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BUILDING DIGITAL ECONOMIES

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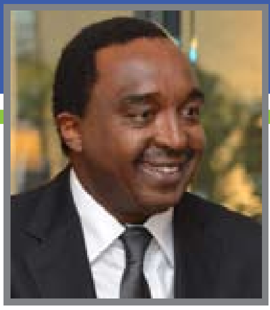
The Future of Telecom and Broadcasting: Forging New Synergies and Cooperation

Franco Bernabe
Chairman & CEO
Telecom Italia

EDITORIAL



The Future of Telecom and Broadcasting

Both telecommunications operators and broadcasters have similarities in what their core business aspires to achieve in the future. That is, both groups want to ensure better content and multimedia service delivery amidst the influx of alternative competition, and both want to efficiently make use of the spectrum available to them—be it for legacy service offerings in their respective domains or for creating innovative services and applications in the telecom-media converged domain. In any case, both require growth and sustainability.

As associated network costs, declining profit per user, and the entry of new players into the telecoms and content value-chains become more pronounced, the need for creating new business models to protect core business interests becomes even greater.

Telecoms operators rely on their experience in leveraging their network assets—which have increasingly become more advanced and resilient than could be thought of earlier—as much as they do on their customer bases and technology partnerships. Similarly, broadcasters rely on their experience in aggregating content, ensuring its targeted delivery, and amassing large customer bases. Thus, given the challenges that are common to both, it is needful for both telecoms operators and broadcasting companies to work together—the more synergistically it can be done, the better results it may yield.

Technologically speaking, cooperation-building can be realized through the implementation of next-generation network technologies and strategies, which allow for effectively dealing with complex network traffic patterns. Clearly, from a network point of view, should telecom operators and broadcasters decide to strategically combine their tangible and intangible assets, various challenges will be faced. However, combined experience and expertise in creatively attending to customer demands could help manage such challenges. Moreover, the presence of enabling regulatory and legal frameworks is highly critical, as this should enable smooth and seamless exchange and delivery of in-demand integrated content services.

A direct involvement of the policy-makers and the regulatory bodies is absolutely required for both telecoms operators and broadcasters to move ahead on a synergistic path to success. After all, the new digital revolution demands that greater degree of cooperation and collaboration be sought across industries and across various stakeholder sets.

Yours truly,

Bocar A. BA
Chief Executive Officer
SAMENA Telecommunications Council

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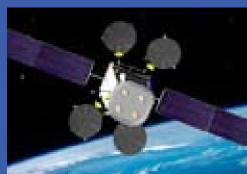


OPERATOR LEADER'S VISION

Franco Bernabè was born in Vipiteno/Sterzing (Bozen) on September 18, 1948. He is married with two children. Since April 2011 he is Telecom Italia Chairman and Chief Executive Officer after having the position of Chief Executive Officer in the previous three-year period. After earning his degree with honors in Economics and Political Science at the University of Turin in 1973, Mr. Bernabè worked for two years as a post-graduate fellow at the Einaudi Foundation. He began his professional career in 1976 as a Senior Economist at the OECD Department of Economics and Statistics in Paris. In 1978 he joined the Planning Department of FIAT as Chief Economist. In 1983 he joined Eni as an Assistant to the Chairman and became subsequently the Head of Corporate Planning, Financial Control and Corporate Development. From 1992 to 1998 Mr. Bernabè was CEO of Eni. During his two terms, he achieved the turnaround of the company and its successful privatization bringing Eni to be one of the largest oil companies by market capitalization worldwide. In November 1998 he became CEO of Telecom Italia, a position he retained until May 1999 after the acquisition of the company by Olivetti. At the end of 1999 he founded FB Group, an investment company active in the areas of financial advisory, ICT and renewable energy. In 2004, following the merger of the financial advisory activities of FB Group with the Rothschild Group, he was appointed as Vice Chairman of Rothschild Europe, position which he left when he became CEO of Telecom Italia. Mr. Bernabè is currently Chairman of the Board of GSMA, the international organisation of mobile operators, member of the Board of Directors of PetroChina, and member of the European Roundtable. He is also Co-President of the Italy Brasil Business Council and Vice President of the Rome Industrialist and Enterprises Association with special duties for innovation and Broadband. He is member of the Governing Board of Confindustria.

He has served on the Board of TPG-TNT, of FIAT, on the Advisory Board of the Council on Foreign Relations and on the Board of the Peres Center for Peace. He has also served pro bono on different public assignments: in 1999 he was appointed by the Italian Prime Minister as a special representative of the Italian Government for the reconstruction of Kosovo; between 2001 and 2003 he was the Chairman of La Biennale di Venezia, and since 2004 he is the Chairman of the Mart Museum. In 2011 he was appointed "Cavaliere del Lavoro". Since February 2012 Mr. Bernabè is President of the Telecom Italia Foundation.

TELECOM ITALIA

Franco Bernabe
Chairman & CEO
Telecom Italia

Q. In the last years the internet ecosystem has changed at a fast pace. What is your perception on where the telecom sector is headed and what does this means for operators like Telecom Italia?

A. The emergence of Over the Top and their services need a quantum leap in terms of capacity and bandwidth. In recent years the Internet traffic has grown at a very fast pace and the forecasts indicate a further increase in terms of connections and usage. This means that telecommunication companies have to redesign the networks in order to make them "future-proof". So far, the return on investment in infrastructure has always been linked to the ability to monetize access and traffic, but with new business models triggered by the spread of the Internet, this ability is gradually failing: despite the rapid growth in traffic, telecommunications players are experiencing a sharp declining of the revenues.
In this context, industry players are considering how their business must evolve to remain competitive and this leads to a significant shift towards the offering of higher levels of "quality of experience" and "quality of services". Telcos need to generate new revenue streams, reinventing their relationship with customers about managed services, security and interoperability. Quality of experience and Quality of Services will allow Telecoms players to broaden the market to new services that will make network investments (both fixed NGAN and mobile LTE) more sustainable.

Q. The rise of the mobile services, the wide spreading of smartphone and tablets and the ever-rising usage of mobile apps can disclose new opportunities for mobile telecommunications players? What are the most promising areas of growth for the mobile market players?

A. As a Chairman of the GSMA, the global organization of mobile operators, I am convinced that there are two major promising areas of services. The first and most important is the payment systems and the NFC technology that from now on will be included in all new terminals. It will take time but it is certain that this technology will lead to a huge amount of new services that will fuel new ecosystems. A second area that has great potential for development is the certification of identity. The SIM card is an extraordinary concentrate of hardware and software that contains a cryptographic element which is able to resist all attempts at penetration. Some countries, such as Korea, have realized the potential and have given the mobile operators the role of identity certification. These scenarios open up a world of new opportunities and new services.

Q. In the past, fast changes in the internet ecosystem were followed by sudden fall due to the unsustainability of the business models. Do you think that a sustainable internet business model is emerging or there are some drawbacks that can affect this industry?

A. Within the information society most of the processes and transactions take place through the exchange of bits, which are recorded, stored and processed. The Over the Top are exploiting and monetizing the huge amount of information they collect about their users and generate revenues from advertising, making their business model profitable and sustainable. At the same time however, the collection of personal data is raising privacy and data protection concerns. We need an adequate institutional support to settle a more balanced and transparent relation with the internet players and to ensure that the opportunities related to the new business model are not endangered by inadequate levels of privacy and data protection to customers. Indeed, regulators should create a playing field for all the players in the Internet ecosystem. OTT and Telcos should be subject to the same degree of regulation when using personal data for business purposes.

Q. Innovation is an essential key to compete in the new market arena. We are aware that Telecom Italia is involved in supporting initiatives to promote innovation, such as the Telecom Italia's digital start-up accelerator 2013. Could you please describe this program?

A. Innovation does not just consist in having a good idea. Lots of people today can have good ideas, but few of them are able to transform them into a business opportunity. Innovation is competence, willpower, enthusiasm and determination to find the right tools to transform an idea into a successful service or product. The distinguishing feature of our project is to combine social community-based mechanisms with the typical tools of venture capital. This model has been able to attract more than 4,000 business ideas, building a new way of start-up in Italian ecosystem. This is why Telecom Italia seeks to stimulate, support and fund innovative ideas proposed by others, such as for instance the Working Capital initiative or other innovation project. Hence, we have decided to devote the 2013 edition of Working Capital to facilitate the encounter between start-ups and domestic and international investors looking for innovative business ideas. Three new acceleration spaces will be opened - in Rome, Milan and Catania, the Italian focal points of digital innovation. This will be workplaces where start-ups can grow their business idea backed by a team of venture capitalists, entrepreneurs and innovators who will accompany them on a path of 'acceleration' with the goal of transforming new ideas into business projects.

The SAMENA Council held this year's Chairmen & CEO's Leadership Dinner in Venice on 24th May 2013. The Leadership Dinner was hosted by Telecom Italia. It served as the SAMENA Council's signature platform, bringing together leaders of the telecommunications and content industries to discuss various prospects for cooperation and collaboration, in order to make use of the emerging business opportunities which have been created by the convergence of media. The primary motivation behind the discussion was to identify areas of further business growth and means to sustain investment in the future.

The Executive Workshop

The Leadership Dinner was preceded by an executive workshop, which was hosted by Telecom Italia, in partnership with the European Telecommunications Network Operators' (ETNO) Association. The focus of the workshop was on generating a high-level debate on the future of the telecommunications as well as the broadcasting market in the context of the ongoing global digital revolution.

Among executive insights shared during the executive workshop, the thoughts of Mr. Franco Bernabè, Executive Chairman and CEO, Telecom Italia, drew particular attention to the fact that 60% of the Internet traffic now consists of video and that telecoms operators are experiencing consequential impedance in their ability to generate profits. Thus there appears to be an obvious need to re-engineer the current telecoms business model, which, to a great extent, depends on the industry's collective ability to efficiently roll out new broadband networks and to make further investments sustainable. Internet applications such as WhatsApp, YouTube, and Skype, among others, are playing a very active role in changing the global dynamics of telecommunications and have occupied much space in the current business model.

Significant growth in OTT content and applications offersample opportunity for telecoms operators. But operator's ability to get the most out of such opportunities is considered to be of greater importance then the opportunity itself. To be able to deliver high-end digital content, telecom operators need to keep their networks upgraded as well as extend their coverage. But equally important, they must begin delivering innovative and localized content and generate more revenues. End consumers of the digital content are demanding choice, flexibility and localized touch in terms of content. The emergence of high-speed broadband and its availability on both fixed-line and mobile networks have facilitated a dramatic rise in the creation and the consumption of content and the emergence of innovative OTT apps, including Skype, Viber, Whatsapp, Twitter, and Tango, among others. Mr. Walid Irshaid, CEOPTCL and Vice Chairman of the Board of Directors of SAMENA Council highlighted the increasingly important role of OTT by saying that "Skype has hundreds of millionsminutes of outbound international traffic, which shows how heavily the OTT services are influencing the common users." He added that the Internet is a global industry which is surrounding us and we all are an active part of it.

OTT services appear to be a highly promising segment of the telecom industry for their existence has ensemble innovation and creativity. The SAMENA region's content industry is on in its way to evolving both in terms of revenues and innovation, hence leaving a huge opportunity for telecoms operators to think more innovatively to have additional revenue streams. Mr. Wolfgang Bock, Senior Partner and MD Practice Leader - TMT, The Boston Consulting Group whileaddressing the audiences said that"The telecom industry has revenue of US$500 billion and is the key driver of building the digital world." Hefurther added that the telecoms sector lost US$100 billion in market capitalization over the last 5 years and that OTT made US$ 280 billion in revenues from the European Union alone.

The telecommunications industry is passing through an evolutionary phase both within the SAMENA region and beyond. The rise in collaboration among industry stakeholders as is the need to survive economically; to make the most of the potential opportunity development

on multiple fronts in on it way, including technological, regulatory, and in terms of business models. There is a dire need for policies for broadband, convergence and innovation to keep this evolution going smoothly. Effective regulatory measures are at the same time needed to encourage competition and investment, considering ROI related uncertainties for operators, based on the current regulatory models.Mr. Luigi Gambardella, ChairmanETNO, while highlighting the significance of new regulatory measures and drawing upon the need to reach out to various stakeholders and relevant entities that represent the telecommunications business, remarked on ETNO and the SAMENA Council's existing positive relations, and shared insights on the change emerging in the European Union's data regulations, especially with respect to data security and taxation.

In the moderated sessions of the workshop, led by Mr. Erik Almqvist, Partner and Global Head of Operational Consulting, Analysis Mason and Mr. Marc Biosca, Vice President and Leader, AT Kearney, a number of high-interest issues and questions were highlighted. Some of the key

questions included, "What new opportunities would emerge for broadcasters and telecom operators to supply content, leveraging 4G LTE and FTTX networks?

AD Little's response to the question highlighted that LTE as a technology is not designed to distribute linear or IPTV... The purpose of LTE in rural areas is to provide OTT services next to satellite or terrestrial TV. It was further discussed that network sharing should be considered in the case of fiber-to-the-home but there should be no network sharing for LTE services. Peppers&Rogers view of the issue was that the revenue for the entire media industry is US$1 billion whereas telcos have revenues of US$50 billion alone. Hence there is a huge opportunity for the telecoms operators to introduce content based VAS and gain maximum revenues."Another discussion topic focused on "creating a level playing field." The question under discussion was, "Does a level-playing field exist for distributing content across diverse platforms and access technologies?" If not, "Is there a need for such equality?" Peppers&Rogers response to the question as that such a question demands consideration of market to market dynamics and situations, and this is not the case in the Middle East. Intigral input was that "The users are looking for differentiating content which would translate to better user experience."AD Little's was of the view that cooperation will be a good move to transition from pure linear TV to all-screen TV.

The participants also discussed the important issue of spectrum allocation strategy. The mobile operators are in the quest for getting additional and more suitable spectrum to make the most of their fourth-generation infrastructure investments. The regulators in many countries have yet not announced any plans for LTE spectrum allocation; a fact that has begun to concern many telecom operator. Nonetheless, harmonized spectrum band plans are being discussed by regulatory authorities and other bodies globally. To the question regarding the best spectrum allocation strategies and what needs to be adopted by both telecoms operators and broadcasters to ensure a win-win outcome, the SAMENA Council maintained that spectrum should be used as a means for fulfilling the requirements of national digital plans, and encouraged the drive to support the development of innovative services, seeking access to the broadcasting bands. Omantel supported the idea of technology neutrality for it is considered to be the most important issue related to the Internet Governance.

The workshop was followed by SAMENA Council's annual Leadership Dinner. It delved into addressing the needs of various stakeholders in the converged telecoms and content landscape; assessing emerging regulatory dimensions and business models; driving innovation at all fronts; and assuring the success of the core business. High-impact areas of the discussion included digitization, sustainability of the telecoms and the media industries, profitable business models that should guarantee future growth, and business transformation.

The Leadership Dinner

The Leadership Dinner, in addition to generating dialogue on the business interests of the telecommunications and the broadcasting industries, also focused on the SAMENA Council's recently-concluded ICT policy assessment and digitization study. A general review of the findings of the Study was presented by the CEO of the SAMENA Council, Mr. Bocar BA. Mr. Luigi Pugliese, Managing Partner, Booz & Company in Italy then set the stage for the next part of the Dinner. He discussed the power of being interconnected, and that OTT and device manufacturers have no barriers and have a lot of power and that telecoms operators, in contrast, are local players and face considerably large challenges.

The Dinner discussion also highlighted content as being central to the evolution of the current telecoms business model, and the role of telecoms operators in providing content through platforms and partnerships. The participants agreed that significant change in the business model is necessary to embrace change, generate, innovation, and to successfully engage with SMEs—especially the application development community. Commenting on the continuation of fixed and mobile convergence, the executives agreed that there is enough capacity on LTE and additionally operators can easily partner with fixed operators in order to offload some of their traffic. However, key value lies in monetizing rising mobile traffic, and operators need to demonstrate this value to the end-customers. In efforts to make the most of the opportunities that are visible to the telecoms and the media industries, synergistic undertakings will, ultimately, define the extent to which cross-industry as well as intra-industry revenue success will become achievable and sustainable in the future.

Google joins SAMENA
Telecommunications Council as Member

SAMENA Telecommunications Council, a tri-regional non-profit telecommunications association has announced that Google, the global search-engine giant and worldwide technology leader focused on improving the ways people connect with information, is the latest organization to join as a new member.

SAMENA Council focuses on digitization, sustainable internet business model, broadband proliferation, and aims to promote telecoms & ICT industry, including favorable policy & regulation to help elevate the industry's development and evolution.

It has actively been involved in promoting ICTs in the region by providing an all-encompassing platform that helps promote cooperation among key stakeholders of the ICT industry.

Bocar A. BA, SAMENA Council's Chief Executive Officer, said, "As both a search giant and a major stakeholder in the digital content value chain, Google brings a great deal of knowledge and experience to the SAMENA Council as a member. We will do everything possible to provide our new member with a platform to share knowledge, exchange ideas, and to work closely with our growing member base on industry issues and challenges, both at the regional level and beyond."

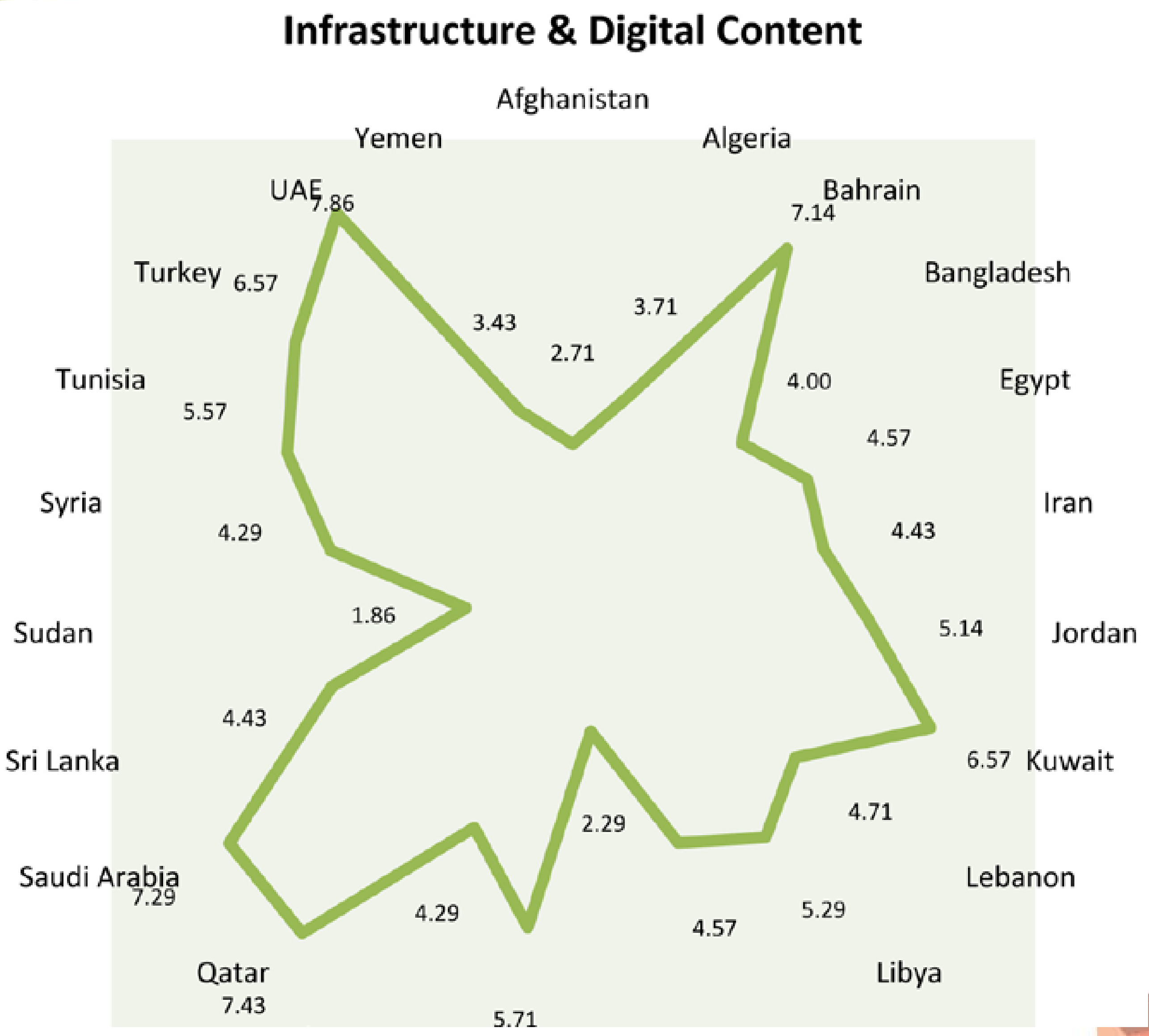
He added, "As a member of the SAMENA Council, Google will have several opportunities to participate and play a key role in our regional industry meetings and conferences, and explore regional markets and opportunities, and collaborate with our Telecom Operators."

"Google has been at the forefront of supporting the development of the ICT industry, ongoing digitization efforts in the region, and the widespread promotion and adoption of broadband and digital content. We hope that Google's joining the SAMENA Council will further the Council's efforts of accelerating the rates of digitization adoption in the region," added Mohamad Mourad, Regional Manager in the Gulf region at Google.

Google's innovations in web search and advertising have made its website a top internet property and its brand one of the most recognized in the world. Apart from that Google has been actively supporting and promoting innovation & entrepreneurship through technology, partnerships, collaboration and number of other initiatives to help promote information and communication technologies.

Infrastructure & Digital Content

Researchers Note: This month's regional KPI focuses on Infrastructure and Digital Content in the regional markets. Strengthening the digital content industry is of paramount importance to a successful digital ecosystem.Data has been taken from Global Information Technology Reports 2013published by The World Economic Forum. A ranking system has been developed using this data and a regional comparison of the SAMENA region has also been performed. Data for Iraq and Palestine is not available.

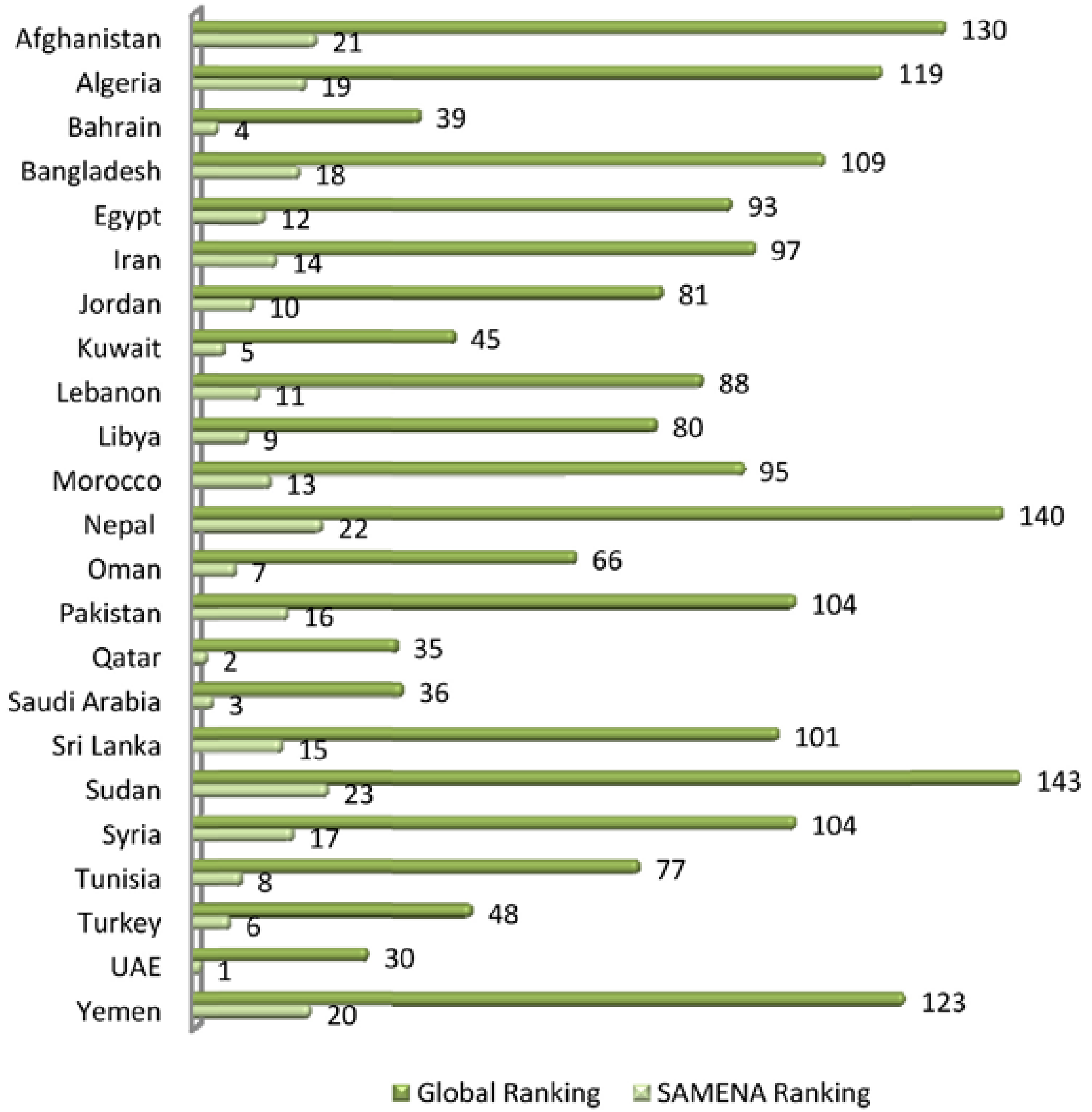


Research Note: Values are assigned from 1 to 10 where 1 is the lowest value for infrastructure availability and digital content and 10 is the highest. Within the SAMENA region, United Arab Emirates has the highest value for infrastructure availability and digital content whereas Sudan has the lowest value for infrastructure availability and digital content.

Image Source: SAMENA Telecommunications Council

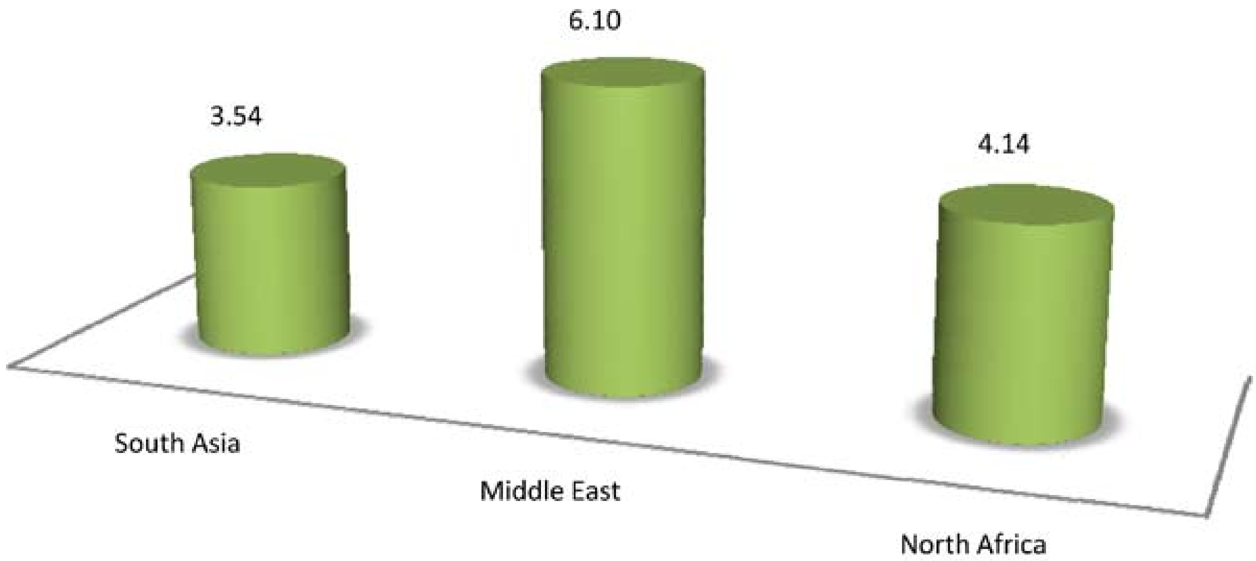
Data Source: The Global Information Technology Report by World Economic Forum & INSEAD

Infrastructure & Digital Content Global vs SAMENA Ranking



Research Note: A ranking system has been developed based on the values of infrastructure availability and digital content. Region-alvsglobal comparison has also been done. Research shows that within the SAMENA region UAE, Qatar and Saudi Arabia are the top 3 countries whereas Afghanistan, Nepal and Sudan occupy the bottom three slots.Globally the highest rank for infrastructure availability and digital content is 30 by United Arab Emirates whereas the lowest is 143 by Yemen, from the SAMENA region.
Image Source: SAMENA Telecommunications Council
Data Source: The Global Information Technology Report by World Economic Forum & INSEAD

Infrastructure & Digital Content Regional Comparison



Research Note: Regional comparison shows that the Middle East has the highest availability of infrastructure and digital content. North Africa is placed at number 2 whereas South Asia has the least availability of infrastructure and digital content comparatively. This is not surprising since based on the ranking 8 countries from the Middle East are in the top 10 whereas 2 are from North Africa. The highest country in South Asia is Sri Lanka which has a ranking of 15.

Image Source: SAMENA Telecommunications Council

Data Source: The Global Information Technology Report by World Economic Forum & INSEAD

REGIONAL NEWS

PTCL now offering "Cloud Services" to its corporate clients

PTCL the only largest and leading Information and Communication Technology Service Provider in the region now offering "Cloud Services" to it corporate clients. PTCL Cloud is an ideal end-to-end solution in managing an organization's growing on demand computing needs. PTCL Enterprise Cloud gives the users a precise, dynamic allocation of computing resources with the scalable, performance and security to handle enterprise-wide applications.

"PTCL Enterprise Cloud is a managed computing platform that gives businesses the power to provision computing resources for mission critical applications in minutes. PTCL Enterprise Cloud lets customers control a resource pool of processing, storage and memory and allows you to deploy server capacity on demand."

Mr. Samer Ajjawi Advisory Team member of EIP announced that the goal of Cloud Computing is to allow users to take benefit from best of breed computing model based on (Intel, Microsoft, Novell and VMware) technologies, without the need for deep knowledge about or expertise with each one of them. The Cloud aims are to cut costs, and help the valued customers to focus on their core business instead of being impeded by IT obstacle. A complete portfolio of cloud computing such initiative shall enable our valued enterprise customers to avail hardware & software infrastructure services from PTCL in a scalable and customized manner, resulting in reduced operational costs and elimination of annual capital expenditures.

Features:

- Power, Simplicity & Control
- Instance Based Resources
- Largest Number of Supported Operating Systems
- Integrated Network and Firewall Management
- Integrated Load Balancing
- Private Network Integration
- Multiple Environments in the World's Most Secure
- Facilities
- Physical Device Integration
- Security and Compliance
- Copy Server

Benefits:

- Zero Capex – Reducing total cost of ownership
- Reduced time to Market
- Flexibility and scalability
- Affordable structured prices
- Access to highly skilled resources and latest technologies
- Reduced efforts to manage, operate and maintain their Network infrastructure
- Predictable Network operating costs
- Eliminates their need to purchase capital equipment
- 24*7 available network for your growing multiplication needs
- Dedicated Corporate Help Desk

Products:

Following are main products which are being offered are as under

The product line also includes;

- Infrastructure as a Service.
- Platform as a Service.
- Cloud Servers.
- DR as a Service.
- Cloud Files.
- Email hosting
- Virtual Private Severs.

PTCL being the only largest national ICT Services provider is fully committed to deliver the on demand needs of enterprise customers in the region and with such first time important cloud initiative, the customer will now have the secure, reliable and cost effective cloud infrastructure within their region based on the PTCL physically and geographically tier4 data centres.

Roshan presents 3G services 3G Jahan in KABUL

Roshan, the leading telecom services provider of Afghanistan, has introduced its 3G services - '3G Jahaan' - in the Afghan capital city of Kabul.The mobile operator has plans to launch the service across the country in due course.The telecom firm has started promotion of its '3G Jahaan' service on its Website as well. The newly unleashed service delivers download speeds of as much as 3 Mbps.The data packages for the postpaid subscribers are available from 250 Afghani per month, whist the prepaid users can enjoy the service for a minimum of 50 Afghani, which offers data of as much as 50 MB for single day.The company s launch of 3G services follows its month-old announcement when it declared that it had obtained US$65 million in debt funding from the International Finance Corporation (IFC), the private sector lending arm of the World Bank, to facilitate its commencement of 3G services. The CEO of the telecom firm - Karim Khoja stated, "We are ready to lead the broadband revolution for Afghanistan's next generation," said Roshan CEO Karim Khoja, at the time. He further said, "Apart from providing even faster speed and access for our customers, 3G's enhanced connectivity enables greater access to vital, quality telecommunications that stimulate social and economic development in a host of sectors such as healthcare, education and finance.The Kabul residents will be able to enjoy the 3G services from Roshan now. However, the telecom firm will offer the service 3G Jahaan, which represents "the world" in the local lingo, throughout Afghanistan in due course.The telecom company has a subscriber base of 6 million.

Etisalat pioneers Internet address revolution

Etisalat has become one of the first companies in the world to pass the initial stages of a procedure to get its own Top-Level Domain as part of a revolutionary shake-up in way we search the World Wide Web.TLDs are the letters after the final dot of a domain name. The approval could pave the way for Etisalat to use "etisalat" in Arabic letters as its domain extension."As one of the most innovative companies in the Middle East, it makes sense for Etisalat to progress toward getting a Top-Level Domain before virtually anyone else," said Ahmed Bin Ali, Group Senior Vice-President, Corporate Communications, Etisalat Group. "Being a pioneer of the telecoms industry has been essential to our success and we plan to continue to be a leader in building an online brand."Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN), the global regulator of web addresses, recently released the initial evaluations of around 60 applicants. Etisalat passed its first application for the Top-Level Domain "etisalat" in Arabic letters.The UAE telecoms operator also applied for the TLD "etisalat" in English. The initial evaluation of this application will be released later this year.Etisalat can expect to see more companies and government organizations all over the world follow its lead to secure dedicated Top-Level Domains as they become the mark of entities that are serious about their futures.

STC extends its 4G LTE area coverage up to 74 percent

In a step that affirms its distinction in providing 4G services STC continued boosting its high speed 4G network coverage which reached 74 percent throughout the kingdom to insure the provision of high speed internet up to 100 mbps, in a manner that enhances the competence of its network as it is the comprehensive operator of the entire telecommunications services "mobile, landline and data" in the kingdom.Being the first operator of 4G services in the region, STC considers the current and next phases as enhancement and developing phases for its competitive capabilities so as to accomplish its aspirations to expansion, performance advancement and productivity upsurge. 4G LTE is deemed one of the promising technologies for the 4G smart devices networks provided by STC in the kingdom through adopting a strategy of continuous research and search for effective tools that secure the best flow for calls' movement, in order to closely keep on satisfying the increasing demand on its services from its customers, who are the widest in the kingdom, by dedicating its material and human resources to communicate and connect all sectors and institutions.

Connection to Internet Exchange UAE-IX in Dubai provides alternative routes in the event of submarine cable outages

A number of submarine cables suffered major outages recently that severely disrupted internet connectivity between the Middle East, Asia, Africa and Europe. Increased carrier interconnectivity would mean a broader range of available routes in such cases and, in the event of another outage, less negative consequences for internet users in affected regions. This type of connectivity would be possible for example at the internet exchange UAE-IX, located in Dubai, United Arab Emirates and managed by DE-CIX Management GmbH in Frankfurt.Since October 2012, the UAE-IX internet exchange in Dubai has been operating as an internet hub between Europe, Africa and Asia. Almost 20 international and regional ISPs exchange traffic here. "Higher connectivity can reduce the impact of submarine cable cuts for ISPs and their customers in the Middle East, East Africa and South Asia", says Harald Summa, CEO of DE-CIX Management GmbH, which manages UAE-IX. "When they interconnect at the UAE-IX, a more robust internet infrastructure for the entire region emerges. This type of increased resilience is to the benefit of all providers and of course, especially their customers, the internet users."

Batelco completes major acquisition

Batelco Group has announced the finalization of its recent acquisition of various companies from Cable & Wireless Communications (CWC), which comprise its Monaco and Islands Division. Batelco's Group Chief Executive Shaikh Mohamed bin Isa Al Khalifa and CWC announced that, following the agreement entered into with CWC on 2 Dec 2012, all necessary regulatory approvals and conditions precedent have now been satisfied and ownership of specific companies has now been transferred to Batelco.Batelco has acquired the entire CWC interest in Dhiraagu (Maldives), Sure Channel Islands and Isle of Man and CWC operations in Falkland Islands, St Helena, Ascension and Diego Garcia ("SADG"). Batelco also acquired 25 percent shareholding in Compagnie Monégasque de Communications SAM ("CMC"), which holds CWC's 55 percent, interest in Monaco Telecom. Total consideration paid for these assets was US$570 million. Batelco Group Chairman, Shaikh Hamad bin Abdulla Al Khalifa said: "Batelco Group is very pleased to formalize this transaction which will see the Group emerge as a communications player of global relevance and Bahrain's most diversified international company. With the acquisition of these businesses from CWC, we are extending our reach and taking our expertise to several new markets across the globe."

Batelco launches 100Mbps the Fastest Home Broadband in the Kingdom

Batelco, the Kingdom's leading telecommunications company, is delighted to announce the introduction of the most-awaited new super-fast Speed Broadband Packages to its customers. In line with Batelco's efforts to deliver the most sought after services, Batelco is first in the Kingdom to deliver the super-fast speed with the launch of 100Mbps Home Broadband. Batelco has started rolling out access to Broadband via fiber optic (GPON) technology, which delivers superfast speed access to the Internet and allows customers to choose any of the Superfast speed Broadband packages available. This is in line with the national broadband plan initiated by the government of Bahrain, to provide fast speed internet to every household in the Kingdom of Bahrain. "The launch of the advanced fiber technology is in line with our on-going commitment to deliver the most advanced communications technology available to our customers," said Batelco General Manager Media Relations Ahmed Al Janahi. Existing packages will be still available along with the new packages. Batelco has presented 3 new packages to suit its customers' needs, with speeds up to 100 Mbps, with prices starting from BD 50.

Etisalat Information Services signs exclusive agreement with Google AdWords

Etisalat Information Services (eIS) leading directory services provider in the UAE announced an exclusive partnership with Google AdWords an advertising platform for SMBs (small and medium businesses) to help them create, manage and optimize online advertising channels allowing them to engage with their key audiences. Under the umbrella of Google Adwords premier SMB partner program, eIS will provide advice to businesses on their online advertising campaigns. The program will provide SMBs with a complete turnkey solution. It will allow them to focus on their business and boost sales when potential customers search for products or services via Google in the region. The MOU was signed during a soft launch taken place today at Etisalat Academy, Dubai by Ali Mohammed Rashed Al Sharid, CEO, Services Holding, Etisalat and Mohamad Mourad, Regional Manager, Google. "Google AdWords provides Etisalat a platform to address this sector by providing expert advice from one of the largest global online company. These small businesses are also able to reach out to a global audience expanding their business beyond local markets."

Mobily launches shared accounts with Ericsson innovation

Etihad Etisalat, Mobily has launched the "Shared Account feature" with technology delivered by Ericsson. The new feature will allow Wajid and RAQI active subscribers to independently share their freebies from their mobile with any Prepaid & Postpaid customers. Meaning that they will be able to share their freebies including free minutes, free SMS, and free DATA."Differentiated customers' experience has always been at the core of our strategy at Mobily," said Ali Al DakheelActing Vice President Consumer Acquisitions"Ericsson's innovative technology will allow us to continue to provide our customers with the right services that fit our customers' individual needs and ultimately exceed their expectations at all times."Ericsson shares a long history of partnerships with Mobily which have proven to be very successful in bringing innovation and flexibility to the operators' customers in the past. The two companies also share a passion to be leaders in providing services to meet the customers' needs as well as to fulfill their expectations.

du's sustainability efforts recognized with CSR Label from Dubai Chamber

du is proud to announce that it has been presented with a second CSR Label from Dubai Chamber. The recognition was presented to Osman Sultan, CEO, du, by Hamad Buamim, Director General, Dubai Chamber, in the presence of several senior Executive Management members from du, during a ceremony held at Dubai Chamber. Dubai Chamber awards the CSR Label to companies in recognition of their efforts towards Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), and the levels of commitment demonstrated to continuing best CSR practices. As a responsible company, du has incorporated sustainability, including CSR, into the core of its business; this marks the second time that Dubai Chamber has bestowed the CSR Label on the telecom, following the initial award in 2011. "We are honored to have our efforts towards sustainability recognized once again by Dubai Chamber. As a responsible company we recognizeour accountability towards our community, environment and country, and we are dedicated to improving all three in the best ways that we can to ensure a positive, sustainable future for the UAE," said Sultan.

REGULATORY & POLICY NEWS

White paper on Arab broadband usage is out

The number of users who access the internet through mobile devices is expected to rise dramatically in the next few years, a Telecommunication Regulation Authority (TRA) official said. Mohammad Nasser Al Ganem, Director General of the TRA, spoke at the launch of a regional white paper titled "The Arab World online: Changing Internet Usage Trends in the Arab Region", which was conducted by Dubai School of Government (DSG) in partnership with Bayt.com. The report focuses on the use of e-government, consumption habits, e-learning, the use of social media, as well as mobile technologies and public attitudes toward online communication. "I have looked at the figures and, for example 'accessing the internet' and I have seen that smartphones and iPads are less than laptops and PCs. This is going to change, they are going to be number one in a few years, it will not last for more than three years — it will be less than that." He said that with technology developing, tablets and mobile devices will be the number one device for accessing the internet, not only in the UAE but the world. The report was based on 3,373 responses to an online regional survey that targeted residents of 22 Arab countries of which 76 percent were male and 24 percent were female; 48 percent of the sample was in the 15-29 age group.

The report showed that 71 percent of Arabs use the internet as an alternative to traditional communication, 28 percent prefer social media as the primary source of news, which matches the preferences for traditional media, while 29 percent have never used any electronic government services.

Nigeria set to launch MNP

The Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC) is set to finally launch mobile number portability (MNP) for the country's GSM subscribers. The NCC's director of public affairs Tony Ojobo says that MNP will lead to improved quality service and increased competition among operators. MNP is free for subscribers, who are permitted to port their numbers once in a 90-day period. The regulator will now work towards implementing the service for Nigeria's roughly three million CDMA mobile customers. TeleGeography's GlobalComms Database notes that the introduction of MNP in Nigeria has encountered numerous delays since it was first announced by the NCC in 2006. Further deadlines of 2009, December 2012, 25 March 2013 and 1 April 2013 came and went, and at the start of the month operators told the NCC that they required three additional weeks to enable them to complete their preparations.

Bangladesh plans to amend the terms of 3G spectrum

Bangladesh's telecoms regulator is reportedly planning to modify the terms of the upcoming 3G license auction in a move that could see more than one foreign entrant into the market.The original plans reserved one slot for a new entrant, but the Acting Post and Telecommunication Secretary Abu Bakar Siddique told bdnews24.com that the ministry decided to incorporate the provision for more foreign operators in the final 3G guideline against one fixed in the draft guideline.Under the previous plans, a total of four 3G licenses are to be offered to the private companies in a country that has seven mobile networks. The state-owned Teletalk has been granted 10 MHz of spectrum already, but will need to match the fees paid by the private bidders when the auction takes place.Under the new plans, blocks of 5MHz will be offered instead of 10MHz, allowing more licenses to be offered -- or for fewer bidders to buy 2 slots each."The new slot of spectrum would not only help the small operators commercially, but it will also pave the way for more foreign operators who are keen to invest here," Siddique added.The 3G license auction is due to take place at the end of June.An issue of how a value added tax will be applied to the auction bids is also still to be resolved.

Mobile subscriber base in Ghana hits 26.33 million

The subscriber base in Ghana reached 26.325 million at the end of February, the telecoms regulator has announced, showing a growth of 1.1 percent over the previous month. MTN comfortably maintained its position as the dominant mobile operator. Its subscriber base having reached 11.94 million.Vodafone's subscriber base of 5.42 million in January increased to 5.55 million representing 21.09 percent of the market share While Tigo's subscriber base shot up to 3.71 million representing 14.1 percent of the market.Airtel's subscriber base which is 12.69 percent of the total market share represents 3.34 million subscribers.GLO and Expresso market share is 6.13 percent and 0.62 percent respectively. The two operators' subscription also increased to 1,614,117 and 163,762 respectively.

Liberian regulator to scrutinizeworldwide call traffic

Liberia's telecoms regulator has set up a International Gateway Monitoring (IGM) project to ensure that the mobile networks comply with international call routing regulations. In an overview of the IGM Project, the regulator that it has been able to generate US$3 million for the government. The LTA Commissioner with oversight on the IGM Project said Lonestar Cell and Cellcom GSM were already connected, announcing that other companies would be connected to avoid fraud. He said the IGM system will be able to monitor and identify international calls posing problems of delayed calls, call- drop, and illegal telecom traffic, among others. The regulator has awarded a 5-year contract to the Global Voice Group (GVG) to manage the gateway monitoring platform, after which ownership will revert to the regulator.

NTA issued market report for March

The Nepal Telecommunications Authority (NTA) has published its 'Management Information System' report for the month ended 13 March 2013, highlighting that the total number of mobile users (GSM and CDMA) topped 17.395 million at that date, up from 16.608 million at the start of the year. Of the total, some 16.562 million were GSM and the remaining 833,367 were signed up to Nepal Telecom's (NT's) Sky Phone CDMA service. Privately owned Ncell led the mobile market with 9.553 million connections, ahead of state owned NT with 7.842 million. In the fixed line segment, the watchdog reported that the number of main lines in service stood at 834,435 by mid-March, compared to the 831,703 three months earlier, broken down as 641,747 PSTN and 192,688 wireless in the local loop (WiLL) users. NT counted 635,941 (PSTN) and 118,052 (WiLL) accesses at that date, to lead the market comfortably from United Telecom Limited (UTL), with 71,686 WiLL lines, Smart Telecom (5,208, PSTN), Nepal Satellite Telecom (2,950, WiLL) and STM Telecom Sanchar (598, PSTN). Broadband take-up continues at a steady rate, according to the NTA's findings, although the number of ADSL users has slipped in the most recent quarter. By the mid-March cut-off point Nepal was home to a total of 102,521 ADSL users – all for NT – down from 103,304 at 31 December 2012.

Mobile internet users reached 3.342 million in March

Hungarian market regulator the National Media and Telecommunications Authority (NMHH) reports that the total number of mobile internet users in the country reached 3.343 million at 31 March 2013, up from 3.179 million at the start of the year. Of these, 2.504 million were designated as 'active' (i.e. subscriptions with data transfer), compared to 2.399 million three months earlier. Further, the watchdog reported that mobile internet users transferred 2.520 million GB of data last month, up from 2.211 million GB in February and 2.587 million gigabytes in December 2012. The average amount of data transferred per user was 1.01GB, down from 1.08GB in December.In terms of mobile internet subscribers, T-Mobile Hungary led the pack with a market share of 45.55 percent (1.522 million), ahead of Telenor Hungary with 28.51 percent (952,823) and Vodafone Hungary at 25.95 percent (867,308).

Romania to re-allocate CDMA450 spectrum for PMR users

Romania's telecoms regulator, Ancom has announced that it is reserving the 450MHz band in future for use by Public Mobile Radio (PMR) users, on a per application basis.Until last week, this band was used by Telemobil, which offered voice and data services based on CDMA 450MHz technology. The regulator said that usage rights for the frequencies in the 450MHz band will be granted upon request, in the order of the date of submitting the requests, as long as the radio spectrum resource is sufficient for settling the existing requests for frequency assignation.Where the radio spectrum requests exceed the spectrum resources available and the settling of all the requests becomes impossible, the usage rights for the radio frequencies will be granted by means of a comparative or a competitive tender.

NBTC: Clarity to come soon on 3G agreements

The National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission (NBTC) insist there will be a clear legal resolution this week on the contentious third generation (3G) network contracts between True Corporation and CAT Telecom.Col Settapong Malisuwan, chairman of the NBTC's telecom committee, said the committee will decide whether one of the six contracts involving the network rental service of BFKT (Thailand) violates Section 7 and 67 of the Telecom Business Act.Section 7 says anyone who intends to run a telecom business must obtain a license from the NBTC, while Section 67 says operators of a telecom business without a license will face a penalty.``We will have no further delay on this issue," said Col Settapong, adding that the resolution will be strictly based on the principles of law.SuthipholTaweechaikarn, an NBTC commissioner, said the resolution will clearly define whether BFKT violated the law and what further measures will be carried out.

A SNAPSHOT OF REGULATORY ACTIVITIES IN THE SAMENA REGION

Active Consultations & Invitations for Feedback

Oman

Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) announces that it is in the process of studying the policy of registering internet domain names for individuals, as the TRA has already launched the first phase of internet domain names administration project which was confined to institutions. The aim of this document is to consult the public on the TRA's proposal for opening registration of domain names under the two top-levels (.om) and (.عمان) for individuals. TRA seeks to receive written comments from the public, government institutions, public authorities, local companies, service providers and any other interested parties. Comments may be submitted to the Authority latest by July 1, 2013. (April 17, 2013) tra.gov.om

Qatar

The Supreme Council of Information and Communication Technology (ictQATAR) launched a public consultation on its Regulatory Strategy for the coming three years. The Regulatory Authority is seeking comments from interested parties on its proposals for the strategic directions and actions for its telecommunications regulatory activities. ictQATAR considers that the development of this Regulatory Strategy with targeted set of actions is an important step in the continuous development of the regulatory regime for telecommunications in Qatar. It is also important to share with all stakeholders the focus areas that the Regulatory Authority will pursue to develop the telecommunication market, enhance available services and protect consumers. The proposed Regulatory Strategy focuses on the following strategic priorities:

- Enhance the competitive environment;
- Improve the clarity and predictability of the regulatory framework;
- Ensure the efficient management of scarce resources (frequencies and numbers);
- Safeguard the interests of consumers; and
- Support Qatar in the transition to a connected digital economy.

All interested parties are invited to review this proposed Regulatory Strategy and provide their comments and views to the Regulatory Authority by May 5, 2013. (April 7, 2013) ictqatar.qa

Country-wise Policy & Regulatory Developments

Afghanistan
Board Chairman: Mr. Abdul WakilShergul
[Afghanistan Telecommunication Regulatory Authority (ATRA)]
Telecom Development Company Afghanistan, Roshan has activated its 3G network in Kabul and confirmed plans to roll out the service nationwide. The cellco is the third of the nation's cellcos to introduce the technology following UAE-backed Etisalat Afghanistan and MTN Afghanistan, which activated their third-generation networks in March and October 2012 respectively. Roshan has introduced a number of pre- and post-paid offerings for the new service and has begun selling 3G-compatible data cards and handsets.
(April 16, 2013) telegeography.com

Algeria
Chairperson: Ms. Zohra Derdouri
[Regulatory Authority for Post & Telecommunication (ARPT)]
The Algerian government wants to complete its acquisition of Djezzy before launching 3G and 3G+ services, said ICT minister. The government is ensuring that no operator is favored by launching 3G before Djezzy. Under Algerian law, no company under receivership or undergoing a change in shareholder structure is allowed to bid for a license. The minister expects the government to close its purchase of 51% of Djezzy from Vimpelcom in around 2 weeks. Algeria originally called for 3G license bidders in October 2011, hoping to launch services in the middle of 2012. It has announced the imminent launch of 3G several times since.
(April 8, 2013) Agence Ecofin

The 3G mobile services is ready to be launched in Algeria. Spokesman for the Ministry of Post and ICT, said that the ministry's vision about the broadband, high-speed broadband, 3G and the LTE "is clear, as there's no hesitation in terms of introducing this technology in Algeria." The tender of the 3G license in Algeria was scheduled for the first time in September 2011, but then was suspended and repeatedly postponed due to disputes between Algerian government and telecom companies. Currently, three operators operate in Algeria's mobile market, namely state-run Mobilis (Algerian Telecom subsidiary), Nedjma (Qtel subsidiary, Qatar) and Djezzy (Vimpelcom). (April 1, 2013) globaltimes.cn

Bahrain
Chairman: Dr. Mohammed Al Amer
[Telecommunication Regulatory Authority (TRA)]
Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) has directed Zain Bahrain to complete an initial public offering (IPO) of 15% of its shares on the local stock market by the end of December to comply with its licence terms. Kuwait's Zain Group won Bahrain's second mobile license in 2003, and the unit had planned to launch an IPO in 2008, but the listing plan was suspended. Last week the company said it had received approval to launch the overdue IPO, while simultaneously it was reported that the government had ordered it to float the shares. Zain Group holds a 56.25% stake in its Bahraini unit, while minority shareholders include Zain Bahrain's chairman, Sheikh Ahmed bin Ali Abdulla al-Khalifa (16.3%), Vodafone Group (6.1%) and a government pension fund (4.7%). It is unclear whether Zain Group's ownership stake will be reduced below 50% via the IPO, which would result from shareholders selling shares on a proportional basis. (April 15, 2013) Reuters

Zain Bahrain has been ordered by the Bahraini authorities to float a 15% stake via an initial public offering (IPO), after the move was approved by the Cabinet following six postponements on the issue by the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority. (April 10, 2013) Trade Arabia

Bahrain Telecommunications Company (Batelco) announced the finalization of its acquisition of the bulk of the Monaco & Islands division of UK-based Cable & Wireless Communications (CWC), which was agreed on December 2, 2012. All necessary regulatory approvals and conditions precedent have now been satisfied and ownership of specific companies across the diverse Monaco & Islands footprint has now been transferred to Batelco, effective April 3, 2013.
(April 4, 2013) telegeography.com

Bahrain has halted an auction to sell radio spectrum for next-generation telecom networks after a wireless broadband operator appealed against its exclusion from the sale, delaying improvements in the kingdom's communications infrastructure. The Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) was due to auction 12 lots of spectrum primarily for long-term evolution (LTE), or 4G, networks from March 31 and the winners were expected to be announced in mid-April. But the regulator, which previously described the country's communications infrastructure as inadequate, has now halted the process "pending further notice" following an appeal by Menatelecom, according to a statement on its website. The spectrum auction was originally open to all bidders, potentially allowing new entrants into an already crowded market. The three mobile operators Bahrain Telecommunications Co (Batelco), Kuwait's Zain and Viva Bahrain, an affiliate of Saudi Telecom Co all opposed this and they appeared to get their wish when the TRA last month issued a notice saying the government had decided to limit the auction to this trio. But Menatelecom, which uses WiMAX technology to provide long-distance wireless broadband, has filed three related cases in Bahraini courts, the TRA told which appeal against this decision and also request that the auction be delayed. Menatelecom, a subsidiary of Islamic bank Kuwait Finance House, declined to comment. Bahrain's 1.3 million population is also served by about 10 Internet providers in arguably the most liberalized telecoms market in the Gulf. This has cut prices for consumers, but sector earnings are shrinking and mobile penetration is about 160 percent, or 1.6 subscriptions per resident, so there is little scope for growth in terms of customer numbers. Batelco's domestic profit fell 32% in 2012, outpacing a 12% drop in revenue, while Zain's net income in Bahrain more than halved in the first nine months of the year.(April 3, 2013) zawya.com

Bangladesh
Chairman: Sunil Kanti Bose
[Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC)]
The Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC) is proposing that the country's 3G license auction be postponed until July 2013. The reason stated for the postponement is the ongoing altercation between the government and domestic mobile network operators over taxes on SIM cards and VAT charges. According to the initial terms and conditions, VAT will be added to the final license fee; however, unconfirmed sources claim that the government is reportedly considering reducing VAT from

15% to 7.5% on the 3G license fees. Cellcos have also called for changes in taxation on SIM card sales, arguing that the current tax of BDT600 (US$7.7) per SIM card needs to be reduced and applied per account in order to avoid repeat charges if a customer's SIM is lost or faulty.
(April 24, 2013) The Daily Star

Telecoms regulator is reportedly planning to modify the terms of the upcoming 3G license auction in a move that could see more than one foreign entrant into the market. The original plans reserved one slot for a new entrant, but the Acting Post and Telecommunication Secretary told that the ministry decided to incorporate the provision for more foreign operators in the final 3G guideline against one fixed in the draft guideline. Under the previous plans, a total of four 3G licenses are to be offered to the private companies in a country that has seven mobile networks. The state-owned Teletalk has been granted 10MHz of spectrum already, but will need to match the fees paid by the private bidders when the auction takes place. Under the new plans, blocks of 5MHz will be offered instead of 10MHz, allowing more licenses to be offered -- or for fewer bidders to buy 2 slots each. "The new slot of spectrum would not only help the small operators commercially, but it will also pave the way for more foreign operators who are keen to invest here," Secretary added. The 3G license auction is due to take place at the end of June. An issue of how a value added tax will be applied to the auction bids is also still to be resolved.
(April 23, 2013) bdnews24.com

Norway's Telenor has committed to investing in 3G services through its Bangladesh subsidiary, Grameenphone. The announcement was made by the Norwegian Trade and Industry Minister who is currently leading a trade mission to the country. The Norwegian government is the largest shareholder in Telenor, while Grameenphone is the largest mobile network in Bangladesh by subscriber numbers. The country is due to auction off its long-delayed 3G licenses shortly, as soon as a dispute about the payment of VAT on the license fees is resolved. The proposed 3G licenses include a 15% tax, and there is hence uncertainty about whether the VAT would be reclaimed as usual or not. A total of four 3G licenses are being offered to the private companies in a country that has seven mobile networks. The state-owned Teletalk has been granted 10MHz of spectrum already, but will need to match the fees paid by the private bidders when the auction takes place. The auction should take place in June, unless further delays manifest themselves.
(April 8, 2013) cellular-news.com

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

Cyprus-based Baskindale has offered to purchase 100% of Orascom Telecom Holding (OTH) shares, a total of 5,245,690,620, at a price of US$0.70 per share, according to its report sent to the Egyptian Exchange (EGX). The amount will be paid in Egyptian pounds, in accordance with the provisions of the Capital Market Law. Baskindale has announced that the purchase offer will last for 25 working days, until the end of the EGX trading session on Monday 27, with the offer being cancelled if the minimum requirement for the purchase offer, 26.16%, has not been reached. This is so that the total proportion of direct and indirect ownership of Altimo in OTH reaches the 51% necessary for a controlling stake. Baskindale owns 24.84% of OTH shares indirectly, as the company is wholly owned by Altimo Holdings and Investments Limited, which indirectly owns 47.85% of Vimpelcom, which, in turn, wholly owns both Weather Capital SARL, and Weather Capital SP1, both of which own 51.92% of OTH or 544,696,390 of its GDRs on the London Stock Exchange (LSE), equivalent to 2,723,481,950 shares on the EGX. Vimpelcom said that will not respond to the submitted purchase offer and will retain its ownership of 51.92% of OTH shares. Egyptian Financial Supervisory Authority (EFSA) has now approved the Baskindale offer.
(April 16, 2013) dailynewsegypt.com

Iran
Minister of Communication & Information Technology: Dr. Reza Taghipour
[Communications Regulatory Commission (CRC)]

South Africa-based mobile operator MTN Group has been prohibited from repatriating funds from Iranian telco Irancell, its second-fastest growing market in terms of new subscribers, MTN chief executive said in an interview. According to the official, MTN has been barred from recovering a EUR300 million (US$391 million) loan it made to its subsidiary MTN Irancell, as well as several hundred millions in profit made there, as a result of US, European Union and United Nations imposed sanctions on Iran to cut off funding for a suspected Iranian nuclear-weapons program. MTN Irancell is 51% owned by Iran Electronic Development Company (IEDC) and 49% by MTN Group of South Africa. IEDC is controlled by Iran Electronic Industries (IEI) and Mostazafan Foundation. There is a requirement under Irancell's concession that the owners divest a 21% stake via an initial public offer (IPO) three years after service launch, however, in November 2012 it emerged that the government was urging MTN Group to push ahead with the sale, which would see the South African firm's interest drop to 38.7%, while IEDC would be left with 40.3%.
(April 24, 2013) telegeography.com

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

Zain has again delayed the long-planned stock market floatation of its Iraqi subsidiary to later this year. A requirement of its mobile operator license, the company has been repeatedly delaying the IPO long past the deadline set by the telecoms regulator. Recently expected to take place in the first half of this year, the company appears to have pushed it back to the second half of the year. Zain has previously said that the delayed stock market listing for its Iraqi subsidiary should take place by this month, subject to regulatory approval. Zain is taking the legal procedures and by the end of the year will finish the public offering. Zain owns 76% of the Iraqi network and is expected to be the sole shareholder selling shares. As the operator license requires at least 25% of the shares to be listed, the company is likely to see its stake reduced to 51%. As with the other mobile networks in the country, it missed the August 2011 deadline, although they cited issues with the stock exchange for the delays. However, the regulator has decided to impose the fine, equivalent to US$12,864 per day on the Zain at a higher rate than its rivals due to its larger customer base. The fine is being backdated to September 2011. Rival network, Asiacell is the only one of the three networks to have listed its shares, and its shares now comprise around half the local stock exchange capitalization. There have been concerns that the telecoms networks would dominate the stock exchange when all three are listed as they could collectively represent about three-quarters of the total market value. (April 7, 2013) Reuters

Jordan
Chairman of the Board of Commissioners/CEO: Mr. Mohammad Al Taani

[Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (TRC)]

The Ministry of Information and Communications Technology said the sector's revenues in 2013 are expected to reach JD1.8 billion (US$ 2.54 billion). In a statement, the ministry said the ICT sector's revenues in 2012 stood at about JD1.8 billion. The ICT sector's revenues in 2011 reached US$1.67 billion, of which US$738 million were generated by the information technology sector, according to figures by the ICT Association of Jordan. . (April 11, 2013) zawya.com

With mobile penetration in Jordan reaching 140% by the end of 2012, a local research and consulting company said there is room for further growth in mobile subscriptions. "Mobile penetration in Jordan is expected to reach 200% in the next few years, and this is normal, as in some countries, mobile penetration is 200% and higher," Jawad Abbassi, General Manager of the Arab Advisers Group, told. "In the near future, cars, TVs and other devices will be connected to the Internet and they need mobile SIM cards to connect to the Internet; therefore, mobile subscriptions will grow," Abbassi said in a recent phone interview. "In addition, many mobile users in Jordan own more than one phone" and others own phones equipped with more than one SIM, he noted According to figures by the Telecommunications Regulatory Commission (TRC), mobile penetration in Jordan rose from 120% in 2011 to 140% at the end of 2012 with about 8.984 million subscriptions The figures showed that Internet penetration in Jordan reached 67% by the end of 2012 compared with 50.5% at the end of 2011, according to the figures posted on the TRC 's website Of the total subscriptions, 691,619 were mobile broadband, 192,738 ADSL, 103,198 Wi-Max, 3,434 TV cable, 923 leased line and 828 dial up. Fixed telephone penetration reached 6.3% with 400,082 subscriptions, by the end of 2012, compared with 6.8% at the end of 2011, according to the TRC.
(April 2, 2013) The Jordan Times

Kuwait
Minister of Communication: Salem Mutheyeb Ahmed Al-Utheina

[Ministry of Communication (MOC)]

Kuwait's three telecommunication companies, Zain, Wataniya and Viva, have signed an agreement with the company responsible for setting up the country's new mobile number portability (MNP) system. Sources report that the Ministry of Communications (MoC) has issued relevant regulations and conditions, including the requirement that network providers should not place obstacles in the way of any customer seeking to port their number from one company to another. (April 23, 2013) The Arab Times

The Kuwaiti Ministry of Communication (MoC) and the National Technology Enterprises Company (NTEC) have announced that mobile number portability (MNP) will be commercially available in 30-45 days. The transaction is estimated to take no more than 24 hours. According to the Minister of Communication and Housing Affairs, Salem Al- Othaina, the delay of 30-45 days for the MNP service activation is triggered by the necessity to set up the billing system properly and avoid the financial losses experienced by other countries when launching their MNP services.
(April 17, 2013) telegeography.com

Lebanon
Acting Chairman & CEO: Dr. Imad Hoballah

[Telecommunication Regulatory Authority (TRA)]

Ministry of Telecommunications (MoT) has confirmed that it suspended a voice-over-internet protocol (VoIP) license which it awarded to SAFICO last month, although it denied accusations from parliamentary critics that it awarded the permit 'illegally'. The ministry is keen to swiftly implement a new VoIP licensing framework to combat the illegal call market as well as to kick start Lebanon's international call centre business sector. The MoT says that around 400 million minutes worth of calls per year bypass the telephone switches of state-run incumbent telco Ogero, resulting in an estimated US$100 million in lost revenue to illegal operators who control servers or soft boxes that make local calls or transform packet protocol into VoIP. Senior advisor to Minister of Telecoms stated that the licensing framework would allow legal termination and origination of VoIP calls, with licensees paying the state 10% of revenues. The advisor explained that SAFICO's license was suspended on April 8 to allow the MoT to revise preliminary tariff controls, to make sure new legal VoIP services were not to the detriment of existing fixed and mobile services which the government relies on as a major revenue source. A VoIP licensee must first submit a price list to the MoT, advisor added, while stressing that the ministry aimed to strike a balance between competing with illegal calls – as low as half the LBP600 (US$0.39) per minute standard outgoing call rate from Lebanon – but not cutting prices to the extent that would cause a mass migration from the existing legal call services. Critics of the MoT claimed that a new licensing framework should first be approved by the Telecoms Regulatory Authority (which operates in a largely advisory role since its powers were curtailed in 2011), the Cabinet, the Finance Ministry and the President, but advisor was quoted as saying that the MoT was given permission from the Justice Ministry to legally award a VoIP license last month after receiving SAFICO's application. (April 17, 2013) The Daily Star

Lebanon's Internet connection speeds could leap to 20 megabits per second within the next three months, the chairman of a major ISP told The Daily Star, as the country climbed 10 places on a global Internet speed ranking. Maroun Chammas, chairman of IDM, said the upgrade would result from several developments, including additional international capacity purchased recently by Lebanon, and the gradually expanding fiber optics infrastructure. "Within months we will be able to reach 20 Mbps and, in the near future, the speeds will go up even higher in the future ... albeit if all the initiatives take place in a timely way," he said. Average Internet speed in Lebanon stands currently at 2.52 Mbps according to the international Household Download Index by U.S. broadband tester Ookla, which ranks the country 151st internationally. The ranking, based on thousands of recent test results from Speedtest.net between March 3 and April 1, also shows the country improved 10 ranks since March last year, when download speeds lingered at just 1.127 Mbps. Chammas said the completion of a fiber-to-the-x (FTTX) project, including fiber to the home and fiber to the office components, would be essential for connection speeds to improve. However even old networks, he said, are capable of seeing much higher speeds, depending on their status. Asked if the resignation of Prime Minister Najib Mikati's Cabinet and the inability to form a new government would stall the pending upgrades, Chammas said most upcoming upgrades would not be affected. Earlier this month, the Telecoms Ministry and the

Cyprus Telecommunications Authority announced sharing capacity on the ALEXANDROS submarine cable subsystem between Cyprus, Egypt and France. The two sides also signed a memorandum of understanding for the construction of the EUROPA system, a high-capacity submarine cable to link Cyprus and Lebanon, which is expected to be ready by 2015. The EUROPA system will enhance and gradually replace the existing CADMOS cable system, also connecting Lebanon and Cyprus, thus providing an alternative route to IMEWE, which has suffered failures before. In addition, the EUROPA will form a bridge between the IMEWE and ALEXANDROS cables landing in Cyprus, providing better connectivity between Europe and the Middle East. (April 3, 2013) The Daily Star

Libya
Minister: Osama Siala

[(Ministry of Telecommunications & Informatics)]

LAP Green Network, a wholly owned subsidiary of the Libyan African Portfolio (LAP), has issued a press statement regarding its operational achievements in the twelve months ended December 31, 2012, but stopped short of providing any financial data. Chairman and CEO of LAP Green, commented: 'All [LAP] Green subsidiaries recorded strong performance with key achievements delivered across the board in 2012. Despite the very challenging circumstances in post-liberation Libya – and still under significant sanctions from various governments slow to react to the UN advice to lift the restrictions – the group recorded significant improvements to key indicators ... We are happy to see all our subsidiaries deliver on their turnaround objectives despite a number of challenges faced. We are confident that with the support of our shareholders, and with the continuous hard work of all the men and women in our group, we will achieve our target of establishing [LAP] Green Network as one of the regional telecoms leaders in Africa'. With reference to the company's balance sheet, the group's chief financial advisor Caba Pinter commented: 'The aggregated operational revenues increased by 1.7% for the current three operational subsidiaries [in Cote d'Ivoire, Uganda and South Sudan]. At the same level, gross margins have improved significantly with an annual growth of 7.5%, and thanks to our efforts in rationalizing our OPEX and reducing wastages, our annual saving result stands at 19%. Moreover, we have successfully improved our overall consolidated EBITDA, cutting our losses by 57% over 2012'. LAP Green noted that the company saw its subscriber base increase by 17% in 2H12, and suggested that UTL is 'on the road to profitability'. (April 23, 2013) telegeography.com

Minister of communications and information, Osama Siala, has indicated that the government is 'exploring options to grant provisional 4G mobile communication licenses to incumbent cellcos Libyana and Almadar Aljaded. However, he clarified that no new GSM licenses will be awarded until long-awaited new telecoms regulations have been drafted. (April 19, 2013) The Libya Herald

Kuwaiti telecoms company Zain Group is the latest high-profile international telecoms firm to publicly disclose an interest in entering the lucrative Libyan telecoms sector. In March 2013 a long-awaited tender to manage the country's monopoly telecoms operator, state-owned Libyan Post, Telecommunication and Information Technology Co (LIPTIC), and its wholly-owned cellular subsidiaries Libyana and Almadar Aljaded, was abruptly halted by the government; no official explanation was forthcoming from Tripoli. Previously, in January 2013 a whole host of international players expressed an interest in securing a foothold in the lucrative Libyan market, including Etisalat of the UAE, France Telecom-Orange (FT-Orange), Digicel Group of Jamaica, the UK's Vodafone Group, Vimpelcom of Russia, Qtel of Qatar (now Ooredoo) and India's Bharti Airtel. (April 11, 2013) Reuters

The Zain is interested in bidding for a management contract in Libya, marking a return to expansion for Kuwait's largest mobile operator. Zain chairman expressed his intentions to head into Libya at the company's annual general meeting yesterday. The Libyan government intended to privatize the two state-owned mobile operators, Al Madar and Libyana, about three years ago but these plans were scuppered with the revolution. Now the Libyan Post, Telecommunication and Information Technology Company, the government body that runs the two operators, is offering up management contracts, similar to those in Lebanon. Zain sold off most of its assets in Africa to India's Bharti Airtel for US$9 billion (Dh33.06bn) in 2010. The company is likely to face competition from the UAE's Etisalat which has also expressed an interest in entering the Libyan market, where there is still room for growth. Zain is also expecting the listing of its Iraqi operations on the Iraq Stock Exchange (ISX) to be concluded by the end of this year, pushing its plans back by about six months. As part of the license agreement issued in 2007 to all three Iraqi mobile operators, Zain Iraq is required to list 25% of its shares on the ISX. All three missed the August 2011 deadline. Asiacell is the only operator so far to have completed its offering, raising US$1.24bn in February. Korek Telecom is also working on becoming a joint stock company, but the operator has yet to announce a time frame for its listing. (April 8, 2013) thenational.ae

Morocco
Director General: M. Azdine El MountassirBillah

[Agence Nationale de Reglementation des Telecommunications (ANRT)]

French media and telecoms group Vivendi has confirmed the receipt of two binding offers for its controlling 53% stake in Morocco's Maroc Telecom, after both Emirates Telecommunications Corporation (Etisalat) and Ooredoo, formerly Qatar Telecom (Qtel), released statements confirming they had submitted bids for the North African company. The French conglomerate is expected to examine the tenders and choose the preferred bidder for exclusive negotiations early next week, as reported by Reuters. The eventual winner must also fund a buyout to minority shareholders; the total purchase price is currently estimated at EUR4.46 billion (US$5.80 billion). However, Since Maroc Telecom is 30% owned by the state, the Moroccan government will have the final say in Vivendi's eventual choice of acquirer. Abu Dhabi state-owned telecoms company Etisalat has already secured a US$8 billion dual-tranche loan facility to finance its bid for the acquisition of Maroc Telecom, while separately, Ooredoo has lined up a loan of up to US$12 billion. (April 25, 2013) telegeography.com

South Korea's second largest mobile phone carrier by subscribers KT Corp has dropped its bid for Vivendi's 53% share in Morocco's Maroc Telecom, which is valued at around US$6 billion. However, the company has announced it might consider various investment options instead. KT Corp, in its first major foray overseas, submitted a preliminary non-binding bid for Maroc Telecom in December 2012. At the time the company said it was planning to share up to 40% of the stake with local partners to help mitigate risk and to finance the bid. Two potential bidders are now left in the running for the telecom, namely Qatar Telecom (Ooredoo) and the UAE's Etisalat, although Saudi Telecom Company (STC) is still mentioned in some reports as being interested in the auction. Dubai-based Etisalat has already secured an US$8 billion dual-tranche loan to finance its bid. Since Maroc Telecom is 30% owned by the state, the Moroccan government will have the final say in Vivendi's eventual choice of buyer. (April 15, 2013) telegeography.com

Etisalat has secured a US$8 billion dual-tranche loan facility to finance its bid for the acquisition of Vivendi's Maroc Telecom. The French media group Vivendi is planning to sell its 53% share in Morocco's biggest telecom, valued at around US$6 billion, in order to finance incurred debts. The funding will be divided equally between a term loan and a bridge loan, which will later be refinanced through a bond sale. South Korea's KT Corp and State-owned Qatar Telecom have also expressed interest in the auction, with the latter already in talks with banks to finance its bid for the stake. (April 11, 2013) Reuters

A deadline of April 22, 2013 has been set for preliminary bids for French group Vivendi's 53% stake in Moroccan incumbent Maroc Telecom, with three main potential bidders thought to be still in the running, namely South Korea's SK Telecom, Qatar Telecom (Ooredoo) and the UAE's Etisalat, although Saudi Telecom Company STC) is also mentioned in some reports as remaining interested. Dubai-based Etisalat is reported to have lined up a US$8 billion dual-tranche loan facility to finance its bid for Maroc Telecom, bankers working on the deal were quoted as saying. The 53% stake has a market value of around US$6 billion, but the winning bidder is expected to eventually make an offer to buy out the minority shareholders. (April 9, 2013) The Economic Times

Nepal
Chairman: Mr. Digambar Jha
[Nepal Telecommunication Authority (NTR)]

The Nepal Telecommunications Authority (NTA) has published its 'Management Information System' report for the month ended March 13, 2013, highlighting that the total number of mobile users (GSM and CDMA) topped 17.395 million at that date, up from 16.608 million at the start of the year. Of the total, some 16.562 million were GSM and the remaining 833,367 were signed up to Nepal Telecom's (NT's) Sky Phone CDMA service. Privately owned Ncell led the mobile market with 9.553 million connections, ahead of state owned NT with 7.842 million. In the fixed line segment, the watchdog reported that the number of main lines in service stood at 834,435 by mid-March, compared to the 831,703 three months earlier, broken down as 641,747 PSTN and 192,688 wireless in the local loop (WiLL) users. NT counted 635,941 (PSTN) and 118,052 (WiLL) accesses at that date, to lead the market comfortably from United Telecom Limited (UTL), with 71,686 WiLL lines, Smart Telecom (5,208, PSTN), Nepal Satellite Telecom (2,950, WiLL) and STM Telecom Sanchar (598, PSTN). Broadband take-up continues at a steady rate, according to the NTA's findings, although the number of ADSL users has slipped in the most recent quarter. By the mid-March cut-off point Nepal was home to a total of 102,521 ADSL users – all for NT – down from 103,304 at December 31, 2012. The number of cable-based broadband connections stood at 18,275, compared to 18,158 three months earlier, and 'other connections' (wireless, fiber-optic, Ethernet) stood at 50,266 (49,960). For the first time, the NTA counted users to WiMAX services – following NT's recent launch of the wireless technology. At mid-March the state-owned telco said it had signed up 198 WiMAX users. Meanwhile, the overwhelming people in the country continue to use GPRS/EDGE/W-CDMA as their primary data/internet connection. The total stood at 5.866 million at that date, while a further 226,509 received their internet access via CDMA2000 1x EV-DO.
(April 19, 2013) telegeography.com

The government of Nepal's plan to implement its much-heralded unified licensing regime descended into chaos after the Supreme Court issued a 'stay order' blocking the award on Monday of a unified telecom license to rural services provider Smart Telecom. Further, the same court issued an interim order to halt, with immediate effect, the implementation of the long-awaited 'Radio Frequency Distribution and Pricing Policy 2012', which is designed to allocate frequencies to telcos acquiring unified licenses for a full range of telecom services – including mobile (cellular). In its ruling, the country's highest court said it had stayed the license award decision in response to two writs filed against the move which argue that the current board of the Nepal Telecommunications Authority (NTA) lacks the 'legitimacy' to do so. The argument rests on the fact that the regulator is still operating without a chairman – contrary to its constitution. (April 17, 2013) telegeography.com

Smart Telecom will get the unified telecom license as per the decision of the government. After getting the license, the company plans a 'soft launch' of its GSM mobile service in the Kathmandu valley within the next eight months. A board meeting of the Nepal Telecommunications Authority (NTA) decided to issue the unified telecom license to United Telecom Limited (UTL) and Smart Telecom to offer them a level playing field and make the market more competitive. Immediately after the decision, Smart Telecom approached the NTA to pay the license fees. The government's decision regarding the "basic telecom service", also known as unified license, requires telecom companies to pay a fee of Rs 357.50 million to get the license. Also, prospective telecom companies have to pay the first installment (Rs 50 million) of the total license renewal fee Rs 20.13 billion, as per the condition set in the new spectrum policy. The NTA communicated with both UTL and Smart Telecom asking them to pay the necessary fees and collect the license. NTA officials said as almost all preparations are over, the NTA will issue the license to Smart Telecom. They also said UTL was likely to clear the fees. In May last year, the government had introduced the provision of unified license, by publishing a notice in the Nepal Gazette. This new licensing regime is targeted at granting permission to small operators — UTL, Smart Telecom, STM Telecom Sanchar and Nepal Satellite Telecom — to provide multiple telecom services, including cellular mobile, fixed line and international long distance calls, under a single license. (April 15, 2013) ekantipur.com

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

The Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) and Cybercom International signed an agreement to implement a project to conduct field surveys in order to measure the quality of services provided by class one licensed telecommunication companies that are operating in various governorates and willayats Oman. According to this agreement, Cybercom will check the networks of the operators which include 2G, 3G and 4G mobile networks, as well as Nawras WiMAX fixed network. The project will also involve evaluating quality of service indicators of the licensees' networks through extracting data and statistics directly from the systems of the operators. Results and data from this study will be documented in a comprehensive report to be a reference for the quality of services provided by the operators. The TRA is assessing the quality of services provided by the licensed operators through quarterly reports submitted by class 1 licensees Omantel and Narwas to the TRA, where these reports are reviewed against the quality of services controls. In 2011, the TRA started surveys to evaluate mobile networks of the licensees in some governorates to help improve the quality of licensees' networks and to promote competition. In such field surveys the networks are checked for the strength of transmitting and receiving signals as well as for the quality of the calls for the purpose of identifying weaknesses in their networks and improving them. (April 15, 2013) timesofoman.com

Pakistan
Chairman:
[Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA)]

Pakistan has imported around term US$ 4.377 billion mobile phone handsets and other telecom apparatus during last five years with telecom imports of US$ 1.331 billion only in 2007-08, the most promising year for the sector. Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) in its year 2012 report has revealed that the country imported mobile phone handsets with battery of US$ 1.428 billion and other telecom apparatus worth US Dollar 2.949 billion. It said during 2012, total telecom imports in the country reached US$ 954 million, showing a sharp rise of 24.5 percent over the previous year. This increase in total telecom imports is due to a sharp rise in imports of cellular mobile handsets in the country, which have reached US$ 465.3 million in 2012 compared to 218.2 million in 2011, registering a growth of 113 percent. This fresh rise in the import of cell phones is due to an increasing demand for less costly Chinese mobile handsets while cellular subscribers have reached 120 million and an increasing demand for expensive smart phones in the country. The report said this import demand is at the back of attractive mobile Internet packages and upcoming 3G services. A huge import bill of almost half a billion dollar for cell phones is not desirable under current economic situation when country's trade deficit has reached US$ 15.4 billion and country is facing a current account deficit of US$ 4.5 billion. The Authority is encouraging existing and new companies to initiate telecom manufacturing in the country. The government and PTA are willing to provide all possible cooperation to facilitate the process. It said to begin with, assembly lines can be established for selected telecom equipments with the help of country's close trading partners. During year 2007-08, the country imported mobile phone handsets with battery worth US$ 445.9 million, in 2008-09 US$ 129.7 million, in 2009-10 US$ 169.23 million, in 2010-11 US$ 218.2 and during 2011-12, the country spent US $ 465.3 million on handsets import. Similarly, on other telecom apparatus, the country spent US$ 885.1 in 2007-08, US$ 570.4 in 2008-09, US$ 556.45 in 2009-10, US$ 548.1 in 2010-11 and US$ 488.7 in 2011-12. (April 30, 2013) pakobserver.net

United States Trade Representative (USTR) has urged government of Pakistan to withdraw International Clearing House to ensure the functioning of a competitive market for the termination of international voice calls and taking necessary steps to prevent collusive behavior among international operators. United States Trade Representative (USTR) is an agency that negotiates directly with governments to create trade agreements, to resolve disputes, and to participate in global trade policy organizations. USTR mentions that LDI operators in Pakistan in October 2012 – upon direction of MoITT – established "International Clearing House" (ICH) under which thirteen Pakistani carriers assigned Pakistan Telecommunications Company Limited (PTCL) the exclusive right to terminate inbound international calls in Pakistan at the "approved settlement rate" set by the Pakistani Telecommunications Authority (PTA). As part of the ICH agreement, every carrier, other than PTCL, suspended their interconnection arrangements for incoming international traffic and in turn received a fixed share of the revenues PTCL generates from the termination of incoming international traffic in Pakistan. The new international termination rate set by the PTA was $0.088 per minute, an increase of approximately four hundred percent over the competitive market rate of approximately $0.02 per minute that existed prior to the ICH agreement. Upon a petition filed by Brain Telecom, Lahore High Court suspended ICH and directed PTA to ensure pre-ICH rates for international incoming calls to Pakistan. USTR said that multiple international carriers have informed it that PTCL remains the only provider of international termination services in Pakistan and that the increased rate of $0.088 per minute remains in effect, even though it is no longer mandated by the PTA. Most recently, the Pakistan Supreme Court overturned the Lahore High Court ruling and remanded the matter back to the CCP. United States Trade Representative, in its review, said that Pakistan's actions to increase its international termination rates have led to a massive increase in rates for telecommunications into Pakistan, hurting both global telecommunications companies seeking to terminate calls in Pakistan and Pakistanis living abroad trying to call home as well as other non-Pakistani consumers. The immediate cost to U.S. telecommunication companies (and their subscribers, if cost increases are passed on) will be in the tens of millions of dollars. As Pakistani companies and U.S. companies investing in Pakistan depend on competitively-priced telecommunications to engage in trade, Pakistan's actions also stand to affect these companies' competitiveness as well, to the extent that they depend on incoming international calls for their business (e.g. from customers, suppliers and affiliates). USTR said that Pakistan is a member of the WTO with commitments under the GATS Annex on Telecommunications. Section 5 of the Annex on Telecommunication requires the provision of access to telecommunications networks and services in Pakistan on reasonable terms and conditions. The WTO Dispute Settlement Body has found that "access to and use of public telecommunications transport networks and services on 'reasonable' terms includes questions of pricing of that access and use." USTR commented that there is substantial evidence that Pakistan carriers participating in the market for terminating international traffic into Pakistan appear to be colluding to avoid competition and to fix the rate for such termination at a level significantly above the prior range of rates that was offered when all such participants were actually competing to provide such services. These actions raise concerns about Pakistan's obligation to provide reasonable terms for access and use as required by the GATS Annex on Telecommunications. USTR said that it looks to Pakistan to ensure the functioning of a competitive market for the termination of international voice calls by rejecting the ICH agreement and taking necessary steps to prevent collusive behavior among international operators. (April 11, 2013) propakistani.pk

Palestine
Minister: M. Osama Al-Issawi
[Ministry of Telecommunications & Information Technology (MTIT)]

Incumbent Palestine Telecommunications Company (Paltel) aims to invest around US$50 million in the development of its fixed and mobile networks this year. Of the total between US$30 million and US$35 million will be directed towards the operator's fixed line infrastructure, with the remainder to be spent on expanding and enhancing its mobile network. With Paltel having recently received most of the necessary approvals from Israeli authorities for the expansion of its mobile infrastructure along main roads in Area C zones of the West Bank, his company hopes to start network deployment in these areas soon. With the new sites expected to run along main roads, including the road from Jerusalem to Ramallah and Jericho, coverage will also be extended to the road from Ramallah to Hebron. Despite having obtained approval for the installation of a number of new cell sites Paltel is still awaiting spectrum suitable for the introduction of third-generation mobile broadband services. (April 9, 2013) CommsMEA

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

Qatar Telecom (Ooredoo) announced the official launch of its 4G Long Term Evolution (LTE) mobile broadband network, making commercial 4G data services available for USB modem/mobile hotspot 'My-Fi' device users. With 4G coverage available Ooredoo is expanding LTE services on a phased basis, and plans to activate batches of additional LTE base stations on a monthly basis throughout the year, it said in a press release. Ooredoo is rolling out the 800MHz/2600MHz network in areas including The Pearl-Qatar, Katara Cultural Village, West Bay, the Corniche, and Sealine Beach Resort, and within 2014 it expects to cover all inhabited areas of Qatar. Having been testing the 4G network with a few hundred customers since last year to optimize services, Ooredoo declared that its paying LTE customers can experience connection speeds that are three-to-six times faster than its existing 3G network, enabling 'seamless connections when browsing multimedia-rich websites, updating social media, or streaming music and HD video', with a 600MB music album or HD movie downloadable in 'a few minutes'. (April 16, 2013) telegeography.com

The World Economic Forum released "The Global Information and Technology Report 2013 (GITR)" on April 10, 2013, in which Qatar rose five places to rank as the 23rd most networked nation in the world out of 144 countries. Qatar is now the most networked country in the Arab World, followed by the United Arab Emirates (25) and Bahrain (29). The comprehensive report examines the networked readiness of countries across four primary indexes: environment, readiness, usage and impact. Qatar ranked highly in terms of environment (14) and usage (16), with particular areas of high of performance including local skills, business innovation, political and regulatory frameworks, government usage and the social impact of technology. The report specifically lauds Qatar for "the government's sharp effort to expand its offerings of online services and increase in the online participation of citizens." The report also highlights the explosive growth of mobile broadband subscriptions and overall penetration of ICTs. The report also highlights "the government's strong vision and its commitment to rapidly develop ICTs as a means to diversify its economy, along with its efforts to create a business-friendly environment to spur entrepreneurship." The primary areas for continued advancement by Qatar highlighted in the report include broadband affordability and increased university enrollment to build a broader local talent base. Overall, the GITR shows a lack of global progress in bridging the digital divide and found that most developing economies are failing to close the gap with advanced economies in terms of ICT-related competitiveness. Finland, Singapore and Sweden top the 2013 global rankings. This analysis shows how matching investments in ICT with investment in skills and innovation can help economies cross a 'magic threshold', beyond which return on investment increases significantly. Individual countries need to identify what separates them from reaching that threshold if they have not reached it yet in order to fulfill long-term growth, competitiveness and innovation targets. The Global Information Technology Report is the result of a long-standing partnership between the World Economic Forum and INSEAD. The Networked Readiness Index uses a combination of data from publicly available sources and the results of the Executive Opinion Survey, a comprehensive annual survey conducted by the Forum in collaboration with Partner institutes, a network of 167 leading research institutes and business organizations. This Survey of more than 15,000 executives provides insight into areas critical for networked readiness.
(April 11, 2013) ictqatar.qa

The Supreme Council of Information and Communication Technology (ictQATAR) has issued a new regulatory strategy for public comment, which indicates that it hopes to introduce new telecoms service providers at either infrastructure or service (virtual operator/reseller) level. The strategy is aimed at developing the ICT market, improving competition, protecting consumers and supporting Qatar in a transition to a connected digital economy. There is no firm schedule for issuing licenses for competitors to Qatar Telecom (Ooredoo) and Vodafone, although the watchdog stated that 'there is a lack of effective competition in some areas of the market which has meant consumers have faced higher prices and poorer quality of service.'
(April 9, 2013) Gulf Times

The Supreme Council of Information and Communication Technology (ictQATAR) has said it plans to introduce new service providers in the telecoms market at either the infrastructure or service level. The plan aims "to develop the ICT market, improve competition and protect consumers," said the regulator, without setting a firm schedule as to when licenses are to be issued to new players.
(April 9, 2013) Gulf Times

The Supreme Council of Information and Communication Technology (ictQATAR) has issued a new regulatory strategy for public comment, which indicates that it hopes to introduce new telecoms service providers at either infrastructure or service (virtual operator/reseller) level. The strategy is aimed at developing the ICT market, improving competition, protecting consumers and supporting Qatar in a transition to a connected digital economy. There is no firm schedule for issuing licenses for competitors to Qatar Telecom (Ooredoo) and Vodafone, although the watchdog stated that 'there is a lack of effective competition in some areas of the market which has meant consumers have faced higher prices and poorer quality of service.'
(April 8, 2013) The Gulf Times

Saudi Arabia
Governor: Eng. Abdullah A. Al Darrab
[Communication & Information Technology Commission (CITC)]
A perk which allowed telecoms customers in Saudi Arabia to receive free calls while abroad came to an end after the country's regulator asked telcos to stop offering the service due to what it deemed to be widespread abuse. Saudi customers had previously been able to pick up the phone for free while travelling – a service telcos introduced in 2008 for students living abroad and for Saudi's staying overseas for long periods in the summer months, according to analysts. But the Saudi regulator, the Communications and Information Technology Commission (CITC), earlier this month told telcos – STC, Mobily and Zain KSA – to stop offering the service as millions of SIM cards had been shipped out of the country so that expats could phone families at home at domestic rates and businesses with operations overseas used the SIMs to avoid international calls, according to local media reports. Following pressure from the CITC, the three telcos have sent text messages to subscribers to inform them they will now have to start paying international call rates. The telcos are now instead offering overseas call packages to Saudi students living in a set number of countries agreed with the Ministry of Education, according to a person familiar with the matter at Mobily. The three telcos do not break out and publish the revenues they earn from overseas voice calls, but analysts said the move to ban free roaming would likely boost voice revenues, which have suffered in recent years from the growth in internet-based services such as Skype and Apple Inc.'s FaceTime. The ban on the free roaming comes just weeks after the CITC said it was seeking to regulate local use of such services, and asked the telecoms operators to work with developers of voice-over-internet applications to bring them into compliance. However, this move appears to reflect the government's concerns over security, rather than a need to protect its telecoms operators' revenues. The CITC's view seems to be that following its ban the Saudi operators will now be able to offer lower local tariffs and spend more on local network development. (April 30, 2013) wsj.com

The Saudi Shoura Council has given the green light to the Communications and Information Technology Commission (CITC) to instruct telecom companies to not charge mobile users in the kingdom for receiving calls while abroad. The council said that the security measures should be taken to prevent misuse of the service. (April 10, 2013) Arab News

The new drive to shift into six new geographical zone codes for landline telephone numbers will save some 500 million new numbers, the Communication and Information Technology Commission (CITC) said. The CITC plans to change the current nine-digit landline telephone numbers into a 10-digit system by adding the digit "one" to the six geographical zone codes in May and August respectively. The change of the six geographical zone codes will provide more phone numbers and serve the communication market in the Kingdom in future. (April 10, 2013) zawya.com

The Communications and Information Technology Commission (CITC) has given mobile service providers in the kingdom until May 25 to offer Mobile Number Portability (MNP). The move aims to promote competition among service providers and ensure better services, said the CITC. Subscribers will no longer be required to settle their dues before moving to new providers, according to the CITC. "The only condition should be that the service provider ensures that the ID number of the applicant matches the ID registered with it. The service provider can only ask for the dues to be settled after the completion of the porting process," said CITC spokesman. (April 6, 2013) Arab News

Five operators are said to have been shortlisted for three mobile virtual network operator (MVNO) concessions in Saudi Arabia. 'Virgin Mobile MEA, Malaysian consortium Tune Talk and a European company [are among the companies which] have been shortlisted for the licenses. There's also a strong rumor that Vodafone and Mexican operator America Movil have dropped out,' said the source. The winning companies are expected to be finalized towards the end of April, with the concessions awarded on May 4. (April 8, 2013) TMT Finance

International Data Corporation unveiled its top 10 predictions for the Saudi Arabian telecommunications space in 2013, revealing that the market is set to continue evolving following the considerable developments witnessed in 2012. Drawing on its continuous market-tracking activities and extensive interactions with key industry stakeholders, IDC believes the transformation that has been seen in operators' service models will continue, with the focus shifting from customer acquisition to retention and the enhancement of customer value. "Operators in Saudi Arabia are expected to follow two main themes, innovation and diversification, resulting in a transformation of the demand for, and the delivery of, communications services. The greatest opportunity for Saudi operators, which also represents one of their foremost challenges, will be the development of a business strategy that effectively harnesses mobile data as a revenue mainstay," Paul Black, director of telecommunications at IDC Middle East, Africa, and Turkey, said recently. On the business services side, strong economic growth (which is forecast to persist over the short term), backed by high global demand and stable oil and gas prices, will continue to accentuate the business potential. (April 2, 2013) zawya.com

The Communications and Information Technology Commission (CITC) has warned mobile networks that they are in breach of their licenses if they permit the use of VoIP and OTT based services on their networks without the required ability to decrypt the messages. "It has become evident that some communication applications through [the] Internet don't meet regulatory requirements," CITC said in the statement. "The authority has informed licensed [telecom] providers of the need to work with the developers of these applications to quickly meet these requirements." Although the statement was ambiguous about what regulations are being broken, it had recently proposed that it should have access to decrypted VoIP communications, or would ban Skype and other similar companies from the country. The regulator had addressed a similar case with BlackBerry in 2010 when it ordered local mobile networks to suspend BlackBerry messenger services. (April 1, 2013) cellular-news.com

Sri Lanka
Director General: Mr. Anusha Palpita
[Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (TRC)]
The number of mobile phones used by 20.8 million Sri Lankans hit over 20.3 million for the first time at the end of December 31, 2012, Central Bank data showed. As of December 31, 2011, the number of mobile phones used remained at 18.3 million. At the end of December 2012, Sri Lanka's telephone density including both mobile and fixed lines was 116 percent. In contrast, the number of fixed line telephones in the fourth quarter of 2012 declined 4.4

percent Year-on-Year to 3.44 million. The number of internet and e-mail subscribers during the same quarter grew 61.7 percent YoY to 1.36 million. (April 10, 2013) dailymirror.lk

Sri Lanka's Dialog Axiata said it had launched commercial 4G mobile services in Colombo, making it the first in South Asia. Dialog's service is based on frequency division - long term evolution standard (FD-LTE) technology requiring paired bandwidth for separate uplink and downlink channels. Dialog last week bought 10MHz of paired spectrum or 20MHz of raw bandwidth in an 1800MHz band auction from the regulator for 3.2 billion rupees allowing it to launch the service. The progressive spectrum management policies of the Telecommunications Regulatory Commission (TRC) of Sri Lanka have once again ensured that Sri Lankan consumers will enjoy the region's most advanced suite of Mobile, Fixed and Nomadic 4G LTE Services. Dialog's fixed access unit, Dialog Broadband Networks, launched fixed 4G services in December 2012 using time division - long term evolution (TD-LTE) which originally evolved in China and does not require paired bandwidth. Dialog said its 4G mobile services will deliver peak data speeds of 50Mbps on FD-LTE 1800MHz band 3 compatible mobile devices. TRC Director General Anusha Pelpita told that spectrum had been kept affordable to allow cheaper services and spectrum sharing had also been allowed. Dialog operates Sri Lanka's largest mobile service with 7.8 million subscribers.
(April 2, 2013) lankabusinessonline.com

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

Proposed reforms to the Telecommunications Act have been passed to the Constituent National Assembly for urgent consideration. The changes, supported by the World Bank, the European Union (EU) and the African Development Bank are considered essential for revitalizing the nation's telecoms sector. The reforms will strengthen the powers of sector regulator the National Telecommunications Commission (INT) as well as implementing new procedures that would allow the watchdog to authorize the launch of new operators including mobile virtual network operators (MVNOs) without the involvement of the telecoms ministry. INT will also be allowed to issue penalties of up to 3% of an operator's turnover, up from the current 1%.
(April 8, 2013) Agence Ecofin

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

Turk Telekom has reported revenues of TRY3.14 billion (US$1.75 billion) for the three months ended March 31, 2013, up 6.2% compared to TRY2.96 billion it booked in the same period a year ago. Operating profit for the first quarter dropped from TRY817 million to TRY712 million year-on-year (-16.3%), while the company posted a net profit of TRY526 million, down 12.2% from TRY772 million in 1Q12. CAPEX for January–March decreased toTRY254 million from TRY401 million a year earlier. In operational terms, Turk Telekom's broadband customer base rose to 7.1 million by April 1, 2012, up 0.6% from seven million a year earlier. By contrast, fixed PSTN subscriptions fell from 14.7 million to 13.2 million, a decrease of 9.7% y-o-y. Meanwhile, Turk Telekom's mobile unit Avea saw its subscriber base grow 6.2% year-on-year to 13.7 million; of these, 7.7 million were on pre-paid plans, up by around half a million on an annualized basis. (April 17, 2013) telegeography.com

The Turkish government has signed a US$46.8 million contract with Aselsan Elektronik Sanayi & Ticaret in partnership with Netas Telekomunikasyon and Turk Telekom's Argela software unit to build a 4G Long Term Evolution (LTE) network designed for civilian and military use. The system is expected to lead to theoretical download speeds of 100Mbps compared to the current 10Mbps-40Mbps offered by 3G technologies. The first LTE tests in Turkey were performed by local operator Turkcell in May 2010. At a later trial in April 2012 Turkcell's transmission speeds surpassed 100Mbps. (April 9, 2013) telegeography.com

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

Nearly 135,000 mobile phone users entered the UAE market in February to boost the total number of GSM subscribers in the second largest Arab economy to a record high of over 14 million, according to official data. The total number of subscribers to mobiles, landlines, internet and other telecommunication services also surged to a record high of around 17.17 million at the end of February, showed the figures by the Telecommunication Regulatory Authority (TRA), which oversees the UAE telecom sector. The report showed that at the end of February, the total mobile phone users stood at 14.14 million, an increase of about 135,000 over the previous months. The increase boosted the mobile phone penetration ratio in the UAE (number of users to population) to a record high of 171.8 per cent, one of the highest ratios in the world. The bulk of the mobile phone users are pre paid subscribers, standing at 12.38 million at the end of February, an increase of 118,000 over the previous months. (April 26, 2013) emirates247.com

Etisalat has announced that it has disconnected 1.3 million SIM cards as part of a campaign to force subscribers to re-register their details. The Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) previously issued a registration directive that applies to customers of both Etisalat and rival cellco Du, as it seeks to prevent identity theft and other fraudulent activity. (April 11, 2013) telegeography.com

Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) has declared that the country's Telecommunications Law and the TRA's VoIP regulatory policy allow only Etisalat and Du to provide telecoms services, including internet telephony. Non-licensees are prohibited from offering telecoms services, and the TRA stressed that this policy has not been amended. The issue has come to the forefront recently, with reports suggesting that Etisalat had unblocked access to Skype. The TRA went on to say: 'As to what the licensees have done in unblocking Skype's website in the UAE, this action does not change the position of the TRA or amend the policy as this service is considered a Regulated Activity, therefore, it must be provided by a licensee. Should the service be provided through a partnership with a third party, both Licensees must seek approval to provide such service after fulfilling the regulatory and technical requirements of the TRA, which has not happened in the case of Skype. VoIP services through Skype are still unauthorized.'
(April 10, 2013) telegeography.com

Regulatory Activities Beyond the SAMENA Region

Asia Pacific

Telecoms retail revenue in developed Asia-Pacific (DVAP) markets is set to decline at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of -0.4% during the next 5 years, according to new research by Analysys Mason. Overall revenue is expected to fall from US$217 billion in 2012 to US$213 billion in 2017. By contrast, GDP is predicted to grow overall by 3% during this period. The decline in the telecoms market will be driven by the fall in fixed revenue from US$86 billion in 2012 to US$74 billion in 2017. By contrast, the outlook for the mobile sector is much healthier and is forecast to grow at around 1.5% per annum from US$131 billion in 2012 to US$139 in 2017. The principal reason for the region's predicted downturn is a decline in fixed voice revenue. Fixed voice connections will decline by 5%, from 138 million at the end of 2012 to 132 million at the end of 2017. Mobile network connections will increase by 21%, from 255 million to 267 million in the same period, but mobile retail revenue will decline because the average revenue per voice minute will decrease - drastically in some countries. "However, it is becoming increasingly difficult to extract the value of a mobile minute in developed economies such as those we examine, because of the high proportion of postpaid subscribers," explained Tom Mowat, Principal Analyst and lead analyst of Analysys Mason's Asia-Pacific research program. "It may be more insightful to look at the value of a mobile connection, which will decline during the period - because of price pressure and the increase in lower-value connections such as mobile broadband and tablets - but at a slower rate than operators will be able to add new connections, resulting in growth." This growth is partly attributable to increases in mobile penetration of the population in the region (from 115% at the end of 2012 to 133% by the end of 2017) as well as significant increases in the percentage of Smartphone SIMs throughout the period. Smartphones represented 42% of handset SIMs at the end of 2012 (up from 28% the previous year) and this proportion will grow to 84% by 2017. By the end of 2013, Smartphone SIMs in the region will outnumber those of non-Smartphones. The report indicates that in both the mobile handset and overall mobile markets, 3G peaked at 86% of connections in 2011. 4G will account for 63% of total mobile connections by the end of 2017. 4G connections will outnumber 3G by 2016. Commercial LTE offerings are available in all DVAP countries except Taiwan, and Japan and South Korea have large numbers of subscribers. The report also predicts that the number of fixed broadband subscribers will grow from 75 million at the end of 2012 to 81 million by the end of 2017. The proportion of fiber-to-the-home/business connections will grow from 42% of the region's fixed broadband connections at the end of 2012 to 48% at the end of 2017. "Fixed broadband connections (including both residential and business) already exceed the number of households in Hong Kong and Singapore, where population density is extremely high," Mowat explained. "The most rapid growth will be in Australia and Singapore, where fiber accounted for less than 1% of fixed broadband connections at the end of 2010. National broadband network projects could increase this to 13% and 46% respectively by the end of 2017." (April 26, 2013) cellular-news.com

GSMA

Industry body the GSMA has called for national governments and regulators to review their approach to Universal Service Fund (USF) levies, which it has labeled as inefficient and ineffective. The term Universal Service relates to telecommunication services that are available, accessible and affordable to a country's citizens. The provision of such services has been advocated as a policy goal by regulators across many countries and to this end, many have established USFs – funds collected by imposing a levy on all operators to be used for providing communication services to the underserved. The GSMA surveyed 64 USFs and concluded that most of them remain inefficient and ineffective, with more than $11bn waiting to be disbursed between them. This is money that could otherwise be used to extend rural coverage or lower the cost of mobile ownership, the body noted. "USF levies and taxes have been established without any substantive analysis regarding the actual service funding or subsidy levels needed, if at all," the GSMA said in a statement. "Many funds continue to request operator contributions that appear to be in excess of the actual USF needs or capabilities even though they seem unable to use the levies collected." For example, in India, the Universal Service Obligation Fund (USOF) currently imposes approximately a five per cent levy on operator revenues, despite the fact that is contains over $4bn of accumulated funds. There is a similar situation in Brazil. Sergio Quiroga da Cunha, Ericsson's head of Latin America said Brazil's USF, which was created by collecting 0.4 per cent of operator revenues, currently sits at almost $5bn but is not being tapped because "nobody is sure how to use it". "The situation needs urgent government review and attention, as the money collected to date far exceeds the amount that is needed to ensure universal access," said Tom Phillips, chief regulatory and government affairs officer at the GSMA. "The reality is that these funds have become a convenient form of taxation on the telecommunications industry and in the majority of cases, they should be closed down and the balance of monies held used to extend access to mobile services to those unable to afford them, or those groups that live in particularly remote areas." (April 10, 2013) telecoms.com

SAMENA

SAMENA Telecommunications Council has announced that Google, the global search-engine giant and worldwide technology leader focused on improving the ways people connect with information, is the latest organization to join as a new member. SAMENA Council focuses on digitization, sustainable internet business model, broadband proliferation, and aims to promote telecoms & ICT industry, including favorable policy & regulation to help elevate the industry's development and evolution. It has actively been involved in promoting ICTs in the region by providing an all-encompassing platform that helps promote cooperation among key stakeholders of the ICT industry. Bocar A. BA, SAMENA Council's Chief Executive Officer, said, "As both a search giant and a major stakeholder in the digital content value chain, Google brings a great deal of knowledge and experience to the SAMENA Council as a member. We will do everything possible to provide our new member with a platform to share knowledge, exchange ideas, and to work closely with our growing member base on industry issues and challenges, both at the regional level and beyond." He added, "As a member of the SAMENA Council, Google will have several opportunities to participate and play a key role in our regional industry meetings and conferences, and explore regional markets and opportunities, and collaborate with our Telecom Operators." "Google has been at the forefront of supporting the development of the ICT industry, ongoing digitization efforts in the region, and the widespread promotion and adoption of broadband and digital content. We hope that Google's joining the SAMENA Council will further the Council's efforts of accelerating the rates of digitization adoption in the region," added Mohamad Mourad, Regional Manager in the Gulf region at Google. Google's innovations in web search and advertising have made its website a top internet property and its brand one of the most recognized in the world. Apart from that Google has been actively supporting and promoting innovation & entrepreneurship through technology, partnerships, collaboration and number of other initiatives to help promote information and communication technologies.

(April 2, 2013) samenacouncil.org

United States

The Center for Business and Public Policy at Georgetown University's McDonough School of Business released a new study on the potential impact of the Federal Communications Commission's (FCC) spectrum incentive auction rules if the Commission bans or limits participation of qualified auction bidders. In the study, economists Robert J. Shapiro , Douglas Holtz-Eakin , and Coleman Bazelon present a data-driven analysis that demonstrates how auction bidding restrictions would cut auction revenues, threaten the Congressional mandate to fully fund a nationwide public safety network, limit the amount of broadcast spectrum available for wireless use, and put upward pressure on the price of mobile broadband services as costs are elevated by restricting efficient firms' auction participation. "The FCC's mission to advance the efficient use of spectrum will require a broad inquiry as it considers the design of rules for the upcoming spectrum auction. We are hopeful that the FCC will indeed incorporate the information provided in the study we are releasing today as the Commission works to fashion the design of the auction," said John Mayo a professor of economics, business, and public policy at Georgetown McDonough and executive director of the Georgetown Center for Business and Public Policy. "In particular, the analysis included in the study points to a number of costs associated with limiting participation in the auction. These empirical findings should give pause to any headlong move to handicap some firms' participation in the auction." The FCC currently is developing a two-part incentive auction framework that enables television broadcasters to voluntarily relinquish some of their spectrum licenses so they can be resold to wireless service providers. The auctions could result in as much as 120 MHz of spectrum transferred from broadcasters, depending on the amount broadcasters' offer and whether the forward auction generates enough proceeds to pay for it. The new study analyzes two potential scenarios - the impact of a complete ban on bidding by the largest wireless carriers and the outcome of permitting these entities to purchase all 120 MHz. In looking at the entire range of potential action, the study provides a mechanism to evaluate the impact of varying restrictions. For example, if the FCC restricts, but does not ban, bidding by the larger carriers, the impact on costs and employment would be proportionate to the extent of the restrictions. The study estimates that bidding rules that bar the participation of the two most efficient wireless providers, Verizon Wireless and AT&T, from participating in the auction process could reduce auction revenues by about 40 percent - lowering federal auction proceeds from as much as $31 billion to approximately $19 billion. This in turn would likely reduce the amount of spectrum acquired from broadcasters and made available for wireless broadband services. The authors warn that lower auction revenues of $19 billion could result in a funding shortfall to support the build out of the nationwide interoperable, high-speed public safety broadband network -- FirstNet -- mandated by Congress in 2012. In particular, they note that with the estimated $7 billion needed from the auction to deploy the public safety network, coupled with the estimated $2 billion needed for re-packing costs, just $10 billion of the potential $19 billion in auction proceeds would remain for purchasing the broadcasters' spectrum. That likely would not be sufficient to secure the full amount made available by the broadcasters. The authors' analysis shows that by permitting all four national carriers to participate without restrictions would generate more revenue, estimating that there could be as much as $22 billion available for the purchase of broadcaster spectrum. "The first and foremost impact of a significant reduction in forward auction revenues would be the diminished amount of spectrum reallocated from television to wireless broadband uses," said Holtz-Eakin and Bazelon. "The inability to pay for all available spectrum would trim total revenue further and risk creating a potential vicious circle of declining revenues and even fewer frequencies reallocated, making the single most important spectrum auction in FCC history a failure." In Shapiro's analysis, he finds that restricting the largest carriers from access to additional spectrum at auction would undermine the effort to address the nation's spectrum crunch by excluding the most efficient providers. According to the paper, this "would increase the industry's effective spectrum deficit by as much as 46 MHz." Shapiro notes in the study that barring large wireless carriers from acquiring additional spectrum to address their capacity needs would force them to deploy other, less efficient solutions that would generate additional costs to be ultimately borne by consumers. These cost increases would likely raise consumer wireless bills by about 9 percent a month and slow the adoption of 4G wireless broadband by some 7 million subscribers by 2017. A slower transition to 4G technologies also would hinder employment growth, resulting in cumulative job losses and lower job gains of more than 118,000 by 2017. "While advocates argue that spectrum caps can promote greater competition, any such speculative benefits of enhanced retail competition must be weighed against the very real consequence of reduced efficiency of spectrum use, higher supply costs, delayed adoption of 4G technologies and harmful reductions in employment relative to an unrestricted auction," Mayo added. (April 30, 2013) cellular-news.com

AT&T Mobility has accused the US Department of Justice (DoJ) of attempting to manipulate the upcoming 600MHz incentive auction to ensure that the two smaller nationwide carriers Sprint Nextel and T-Mobile USA win most of the available spectrum on offer. In a letter to the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), AT&T said that the DoJ's suggestion that AT&T Mobility and Verizon Wireless would be bidding on the low-frequency spectrum merely to 'foreclose' access to it is inaccurate, adding that the DoJ's intervention on the behalf of Sprint and T-Mobile is unlawful and potentially puts the auction in jeopardy. Fierce Wireless quotes Wayne Watts, AT&T's senior executive vice president and general counsel, as saying: 'It is surprising

that the Antitrust Division of the Department of Justice would even propose measures that are so nakedly designed to help specific companies'. In a filing earlier this month, the DoJ asked the FCC to develop auction rules designed to promote competition with a view to ensuring that Verizon and AT&T do not shut out smaller carriers; the 600MHz auction is expected to be held in 2014 or later.
(April 29, 2013) telegeography.com

The US Department of Justice's (DoJ) Antitrust Division has called on telecoms regulator the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to more aggressively regulate the amount of spectrum that the country's larger operators are able to own. "The Department of Justice's principal concern is that acquisitions of spectrum, whether at auction or through subsequent transactions, should not be used to create or enhance market power," it wrote in a letter to the FCC. "The Department concludes that rules that ensure the smaller nationwide networks, which currently lack substantial low-frequency spectrum, have an opportunity to acquire such spectrum could improve the competitive dynamic among nationwide carriers and benefit consumers." It has been widely reported that US operators are facing a radio spectrum shortage. As a result, US carriers have been frantically acquiring more spectrum from rival firms. In January 2013, Verizon signed a deal with rival AT&T to sell its excess 700MHz spectrum licenses. AT&T has also looked to acquire smaller firms for more spectrum, such as the retail wireless operations of Atlantic Tele-Network, which it bought for $780m. Meanwhile, Sprint also looks close to sealing an acquisition of WiMAX player Clearwire and T-Mobile USA appears close to sealing its acquisition of MetroPCS. In response to the spectrum shortage, the FCC has plans in place to make 500MHz of additional spectrum available within ten years, predominantly through freeing up spectrum used by television broadcasters in the country. However, the DoJ voiced its fears that in the meantime, the situation could lead to operators being incentivized to acquire spectrum for the wrong reasons. The Department added that it is therefore "essential to maintain vigilance against any lessening of the intensity of competitive forces". Mike Roberts, principal analyst and head of Americas at Informa Telecoms & Media, said that although operators always crave more spectrum, he concurred that in terms of MHz per subscriber, that the US does look a little tight compared to other major markets. "Operators have been doing everything they can to get their hands on spectrum or by buying other companies such as T-Mobile buying Metro PCS," he said. "It has been a pretty high level strategic chess game, driven in part by the need for spectrum."
(April 15, 2013) telecoms.com

Mexico

Mexico's lower house of Congress has approved plans for a major reform of the telecoms market in order to improve competition and try to end the dominance of America Movil in the mobile market. The bill also challenges the dominance of the broadcaster Televisa in its market. Attempts to reform the telecoms market have been hampered by political difficulties for years, but earlier this year all political parties agreed to support the current proposals. However, the current bill, approved by the Congress has to be sent back to the Senate after the lower house slightly modified the language used in the bill. Companies have often appealed against regulatory declarations, and taken advantage of the often sclerotic legal system to delay any outcome from the appeal. A proposal by the Senate to allow companies declared to be dominant to appeal the decision was rejected by the Congress, which wanted to limit the appeals to just orders about what assets are to be sold off not the declaration itself. The modified limits on appeals will now need fresh approval by the upper house. The modification is small and not expected to block the passing of the bill. The bill also calls for the creation of a new independent telecoms regulator. The decision by the politicians to finally reform the telecoms market have driven down the share prices of the two biggest losers from the changes, Televisa and America Movil. (April 28, 2013) cellular-news.com

Uruguay

Telecoms regulator URSEC has reported that the country ended December 2012 with 4.995 million mobile subscribers, an increase of 5% from 4.757 million twelve months earlier. Pre-paid subscribers accounted for the majority (3.427 million, 68.6%) of users at end-2012, while the number of post-paid customers climbed from 1.419 million at the end of 2011 to 1.568 million twelve months later. The proportion of contract users continued its upward trend during 2011, reaching 31.4% at the end of the year, compared to 29.8% twelve months earlier and 23% at the end of 2008. According to URSEC, Uruguay ended 2012 with 1.01 million fixed lines in service, an increase of over 31,000 from the 979,923 recorded a year earlier. Residential lines accounted for the lion's share (81%) of fixed telephony lines at 31 December 2012. The number of fixed broadband subscribers continued to climb in 2012, reaching 580,669 at year-end, up 23% from the 472,876 reported twelve months earlier, with DSL accounting for 97% (563,108) of all fixed broadband accesses. Mobile broadband customers totaled 1.084 million at the end of 2012, compared to 873,400 a year earlier. Meanwhile, pay-TV customers increased from 536,812 at 31 December 2011 to 592,699 twelve months later. (April 30, 2013) telegeography.com

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Brazil

Telecoms regulator ANATEL voted in favor of allowing domestically owned Oi SA and TIMParticipacoes (TIM Brasil), the Brazilian subsidiary of Telecom Italia, to share infrastructure for the provision of 4G Long Term Evolution (LTE) services. As a result, the pair will be allowed to share towers, transmission equipment and broadcast stations, ANATEL said, adding: 'The authorization does no harm to competition and may, by promoting lower costs for the companies, bring actual benefits to consumers.' In January 2013 TIM Brasil and Oi SA had announced plans to share 4G networks in the country, to allow them to offer ultra-high speed cellular services in the host cities for the FIFA Confederations Cup (Copa das Confederacoes) – Belo Horizonte, Brasilia, Fortaleza, Recife, Rio de Janeiro and Salvador. In a joint statement on January 18, the two carriers said the decision to share the deployment of LTE network infrastructure will yield savings of between 40%-60%, enabling them to be more competitive against other mobile carriers. At the time they said that the new services are expected to be ready in April, in time for testing ahead of the football tournament which kicks off in June 2013.
(April 19, 2013) telegeography.com

Figures published by the Brazilian telecoms regulator ANATEL, show that the total number of mobile SIMs in the country stood at 264.035 million at March 31, 2013, up 0.38% on the previous month, thanks to a total of 1.01 million net new additions for the incumbent cellcos. Of the total, some 188.515 million lines were 2G connections, it said, while W-CDMA (3G) accesses had reached 61.303 million and CDMA2000 1xEV-DO added a further 83,326. In addition, the regulator noted that Brazil was home to 7.192 million machine-to-machine (M2M) data terminals and 6.942 million data terminals (i.e. modem-based) connections. Finally, ANATEL also published an assessment of early 4G Long Term Evolution (LTE) take-up, showing that 0.01% of the total, or 14,700 users, were on LTE at the end of last month. Telecom Americas (Claro), owned by Mexico's Americal Movil (AM), launched its fledgling 4G service late last year. In terms of market share, ANATEL estimates that mobile market leader Vivo, a unit of Telefonica of Spain, had 28.78% of all users, down from 28.83% in February. Second-placed TIM Participacoes (TIM Brasil) increased its share of the pie to 26.98% from 26.88%, while number three player Claro lost ground, ending March with 25.11% of the market, compared with 25.12% in February. Brazilian owned Oi SA meanwhile, stayed firmly in fourth with 18.74% of all users, down from 18.83% a month earlier. (April 19, 2013) anatel.gov.br

ANATEL has announced a 20-day extension to the deadline on its consultation on the use of the 700MHz band in the country. The watchdog has taken the decision it says, to allow interested parties to fully express their views about its proposal 'Regulations about the terms of use for the broadband radio frequency from 690MHz to 806MHz'. The new deadline is set as May 5. In February this year Brazil's Minister of Communications officially sanctioned the use of the 700MHz band for mobile broadband services in a decree published in the federal gazette. The authorization gave ANATEL the go ahead to begin formulating how to define and allocate the 698MHz-806MHz frequency band for mobile broadband use, with one eye on furthering the goals of the country's national broadband plan (PNBL). Under the plans, the government is looking to speed up the process of digitalizing TV services in Brazil, accelerating plans to switch off analogue signals in at least some parts of the country by July 2016, whilst simultaneously strengthening broadband capacity and penetration with additional (more suitable) spectrum. (April 17, 2013) NexTV LatAm daily news

Colombia

The Colombian government has extended the deadline for interested companies to present bids for the upcoming 4G auction, without altering the date of the auction itself. Prospective buyers have until May 6 to submit bids, extended from the previous deadline of April 16. Elsewhere, the government has kept to its original schedule and will announce pre-qualified bidders on May 28 before the auction proper kicks off on June 26. The auction will see 225MHz of airwaves put up for sale: a single 5MHz block of 1900MHz spectrum, three licenses for 2×15MHz of paired spectrum in the 2100MHz range and four 2500MHz permissions, consisting of three 2×15MHz blocks of Frequency Division Duplex (FDD) spectrum and a single 40MHz Time Division Duplex (TDD) concession. In a bid to attract new investors to the market, the Ministry of Information Technology and Communication (MinTIC) has reserved one each of the 2100MHz and 2500MHz concessions for new players. The regulator set rollout targets for winning licensees at 50% of all municipalities by July 2014, increasing to all areas by 2018, though the network obligations were relaxed for new entrants. Claro will be restricted to bidding in the 2500MHz band, whilst Tigo and Movistar will be limited to the 2100MHz and 1900MHz ranges. (April 16, 2013) BNAmericas

Virgin Mobile has launched in Colombia, offering services over the infrastructure of Telefonica's local unit Movistar Colombia. The provider signed an MVNO agreement with Movistar in early 2012 and had previously slated H2 2012 and Q1 2013 as prospective deadlines for beginning commercial services. In August 2012 Virgin launched discussions with the International Finance Corporation (IFC), part of the World Bank, over debt funding for the Colombian MVNO venture, having already acquired similar financing for its Chilean unit: in December that year, the group signed an agreement extending its debt facility to US$14 million.
(April 4, 2013) BNAmericas

European Union

More than 80 European digital rights organizations called on the European Commission to do more to protect net neutrality. The groups, represented by The European Consumer Organization (BEUC) and European Digital Rights (EDRi), are demanding an end to "dangerous experimentation with the functioning of the Internet in Europe." The group said in an open letter to the Commission that operators across Europe are violating Internet neutrality particularly in the mobile sector, where they say there is evidence that companies including ISPs are "using technical measures for their own commercial interests and tampering with citizens' ability to access the Internet." "The experimentation by certain European access providers with blocking, filtering and throttling of services creates borders in an online world whose key value is the absence of borders," said Joe McNamee, Executive Director of EDRi, in a statement demanding that the European Commission put a stop to it. BEUC and EDRi fear that the upcoming non-binding recommendations on net neutrality from the Commission will be based on what the deem to be meaningless safeguards, such as the possibility to switch operators and an obligation for each operator to have at least one full Internet offer. Digital Agenda Commissioner Neelie Kroes has been a vocal advocate of net neutrality, saying consumers should be free to make their own choices about their Internet subscription and online activity, but that this "does not preclude consumers from subscribing to more differentiated, limited Internet offers, possibly for a lower price." Digital rights organization La Quadrature du Net claimed in January that Kroes had caved in to telecom operator pressure and was giving up on net neutrality. She replied that she would not be bullied by NGOs or lobbyists. "Make no mistake: I am in favor of an open Internet and maximum choice. That must be protected. But you don't need me or the E.U. telling you what sort of Internet services you must pay for," said Kroes. The Commissioner has initiated many consultations on net neutrality, and has asked European national legislators and regulators to wait for better evidence before regulating on a country by country basis. However both The Netherlands and Slovenia, reluctant to wait, have already introduced legal protection for net neutrality. (April 17, 2013) pcadvisor.co.uk

The European Commission has blocked a proposal by the German Telecoms Regulator (BNetzA) to set fixed termination rates three times higher than the average of countries which follow the recommended approach set out in EU telecoms rules. Under BNetzA's proposal, fixed termination rates would range from €0.0036/minute (peak) to €0.0025/minute (off-peak). Operators in countries which follow the EC's recommended approach pay on average €0.001/minute. European Commission Vice President Neelie Kroes stated: "My job is to deliver a Single Market for telecoms for all EU citizens. All EU countries - big and small - have signed up to, and are implementing, the rules which put this in place. No country can be allowed to divert us from this goal. I urge BNetzA to bring forward a new proposal that delivers lower consumer prices and helps us build telecoms Single Market." Following the "serious doubts" letter sent today by the Commission, BNetzA now has three months to work with the Commission and the body of European telecoms regulators (BEREC) on a solution to this case. In the meantime implementation of the proposal is suspended. (April 11, 2013) BNetzA

United Kingdom

Telecommunications regulator OFCOM announced plans for a pilot of innovative 'white space' technology in the UK, among the first of its kind in Europe. The technology uses gaps in radio spectrum, called 'white spaces', which exist in between frequency bands. In this instance, these bands have been reserved for digital terrestrial TV broadcasting and wireless microphones. Use of these white spaces will allow devices to transmit and receive wireless signals for applications such as broadband access for rural communities, Wi-Fi-like services or new 'machine-to-machine' networks. OFCOM is inviting industry to take part in the pilot, which is intended to take place in the autumn. (April 26, 2013) ofcom.org.uk

OFCOM has published a call for inputs on the future use of the 694-790 MHz band which is currently used for Digital TV. In the UHF strategy statement, published in November 2012, OFCOM explained the steps it intends to take to increase mobile broadband capacity by drawing on the 700 MHz frequency band, which is currently used for digital terrestrial television (DTT) as well as program making and special events (PMSE), as part of potential future spectrum harmonization across Europe and the rest of the world. OFCOM is now seeking views from stakeholders on the relevant factors to consider when assessing the costs and benefits associated with a potential future change of use of the 700 MHz band. OFCOM is also asking for inputs on the measures that it can and should take, ahead of any future change of use of the 700 MHz band, to reduce the disruption and costs which could result from a change of use of the band. Currently a nationwide operation is starting to install filters on TV's to protect against possible interference from 800 MHz 4G services. It would appear from the OFCOM document that once this exercise has been completed it will have to be done all over again this time to protect TV's from new 700 MHz mobile broadband services. (April 25, 2013) southgatearc.org

Regulator OFCOM is preparing the ground for the relatively quick introduction of 5G mobile services to tackle what it sees as a future "capacity crunch". Over 10 years ago, before mobile 3G was widely used in the UK, there were media chortles about standards bodies mooting the prospect of 4G, which is now here. At the time UK mobile users were still getting their heads around getting the best use out of 2.5G network services like GPRS and EDGE - which are still very much alive on entry level smartphones. Such services are also used by mobile operators as back-up networks when there aren't enough 3G bars on higher performance smartphones. But with many users now expecting to view video clips, watch live TV and play interactive games on their mobile devices as part of standard smartphone data packages, the days of 4G seem to be numbered before it becomes widely available. Although faster 4G services are not expected to be fully available until this summer - much later than other countries like Japan and Korea, OFCOM now seems to be determined to get the UK on a better war footing when it comes to 5G. The introduction of 4G came late to the UK because the mobile operators were arguing over standards and the terms of spectrum license auctions through OFCOM. It was only when OFCOM allowed EE, the holder of the Orange and T-Mobile brands, to launch 4G with existing spectrum, that the rest of the mobile operators came quickly into line to prepare for the 4G spectrum auction, so that they could launch their own rival 4G services. Now OFCOM will this week launch an industry consultation about freeing up spectrum for 5G, to allow the UK to catch up with other countries on the mobile communications front. Steve Unger, chief technology officer at OFCOM, told: "There are three ways to meet the demand for more data – more spectrum, better use of spectrum and more cell sites. We need to progress on all three fronts, which is in effect what we mean by 5G, to meet the 80-fold increase in data usage we predict by 2030." Unger added: "We expect 5G will be about making mobile data ubiquitous – you won't lose reception, or worry that your service will be too slow. It will always be there, always reliable, to the extent that it will become a fixed line substitute." The consultation launch coincides with a European Wireless Conference this week at the University of Surrey, focused on using 5G technologies to solve an impending "spectrum crunch", that academics predict when radio space becomes fully used by 2020. University of Surrey was awarded £35 million in funding last year from the government and the mobile operators to help develop 5G mobile services. The University predicts that data traffic over mobile devices is expected to increase globally 1,000-fold by 2020, and as a result mobile blackouts and patchy services could be prevalent in major European cities as they "run out of capacity by 2020".
(April 17, 2013) computerworlduk.com

UK fixed line incumbent BT has announced that it wholesale fiber network now passes more than 15 million premises, a figure which it claims means that more than half of the country's premises now have access to the superfast infrastructure. In making the announcement BT claimed that its GBP2.5 billion (US$3.82 billion) fiber rollout program is now some 18 months ahead of its original schedule, noting that Open reach engineers are currently passing between 100,000 and 200000 additional premises with fiber each week. Looking ahead, BT has said it is now on course to pass around 19 million premises by 'the end of spring 2014'. (April 10, 2013) telegeography.com

France

French regulator ARCEP has announced that an independent Committee of Experts, appointed by the regulator to evaluate the introduction of next generation access (NGA) technologies on the copper local loop network of Orange France, has authorized VDSL2 technology as suitable for commercial distribution without disrupting existing DSL networks/services. The Committee added that the use of VDSL2 is applicable to the provision of full/shared access to the copper pair for wholesale broadband/voice line services. VDSL2 is applicable to copper lines and allows significant increase in the downlink speed in comparison with ADSL. However, due to equipment's inherent physical limitations, the performance gain of VDSL2 is limited to copper lines whose length does not exceed 1km. These units represent about 16% (around five million) of the total copper lines on Orange France's network, and are concentrated in areas that do not benefit from fiber-to-the-home (FTTH) rollouts. For lines of greater length, the downlink of VDSL2 is equivalent to the speed provided by ADSL2+. On April 26, 2013 a pilot VDSL2 network was launched at the Dordogne and the Gironde administrative departments, providing the rest of the operators with an opportunity to assess the technology. Upon publication of Orange France's VDSL2 wholesale price proposal, operators will have three months to prepare for the launch of VDSL2 in the rest of the country, with estimated national commercial rollout of the technology set for autumn 2013. ARCEP will closely monitor the introduction of VDSL2 and will review one year after its nationwide launch. The Committee of Experts examining copper access technologies consists of representatives from France Telecom-Orange itself, the incumbent's rivals who offer unbundled services over Orange's network, plus major NGA equipment manufacturers, while representatives of local authorities also attend the monthly committee meetings. A similar committee was appointed by ARCEP to study fiber-based NGA solutions. (April 30, 2013) telegeography.com

Telecom regulator ARCEP has launched a public consultation on possible changes to local loop unbundling (LLU) regulation during its upcoming round of market analysis (mid-2014 to mid-2017) of high speed and very-high speed internet markets. 86.3% of the French population is currently able to access alternative operators' services via LLU, which was achieved via self-regulation, the encouraging of unbundling ever-smaller subscriber access nodes, and via the projects implemented by local authorities aimed at increasing broadband access for subscribers in their regions. The high rate of coverage in terms of number of subscriber lines (86.3%) has been achieved even though only 40% of incumbent France Telecom-Orange's subscriber access nodes have been unbundled. It is unlikely that unbundling will be achieved throughout France before the completion of the next round of market analysis in mid-2017. However, where unbundling has not been implemented, the range of services available to subscribers is often limited and generally does not include television, for example. For this reason the regulator wishes to collect analyses from market players on possible modifications to its LLU regulation in order to provide a near-homogeneous level of service to the entire population, thereby reducing the digital divide. The public consultation will be open until May 15, 2013.
(April 9, 2013) telegeography.com

Germany

Telecoms regulator, the Federal Network Agency (FNA), has given Deutsche Telekom (DT) conditional approval to upgrade its copper network with VDSL2 technology. The watchdog said that DT must allow competitors to access the infrastructure, but that it could deny access in areas where alternative networks are already available. German broadband network operators association Breko has been critical of DT's VDSL2plans, saying that the proposals will hinder the growing fiber-optic deployment of regional operators and significantly reduce unbundled access for rivals. (April 10, 2013) telegeography.com

Switzerland

Swisscom has announced that it has expanded the footprint of its 4G Long Term Evolution (LTE) network to 159 locations, from 26 in November last year, when it commercially launched the platform. The infrastructure now covers some 35% of the population, and Swisscom claims that around 300,000 subscribers currently use 4G-compatible smartphones, enabling them to 'benefit directly from the higher capacity, greater speed and shorter reaction times of the new network.' The incumbent is looking to expand coverage to 70% by the end of 2013 and plans to invest CHF1.5 billion (US$1.59 billion) in its mobile network up to 2017. (April 5, 2013) telegeography.com

Romania

According to the figures released by the telecoms regulator, ANCOM, at the beginning of April 2013, Romania reached the threshold of one million ported numbers. Since the introduction of the service in October 2008, the amount of ported numbers has risen every year. A total of 672k of the 1,001,364 of numbers ported as of April 1, 2013 was mobile telephone numbers and remainder were fixed telephone numbers. An amount of 255,893 numbers were ported in 2012, out of which 65% mobile telephone numbers and 35% fixed telephone numbers. The statistical data show that post-paid users are keener to port their numbers (75%) as opposed to prepaid users. In the mobile telephony segment, the operators involved in the porting process share the mobile numbers ported so far as follows: Cosmote accepted 223,450 numbers, Vodafone 220,051, Orange 219,986, RCS & RDS 6,889, and Telemobil 719. The number of complaints related to MNP issued has also declined over the past 4 years, from 196 in 2009 to 112 in 2012. (April 5, 2013) ancom.org.ro

Telecoms regulator, ANCOM has announced that it is reserving the 450MHz band in future for use by Public Mobile Radio (PMR) users, on a per application basis. Until last week, this band was used by Telemobil, which offered voice and data services based on CDMA 450MHz technology. The regulator said that usage rights for the frequencies in the 450MHz band will be granted upon request, in the order of the date of submitting the requests, as long as the radio spectrum resource is sufficient for settling the existing requests for frequency assignation. Where the radio spectrum requests exceed the spectrum resources available and the settling of all the requests becomes impossible, the usage rights for the radio frequencies will be granted by means of a comparative or a competitive tender. (April 2, 2013) cellular-news.com

Norway

The Norwegian Post & Telecoms Authority (NPT) has announced that it will offer three frequency blocks in the 900MHz band for offshore use in an auction to be conducted on June 26, 2013. The regulator notes that the available spectrum falls in the 880MHz-915MHz and 925MHz-960MHz bands. Interested parties have until May 20, 2013 to submit comments on the proposed rules for the sale process. (April 26, 2013) telegeography.com

Slovak Republic

Slovakian mobile operator Orange Slovensko has returned a CDMA mobile network license to the regulator. The reason given for relinquishing the license was a lower than predicted demand for CDMA-based services. (April 2, 2013) Daily Sme

Moldova

Moldovan industry watchdog ANRCETI has announced the results of a public consultation for the auction of 2500MHz-2520MHz/2620MHz-2640MHz mobile frequency licenses. The draft document was made available for public discussion between March 26, 2013 and April 8, 2013, however, no comments or recommendations were reportedly received. According to the draft document, the ANRCETI will auction parts of the 2500MHz-2690MHz frequency band via a 'beauty contest' process, giving the winners the rights to use the aforementioned bands for the deployment of networks using IMT-2000, UMTS (W-CDMA), LTE and IMT-Advanced technologies. Under the license conditions, each winner will be required to provide the minimum set of 4G services (data transmission, including mobile internet access) in areas inhabited by at least 25% of the Moldovan population (excluding the territory of Transdniestria) by December 31, 2015. (April 26, 2013) telegeography.com

Slovenia

The country's three largest mobile network operators, Telekom Slovenije, Si.Mobil and Tusmobil – which recently entered applications for additional 1800MHz/2100MHz wireless spectrum – have had their initial bids approved.
(April 26, 2013) STA News Agency

Slovenia's three largest mobile operators Telekom Slovenije, Si.Mobil and Tusmobil have entered bids for additional mobile frequencies in the 1800MHz and 2100MHz bands, suitable for 4G LTE-based services, it was revealed after the country's Agency for Post and Electronic Communications (APEK) publicly opened bidding applications. APEK issued an open invitation for the 1800MHz/2100MHz tender in March, with the deadline for submission of applications passing on April 15, 2013. On offer are eight 2×5MHz sub-bands in the 1800MHz range (1710MHz-1720MHz and 1755MHz-1785MHz paired with 1805MHz-1815MHz and 1850MHz-1880MHz) with validity up to January 3, 2016; plus two 2×5MHz sub-bands in the 2100MHz band valid for the period ended September 21, 2021 (1955MHz-1965MHz paired with 2145MHz-2155MHz). License winners must offer services in the specific bands covering at least 30% of the population within one year of the license award. APEK expects to announce license winners on June 1, 2013. Also on April 17, APEK published a contract tender for conducting an independent study aimed at determining the optimal level for the base pricing in the upcoming multi-band auctions involving frequencies in the 800MHz, 900MHz, 1800MHz, 2100MHz and 2600MHz bands. The deadline for submission of tenders is 30 May 2013. (April 18, 2013) STA News Agency

Belgium

Tecteo Telenet Bidco (TTB), the joint venture between cable operator Telenet and the Tecteo Group, which owns Walloon-based cableco VOO, has been formally notified by the Belgian Institute for Post and Telecommunications (BIPT) that its 3G concession could be withdrawn if it does not launch commercial services using the spectrum it was awarded in August 2011. The watchdog has pointed to the terms of the license issued to TTB, which stipulated that the JV should have rolled out service over its own network by January 15, 2013. For its part, TTB has claimed that it is unable to develop a competitive service unless one of the country's existing mobile network operators agrees to allow it to rent infrastructure so that it can take advantage of its spectrum. Such an argument has, however, been rejected by the BIPT. The BIPT forewarned TTB that its concession could be revoked should it fail to utilize its spectrum by May 2012. In July 2011 TTB emerged as the sole bidder for the country's fourth UMTS license, confirming that it was looking to acquire the maximum available block of spectrum, 2×14.8MHz in the 2100MHz band, offering EUR71.5 million (US$101 million), the minimum bid amount, for the new frequencies. The following month the BIPT named the JV the recipient of the spectrum, noting that the former would be required to pay the fee in annual installments over the lifetime of its new license, with the concessions valid until March 15, 2021. (April 26, 2013) L'Echo

The Belgian Institute for Post and Telecommunications (BIPT) has issued an updated report considering the possible advantages to be had from using the 790MHz-862MHz band for Digital Terrestrial Television (DTT) and for mobile broadband services. Following its publication, the government asked the BIPT to conduct a further study on the assessment of the value of the 800MHz band for one of two possible uses: DTT and mobile broadband. In its press release the watchdog notes that until recently, evaluations were only made on the basis of extrapolations of the situation in other European countries and the basic parameters (e.g. duration of authorizations) which have now changed. In conclusion, the preliminary findings of the report are:

- It expects there to be very limited value to use of the band by DTT. Within its base case analysis, the report estimates that the value for use of the frequencies for free-to-air services would be about EUR58 million (USD74.5 million), and the value for use by DTT subscription services would be about EUR226 million.
- In contrast, the study concludes that it expects there to be significant value for use of the band by mobile broadband services. Its 'model' expects that overall surplus derived from use of the band could be in the region of EUR1.056 billion.

The report also says that it is confident that its results are 'a valid representation of the potential surplus within the context of the Belgian market. Despite generally applying optimistic assumptions when estimating the economic benefits of using the 790MHz-862MHz band for DTT services, we cannot establish a significant positive value'. (April 3, 2013) ibpt.be

Hungary

Market regulator the National Media and Telecommunications Authority (NMHH) reports that the total number of mobile internet users in the country reached 3.343 million at March 31, 2013, up from 3.179 million at the start of the year. Of these, 2.504 million were designated as 'active' (i.e. subscriptions with data transfer), compared to 2.399 million three months earlier. Further, the watchdog reported that mobile internet users transferred 2.520 million GB of data last month, up from 2.211 million GB in February and 2.587 million gigabytes in December 2012. The average amount of data transferred per user was 1.01GB, down from 1.08GB in December. In terms of mobile internet subscribers, T-Mobile Hungary led the pack with a market share of 45.55% (1.522 million), ahead of Telenor Hungary with 28.51% (952,823) and Vodafone Hungary at 25.95% (867,308). (April 19, 2013) nmhh.hu

Country's three mobile telecommunications companies told that they are keen to learn more from the National Media and Infocommunications Authority (NMHH) about its plan regarding expiring frequency licenses. NMHH told mobile companies that it did not intend to extend automatically frequency licenses when they expire in the coming years. Telenor Magyarország communications director told MTI the company welcomes the strategic cooperation and expects to learn more. Vodafone Magyarország said it is open to dialogue and cooperation with NMHH on drawing up a frequency management strategy and harmonizing the expiration of frequency licenses for the long term. Magyar Telekom, a unit of Deutsche Telekom, said it hoped for genuine, active dialogue and strategic cooperation with NMHH. It added that the extension and harmonization of the expiring frequency licenses is of key importance as would affect mobile broadband developments already underway. (April 15, 2013) bbj.hu

Czech Republic

National telecoms watchdog the Czech Telecommunications Office (CTU) published its new outline plan for the auctioning off of mobile frequencies suitable to support Long Term Evolution (LTE) services, and hopefully result in the launch of a fourth mobile network operator in the country. The goal is to support the development of high speed mobile internet networks of the fourth-generation, intensify competition, support the entrance of a new mobile operator and improve the quality of mobile services. The CTU's revised auction plan, which follows the debacle of its cancelled tender last month when bids rose three-fold on the reserve price of CZK7.4 billion (US$373.6 million) to exceed CZK20 billion, envisages a public consultation period lasting until 8 May. Following this, in June this year the CTU expects to be in a position to announce the deadline for interested parties to submit bids. Further, the regulator now expects bids to be below CZK10 billion. This time, the watchdog aims to put a cap on bids arguing that such high sums as seen in the original auction would hamper operators' efforts to roll out 4G, leading them to seek to recoup investment costs by imposing higher charges on end users. The CTU now plans to offer frequencies in the 800MHz band seen as potentially the most lucrative block on offer exclusively to a new market entrant, in a bid to break the stranglehold of the big three – Telefonica O2 CR, T-Mobile CR and Vodafone's local unit. (April 10, 2013) The Wall Street Journal

The Czech telecommunications regulator CTU said it has set new parameters for an auction of mobile radio frequencies that could lead to a fourth cellular operator entering the local market. "The goal is to support the development of high-speed mobile internet networks of the fourth generation, intensify competition, support the entrance of a new mobile operator and improve the quality of mobile services," the CTU said. The period of consulting with potential bidders will last through May 8, the regulator said, adding that in June it will likely announce the deadline for interested parties to submit offers. The regulator now expects bids to be below 10 billion koruna (US$505.5 million). The CTU last month suspended an earlier version of this auction when bids climbed to above CZK20 billion, or nearly three-fold of the minimum bid of CZK7.4 billion set at the start of the auction. Such high sums would force operators to recoup investment by increasing costs to end-users, which runs against the goals of the competition, the regulator said. The CTU said it will now offer 800MHz frequencies, the most lucrative of available bandwidths, exclusively to new operators to boost competitiveness on the market, which is now dominated by three operators: the local units of Telefonica SA (TEF), of Deutsche Telekom AG (DTE.XE) and of Vodafone Group PLC (VOD). The bandwidth auction aims to speed up the roll-out of new high-speed mobile networks with long-term evolution technology, or LTE, the successor to third-generation, or 3G, mobile data services. (April 8, 2013) foxbusiness.com

The Czech Telecommunication Office (CTU) has published its findings on a survey into internet access prices in the country, determining that the average household connection cost rose by CZK15 to CZK430 (US$0.746 toUS$21.40) per month in the second half of the year. The findings also suggest that currently almost one-third (31%) of homes are not paying more than CZK300 per month for their web connection. Not surprisingly, price is the principal factor in deciding what kind of service to take, with 70% of respondents considering it the most important criterion. Internet speed also figured highly in the decision-making process, although 77% of those surveyed reported being happy with the speed of their service, and 81% with its overall quality. The CTU's report also concluded that almost half of all Czech households with an internet connection use some form of wireless (Wi-Fi) platform, 23% use a fixed xDSL connection, 12% have a cable modem line, 5% use a modem for mobile internet (dongle) access and a similar number have a fiber-optic (FTTx) hook up. Furthermore, it was reported that four out of five Czechs now use a computer, compared to a rate of 60% five years ago, while 76% of respondents use the internet, up from less than 60% previously. (April 3, 2013) Daily Monitor

Lithuania

Lithuania's Communications Regulatory Authority (RRT) has launched a public consultation on the draft program for use of frequencies in the 790MHz-862MHz band. The consultation will remain open until April 22, and the legislation covers conditions of use and the minimum requirements for development of terrestrial systems. (April 12, 2013) telegeography.com

Nigeria

The Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC) has published its findings from the 'Study of the Assessment of the Level of Competition in Nigerian Telecommunications Industry', which it began in June 2012. The regulator has determined that MTN Nigeria is a dominant player in the mobile voice segment, with a market share of approximately 44%. As such, the South African-owned operator is required to adhere to obligations concerning: accounting separation; the introduction of equal rates for on-net and off-net tariffs (which will then be subject to periodic review); and submission of details on specific aspects of its operations as the need arises. Meanwhile, MTN and Globacom have both been designated as dominant operators in the wholesale leased lines and transmission capacity sub-segment of the upstream market. The pair are required to adhere to obligations of accounting separation, and must submit details on specific aspects of their operations as the need arises. They are also required to introduce a price cap for wholesale services and a price floor for retail services, as determined by the NCC. As the fixed voice market is in decline, the regulator did not identify a dominant operator in this segment, while the mobile data market was declared effectively competitive. The fixed data market and downstream segment, meanwhile, were identified as nascent markets in which no operators are considered dominant. The regulator's determinations will take effect from May 1, 2013 and will remain valid and binding for the services specified in relevant market segments until further review by the NCC. (April 30, 2013) telegeography.com

The Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC) is set to finally launch mobile number portability (MNP) for the country's GSM subscribers. According to NCC, MNP will lead to improved quality service and increased competition among operators. The regulator will now work towards implementing the service for Nigeria's roughly three million CDMA mobile customers. The introduction of MNP in Nigeria has encountered numerous delays since it was first announced by the NCC in 2006. Further deadlines of 2009, December 2012, March 25, 2013 and April 1, 2013 came and went, and at the start of the month operators told the NCC that they required three additional weeks to enable them to complete their preparations. (April 23, 2013) telegeography.com

The Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC) has unveiled a five-year 'Strategic Master Plan' designed to increase investment in the country's telecoms sector and improve on the regulator's functions and framework. The NCC said that the plan, which will be implemented from 2013 to 2017, will serve as a roadmap for the future, taking into consideration the current and emerging trends in the industry and expectations of stakeholders. A robust Strategic Master Plan has many purposes such as ensuring the alignment of day-to-day work to the Commission's strategy; prioritizing programs and projects to achieve the NCC's goals and objectives; ensuring optimal use of the NCC's recourses; providing objective basis for performance monitoring and management, and meeting the Commission's vision and mission. (April 17, 2013) The Guardian

The Nigeria Communications Commission (NCC) has told that mobile number portability (MNP) will begin this month, despite repeated delays. MNP was first announced by the NCC in 2006 but was not implemented. Further deadlines of 2009, December 2012, March 25, 2013 and April 1, 2013 have all come and gone. When faced with the deadline of April 1, 2013, operators told the NCC that they required three additional weeks to enable them to complete their preparations. NCC have been liberal enough in shifting dates, in order to allow for adequate preparation of all networks but this time around we will shift no further as we are determined that MNP must begin this April,' regulator said. (April 11, 2013) Daily Thisday

Russia

The Russian government has authorized the use of monies from the Universal Service Fund (USF) to bankroll the creation of a national mobile number portability (MNP) database. The introduction of MNP is currently scheduled for December 1, 2013. The USF, which is generally used to compensate operators who roll out telephone or data access services in remote areas, is supported by all domestic telcos, each of which channels 1.2% of its annual revenues into the pot. (April 30, 2013) Prime Business News Agency

Australia

Having opened submissions for the country's upcoming digital dividend auction back in January 2013, the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) noted that the sale process would begin today. Ahead of the launch of the auction, the regulator noted that it anticipates the sale will run 'over several weeks, with auction results known in mid-to-late May 2013'. Looking further ahead, the ACMA has also confirmed that it will publish the names of the winning bidders, along with the spectrum they have been allocated and the total sum paid, once the auction has been concluded and results verified by an independent third party. During the sale process itself, however, the watchdog has noted that it will not disclose any information about the progress of the auction, a move which it claims is 'to protect the integrity of the auction'. The digital dividend will see spectrum offered in both the 700MHz band (703MHz-748MHz and 758MHz-803MHz) and 2.5GHz band (2500MHz-2570MHz and 2620MHz-2690MHz). In the 700MHz band, the ACMA has previously revealed that there is 'one product containing nine generic lots', with each lot comprising a paired 2×5MHz block of spectrum, of which 5MHz will be in the upper part of the band, and the other in the lower part. Each of the nine available spectrum allocations will allow for nationwide coverage, bar the Mid-west Radio Quiet Zone (RQZ). In the 2.5GHz band, however, the ACMA is offering 'eleven products, each containing 14 generic lots', with each lot offering 2×5MHz, again with 5MHz in each of the upper and lower parts of the band. Unlike the nationwide 700MHz band concessions, the 2.5GHz licenses will be available on a region-by-region basis, with the eleven locations listed as: the eight metropolitan areas of the Australian Capital Territory (ACT). With regards to pricing, the ACMA has been directed by country's telecoms minister to set the reserve prices for the 700MHz band at AUD1.36 (US$1.42) per MHz per head of population calculation (AUD/MHz/pop). By comparison, for the 2.5GHz spectrum licenses, a reserve price of AUD0.03/MHz/pop has been set.
(April 23, 2013) telegeography.com

The value of mobile data and messaging revenues has exceeded voice call revenues for the first time in Australia, according to new research from the analyst firm, Telsyte. Mobile data activity and messaging has been growing for the last few years and has finally exceeded voice revenues as consumers shift from using their mobile primarily for

telephony to mainly data. Ultimately voice will be used as any other application. "The phenomenal growth of Smartphones, apps and personal messaging has finally put data and messaging ahead of call revenues for carriers," Telsyte mobile services analyst, Alvin Lee says. "Ultimately carriers will move to an all IP network with voice becoming another data application," Lee says. The arrival of Voice over LTE (VoLTE) will accelerate this trend and ultimately all voice revenues could be included as data. "Current LTE devices don't support VoLTE, but as they start to, mobile data might become the single unit of value" Lee says. Telsyte expects Facebook to become more influential in the mobile industry as people utilize Facebook Home and Facebook features such as presence and a unified experience to enhance their communications. Telsyte estimates there was 30.6 million services in operation at the end of December 2012, or around 133 per cent population penetration. A little over 6 per cent of these were 4G connections.
(April 23, 2013) cellular-news.com

The Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) is likely to focus its attention on the performance of the country's mobile networks. CEO ACMA said that regulator would begin an examination of networks in July 2013, with that date set with a view to giving operators time to prepare after the auction of spectrum freed up by the digital dividend, which is due to take place later this month. It is understood that the regulator plans to look at mobile network performance monitoring, while it will also seek the views of consumers with regards to how networks are performing, following which the ACMA expects to conduct a summit regarding the matter later this year. CEO did not, however, confirm whether the ACMA plans to regulate mobile network performance, noting: 'It is premature to discuss further regulation in relation to this initiative.'
(April 10, 2013) ZDNet Australia

Kyrgyzstan

According to the latest report from the country's National Communications Agency the total number of mobile subscribers in Kyrgyzstan reached 6.797 million at the end of December 2012, up from 6.277 million twelve months earlier,. The regulator added that wireless population penetration climbed to 122.4%, while service coverage reached 95.7% of the country by year-end. Meanwhile, fixed telephony connections fell from 502,020 at the start of the year to 488,853 as at December 31, 2012.
(April 3, 2013) telegeography.com

China

China's mobile customer base grew by a record 13.68 million in March to 1.15 billion, the country's Ministry of Industry and Information Technology (MIIT) revealed. In the first three months of the year, overall mobile subscribers grew by 33.57 million. The ministry statistics showed that 3G is really taking off in China. 44.46 million Customers signed up for 3G services in the first quarter, a number almost equivalent to the population of Spain. In total there were 277 million 3G users by the end of March, or 24.2% of the country's mobile base, up from 20.9% at the start of the year. The operators' own Websites show that market leader China Mobile continues to account for the bulk of new 3G connections, having added 26.44 million in Q1, compared to China Unicom's 11.36 million. China Telecom has yet to publish statistics for March, but added 5.82 million 3G subscriptions in January and February combined. Fixed-line connections continued to decline, falling by 1.75 million during the quarter to 276 million. But the last month of the quarter saw an increase in Internet connections. Fixed broadband households grew by 2.56 million in March to 181 million, while 13.94 million new mobile Internet users took the total to 817 million. (April 23, 2013) totaltele.com

Taiwan

National Communications Commission (NCC) has published statistics detailing the makeup of the country's broadband sector at end-March 2013. Fiber-based connections accounted for the largest portion of the country's high speed internet accesses, with there being 2.703 million such connections at the end of March 2013, up from 2.633 million three months earlier. ADSL connections, meanwhile, continued to decline, falling to 1.744 million at the end of the first three months of 2013, down by just over four percentage points quarter-on-quarter. Cable broadband connections stood at 1.099 million at end-March 2013, up marginally from the 1.081 million reported three months earlier, while WiMAX subscribers numbered 135,595, down from 137,009. (April 30, 2013) telegeography.com

National Communications Commission (NCC) has revealed that it will begin accepting applications for 4G concessions from May 1, 2013, with the submission period subsequently ending on June 15. Following that the regulator has confirmed that it will examine the applicants between June 15 and August 15 with a view to announcing a list of those would-be bidders that have qualified to participate in the sale process. Meanwhile, the report also notes that the NCC will hold conferences between July 10 and July 20 to outline the procedures for the sale itself, while an auction rehearsal is expected to take place on August 20. The spectrum sale itself will get underway on August 26. (April 29, 2013) The Digitimes

Vietnam

Ministry of Information and Communications (MIC) has rejected a proposal by state-run national PTO Vietnam Posts and Telecommunications (VNPT) to merge its two wholly-owned mobile operators, MobiFone and Vinaphone, stating that the move would have a negative impact on competition. VNPT was required to submit a restructuring plan to the government for final approval by the end of last year, under a program to reorganize state-owned companies to boost competition in certain markets. Under the government's new rules, an institution or individual that owns more than 20% in one company may not hold more than 20% of another firm operating in the same market. VNPT is the largest fixed telephony and broadband provider in Vietnam and owns 100% of the country's second and third largest mobile operators by subscribers, Vinaphone and MobiFone. The Minister of Information and Communications said that VNPT's proposal does not follow the government's telecommunication plan, under which the country must still have three to four large telecoms operators following the restructure; if MobiFone and Vinaphone were to be merged, the mobile market would be left with just two large players – the VNPT unit and the country's largest cellco by subscribers, Viettel. The MIC will now instruct VNPT to formulate a new restructuring plan for submission to the government.
(April 15, 2013) Saigon GP Daily

Thailand

Thailand's National Broadcasting & Telecommunications Commission (NBTC) has scheduled an auction for two 25MHz blocks in the 1800MHz frequency band consisting of 15MHz for 4G services and an optional 10MHz for 2G, by September 2014, a year after the 1800MHz concessions of True Corp's True Move unit and Advanced Info Services (AIS) subsidiary Digital Phone Company (DPC) expire in September 2013. The watchdog has also asked Digital Total Access Communications (DTAC) to return an unused 25MHz block in the 1800MHz band [half of DTAC's total 50MHz in the band] in order to auction it simultaneously with those of True and DPC. However, the NBTC has no authority to force DTAC to return the frequency, as its concession does not expire until 2018. (April 18, 2013) The Bangkok Post

Thailand's Advanced Info Service (AIS) has revealed a plan to soft launch 2100MHz 3G mobile services on April 9, 2013 ahead of a scheduled commercial launch on May 8. AIS, which had 4.5 million 3G 900MHz network users at the beginning of January, is targeting a total of eight million 3G subscribers by the end of the year, while its 2100MHz rollout is expected to reach 50% population coverage by mid-year, 80% by the start of 2014 and 97% coverage within three years. (April 4, 2013) telegeography.com

Thailand's mobile networks have agreed to gradually increase the capacity of their shared mobile number portability facility based on customer demand for the service. The three private networks wanted a big increase in capacity, but this was opposed by the two state-owned networks. The private networks are keen to migrate customers they currently manage on the state-owned networks via a concession agreement over to their own 3G networks. The state operators opposed a fast migration as it reduces their income. Currently the number-transfer capacity is limited to just 40,000 customers per day. Putting that into context, AIS wants to migrate around 10 million customers this year alone. The latest proposal will require the networks to agree on what the actual customer demand is and then submit that to the telecoms regulator for approval. They have not yet agreed on regulator requested plans to lower the cost of MNP services or to speed up the process.
(April 4, 2013) The Nation

The National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission (NBTC) insist there will be a clear legal resolution this week on the contentious third generation (3G) network contracts between True Corporation and CAT Telecom. Chairman of the NBTC's telecom committee, said the committee will decide whether one of the six contracts involving the network rental service of BFKT (Thailand) violates Section 7 and 67 of the Telecom Business Act. Section 7 says anyone who intends to run a telecom business must obtain a license from the NBTC, while Section 67 says operators of a telecom business without a license will face a penalty. NBTC commissioner said that resolution will clearly define whether BFKT violated the law and what further measures will be carried out. He acknowledged that the telecom committee could face a legal backlash no matter what conclusions come out. (April 2, 2013) bangkokpost.com

Maldives

The Communications Authority reports that the island nation ended March 2013 with a total of 574,211 mobile subscribers – compared to 539,792 twelve months earlier – of which the majority (87.6%, or 503,030) were pre-paid customers. The regulator said that fixed broadband subscribers reached 19,594 at March 31, 2013 (up from 17,140 a year earlier), while mobile broadband customers totaled 81,735 (60,215). The number of fixed telephony lines (including payphones) fell from 25,306 to 24,118 over the twelve-month period.
(April 26, 2013) csc.gov.mv

Hong Kong

The Office of the Communications Authority (OFCA) announced that the licensing exemptions for PHS radiocommunications apparatus operating in the 1895MHz-1906.1MHz band will be withdrawn in phases from May 10. 'PHS is a short and medium-range mobile radiocommunications technology developed in Japan and introduced into Hong Kong in 1997 mainly for use as cordless telephones. However, the deployment of PHS in Hong Kong has not been as successful as anticipated. In fact such products are no longer available for sale in the local market,' said a spokesperson for OFCA. The watchdog goes on to say that from May 10 onwards no person shall carry PHS apparatus into Hong Kong or sell such apparatus. Current users of PHS apparatus may continue to do so until May 9, 2016. (April 23, 2013) telegeography.com

The Office of the Communications Authority (OFCA) has decided to withdraw regulatory guidance on the interconnection charges between fixed network operators, subject to an 18-month transitional period. Following a two-month consultation, the OFCA concluded its review of narrowband interconnection between fixed carriers, which is the only remaining type of carrier-to-carrier local interconnection subject to regulatory guidance on charges. Fixed-fixed broadband interconnection charges, mobile-mobile interconnection charges and fixed-mobile interconnection charges are not subject to any regulatory guidance and are solely determined through commercial negotiations between the telecommunications operators. In view of the competitive environment in the local fixed telecommunications market and the wide range of service choices available to the consumers at affordable prices, the OFCA considered that the withdrawal of wholesale regulation would not impact the retail prices of local fixed services. The regulatory guidance will cease to be effective starting from October 16, 2014 after an 18-month transitional period. Fixed carriers are encouraged to make their best endeavors to conclude commercial agreements on interconnection. In the meantime, the OFCA will ensure that fixed carriers fully observe any-to-any connectivity requirement, i.e. any customer in any network can have access to any other customer in any interconnecting network, such that services would not be interrupted in case of failure of commercial negotiations between fixed carriers.
(April 17, 2013) telegeography.com

Hong Kong's six main MVNOs have joined a voluntary Customer Complaint Settlement Scheme that was set up by the Communications Association of Hong Kong (CAHK) last November. The CCSS trial program was launched to help resolve deadlocked billing disputes between the telecommunications service providers and their residential/personal customers outside the judicial system. All major fixed and mobile telecommunications service providers have already participated in the scheme at its initial launch last year. Customers who have billing disputes for an amount not less than HK$300 with the participating service

providers and who have encountered a deadlock situation where the disputes remain unsettled for 6 weeks or more may choose to use the mediation service provided by the CCSS as an alternative dispute resolution channel. Since its launch, the CCSS mediation service centre received 9 cases from OFCA for follow-up actions, among which 6 cases were successfully settled and 3 are being processed.
(April 3, 2013) cellular-news.com

Macau

According to Macau's Bureau of Telecommunications Regulation (DSRT), the territory's total mobile subscriber base shrank marginally to 1.551 million at the end of March 2013, down by a net 2,000 users in a month. Nearly all subscribers are now 3G customers, with just 0.3% using 2G-only services. Macau's active fixed voice lines also decreased in March 2013, by 500 in a month to 160,637, while the number of fixed broadband internet subscribers rose by 650 to 145,993. (April 30, 2013) telegeography.com

Myanmar

The government announced that it has pre-qualified 12 companies to bid for the country's two mobile operator licenses. The final stage of the license award process will now start for the pre-qualified applicants. The pre-qualified applicants will be required to submit their applications to the Committee by June 3, 2013. The Committee expects to announce, by June 27, 2013, the two Applicants that will be granted nationwide telecommunications licenses. The license details are still being worked out but are expected to be between 10-20 years in duration and will come with a minimum geographical coverage requirement. The country currently has both GSM (900 MHz, launched in 2002) and CDMA networks (800 MHz and 450 MHz launched respectively in 1999 and 2008). In 2008, 3G (WCDMA 2100 MHz) was also introduced. According to the latest official data, as of end of December 2012, the current mobile base is 5.44 million subscribers equivalent to just 9% population penetrations. 3.62 million or 67% of mobile subscribers are using GSM, 0.74 million or 14% are using WCDMA, 1.1 million or 20% are using CDMA. The pre-qualified companies are are: Airtel, Axiata Group, Digicel, France Telecom + Marubeni, KDDI + Sumitomo + Myanmar MICTDC + A1 Construction, Millicom, MTN Dubai + M1 Telecom + Amara Communications, Qatar Telecom (Ooredoo), Singapore Telecommunications (Singtel) + KBZ + Myanmar M-Tel, Telenor, Viettel Group and Vodafone + China Mobile
(April 12, 2013) cellular-news.com

Vodafone has confirmed that it is to bid for one of the forthcoming mobile licenses being offered in Myanmar/Burma. The company has formed a joint-venture with China Mobile to bid for the license. With a comparatively young and highly literate population of around 60 million, a GDP growth rate of 5.5% per annum and mobile phone penetration currently below 10% -- significantly lower than in many other emerging economies -- Myanmar is expected to become an important new market for the global mobile industry. The two new licenses will authorize the license holders to build, own and operate a mobile network on a nationwide basis for an initial term of 15 years. The Vodafone-China Mobile pre-qualification application has been submitted to the Myanmar authorities in line with the submission deadline of April 4, 2013. (April 4, 2013) cellular-news.com

India

India's Department of Telecommunication (DoT) has put forward plans to grant greater powers to sector watchdog Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI). The DoT has proposed that the TRAI be given authority to establish a framework dealing with consumer grievances as well as powers to impose penalties on telcos that fail to comply with the regulator's orders. The proposals are part of plans set out in the National Telecoms Policy (NTP) 2012, to make the TRAI more efficient. Other suggestions included raising the level of qualification required by the chairperson or members of the TRAI and allowing the TRAI to have a greater say in the use of spectrum, granting it the ability to fine players for inefficient or under-use of airwaves.
(April 29, 2013) The Business Standard

India's cellcos will be given permission to share spectrum under plans sketched out in the National Telecom Policy (NTP) 2012. Strict regulations and high costs are expected to deter operators from the practice when the new measures come into force, however. In order to share spectrum, operators will need to receive regulatory approval – which will be valid for five years – as well as pay fees for the shared spectrum, including the one-off fee for holding excess spectrum. Secretary General of industry lobby group Association of Unified Telecom Service Providers of India (AUSPI) commented that the operators will have to go back to the drawing board and decide whether there is a business case for sharing spectrum after paying the one-time fee and the combined spectrum usage charge. The devil is in the details, and unless you know what the DoT expects in the commercial agreements between the operators, it's difficult to say anything. It's a very good move as the operators will be allowed to trunk spectrum, which significantly increases the efficiency. (April 16, 2013) MinTIC

The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India has said that mobile operators' revenues will get impacted only by about 1.5% if roaming charges are waived across the country. According to the estimates made by the regulator, mobile companies stand to lose between Rs 1,806 crore and Rs 2,216 crore if roaming charges are waived. It has, however, said that the impact on revenue should be looked at in the context of the socio-economic benefits that such a regime would bring to the country. "By facilitating communication between citizens, the regime would play its role in fostering nationwide mobility of individuals and social, cultural and educational integration," TRAI said in a consultation paper floated on the subject. (April 11, 2013) thehindubusinessline.com

India's Supreme Court has granted Bharti Airtel something of a reprieve, allowing the cellco to continue providing 3G services in seven circles where it does not hold a license, though it is forbidden from signing up new users in those areas. The Department of Telecommunications (DoT) has sought to ban the practice of 3G roaming, recently ordering Bharti, Idea Cellular and Vodafone India to cease the service and issuing fines totaling INR12.5 billion (USD228.44 million) to the trio. (April 11, 2013) The Economic Times

Bharti Airtel has won a temporary reprieve in its 3G roaming dispute with the government, after the Supreme Court ordered the Department of Telecom not to take coercive action against the company. Airtel is challenging an order from the DoT banning 3G roaming in circles where it lacks radio spectrum. The DoT has also issued a fine against the mobile network for in its opinion breaching the 3G license

conditions. Three of the largest mobile networks, Airtel, Vodafone and Idea Cellular offer roaming on their 3G networks to each other in areas where they lack operator licenses. They offer the same facility on GSM services, and say they were assured this would also be allowed for 3G services. The DoT has disagreed with that interpretation though, and ordered the networks to stop their 3G roaming agreements. In the May 2010 auction, Vodafone secured licenses in 9 of the country's 22 circles, while Airtel secured 13 licenses, Idea has 11 and Tata gained 9 licenses. For example, Vodafone and Airtel can provide coverage in Delhi, but Tata and Idea cannot. The situation is reversed in Kerala though. The next court hearing is set for this Thursday.
(April 9, 2013) cellular-news.com

The Department of Telecommunications (DoT) issued notices to Vodafone and Idea Cellular ordering them to immediately stop providing 3G intra-circle roaming services in circles where they do not have spectrum. Vodafone and Idea provide such services in 11 and 6 circles, respectively. Apart from asking the two companies to stop roaming services, the DoT has also slapped a penalty of Rs 550 crore on Vodafone and Rs 300 crore on Idea for violating license conditions. Vodafone has already requested to be impleaded itself with Bharti's case. Idea officials said that they are contemplating legal steps against the DoT order. Interestingly, Idea Cellular had earlier received a stay order from the Delhi High Court in a related matter. Idea, which had got fresh licenses in seven circles after winning spectrum in November 2012, had moved the HC against the DoT's move of inserting a clause in the license conditions that it cannot provide 3G intra-circle roaming in these circles. The court had stayed this action of DoT's till further hearing. Industry sources said that the 3G intra-circle roaming case has become complicated and seems set for a long-drawn battle. The fight between the mobile operators and the DoT over this issue is an old one in which no clarity emerged since even the TDSAT gave a split verdict. (April 8, 2013) indianexpress.com

Three of India's largest mobile networks have again been ordered to stop 3G roaming between their networks where each of them lacks coverage. Vodafone and Idea Cellular have both been issued with fresh orders to stop the roaming service, while Bharti Airtel is seeking an urgent hearing at the Supreme Court to overturn the ban that was imposed on it. Bharti Airtel was served an order to stop the 3G services but has carried on regardless pending the Supreme Court hearing. The company is facing fines for breaching the order, but says that the ban would affect around 20 million customers. The High Court has already upheld the ban imposed by the Department of Telecom, and that order would also apply to Vodafone and Idea Cellular if they appeal. The networks have been in dispute with the DoT ever since their 3G licenses were awarded and they started roaming services were rival networks had coverage they lacked. The networks claim they were permitted this explicitly in pre-auction talks, but the Department denies this. (April 5, 2013) cellular-news.com

Javaid Akhtar Malik
Director Regulatory Affairs
SAMENA Telecommunications Council

Europe's Broken Telecom Policy

In the U.S., four operators control 86% of the market. In Europe, the top 15 operators achieve the same combined market share.

LUIGI GAMBARDELLA
Chairman Executive board

ETNO

The European Council has declared that strengthening the Digital Single Market is a major policy priority.

The European telecommunications sector is facing unprecedented challenges. Total revenue in the sector shrank 8% between 2007 and 2011, a period in which other regions, most notably East Asia and North America, saw sustained growth.

At the same time, European telecommunications companies need to invest in upgrading network infrastructure to allow much faster Internet-access speeds than are generally available in Europe today. The European Digital Agenda targets download rates of 30 megabits per second for all EU citizens by 2020, and speeds above 100 mbps for at least 50% of broadband subscribers in the EU. According to the European Commission, only 12% of fixed broadband lines are at least 30 mbps, and just 2.5% are 100 mbps or more.

Europe's telcos can contribute to the general economic recovery that the Continent so badly needs. But as matters stand, the telecom industry is heavily regulated and unduly fragmented. The European Council has declared that strengthening the Digital Single Market is a major policy priority. The European Commission's new strategy, which will be presented later this year, needs to focus on how best to streamline regulation and remove obstacles to further market consolidation.

Once a global leader in telecom infrastructure and innovation, Europe today faces some key disadvantages compared with the rest of the world. While allowing for market liberalization at the national level, EU policy has focused on keeping wholesale and retail prices low to promote accessibility of telecom services. Overly intrusive regulation of wholesale access to operators' networks has led in many cases to an inefficient market structure.

The result is a degree of market fragmentation across Europe unseen anywhere else in the world. In the EU there are more than 1,200 fixed telecom operators, 100 mobile network operators, 200 mobile virtual network operators and 1,500 cable operators. In the U.S., by contrast, there are six major operators; in China there are only three. In the U.S., four *with the tremendous increase in mobile network usage, spectrum is becoming an increasingly essential resource both for telecom operators and for the public at large.*

operators control 86% of the market, which has around 330 million subscribers. In Europe, which has a total of 645 million subscribers, it takes the top 15 operators to reach the same combined market share.

This highly fragmented market structure has led to declining revenue across the sector, which in turn has substantially diminished firms' investment capacity. A cycle of declining value and decreasing investment is detrimental both to EU citizens, who will see far less innovation as a result, and for the entire European economy.

That's why Europe's entire market-structure and regulatory strategy needs to be rethought. The sector must be placed on a more sustainable, market-based footing before it can provide a vibrant communications network. Consolidation, both domestically and across national borders, is vitally needed. Allowing operators to achieve larger economies of scale is crucial to the development of next-generation broadband infrastructures across Europe.

Finally, with the tremendous increase in mobile network usage, spectrum is becoming an increasingly essential resource both for telecom operators and for the public at large. A thorough review of EU spectrum policy, one that takes into account the negative effect of high auction costs and fragmented national licensing regimes, must be undertaken to allow operators to recoup investment within a shorter time frame.

Keeping prices low in national markets, rather than fostering competition across the Single Market, was a good strategy early on, while the sector was still growing. But in today's market, such policy is no longer reasonable, credible or effective. In a digitally interconnected world, the most relevant geographic marketplace is global. It is this overarching fact that European competition and industrial policies must now boldly address.

SATELLITE NEWS

Australian Satellite Communications boosts bandwidth requirements on EUTELSAT 172A

Eutelsat Communications announced that Australian Satellite Communications (ASC) is increasing capacity leased on the EUTELSAT 172A satellite for Panasonic Avionics Corporation (Panasonic). Australian Satellite Communications has signed a multi-year lease for a 36 MHz transponder on the EUTELSAT 172A satellite to benefit from its superior performance and coverage of the South Pacific, including Australia and New Zealand. This new expansion of bandwidth requirements builds on ASC's existing leasing agreements with Eutelsat for capacity on EUTELSAT 172A to enable Panasonic Avionics Corporation to address airline routes over Australia and New Zealand and for trans-Tasman flights, with teleporting managed from ASC's teleport in Adelaide. Panasonic's Global Communications Service provides two-way broadband connectivity, supporting a wide range of passenger and crew applications including Internet access, voice, data and the ability to monitor and transmit airline operational data in real-time at speeds of up 50 Mbps to the aircraft.

Hughes 9502 BGAN M2M terminal receives Inmarsat type approval

Hughes Network Systems has announced that its new Hughes 9502 BGAN M2M (machine-to-machine) terminal with integrated antenna has been fully "Type Approved" by Inmarsat, and commercial shipments have begun.The Hughes 9502 BGAN M2M IP satellite terminal delivers affordable, end-to-end data connectivity reliably over Inmarsat's global BGAN service for IP SCADA and M2M applications in industry sectors such as environmental monitoring, SmartGrid, pipeline monitoring, well site automation, and surveillance, as well as for out-of-band management and back up to primary site communications.

China to open Beidou satellite system to mobile phones

China is promoting the civilian use of its indigenous Beidou Navigation Satellite System and plans to apply it in public mobile phones services. The Beidou system has been performing well, with its navigation precision improving steadily since it began providing services to users in the Asian-Pacific region on Dec 27 last year, said Yang Qiangwen, a leading scientist with the China Satellite Navigation Office in an interview with Xinhua. China started to build up its own space-based Positioning, Navigation and Timing system in 2000. So far, China has successfully launched 16 navigation satellites and four other experimental ones for the Beidou system. Beidou has so far mostly provided licensed services for China's government and military users in transport, weather forecasts, fishing, forestry, telecommunications, hydrological monitoring and mapping.As the public interest in Beidou is rising, the fourth China Satellite Navigation Conference, to be held in Wuhan city of Central China's Hubei province in May, will focus on the opportunities and challenges for the system's application, Yang added.

Regional conference on satellite communication

More than 250 delegates from East African countries gathered for a regional conference on broadband and satellite communication for East Africa. The five-day meeting from 15 to 19 April 2013 took place in Kampala, Uganda and had the theme "Strategy for Broadband Access to All in East Africa". It was organized by the Ministry of ICT, Uganda Communications Commission (UCC), International Telecommunications Organization (ITSO), and the East African Communications Organization (EACO). The event was the first of its kind for the East African region. The objectives of the conference are to build capacities in the region regarding broadband communication and to highlight the importance of satellite communication for the socio-economic development in East Africa.

PBC launches fixed, mobile satellite system, line streaming

Pakistan Broadcasting Corporation (PBC) achieved a landmark when it launched three projects: Earth Station, Digital Satellite News Gathering (DSNG) and Satellite & Internet Streaming of External and World Services. The new DSNG will help in providing election updates from different parts of the country, particularly in rural areas. PBC Director General Murtaza Solangi inaugurated the projects. The Earth-Sattellite Station has been established at National Broadcasting House, Islamabad, on turnkey basis. FM-101, National Broadcasting Service, FM-93, News, World Service and External Services will be available on Satellite. The DG said more channels would be added in future for the listeners across the globe.The DSNG system installed in a mobile van is based on the most advanced satellite technology for efficient outdoor broadcast coverage, including sports and news coverage. It would now be possible to cover events taking place at any location at any time due to mobility, easy access to remote areas and satellite transmission.

NASA launches three smartphonepowered satellites into space

NASA has successfully launched three smartphones into space to snap images of Earth, and the handsets may prove to be the lowest-cost satellites ever flown into space. Each smartphone is housed in a standard cubesat structure, measuring about 4 inches square. The smartphone acts as the satellite's onboard computer. Its sensors are used for attitude determination and its camera for Earth observation. The smartphones destined to become low-cost satellites rode to space aboard the maiden flight of Orbital Science Corporation's Antares rocket from NASA's Wallops Island Flight Facility in Virginia. The trio of "PhoneSats" is operating in orbit, and may prove to be the lowest-cost satellites ever flown in space. The goal of NASA's PhoneSat mission is to determine whether a consumer-grade smartphone can be used as the main flight avionics of a capable, yet very inexpensive, satellite. Transmissions from all three PhoneSats have been received at multiple ground stations on Earth, indicating they are operating normally. The PhoneSat team at the Ames Research Center in Moffett Field, California, will continue to monitor the satellites in the coming days. The satellites are expected to remain in orbit for as long as two weeks.

Satellite Bandwidth Internet.com launches new ISP plans

Individuals, families, businesses, and commercial establishments that require high speed Internet access in California can now rely on broadband satellite Internet service solutions provider - Satellite Bandwidth Internet.com, which is an authorized reseller of HughesNet Satellite services throughout California. Through Hughes Net, the company offers a high speed satellite Broadband Internet service that is available to any person or business nationwide even if DSL or Cable Internet service providers are unable to provide Internet access. Satellite Bandwidth Internet from HughesNet in California is now even more cost effective than ever provided users go in for the purchase payment option. Users will certainly benefit from satellite high speed Internet as they will enjoy the quicker speeds that Satellite Bandwidth Internet.com in conjunction with HughesNet can offer. The new Internet speeds and satellite launched can deliver up to 15 Mbps, which is a whopping improvement over previous speeds and comparably many times better than traditional methods of Internet service delivery.

NordNet introduces 6 Mbps satellite internet upload speed

French satellite internet operator NordNet has introduced a new plan with a peak download speed of 20 Mbps and a peak upload speed of 6 Mbps. Called "Max", the new plan starts at EUR 44.90 a month with usage capped at 20 GB a month, unlimited calls to fixed numbers in France and TV. Service is throttled to 256 kbps downloads and 138 kbps upload beyond the fair-use cap. Two other versions are available, costing EUR 64.90 a month for up to 30 GB of use and EUR 79.90 for unlimited data at full speeds. Customers can pay an extra EUR 14.90 a month for unlimited calls to mobiles in France and 50 international destinations. Nordnet introduced its Jet plans at the end of last year, which offered 20 Mbps downloads but uploads of only 2 Mbps.

Kymeta successfully demonstrates Ka-band Satellite link

Kymeta announced that it successfully closed a link with a Ka-band DTH satellite transporting high definition TV signals. Kymeta believes that this is the first time a metamaterials-based antenna has established a connection with a Ka-band satellite.The connection used an aperture size of 15 by 17 inches and was about one centimeter thick. The antenna was powered by a USB cable using less than three watts of power to drive the electronic beamforming antenna.The technology behind Kymeta's metamaterials antenna was developed by Dr. Nathan Kundtz, co-founder and chief technology officer of Kymeta and an expert in the field of metamaterials, who worked on the use of advanced structured materials in beamforming applications. His research resulted in the PCB-like surface that allows for an antenna that is flat, light and can be mass-produced using existing manufacturing techniques available to the industry for low-cost production.

ROAMING NEWS

Serbia lowers telecom roaming tariffs

Serbia's Ministry of Foreign and Internal Trade and Telecommunications and the Agency for Electronic Communications (RATEL) will launch an initiative before the European Commission to lower roaming prices for Serbian citizens who use mobile phones during their stay in the EU.Representatives of the Ministry and RATEL reached an agreement on this issue and will take a series of consultations with representatives of the European Commission in order to achieve significant reduction of roaming prices and services for the citizens of Serbia staying in the EU countries.Given that the relevant institutions in the field of telecommunications in Macedonia and Montenegro, with whom RATEL has signed Memoranda of Understanding, also raised the issue of lowering the price of roaming services for their citizens in the EU, this initiative has regional significance, according to statement by the Ministry of Foreign and Internal Trade and Telecommunications.

SK Telecom signs LTE roaming deal with Globe Telecom

SK Telecom has expanded its LTE roaming program to include Globe Telecom of the Philippines. The South Korean operator previously initiated LTE roaming service with CSL in Hong Kong and SingTel in Singapore.SK Telecom also intends to plans to launch quad-band LTE devices that work at 850 MHz, 1.8 GHz, 2.1 GHz and 2.6 GHz during the second quarter. "These devices carry a great meaning as they mark the first Korean LTE device that can operate in 2.6 GHz band, which is chosen by most mobile carriers across the world for LTE service. With these devices, customers will be able to enjoy LTE service in other countries just like they do in Korea," said the operator."Going forward, SK Telecom will expand its strategic partnerships with mobile carriers across the globe, while also focusing on enriching the line-up of devices that function in multiple frequency bands," said Kim Young-Sup, senior vice president and head of the operator's collaboration marketing office.Tune-in to this webinar to learn more about WiFi evolution, its critical role in addressing the looming 1000x data challenge, enabling smart connected homes, and exciting new frontiers it is poised to explore.

AT&T looks to WiFi for international roaming

AT&T's addition of Boingo Wireless WiFi hotspots to its international roaming coverage may point toward the future of mobile data across borders.The deal that the companies announced was fairly modest, though it could make a big difference for data-starved travelers who go to airports that are included in the arrangement. Subscribers to the 300MB or 800MB AT&T Data Global Add-On package will get to use 1GB of data per month on WiFi networks that Boingo Wireless operates in 30 international airports around the world. The carrier is throwing in that access for free with the two data roaming plans, which cost US$60 and US$120 per month, respectively, on top of a regular monthly plan.

In the big picture of international travel, 30 airports is a small footprint, though it includes the main airports in Beijing, Rome, Tokyo and other major destinations. Coverage will also expand throughout this year, according to Boingo.

However, WiFi may play a big role in international roaming for all carriers as subscribers' demand for access grows, industry analysts say.WiFi is typically less expensive than cellular networks for covering dense areas with high speed because it runs on unlicensed radio spectrum. As long as there are enough users within the relatively short range of an access point, WiFi is an economical way to give users more capacity. Many carriers, including AT&T in the US, have invested heavily in this technique by building their own hotspots.

Roam Mobility marksits presence in 400 locations

Roam Mobility launched their U.S. voice and data roaming service back in January of last year. This gives Canadians who travel to the United States an option to save money by purchasing one of their SIM cards, or SIM and mobile devices, with a low-cost plan – a basic talk, text and data package is US$4/day. Roam offers up a standard SIM, microSIM and will be releasing a nanoSIM that's compatible with the iPhone 5 and other devices in May.The Vancouver-based company announced that their SIM cards can be found in over 400 locations across Canada, including Future Shop, Shaw, and Pipestone Travel and a new partnership with 76 London Drugs locations in British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba.

Vodafone cuts roaming charges

Vodafone India has slashed national roaming rate to 30 paise / minute to pre-paid customers on Vodafone network. Outgoing call rates are priced at 1.5 paise / sec for all local & STD calls, while roaming or at home.The price point for the new national roaming plan varies from state to state and ranges between Rs 26 to Rs 47.These new roaming plans for pre-paid customers are presently available in all Vodafone circles, except Himachal Pradesh, Odisha and J&K. Vodafone is trying to tap people who are looking for the holiday season. The telecom operator says most people will be planning their vacations and this new roaming plan will let the vacationers enjoy affordable roaming rates.Standard rates will be applicable for SMS, data roaming and ISD roaming. The plans come with a roaming incoming benefit of 30 days and tariff validity of 180 days.VivekMathur, chief commercial offer, Vodafone India, said: "The new national roaming plan has been specially created for those who tend to travel a lot on a regular basis. They can now talk more without worrying about high roaming costs."

Canadian operator Rogers says wireless data revenue is comprised of 45 percent of wireless revenue

Canadian operator Rogers says its wireless data revenue in Q1 2013 comprises 45 percent of wireless revenue against 39 percent in the corresponding period of 2012.A portion of this growth reflects enhancements to data roaming plans introduced in the third quarter of 2012.Its wireless data revenue rose 22 percent in the first quarter of 2013 to US$762 million. The growth in wireless data revenue reflects the penetration and growing usage of smartphones, tablet devices and wireless laptops, which drive increased usage of e-mail, wireless Internet access, text messaging, data roaming, and other wireless data services.3 percent growth in Q1 revenue to US$3.027 billion was primarily driven by wireless network revenue growth of 4 percent and cable revenue growth of 4 percent, partially offset by declines at media.Net income rose 15 percent to US$414 million.Blended ARPU increased 3.5 percent in the first quarter.The 3.5 percent year-over-year increase in blended ARPU for the quarter ended March 31, 2013, compared to the corresponding period of 2012, primarily reflects the aforementioned growth in wireless data revenue, partially offset by the continued decline of wireless voice ARPU.

US networks take action to curb bill shock

The USA's telecoms regulator has announced that approximately 97 percent of wireless customers across the USA are now protected from bill shock as participating U.S. wireless companies have met an April 17 deadline to provide free, automatic alerts to customers who approach or exceed their wireless plan limits.A recent FCC survey found that 30 million Americans -- or one in six customers -- have experienced bill shock.Bill shock is a sudden and unexpected increase in monthly wireless bills that happens when consumers' unknowingly exceeding plan limits for voice, data and text. Bill shock can also happen when consumers travel abroad and get hit with unexpected international roaming charges.

"This milestone is a clear win for consumers," said Chairman Julius Genachowski. "These text alerts will allow consumers to enjoy the benefits of mobile without unexpected hits to their wallets."In October 2011, Chairman Genachowski announced a new program that would provide free alerts for wireless consumers as they approach monthly voice, data and text limits, and after those limits have been exceeded. Chairman Genachowski was joined by CTIA-The Wireless Association.As of the April 17, 2013 deadline, participating members of CTIA are voluntarily providing free, automatic usage-based alerts when they approach or exceed plan limits for data, voice, and text, or when international roaming charges may be applied.

Globe expands LTE roaming service

Globe Telecom in a statement said it further expands its LTE international data roaming service coverage as it strengthens partnership with SK Telecom, South Korea's largest mobile operator.With this service, tourists coming to the Philippines will enjoy seamless connectivity, empowering them with efficient multi-tasking and rich content data applications in Globe LTE-covered areas in the country. This means ultrafast browsing and multimedia streaming on their mobile phones.Globe first launched its LTE international data roaming partnership with China Mobile Hong Kong Company Limited in October last year. As of April 2013, the Globe LTE network has expanded to cover more areas nationwide. Aside from Makati, Globe LTE coverage is now available in select areas in Manila, Pasig, Quezon City, Taguig, Muntinlupa, Mandaluyong, Cebu City, Davao City, and Boracay. The Globe LTE rollout focuses on large, contiguous areas instead of sporadic distribution in the form of pocket activations or hot spots to ensure greater and more stable coverage.

TECHNOLOGY NEWS

Orange Romania launches tariff with unlimited VoIP calls

Orange Romania launched a new 'Orange Young' offer aimed at youth, which includes minutes, messages, data traffic as well as various benefits. Named 'Fluture 12', the new tariff plan includes unlimited on-net SMS, 300 MB traffic, 150 minutes or messages towards national numbers or international fixed numbers, 3,000 on-net minutes as well as access to Yahoo!, Facebook and Orange's mobile portal. In addition, users gain access to the 'Libon' VoIP application at no extra cost. Compatible with iOS and Android, the app offers users the possibility to make unlimited calls and send unlimited messages while inside the country as well as outside its borders to users of the same app.Libon uses the IP network to enable customers to communicate through messages and HD calls with other users of the application. It can be downloaded from App Store and Google Play and traffic used within the app is not limited for those who pick the 'Fluture 12' tariff plan from the Orange Young offer. Besides its VoIP function, Libon also offers a voice messaging service.In case of using all their minutes, SMS or MB in the 'Fluture 12' subscription, users can top-up their tariff plan and make calls at EUR 0.1 per minute to national numbers or activate one of the add-ons designed for prepaid customers. In related news, the orangeyoung.ro website has been given a new interface.

Vodafone Portugal brings cloud hosting to TV

The Portuguese division of telecoms giant Vodafone has started offering cloud hosting services from the TV screen, giving its IPTV customers access to their personal photos, videos, music, documents and other digital content.The Cloud Vodafone on TV application is free and is available via the television's StartApps menu, using the blue button on the remote control, offering 20 GB of free hosting with the opportunity to increase it up to 100 GB.The cloud hosting service was launched in December 2011 is now available on all major connected platforms: smartphones (Android and iPone), tablets (Android and iPad), PC, Mac and TV.Vodafone Portugal launched its IPTV service in July 2009 but has so far failed to make a big dent on the local pay-TV market: recent figures from regulator Anacom indicated that the country had 587,000 IPTV subscribers by the end of last year, served by five operators: PT Comunicações, Optimus, Vodafone Portugal, AR Telecom and IPTV Telecom.

Moldtelecom deploys EntoneKamai for hybrid IPTV

Moldtelecom, the primary telecommunications provider in Moldova, is deploying the EntoneKamai 500 Hybrid Media Player to deliver advanced video services.Moldtelecom provides a full range of TV, broadband and telephony services to Moldova, a nation of 3.6 million people in Eastern Europe. As part of its IPTV service expansion, Moldtelecom offers advanced TV services such as network digital video recorder (nDVR), pause and restart of live TV programs (PLTV), and catch-up TV.The Kamai 500 series provides a platform for decoding popular video formats, including MPEG-4 (AVC/H.264), MPEG-2 and VC-1, as well as advanced audio formats and transcoding capabilities. To further aid service providers, the Kamai 500 series offers 5GHz-band Wi-Fi and Adaptive Bit-Rate (ABR) streaming support.

Telstra launches IPTV bundles

Telstra has launched a range of entertainment plans that are bundled with access to Foxtel on T-Box channels over broadband.The Telstra Entertainer Bundle Range plans include high speed broadband and access to 11 Foxtel on T-Box channels, including FOX8, Cartoon Network and Discovery, through a new T-Box. Customers will also be able to access more than 6,000 BigPond Movies and TV episodes to rent.Customers can choose 100GB, 200GB or 500GB high speed broadband. According to John Chambers, the director broadband bundles and devices their customers have flocked to great value bundles, and told them that entertainment and mobility were the features they most wanted to see added. These take centre stage in their new offerings.

Razer Comms all-in-one gaming VoIP communication tools now available

Razer has launched their new Razer Comms communications tools into beta testing, and is now providing the free all-in-one communications solution to all gamers, for feedback. Razer has designed the Razer Comms communications tools with in-game overlay functionality and cross-game chat support, allowing users to get in touch with their friends without compromising your gameplay.Razer Comms overlay technology has been designed to integrate seamlessly with game interfaces enabling users to chat or talk to their friends while staying in the game. Chat messages are displayed in a news ticker format allowing users to quickly glance at incoming chat, while the VoIP overlay allows them to identify the speaker.

NTT leads residential VoIP service provider market with 7.6 percent subscribers

NTT is the world's largest residential VoIP service provider in 2012 with 7.6 percent subscribers.Comcast and France Telecom are in second and third places, respectively.The combined business and residential VoIP services market is forecast to grow to $82.7 billion in 2017.The global VoIP services market, including residential and business VoIP services, reached $63 billion in 2012, up 9 percent from 2011.Due to continued demand for enterprise cloud-based services, hosted VoIP and UC services revenue grew 17 percent in 2012 from 2011, the most of any segment. SIP trunks rose 83 percent in 2012 from the previous year, as multi-site businesses adopt SIP trunking for cost savings and flexibility.Managed IP PBX services, which focus on dedicated enterprise systems, remain the largest business VoIP services segment, and sales grew 9 percent in 2012.Vendors are pitching cloud telephony and unified communications services alongside SIP trunking as more multi-site businesses seek out hybrid solutions.

Orange launches own FTTH network in Spain

Orange Spain says it has completed its first fiber-to-the-home (FTTH) deployment project and has launched the fiber-based services for the general public in the La Vaguada district of Madrid.Customers in areas covered by FTTH will now have access to Internet speeds of up to 100 Mbps, as well as many other services, the operator says. Following this initial stage, in the coming months Orange will be in a position to offer its most advanced technologies and services to people living in other Spanish cities.In addition to the La Vaguada district, other areas of Madrid, including Retiro, Montecarmelo, Sanchinarro, Chamberí, and Vicálvaro could also benefit from FTTH services. In total, up to 40,000 homes in the Spanish capital could be connected to the fiber-optic network.A further 58,000 homes in Catalonia and Asturias could also be offered FTTH services from Orange via third-party networks. So by next summer, Orange could be providing FTTH to as many as 100,000 homes and businesses in Spain.

Brazil's GVT expands FTTH speeds to 150Mbps

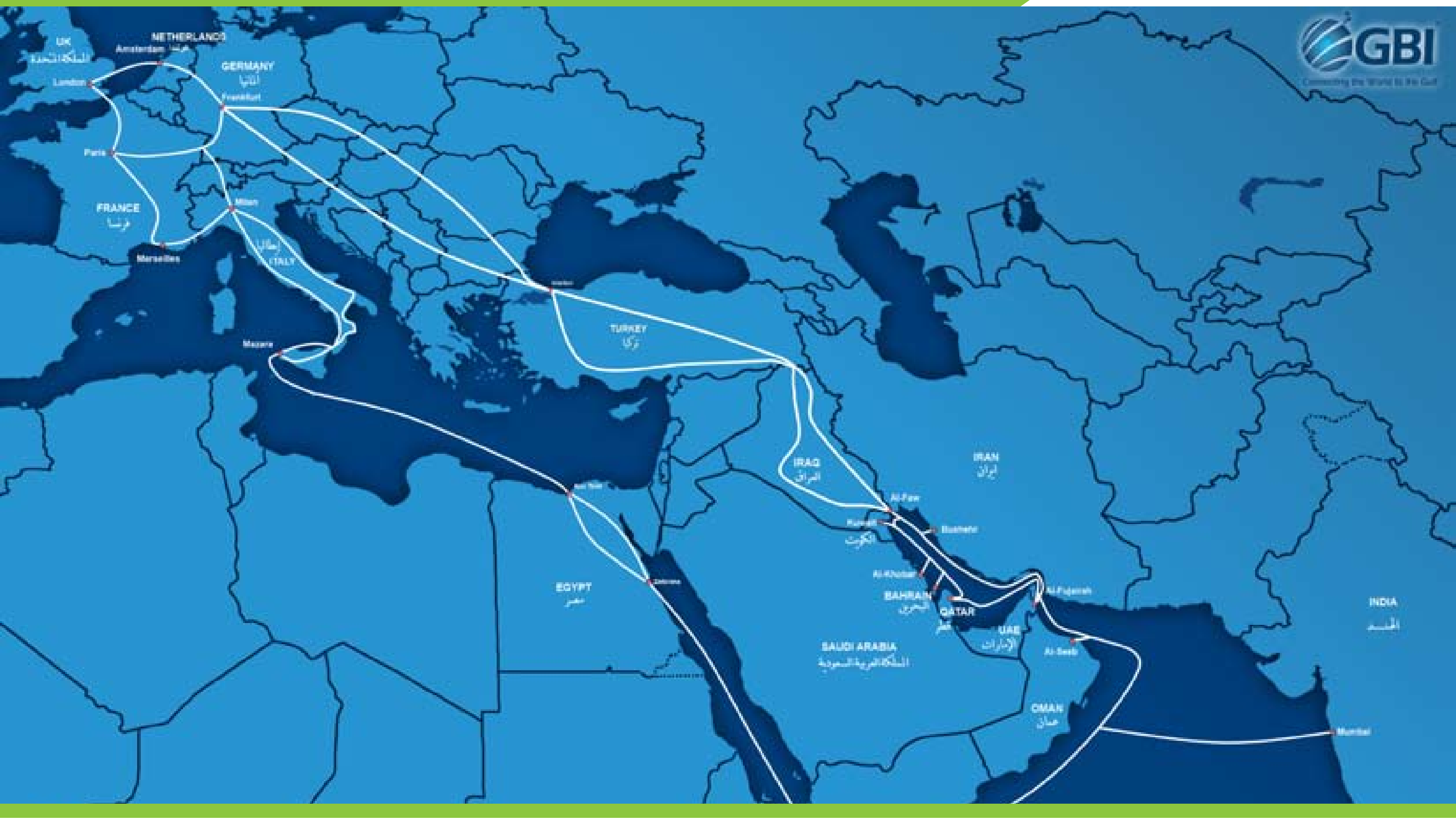
Brazilian telco GVT has ramped up its broadband offering with an online video-friendly speed upgrade to 150Mbps over its fiber-to-the-home (FTTH) offering.The offer is available across the provider's footprint at a monthly cost of R$299.90 (US$152) for a triple-play package (fixed telephony, broadband and pay-TV).Meanwhile, the company discounted its 50Mbps broadband tier by R$50.Overall, GVT said that it has increased its client base's average speed to 12.3Mbps as of March 2013, up from just 5.1Mbps in 2009. "These moves reinforce our strategy of innovation in ultrafast broadband with increasingly affordable prices for our customers," vice president of marketing Marco Lopes said in a statement.

AT&T ups its FTTH speed to 24 Mbps

AT&T is increasing the speeds for customers that are on its fiber to the premises (FTTP) U-verse network to 24/3 Mbps, up from 18/1.5 Mbps. While the service provider has been an advocate of fiber to the node (FTTN), it does offer FTTP-based services in some select locations, particularly in Greenfield housing developments.What's interesting about the new tier is that FTTP can offer much higher speeds. Besides Verizon's 300 Mbps Quantum offering, Google Fiber and municipal providers such as Chattanooga, Tenn.-based EPB Fiber are providing 1 Gbps.As part of its Project VIP initiative, AT&T said it plans to deliver 45 and later 75 Mbps to users that are close to a VRAD on their FTTN network, and possibly its FTTP infrastructure, later this year via VDSL2 with bonding and vectoring.

Tele2 completes Vilnius network upgrade

Tele2 Lithuania has announced that it has upgraded all of its 170 mobile base stations in the capital Vilnius and its districts, enabling the wireless operator to provide improved network coverage and service quality in the area. Tele2's technical director Valerijus Kovzan said that the work will also allow the company to offer 4G LTE services, which were launched in the five cities of Alytus, Jonava, Marijampole, Mazeikiai and Utena last month.



Connecting Cars: Digital Technology on The Road

Amr Eid
Chief Commercial Officer

GBI

SINCE LAUNCHING IN FEBRUARY 2012, GBI has continued to set new industry standards and challenge the traditional carrier business model. Operating a comprehensive 40G system, GBI is the highest capacity network in the Middle East, and recently became the first subsea operator to cross the Mediterranean Sea with 100G capability. GBI is also the only carrier-neutral regional network, providing highly resilient connectivity to fixed and mobile operators, and internet service providers (ISPs) of the Gulf, as well as to global operators looking to connect their customers to a region with one sixth of the world's population.

Offering increased capacity, choice, and value, the true significance of the enhanced connectivity that GBI brings is recognised by the industry. Last year, we were named as the world's 'Best Niche/New Player' at the Capacity Awards for going above and beyond our original vision. We were also recognised at the CommsMEA Awards as the Middle East and Africa's best telecoms technology investment.

In March 2012, GBI launched a new North Route, providing connectivity from our cable landing station at Al Faw, in the south of Iraq, crossing Iraq and Turkey to Istanbul, and onward to Frankfurt in Germany. This makes us the only operator to offer seamless connectivity from Europe to all of the Gulf countries via the Mediterranean, Egypt and the Red Sea, or terrestrially via Turkey and Iraq.

The new North Route gives operators true route diversity between Europe and the Gulf, and a much needed alternative to the traditional pinch points between Asia and Europe. This ensures operators can address their customers' requirements for always-on connectivity with confidence, and we are working closely with operators to meet the significant demand.

Between 2008 and 2012, international internet capacity to the Middle East rose at an annual rate of 79% to approach nearly 3Tbps. It is no stretch of the imagination to forecast that in a few years, demand will reach 8Tbps and beyond.

GBI is the only carrier-neutral regional network, providing highly resilient connectivity to fixed and mobile operators, and internet service providers (ISPs) Gulf.

This shift in economic growth is mirrored by a change in the flow in international telecoms traffic

ECONOMIC POWER SHIFT

The telecoms landscape in the Middle East is undergoing major transformation as markets deregulate and businesses and consumers increase their use of communication-based products and services. There are a number of trends leading this transformation. Perhaps the most significant is the change in the volume and flow of international telecoms traffic.

Historically, most traffic flowed from the region to Europe and the US. However, a gradual shift is taking place as the emerging markets in Middle East and Asia grow at a much faster pace than mature markets in the West. In Africa too, growth is returning.

This shift in economic growth is mirrored by a change in the flow in international telecoms traffic, with Asia, sub-Saharan Africa, and the Middle East continuing to experience the highest growth. GBI is therefore well placed to provide a strategic hub for traffic between Europe and Asia, and also between the Northern Hemisphere and Africa.

A recent study of 7,000 internet users in the Gulf revealed 61% used a mobile app every day.

FROM CARBON TO CONTENT

The second major trend centres on the internet. We are seeing a move by large content providers to create regional hubs. Until recently, most internet traffic was routed westwards through Europe to the US. As with the balance of economic power, this is changing, with the Middle East proving an attractive hub for content providers looking to decentralise their operations. Decentralisation is driven not just by the desire to reduce costs and improve operational efficiency; it also reflects the localisation of content. Currently, only 2% of the world's online content is in Arabic, while native Arabic speakers total 7% of the global population. Yet there continues to be a rapid rise in localised internet content and use of Arabic apps and social networking. A recent study of 7,000 internet users in the Gulf revealed 61% used a mobile app every day. Similarly, social web use is soaring, particularly among 15 to 29 year olds, who make up more than one-third of the Middle East's total population and 75% of the region's Facebook community.

Some 65% of the Middle East's population is under 35 years of age and use the internet and smart phones regularly. Not only are they tech savvy, they have increasing disposable incomes and are hungry for new technology. This is manifest in the popularity of the Apple iPhone and iPad, and Google's fast emerging Android system. These platforms are hosting increasing amounts of Arabic-language apps, online video, online gaming, voice telephony, video telephony over IP, as well as a variety of other applications that demand low latency, low jitter, and consistent availability of bandwidth.

GBI is building a double bottom line of economic and social benefit for the region.

BROADER BUSINESS BASE

Growth in enterprise bandwidth demand is also forecast to result in a significant long-term rise in inter-regional capacity across the Middle East, driven by data centralisation, economic growth, and globalisation.

The growing number of broadband consumers and the rise in availability and speed of access are resulting in much greater volumes of internet traffic in the Gulf. Speeds above 4Mbps are on offer in a number of countries, including Bahrain, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE. Most other countries in the region are promoting broadband investment, while governments are looking to lessen their dependence on carbon-based industries and diversify investments in other sectors.

Increased bandwidth and reliability are critical to supporting these broader development plans, and the GBI network is proving critical to supporting continued investment in sectors such as financial services, media, research and development, education and health. As such, GBI is building a double bottom line of economic and social benefit for the region.

FROM THE REGION, FOR THE REGION

Not only was the Gulf capacity-hungry, there was limited choice. Our open access and completely neutral business model has enabled us to address the clear appetite for change, alter the market dynamic and given our customers much greater flexibility.

The GBI network improves competition as it enables operators to serve their clients more reliably. We provide a full range of wholesale international capacity products designed to meet the current and future requirements of telecoms operators, ISPs, content providers, corporate customers, and governments around the Gulf:

- Synchronous Digital Hierarchy (SDH) – core wholesale products delivering international voice & data services.
- Wavelength – based on using the multiple wavelengths available on each fibre of the fibre-optic cable.
- Ethernet – industry standard 1Gbps and 10Gbps interfaces.

Our secure capacity enables new entrants to break into the market more easily, and existing players to diversify their routing. This is essential, given the threat of offshore earthquakes and disruption of services. The impact of cable breaks has refocused attention on proper redundancy planning for network outages and pushed up the level of demand for redundant capacity.

GETTING CLOSER TO CUSTOMERS GLOBALLY

Crucially, GBI's commercial footprint is now matching our network coverage and reach. We have over sixty team members, comprising in excess of twenty nationalities, and are a truly multi-cultural organisation. We have also continued to increase our presence on the ground globally to get closer to the markets we serve, opening offices in Dubai, Cairo, Amsterdam, and Rome.

GBI has bold plans for growth in connectivity to Africa and Asia, as well as the introduction of Layer 2 and Layer 3 products and services.

As the Gulf region becomes an international strategic hub, so too will the GBI network. We will continue in our mission to evolve from a Gulf company to a business with global relevance. We have bold plans for growth in connectivity to Africa and Asia, as well as the introduction of Layer 2 and Layer 3 products and services.

Our network provides the capacity over which the content of the future knowledge economy can be exchanged, and the carrier-neutral business model needed to support industry growth and diversification. We aim to be the carrier's carrier of choice across the region and beyond by offering unparalleled reach, resilience, and route diversity.

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