternative transportation systems, in addition to the management of surplus capacity and excess resources of alternative fiber networks.
(July 10, 2013) Nam News Network

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

Batelco Group the international telecommunications company with operations across 16 countries, announced its financial results for the six months ended June 30, 2013 which include results from the newly acquired Island Units from Cable and Wireless Communications (CWC) on 3rd April 2013.

- Gross Revenues of BD170.7m ($452.8m) for the period;
- EBITDA of BD56.6m ($150.1m) representing a 33% margin;
- Consolidated Net Profit of BD27.0m ($71.6m) for the period;
- Successful integration of Islands portfolio in the second quarter;
- Subscriber base of 8.6 million, an increase of 24% YoY and 13% QoQ;
- Further diversification of Group revenues with 50% of revenues and 48% of EBITDA now sourced from markets outside Bahrain;
- Significant cash balances totaling BD153.1m ($406.1m) and Investment Grade credit ratings from Fitch and Standard & Poor's Ratings Services;
- Earnings per share of 17.1 fils and an approved interim cash dividend of 10 fils per share.

For the first six months of the year, the Group reported Net Profit of BD27.0m ($71.6m) versus BD34.6m ($91.8m) for the corresponding period in 2012, a decrease of 22% year over year and a 2% increase since last quarter. Profits for the period was impacted by a number of one off expenses associated with the acquisition and related financing. EBITDA for the period was BD56.6m ($150.1m), representing a healthy margin of 33%, compared to EBITDA of BD55.8m (US$148.0m) for the corresponding period in 2012, a 1% increase year over year and a 58% increase quarter on quarter. The Group's Gross Revenue for the period, which stood at BD170.7m (US$452.8m) was up 10% from BD155.3m ($411.9m), year over year and 40% quarter over quarter. Operating Profit for the period was BD33.5m ($88.9m) versus BD38.5m ($102.1m) for the corresponding period in 2012 reflecting a 13% decline year over year but a 73% increase over the first quarter of 2013. In line with ongoing efforts to diversify revenues and maximize investments, the Group saw increased contributions from overseas markets both existing and through the 10 new markets added. At the end of the six month period, 50% of Revenues and 48% of EBITDA was attributable to operations outside of Bahrain. This is compared with 39% of Revenues and 35% of EBITDA in the first half of 2012 and 42% of revenues and 39% of EBITDA during the first quarter of 2013. The Group's balance sheet also remained strong. As of 30 June 2013, there was a substantial cash balance of BD153.1m ($406.1m). Earnings per share were also healthy at 17.1 fils and the Board of Directors approved an interim cash dividend for shareholders of 10 fils per share for the six month period. Commenting on the results, Batelco Chairman, Shaikh Hamad Bin Abdulla Al Khalifa, said, "We're pleased to announce our results for the first half of the year, which were enhanced by the inclusion, for the first time, of our recently acquired Islands businesses. As we have said, this was an accretive transaction that has enabled us to strengthen our financial performance and emerge as a more profitable and cash generative communications Group. Diversification has long been an important part of our strategy and we've reached a milestone with half of our revenues and a considerably higher percentage of profits now being sourced from outside of our home market, where we are looking to continue to offset the impact of ongoing and aggressive competition." He added, "With the ongoing integration of these businesses and following a number of one off expenses incurred during the quarter, we expect to see an even more positive contribution from our Island assets as we go forward. This, coupled with the progress we are making in improving our competitiveness across all existing operations, will enable us to deliver even stronger results for shareholders in the periods to come. Our commitment to shareholder value remains a priority and is reflected in yet another solid half year dividend today approved by the Board." (July 31, 2013) ameinfo.com

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

The Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC) has sent a recommendation to the Ministry of Posts & Telecommunications (MoPT) to approve the issuing of a nationwide WiMAX (mobile and fixed-wireless) 2.5GHz broadband network operating license to Russian-backed Bangladeshi ISP Ollo, currently operates fixed-wireless 3.5GHz WiMAX services in Dhaka. Ollo's proposed new license fee is set at BDT2.15 billion (US$27.2 million) the same price paid by the two existing licensees Banglalion and Qubee in 2008 whilst the regulator also proposed that up to two new mobile WiMAX concessions could be issued, with the future option for all WiMAX operators to evolve to Long Term Evolution (LTE) mobile broadband technology subject to individual permission from the authorities and additional fees. (July 16, 2013) The Daily Star

Bangladesh's mobile networks are seeking another two years to deploy Mobile Number Portability in the country. Last month, the telecoms regulator, the BTRC outlined plans to introduce MNP, with the expected launch due at the end of this year. However, in a letter to the regulator, the Association of Mobile Telecom Operators of Bangladesh

(Amtob) says that the mobile networks first need to deploy their 3G networks, and that the cost of adding MNP would require a large investment. Amtob Secretary General TIM told that they have sent a letter to the regulator, clearing our position on the timeframe and are now waiting for them to call a meeting. He added that their research hadn't found a country yet that had implemented MNP in less than two years. A lot of financial, commercial and technical issues are involved with this. So, we need to think more before taking the final decision, he added. (July 10, 2013) The Dhaka Tribune

Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC) has announced the selection of 159 applicants to receive VoIP Service Provider (VSP) licenses, which permit retail international voice call termination. Following the notification the chosen companies have 30 days to pay a BDT500,000 (US$6,300) license acquisition fee. BTRC previously announced a list of 844 companies which had applied for the VSP licenses, aimed at significantly reducing the number of illegal international VoIP calls and increasing the state's revenue from the international voice market. Existing domestic mobile operators and international gateway operators were prohibited from applying. According to the VSP license guidelines, 45% of revenues from each VoIP call will go to the government, 13.25% to the wholesale international voice gateway (IGW) operators, 15% to interconnection exchange (ICX) operators, 20% to Access Network Service (ANS) providers, leaving 6.75% revenue from each call for the retail VSP operators.
(July 5, 2013) telegeography.com

The Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC) has extended the deadline for prospective bidders to submit their applications for the upcoming 3G mobile license auction to August 1, 2013, from the previous scheduled date of July 10. As it stands the scheduled auction date remains unchanged (September 2). (July 2, 2013) The Dhaka Tribune

Mobile phone users of six telecom operators reached around 103 million till May 2013 according to BTRC, by adding nearly 3 million new users from the previous month. According to the Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC), the subscriber base was 100.1 million at the end of the April. Besides, total internet connectivity has moved to 34 million by this time. In May, Grameenphone subscriber base reached 43.263 million following Banglalink Digital Communications Limited 26.574 million, Robi Axiata Limited (Robi) 22.192 million, Airtel Bangladesh Limited (Airtel) 7.662 million, Pacific Bangladesh Telecom Limited (Citycell) 1.408 million and Teletalk Bangladesh Ltd. (Teletalk) 1.897 million.
(July 1, 2013) thefinancialexpress-bd.com

Egypt
Executive President: Dr. AmrBadawi
[National Telecommunication Regulatory Authority (NTRA)]

Minister of Communications and Information Technology Atef Helmy has said that the government will announce fees for a fourth mobile provider license within weeks. The move is an attempt to restructure the telecommunications sector, inject new investment, and provide employment opportunities and financial resources. "We drew on the help of a German company to determine what the fees for that service should be," Helmy said, adding that the license would be granted to Telecom Egypt to help it face fierce market competition. He also said that the three existing mobile providers would be allowed to apply for licenses for the land line and international communications portal. He added that Telecom Egypt is negotiating with them to provide the service through its network, as the license does not include access to frequencies for the time being. Mobinil and Vodafone owe Telecom Egypt approximately LE8.8 billion going back years, a transaction which will be subject to judicial arbitration. Etisalat owes the company a further LE300.(July 18, 2013) egyptindependent.com

The proposal by Egyptian regulators to allow all four main telecoms companies to provide universal services looks set to shake up the industry, encouraging growth in data service amid a tight competitive environment. On May 12, Telecom Egypt (TE), the monopoly fixed-line operator, announced it would be ready to launch its new mobile network by July once it is awarded a universal telecoms license by the National Telecommunication Regulatory Authority (NTRA). In 2012, the NTRA revealed its plans to issue universal licenses in 2013 to TE , plus mobile operators Vodafone Egypt (in which TE has a 45% stake), Mobinil and Etisalat Egypt. This will allow the mobile companies to enter the fixed-line market to compete with TE, using the incumbent's infrastructure, while also allowing TE to operate its own standalone mobile operator, which according to local press reports will take the form of a virtual network operator (MVNO). TE is 80% owned by the government, with the remainder listed on the Egyptian Stock Exchange and London Stock Exchange. The company has seen its profits slow in recent years as fixed-line activity gives way to increasing mobile usage, but TE's shift into the mobile market is partly intended to offset the decline of its core business. The company has already had some success in diversification. For example, subsidiary internet business TE Data has played an important role in bolstering the parent company's earnings. TE Data's revenues rose 28.9% in the first quarter of this year on the same period of 2012. (July 9, 2013) zawya.com

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

Nine local and international consortiums submitted applications to the government to complete the National Broadband Network project, which seeks to provide all public schools with high-speed Internet, according to the Ministry of Information and Communications Technology. The tender committee at the ministry is receiving applications for completing the project until August 22, after which it will start assessing the bids and select the winning consortiums to complete the project, Nader Thneibat, secretary general of the ministry told. About 35% of the project has been completed so far at a total cost of US$36 million, he said. Once completed, the project will help boost e-education and e-health services in the Kingdom through high-speed Internet and the capacities it will provide, Thneibat added. Some 750 schools, as well as comprehensive and primary healthcare centers, will be connected to the network under the project, he said. Work on the project was halted in 2008 due to financial difficulties faced by the government. In 2012, the government encouraged local telecom companies and others to form partnerships to complete the project, but none of them showed interest. Later that year, the Cabinet approved floating a tender to go ahead with the project. Work on the project started in 2003 with the aim of connecting all public schools and universities to a nationwide fiber optic network. The project was expanded in 2007 to include government agencies, healthcare centers and hospitals. (July 25, 2013) The Jordan Times

Sales of mobile subscriptions and pre-paid cards have dropped by roughly 15% since the government doubled taxes on wireless services earlier this month. A number of local small business owners as saying that sales have suffered since the introduction of the higher tax rate, in some cases by as much as 20%. Zain CEO was also quoted as saying that the company's sale of pre-paid cards dropped by around 10%-15% since the tax hike, adding that he expected revenues to drop by around JOD113 million (US$158.99 million) annually as a result. Multiple-SIM users, previously a lucrative segment of the market for pre-paid voucher sellers, were reportedly on the decline as the tax increase has made maintaining several phone subscriptions unsustainable. Another major cause of the decline was attributed to the sudden increase in price for SIM cards and pre-paid vouchers, causing confusion amongst retailers and customers. (July 24, 2013) The Jordan Times

The Jordanian government has doubled the rate it was planning to apply to mobile phones and also hiked the taxes to be applied to phone subscriptions. The move was widely expected, and condemned by the mobile industry, which is reviewing its commitment to the country's upcoming spectrum auction.

The special tax on mobile devices which had been expected to come in a 8% will in fact be implemented at 16% instead. The tax on mobile subscriptions has also been doubled from 12% to 24%. The telecoms sector is said to be responsible for 14% of the country's GDP and employs more than 60,000 people. In most countries, raising taxes is seen as slowing mobile phone adoption, however, in Jordan, the population penetration rate has already exceeded 100%, which may have reassured the government that it could raise taxes without impacting on subscriber growth rates. The government plans to auction of additional radio spectrum in September, but all three mobile networks have previously indicated that they will have to review their intentions to bid for the spectrum in light of the higher taxes on their services. (July 13, 2013) The Jordan Times

The Telecommunications Regulatory Commission (TRC) has confirmed that it has no plans to block messaging service WhatsApp, shutting down speculation that it would follow the lead of Saudi Arabia and Egypt in blocking the app. TRC told that they have not asked any of the country's operators to block WhatsApp for any reason and they don't coordinate with any country on this issue. Saudi Arabia and Egypt had previously unveiled plans to block the app, citing commercial and security reasons. (July 3, 2013) The Jordan Times

Kuwait
Minister of Communication: Salem Mutheyeb Ahmed Al-Utheina

[Ministry of Communication (MOC)]

Six months after launching Long Term Evolution (LTE) services in Kuwait, the country's largest cellco in terms of subscribers Zain has switched 9.3% of its mobile customers to the 4G technology. According to Zain Kuwait's COO, the LTE subscribers were responsible for 41% of the company's data traffic in the January-June period of 2013, while 3G subscribers, who represent 55% of the total subscribers, accounted for 56% of the data traffic by that date. The executive, however, added that although the LTE network has boosted demand, it is a significant challenge for mobile operators to monetize it, as the cost of investment in LTE infrastructure is immense. He also stated that LTE can become the primary method of internet access. You don't even need the fixed network in Kuwait. It is designed to provide up to 100Mbps and we have seen 85Mbps average download speeds. (July 19, 2013) Global Telecoms Business

Kuwait's government has no imminent plans to ban OTT applications such as WhatsApp or Viber, although they have not ruled out a possible ban in the future. Kuwait's State Minister for Housing Affairs and Minister of Communications told that the ministry has not yet studied the matter. A number of countries in the region have proposed bans on the use of OTT and VoIP apps where there isn't a route into monitoring the communications by the respective country's security services. (July 16, 2013) Arab Times

Kuwait is the third largest spender on Information and Communication Technology (ICT) infrastructure in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), according to Kuwait Financial Centre (Markaz) recently published executive summary of its report on the Kuwait Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Sector. ICT spending grew at a compounded annual growth rate (CAGR) of 12.6% between 2003-2011 and is expected to moderate to a 6.4% annualized growth over the next three years. Markaz, in the report analyzed the status of the sector and discusses challenges and investment opportunities in the GCC Education sector, predicts that total ICT spending will reach US$28 billion between 2011-2015. The bulk of ICT spending, about 80% (US$21.3 billion), is directed towards communications, followed distantly by computer hardware and software. This projection is in line with the larger picture in the region as a whole, where the key driver in ICT spending remains the telecommunication sector. The report notes that the sector is in constant growth, in tandem with economic and demographic trends in Kuwait. This creates a great need for capacity building and maintenance. (July 8, 2013) zawya.com

Lebanon
Acting Chairman & CEO: Dr. Imad Hoballah

[Telecommunication Regulatory Authority (TRA)]

Telecom Minister Nicolas Sehnaoui said that more than half of Lebanon's telephone substations were linked to a long-awaited fiber-optics network, and vowed to extend coverage to the remaining areas within the next six months. "After two years of work, the fiber optics network is ready in 170 telephone areas, and we sent a letter to [state-run telephone land line operator] OGERO to detail their financial and technical requirements to expand it to the remaining areas, which do not yet have DSL," he said. The minister said that around six months were needed before some 500,000 households in 541 towns covered by 118 stations would benefit from the expansion of the network. "The project is a part of balanced development ... and no Lebanese will be without fast Internet by the end of the year," Sehnaoui said. Average Internet speed in Lebanon stands currently at 2.62 Mbps. (July 26, 2013) zawya.com

Libya
Minister: Osama Siala

[(Ministry of Telecommunications & Informatics)]

Kuwaiti telecommunications provider Zain said it has no plans to leave Sudan and looking to extend its business into Libya. The group plans to access Libya, which its telecom sector remains in state hands. Government-controlled Libyan Post, Telecommunication and Information Technology Co (LIPTIC) owns the country's two mobile operators Al Madar and Libyana as well as Libya's main internet provider, with the telecoms sector isolated from much foreign competition during Muammar Gaddafi's 42-year rule. Libya had planned to tender a management contract for LIPTIC, seen by analysts as a first step to privatization, but this tender has been put on hold. (July 8, 2013) menafn.com

Morocco
Director General: M. Azdine El MountassirBillah
[Agence Nationale de Reglementation des Telecommunications (ANRT)]
Etisalat is considering entering into a partnership with Moroccan investment group Caisse de Depot et de Gestion (CDG), which manages the state's pension funds, for the acquisition of French media group Vivendi's 53% controlling stake in Morocco's largest telco in terms of subscribers Maroc Telecom. The Moroccan government requested that Etisalat should take on a local partner in order to gain approval for its bid; the government wanted to ensure that the new owner of the company would invest substantially in broadband and mobile infrastructure. CDG's chief executive Anas Alami said: 'The law allows us to take up to 10% of Maroc Telecom, which it is already a lot for us.' However, CDG cannot take a larger than 10% stake in Maroc Telecom as it already controls 30% of rival network operator Medi Telecom (Meditel), along with Orange Group (40%) and Morocco's FinanceCom (30%). Mr. Alami, however, did not clarify if CDG would buy part of Vivendi's 53% majority stake or the 17% of Maroc Telecom that is currently floated on the stock exchange, as Moroccan Finance Minister Nizar Baraka previously told Reuters that the government's 30% stake in the company was not for sale. Vivendi confirmed the receipt of two binding offers for its 53% controlling stake in Maroc Telecom from Etisalat and Ooredoo. In June 2013 the latter withdrew its bid from the tender in a move which left Etisalat as the sole bidder for Morocco's biggest wireline and mobile network provider, currently valued at EUR4.2 billion (US$5.6 billion). French media company Vivendi Universal holds 53% of Maroc Telecom via its wholly owned subsidiary Societe de Participation dans les Telecommunications. Since Maroc Telecom is 30% owned by the state, the Moroccan government will have the final say in Vivendi's eventual choice of buyer. (July 17, 2013) Al Arabia

Nepal
Chairman: Mr. Digambar Jha
[Nepal Telecommunication Authority (NTR)]
The Nepal Telecommunications Authority (NTA) has published its latest Management Information System (MIS) report on the local market for the period May 15, 2013 –June 14, 2013, showing that there were a total of 18.557 million mobile users in the country at that date, up from 17.395 million at mid-March, a cellular penetration of 70.04%. Of the total, some 10.346 million were signed up with GSM market leader Ncell, while state owned incumbent Nepal Telecom (NT) had 7.380 million GSM and 829,447 CDMA-based customers. In the fixed line sphere, the watchdog reported that Nepal was home to a total of 835,437 PSTN and wireless in the local loop (WiLL) subscribers at mid-June, a fixed teledensity of 3.15%, of which NT claimed 754,862 (639,968 PSTN and 114,894 WiLL), United Telecom Limited (UTL) had 71,797 (WiLL), Nepal Satellite Telecom had 2,950 (WiLL), STM Telecom Sanchar had 5,230 (PSTN) and Smart Telecom claimed 598 (PSTN). There were also a total of 1.498 million Limited Mobility Services (LMS) subscribers at the same date, the NTA said, mainly attributable to UTL (638,037) and Smart (713,302). Furthermore, the watchdog reported that data and internet services reached a total of 6.841 million subscriptions at mid-June 2013, including 112,869 ADSL lines (all NT), 1,886 WiMAX connections (NT), 18,374 cable broadband (all internet service providers [ISPs]) and 56,896 fibre-optic and wireless broadband (ISPs). Finally, 2.912 million users are hooked up via mobile internet connections based on GPRS/EDGE/W-CDMA technology and 136,573 through CDMA2000 1xEV-DO. (July 30, 2013) telegeography.com

The state committee formed to oversee the process of finding a strategic partner for Nepal Telecom (NT) has taken a decision to establish a sub-committee to explore potential partners, prepare the legal framework for privatization and prepare bid documents before sending proposals to the cabinet, revealed in a statements from Finance Ministry undersecretary Basu Sharma. (July 9, 2013) ekantipur.com

Oman
Chief Executive Officer: Dr. Hamed Al-Rawahi
[Telecommunication Regulatory Authority (TRA)]
According to the latest figures from Oman's Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA), country ended March 31, 2013 with a total 122,124 fixed broadband subscribers, an increase of 7.8% from 113,324 three months earlier. Active mobile broadband customers grew 15.4% quarter-on-quarter to 1.899 million in Q1 2013, while total mobile services subscribers increased from 5.278 million at the end of December 2012 to 5.282 million (including 496,197 customers of resellers) three months later. Pre-paid users made up the vast majority (90.9%) of total mobile subscribers at the end of March 2013, down slightly from 91.2% at the end of 2012. According to the TRA's report, fixed telephony lines in service are continuing to climb, reaching 331,596 as of March 31, 2013, up by 8.9% quarter-on-quarter. (July 23, 2013) tra.gov.om

A consortium that includes Virgin Mobile Middle East & Africa (VMMEA) will list its shares on the Oman bourse within five years as a condition of winning a license to provide telecom services in the Gulf Arab state. Connect Arabia International (CAI) was awarded a 15-year license that will require the company to sell 40% of its shares through an initial public offering on Muscat's bourse, the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority said in an email. The license will cost OR20,000 (US$51,900), the regulator added. In the Gulf, telecoms licenses are sometimes awarded for minimal fees to encourage buyers to invest in developing their services. VMMEA chief executive said his company was part of a consortium that owns CAI, but he declined to reveal the size of its holding. VMMEA, part-owned by British entrepreneur Richard Branson's Virgin Group, is a mobile virtual network operator (MVNO). These typically lease capacity from established operators and pay them a percentage of their revenue as well as fees. Oman is the only Gulf country where MVNOs have started operations. These compete with the sultanate's two conventional telecom operators, Omantel and Nawras, a unit of Ooredoo. (July 9, 2013) arabianbusiness.com

Pakistan
Chairman:
[Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA)]
Russian-backed, Amsterdam headquartered telecoms giant Vimpelcom Group has hired Citigroup Inc to advise on the potential acquisition of Warid Telecom from Abu Dhabi Group. The announcement follows on the heels of the revelation that Etisalat, through its Pakistani unit Pakistan Telecommunications Company Ltd (PTCL), is interested in snapping up the cellco and has hired Goldman Sachs to advise on the planned takeover. The sources also noted that

China Mobile's rapidly expanding Pakistani subsidiary China Mobile Pakistan (CMPak), which operates under the 'Zong' brand, is also expected to weigh-in to compete for the cellco. Vimpelcom's local unit Mobilink claimed a 29.8% share of the wireless market at the end of March 2013, followed closely by Norwegian-backed rival Telenor Pakistan. PTCL's 'Ufone'-branded mobile division followed with 18.9% of the sector, whilst Zong claimed 15.4%. Warid meanwhile represented just 10.2% of the space, down from 12.1% a year earlier, as the rise of Zong has eroded the cellco's subscriber base.
(July 30, 2013) Reuters

Pakistan Telecommunication Company Limited (PTCL) has reported net profit of PKR3.37 billion (US$33.3 million) for the three months to 30 June 2013, on revenues of PKR20.6 billion, representing quarter-on-quarter growth of 15.8% and 6.5% respectively. The firm says that the positive results are being driven by the emerging segments of broadband services and corporate solutions. (July 18, 2013) telegeography.com

Teledensity in Pakistan including fixed, WLL and mobile phone has improved 1.4% in two months as it reached all-time high level of 73.5% by the end of May 2013 as against 72.1% in March 2013 according to the stats released by Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA). Cellular teledensity alone in Pakistan touched again the 70% mark by end of May 2013 as total mobile service subscribers have reached 125.12 million. It is worth mentioning here that cellular teledensity declined in March this year to 68% due to action against unregistered and fake SIMs, revision in SIMs selling mechanism and limitation of only five SIMs on one Computerised National Identity Card (NIC). However, the growing subscriptions of cellular mobile phone companies in urban and rural areas of the country, supported the teledensity again as 2.5 million new subscribers have been included in total subscribers base during April and May 2013, consequently total numbers reached to 125.01 million by the end of may 2013. Meanwhile, 71,098 new broadband subscribers have been added in broadband family of the country during April 2013, making the total broadband subscribers base to 2.61 million by the end of April 2013 as compared to 2.5 million in March 2013. Telecommunication Companies' revenues are being suppressed by continuous unfavorable regulatory measures as last government made several decisions against the sector by claiming that unregistered SIMs are major cause behind terrorism, resultantly almost 4 million to 5 million unregistered and fake registered SIMs have been deleted from the networks of all companies in the first three months of this year. Industry experts said that last government suspended the mobile service for nine times partly and fully due to which telecommunication companies suffered almost Rs 7 billion to 8 billion losses. Besides this the SIMs selling system had been revised several times, due to which now it has become more complicated for a layman. Similarly, new government following the previous rulers guidelines has raised the withholding tax (WHT) by 5%, which will also discourage the revenues. The teledensity including fixed, WLL and mobile stood at 73.5%; wireless sector teledensity reached 1.8% and landline teledensity settled at 1.7%, making overall teledensity at 73.5%. Pakistan's teledensity is the second highest in South Asia after India that reached 78.10% in April 2012 but the overall teledensity in India has decreased to 73.07% at the end of January, 2013 due to corrective measures and saturated markets. The teledensity is defined as the number of customers per 100 people. Hence it is roughly said that 73.5% of the population own and avail telephony services through different technologies. In the cellular sector, Mobilink remained the market leader by grabbing 140,433 new consumers in May 2013 making a total of 36.75 million subscriber base by the end of May 2013. It was followed by Telenor and Ufone, which adding of 407,393 and 100,267new connections, respectively in May 2013, taking the total subscribers base of the companies to 31.70 million and 23.87 million, respectively by the end of May 2013. The subscribers' number of Zong and Warid stood at 20.20 million and 12.50 million users, respectively by the end of May 2013. It is to be noted that Warid's consumers base is continuously shrinking for last few years as total users of Warid stood at 17.39 million at the end of fiscal year 2010-11 but it declined to 12.51 million consumers by the end of May 2013. (July 12, 2013) dailytimes.com.pk

Pakistan's second largest cellco by subscribers, Telenor, has said that it will reconsider its decision to participate in a future auction for 3G licenses and for investing in the country in the future. The revelation followed a government decision to impose a further 5% withholding tax on wireless services, increasing to 15% from 10%, whilst upping the target income from the sale of 3G concessions to US$1.2 billion from the currentUS$800 million. Cellco's CEO, Lars Christian Luel said that he understand that the tax base has to increase, but we would rather see an expanded tax base rather than the greatening burdening of industry and individuals who are already taxed' The official also noted that Telenor's revenues would be put under pressure, as customers are already required to pay a 19.5% federal excise duty on services, adding: 'We think it is reckless to impose these taxes on the common man in the street, while those who have the ability to pay are not taxed.' On the increase in price for 3G concessions, Luel decribed the government's plans as 'wishful thinking', claiming that 'the value of the 3G license is decreasing as more taxes and regulations are imposed.' Telenor has reportedly called on the ministries of information technology and finance to either remove certain regulatory requirements – referring specifically to limitations on the number of SIM cards a person can own, the ban on late-night packages and service blackouts – or reduce taxes, as both combined made new investment less and less attractive. Luel lamented that: 'It seems that in every meeting we attend [with the Ministry of Information Technology], we come out worse off.'
(July 10, 2013) The Express Tribune

Qatar
Executive Director: Mr. Greame Gordon
[The Supreme Council of Information and Communication Technology (ictQATAR)]

Vodafone Qatar has reported a 31 percent rise in its first fiscal quarter revenues of QR 459 million, which exactly matched the 31% rise in its customer base over the same period. Mobile average revenue per user (ARPU) was stable at QR 123. The company's net loss also shrank by 28% to QAR 85 million. Vodafone Qatar's Chief Financial Officer told that revenue for the quarter grew by 31% year-on-year, driven by a combination of continued strong customer growth and a stable ARPU which resulted in a near doubling of EBITDA over the same period last year. Vodafone Qatar is a joint venture between Vodafone and the Qatar Foundation and has 55% of its shares listed on the local stock market. Vodafone Group's effective interest in the company is 23%. Vodafone Qatar also announced that it grew its customer numbers by 5.7% over the quarter to reach 1,146,000 mobile customers as at 30 June 2013. The company launched its

Qatar network in March 2009, and now has around a third of the market share. Vodafone Qatar will report its financial results for the quarter ended 30 June 2013 following a Board Meeting later this week. (July 25, 2013) cellular-news.com

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

The Communications and IT Commission (CITC) has shortlisted three companies to be awarded mobile virtual network operator (MVNO) licenses. According to the regulator's press release, the selected companies are Dubai-based Axiom Union Mobile, in collaboration with Zain Saudi Arabia (formerly Saudi MTC), Virgin Mobile MEA (VMMEA), with host provider Saudi Telecoms Company (STC) and Jawraa Group (Lebara), in partnership with Mobily (Etihad Etisalat). In order to qualify for MVNO licenses in Saudi Arabia, companies needed to sign an agreement for alliance with one of the three incumbents in the Kingdom STC, Zain Saudi Arabia and Mobily. The watchdog stated that the shortlisted MVNOs now have 90 days to meet the requirements for the license award. (June 24, 2013) telegeography.com

Sri Lanka
Director General: Mr. Anusha Palpita
[Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (TRC)]

Sri Lanka's mobile subscriber base has started to shrink, falling by almost a million subscribers in the first quarter of 2013, the first time since the industry began its explosive growth in 1992, data from the regulator showed. Total mobile subscribers fell 988,337 to 19,335,733 in the March 2013 quarter from December, in an island which has a population of about 20 million people, indicating that large number were users with more than one SIM or subscriber identity module. Sri Lanka's explosive mobile sector growth began in 1992, when Celltell, a unit of Millicom International Cellular - now Etisalat Sri Lanka - launched South Asia's first mobile service, ending a state monopoly in telecoms. Mobile subscribers grew, despite high tariffs, with waiting lists of more than 10 years at the state run incumbent. Competition came when Australia's Telstra launched a second service as a joint venture with state-run Sri Lanka Telecom. Dialog came in third with digital GSM technology quickly overtaking its analogue competitors. Fixed access users also fell 3,449,391 to 2,832,464 a trend that first began in 2008, when fixed access users peaked at 3,446,411, data released by the telecom regulatory authority showed. Both mobile and fixed access firms have been investing in broad band data connections to boost revenues. Fourth generation fixed and mobile wireless technology is now being rolled out. The telecom regulator said what it called fixed internet subscribers grew from 423,194 to 435,758 during the March 2013 quarter, while mobile internet subscribers grew to 1,069,482 from 942,461. (July 1, 2013) lankabusinessonline.com

Sudan
Director General: Dr. Izz Al Din Kamil Amin
[The National Telecommunication Corporation (NTC)]

Kuwaiti telecommunications provider Zain said it has no plans to leave Sudan and looking to extend its business into Libya. A company board member Bader Nasser Al-Kharafi said the Kuwaiti telecoms giant is committed to Sudan and has no intension of pulling out. Zain reported a 27% decline in first-quarter net profit, mainly due to a steep devaluation in the Sudanese pound. Sudan accounted for nearly a third of Zain's customer base and a fifth of group revenue last year, but the country has been mired in economic turmoil following South Sudan's split in 2011. Also, Al Kharafi said that the group plans to access Libya, which its telecom sector remains in state hands. Government-controlled Libyan Post, Telecommunication and Information Technology Co (LIPTIC) owns the country's two mobile operators Al Madar and Libyana as well as Libya's main internet provider, with the telecoms sector isolated from much foreign competition during Muammar Gaddafi's 42-year rule. Libya had planned to tender a management contract for LIPTIC, seen by analysts as a first step to privatization, but this tender has been put on hold. (July 8, 2013) menafn.com

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

12.65 million Mobile telephone lines in service were identified in Tunisia at the end of April 2013, representing a penetration rate of 116%. The 3G SIM cards number 688,000, against 383,000 in late April 2012. The decline in fixed lines has continued, although there Tunisie Telecom has added more than 1000 lines. The incumbent telecom operator has 1.1 million fixed lines, while Orange Tunisia has 58,000. (July 1, 2013) africanmanager.com

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

Turk Telekom has offered US$530 million to buy a 53% stake in local pay-TV operator DigiTurk. The state body seized control of DigiTurk in May this year after its owner, troubled conglomerate Cukurova Group, ran into financial difficulties. Turk Telecom have only received one non-binding bid from a single company, and that is a US$530 million bid for Cukurova's stake, bringing the total value of the company to US%1 billion'. (July 29, 2013) Reuters

Cukurova Holding has asked for more time to raise the US$1.56 billion needed to retain control of the local mobile network, Turkcell. Cukurova put its shares in Turkcell up as collateral for a US$1.35 billion bank loan from Altimo back in 2005, but then defaulted on the repayments. The two sides have been fighting in the courts over the details of the loan ever since, and last week the Privy Council issued a compromise order, allowing Cukurova to retain the shares, but only if it repays the loan. In a filing with the UK's Privy Council, the company is appealing part of that earlier ruling and is seeking n extension of time within which to make payment until appeals pending before the US Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit have been resolved, and for an order that Altimo is not entitled to any additional interest on the debt from July 9, 2013 until the date on which those appeals are resolved. Although Cukurova is facing some financial difficulties, due to the way the dispute could unlock some US$3 billion worth of accrued dividends at the Turkish phone company, it was not expected to have much difficulty raising the funds. The company is now seeking an extension on the repayment date could indicate more financial difficulties than originally expected. Although TeliaSonera is the largest direct shareholder in Turkcell, with a 38% stake, it is Cukurova that has management control with a much smaller stake thanks to a complex shareholding arrangement. (July 17, 2013) cellular-news.com

Cukurova has been given 60 days to raise the US$1.56 billion to buy back its stake in the Turkish mobile network, Turkcell, or it will forfeit them to Russia's Alfa Telecom. The announcement was made by a court of appeal in the UK

which has been hearing a long running and complex case that would determine who ultimately controls the mobile network. Back in 2005, Alfa Telecom agreed to lend US$1.352 billion to Cukurova, which was then secured against the Turkish firm's indirect holdings in Turkcell. In April 2007, Alfa declared that Cukurova had defaulted on the payments and tried to sieze the shares. A court ruling last year upheld that seizure, but then gave both sides time to settle the dispute, and the Privy Council was again brought in to mediate. It has now said that Cukurova need pay just US$1.56 billion for the shares -- significantly below some expectations that the company could be asked to pay as much as US$2.4 billion to reclaim its shares. Although Cukurova is facing some financial difficulties, due to the way the dispute could unlock some $3 billion worth of accrued dividends at the Turkish phone company, it is not expected to have much difficulty raising the funds. While the ruling has the potential to settle the dispute between the two shareholders, it does nothing to settle a separate but related dispute between Cukurova and TeliaSonera. In that dispute, an International Chamber of Commerce Arbitral Tribunal awarded TeliaSonera US$932 million in damages, plus interest and costs, for Çukurova's failure to deliver to TeliaSonera the Turkcell Holding shares as required under a share purchase agreement between the parties. Although TeliaSonera is the largest direct shareholder in Turkcell, with a 38% stake, it is Cukurova that has management control with a much smaller stake thanks to a complex shareholding arrangement.
(July 9, 2013) cellular-news.com

United Arab Emirates
Director General: Mr. Mohamed Nasser Al Ghanim
[Telecommunication Regulatory Authority (TRA)]

The telecom regulator in the UAE is set to implement new regulations allowing the two local operators access to each other's network infrastructure, a move that will likely boost competition and lower retail prices in the Gulf state. The Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) has sent the determination to Abu Dhabi-based Emirates Telecommunications Corp (Etisalat) and Dubai's Emirates Integrated Telecommunications Co (du) for feedback after months of discussions and consultations involving both the companies. The regulator expects to have the document approved by its board before the end of the year, according to a person familiar with the matter, who declined to be named. It will however implement the "new remedies" - offering consumers across the UAE a choice on broadband and phone services - only after consultation with the stakeholders, according to the determination. Etisalat was not immediately available for comment, while a du spokesperson declined to comment. Currently du offers broadband and fixed-line services in certain parts of the country, while Etisalat has a far wider reach. The TRA draft determination pushes for better terms of interconnectivity between the two operators in terms of fixed and mobile calls, as well as bitstream access for broadband services. The TRA's draft determination is part of an initiative to boost "sustainable" competition in the country. It first published a consultation late last year outlining areas of the telecom market where Etisalat and du possessed a dominant "market power" that could be used to each telco's advantage. The consultation elicited a strong response from Etisalat as the telco sought to maintain its dominant market position, labeling the analysis "considerably insufficient" and asking the regulator to return to the drawing board. But the TRA has been adamant in its push for greater market competition, and in a request-for-proposal document issued in April asked consultants to pitch for work to carry out a study that would estimate the value of economic activity generated by the sector, and the impact of lower prices on the overall economy. "The vast majority of consumers in the UAE do not currently have a choice between fixed network service providers," the TRA said in a response document to feedback from the telcos on the consultation. "The TRA therefore considers it is important to impose access remedies in order to ensure that competition can take place at the retail level," the regulator said. (July 29, 2013) gulf-times.com

The UAE's mobile phone market generated total revenues of more than AED20bn (US$5.4bn) during 2012, according to a new report by the country's telecoms regulator. The Telecommunications Regulatory Authority's (TRA) fourth annual review said the sector was "continuing to thrive". According to the report, the UAE had almost 2 million fixed line subscriptions and the number of active mobile subscriptions continued to grow reaching around 13.8 million by the end of the year. The report also said the UAE has one of the highest mobile penetration rates in the world. In terms of the number of minutes used per mobile subscriber, this figure increased by 5.6% during the year, the report added. The research reported that India continued to be the most popular destination for outgoing international calls, followed by Pakistan and the Philippines. The study also highlighted that the number of internet service subscriptions has now reached around 958,000 and the percentage of internet subscriptions connected by fiber technology increased by 37.2%. The proportion of broadband subscriptions that were bundled together with fixed line services and TV services increased from 17% in 2011 to 31% in 2012, with total revenue generated by internet services increasing by 15.2%. The report also revealed that the number of people employed by phone operators Etisalat, du and the TRA reached 7,961. (July 22, 2013) arabianbusiness.com

The Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) is looking to impose a requirement on operators to offer bitstream access to end a deadlock in negotiations between the country's two service providers, Etisalat and Du. The introduction of bitstream access is designed to break the monopolies held by the pair within their respective areas by giving consumers nationwide the choice of operator for their fixed line voice and broadband services. A trial bitstream service with selected customers was launched in July 2011, with a view to making the service available across the UAE by the end of the year, but in December 2011 the TRA delayed a full commercial launch as Etisalat and Du were not technically ready to introduce the service. In October 2012 Etisalat's chief executive was quoted as saying that negotiations between the two operators on the commercial terms of network sharing were still ongoing.
(July 18, 2013) The National

The Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) announced that it has established the policies needed for the licensing and regulation of Certification Service Providers (CSP) operating in the UAE. This is in line with the TRA's objective to establish a secure environment for e-commerce and electronic transactions in the UAE. The initiative is part of TRAs overall objective to regulate certification service providers who offer Public Key Infrastructure (PKI) solutions that help businesses conduct e-commerce securely on the web. By developing a solid regulatory framework for CSPs, the TRA aims to create a transparent and structured process by which CSPs can offer their services by following clear guidelines. The regulations will be applicable to all Certification Service Providers operating in the UAE, namely Etisalat, Al Hilal Bank and Global Information Technology (GIT) and to all who provide electronic attestation services directly or indirectly to the public for commercial purposes, through electronic records, documents and signatures as part of electronic transactions and e-commerce. TRA Acting Director General, said that as the e-commerce market in the UAE continues to experience unprecedented growth due to high levels of internet and mobile device penetration usage, the TRA is committed to enhancing the quality of services offered, raising public awareness and facilitating the growth of the e-commerce sector in the country that accounts for around 60% of total GCC e-commerce sales. With their unique capacity to verify the authenticity of users' digital signatures, Certification Service Providers play a key role in facilitating growth in this sector. With this in mind, TRA has established the needed regulatory framework that will help empower online trade in the UAE and bolster the Nation's confidence in e-commerce by guaranteeing a trustworthy experience to online shoppers." The TRA will also be hosting the country's first Electronic Transaction and Commerce Summit that will take place in September 2013 in Dubai. The event will gather stakeholders from the e-commerce industry to discuss existing regulations and guidelines and highlight any issues concerned with the growth of the e-commerce sector while driving public trust in electronic transactions. The UAE is one of the first countries in the region that has taken the necessary steps for the licensing and regulation of CSP's operating in the country with the regulations being established on the basis of Federal Law No (1) of 2006 on Electronic Commerce and transactions. (July 1, 2013) zawya.com

Yemen

Minister: Dr. Ahmed Ebeid Bin Dagher

[Ministry of Telecommunication & information Technology (MCITT)]

General Manager of Wireless Telecommunications reported that the number of internet service subscribers in Yemen has reached 160 thousand. He pointed out that only 900 thousand subscribe to landline phones, and this number is decreasing due to the increasing popularity of wireless phone plans through the companies Yemen Mobile and GSM. "This is not a phenomenon unique to Yemen; it is occurring all over the world," he added. GM stated that institutions will hold projects for meeting the needs of subscribers and that the government will work to spread the service of wireless internet access. He added that the services will include rural areas as well. He further described a plan to establish a new category of membership for low income subscribers who want low prices for internet, stating that this component of the initiative will be launched at the beginning of August. (July 22, 2013) nationalyemen.com

Regulatory Activities Beyond the SAMENA Region

ITU

G.fast, a new ITU broadband standard that promises up to 1 Gbit/s over existing copper telephone wires is one step closer following a meeting of ITU-T Study Group 15. G.fast is designed to deliver superfast downloads up to a distance of 250 meters, thereby eliminating the expense of installing fiber between the distribution point and people's homes. The Geneva meeting saw first-stage approval of ITU standard, Recommendation ITU-T G.9700 that specifies methods to minimize the risk of G.fast equipment interfering with broadcast services such as FM radio, paving the way for G.fast to be approved in early 2014. G.fast is expected to be deployed by service providers wanting to provide fiber to the home (FTTH) -like services, which will enable flexible upstream and downstream speeds to support bandwidth-intensive applications such as streaming Ultra-HDTV movies, uploading high-resolution video and photo libraries to cloud-based storage, and communicating via HD video. Hamadoun Touré, Secretary-General, ITU, applauded the organization's membership for continuing to show great leadership in the development of specifications that brought broadband into homes at ever increasing speeds and at ever greater efficiencies. The G.fast work has attracted active participation by a large number of leading service providers, chip manufacturers, and system vendors. An important feature of G.fast is that it will enable self-installation by consumers without a technician's assistance. For service providers, self-install eliminates the expense of deploying technicians to the consumer's home, thereby also improving the speed at which they can roll out new services. Consumers will benefit from not having to arrange to be at home for a technician's visit. "G.fast is an important standard for service providers globally," said Tom Starr, chairman of ITU-T Study Group 15, Working Party 1, which oversees the G.fast effort. "Service providers will be able to deliver fiber-like performance more quickly and more affordable than with any other approach." "G.fast provides the speed of fiber with the ease of installation of ADSL2," added Les Brown, Associate Rapporteur of the G.fast Experts Group. The new G.fast standard is being coordinated with the Broadband Forum's system architecture project, Fiber to the Distribution Point (FTTdp). The ITU-T and Broadband Forum have been working closely to ensure that G.fast solutions can be quickly placed into FTTdp deployments.
(July 16, 2013) itu.int

Countries with a clearly-defined national vision for broadband roll-out are significantly out-performing those with a more relaxed approach, according to a new report by the International Telecommunications Union. The report observes that there were 134 national broadband plans in place around the world by the middle of 2013, all of which aim to increase usage of broadband-enabled services and applications by citizens and businesses. Such plans are found to have a big impact on market penetration of fixed and mobile broadband services, with average penetration around 8% higher for both in those countries with a formalized plan. Market competition is also believed to play an important role here, with competitive markets averaging 1% higher penetration for fixed broadband and 26% higher for mobile broadband. Dr. Hamadoun Toure, Secretary General of the ITU, said: "Governments are realizing that broadband networks are not just vital to national competitiveness, but to the delivery of education, healthcare, public utilities like energy and water, environmental management, and a whole host of government services. Broadband is the key enabler not just of human interaction, but of the machine-to-machine communications systems that will underpin tomorrow's world." The study concludes by stating that the full economic and social benefits are most likely to be realized where there is strong partnership between government and industry, and counsels a consultative, participatory approach to policy in conjunction with key stakeholders. (July 2, 2013) telecoms.com

SAMENA

In a move that further strengthens its relationship with the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) and provides impetus to its efforts in forging synergies and cooperation within the South Asia - Middle East - North Africa region's ICT community, SAMENA Telecommunications Council and ITU have agreed to promote ITU Telecom World 2013 among all its stakeholders. This high-level knowledge-sharing and networking event will be held in Bangkok, Thailand from 19-22 November 2013. It will convene an audience spanning leading industry stakeholders from the public and private sectors, including Heads of State and Government, Ministers, Heads of UN Agencies, Heads of Regulatory Authorities, industry CEOs from across the entire ICT ecosystem, thought leaders, consultants, academics and digital innovators. Highlighting the SAMENA Council's efforts in actively engaging with its members and stakeholders for the progress of the ICT industry in the region and beyond, Mr. Bocar A. Ba, CEO, SAMENA Telecommunications Council said, "The ITU's interest in using our platform to effectively support its events in the region is a positive one and augurs well for our member base who stand to benefit. We are excited about this program and look forward to seeing strong representation and participation from the regional ICT community at the ITU Telecom World 2013 in Thailand. The global ICT industry is on the threshold of a digital revolution, and this event with high-level discussions on regulations and policies, innovations and strategies, and business models, between industry and government experts, will provide ICT players in the SAMENA region with the opportunity to exchange ideas collaborate on industry issues and identify solutions with far-reaching benefits." SAMENA Telecommunications Council collaborates with leading non-profit international organizations, including the International Telecommunication Union and the European Telecom Network Operators' Association. With an expanding member portfolio, the Council is quickly securing strong footing in the region. SAMENA's current network consists of 25 countries from South Asia, Middle East and North Africa. However, organizations from the Asia Pacific, Europe and North America regions are also part of the SAMENA Council member base. (July 23, 2013) samenacouncil.org

United States

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) has indicated that it will auction off a block of licenses in the 1915-1920 MHz ("Lower H Block") and 1995-2000 MHz ("Upper H Block") bands early next year. It has opened a consultation on the plans for the auction, which will release an addition 10MHz of spectrum for the mobile networks. A reserve price is being proposed for the spectrum, but that will be set after the consultation closes. It's expected that the auction will take place in the middle of January, and by law has to take place by March 2015. The regulator last auctioned off spectrum in the 1900MHz bands back in 2008. In a statement, FCC Commissioner, Ajit Pai commented that "the sooner we get the currently fallow H Block spectrum into the commercial marketplace, the sooner it can be used to deliver bandwidth-intensive mobile services and applications, and the sooner the First Responder Network Authority (FirstNet) will receive its initial infusion of funds from auction revenues." (July 18, 2013) cellular-news.com

Brazil

According to ANATEL, Brazil's mobile-phone subscriptions in June rose at a slower pace compared with the prior month, while market leaders, mainly TIM Participacoes SA, the local unit of Telecom Italia SpA, gained ground. Total mobile-phone users in Brazil increased to 265.7 million in June, up 0.07% from May, ANATEL said. A total of 215,300 new subscribers were signed, down from 974,290 in the previous month. In May, subscribers increased 0.37% from April. Vivo gained slightly in the period. Vivo's market share ended June at 28.67%, up from 28.66% in the previous month. TIM Participacoes, which is the second-largest company in terms of clients, had more gains with its market share, up to 27.17% from 27.12%. TIM is the local unit of Telecom Italia. Claro, the local unit of Mexico's America Movil SAB (AMX, AMX.MX), lost ground, ending June with a share of 25.01%, compared with 25.05% in May. Local company Oi SA (OIBR, OIBR4.BR) remained fourth with 18.71%, down from 18.74%. (July 17, 2013) online.wsj.com

According to data published by the Brazilian telecoms regulator ANATEL, the country was home to nearly 266 million 'active' mobile connections at May 31, 2013, a net increase of 974,290 new lines from the previous month and a significant increase on the 500,000 or so new lines connected in April. According to the watchdog the cellular penetration rate in the country topped 134.4% by end-May, up from 133.8% in April. Of the total, some 211.5 million connections (79.65%) were pre-paid and the remainder on post-paid contracts, while ANATEL also reported a shift in the mix of 2G and 3G users – with the trend moving towards the latter. By May 31 the number of GSM handsets stood at 183.7 million, a roughly 69% share, while 3G W-CDMA users had increased to 66.9 million, or 25.2% of the market. In the same period machine-to-machine (M2M) connections had increased to 7.54 million (or 2.84% of the market), data terminals (3G modems) accounted for 2.66% of the market (7.1 million) and CDMA-based phones had slipped to just 81,722 – just 0.03% of the overall market. Finally, ANATEL reported that the number of 4G Long Term Evolution (LTE) accesses doubled to 105,250, compared to 48,459 at end-April, to account for 0.04% of the Brazilian mobile market. (July 9, 2013) anatel.gov.br

Chile

Eight telcos have been given permission to resume marketing products by phone, having met requirements set by Chilean regulator SUBTEL, the watchdog said in a statement. DirecTV, Grupo GTD, Telsur Telcoy, Movistar, Entel, Claro and VTR were cleared to resume telesales, after SUBTEL reviewed and audited the companies. SUBTEL had previously suspended telesales for all telcos until operators put in place measures to increase transparency and security. Under the new rules, providers must be able to verify the identity of the customer and must keep records that validate the purchase and acceptance of the terms and conditions. Undersecretary of Telecommunications added that this is trying to regain the public trust of users in telephone sales ...[with] a mechanism that should make life easier for consumers, but giving full guarantees of transparency and security. (July 11, 2013) telegeography.com

Argentine

The government is developing new regulations for the telecommunications sector which are designed to improve the quality of fixed and mobile telephony services in the country. Decree 681/2013 directs the Secretaria de Comunicaciones (SeCom) and the Ministry of Federal Planning, Public Investments and Services, together with the support of other agencies, to issue within the next 30 days 'a new regulation establishing quality standards for the provision of telecommunications services.' In a press release on the ministry's website, Planning Minister Julio De Vido is quoted as saying that the new rules will set quality of service parameters to help evaluate the performance of telecoms operators and encourage competition in the sector. Last month a new decree published in the Official Gazette empowered SeCom to tighten regulation of telecoms service standards in the country. The new legislation authorizes the body to implement 'appropriate measures' aimed at ensuring operators' compliance with quality of service requirements; such measures include forcing operators to suspend the marketing and activation of new mobile lines. The decree followed the recent appointment of a new SeCom head, Norberto Berner, who has ordered an inspection of the investment plans of the country's mobile operators, including America Movil-owned Claro, Movistar (a unit of Telefonica of Spain) and Personal, the mobile arm of fixed line incumbent Telecom Argentina.
(July 3, 2013) telegeography.com

Ecuador

Telecommunications regulatory body SUPERTEL has presented a report analyzing the mobile market's level of readiness for introducing mobile virtual network operators (MVNOs). The report includes a wider examination of the current state of Ecuador's regulatory and competitive framework, including recommended changes to wireless spectrum/infrastructure allocation/ownership and resource sharing rules to help improve services and levels of competition. The document from SUPERTEL concludes that the introduction of MVNOs in Ecuador is feasible 'in the medium term'. Factors generally favoring the arrival of MVNOs were listed by SUPERTEL as: the high percentage of pre-paid mobile users (nearly 86% at the end of 2012); ongoing technology standardization (towards GSM/W-CDMA/HSPA/LTE); the rising demand for mobile services reflected in strongly improving mobile telecoms revenues; and indications that the process of reforming legislation is under way which will form a suitable stage for the entry of MVNOs. SUPERTEL's report noted that Ecuador has a highly concentrated market with two dominant operators (Claro and Movistar, with 98% of subscribers between them at end-March 2013 and that the introduction of a third operator (state-owned CNT's mobile arm, the former Alegro) has so far resulted in only a marginal change to the competitive environment. SUPERTEL provided a detailed analysis of the potential forms of infrastructure sharing, focusing on the specific network elements that can be shared in order to identify opportunities for MVNO's market entry. The analysis was directed at the development of regulation incorporating sharing obligations, using spectrum efficiently and other issues that would ensure an effective regulatory framework for the entry of MVNOs. Going beyond the scope of MVNOs per se, the telecoms authority issued recommendations on improving the competitive environment including improving the efficiency of spectrum usage, e.g. referring to currently unused blocks of spectrum which are held by the existing cellcos: 'The regulatory body shall have the power to reverse spectrum concessions that are not being used and make them available to [share with] new MVNOs [operating via the frequencies over the existing network operator's infrastructure].' The report noted that spectrum sharing is currently not allowed under Ecuadorian law, and that new telecoms legislation should incorporate this possibility (which should include concepts from competition law); based on this proposed legislation, MVNOs would be able to request/require operators to share their spectrum and other network resources. The report added that the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) has started a discussion regarding Ecuador on the need to use the existing spectrum efficiently, stressing that control mechanisms are essential to ensure that spectrum licensees make all necessary technological adjustments to fulfill this need. Furthermore, SUPERTEL pointed out that at present the country's National Frequency Plan rigidly assigns frequency bands to specific applications such as broadcasting, analogue and digital television, telecoms services, etc, and that this system must be modernized under the principles of service/technology neutrality. (July 12, 2013) telegeography.com

European Union

The European Commission (EC) announced that it has 'reluctantly' accepted the reasons given by nine out of 14 European Union (EU) member countries which requested to postpone the use of the 800MHz 'digital dividend' frequency band for wireless broadband services, having missed the January 1, 2013 deadline they originally agreed to. Whilst twelve of 28 EU countries have already issued 800MHz mobile broadband licenses for services including 4G LTE (on the basis of the technical usage conditions specified in the 2010 EC Decision to harmonize the 800MHz band), 16 are yet to do so. Due to reasons it deemed 'exceptional', the Commission has agreed to authorize postponements to the previously agreed deadlines (referred to as granting 'derogations') for nine countries: Spain, Cyprus, Lithuania, Hungary, Malta, Austria, Poland, Romania and Finland; it refused derogations for Slovakia and Slovenia where it judged delays were due to 'the organization of the authorization process and not to exceptional circumstances preventing the availability of the band.' Decisions on Greece, Latvia and the Czech Republic have not been issued yet as the EC says these cases require 'additional evaluation', while Belgium and Estonia did not request derogations despite missing the January 2013 deadline. In Estonia's case, commercial 800MHz LTE mobile services have since been launched following the award of frequencies via a beauty contest process in May, while Belgium has tentatively scheduled its digital dividend auction for November. Bulgaria represents a special case as it has notified the EC of the continued use of the 800MHz band for public security and defense purposes. In assessing each derogation request, the EC considered whether there were exceptional difficulties in immediately freeing the 800MHz frequencies from broadcasting services via the transition from analogue to digital television, or cross-border frequency coordination problems (in particular with non-EU country borders). Member states are granted derogations on the condition that their temporary continued use of the 800MHz band for broadcasting or other purposes does not hinder the development of wireless broadband in that band in neighboring member states. The EC declared that the delays by the member states 'provided further evidence of why radio spectrum needs to be assigned with greater co-ordination across the EU'. Potential penalties for the countries refused EC authorization to postpone auctions (or failing to seek permission) were not mentioned in announcement. Of the 28 EU member countries, the twelve which have so far enabled access to the 800MHz band for commercial mobile broadband services are: Denmark, Germany, Ireland, France, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal, Sweden, United Kingdom, Croatia (which all met the official deadline) and Estonia (which did not request EC approval for its late launch). Lithuania (having been granted legal derogation by the EC) is poised to be the 13th on the list, with an auction for digital dividend spectrum licenses scheduled for 8 August 2013. Seven additional EU countries are expected to issue 800MHz mobile broadband frequencies between that date and the end of 2013, including four granted derogation (Spain, Austria, Finland and Hungary) plus Czech Republic ('requiring additional evaluation' by the EC), Slovakia (refused derogation) and Belgium (which neither requested nor received derogation). In addition, Estonia may issue further licenses in the band during this period. A further five members have scheduled 800MHz licensing in 2014: Romania, Poland and Malta (all three granted derogation), Greece (additional evaluation) and Slovenia (derogation refused). Of this group, both Poland and Greece are special cases where military use of part of the band has been notified as an obstacle in the process. Cyprus (granted derogation) and Latvia (additional evaluation) have delayed digital dividend broadband licensing until the second half of 2015. The 28th EU country scheduled to launch 800MHz mobile broadband is Bulgaria, which has roughly penciled in licensing for 2017; there are special circumstances in Bulgaria's case as it has notified the EC of continued use of the band for public security and defense purposes. Spain has already awarded 800MHz mobile licenses, but under the terms of the country's multi-band 4G auction process in 2011, the 800MHz spectrum portion does not become valid until the beginning of 2014, once the switchover from analogue to all-digital TV broadcasting in Spain has been fully completed. (July 24, 2013) telegeography.com

European Union (EU) commissioner Neelie Kroes has said a single European telecoms market could provide the region's economy by as much as €110 billion (US$140 billion) annually. In a speech delivered this week to the European Parliament in Brussels, Kroes said that Europe's telecoms industry is lagging those in other parts of the world because of "border checkpoints" that discourage investment and weaken competitiveness. "The rest of the world is racing ahead," said Kroes. "America, Japan, Korea have 88% of the world's 4G subscriptions; the EU has just 6%. Meanwhile, only 2% of European homes have superfast broadband." Kroes promised a new package of reforms in September this year that would "bring down borders" and "stimulate investment". "Quality communications for business could be worth €800 billion over 15 years," she said. "Broadband could create two million jobs." The commissioner said that operators needed standardized ways of accessing fixed-line networks – such as "virtual bitstream" products – and more

coordination between EU countries on the assignment of spectrum needed to provide high-speed mobile services. Her reference to bitstream is interesting in light of recent moves in Germany, the EU's largest member state, allowing Deutsche Telekom to block sub-loop unbundling (SLU) – previously favored by regulatory authorities as a means of fomenting broadband competition – if it provides a bitstream alternative. The operator is set to roll out a technology called vectoring that boosts broadband performance but is incompatible with SLU. Kroes' remarks about spectrum harmonization will also provoke debate. Many operators and national regulatory authorities want greater 'liberalization', allowing providers to run 4G technology over airwaves originally reserved for older voice and text messaging services. In many cases, however, liberalization seems to be at odds with efforts to ensure operators are using the same bands to support particular standards. Kroes also argued that roaming charges were a barrier to market development, but said operators would be compelled to abolish them in a true single market. "It's not by banning roaming charges that we create a single market," she said. "Quite the opposite: it is by creating a single market that we will end roaming surcharges. A market where companies face the same competitive pressure to push down roaming prices as they do at home on their own network."
(July 10, 2013) telecomengine.com

From July 2013, the European Union's Roaming Regulation has lowered the price caps for data downloads by 36%, making it much cheaper to use maps, watch videos, check emails and update social networks while travelling across the EU. Data roaming will now be up to 91% cheaper in 2013 compared to 2007. During this period, the volume of the data roaming market has grown 630%. The EU said this week that it had achieved retail price reductions across calls, SMS and data of over 80% since 2007. "The EU has to be relevant to people's lives. The latest price cuts put more money in your pocket for summer, and are a critical step towards getting rid of these premiums once and for all", Commission Vice-President, Neelie Kroes said, adding: "This is good for both consumers and companies, because it takes fear out of the market, and it grows the market." The new prices caps are: Downloading data or browsing the Internet - 45 cents / Megabyte (MB) (charged per Kilobyte used) + VAT. (36% reduction compared to 2012).

Making calls - 24 cents / minute + VAT (17% reduction compared to 2012).
Receiving a call - 7 cents / minute + VAT (12.5% reduction compared to 2012).
Sending a text message - 8 cents + VAT (11% reduction compared to 2012).

Operators are free to offer cheaper rates, and some have already begun to remove roaming premiums altogether for voice and SMS, or offer a roaming-free area across one section of Europe or another. In addition, from July 2014, consumers will be able to choose an operator other than their national operator, for roaming services. The European Commission must review the functioning of these rules by 30 June 2016. While roaming issues seem well on the way to benefitting consumers across the EU, they still seem to be drawing the short straw when it comes to broadband speeds. The EU revealed last week that consumers are not getting the broadband download speeds they pay for. On average, they receive only 74% of the advertised headline speed they have paid for, according to a new European Commission study on fixed broadband performance. The above figure includes ADSL, fiber optics and cable. In Portugal, speed, when using ADSL is only 59.4%, though this is only slightly below the EU average of 63.3%. The best performers are Slovakia (97.1%), Croatia (94.8%) and Hungary (90.3%). The worst performers were France (40.4%) and the United Kingdom (44.7%) who both failed to reach even half of the contracted broadband speeds. The average download speed in Portugal for ADSL was 7.49 megabits per second (Mbps), above the EU average of 7.23 Mpbs. The results for fiber optics or cable were not disclosed for Portugal. The upload speeds are closer to their advertised speeds. Across Europe, the average upload speed was 6.20 Mbps, representing 88% of advertised upload speeds. The EU average of advertised headline speed for cable was 91.4% while it was 84.4% for fiber optics. "This is the first time the difference between advertised and actual broadband speed is confirmed by comparable and reliable data from all EU Member States", the EC's Neelie Kroes revealed. European consumers can measure their own ISPs performance by joining a community of volunteers across all EU27 countries plus Croatia, Iceland and Norway. Selected consumers will be sent a small device to plug into their home internet connection. This device will run a series of automated tests when the line is not in use. It will establish the speed and performance of their broadband connection. (July 9, 2013) theportugalnews.com

The Body of European Regulators for Electronic Communications (BEREC) has published its latest guidelines for European mobile networks on applying on the separate sale of roaming. The Guidelines are aimed to clarify all the aspects regarding the application of the separate sale of roaming services which will enter into force in July 2014. Along with the Guidelines, BEREC took note of the Liaison on Terminal and Device behavior to support manual network selection and editing of APN. This document was prepared by the Steering Committee (formally known as the Steering Committee of the Cooperation Platform for the Separate Sale of Roaming Services in the European Union). The Forum has noted that an important contributor to success in allowing customers to choose a separate roaming service is that the terminal, Smartphone or device used should be able to both manually select the chosen alternative network and allow for changes to settings to ensure selection of alternative infrastructure. As for now, BEREC has not received any proposal for new legal provisions on international roaming and therefore has focused its efforts on the application of the existing regulation, which has been in force since July 1, 2013. BEREC added that in any case will monitor and follow closely any proposal that may complement or amend the existing regulation as a part of the new provisions for the single market initiative and will provide its view in any new proposal in this line. (July 8, 2013) cellular-news.com

United Kingdom

UK telecoms regulator OFCOM has announced that a four-year process aimed at releasing frequencies suitable for 4G mobile broadband will be completed tomorrow, a development which it says would '[clear] the path for new superfast wireless broadband services in the UK'. Digital UK, which led the implementation of digital TV switchover from 2008-2012 and during 2013 oversaw the clearance of terrestrial TV services from the 800MHz band, issued a statement confirming the progress of the project. Noting that Freeview channels in parts of the UK began moving to new frequencies to allow for the future roll-out of 4G

mobile services in February 2012, it confirmed that the final engineering works are being carried out in north-east Scotland and the Western Isles, some five months ahead of the original timetable. The clearance program, Digital UK noted, has seen signals realigned at more than 270 transmitters, serving one-in-four homes. As a result of the work mobile companies will be allowed to launch 4G services to UK customers using the cleared frequencies after OFCOM auctioned 800MHz spectrum for use by operators looking to offer 4G services in February 2013.
(July 30, 2013) telegeography.com

British fixed line incumbent BT has published it financial results for the first quarter of its 2013/14 financial year, revealing that underlying revenue excluding transit, its key measure of revenue trend, was down 1% year-on-year. This decline, the operator said, reflected the anticipated impact of regulatory price reductions. Reported turnover was also 1% lower than in 1Q 2012/13 at GBP4.449 billion (USD6.99 billion), in part as a result of aGBP51 million decline in transit revenue, including mobile termination rate reductions of GBP29 million; aGBP32 million positive impact from foreign exchange movements and a GBP 8 million positive net impact from acquisitions and disposals failed to fully offset these declines. BT meanwhile said that underlying operating costs excluding transit were down 1%, noting that its efficiency programs had been partly offset costs of GBP40 million related to the pre-launch of its BT Sport service, as well as a GBP13 million increase in the non-cash pension operating charge. Adjusted EBITDA fell by 1% year-on-year to GBP1.44 billion, with adjusted profit before tax standing at GBP595 million, representing a 5% increase from the year earlier period, with BT saying that the growth reflected the lower depreciation and amortization and net finance expense. Reported profit before tax (which includes specific items), however, totaled GBP£449m, down 16% year-on-year. Highlighting the progress made on its fiber broadband rollout program, BT confirmed that more than 16 million premises are passed by its network, with more than 1.7 million homes and businesses having signed up for its fiber-based services. Total retail broadband subscribers, meanwhile, numbered 6.799 million, up from 6.365 million a year earlier, while BT's wholesale broadband subscriber base rose to 8.860 million from 8.577 million at end-June 2012. Pay-TV customer numbers increased to 833,000 from 728,000 a year earlier. (July 26, 2013) telegeography.com

Having concluded a consultation on proposals to amend the country's 900MHz, 1800MHz and 2100MHz mobile licenses, UK telecoms regulator OFCOM has issued a statement setting out its final decisions on the matter. To that end, the watchdog has confirmed that it will proceed with the variations that permit the use of LTE and WiMAX technology in all three of the aforementioned bands, while it also said it will increase the maximum permitted power in the 900MHz licenses by 3dB. Further, OFCOM will update a number of terms and conditions in these concessions 'in order to align them more closely with the equivalent terms and conditions in the recently awarded 800MHz and 2.6GHz licenses'. While only Vodafone UK and Hutchison 3G UK (H3G UK) had actually requested license variations prior to the publication of OFCOM's consultation, the regulator confirmed that both O2 UK and EE have since called for their licenses to be amended. As such, Vodafone and O2 have both had their respective 900MHz and 1800MHz licenses updated, while the 2100MHz concessions held by Vodafone, H3G UK, O2 UK and EE have also been varied. Commenting on the development, OFCOM said in statement detailing the plans: 'This decision delivers a long standing objective to liberalize all mobile licenses so as to remove the regulatory barriers to deployment of the latest available mobile technology. Even though operators may not seek to deploy 4G services in the newly liberalized bands in the immediate future, the interests of consumers will be served by the fact that these bands have been liberalized now, ahead of a market led transition to their use for 4G technology in future. As a result, operators can plan and implement a transition to 4G technology in these bands without having to engage in a further regulatory process.' (July 10, 2013) ofcom.org.uk

OFCOM has announced this month that it is gearing up to carry out extensive new research into the UK's mobile internet infrastructure, with the aim being to find out just how fast 4G and 3G services are and whether coverage is as significant as providers claim. The regulator is in the process of seeking a partner to help it complete the research. As well as getting a grip on the state of the UK's network speeds and coverage, OFCOM hopes that this information will be useful to business mobile users and domestic customers, when determining which type of device and provider to procure. OFCOM is hoping to carry out the study in December and then publish its findings in the first quarter of 2014. Network providers will be assessed on data rates and coverage levels; although a spokesperson said that the regulator has yet to decide on the exact measurements which will be used to determine the relative quality of particular packages. The timing of the study is significant, because by the end of the year, it is expected that the majority of the UK's biggest mobile network providers will have started rolling out 4G services, advancing the market from its current state of monopoly. It is still early in the lifespan of 4G in Britain, but OFCOM's study will represent a major health check for mobile broadband speeds across the country. Business mobile users will be able to harness the information that is gathered to make an informed decision about which carrier is going to meet their needs, although for some, the idea of having to wait until 2014 to get an answer on 4G will not be hugely appealing. This month it was also revealed that several cities in the UK, which have already received 4G coverage as part of the initial rollout, can expect to receive significantly boosted download speeds. Until recently the basic data rates achievable on a 4G mobile broadband connection have been around 8 to 10Mbps, which is faster than 3G but still slightly slower than the average ADSL landline service. However, 4G is now being enhanced to the point that it has a theoretical maximum download speed of 150Mbps. The reality is that it will be almost impossible to achieve this peak performance in real world scenarios, so it is expected that most customers will get between 24 and 30Mbps out of a compatible device in an area with decent 4G coverage. A total of 12 cities will be receiving faster 4G coverage this month, including London, Sheffield, Manchester and Edinburgh. This will make superfast 4G available to almost a quarter of the UK's population. With the growth of 4G and the impending arrival of more network providers on the market, it makes sense for business mobile users to prepare for the future, even if they are upgrading and still using 3G for the time being. Most modern, high end handsets, including the BlackBerry Z10 and the Samsung Galaxy S3, have 4G connectivity capabilities, although this is far from a universal function, so it might be worth checking the specifications of a device carefully before committing to a purchase. There will no doubt be a point in the near future when it will be pointless for a manufacturer to release a device that does not have 4G onboard, although we have yet to reach it. Meanwhile, the truth about 4G speeds and coverage should be revealed in the spring of 2014, after OFCOM's report is published. (July 9, 2013) 4-traders.com

France

Telecoms watchdog ARCEP has opened a public consultation on the procedures used for the determination of universal service costs in 2012. According to the document, the regulator is seeking comments on the methods of establishing the tariff obligations for provision of payphone services, the rate of capital and net contributions to the Universal Service Fund (USF). All interested parties are invited to submit their comments until September 16, 2013. (July 25, 2013) telegeography.com

Telecom regulator ARCEP has unveiled a 'broad public consultation' covering mobile frequency assignments in a number of French overseas territories. Stakeholders are invited to send their contributions to ARCEP by September 30, 2013. The consultation will focus on 700MHz, 800MHz, 900MHz, 1800MHz, 2100MHz and 2600MHz spectrum bands. Earlier this year it was revealed that plans were underway for the introduction of Long Term Evolution (LTE) licenses in the overseas markets, and the consultation will seek to establish suitability and pricing for 4G spectrum. (July 19, 2013) telegeography.com

The Constitutional Council has revoked legal provisions governing the telecom regulator ARCEP's powers, thus stripping of its authority to ensure implementation of its decisions and enforce sanctions. The Constitutional Council made the decision as it considered that ARCEP was in non-compliance with the French Constitution's principle of separation of power. The government will propose new decrees in parliament to reinstate sanctions procedures as soon as possible, but in the meantime, ARCEP will not have the authority to enforce its statutes in cases currently awaiting a final decision. The Constitutional Council's ruling came in response to the application for a 'priority preliminary ruling on the issue of constitutionality' filed by domestic cableco Numericable in April 2013, wherein the cable operator argued that the principle of separation of powers of investigation and sanction was not met within ARCEP. ARCEP fined Numericable EUR5 million (US$6.41 million) for failing to comply with its November 2010 ruling calling for amendments to its fiber-optic network contracts. The watchdog considered that certain clauses relating to operational procedures provided for in Numericable's contracts for the sale of cable networks and applied by the operator when upgrading its networks with optical fiber, had to be modified in accordance with the provisions applicable to all telecoms operators deploying FTTx networks. The regulator's decision was confirmed by a decision of the Court of Appeal of Paris of 23 June 2011. ARCEP argued that Numericable took more than a year to implement the necessary changes rather than the two months decreed in its ruling. Under these conditions, ARCEP pronounced against the operator, pursuant to Article L. 36-11 of the Post and Electronic Communications (CPCE) code. (July 8, 2013) La Tribune

Germany

Telecoms watchdog the Federal Network Agency (FNA) has said it will examine the planned acquisition of KPN Telecom's local mobile unit E-Plus by Telefonica Deutschland. The FNA will look into the impact on network frequencies to see if the deal would distort competition in the market, while the Federal Cartel Office (FCO) has separately said that the transaction will need to be registered with authorities in Brussels. KPN announced that it had agreed to sell E-Plus to Telefonica Deutschland for EUR5 billion (US$6.6 billion) in cash and a 17.6% stake in the combined entity post transaction. The merger of Germany's third and fourth largest mobile network operators by subscribers will create a stronger competitor to larger players Telekom Deutschland and Vodafone Germany. Telefonica said the deal will result in an operator with 43 million fixed and mobile customers and combined revenues of EUR8.3 billion (end of 2012). Under the terms of the transaction, KPN will transfer 100% of its interest in E-Plus to Telefonica Deutschland for a consideration of EUR3.7 billion in cash and newly issued shares in Telefonica Deutschland, representing 24.9% of the share capital. Simultaneously, Spanish parent Telefonica will acquire a 7.3% interest in Telefonica Deutschland from KPN for a cash consideration of EUR1.3 billion, lifting its total stake to 65.0%, while the remaining 17.4% will be in free float. (July 25, 2013) Reuters

Telecoms regulator, the Federal Network Agency (FNA), has presented a draft decision on the introduction of vectoring technology in the network of Telekom Deutschland (TD) to the European Commission for approval. In December last year TD submitted an application to the watchdog for permission to introduce vectoring technology, which would enable bandwidth to be doubled to up to 100Mbps by cancelling interference between lines. The company plans to invest up to EUR6 billion (US$7.9 billion) in developing broadband using fiber-to-the-curb (FTTC) and vectoring in its domestic market to boost maximum VDSL download speeds from 50Mbps to 100Mbps. TD was given conditional approval to upgrade its copper network with VDSL2 technology in April this year; the FNA ruled that the operator must allow competitors to access the infrastructure, but added that it could deny access in areas where alternative networks are already available. The EC and the national regulatory authorities of other EU Member States can now submit comments on the proposal within one month of the revised draft decision. The decision will then enter into force if the Commission does not express any serious concerns. (July 11, 2013) telegeography.com

Italy

Incumbent Telecom Italia has won support from Italy's regulator for its plans to spin off its fixed-line business. In a speech to the Italian parliament, the President of Regulatory Authority AGCOM, is reported to have praised the plans, saying that a broad and deep separation would pay regulatory dividends. Telecom Italia's board approved the separation scheme in May and will hope the move helps the operator to slash its substantial debt of more than €28 billion (US$35.8 billion). Regulatory authorities are keen on the plan because it is seen as a way of leveling the competitive playing field and ensuring that Telecom Italia's rivals – including Vodafone, Fastweb and Wind can access fixed-line services on the same terms as its retail business. Similar moves have already gone ahead in the UK, where the carving up of fixed-line incumbent BT into separate retail, wholesale and infrastructure units is believed to have spurred broadband competition. Nevertheless, Telecom Italia has been asking for a "light-touch" approach to regulation, worried that it will be disadvantaged against its competitors as a consequence of legislative moves. Its proposed spin-off would include assets and resources for developing and managing the passive access network as well as active network components. The separation is also likely to be drawn-out process given its complexity and the political sensitivities associated with the plan. Although Telecom Italia had been aiming for a deal with AGCOM by early 2014, the separation could take up to 18 months to complete. A spin-off could precede the sale of a stake in the fixed-line business to Cassa Depositi e Prestiti (Rome, Italy), a state-backed investment group, helping Telecom Italia raise funds to pay down debt and make network improvements. The operator recently launched 4G services and is keen to expand the coverage of its "mobile ultra-broadband" network to more than 60% of the Italian population by the end of 2015. (July 10, 2013) telecomengine.com

Spain

Telecoms regulator CMT has announced the launch of a public consultation regarding the development of the country's broadband sector. In publishing the consultation the CMT said that it was aiming to obtain the views of the industry on new regulations related to next generation networks (NGNs) that are expected to be implemented during the period 2014-2016. Among the topics up for discussion is a proposal that would allow the regulator to set different access obligations dependent on the level of competition in a given geographical area, while the CMT is also looking to examine whether fixed line incumbent and market leader Telefonica Espana's should be obliged to provide a wholesale service over its fiber-optic infrastructure in a similar manner to those which it provides over its copper network. Further, questions have been posed over whether to revise the current regulation under which Telefonica is only required to offer wholesale access for broadband services with downlink speeds of 30Mbps or less, be it over copper or fiber. Stakeholders have been given until 18 September 2013 to make their submissions to the CMT.
(July 25, 2013) telegeography.com

Telecoms regulator the CMT has published data showing growth in May 2013. Overall, the wireless sector saw an increase in accesses of 31,326 against the end of the previous month, with post-paid additions of 97,187 helping to offset the loss of 20,356 connections in the pre-paid segment. The number of data card subscriptions, meanwhile, fell by 45,505 between end-April 2013 and end-May 2013. Despite the positive development, subscriber numbers (including machine-to-machine connections) remain some way off where they stood a year ago, with the CMT noting that the 55.034 million total represented a 4.2% year-on-year decline. In terms of individual operator performance, the CMT revealed that of the country's four cellcos only Yoigo actually saw customer growth in the month to end-May 2013, though it added just 6,990 subscribers in that period. Movistar and Vodafone Spain fared less well, reportedly seeing wireless accesses decline by 199,050 and 57,620 respectively, while Orange Espana's base was relatively stable and the cellco seeing a net loss of just 250 subscribers. The big winners however were Spain's mobile virtual network operators (MVNOs), which between them added 281,250 new subscribers. Intense competition between operators, the CMT noted, was reflected in statistics for mobile number portability (MNP); May 2013 saw the second-highest number of customers switching provider this year, with 593,633 requests to change, up 80.3% y-o-y. (July 19, 2013) telegeography.com

Telecoms regulator CMT has confirmed that new mobile termination rates (MTRs) had become valid. As per a previously announced glide-path, the regulator noted that the fee has now reached its target level, with all of the country's wireless operators now required to charge each other EUR0.0109 (US$0.0142) per minute for terminating calls on their respective networks. Highlighting the fact that the new rate represented a reduction of around 75% from the EUR0.04 per minute charged by Movistar Espana, Vodafone Spain and Orange Espana when the glide path began back in April 2012, the CMT claims that MTRs in Spain are now among the lowest in Europe. (July 2, 2013) telegeography.com

Belgium

The Belgian Institute for Post and Telecommunications (BIPT) has published an Information Memorandum (IM) for the award of spectrum licenses in the 800MHz band suitable for the deployment of 4G services. With the document detailing a number of elements related to the sale process, the BIPT has confirmed that it will make three concessions available, each of which will provide 2×10MHz of 800MHz spectrum. A minimum price for each license has been set as EUR120 million. Meanwhile, the regulator has also noted that each applicant can only acquire a single concession, with the BIPT stating that the auction will be open to 'any organization that fulfils the application requirements, including both existing providers of electronic communications services in Belgium and potential newcomers'. However, with a view to enticing newcomers to the market, the publication also lays out a number of incentives, including relaxed coverage conditions for those winners that do not hold 2G licenses. While existing wireless operators will be required to reach 98% population coverage within six years of being awarded a license, newcomers will be given nine years to expand its network footprint to that level. Further, while Belgacom, Mobistar and KPN will all be obliged to offer national roaming if they obtain 800MHz spectrum, all other licensees will be entitled to obtain national roaming. Finally, the BIPT has confirmed that the 2×15MHz block of spectrum in the 2.6GHz band that was not allocated in 2011 has been reserved for an 800MHz operator, should one not holding frequencies in that band be successful in the forthcoming auction. In terms of the method of sale for the 800MHz spectrum, the BIPT has said it intends to use the simultaneous multiple-round ascending bid (SMRA) format, similar to that it has used for previous frequency sales. Also included in the IM is an indicative timetable for the 800MHz auction, in which the regulator has said it expects to issue a call for candidates on August 14, 2013, following which a deadline for the submission of applications will be September 23, 2013. With the notification of successful candidates expected to be carried out on October 8, 2013, the sale itself is tentatively set to begin on November 12, 2013. (July 3, 2013) bipt.be

Belgium

The Belgian Institute for Post and Telecommunications (BIPT) has confirmed the renewal of BASE Group's 900MHz spectrum license. According to the regulator, the concession belonging to the Belgian wireless unit of Netherlands-based KPN Telecom is now valid until July 2, 2018. However, as part of the renewal BASE Group will return a portion of its spectrum holdings; the operator will hand back its 914.1MHz-914.9MHz and 959.1MHz-959.9MHz frequencies.
(July 1, 2013) telegeography.com

Czech Republic

The Czech Telecommunication Office (CTU) hopes to launch its revised auction of 4G mobile frequencies by mid-August, the agency said yesterday, and is sticking to its plan to reserve spectrum for a new market entrant. Last month the watchdog confirmed it was sticking to its guns vis-a-vis the 4G auction, setting aside two blocks of 800MHz spectrum for a potential newcomer, as well as sticking with a plan to introduce a spectrum cap on all companies looking to purchase bandwidth (i.e. a maximum two blocks each in the 800MHz band) – which is seen as critical in the swift deployment of 4G services across the Czech Republic. The CTU's revised auction follows the debacle of its cancelled tender in March this year, when bids rose three-fold on the reserve price of CZK7.4 billion (US$373.6 million) to exceed CZK20 billion, prompting fears that such high sums would hamper operators' efforts to roll out 4G, leading them to seek to recoup investment costs by imposing higher charges on end users. However, the Republic's existing mobile operators – in particular Telefonica O2 CR – have openly criticized the CTU's plans, arguing that they will be at a competitive disadvantage if the new entrant is allowed to pay less for its license. (July 30, 2013) telegeography.com

New Zealand

The New Zealand government's plan to auction Long Term Evolution (LTE) suitable 700MHz spectrum later this year has been thrown into doubt after Maori claimants to certain spectrum rights unexpectedly reactivated a previously dormant request. The Waitangi Tribunal's Chief Judge Wilson Isaac issued a direction for an urgent remedies hearing, after receiving an application on 4 July, and parties now have until the end of this month to file affidavits. As things stand, the government intends to make NZD30 million (US$23.6 million) available in funding to develop Maori capacity in ICT, rather than echoing its 1999 approach towards the distribution of 3G spectrum rights. On that occasion the government made NZD5 million available to allow Maori to bid in the 3G spectrum option, with Maori-backed interests going on to pay a total of NZD14 million for 3G spectrum rights that eventually underpinned the creation of third mobile operator 2degrees. telecoms minister Amy Adams said that they have never accepted that spectrum is a taonga [cultural treasure], but that the language is. We don't therefore accept that there's an automatic claim to spectrum. Maori investment group the Hautaki Trust, which originally brought government-discounted frequencies to the company as part of the Maori Spectrum Trust, held 10.17% of 2degrees' shares as of end-March 2013. Around 4.70% of this is a direct holding, while the remainder is accounted for by the trust's 'custodial services' on behalf of other Maori groups. In February 2013 the Hautaki Trust revealed that it was looking for new Maori investors to acquire some of the custodial shares. (July 12, 2013) scoop.co.nz

Bulgaria

Telecoms regulator the Communications Regulation Commission (CRC) has announced plans to hold a tender for the authorization of the use of frequencies in the 2500MHz-2690MHz spectrum band. Under the terms set out by the document, the spectrum available for use is listed as follows:

- Five 2×5MHz paired blocks (frequency division duplex, FDD) in the 2500MHz-2570MHz/2620MHz-2690MHz band; and
- Three 1×5MHz blocks (time division duplex, TDD) in the 2570MHz-2620MHz band.

The licenses will be issued for a ten year period and operators will be required to establish and operate 3G and/or 4G networks covering 35% of the Republic's territory within two years from the date of license authorizations, going on to reach 55% coverage within five years. The CRC has announced a deadline of July 26, 2013 for interested parties to submit their plans for use of the spectrum. In April 2013 the Bulgarian government announced that the National Security Service (NPS) will start the release of frequencies in the 2500MHz-2690MHz band, currently occupied by the military, for terrestrial systems capable of providing communications services. The release was scheduled to start on January 1, 2014, while the CRC was obliged to launch an auction for the allocation of spectrum for new Long Term Evolution (LTE) network by August 31, 2013.
(July 15, 2013) telegeography.com

Telecoms watchdog the Communications Regulation Commission (CRC) has opened a public consultation on the prospective allocation of available resources in the 1800MHz, 1900MHz, 2100MHz and 3500MHz frequency bands. The CRC has indicated that the 3500MHz frequencies are best suited for broadband wireless access (BWA) services, while the remaining frequencies are earmarked for 2G GSM, 3G UMTS, 4G Long Term Evolution (LTE) and WiMAX use. However, the 1900MHz frequencies will be reserved for use by new operators, each of which will receive an allocation of both FDD and TDD frequencies. All potential licenses will be technology neutral and operators will be permitted to select the technology and the corresponding services in accordance with their business strategies. The regulator has also announced a deadline until August 2, 2013 for interested parties to post their comments on the matter.
(July 3, 2013) telegeography.com

Republic of Cyprus

The Republic of Cyprus's Department of Electronic Communications, part of the Ministry of Communications and Works (MCW), has published the tender documents for communication network licenses using the 2600MHz frequency band. The Ministry has set a deadline of September 12, 2013 for interested parties to submit their applications, and has announced a starting price of EUR2.7 million (USD3.53 million) for a Category A license, and EUR2 million for a Category B concession. Under the terms set out by the document, the spectrum available for use is listed as follows:

- Category A: 2×20MHz paired blocks (frequency division duplex, FDD) in the 2600MHz band;
- Category B: 1×40MHz block (time division duplex, TDD) in the 2575MHz-2615MHz band

The MCW has indicated that there are three available FDD concessions in the 2500MHz-2520MHz/ 2620MHz-2640MHz, 2525MHz / 2545MHz / 2645MHz-2665MHz and 2550MHz-2570MHz / 2670MHz-2690MHz paired spectrum bands. Successful bidders are required to establish and operate 4G networks covering 25% of the Republic's territory within three years from the date of license authorizations, and must reach 40% territorial coverage within five years from the date of their license. By 2019, the networks should

have downlink transmission speeds of at least 30Mbps.
(July 15, 2013) telegeography.com

Azerbaijan

Country's three mobile network operators Azercell, Bakcell and Azerfon have received instruction from the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology (MCIT) to introduce mobile number portability (MNP) on August 1. Subscribers will be able to port their number once in a three-month period, with the process to be free of charge for consumers. The introduction of MNP has encountered a number of delays in Azerbaijan. In January 2010 communications minister said that MNP documents had been drawn up and submitted to the Cabinet of Ministers, but the country's mobile operators had not agreed to implement the service. It was not until June 2011 that the MCIT was reported to have finalized the legal framework for the implementation of MNP, with operators asked to start preparing their networks the following August. At the start of 2012 cellcos began switching to a ten-digit numbering system in preparation for the introduction of MNP, which at that date was expected to take place by the end of the first quarter of 2012. In December that year, however, Minister told local media that the launch of MNP had once again been pushed back to sometime in 2013, with the system still needing to undergo testing. (July 8, 2013) Trend

Nigeria

The National Council on Privatization (NCP) has appointed a liquidator for indebted fixed line incumbent Nigerian Telecommunications (NITEL) and its mobile arm M-Tel. Joe Anichebe, spokesman for the Bureau for Public Enterprises (BPE), was cited as saying that the council has hired Olutola Senbore, who has six months to set up the guided liquidation process. 'The reason we choose to go through the liquidation option is because the expected proceeds from the sale [are] likely going to be less than its [debts'] value,' said Anichebe. The privatized company will effectively be debt free, with creditors taking a loss on the remainder owed to them; the government will not make up for the difference in value to settle any outstanding liability. Anichebe added that NITEL owes creditors, which are mainly suppliers, around NGN400 billion (USD2.47 billion) and the liquidation process is aimed at protecting the government from future claims and liabilities. The announcement follows local press reports that the Senate opposes the BPE's planned liquidation of NITEL. The federal government approved the adoption of a guided liquidation strategy for NITEL and M-Tel in March last year, following a series of failed attempts at selling the indebted state-owned telco. In June 2011 the latest attempt to privatize the firm was cancelled when the reserve bidder, British Virgin Islands-based Omen International, failed to meet the deadline to pay its US$105million bid security. Omen was invited to re-register its interest in buying NITEL in March 2011, as the preferred buyer New Generation Telecommunications repeatedly missed payment deadlines for its bid of US$2.5 billion. Omen offered US$956.9 million during the latest attempt to privatize the company, held in February 2010. The government began seeking a buyer for a minimum 75% of NITEL and 100% of M-Tel in July 2009 after previous majority shareholder Transcorp divested its stake earlier in the year. (July 12, 2013) Reuters

Zimbabwe

Zimbabwe's telecoms watchdog the Postal and Telecommunications Regulatory Authority of Zimbabwe (POTRAZ) has cancelled the 'Class A' internet access provider (IAP) license held by Valley Technologies, the Zimbabwe Independent reports. According to the article, the company failed to address its debts and meet current license and spectrum obligations, totaling around US$2.45 million, despite being issued with several reminders and final notices since 2010. POTRAZ's director-general Alfred Marima has reportedly ordered the company to switch off and decommission all equipment used for the provision of services by September 10, 2013, and failure to do so would result in legal actions against the company.
(July 22, 2013) telegeography.com

Russia

Ministry of Communications (MinSvyaz) has reportedly sent a draft proposal to the president's office concerning a possible 'redistribution of frequencies for the construction of a pan-Russian 4G Long Term Evolution (LTE) mobile network'. The ministry has demanded access to the right to use spectrum in the 720MHz-750MHz and 761MHz-862MHz bands, as well as any available spectrum in the 390MHz-470MHz and 694MHz-876MHz bands. It then proposes transferring the accumulated spectrum to a new, state-owned company that will build a wholesale LTE network, providing access to all operators at state-regulated tariffs. Despite confirming that LTE licensees Rostelecom, Vimpelcom, MegaFon and Mobile TefdsleSystems (MTS) all met their license-stipulated launch conditions on or before June 1, MinSvyaz is reportedly concerned at the slow pace of the respective deployments; to date MTS and Vimpelcom are offering LTE services in Moscow, while MegaFon launched its 4G network in Yekaterinburg, and Rostelecom in Sochi. The four companies have rolled out fewer than 1,000 base stations between them over the course of the last year. In addition, the ministry has expressed concern that the four operators are deploying 'overlapping' LTE infrastructure and are focusing their efforts on large cities 'in the pursuit of profit'. Finally, MinSvyaz has complained about the inefficiency of the spectrum allocation process that granted each operator a 7.5MHz block of spectrum, rather than the standard 5MHz. This means that more than 30% of the allocated spectrum will not be used, the ministry has claimed. (July 9, 2013) Daily Vedomosti

Australia

An Australian parliamentary committee has recommended that a portion of the country's unsold 700MHz spectrum freed up as a result of the Digital Dividend be handed to public safety agencies. The Parliamentary Joint Committee on Law Enforcement has suggested that Communications Minister issue a ministerial direction to the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) to allocate 20MHz of contiguous spectrum in the 700MHz band for a public safety mobile broadband network. In a report the committee also proposed that the minister 'take appropriate measures to secure, for public service agencies, priority access to an additional 10MHz of spectrum in the 700MHz band for public safety purposes'. The Police Federation of Australia (PFA) has been actively campaigning for the government to allocate 20MHz of the 30MHz in the 700MHz band that went unsold in the frequency auction that concluded in May 2013. However, the Australian Mobile

Telecommunications Association (AMTA) was supporting a previous decision made by the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) which said that spectrum in the 800MHz band would be utilized for public safety, with the unsold 700MHz frequencies to be put up for sale once again. However, as the committee has only issued recommendations, the communications minister could still elect to move forward with the original plans to utilize the 800MHz band for public safety purposes.
(July 24, 2013) Computerworld

SMS alerts spend management tools and opt-out arrangements for Australians using their mobile phone overseas will become available soon under a new Australian Communications and Media Authority standard announced today. The new International Mobile Roaming (IMR) standard requires mobile service providers to provide a range of consumer protection features to help overseas travelers manage their mobile usage and better avoid bill shock. "Forewarned is certainly a major part of being forearmed," said ACMA Chairman. "These new measures will help consumers travelling with their mobile phone to be much better equipped than ever before to avoid travel bill shock."The standard extends the information which suppliers must make available to Australian consumers under the Telecommunications Consumer Protections Code. They will now receive similar information when they travel overseas and use roaming services." This initiative builds on the ACMA's work in the Reconnecting the Customer public inquiry (RTC inquiry), which found consumers were often not aware of charging arrangements and how charges accrue. The IMR Standard will be phased in from September 27, 2013. Its four key consumer protection measures are:

- A notification via SMS to be sent to all consumers on arrival overseas, warning them those significantly higher charges for using roaming services may apply.
- Enabling customers to stop international roaming, at low cost, at any time-including from an overseas location.
- A notification to be sent via SMS to customers of service providers giving them pricing information for using a range of roaming services. These services include any that would normally be free in the domestic market, such as receiving a call on a mobile device.
- Spend management tools, including notifications in A$100 increments for data usage and notifications at 50, 85 and 100 per cent of included value, if a customer has purchased an included value travel package from their IMR service provider.

The new standard represents the second tranche of improved transparency measures to aid telecommunications consumers. The first tranche was in the strengthened Telecommunication Consumer Protections Code, following the RTC inquiry. The Australian Government has also announced other measures to address the cost of roaming overseas. (July 3, 2013) cellular-news.com

Taiwan

Seven companies will vie for spectrum suitable for offering 4G services in Taiwan's upcoming auction. With the deadline for submissions to take part in the sale process having now passed, the National Communications Commission (NCC) has revealed the identities of the would-be bidders. All four of the country's 3G licensees Chunghwa Telecom, Taiwan Mobile, Far EasTone and Asia Pacific Telecom are among the companies that will participate, with the other three being: Foxconn Group subsidiary Ambit Microsystems; a mobile telecom company newly established by the Ting Hsin International Group; and another new company set up by the Shinkong Group. The NCC will now examine the applicants with a view to announcing which of them have qualified to participate in the sale process, with this preliminary screening expected to be complete by the end of August 2013. The bidding process itself is then expected to get underway in early September 2013, the regulator has said. In May 2013 the NCC outlined the starting prices for the 4G-suitable spectrum which will be made available. Should the government sell all spectrum on offer at its lowest price, it will raise around TWD35.9 billion (US$1.2 billion) in total. With frequencies in the 700MHz, 900MHz and 1800MHz bands to be offered for sale, the NCC at that date also confirmed at that date that a total of twelve lots of spectrum will be made available, each offering between 20MHz and 30MHz. In the 700MHz band four lots of spectrum will be offered, three of which carry a base price of TWD4.6 billion for 20MHz of bandwidth, and one of which will cost at least TWD6.9 billion for a 30MHz block. Meanwhile, three lots in the 900MHz will all offer 20MHz of bandwidth, with two costing at least TWD2.1 billion, and the third at least TWD1.6 billion. Finally, five lots will be up for grabs in the 1800MHz band, with three of those offering 20MHz of bandwidth for a minimum bid of TWD1.4 billion. The remaining two lots will both offer 30MHz of bandwidth, although they are priced differently, at TWD2.2 billion and TWD3.0 billion. The NCC noted that the variation in pricing for spectrum blocks in the same band was partly dependent on the date at which the frequencies will become available for use, as some spectrum in the 900MHz and 1800MHz bands are currently used for 3G services and the licenses are not expected to expire until 2018. (July 2, 2013) The Digitimes

WiMAX operator Vee TIME has now said that it will not take part in the country's upcoming auction of spectrum suitable for LTE services. As recently as the end of May 2013 it was being claimed that Vee TIME would look to bid on 1800MHz frequencies with a view to using these to offer a 4G voice service designed to complement its existing product range. However, in the latest development it is understood that the likely cost of the concession – it has been estimated that bids could go as high as TWD10 billion (US$333 million) has put Vee TIME off participating in the sales process. Instead of seeking 4G spectrum the report claims that the operator will continue to focus on its WiMAX operations for the time being. (July 1, 2013) DigitimeS

Indonesia

Indonesian telecoms operators are increasingly turning their attention to mergers in a bid to sidestep a lack of allocated spectrum resource in the country that currently threatens to hamper further rapid development in the sector. Ministry of Communication and Information Technology (MoCI) postal and information infrastructure chief said that a number of telcos are becoming increasingly frustrated by the lack of bandwidth capacity which has resulted in end users experiencing slow mobile internet speeds as more and more users clamor for broadband access. The MoCI official sees no 'quick fix' other than for telcos to merge in order to secure a greater share of the spectrum frequencies that have been assigned to date. In his opinion, industry players in other 2G markets (both GSM and CDMA) have seen consolidation as a simple answer to addressing limited frequency constraints. Turning to Indonesia's crowded mobile market, chief said that it's only sufficient for the market to have four operators – three GSM and one CDMA. However, the domestic mobile landscape is pock-marked by a plethora of GSM and CDMA service providers, each of which is clamoring for their share of precious spectrum. GSM operators include Telkomsel, Indosat, XL Axiata, Axis Indonesia and 3 Indonesia, while CDMA operations are also offered by locally owned firms Bakrie Telecom, TelkomFlexi and Sampoerna Telecommunication Indonesia. Local industry watchers suggest that as a consequence of frequency shortages in Indonesia, the market – when compared to other countries – has suffered from their being too many small players which has resulted in cut-throat competition, both for customers and for mobile frequencies. In March 2013 the MoCI awarded additional blocks of 3G mobile spectrum, but only Telkomsel and XL Axiata were successful, leaving the three other applicants empty handed. The process was run as a 'beauty contest' and saw Telkomsel, which is 65% owned by Telkom Indonesia, winning spectrum at 1970MHz-1975MHz, while XL Axiata was the runner up with spectrum at 1975MHz-1980MHz. However, since then XL Axiata has said its 3G allocation is 'insufficient', prompting it to consider a bid to take control of Axis Indonesia – the fourth biggest player with two blocks of spectrum. If successful in its takeover bid, XL Axiata would leapfrog Indosat to become Indonesia's second-biggest cellco after Telkomsel. (July 11, 2013) The Jakarta Post

China

The Chinese government has revealed plans to speed up the 4G mobile license allocation process, with concessions now due to be awarded by the end of this year. An executive meeting of the State Council also discussed plans to accelerate fixed broadband deployments, plus moves which would encourage operators to upgrade the coverage and quality of their 3G wireless networks. The country's leading cellular operator by subscribers, China Mobile, has already begun rolling out 4G networks based on time division duplex Long Term Evolution (TDD-LTE, or TD-LTE) technology, but there has been speculation that rival operators China Unicom and China Telecom could also adopt the frequency division duplex (FDD) LTE standard which is more popular in other markets worldwide. Last month, China Mobile opened a tender for the construction of 207,000 TD-LTE base stations in 31 provinces. (July 16, 2013) China Daily

China will speed up work to issue spectrum licenses for 4G mobile networks this year and accelerate development of broadband internet access. The statement released after an executive meeting of the State Council presided over by Premier Li Keqiang. The meeting demanded implementation of the "Broadband China" strategy; China is aiming for annual average growth of 20 per cent in the information consumption industry from 2013 to 2015, the statement said. China Mobile, its largest telecom carrier, is promoting the TD-LTE standard and hopes to start commercial 4G rollout as soon as possible. Central government officials have openly supported the TD-LTE standard, however there are signs that China Mobile's two rivals, China Unicom and China Telecom, will opt to use FDD-LTE technology.
(July 16, 2013) Xinhua News Agency

Singapore

National telecoms regulator the Infocomm Development Authority of Singapore (IDA) has allocated additional radio frequencies to the city-state's 'Big Three' mobile operators SingTel Mobile, StarHub and M1 Limited (M1) enabling them to use spectrum in the 1800MHz and 2500MHz bands. In total, the three firms paid SGD360million (US$284.2 million) for the spectrum, which gives them more capacity to deploy Long Term Evolution (LTE) services to meet pent up demand from millions of Singaporeans. The three incumbent carriers were the only firms to put forward the requisite reserve bids for the 270MHz of spectrum on offer. The 4G licenses are valid from 2015 to 2030 and are being sold off as the current rights – originally sold in 2005 and 2007 – are due to expire in the next few years. As per the terms and conditions of the awards, SingTel, StarHub and M1 will be required to provide nationwide street-level coverage for LTE by June 2016, and must provide signal coverage of subway stations and lines, and road tunnels, by June 2018. SingTel Mobile obtained 100MHz of spectrum at a total price of SGD136 million, StarHub purchased 90MHz of spectrum at a total price of SGD120 million, and M1 bought 80MHz of spectrum at a total price of SGD104 million. Commenting on the awards, IDA said that the successful allocation of spectrum in the auction will give operators more long-term certainty on their spectrum holdings as they continue to deploy 4G services. This will enable the industry to better meet the demands of growing mobile traffic, and ensure that consumers can reap the benefits of quality 4G mobile services well into the future. The three cellcos were each awarded four lots of spectrum in the 2500MHz band, while SingTel Mobile emerged as the biggest single beneficiary of more favored 1800MHz spectrum – which provides for better coverage – winning six blocks, compared to StarHub (five) and M1 (four). (July 1, 2013) telegeography.com

India

Telecoms Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) has issued an amendment to mobile number portability (MNP) regulations, closing a loophole that was preventing the porting of numbers for corporate users. Under the new Telecommunications Mobile Number Portability (Fifth Amendment) Regulations, 2013, up to 50 numbers of a service provider can be ported to another operator in a single request through a letter of authorization. The time allowed for the porting request to be processed has also been extended to 48 hours for corporate accounts. The measures come into effect in late October. The amendment was drafted in response to complaints that corporate customers were having their porting requests rejected on the grounds of 'contractual obligation', in the absence of permission or authorization from the company or corporation. (July 26, 2013) telegeography.com

Telecoms Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) has issued new directions on the activation and de-activation of value added services (VAS), requiring operators to double-check consent from customers before providing VAS through any format. The first request for consent is through the provider's platform, whilst a second confirmation must go through a dedicated consent gateway owned by a third party. In its statement, the TRAI said that the activation of VAS by service providers has been the cause of many customer complaints and is a major concern for TRAI as well. The authority has been addressing consumer issues which have come to its notice through consumer complaints, relating to activation of value added service through different modes without

the explicit consent of the consumer. While issuing these directions, the Authority has also considered the interests of the service providers and growth of value added service industry.' Other obligations included in the new measures were: to inform subscribers 24 hours before an automatic renewal of VAS; to refund customers for wrong activations within 24 hours; to immediately provide subscribers with certain details of the VAS such as a number for deactivation, validity and renewal charges and; to provide monthly reports on activations, deactivations and complaints to the TRAI.
(July 11, 2013) telegeography.com

Indian regulator the Department of Telecommunication (DoT) is expected to deny Bharti Airtel a hearing regarding an INR650 million (US$10.64 million) fine for allowing subscribers to make long-distance calls at local rates to bypass roaming charges. Bharti claims that the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) had approved the practice, known as Subscriber Local Dialing (SLD), in 2003 and should be given the opportunity to explain its actions. However, an internal note from the DoT was quoted as saying: 'The issue has been examined by DoT and TRAI also. Further opportunity [for appeal] again is not desirable. The legal advisor has pointed out that Bharti Airtel's request, if granted, will perpetuate further delay in the matter.'
July 8, 2013) The Economic Times

India's Telecom Commission, the highest decision-making body in the Ministry of Communications (MoC), has approved plans to allow 100% foreign direct investment (FDI) in the telecoms sector. The move would allow foreign companies to own 100% of their subsidiaries in India and would remove the need for overseas investors to find a local partner to set up shop in India. The measures must still be approved by the cabinet before they can be implemented.
(July 3, 2013) The Economic Times

Javaid Akhtar Malik
Director Regulatory Affairs
SAMENA Telecommunications Council

Building "Best Practices" Telecoms Regulators in the Middle East

Phil Reynolds
Partner
The Rights Lawyers

1. Introduction

Kuwait's National Assembly has recently passed a draft law to establish an independent telecoms commission[2] to oversee the country's communications sector[3]. The Ministry of Communications (MoC) - the state regulator (and sole fixed line telephony operator) - is currently responsible for overseeing Kuwait's telecoms sector[4].

Kuwait is the last country in the Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) region to establish such a regulatory body. The new Commission is intended to regulate the mobile, landline and broadband sectors, although the exact scope of delegated powers it will be given remains unclear.

The above recent announcementin Kuwait presents a timely opportunity to discuss the so-called "independent regulator" seemingly one of the most highly revered institutions of modern regulatory practice – and the established principles and practices of "independence" that will need to be considered and applied to assure the success of the new Commission in Kuwait. Other existing ME governments and regulators may also find the discussion of these principles and practices a helpful measure against the current status of their existing individual respective regimes.

2. Investment opportunities are begging

Clearly, the performance of ministers and regulators substantially impacts the investment incentives and development of the telecommunications industry, whose quality and accessibility is central to the quality of life for citizens, and whose efficiency and effectiveness is critical to the overall economic development of any country.

1Phil Reynolds is a Partner in therightslawyers (www.therightslawyers.com) , a leading ME niche TMT law firm, and Chairman of gr82tlk FZ LLC a leading global MVNO consultancy.
2The Kuwait Telecommunications Commission
3Kuwait Times, 23 June 2013
4The MOC had previously announced, in November 2010, that it intended to establish an independent telecoms regulator as part of its ongoing intention to privatize the country's fixed line telephony market. Reportedly, no further internet service provider (ISP) licenses would be issued in the interim period.

The performance of ministers and regulators substantially impacts the investment incentives and development of the telecommunications industry

In recent years, the Middle East (ME) region has received considerable private sector investment into telecoms infrastructure development from local and, to a much lesser degree, foreign investors. Much more investment in these services (including foreign investment) is needed in the next decade to meet the needs of current and projected ME populations and to deliver levels of innovation, choice and growth in voice and digital communications services comparable to other more developed countries and economic regions[5].

Investment in the telecommunications sector - characterized by long-term investments, high sunk costs, and complicated property rights that change as technology changes - is highly influenced by government reputation for fairness and adherence to core "best regulatory practice" principles[6]. High credibility improves market outcomes, while low credibility weakens or frustrates the benefits of markets. The design of the regulatory regime should therefore seek to bolster credibility based on a reputation for fairness, efficiency, and respect for free market economic and competition principles.

Independence of aregulator,is viewed as a key component of credibility. However, such independence is not an end in itself – it needs to be buttressed by other principles or components of "fairness" as part of the overall regulatory framework and functionality. These additional components are discussed later in this article[7].

Liberalization of telecommunications and investment during the last decade has stimulated the creation of new regulatory regimes and institutions across the ME, which are, in turn, intended to further stimulate investment by establishing confidence in government commitments to open (and fully competitive) markets and stable economies.

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Moreover, the current ongoing economic and financial crisesacross the ME region means post-crisis investors remain nervous and hesitant, and are warier and more risk conscious nowadays Therefore, the necessity for sound regulatory frameworksand strong and effective regulators is greater than ever. Hence, efforts to build new, and to improve existing, regulatory regimes are to be lauded and – if implemented effectively - are likely to have even higher payoffs in the future[8].

Accordingly, in frontier economies[9] such as Kuwait where fundamental institution-building is underway, it is important to clearly understand the rationale for "independent" regulatory bodies, their links to other aspects of the legal and policy environment, and the design options related to their performance.

This article provides a brief summary of some of the key accumulated wisdom relating to "independent" regulators in the telecommunications sector[10].

3. Global Support for Independent Regulators

Legislators in Kuwait and most other frontier economies are aware that independent regulators are widely used in liberalizing telecommunications markets[11] .Today, out of thirty-four OECD member countries, only seven still have un-delegated regulators, headed by a government minister. Of those, only three are European[12]. By way of further example all the APEC countries have separate delegated or independent regulators. Accordingly, the calls for delegation to "independent" authorities seem to have won the debate in optimizing models of regulation.

This trend is not only supported by the precedent established in other developed economies, it is also being driven by international policy advice by thelikes of the World Bank, the ITU, the IMF, the OECD, APEC,the EC and other international institutions, as well as by the expectations of investors. As alluded to previously, establishing an "independent regulator" is increasingly becoming a strong symbol of a government's commitment to genuine reform for effective competition and "free market" principles. In few other areas of regulatory practice is there such widespread agreement of the need for this particular type of regulatory model.

5See for example, SAMENA Telecommunications Council. Smart SAMENA:Capturing the USD 1.3 Trillion-dollar digitization opportunity in the SAMENA region. Dubai: the Council, 2012.
6This is because expected returns on investments and assets change as the level of regulatory risks and regulator competence change.
7See section 7 'Enabling an Effective Independent Regulator' below.
8Op.Cit.
9The term "Frontier Economies" are commonly seen as countries capable of becoming the next generation of emerging markets. Based on the MSCI Frontier Markets Index, such countries include 25 countries in the Middle East and North Africa.
10See for example, ITU. Regulatory Handbook, Geneva: the ITU, n.d.; World Bank. Policy research working papers, 1999.'Governance and regulatory regimes for private infrastructure development'. London: NERA,1998.

When a regulatory body bows to external pressure from government officials, or entities controlled or owned by the government, it demonstrates lack of independence and prima facie raises at least the suspicion that its decisions may be neither objective, impartial or transparent

4. The meaning of independence

It may be helpful to cite at the outset the definition of independence adopted over a decade ago by the International telecommunications Union (the ITU) which defines independence as a term that variously refers to the separation of regulatory and operational functions, neutrality, insulation from external pressure, or simply the designation of an official person or body publicly identified as having the regulatory responsibility and not subservient to the rest of the ministry[13].

When a regulatory body bows to external pressure from government officials, or entities controlled or owned by the government, it demonstrates lack of independence and prima facie raises at least the suspicion that its decisions may be neither objective, impartial or transparent. Such conduct ultimately and inevitably undermines investor and consumer confidence and regularly brings the regulator (and possibly the government) into criticism and disrespect.

The most commonly cited reasons in support of independent regulators are that governmental ministries:

1. Frequently have competing or conflicting internal issues, responsibilities and commitments.
2. Maintain budgetary and financial control of the regulator.
3. Are not transparent enough[14].
4. Frequently have direct or close ties to industry participants and other stakeholders (most notably where there are government held or controlled operators) and consumers, and favour their welfare.
5. Lack professional experience and expertise sufficient to monitor and analyse the market (in a competition law sense); and, consequently, lack legitimacy and credibility for their policies and actions.

These five last mentioned reasons are all internal policy and institutional factors which are capable of being addressed by individual governments, and are best addressed through the creation of a legally independent regulator.As discussed in a Postscript at the end of this article, there are also a number of regional cultural and political externalities which adversely impact the credibility of ME regulators. Unfortunately, these externalities are beyond the control of any individual government and are not easily or readily addressable. These social and demographic factors are simply reality, but will likely continue to hamperthe realization and implementation of all "regulatory best practices" in the ME and other frontier countries for some decades to come[15].

Drawing on the earlier mentioned ITU definition and the recognised deficiencies of Ministerial regulation one can distil four distinct attributes underpinning the notion of effective independence of regulators, namely:

1. 6.Independence from the market players (operators and service providers) of the telecommunications sector itself16.
2. 7.Independence (avoidance of capture) from other interested, and potentially impartial, parties such as consumers and related industry manufacturers and suppliers17.
3. 8.Independence from political actors such as political rulers or leaders and ministers and administrative officials (including, in some frontier countries, military and religious persons) for the day-to-day matters.
4. 9.Financial independence.

The first three points listed above, taken together,go are issue of structure and function. Therefore, in its broadest sense, effective independence of the regulator normally requires both (a) structural independence and (b) financial independence.

11As well as other utility sectors with network characteristics such as energy and transport, and in other sectors where sector-specific regulatory oversight is needed such as financial services.
12Estonia, Finland and Hungary.
13ITU, The changing role of Government in an era of telecom deregulation: Report of the colloquium held at ITU Headquarters 17-19 February 1993
14Even in states where freedom of information rights exist.
15See section 9 'Postscript: Regional Hurdles to Regulatory Best Practices' below.
16This goes to the notion of "privatization" or divestiture of government equity or direct interest or participation in the market.
17For example, network facilities and IT system providers, digital media content suppliers and mobile handset suppliers etc.

Structural independence is an important element of an effective regulatory environment, it alone is not sufficient to ensure successful development of the sector

5. Structural Independence

Providing a regulator with full structural independence will reduce the possibility of political, consumer or industry capture and heighten the perception among citizens, the industry and investors of a credible, impartial and transparent market place. In a structural sense, independence means guaranteeing that the regulator maintains an arms-length relationship with private industry, consumers and the other branches of the government. However, there are various institutional options for structuring an "independent" regulator:

1. A structurally separate and autonomous unit may be established inside the ministry that acts in the capacity of a regulator.
2. Preferably, the autonomous unit may also be a formal and physically separate office or administrative organ outside a government ministry that serves as the regulator.
3. Ideally, a regulator can be legally independent; that is, a legislatively separate entity from the central governmental structure18.

Although structural independence is an important element of an effective regulatory environment, it alone is not sufficient to ensure successful development of the sector. In order to be fully effective, a regulator also requires (a) financial independence and (b) effective functionality (both these components are discussed in turnbelow).

6. Financial Independence

The funding sources, and the process by which funds become part of the Regulator's actual budget, has a direct and important impact on the regulators autonomy, independence, institutional competence and effectiveness when carrying out its responsibilities.

While a regulator's budget may come from the government or from the telecommunications sector itself through licensing fees, spectrum fees, fines and other administrative charges, the key principle is that funding should be, and must be seen to be[19], free from political and private interest influence.

There are two primary vehicles used by countries to fund a regulator's budget. And, although a country may use one or the other, funding for the regulator generally comes from some combination of the two sources:

1. One source of funding is a formal allocation from the government's consolidated revenues (as part of the State budget). This approach offers the benefitof promoting a greater role of the elected government in formulating and directing regulatory policies to support the overall economic goals of a country
2. A second source and model permits and empowers the regulator to collect monies from the industry through fees and various contributions. Regulators may receive payments from operators for spectrum and/or operating licensing fees; penalties resulting from enforcement or settlement of disputes; and or recurring charges associated with cost recovery for administrative tasks performed by the regulator such as providing and managing spectrum or numbering resources20.

The ITU reveals that, for the most part, telecommunications regulatory authorities are funded through a combination of these last two mentioned models - that is, general government budget appropriations, license allocation fees, spectrum fees, recurring regulatory fees (usually annual fees based on a percentage of operator's turnover, profits or revenues), or a selection of these[21]. Of the 192 countries that provided information on the breakdown of their regulatory authority's financing sources, only 28 indicated that the regulator relies on a single source of funding over 85 per cent rely on some combination of funding sources[22].

18For example, as is the case in all GCC states except Kuwait and Jordan. The World Trade Organization (WTO) Telecommunications Reference Paper requires that countries establish a regulator separate from the operators or others that are responsible for supplying the services that are regulated.
19The issue is one of transparency.
20Many ME countries also assess special royalties (taxes) on telecommunication operator revenues (in addition to income taxes imposed by the treasury), of which a portion is sometimes earmarked for universal service purposes.

Good regulation is not just about finding the right technical solution, but about placing that solution within a larger supportive policy, economic, and social environment in which it can function

7. Enabling an Effective Independent Regulator

The structure, funding and legal status of the regulatory authority will be shaped by the country's political and legal systems. Normally, government leaders or the legislature must first create and establish a policy framework for an effective regulator[23]. Specific government legislation is then required to create the regulator and set the regulator's mandate and functions and provide an effective delegation of the required powers and responsibilities. This is not an easy or simple process and the enormity of the legislative and administrative exercise necessary to create new policy frameworks, laws, regulations, by-laws – and to amend or repeal existing ones – should not be underestimated[24].

As alluded to previously, the institutional structure of a regulator - including the organizations legal status and standing as well as its relationship with the government, industry, and the public - andthe model of financing adopted in its establishment are key.However, the realization of these core components is not an end in itself.The real effectiveness of the regulator will ultimately lie in how it achieves successful functionality (discussed next below). Good regulation is not just about finding the right technical solution, but about placing that solution within a larger supportive policy, economic, and social environment in which it can function.

8. Achieving Successful FunctionalityIs Equally Important as Independence

Of equal importance to structural and financial independenceis need for the enabling framework to enshrine the long established notions, principles and best administrative and regulatory practices of:

1. Impartiality;
2. Transparency; and
3. Accountability.

These complementary and concomitant functional components of "independence" are the paramount checks and balances necessary to prevent bias or arbitrariness in decision making and/or partisan capture of regulators and to deliver long term sustainable competition and maximum consumer welfare. Successful functionality is achieved only when the regulator is able to perform its responsibilities and implement and enforce its powers openly, fairly, without external influence or interference and in a timely fashion.
Accordingly, the underlying legislative framework establishing the regulator should prescribe each of the following functional elementswhich,singly or in combination, address one or more of the above last mentioned three principles:

1. Clear mission statement established in legislation to serve all interested parties interests by encouraging open competition, adherence to competition principles, and customer choice (a vague general "public interest" mandate should be avoided).
2. Delegation of a clear, comprehensive an unambiguous scope of power – i.e. its duties, obligations, responsibilities, operations and functions (free of ministerial control).
3. Credible and professional criteria for the selection and appointment of the regulator (and for any relevant board members or commissioners).
4. Appointment of regulators for fixed terms (of adequate tenure (5 years? And with no re-appointment?)) And protections from arbitrary removal or political interference.
5. For a board or commission, stagger the terms of the members to ensure continuity within the top ranks of the regulator.
6. Ensuring required resources are sufficient to carry out its mission and enforce its delegated powers.
7. Aligninghuman resource policies with the need to hire expertly qualified and experienced staff from competitive private labour markets, and ability to engage external experts for specific projects.
8. Exempting the regulatory agency from civil service salary and employment rules that make it difficult to attract and retain well-qualified staff[25], as well as permitting termination of poorly performing staff -(it should not be part of the civil service system).
9. he requirement to provide and publish reasons in writing for actions, decisions and determinations.
10. 1Providing the agency with a reliable and adequate source of funding.
11. Establishing a robust model or mechanism for performance monitoring, reporting and accountability of the separate regulator. This should include clear accountability for defined market results (KPI'S) and regular public reporting showing progress

After more than a decade of liberalization of telecommunications in the ME region the majority of Gulf and other Arab states continue to struggle to establish and/ or maintain "global best practice" regulatory regimes and authorities

against mission statement, market objectives and KPI'S.

12. Oversight by an ethics committee against clear ethical standards.
13. Clearly defined internal authority and processes for communications with stakeholders.
14. Through systematic monitoring (and auditing) of performance and statutory duties, protecting against capture by the very industry they regulate[26].
15. Legislative and executive oversight by an outside policy or parliamentary body;
16. Explicit public and other stakeholder participation (including the requirement for formal consultation with all affected stakeholders). No selective lobbying behind closed doors.
17. Eliminating any confusion relating to competition law enforcement. Namely, clear demarcation lines between sectoral regulators under their own statutes, and any general economy wide competition regulators under general competition law. The objective is to avoid fragmenting competition principles and practices which results in the undesirable situation of different approaches and standards applying to different parts of the economy. Conflict, confusion and "forum shopping" for dispute resolution has occurred in some countries[27].
18. Substantive appeal rights and procedures and independent and open (public) judicial review of the regulators decisions and actions.
19. Establishing specialist tribunals or courts and/orensuring that at least somemembers of the judiciary are educated and familiar with the economic principles, competition concepts, telecommunications markets and consumer welfare analysis used by regulators.Absence of a an adequately skilled and informed judiciary has resulted in significant delays in review of many of the most important decisions of independent regulators, and in some cases has resulted in misguided reversals of decisions.

9. Postscript: Regional Hurdles to Regulatory Best Practices

As mentioned earlier in this article, the reality in the ME region remains that the difficulties of building stable, effective and credible regulatory regimes has proved a considerable challenge, involving a complex mix of market, policy, institutional, and legal reforms. After more than a decade of liberalization of telecommunications in the ME region the majority of Gulf and other Arab states continue to struggle to establish and/or maintain "global best practice" regulatory regimes and authorities. The difficulties are, in part, attributable to a number of overarching and enduring regional cultural and political externalities such as:

1. Political instability and an environment of continual ministerial change and official interference.
2. Levels of poverty are higher and consumer interests are generally poorly organised and non-assertive, in line with a weaker civil society in general.
3. Lack of effective and independent decision making and dispute resolution processes.
4. Legal institutions, legal rights and the enforcement of the rule of law – the essential foundation to robust regulation - in many countries remains an issue28.

Unfortunately, these externalities will likely continue at least into the foreseeable future, and improvements in these areas will not be swift. Accordingly, it is simply unrealistic to expect regulatory performance in ME frontier countries to achieve the same levels as in more developed economic regions of the world, at least for some decades. Unfortunately, until governments also start to more effectively address these broader underlying issues, better regulatory models alone will be insufficient to drive the levels of investment and increased competition vitally needed in telecommunications markets across the Middle East, and thereby achieving delivery of world class services for its citizens.

21See ITU World Telecommunication Regulatory Database.
22Op. Cit.
23This usually takes the form of a formal government policy document. For example Jordan, TRC Statement Of Government Policy On The Information & Communications Technology Sectors& Postal Sector, 2003.
24To get to the present position in Kuwait has reportedly taken over a decade ofdiscussion and official debate.
25Regulatory failures can frequently be traced to lack of expertise among the personnel.
26Sector-specific independent regulators are vulnerable to capture, in part, because regulators depend on the industry for information and cooperation in order to do their job. The risk of capture does not seem to materially change when regulation is moved from line ministries to independent bodies; in fact, the risk of capture can increase if the regulator is under-equipped and under-financed. The risk of capture is also higher when incumbent firms have political power or influence and can intimidate the regulator through the political system. The risk is also higher when the regulatory system allows excessive appeals and layers of decisions, so that the decisions of the regulator become mired in years of controversy before they become effective.
27Traditional telecommunications sectors are merging into digital media, internet and broadcasting as technologies become intertwined. The OECD is of the view that there should be a single, economy-wide framework of sound competition policy principles that is applied equally everywhere. Sector-specific regulatory regime and independent regulators should not be able to establish sector-specific competition policies.
28For example, laws in many ME countries still protect local monopoly (exclusive agency) rights and property rights (often a legacy of special rights and privileges granted or afforded to influential tribal and family group interests). And in some countries the courts are ill versed and experienced in dealing with modern technical concepts and commercial arrangements.

SATELLITE NEWS

Telekom Slovenije launches satellite-based internet

Telekom Slovenije started offering broadband internet access via satellite in cooperation with Eutelsat. The service is primarily intended for residents where the provision of broadband internet service has not been possible via terrestrial links or mobile signal. Most of these areas are in the Slovenian countryside, but the service can also be accessed in urban areas. Customers can choose from three packages with speeds of 8/2Mbps to 18 Mbps/6Mbps and data allowances of 8GB to 16GB, at prices ranging from EUR 32 to EUR 99 per month. If they need additional data, a 1GB package is offered at EUR 12. Customers need special equipment in order to use the service, namely a satellite dish or antenna with a diameter of 70 centimeters, a signal transceiver and a modem. The installation of equipment is carried out by installers from Telekom Slovenije and GVO. By entering into a contract for 24 months, users get leased equipment from Tooway. Establishing the connection with the installation is charged EUR99.

Successful launch for Inmarsat Alphasatsatellite

Inmarsat has confirmed the successful launch of Alphasat, the largest satellite, designated I-4A F4. Alphasat was launched on an Ariane 5 ECA, the latest version of the Ariane 5 launcher, from the Guiana Space Centre in Kourou, French Guiana at 20.54hrs BST on 25th July (16.54hrs Kourou local time). Arianespace confirmed a successful spacecraft separation at 27 minutes 45 seconds after launch and the Alphasat Mission Operations Team confirmed telemetry reception and that they have command of the satellite at 21.47 BST. Inmarsat is the owner and operator of Alphasat, one of the most technically advanced telecommunications satellites ever constructed for civilian applications. With a US$350 million investment from Inmarsat, Alphasatcomplements the company's award-winning L-band satellite fleet, which has been powering global broadband connectivity for government and commercial customers on land, sea and in the air since 2009.

Eutelsat 25B satellite arrives in Kourou, readies for launch

The Eutelsat 25B satellite of Eutelsat Communications has arrived at the European spaceport in French Guiana and is now in final stages of preparation for launch by an Ariane 5 vehicle on 29 August 2013. Built by Space Systems/Loral (SSL) this high-power, multi-mission satellite is jointly operated by Eutelsat and Es'hailSat from Qatar. It will be operated at the 25.5 degree East orbital location currently occupied by the Eutelsat 25C satellite in order to provide both operators with flexible coverage over the Middle East, North Africa and Central Asia for broadcasting, telecommunications and government services in Ku and Ka-bands. The satellite is based on the SSL 1300 platform and is designed to provide service for fifteen years or more. The launch is scheduled for 29 August during a launch window opening at 20.30 UTC and closing at 21.20 UTC.

C-COM partners with Vox Telecom

C-COM Satellite Systemshas announced that it has started supplying Vox Telecom with iNetVu Mobile antennas. The C-COM manufactured antennas will be used by Vox Telecom on the YahClick Go broadband satellite service. YahClick offers Africa's first Ka-band satellite connection providing coverage over highly targeted areas, allowing for greater efficiencies on the ground and a lower cost to the end user.The products have already been deployed at several high-profile events in South Africa, such as the ANC Mangaung conference in Bloemfontein, the opening game of the AFCON in Soweto, the annual Dusi Canoe Marathon in Kwazulu-Natal and the Charity Balloon Run event recently held in Cape Town. YahClick, in conjunction with Wildfire TV, also provided the live webstream for over a million viewers when Nina the Chimpanzee gave birth on camera at the Jane Gooddall Institute.

SBG Technology Solutions supports successful launch of MUOS satellite

SBG Technology Solutions supports the successful launch of the second MUOS (Mobile User Objective System) Satellite. MUOS is a next-generation tactical satellite-based communications system that improves communications for U.S. forces worldwide. MUOS gives military users expanded communications capability, including simultaneous voice, video and data usage - similar to civilian smart phones of today.SBG provides space systems engineering and technical support to all Program Executive Office (PEO) Space Systems programs, including MUOS. SBG supported the development and review of program technical and acquisition documentation guiding systems engineering technical reviews. SBG also assisted in providing technical, management and acquisition oversight support for all sustainment and modernization concepts of Navy Space Systems, the MUOS satellite included. SBG's support included documentation review, technical liaison, program reviews and participation in integrated product teams.

Panasonic signs agreement to extend eXConnectservice into Chinese airspace

Panasonic Avionics, which has purchased Ku-band satellite capacity for in-flight connectivity covering many of the world's principal air routessaid it has signed an agreement with China Telecom's satellite telecommunications subsidiary to extend the service into Chinese airspace.Lake Forest, Calif.-based Panasonic, which in 2012 became the first big customer for satellite fleet operator Intelsat's new Epic high-throughput Ku-band satellite system, currently in development, said a formal contract on the Chinese service should be signed in time to begin providing commercial links late this year.The memorandum, with China Telecom Satellite Communications Ltd., includes allowing Panasonic's current non-Chinese customers to use their Panasonic eXConnect service in Chinese airspace, the company said.

SKY Perfect JSAT, SSL sign new satellite deal

SKY Perfect JSAT Corporation has entered into an agreement with Space Systems/Loral (SSL) for the construction of its new communications satellite JCSAT 14, scheduled for a 2015 launch. JCSAT 14 will succeed and replace JCSAT 2A in the 154 degree east orbital position. Based on the SSL 1300 platform, the new satellite will feature larger, re-designed C-band and Ku-band payloads, boosting the available regional capacity by multiple folds.The new satellite is designed to fulfill the growing demand for telecommunication infrastructure in the Asia Pacific region.

Orbit launches new Maritime Mobile VSAT product line in Asia

Orbit Communication Systems, a provider of mission-critical connectivity solutions for mobile satellite communications, tracking and telemetry, and communications management systems, has launched the OceanTRx maritime stabilized mobile VSAT platform for the Asian market.Designed for efficient on-board serviceability and maintainability, OceanTRx-4 and OceanTRx-7 feature a highly accessible pedestal design enabling efficient service support and field upgrade process without requiring accurate or periodic balancing. The OceanTRx product line shares common electronic field-replaceable units (FRUs), allowing lower cost of ownership, easier maintenance support, and shorter service response times.

Thaicom and Gilat Satellite Networks announce HTS partnership

Gilat Satellite Networks and Thaicom have signed a Cooperation Framework Agreement. The companies will partner to provide customers across the Asia-Pacific region with an integrated solution using Gilat's satellite ground equipment in conjunction with Thaicom 4 (Ipstar)'s high throughput satellite.This cooperation is part of Thaicom's Open Access Platform (OAP) strategy, which allows technology equipment vendors to access the Thaicom 4 (Ipstar) high throughput satellite and provide customers with additional choices.

FCC proposes Ku-Band for mobile air-to-ground services

In an effort to increase broadband access on aircraft, the U.S. Federal Communications Commission (FCC) is proposing to use Ku-band, on a secondary basis, for terrestrial-based air-to-ground mobile services.According to IMS Research, by 2021 more than 15,000 global aircraft will have WiFi – a five-fold increase from current numbers. Consumers' unquenchable thirst for ubiquitous broadband connectivity has everyone looking for technical and regulatory solutions to meet this demand. Under the FCC's proposed rules, the 14.0-14.5 GHz band could now be used for air-to-ground mobile, or what the FCC calls Aeronautical Mobile Services (AMS).

RuSat claims 1,000 KiteNet satellite internet users

Russian satellite operator RuSat reported that the subscriber base of its KiteNet satellite internet service reached around 1,000 as of 1 July, reports Digit.ru. The service was launched on 15 March. The total includes 140 corporate users. KiteNet is a joint project of satellite operators RuSat and Raduga-Internet. They have sold 1,328 end-user device packages, and the ARPU exceeded RUB 1,800. The service is being offered across the country, save the Far-East.

ROAMING NEWS

European lawmakers may eliminate all roaming charges

The prospect of downloading data, sending text messages and making calls without incurring huge roaming charges while travelling in Europe came a step closer when politicians voted in favor of new legislation. A call to end roaming fees by 2015 was unanimously approved by the European Parliament's Industry Committee.Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) inserted text into the draft law saying that Europe's digital market still cannot be considered a level playing field because "artificial borders are maintained by mobile operators with the sole aim to increase their revenues. "Unbalanced profit margins on roaming not only create excessive costs for users, but also hamper growth and prosperity"committee stated.According to the annual E-Communications Household Survey published last week, half the population in the E.U. limits international and roaming calls because of price concerns."Mobile services are an essential part of daily life. It's not acceptable for half the population to be limiting their phone calls because of cost issues, and it's not acceptable that the lack of a connected single market encourages those limitations," said Digital Agenda Commissioner Neelie Kroes."India and the United States have already abolished roaming fees, and it is high time for the E.U. to do likewise""We must ensure that people are no longer afraid to use their mobile phones to make calls or download data when abroad. India and the United States have already abolished roaming fees, and it is high time for the E.U. to do likewise," said the politician charged with steering the draft law through the committee, Jens Rohde.

Airtel lowers roaming rates

Bharti Airtel has introduced affordable roaming for data, SMS and voice at a flat attractive rate whilst travelling within Africa and South Asia.Commenting on the service, Andre Beyers, CMO for Airtel's operations in Africa said, "Data usage has increased exponentially over the past few years, alongside the growing number of smart phones. There is an increasing number of excellent apps that can be used whilst on the go internationally. By introducing a flat and attractive roaming rate for data and SMS use, Airtel will help lower the communication cost for millions of frequent business and leisure travelers across the countries that we operate in." Airtel customers will not need to register or buy new SIM cards, as they are automatically enrolled in the 'ONE AIRTEL' service. In addition to enjoying flat roaming tariffs for data and SMS, they will also be treated as local consumers and pay local rates whenever they travel to nations where Airtel operates their service. The service is available in Airtel's operations across Africa in Burkina Faso, Chad, Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Republic of the Congo, Gabon, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Madagascar, Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia. In South Asia, Airtel is in India, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh. Beyers added "Whilst travelling, customers will feel right at home because they will be able to use their Airtel SIM cards in the host country. Airtel customers will also receive calls for free and have the opportunity to recharge their phone credit by using the host country's top up vouchers. There is a nominal mark up on the local rate to cover for exchange rate differences and currency fluctuations."

WAP/Bridge/Repeater provides Fast Roaming technology

Operating in 2.4 or 5 GHz bands, RLX2 802.11abgn Fast Industrial Hotspot features Fast Roaming technology, which uses less than 50 ms time between access points and provides full device bridging. Module offers secure 802.11i and 128-bit AES encryption as well as advanced management tools, including IH Browser Utility, web server, and OPC server. Operating from -40 to +167°F, Hotspot is suited for remote I/O, safety I/O, plant backhaul networking, remote video, and mobile worker connectivity.

Gamers applaud new roaming prices

The news at the end of June that roaming prices for mobile phones would tumble in July was met with ear-to-ear smiles by Germany's gaming community.With the cost of a megabyte of data within the EU dropping from 70 cents to 45, casual game addicts can play abroad with significantly more abandon than before; good news for Germany's thriving gaming industry.Gamers in Germany spend 110 thumb-aching minutes per day playing on their smartphone or laptops according to Germany's Federal Association for IT, Telecommunications and New Media (BITKOM). There are fluctuations across the age groups, but even the 50-64-year-olds spend the duration of a soccer match chasing their next level.This fall in roaming prices will give the industry a kick, particularly in Berlin, where more than half of Germany's venture capital into the IT industry flows and where many an App-creating company is setting up shop.This year's third Casual Connect expo is in San Francisco on July 30, where Germany Trade and Invest will be pointing out the investment conditions that make Germany so attractive for gaming companies of all sizes."Germany is in a great position," said Julia Oentrich, Manager of ICT at Germany Trade and Invest."This trade fair comes on the heels of Minister of Economics Philip Rösler's visit here to showcase Germany as a place for start-ups and innovation. The casual gaming industry is booming, with 63% of gamers playing casual games on their phone and tablet apps. Germany, with its cutting-edge IT infrastructure and great investment conditions, is the perfect place for creative minds to add further value to this industry."

Globalroam's international roaming softphone gets SPIRIT Voice Engine Mobile

SPIRIT DSP announced that Globalroam, a Singaporean innovative service provider, has licensed SPIRIT's TeamSpirit® Voice Engine Mobile to power its new mobile client application for making cost-effective VoIP calls for consumers and enterprises using iOS or Android smartphones.The new Globalroam Softphone, a smartphone application for Android and iOS devices, will enable subscribers to make telephone calls using data connections, either between two smartphones or from a smartphone to PSTN or mobile network, which is needed in cases when there is no opportunity to establish VoIP application-to-application connection between speakers. Globalroam has licensed SPIRIT's TeamSpirit Voice Engine Mobile to develop its software that enables voice communications with HD Voice quality, reliability and stability that exceeds other existing OTT services that use incomplete open source products, such as Google's WebRTC.Licensing SPIRIT engine will help Globalroam to offer its subscribers cost-effective international roaming services, in line with the global trend of OTT services expansion, such as Skype, Viber, and others which has resulted in significant revenue loss for traditional telcos. VoIP, which has become very popular among people over the last few years, has taken a great part of telcos revenue by cutting prices, especially for roaming and long-distance calls.

Hrvatski Telekom users offers unlimited internet in Slovenia

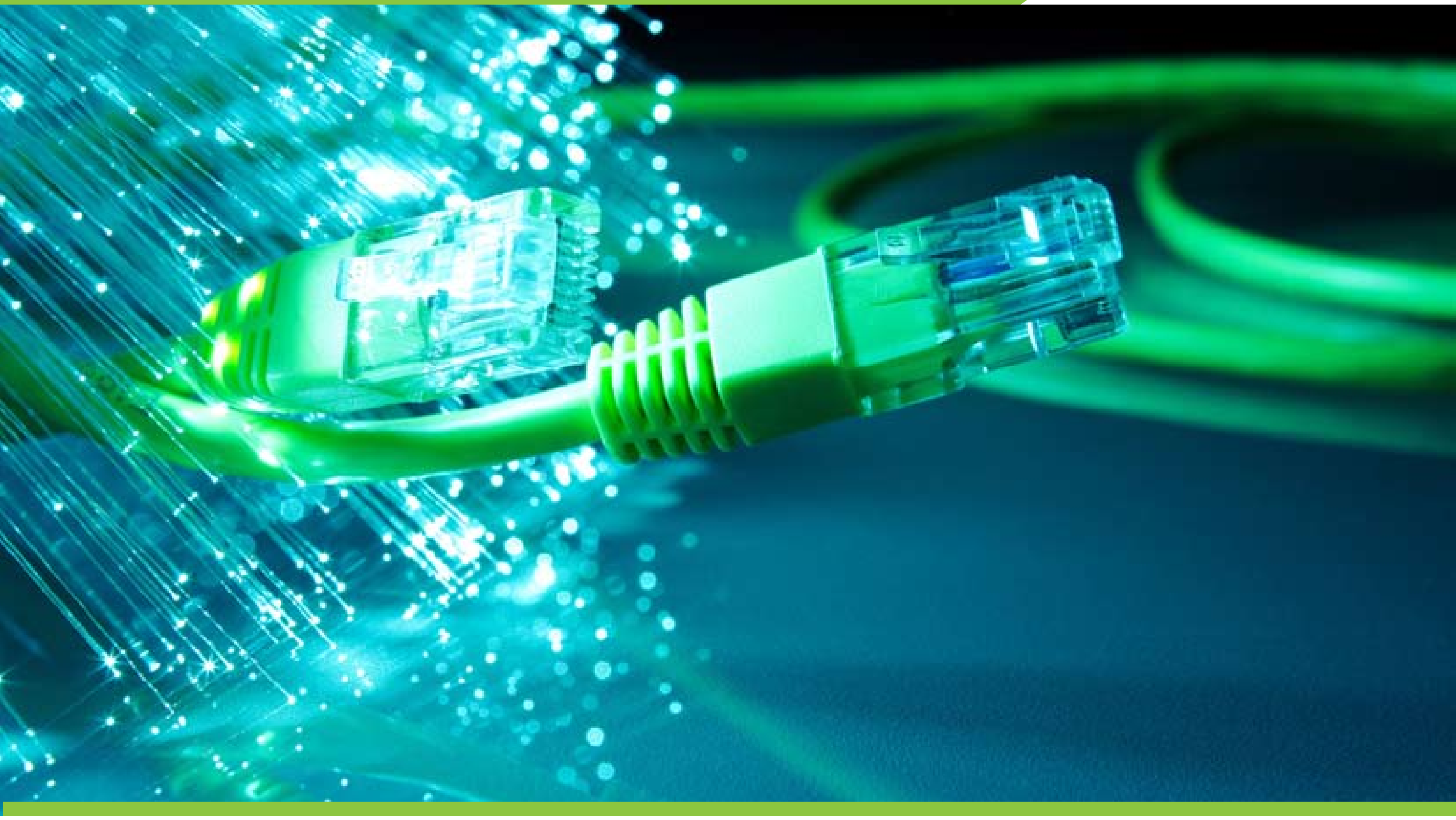
Croatian operator Hrvatski Telekom has introduced a new option that allows customers unlimited mobile internet access for HRK 75/month when visiting Slovenia on the mobile network of Telekom Slovenije (Mobitel). This is the result of a long term strategic partnership between the two operators in the field of international roaming. The new option is valid for all private and business customers of Hrvatski Telekom and provides 1 GB of traffic at maximum speeds. The offer is valid from 22 July to 30 September this year. The service can be activated free of charge by making a call or sending an SMS.

Roam Mobility's SIM Swap promotion provides better deal for US roaming

Roam Mobility wants people to use its service over the equivalent voice/text/data bundle from one of the incumbents, or choosing to dally with prepaid plans from AT&T or T-Mobile.The company is re-launching its successful "SIM Swap" promotion, giving potential buyers the option of sending in a current or expired US SIM card in exchange for a free Roam SIM. The savings are significant — a Roam Mobility SIM costs $19.95 — but even more important is the brand recognition (and good press) around the deal. Roam offers talk and text plans for $3/day or talk/text/data plans for $4, which start with allotments of 100MB. Users can pre-purchase blocks of data in one, three, seven, 14 or 30-day allotments, and all come with unlimited US talk and text, plus Canadian long distance for calling home.Running on T-Mobile's growing "4G" network — the equivalent of 21Mbps HSPA+ in most markets, with 42Mbps DC-HSPA+ in some that support it — it's a good option for those with unlocked phones looking to save a few bucks. While it's not necessarily cheaper than walking into a T-Mobile store, it saves the hassle and lets you hit the ground with cell service upon arrival.

BICS initiates first intercontinental LTE data roaming

BICS announced that its IPX platform enabled Swisscom and South Korean operators to perform the first intercontinental LTE roaming connection over IPX, between Europe and Asia.In early July the roaming facility will be extended to customers in Canada and Hong Kong. "We have not only taken the lead in expanding 4G/LTE in Switzerland, now we are also at the forefront internationally, leveraging on the best-in-class BICS IPX platform for LTE roaming," says Marc Furrer, Head of International Roaming at Swisscom.The fast expansion of LTE services is challenging for operators as it requires a brand new roll-out of technical interconnections and commercial agreements between all mobile networks to make it work, supported by a completely new all-IP international signalling infrastructure.



TECHNOLOGY NEWS

Sterlite Technologies launches enhanced family of bend-insensitive fibers

Sterlite Technologies Limited has announced the launch of three new products in its bend-insensitive BOW LITE family of fibers. These include the brand new BOW LITE SUPER (G. 657 B3), and significantly improved BOW LITE PLUS (G.657 A1) and BOW LITE ENHANCED (G.657 A2.B2) fibers. All fibers have industry leading specifications for attenuation and macro-bend loss with tight geometry control making them particularly suitable for Fiber to the Home (FTTH) applications. Furthermore, Sterlite is one of the few manufacturers in the world with the scale to offer novel products for such applications.Optical fiber cables in FTTH networks experience several tight bends, especially in distribution section of the network, drop cables found in Multi Dwelling Units, and cables inside the homes. The use of bend insensitive G.657 fibers in FTTH installations is required as carriers have to contend with tight power budgets, and uncertain deployment conditions needing healthy safety margins. Additionally, since bandwidth demands of end consumers keeps increasing at an exponential rate, carriers have to future proof their network assets, even as they are deploying current generation technology. With its significantly low macro bend loss and attenuation, Sterlite family of bend insensitive fibers are the perfect solution to the carriers' FTTH needs, suited to all FTTH architectures and deployment conditions.

Sprint extends LTE coverage to 41 new markets

Sprint has expanded the footprint of its 4G LTE coverage with the addition of 41 new markets across the U.S., the wireless carrier announced. The carrier, which lags behind Verizon Wireless with its LTE network, added markets such as Philadelphia, Portand, Ore., and Oakland, Calif., bringing the footprint of Sprint's high-speed wireless network up to 151 markets.While the update brings long-awaited network access to Brooklyn and the Bronx, the rest of New York -- Manhattan, Queens, and Staten Island -- is still without coverage. The company started work on building its LTE network later than its rivals, and has also been juggling a full overhaul of its network to modernize the equipment. As a result, many customers who buy Sprint 4G LTE smartphones have had to wait it out until the service comes to their locales.

Vodafone Italy plans FTTH for 27 cities

Vodafone Italia will bring its fiber to the home (FTTH) service to 27 cities in the country, offering eligible users up to 30/3 Mbps speeds.To entice customers to subscribe to the new service, the service provider is offering the fiber-based broadband service for the same price as its existing ADSL service for six months.Customers will have their choice of two FTTH packages: Fiber Vodafone and telephone Start, which will offer a fiber-based connection with unlimited calls to wire line and wireless phones for 19 cents a call for €32 (US$42) a month; and Fiber Vodafone phone and Without Limits that includes unlimited fiber-based broadband and calling to national and international calls to Europe and North America for €39 ($51).Users will also be able to get Vodafone Italia's HOUSE package, one that includes a Wi-Fi router, 1 GB of mobile data, voice services and Internet security.In addition, the service provider will provide FTTH services to 45,000 housing units in Milan via an agreement it recently signed with Metroweb. By 2016, Vodafone said its FTTH service will be available throughout the city.

China ramps up its 4G efforts

China is stepping up its efforts to drive the rollout and uptake of high-speed broadband services, which includes allocating 4G licenses this year.The Council also demanded the government implement its 'Broadband China' strategy; renew its push on fiber-to-the-home (FTTH) deployment; and drive forward upgrades to existing network infrastructure. The government is aiming for 250 million fixed broadband subscribers and 450 million 3G subscribers by the end of 2015. On the subject of 4G, market leader China Mobile has already begun putting a TD-LTE network in place – despite not having a license to operate commercial services – building 22,000 sites in 15 cities, according to the China Daily. The operator has previously stated its ambition to reach 200,000 base stations in 100 cities by the end of 2013, by which time it aims to have reached 1 million TD-LTE connections.However, China Mobile is considerably further ahead than its rivals, China Unicom and China Telecom, which have yet to publicly confirm whether they will deploy the country's home-grown TD-LTE standard, or the more mature FDD-LTE standard.

TOT plans fiber optic lines for ISPs

TOT Plc earmarked 25 billion baht for two fiber-optic networks in its latest move to become a network service provider and create new revenue streams. The move is part of TOT's strategy to stay afloat after its concession revenue vanishes at year-end. Chief executive YongyuthWattanasin said up to 20 billion baht will be spent on installing 3 million ports for a nationwide fiber-to-the-home (FTTH) network. FTTH is a broadband network architecture using optical fibers to replace all or part of the usual metal local loop used for last-mile telecommunications, thereby increasing the speeds. The plan will be submitted to TOT's board on July 24 for approval before being passed on to the Information and Communication Technology Ministry and the National Economic and Social Development Board and then submitted for cabinet endorsement.

StarView Solutions adds SMS to wholesale VoIP services

StarView Solutions announced that it has selected text messaging (SMS) services from TSG Global, Inc. in order to expand its SMS network footprint and bolster its array of voice services to serve its communication service provider customers with a host of new wholesale VoIP origination products.The addition of text messaging services from TSG Global will allow StarView Solutions to enable its base of VoIP carriers, service providers and reseller customers, as well as mobile application providers and developers with an even greater range of wholesale VoIP features. StarView Solutions' API-driven VoIP origination portal will also enable its wholesale VoIP customers to easily pull down any amount of SMS-enabled inventory from the company's global network of wholesale VoIP applications. This will simplify the ability to acquire and activate phone numbers through proactive, real-time transactions, which can also help to heighten the dexterity of their own product portfolios downstream.

Audi introduces LTE technology in Audi S3 Sportback

Audi, the German luxury car manufacturer becomes the first carmaker to bring the fast LTE data transfer standard to the car with full integration. This technology can be ordered as an option in the Audi S3 Sportback from July, and in all other models of the premium compact from early November. LTE technology is very important for Audi connect the networking of the car with the driver, the Internet and the environment.The new LTE (Long Term Evolution) enables the exchange of large amounts of data via the Internet, such as music and films in HD quality. Commercial LTE networks already exist in many European countries and in the USA. In Germany, LTE is available in a few large cities, but is primarily active in many rural areas. The standard is expected to be available everywhere by the end of 2014.

NT all set to launch Fibre to the Home project

Nepal Telecom (NT) is gearing up to launch a new project- Fibre to the Home (FTTH) in a bid to offer customers the fastest Internet as well as other value added services including voice, television.As part of the FTTH project, the company will install equipment in 10 exchanges.Currently in the local market, Internet service providers such as World Link Communications and Classic Tech are providing internet service with speed of up to 10 Mbps and 15 Mbps respectively. Even as Classic Tech offers data service of up to 15 Mbps through optical fibre connection, it does not have video and voice telephony services as its license condition not allowing do so.The state-owned company has also kept the FTTH project based on the next generation network technology on the priority list in the budget for the next fiscal year too. NT officials said that they would gradually replace the existing copper wire fixed line with fibre cables. As demand for high bandwidth by the modern multimedia application increases, many of the telecom companies in the world have replaced the copper wire with optical fibre from the exchange to the customers' premises.

TeslaOne launches low cost VoIP package for UK start-ups

Hosted voice over internet protocol (VoIP) provider, TeslaOne has announced the launch of a unique all-inclusive VoIP package, TeslaVoice aimed at UK start-ups and micro businesses for £25 per month. With no other subscription additions the offering will provide its users with unlimited extensions and UK phone numbers, time-based routing, call queues, music-on-hold and fax to e-mail as well as other features. The London-based phone provider is targeting its low cost service exclusively to businesses with fewer than 10 people. It claims its service is a first in the market as competitors would usually charge extra rates for a full suite of features.

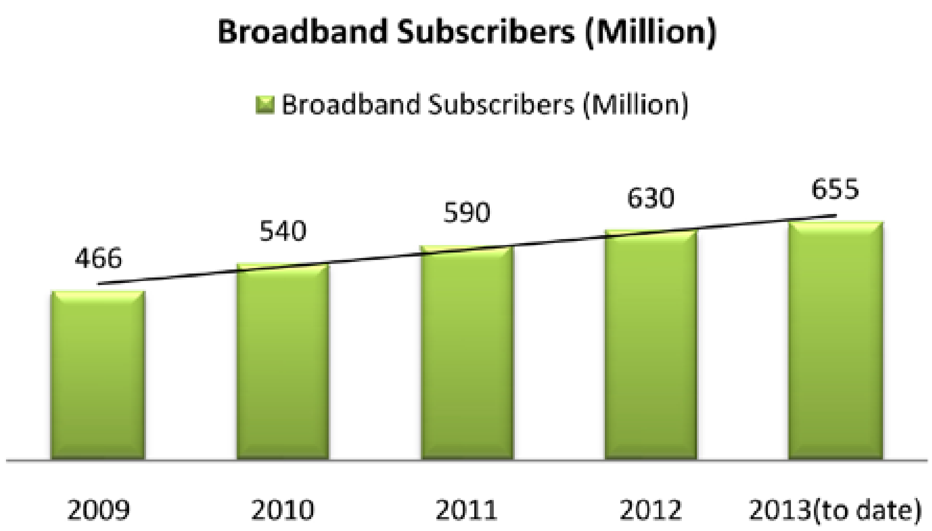
The Phenomenal Rise in Broadband Subscribers

Ali Tahir
Research Analyst
SAMENA Telecommunications Council

There are currently 655 million broadband subscribers globally

Broadband subscribers have increased from 466 million to 655 million in the last 5 years

There are currently 655 million broadband subscribers globally. Out of this around 22 percent (almost 144 million) market share is taken by fiber technologies which makes it the second most popular access technology after copper. Globally, broadband subscribers have increased from 466 million to 655 million in the last 5 years. This increase in broadband subscriberscan be seen in the following chart:



Fiber Technologies

Fiber to the home (FTTH) is the delivery of a communications signal over optical fiber from the operator's switching equipment all the way to a home or business, thereby replacing existing copper infrastructure such as telephone wires and coaxial cable.

Investment in fiber broadband comes with the added potential to deliver social goods

Fiber to the home (FTTH) is the delivery of a communications signal over optical fiber

There has been a steady rise in fixed broadband users within the SAMENA Region

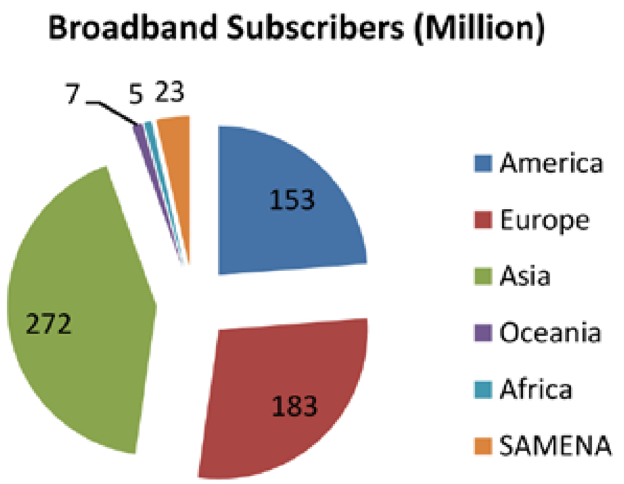
The top 5 countries in terms of broadband subscribers within SAMENA Region are Turkey, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, UAE and Pakistan

Connecting homes directly to fiber optic cable enables enormous improvements in the bandwidth that can be provided to consumers. Current fiber optic technology can provide very high bandwidth compared to other access technologies. Further, as cable modem and DSL providers are struggling to squeeze increments of higher bandwidth out of their technologies, ongoing improvements in fiber optic equipment are constantly increasing available bandwidth without having to change the fiber. That's why fiber networks are said to be "future proof."Fiber technologies (FTTx, FTTH) have continued to dominate the overall trend of growth since the last few years. It is a fact that the speeds of both the fiber-optic and copper are limited by length, however copper is a lot more susceptible in this regard. We can see the example of the example of the common form of gigabit Ethernet (1Gbit/s) over copper which is limited to 91 meters as compared to a several miles which can be achieved by the same Ethernet over fiber.

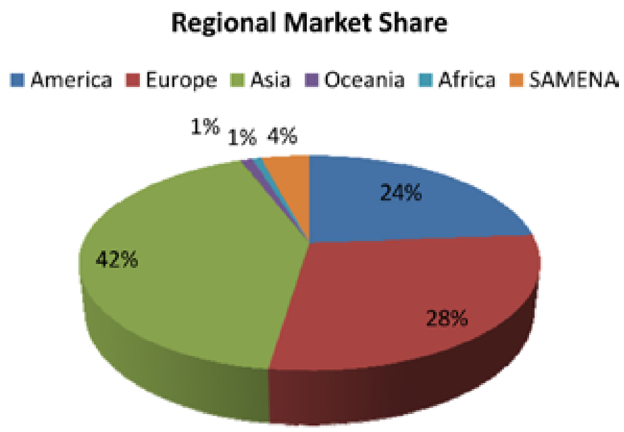
Investment in fiber broadband comes with the added potential to deliver social goods, such as improving public service levels in areas such as health, education, e-government, and democratic participation at a much lower cost than would be available offline.

SAMENA vs Rest of the World

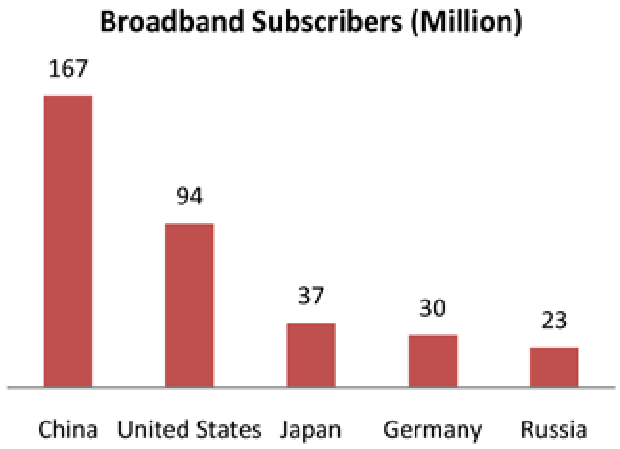
Like the rest of the world, there has been a steady rise in fixed broadband users within the SAMENA Region as well. There are currently around 23 million users of fixed broadband within the SAMENA Region. The following chart shows the broadband users in different regions:

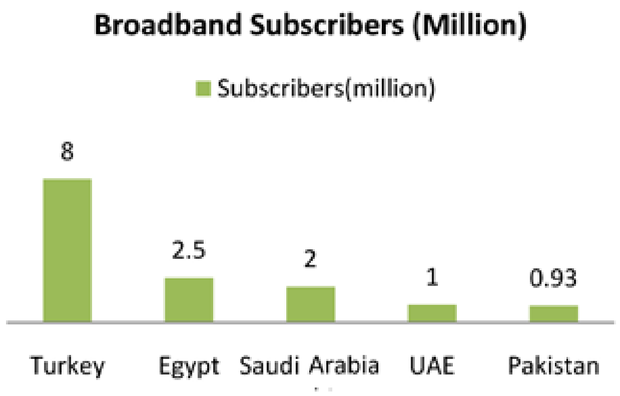


The regional market shares of various regions can be seen in the following chart:



The top 5 countries in terms of broadband subscribers globally are China, United States, Japan, Germany and Russia. The top 5 countries in terms of broadband subscribers within SAMENA Region are Turkey, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, UAE and Pakistan





SAMENA Council Strengthens its ties with the ITU with new Cooperation Program

In a move that further strengthens its relationship with the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) and provides impetus to its efforts in forging synergies and cooperation within the South Asia - Middle East - North Africa region's ICT community, SAMENA Telecommunications Council and ITU have agreed to promote ITU Telecom World 2013 among all its stakeholders. This high-level knowledge-sharing and networking event will be held in Bangkok, Thailand from 19-22 November 2013. It will convene an audience spanning leading industry stakeholders from the public and private sectors, including Heads of State and Government, Ministers, Heads of UN Agencies, Heads of Regulatory Authorities, industry CEOs from across the entire ICT ecosystem, thought leaders, consultants, academics and digital innovators.

Highlighting the SAMENA Council's efforts in actively engaging with its members and stakeholders for the progress of the ICT industry in the region and beyond, **Mr. Bocar A. Ba, CEO, SAMENA Telecommunications Council** said, "The ITU's interest in using our platform to effectively support its events in the region is a positive one and augurs well for our member base who stand to benefit. We are excited about this program and look forward to seeing strong representation and participation from the regional ICT community at the ITU Telecom World 2013 in Thailand. The global ICT industry is on the threshold of a digital revolution, and this event with high-level discussions on regulations and policies, innovations and strategies, and business models, between industry and government experts, will provide ICT players in the SAMENA region with the opportunity to exchange ideas, collaborate on industry issues and identify solutions with far-reaching benefits."

SAMENA Telecommunications Council collaborates with leading non-profit international organizations, including the International Telecommunication Union and the European Telecom Network Operators' Association. With an expanding member portfolio, the Council is quickly securing strong footing in the region. SAMENA's current network consists of 25 countries from South Asia, Middle East and North Africa. However, organizations from the Asia Pacific, Europe and North America regions are also part of the SAMENA Council member base.

SAMENA Council to Host Regulatory Summit with Viva Kuwait

SAMENA Telecommunications Council will be hosting a Regulatory Summit in Kuwait on 2nd September 2013 in partnership with Viva Kuwait. The theme of the summit is Regulation 4.0 where discussions will converge around a healthy and sustainable regulatory environment for all stakeholders.

The need for changes in regulatory policies and practices is being driven by an environment where there is rapid technological progress and evolution in telecom markets where digital infrastructures (particularly fixed and mobile access networks) have now become vital utilities whose availability and performance impacts every aspect of the economy and societal development. Discussions at the summit will also revolve around finding new approaches, which improve investment activities and provide more flexibility while maintaining and fostering competition.

The Kuwait Regulatory summit is a vital event with a number of panels which will discuss topics such as regulatory trends and case studies, the opportunity to foster growth through digitization, public private partnership to acceralate broadband development and efficient implementation of policy and regulatory frameworks among other topics. Industry leaders will convene to discuss regulatory issues and provide their strategic viewpoints based on their understanding of these issues.

According to Mr. Bocar BA, Chief Executive Officer, SAMENA Council, "The key aspect of discussions at the summit will be on ensuring a more dynamic regulatory framework which is based on enabling a more flexible environment and promoting a sustainable market. There is a need for regulations which grant access and consider the engagement of different stakeholders. With the changes in the telecom landscape the focus of national regulators has to shift towards new challenges such as quality monitoring and establishing dynamic efficiency as the centerpieces of regulatory policies and strengthening technological neutrality as a basic principle."

Salman Al Badran, CEO VIVA Kuwait added, "In June 1983, Kuwait became the first country among the GCC Members and one among the first in the SAMENA Region to implement Private Public partnership in Telecommunication Services, when 51% Private Equity was permitted in the Mobile Telephone Systems Company. A Regulatory environment is critical to proactively facilitate, promote and expedite the growth of Information and Communication Technology in any country."

SAMENA
TELECOMMUNICATIONS COUNCIL
BUILDING DIGITAL ECONOMIES

#304, Alfa Building, Knowledge Village, PO. Box: 502544, Dubai, UAE.
Tel: +971-4-364-2700 | Fax: +971-4-4369-7513

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