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SAMENA TRENDS

EXCLUSIVELY FOR SAMENA TELECOMMUNICATIONS COUNCIL'S MEMBERS

BUILDING DIGITAL ECONOMIES

A SAMENA Telecommunications Council Newsletter

THE FUTURE OF TELECOMS

H.E. Mohamed Nasser Al Ghanim
Director General
Telecommunications Regulatory Authority, UAE

“Meeting the Digital Agenda: Maximizing Revenue Through Excellence.”

Beyond Connectivity 2013

6th & 7th March, 2013

Kempinski Hotel Ciragan Palace
Istanbul, Turkey

EDITORIAL

The Future of Telecommunications

With a new year ahead, the future is here before us. In this moment in time, the SAMENA Telecommunications Council feels highly privileged to extend its warm New Year greetings to the leadership of the telecommunications industry, the telecommunications operator community, technology partners, and to the custodians of telecommunications progress in the world.

May your goals find their due fulfillment!

How our telecommunications industry chooses to react to change today, will determine the outcome we will realize and the progress and success we will meet tomorrow.

Over the months, we have recognized that tremendous change has occurred within the telecommunications industry, no matter the context. Mostly, this change has been embraced; investments, policy initiatives, and partnership development, otherwise, would not have taken place.

Some of the key drivers of change within the telecommunications industry include mobile Internet, content, social media, cloud-based service access, partnership-based operating and revenue-sharing models, and knowledge-based ICT policy-making. The latter is what the telecommunications industry sees as one of the greatest needs of the hour.

However, in light of the change before us, defining an ideal way and pace to transform business operations, continues to be a great challenge for the telecom operator community. Furthermore, as the role of telecom operators has become much more active with time-for example, in the way telecommunications have been integrating and meeting the society's needs-the additional challenge of creating sustainable value for the end-users as well as investment stakeholders has also been getting tougher.

Whatever the industry chooses to do tomorrow will ultimately be driven by the ability to understand and act along key events: the way telecommunications services are being used by users and the pace at which telecoms services are evolving; how devices and network access technologies are transforming and causing new players to directly impact revenue structures; and the foundational (or foundation-shaking) changes that are impacting future of the communications industry.

Fortunately, for the benefit of all those who consume telecommunications services and rely on them for both socio-economic successes, various governments around the world have pledged willingness to redefine and revamp their ICT policies. The SAMENA Council views such initiatives as a sign of progress and stakeholder involvement; the latter being highly critical to the success of the telecommunications industry's future. The SAMENA Council also feels that the future of the telecommunications rests on our collective ability to work together, fulfill the requirements of national digital agendas, and facilitate the creation of a digital environment that catalyzes not only economic development but also socio-political participation for the common man.

As the world embraces change and business priorities shift to innovation-driven approaches-for example, infrastructure sharing, citizen-centric service provisioning, and technology and device neutrality-collectively which shall result in the interconnection of tens of billions of devices soon enough, providing access to a wide array of services over multi-networks, the SAMENA Council will continue to develop its role as the regional agenda-setter, and as a major enabler of digital transformation in the South Asia - Middle East-North Africa region.

We view digitization as the true future of telecommunications, and we see the year 2013 as the new beginning of a prosperous future for all of us.

Join us as we welcome the year 2013!

Your Truly,

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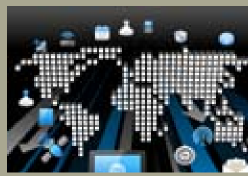
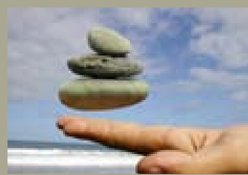




REGIONAL NEWS

Strategic Partnership Between Omantel and Bank Muscat

Omantel and Bank Muscat signed at Omantel head office a MoU to establish a strategic partnership between the two leading organizations in a number of fields. The MoU was signed by Dr. Amer bin Awadh al Rowas ,CEO, on behalf of Omantel and Abdul Razak Ali Essa, Chief Executive, on behalf of Bank Muscat.The signing of this MoU mirrors the strong partnership between the two leading companies and serves as an addition to the existing cooperation between them in implementing a number of leading national initiatives that aim at paying back to Omani society and playing their respective social role. The MoU, signed by the biggest two MSM listed companies, crowns the continuous efforts made by the boards and executive managements in both companies to make the optimum utilization of available resources with each party to ensure the maximum benefit on Omani society at large. The two organizations will join hands in implementing a number of initiatives, especially in the field of social responsibility and improving the services provided for Omantel and Bank Muscat customers. Bank Muscat and Omantel are the two leading brands in their respective fields.They both have strong presence in different parts of the Sultanate which enable them to reach the maximum number of targeted groups with their services.

TRA Felicitates du for Support of ITU Events in the UAE

In a recently-held ceremony, the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) recognized du for its support of four recently-held International Telecommunication Union (ITU) events: Global Standard Symposium; World Telecommunication Standardization Assembly and World Conference on International Telecommunications. All three events were held in the UAE and organized by the ITU, the leading United Nations agency for information and communication technology. H.E Mohamad Ahmad Al-Qamzi, Chairman of TRA presented Osman Sultan, CEO of du with the trophy, in the presence of the Director General of TRA, H.E Mohamed Nasser Al Ghanim. Osman Sultan, CEO of du, said: "The ITU is the apex body in telecommunications and it's an honor for us to be a part of events which define the future of global telecom. We are thankful to the TRA for presenting us with this opportunity." du supported and participated in ITU Telecom World 2012, held for the first time in the UAE from 14-18 October. This landmark event convened a high-quality, influential mix of participants drawn from across the ICT industry along with Heads of State and Government, regulators, innovators, digital entrepreneurs and more.

Batelco Provides iPads for Salmaniya Hospital Paediatric Cancer Ward

Batelco, Bahrain's leading telecommunications company has provided iPads to Salmaniya Hospital's Paediatric Cancer Ward for use by their young patients to entertain them during their stay in the hospital. The sponsorship took place in cooperation with the Child Wish campaign. In addition to the provision of iPads, Batelco has also provided a free internet line for the ward. Batelco has made the contribution as part of its commitment to health initiatives. The Company involves itself in a variety of programs which aim to support the wellbeing of all residents of Bahrain. Batelco Group General Manager Ahmed Al Janahi said that Batelco was delighted to lend a helping hand to the Pediatric Ward at Salmaniya Hospital. "Children are the most vulnerable members of the community and especially children who are ill. Being able to support these young patients is an initiative very close to our hearts," said Mr. Al Janahi.

Batelco Wins Gold Award for Excellence in CSR

Batelco, Bahrain's leading telecommunications company has been presented with a prestigious award for its contribution to CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility). Batelco was presented with the Gold Award for Excellence in CSR by the Arab Organisation for Social Responsibility and Tatweej Academy for Excellence at their 3rd annual awards ceremony, held in the Jumeirah Beach Hotel, Dubai recently. For the second year, Batelco was presented with the award in recognition of its comprehensive and highly reputable CSR programmes which have a far reaching and positive impact on the lives of thousands of residents of Bahrain. The awards have been designed to honour and recognise individuals and organisations that have demonstrated excellence across a range of fields that serve the Arab society. Batelco Public Relations Manager Osama Alsaad was in attendance at the event to collect the award on behalf of Batelco. Batelco Group General Manager Media Relations Ahmed Al Janahi said that Batelco is honoured and delighted to have been selected from amongst many leading regional companies as the winner of this prestigious award.

STC Launches 'Lamsa' Digital Service

STC launched the digital entertainment application "Lamsa" for Arabic – speaking children aged between 1 – 6 years. The application is the first of its kind and comes within the context of STC's effort to provide distinguished products consistent with common Saudi societal and cultural trends and highlighting the richness of the Arabic language. The application is designed to enrich the child's imagination, provide enjoyable education and allow parents to control the entertaining and educational content suitable for their children. The new application is fully integrated and based on modern and folk tales with interactive and motion picture enhancements combined with a novel content and a collection of coloring, painting and singing games that are all engineered and periodically updated by local and foreign early education and children literature professionals. The application is open-sourced as it allows developers, designers and authors to incorporate their creative source codes for further enrichment. The application further benefits children and develops their talent, individually and collectively through their kindergartens or primary schools.

Nawras Recognized by KWD Webranking as Best Corporate Website in Oman for Investor Relations

Nawras has recently been recognized as the best corporate website in Oman for investor relations by industry analysts KWD Webranking Middle East Survey 2012. The annual survey reviews corporate websites across the region based on the requirements of the investment community. Impressing the panel with its online Investor Relations page, the Nawras website offers shareholders easy access to the latest financial information and corporate governance as the company's stocks, reporting and disclosures remains transparent. The KWD Webranking Middle East Survey 2012 assessed 145 of the largest listed companies from nine countries across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region to analyze their online reporting procedures and how each company addresses the needs of the capital market. Ahmed Al-Humaidi, Investor Relations Manager, and Idris Al Balushi, Online and Content Manager at Nawras accepted the award at a ceremony in Doha and thanked the organizers for recognizing the tireless efforts of Nawras family members in updating the ever evolving website and in making the Investor Relations page accessible and informative for all visitors.

Türk Telekom Group's Mobile Communication Unit Avea Joins the GSM Association Board with Hakam Kanafani

Avea will be represented by Hakam Kanafani, Türk Telekom Group CEO and Board Member of Avea, at the GSMA Board, which defines the road map of world's mobile communication. Avea, the fastest growing GSM Company in Turkey, has been elected to the Board of the GSM Association (GSMA), the organization which represents the interests of mobile operators worldwide. Türk Telekom Group's mobile communication unit Avea will serve at the GSMA Board in 2013 and 2014, and will be represented by Hakam Kanafani, CEO of Türk Telekom Group and Board Member of Avea. The GSMA Board has 26 representatives including 25 operator members, as well as the GSMA's Director General, Anne Bouverot. Spanning more than 220 countries, the GSMA unites nearly 800 of the world's mobile operators with more than 230 companies in the broader mobile ecosystem, including handset makers, software companies, equipment providers and Internet companies, as well as organisations in industry sectors such as financial services, healthcare, media, transport and utilities GSMA Wireless Intelligence research shows that the number of mobile subscribers reached 3.2 billion worldwide and total mobile connections globally stand at 6.8 billion including machine-to machine (M2M) communications. After joining the GSMA Board, Türk Telekom Group, who owns 89.99% shares of Avea, has become the only company in the world being in the boards of directors of 3 different organizations, together with SAMENA Telecommunications Council and The European Telecommunications Network Operators' Association (ETNO) at the same time.

Industry Leader's Vision

H.E. Mohamed Nasser Al Ghanim

Director General
Telecommunications Regulatory Authority, UAE

The Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), established according to the UAE Federal Law by Decree No. 3 of 2003 – Telecom Law, is responsible for the management of every aspect of the telecommunications and information technology industries in the UAE. Despite its relatively short life-span, the TRA has exceeded expectations by achieving its projected goals in record time.

Mr. Mohamed Nasser Al Ghanim, Director General of the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority, is the founding head of the Authority. Under the supervision and management of Al Ghanim, the TRA has succeeded in implementing the regulatory framework of the sector through developing the necessary policies and regulations such as the competition framework, interconnection agreements between providers, pricing policies, and the implementation of the National Spectrum Plan, which is considered to be the first of its kind in the region. Al Ghanim was also the President of WCIT-12, ITU's World Conference on International Telecommunications, held in Dubai in December 2012. He was awarded the ITU's Gold Medal for successfully and expertly heading the international conference.

Q. What are the initiatives taken by the TRA UAE to ensure a leadership position of the UAE's ICT sector in the global marketplace?

A. We have based the regulatory environment in the UAE on a best-practice international model, and have aligned ourselves with the concepts of Fairness, Non-discrimination, Transparency and Regulatory Certainty. Such a regulatory environment has helped us establish an effective level of competition in a duopoly market.

The regulatory framework is an evolving process and the TRA is working continually to develop regulatory initiatives aimed at the promotion of further competition. Such initiatives include: encouraging the provision of high-quality services by licensees using advanced technologies such as LTE and fiber-to-the-home; collecting and provisioning high-quality ICT data to various international organizations, so that the UEA's position is accurately reflected in international indices and indicators; and regularly participating in meetings and conferences, convened by international organizations.

Q. The UAE is playing a leading role in the region to promote ICT development. What is the TRA-UAE's roadmap to achieving such leadership?

A. Firstly, it should be noted that the TRA has a focus on Information and eGovernment, following the successful integration of the former GIA into the TRA. A number of initiatives are planned in the area of Information and eGovernment services.

As for the telecommunications sector, the TRA will continue to monitor developments and will develop strategies in relation to those developments as well as to the UAE Government's policy. The TRA's immediate focus is on securing a greater degree of competition in fixed-line services. The approach of the TRA is to bring about such competition through the sharing of networks. As you will know, the UAE has very advanced fixed-line infrastructure and we believe that infrastructure sharing is economically efficient and negates the need for investment in duplicate infrastructure.

We are aware that several phases are elemental to the realization of a sound network-sharing approach, which include: Carrier Selection (CS) and Carrier Pre-Selection (CPS) – we have completed this phase; Bitstream Access – we are at an advanced stage of testing with hundreds of real customers taking part in a trial, and commercial launch is imminent; and sharing of passive infrastructure – the TRA will turn its attention to this aspect of network-sharing, following the commercial launch of bitstream access.

While the TRA is very pleased with the development of the mobile sector of the UAE, the Authority notes that there is a significant difference between the post-paid and pre-paid markets for mobile services, with the former being more competitive. The TRA considers that the introduction of mobile number portability (MNP) will further assist in the development of the mobile sector.

The TRA is also extremely proud to have supported the ITU in the organization and hosting of three major ITU conferences in Dubai in 2012. These include ITU Telecom 2012 in October, ITU WTSA (World Telecommunications Standardization Assembly in November 2012), and ITU WCIT (World Conference on International Telecommunications in December 2012).

Most, if not all, industry commentators are predicting further growth in the demand for and use of mobile broadband and data services. It is thus also foreseeable that future demands on spectrum usage will be very high. Accordingly, the TRA has a number of initiatives focused on the efficient utilization of spectrum. These include the establishment of a framework of fixed spectrum monitoring stations; implementation of the TRA's online Spectrum Management System; Switch-over to digital broadcasting (planning and trials); vacating of the 800 MHz band; and planning for future re-farming of the 700 MHz band.

Q. What does it signify for the TRA-UAE to host the ITU's major meetings in 2012 for the first time in the UAE?

A. The TRA's hosting of the ITU events in 2012 is a national achievement and a victory, and a new international milestone added to a series of different global indicators that show global confidence in the UAE's progress in various fields, including telecommunications. The TRA believes that we have successfully raised the profile of the UAE as a leading international telecommunications hub.

Q. In what ways did the WCIT-12 present a key opportunity to increase collaboration between countries?

A. According to the outcomes of the conference, the ITRs in their new form include a set of several new principals and procedures, which set the framework for international cooperation among the ITU's Member States. All Member States, upon signing the ITRs treaty, are bound and urged to use them to a maximum practicable extent. WCIT-12 was an important platform that brought together nations of the world, which engaged in an important collaborative exercise, bearing long-term implications for the telecommunications industry as well as the world.

Q. What are the changes in the Telecom/ICT ecosystem that need to be reviewed in terms of administration and governance?

A. Governance of ICTs has globally become the focus of governments, international organizations in the ICT field, and multinational ICT corporations. The growing need for more coherent and harmonized governance models across the globe to cater for increasing penetration of multi-stakeholder and multinational ICT business around the world, has inevitably moved policy-makers and regulators to work closer with their piers to build such multi-characteristic governance models with nationalized features to protect investments and business growth of both state-interest and commercial-interest ICT players.

The increasing dependence on distributed business processing or cloud-based services has its share of space in the minds of the policy-makers to develop regimes and models, catering to emerging service demands, while safeguarding the privacy and integrity of information and personnel.

Due to saturation in most markets, competition dynamics have changed, with focus on capturing churn customers rather than taping into virgin markets. This, in turn, has led to change in approach towards developing the regulatory frameworks by the policy makers in these markets.

Q. How do you see the opportunities for telecommunications operators in order to be able to achieve sustainability in the light of the massive mobile data growth?

A. The TRA is very pleased with the way the mobile market has developed. We have two very competitive innovative operators with advanced networks offering low prices by international standards. We would expect this to grow further as mobile data prices come down and as 4G networks become increasingly prevalent.

The use of smart phones is another major growth segment. We expect this to grow further as well since prices will come down with greater availability of high-speed mobile connectivity. Smart phones are a potential area of significant opportunity given the UAE's very high mobile penetration rates—over 163% as of October 2012.

The UAE's wise leadership envisions the UAE to become a leading knowledge-based economy. Digitization can support, promote, and build such an economy.

Q. The issue of cyber security is becoming a major challenge that needs regional and international coordination. What are the recent TRA-UAE activities in this matter?

A. The UAE National Computer Emergency Response – aeCERT is established by the TRA as an initiative to facilitate the detection, prevention and response of cyber security incidents on the Internet. One of its main goals is to coordinate with domestic and international CSIRTs and related organizations.

Some of the activities done in this regard include:

Q. In what way can digitization impact the overall national economy?

A. With digitization, there is transparency in transactions. Digitization reduces the chances of human errors and grants speedy access to services and information. It thus adds to the overall effectiveness of the public sector.

Digitization creates new avenues of employment, opens new markets, improves the quality of life and increases GDP. It brings prosperity. As per the findings of consulting firm Booz & Company's analysis "Maximizing the Impact of Digitization", the rise in digitization has generated 19 million jobs and has contributed $400 billion in economic growth globally over the past two years. It further reveals that countries that are at an advanced stage of digitization receive 20 percent more in economic benefits than those at the initial stage.

- aeCERT becoming the cyber security coordination center in the UAE.
- Becoming a member of FIRST, Forum of Incident Response and Security Teams. FIRST brings together a wide variety of security and incident response teams including especially product security teams from the government, commercial, and academic sectors.
- Joining APWG, which is the Anti-Phishing Working Group and an industry association focused on unifying the global response to cybercrime.
- Becoming a member of GCC-CERT, a center for collaborating and coordinating in handling cyber security incidents at the regional and global levels.
- Hosting international Information and cyber security events in the UAE, such as Black Hat, to spread information security awareness in the region and to stimulate more collaborative initiatives.

Q. How do you see the current state of the UAE's ICT Sector? What are the goals achieved and the challenges still to overcome?

A. The UAE's telecommunications networks are among the most advanced in the world. The telecommunications infrastructure in the UAE has undergone a tremendous update over the last few years as predominantly copper infrastructure was replaced by fiber-optic connections running either all the way to the customer's premises (FTTH) or to multi-tenant buildings (FTTB). This means services up to 100 Mbps can be offered to residential and corporate customers depending on the maximum speed of the inside wiring of the building.

Such network updates have been done gradually, starting with Dubai and Abu Dhabi Island, the most populated areas of the country, directly followed by all other areas. As of today, fiber-based connections are available at almost all locations in the UAE with only a few exceptions. The UAE is ranked second globally as the most fibre-optic connected nation according to FTTH Council Europe, surpassed only by South Korea.

The TRA is also very pleased with the way the mobile market has developed. However, there is room for improvement in the fixed services market. Competition does not work as well in that market as there are few locations where the operators have overlapping network coverage. As a result, prices are higher than we would like them to be. However, the TRA is in the process of introducing a range of measures to enhance competition within that market such as, sharing of infrastructure. The TRA considers that once these measures are in place, competition will intensify, prices will fall and broadband uptake levels will increase.

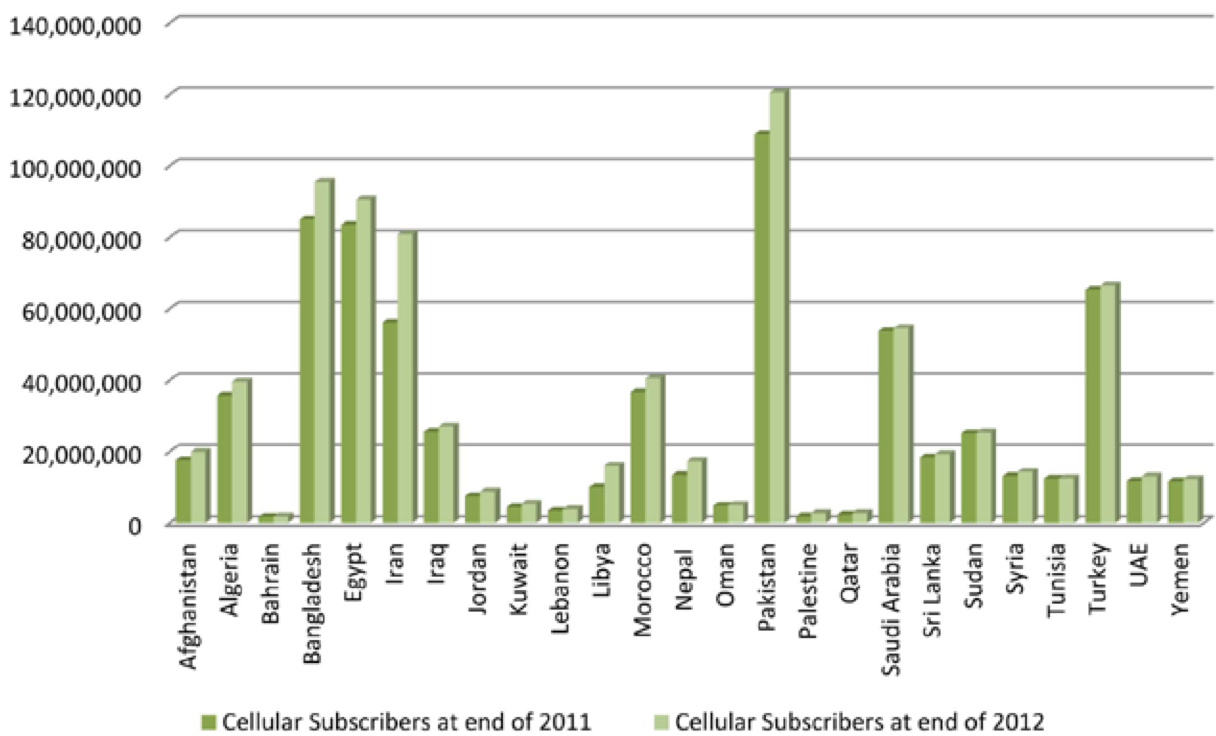
Q. How do you see the future of the telecommunications/ICTs in the Arab region?

A. The overall health of the country's economy is intrinsically linked to the state of the telecommunications sector. This is because telecommunications is a vital business enabler. Without a robust telecommunications sector, businesses would not be able to compete effectively in global markets. Thus if you want a strong economy, you need a strong and sustainable telecommunications sector. Telecommunications also plays a very important role in the day-to-day life of the residents, so it is important from a social perspective that we continue to focus on safeguarding the future of the telecommunications sector.

In many countries, the telecommunications sector is also a major source of revenues for the Federal Governments. The telecommunications sector in the Arab region has been innovative, generally speaking, and has been characterized by an ongoing development of new technologies and services. The operators, especially in the GCC, have proven to be very responsive in terms of investing in and adopting these new technologies and services. This has helped ensure that the GCC develop some of the most advanced telecommunications infrastructure in the world.

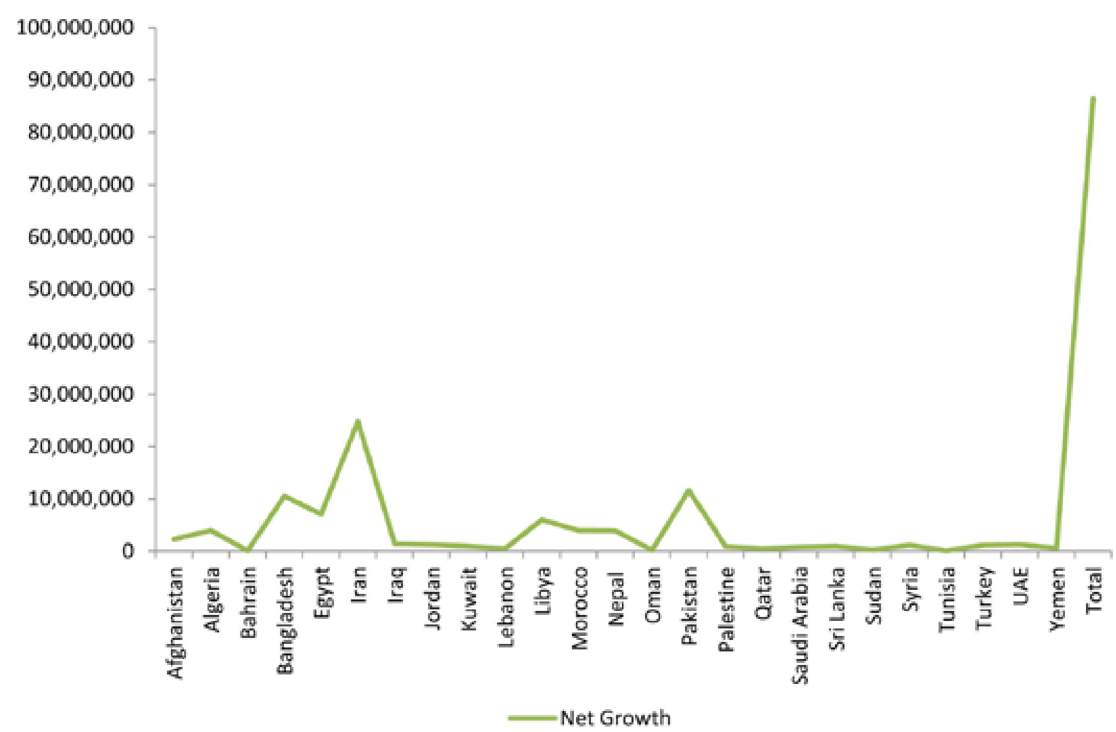
The TRA believes that the operators throughout the GCC are well-placed to continue investing in new technologies in the future. This, in part, is because the telecommunications regulatory environment is conducive to the ongoing sustainability of the industry. For these reasons, we think that the GCC's telecommunication sector will continue to flourish well into the future.

SAMENA Region: Cellular Subscriber Growth Rate



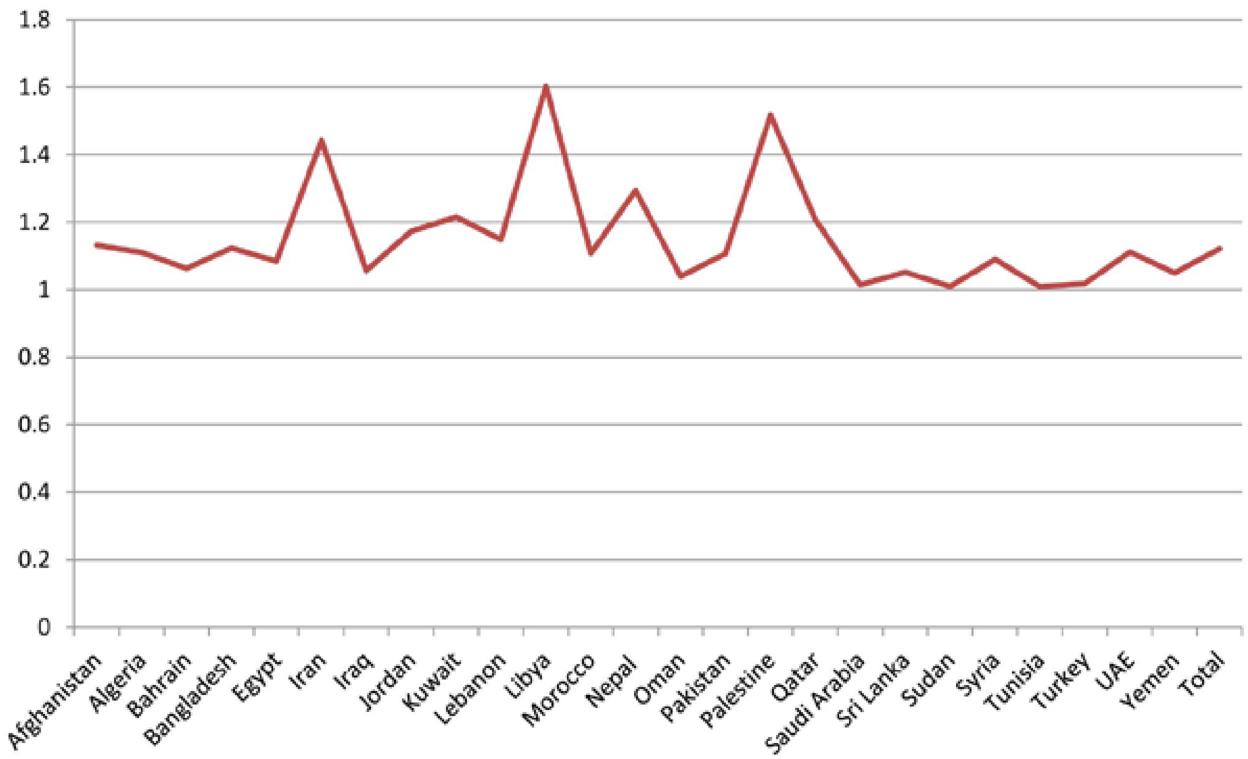
Research Note: All the markets in the SAMENA region experienced positive growth in terms of cellular subscribers during 2012. Growth was seen in all the 25 markets in the region. Iran saw the maximum growth with respect to numbers with an addition of 24.8 million subscribers whereas Bahrain saw the lowest growth with respect to numbers with an addition of 0.1 million cellular subscribers. There was an overall growth of 86.4 million cellular subscribers in the SAMENA region. There are now 791 million cellular subscribers within the SAMENA region.
Image Source: SAMENA Telecommunications Council
Data Source: Regional Regulators, ITU

SAMENA Region: Net Growth in terms of Cellular Subscribers



Research Note: The year 2012 saw a total increase of 86.4 million cellular subscribers. Regionally Pakistan had the highest growth in South Asia at 11.6 million; Iran had the highest growth in the Middle East at 24.8 million and Egypt the highest in North Africa at 7 million. Within South Asia, Sri Lanka had the lowest increase of cellular subscribers at 0.95 million, Bahrain in the Middle East at 0.1 million whereas Tunisia had the lowest increase in cellular subscribers in North Africa at 0.11 million.
Image Source: SAMENA Telecommunications Council
Data Source: Regional Regulators, ITU

SAMENA Region: Y-O-Y Percentage Growth in terms Cellular Subscribers



Research Note: SAMENA Region ended on 791 million cellular subscribers in 2012 as compared to 701 million cellular subscribers in 2011 exhibiting and year-on-year(y-o-y) growth percentage of 1.12%. Libya had the highest cellular growth with respect to y-o-y this year at 1.16% whereas Tunisia the lowest at 1%. Regionally, Nepal had the highest y-o-y growth in South Asia, Palestine the highest in the Middle East and Libya the highest growth in North Africa. Sri Lanka had the lowest y-o-y growth in South Asia, Saudi Arabia the lowest in the Middle East whereas Tunisia the lowest growth within North Africa.

Image Source: SAMENA Telecommunications Council

Data Source: Regional Regulators, ITU

Telecoms Predictions for 2013

During 2013 we will see the start of a fundamental reshaping of mobile telecoms services offerings driven by new services based on the IP Multimedia Subsystem (IMS), the evolution of mobile wholesale as well as regulatory trends.

Some operators have already introduced services based on IMS, for example in Canada the Rogers One Number service allows the seamless switching between a smartphone and computer. Services of this kind are particularly of interest to operators who are not part of a larger group. It allows mobile operators to can leverage the proliferation of free WiFi connectivity to in effect extend their network coverage world-wide. This allows mobile operators to fight back against OTT services such as Skype, WhatsApp and FaceTime by in effect becoming themselves an "OTT over WiFi" player.

Let's look at a practical example: An operator such as Bouygues in France, Telstra in Australia, or 2 degrees in New Zealand introduces a service where its customers are in effect connected to the home network wherever in the world they log on to the internet, whether using a smartphone or laptop with an appropriate client. The customer lands in Singapore's Changi airport, logs onto the free WiFi and can make and receive calls as if he were on his home network. Initially this might be positioned as a premium services, for say an additional US$ 5 per month. The operator may lose margin on international roaming, but as a smaller operator the roaming margins are not that favourable anyway and more could be gained by attracting new customers. Furthermore, without such offering the same customer may not make roaming calls anyway, and instead use Skype, Face Time or WhatsApp when out of country, i.e. completely bypass the operator's service. There is therefore potentially a lot gain for some mobile operators.

> *"using innovative IMS based services operators may be able to maintain or even increase margins."*

Services which allow users to avoid roaming charges already exist for voice (Truphone, WoldSIM and other) and data (roamline.com, in collaboration with KPN). The business model is built on exploiting the difference between lower wholesale prices paid, for example, by MVNOs and high inter-operator roaming tariffs (IOT), the input cost into roaming retail prices. Some operators, who do not have a lot of roaming margin to lose, may attack and offer their own multi-IMSI services, for, say, an additional $10 per country. In the EU downward pressure on intra-EU roaming comes from regulation and using innovative IMS based services operators may be able to maintain or even increase margins. The conventions which govern how roaming is handled already started to fall apart. There are now special inter-operator deals and "roamer high-jacking". For example, when a visitor arrives in Jakarta, it is likely that he will be greeted by the Indonesian mobile network with an SMS assigning him a local number.

> *The opportunity to innovate is not limited to roaming.*

The opportunity to innovate is not limited to roaming. For example, Turk Telecom already launched a service in Germany and is about to launch a service aiming at the Turkish ethnic segment in Belgium. The service, in conjunction with KPN's Base, replaces Base's Ay Yildiz brand. Customers will be charged exactly the same to call numbers in Belgium or Turkey. Turkcell could add the ability to recharge linked accounts (Turkish person working in Belgium can recharge the prepaid SIM of relatives in Turkey) and make small mobile payments across borders. It is easy to see that mobile operators have a lot to gain. Smart, of the Philippines is already going down this route, targeting the Filipino diaspora segment around the world.

> *Location is not an issue with Skype or FaceTime and this is one of the reasons for the success of OTT operators.*

Some operators may go all the way and break the link between the mobile telephone number and geography. After all it seems somewhat archaic that in a world where distance does not matter, mobile operator tariffs are still based on location and distance. Location is not an issue with Skype or FaceTime and this is one of the reasons for the success of OTT operators.
Sooner or later someone in the EU will wake up to the fact that charging high prices for cross border calls - whereas within a bundle the marginal cost of in-country calls is in effect nil - constitutes a barrier to EU integration. This is a. similar line of reasoning as we have seen with roaming pricing. There is also the precedence of regulation intra-EU retail banking transactions, preventing banks to charge more for intra-EU transaction than for domestic transactions. Again, there is an opportunity for operators who make little margin from international calls. Including international calls in the bundle would make a mobile operators' service more attractive, possibly even halting the growth of Skype over mobile and taking back business from international mobile call specialists such as Lebara.

We are likely to see offerings from mobile operators where the national number can in effect be used across the whole EU as if the customer was in the home country. Incoming calls will be free and outbound calls will come out of the bundle in the normal way. Some operators are already moving towards this charging model, for example Vodafone's EuroTraveller which for an extra £3 a day allows customers to use UK bundled minutes, texts and internet in Vodafone's Europe zone. £3 a day equates to £90 a month, a huge premium that will soon be eroded since there is no link between price and input costs.

In this context the value of a wider international footprint becomes apparent. Some operators may regret that they sold off operations. Dual country "roam-like-home" offerings could be particularly attractive to address certain segments in regions that are well integrated across borders, such as Benelux, Austria-Bavaria, around Geneva and the surrounding region in France, or even Malaysia and Singapore.

The changes are hastened by the rapid decline in mobile termination rates in the EU and other countries as well as regulatory pressure. Data traffic now exceeds voice traffic and soon voice traffic will account for a minor proportion of overall traffic. MTRs based on LRIC will become very small indeed. Eventually location and distance independent mobile tariffs will become a global trend, but it will take a long time in countries, such as Tunisia or Bangladesh, who milk international inbound call termination revenue and visitor roaming revenue as a source of foreign currency earnings.

Stefan Zehle
Chief Executive Officer
Coleago Consulting

SATELLITE NEWS

ILS Potentially Delays Satmex 8 Launch

The Satelites Mexicanos (Satmex) C- and Ku-band Satmex 8 satellite launch is likely to be delayed due to the ILS Proton Breeze M glitch, Satmex announced Dec. 14. Satmex will participate in the ILS Failure Review Oversight Board (FROB) and reports that it is confident the issue will be resolved and that the launch will occur in a timely manner. Satmex 8 is designed with 24 C-band and 40 Ku-band transponders, 19 additional high power Ku-band transponders than the current Satmex 5. The additional capacity aims to serve Latin America's growing demand for satellite capacity and to provide growth for the company until the scheduled early 2015 launch of Satmex 7.

Turkey to Launch Second Satellite

Turkey's second domestic reconnaissance satellite Göktürk-2 will be launched on December 18,2012 according to the online newspaper Zaman. The satellite will be launched from the Jiuquan Chinese base at 18:13 Turkish time. With a resolution of 2.5 meters, the satellite will be used for defence purposes. The first signal from the satellite will be received in Ankara at 21:25 local time. The first images from the satellite will be transferred on Dec.25-30.Previously, in 2011, Turkey launched first domestic reconnaissance satellite RASAT. It has been reported that the image resolution of the Göktürk-2 satellite will be three times larger than the RASAT satellite. Creating satellites is part of a state programme aimed at ensuring the Turkish army is fully armed with equipment and kitting itself out. Currently, Turkey has achieved a 50 per cent level of self-sufficiency in this sphere.

EUTELSAT 21B Satellite in Full Commercial Service

Eutelsat Communications (Euronext Paris: ETL) announced the full entry into commercial service of the powerful EUTELSAT 21B satellite at 21.5° East. The seamless transfer of all traffic from the EUTELSAT 21A satellite was carried out overnight by Eutelsat's control center, working in close collaboration with clients and providers of uplink services. The EUTELSAT 21B satellite takes the 21.5° East position to a new dimension for users ranging from broadcasters to news agencies, Telco's, enterprises and government administrations. The new satellite offers increased bandwidth (40 Ku-band transponders versus 29 on EUTELSAT 21A), higher power and improved flexibility. In addition to an enhanced Widebeam spanning Europe, North Africa and Central Asia, it features two dedicated high-energy beams covering North-West Africa and the Middle East/Central Asia optimized for data, broadband and professional video services. Customers now have the choice to operate services within a beam or to interconnect between beams. EUTELSAT 21A will now be redeployed to 48° East where it will continue to provide full commercial service. The EUTELSAT 70B satellite, launched on December 3, is currently undergoing in-orbit testing and on track to enter service at 70.5° East in mid-January 2013.

VSAT and Broadband Satellite Seeing Solid Gains

NSR's Broadband Satellite Markets, 11th Edition report found that satellite broadband Internet access subscribers will exceed 5.2 million globally in 10 years, and the enterprise VSAT installed base will reach nearly 2.9 million sites. In addition, backhaul services and even IP trunking will make important strides as services shift to provisioning with HTS and O3b capacity. Looking to enterprise VSAT, the report predicts that developing markets like Latin America and parts of Asia will have larger installed VSAT bases than mature markets like North America within a few years. Beyond VSAT and broadband access, the backhaul and trunking markets will undergo a critical metamorphosis in the coming years. Traditional C- and Ku-band services become ever less cost effective as the data load at the 3G/4G backhaul sites exponentially increases. The satellite industry has a solution for this, and the migration to O3b and HTS provisioned backhaul sites is the key to offering substantially more capacity at a much cheaper price. The same applies to IP trunking that will see increased bandwidth demand as it moves to O3b and even HTS-provisioned services despite a declining installed base of sites.

Multi-Year Collaboration Agreement Between Astrium and ESI Group

ESI Group announced the signature of a protocol for a multi-year strategic collaboration agreement with Astrium, Europe's space technology company. Officially signed in Paris on November 16, 2012 during the Astrium R&T days, this agreement aims at developing Virtual Prototyping technologies and promoting Virtual Engineering in the space domain, and addresses critical needs in the design and manufacture of next generation launchers. Astrium and ESI Group have implemented this long-term collaboration agreement with the intent to jointly "co-create" new and innovative technologies, processes, and development methodologies for the space industry and its next generation launchers. The objective of this collaboration is to enable the space industry to rapidly build robust virtual prototypes of components, subsystems and systems of the new and improved launchers at various and early stages of the design and development cycle.

Elop to Supply Jupiter Camera for Optsat 3000

Elbit Systems wholly owned subsidiary Elbit Systems Electro-Optics Elop will provide Israel Aerospace Industries with the Jupiter space camera for the Italian Optsat 3000 observation satellite, the company announced Dec. 14. The deal is valued at around $40 million and is comprised of the Jupiter advanced camera and additional services. The project aims to be completed in three and a half years. "Elop has been a world leader in the field of space cameras for many years, and our systems are supplied to a variety of space agencies and customers in the satellite market, providing high performance and reliability throughout the mission lifecycle," Elop General Manager Adi Dar said in a statement. "We trust that this contract will lead to additional contracts, both in Israel and abroad."

Viasat Broadcasting, NBA Collaborate to Increase Coverage

Modern Times Group (MTG)'s Viasat Broadcasting will provide season-long coverage of the National Basketball Association (NBA) according to a new multi-year pay-TV partnership, the organizations announced Dec. 17. The Viasat Sport East channel will broadcast up to five regular season games per week along with marquee NBA events including the NBA All-Star Weekend, Play-offs and The Finals for viewers in Russia, the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and Georgia on the Viasat Sport East channel. The Viasat Sport East channel is available on Russia's Raduga TV digital satellite TV platform, of which MTG owns 50 percent, as well as on third party satellite, IPTV and cable networks. "The new agreement between Viasat Sport and NBA follows our successful cooperation with the NBA during the 2012 Play-offs," MTG Executive Vice President of Russian & CIS Broadcasting Irina Gofman said in a statement. "We are delighted that Viasat Sport East subscribers will now be able to watch coverage of the NBA 2012-13 season as the NBA is the world's premier basketball league with a large and loyal fan base across the region."

SES Broadcasts Swiss Channel via ASTRA

SES' ASTRA is now broadcasting the Swiss private channel 3+ from its orbital position 19.2 degrees East, the company announced Dec. 14. 3+ is the first Switzerland-based broadcaster to use SES satellite capacities and aims to expand its reach by around 400,000 Switzerland households with the new capacity. A satellite receiver and the Swiss Broadcasting Organization SRG's SRRSat Access Card are required to receive the encoded private channel. The uplink and encryption of 3+ is provided by SES subsidiary SES Platform Services. "The decision of 3+ to partner with ASTRA for its satellite transmission is an important milestone in the development of the Swiss market," ASTRA Germany Managing Director Wolfgang Elsässer said in a statement. "3+ is a very popular channel and in addition to the Swiss channels of ProSiebenSat1 Media and RTL Group, satellite TV in Switzerland via ASTRA is now even more attractive." 3+ reaches about one third of the German-speaking Swiss population, averaging around 1.7 million viewers.

SES Launches 20Mbps Satellite Offer in France

SES has become the first operator to offer a satellite broadband service with download speeds of up to 20Mbps for the French market. The new service uses Ka-band capacity on SES' Astra 2F satellite and is available with immediate via France Telecom-Orange's satellite broadband affiliate NordNet. The broadband package, called Internet Satellite JET, features downloads speeds of up to 20Mbps, VoIP telephony and HD TV from €29.90 per month. Patrick Biewer, managing director of SES Broadband Services, said, "SES is again pioneering satellite broadband services in Europe, being the first operator to offer equal features to terrestrial services and at a highly competitive price. We are convinced that the new Ka-band offer presents a great solution for users in remote locations and will significantly drive product sales in France."

REGULATORY NEWS

Govt in Dilemma Over Fixation of Spectrum Price for 3G Mobile Phone Service

The government is in dilemma to fix spectrum price for 3G mobile phone service which will be finally determined by the finance ministry. Already, telecom ministry suggested a price of US$ 20 million for each MHz spectrum instead of US$ 30 million mentioned in 3G draft guideline prepared by Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC). In a recent proposal to the finance ministry for approval, the Telecom ministry suggested the revised price after evaluating the market of neighboring countries like India, Pakistan and Thailand where spectrum price ranges below US$ 30 million. It is learnt that the 3G (Third Generation) mobile phone service in some countries including India did not succeed due to high spectrum price. The telecom authority even expressed doubt about the demand of license or spectrum if the auction price is kept US$ 30 million. According to the industry insiders, base price of the spectrum should be kept reasonable so that successful bidders invest more money for market creation and fix affordable prices for consumers. They said the more the spectrum price, the higher the service charge for people which will be a barrier to rapid penetration of the service.

The economic benefit of the service is tremendous as a large number of IT firms are expected to develop centering the issue.

Uganda: Telecoms to be Penalized for Charging Dropped Calls

Telecommunication companies which charge users on dropped calls and send them unsolicited SMS messages, will face a penalty, the executive director of Uganda Communication Commission, Godfrey Mutabazi, has said. The UCC will announce the penalty in two months following several complaints from the public. Mutabazi made the remarks at the launch of a new telecommunication company, Suretelcom, at Kibuli. According to Mutabazi, UCC is in the process of drafting new terms for service providers in an attempt to improve telecom services in the country. "We are equally concerned about this issue. We met stakeholders a few weeks ago about changes in the regulation of telecom companies," Mutabazi said. He said UCC has imported quality service and monitoring equipment to help monitor and enforce quality benchmarks like the number of blocked and dropped calls. Suretelcom, Uganda's newest telecommunications provider conducted its first Ugandan GSM call on Friday. This takes the number of telecom companies from five to six. In July 2007, UCC and the then minister of Information communication Technology granted a licence to Suretelcom for both public infrastructure provider and and Public Service Provider (PSP). Suretelcom is a subsidiary of the International Telecommunication company, Timeturns Holding.

BTRC sets broadband standard

The telecommunications regulator has set 1 megabits per second (Mbps) as the standard broadband internet speed, a significant improvement from the current 128 kilobyte per second (Kbps) in Bangladesh. "Data [internet] penetration in the country is not satisfactory at all. The current internet speed cannot be called broadband," Sunil Kanti Bose, chairman of Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC), said in a press briefing yesterday. The standardization means broadband providers are now obligated to provide a minimum of 1 Mbps internet to customers at all times, which is the standard speed maintained in parts of the world. The government's vision of Digital Bangladesh is only possible through countrywide broadband connectivity, according to Bose. Robust telecommunication infrastructure is the only way to provide countrywide standard broadband, according to the BTRC chairman, and the regulator will start working on it immediately. "The whole country should be connected through optical fiber cable. We want to provide broadband to all corners of the country, and it is very much possible." However, BTRC chairman Bose said wireless technology such as 3G (3rd generation mobile service), WiMax and WiFi will also have to be availed to provide broadband to the end users.

French Regulator Ready to Block Telecoms Deals

France's competition authority stands ready to block some potential mergers among the country's mobile-phone operators, the authority's chief said, as he announced €183 million ($239.3 million) in fines against two phone companies for alleged anticompetitive behavior. Bruno Lasserre, head of France's Autorité de la Concurrence, said the antitrust regulator will keep a close eye on French operators as they discuss potential deals to merge or share networks in order to cut costs. French mobile-phone operators have been facing off in a brutal price war that has slashed phone bills and eaten into profits, following January's launch of a new cut-rate mobile operator, dubbed Free Mobile, from Iliad SA. In recent months, Vivendi SA's SFR has, for instance, held exploratory talks with operators in France about potential network-sharing deals or even outright mergers, according to people close to the talks. France's government asked the competition authority to render an opinion on the feasibility of network agreements early next year, as it looks to blunt job cuts at the operators. "We are extremely attentive that we maintain competition," Mr. Lasserre said when asked about potential mergers in the telecommunications sector. "If we are presented with a configuration we cannot accept, we won't hesitate to say no." Mr. Lasserre's declaration came as the authority announced that it is levying a €117.4 million fine on France Telecom SA and a €65.7 million fine on SFR for mobile plans between 2005 and 2008 that offered customers unlimited calls, but only to other customers of the same operator. The deals created a "tribal" effect that a hurt smaller operator, Bouygues SA's Bouygues Telecom, the commission said.

Nepal to license third GSM operator to boost competition

National regulator the Nepal Telecommunications Authority (NTA) is considering plans to issue a third mobile license to a GSM operator in the country, as it looks to galvanize competition in the local market. MyRepublica reports the agency's new chairman Digambar Jha as saying that the market has become imbalanced in recent years due to Nepal Telecom (NT) deteriorating badly, and leaving privately owned rival Spice Nepal (Ncell) to grow 'without competition'. The NTA official says such a situation is to the detriment of end users and that introducing competition from another GSM operator from the private sector is 'critical' to redress the current shortfalls. The NTA's plan, Jha said, is to award a GSM license to one of the country's three rural telecoms operators or limited mobility service (LMS) providers, through the issuance of a unified license. 'Instead of introducing a new player, we will award the license to one of the existing operators,' he said, hinting that Smart Telecom or United Telecom Limited (UTL) have already applied for a unified license and are expected to get the authority's approval 'soon'.

FCC Launches Mandatory Special Access Data Collection

To the salutes of some telcos and the continuing concern of the National Cable & Telecommunications Association, the FCC has launched a data-collection initiative to inform a review of its special access regs. In a 3-2 party line vote, the FCC suspended its current benchmarks for deregulating the rates of special access (business) broadband services while it better determines where there is competition for that service. The "better determining" part is the just-announced data collection framework. The FCC has tried voluntary data collections in the past, but some players were no-shows.

The National Cable & Telecommunications Association argued the commission has proposed too extensive and burdensome a data collection effort, pointing to the "extreme burden that a nationwide, building-by-building data request would impose on cable operators and while it was still vetting the 100-page-plus order, the trade group said in a statement that it "remain concerned that it could result in significant and burdensome reporting requirements for competitive providers." It was not clear just how burdensome the final version was -- Republican Ajit Pai, who shared NCTA's concern, supported the final version and praised the chairman for compromising on some points. But Pai also said that the data collection proposal, though improved from the original, was still overbroad and should have started with sample markets rather than "seeking information about every cell tower, office building, factory, farm, and other enterprise facility in the country" and making industry, rather than the FCC, code each street address.

Telecommunications Affairs and TRA Mark National & Accession Days

The Ministry of State for Telecommunications Affairs and the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority celebrated the National Day of the Kingdom of Bahrain and the 13th Accession Anniversary of His Majesty the King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa. Minister of State for Telecommunications Affairs H.E. Sheikh Fawaz bin Mohammed bin Khalifa Al Khalifa, and the staff of both the Ministry and TRA attended.

A SNAPSHOT OF REGULATORY ACTIVITIES IN THE SAMENA REGION

Active Consultations & Invitations for Feedback

Bahrain

The Third National Telecommunications Plan of the Kingdom of Bahrain, published in July 2012, sets out the Government's policy for the sector. Among the priorities it identifies is the need to facilitate the availability of efficiently provided Long Term Evolution (LTE) based services in the Kingdom, under competitive conditions by releasing radio frequencies suitable for the provision of Post 3G mobile services. The Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) issued a Consultation Document entitled, 'Award of Individual Licenses and associated Frequency Licenses for the delivery of mobile telecommunications services in the 900, 1800, 1900, 2100 and 2600 MHz frequency bands in the Kingdom of Bahrain'. The document advises interested parties of TRA's intention to conduct a licensing process that will result in the award of licenses for the provision of state-of-the-art mobile telecommunications services. TRA seeks views on the proposed award process, requirements and license conditions. The Authority's expects that this spectrum release will promote the delivery of high speed mobile services in the Kingdom, in line with the objectives of the Third NTP. The comments are to be submitted by January 10, 2013. **(November 28, 2012) tra.org.bh**

Oman

The TRA has embarked on an initiative to review the current licensing framework in order to identify and remove barriers of entry and enhance the level of competition in the telecommunications sector. The overall objective of the new Licensing Framework is to facilitate the realization of the following broad requirements:

- To increase Internet penetration whilst focusing on high speed broadband access;
- To prepare suitable conditions for effective competition in the provision of infrastructure and telecom services, and promote competition in the provision of these services;
- To expand the provision of full range of telecoms services to the unserved willayats;

In connection with the requirements TRA intends to review and modify the current Licensing Framework to simplify entry procedures and license awards. The Consultation document briefly outlines the findings of a study related to the historic and present context of the present licensing framework, together with certain proposals for change. The Authority is seeking the comments of interested parties, stakeholders on the proposals put forward for comment at the present stage of their development. Subsequent to the receipt of comments a substantive Licensing Framework will be set out, in full detail. Last date for submission of comments is January 21, 2013 **(December 24, 2012) tra.gov.om**

Country-Wise Policy & Regulatory Developments

Afghanistan
Board Chairman: Mr. Abdul WakilShergul

[Afghanistan Telecommunication Regulatory Authority (ATRA)]

The Ministry of Communication and Information Technology (MCIT) has signed three deals for the deployment of fiber-optic links connecting a number of central and northeastern provinces to the national fiber backbone. 'Package A', will cover the supply and installation of all non-cable equipment for the project and had an estimated budget of US$5.03 million, while 'Package B', which carried a budget of US$13.72 million, was for the supply and installation of optical cable linking ten districts. **(December 6, 2012) telegeography.com**

Algeria
Chairperson: Ms. Zohra Derdouri

[Regulatory Authority for Post & Telecommunication (ARPT)]

The Algerian government and Russia's VimpelCom Ltd. (VIP) have formed a new company to operate Orascom Telecom Holding SAE (ORTE)'s local unit, its chairman said. The new company, Optimum Telecom Algerie, was formed on December 2 and is 51% owned by Algeria with the remaining portion held by VimpelCom, chairman of Orascom- Telecom Algerie, also known as Djezzy, told reporters in Algiers. The North African country's government has been in discussions for more than two years to purchase a 51% stake in Djezzy held by Cairo-based Orascom Telecom Holding. This would give Algeria full ownership of Djezzy. VimpelCom and Orascom Telecom Holding merged last year. Shares of Orascom Telecom Holding rose as much as 5.92% to 3.76 pounds in Cairo, beating the EGX30 Benchmark Index's highest gain of 2.8% to 5,158.4 pounds.
(December 13, 2012) businessweek.com

Minister of Posts, IT and Communications said that the country's wireless operators will be launching the first 3G mobile data services by the end of March 2013, with licenses to be awarded early in the new year. The government has attempted to proceed with 3G licensing several times in the past few years since plans for a formal auction were first revealed in May 2008. The procedure then stalled for several years and was further delayed when the state decided whether to by-pass 3G altogether and instead issue licenses for 4G technology. Authorities have now decided that it would be too expensive for operators to deploy 4G, plus the cost of handsets is still too high for many prospective 4G users, so the country will at last be seeing its first high speed mobile services. The minister also revealed that Algeria's first mobile money services will be introduced early next year. Algeria's wireless market is currently dominated by Orascom Telecom Algeria, which operates under the Djezzy brand and claimed almost half of the country's 37 million mobile subscribers at the end of September 2012. The other two active mobile operators are state-backed Algerie Telecom Mobile (Mobilis) and Wataniya Telecom Algeria (Nedjma), which held around 29% and 24% of the market respectively at September 30. **(December 12, 2012) telegeography.com**

Bahrain
Chairman: Dr. Mohammed Al Amer

[Telecommunication Regulatory Authority (TRA)]

The telecoms affairs ministry and the Telecoms Regulatory Authority (TRA) have announced the timeline for licensing Post 3G Services in the kingdom. Details of the timeline includes extending the deadline to January 10 for responses to the public consultation document entitled Award of Individual Licenses and associated Frequency Licenses for the delivery of mobile telecoms services in the 900, 1800, 1900, 2100 and 2600MHz frequency bands in Bahrain. The proposed date for issuing the invitation to tender is January 24. **(December 30, 2012) ameinfo.com**

The latest telecom sector indicators have shown excellent growth despite the global economic downturn. The telecom sector is a significant factor contributing to Bahrain's national wealth and represents 4% of Bahrain's 2011 gross domestic product, the report said citing the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority's (TRA) seventh market indicators data. The mobile services contributed almost half of the revenues, contributing 46% to the retail sector, the report stated. According to TRA, the international calls comprised 22%, leased lines 15%, Internet 12% and fixed telephony 5% of the total revenues. There are now approximately 2,700 direct employees, showing a 50% increase in employment since the liberalization of the telecoms market in 2003, said Minister of State for Telecommunications Affairs. The goal for 2013 is to reinforce our telecoms sector through the TRA, to the benefit of the consumers and Bahrain's economic outlook, he said. Healthy competition will ensure that we offer the latest technology and attractive retail packages and price points, he added. The ministry is working to provide necessary public policies to enhance the communications sector. The latest report contains market indicators for last year until the second quarter of this year.
(December 28, 2012) The Gulf Daily News

The Bahrain Telecommunications Regulatory Authority was named "The Best Regulator of the Year Award," for the third time as announced in the annual CommsMEA Awards held in Dubai. The award comes in recognition of TRA's achievements in developing the telecommunications sector across Bahrain. Since inception of such international award, the TRA's third win comes as an extraordinary accomplishment. The Bahrain Telecommunications Regulatory Authority has outpaced prominent rivals like the TRAs of Saudi Arabia and the UAE and Qatar's Supreme Council of Information & Communication Technology. TRA Chairman Dr. Mohammed Al Amer commented in regard of this achievement saying that the series of remarkable achievements of TRA regionally and internationally is attributable to the wise vision exerted by the Kingdom's Leadership. These achievements are the catalyst to such wisdom as it has initiated a viable economic strategy for a free telecommunications market. It also paved the way for a concrete business platform enabling effective competition. **(December 6, 2012) ameinfo.com**

Bangladesh
Chairman: Sunil Kanti Bose

[Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC)]

The telecommunications regulator has set 1 megabits per second (Mbps) as the standard broadband internet speed, a significant improvement from the current 128 Kbps in Bangladesh. The data penetration in the country is not satisfactory at all and current internet speed cannot be called broadband told chairman of Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC) in a press briefing. The standardization means broadband providers are now obligated to provide a minimum of 1 Mbps internet to customers at all times, which is the

standard speed maintained in parts of the world. The government's vision of Digital Bangladesh is only possible through countrywide broadband connectivity, according to chairman. Robust telecommunication infrastructure is the only way to provide countrywide standard broadband, according to the BTRC chairman, and the regulator will start working on it immediately. The whole country should be connected through optical fiber cable. However, BTRC chairman said wireless technology such as 3G, WiMAX and WiFi will also have to be availed to provide broadband to the end users. Regarding 3G auction, chairman said as soon as the finance ministry approves the spectrum price BTRC will fix a date. Earlier, BTRC proposed US$20 million per MHz spectrum as the base price for the auction.
(December 20, 2012) thedailystar.net

The government is in dilemma to fix spectrum price for 3G mobile phone service which will be finally determined by the finance ministry. Already, telecom ministry suggested a price of US$ 20 million for each MHz spectrum instead of US$ 30 million mentioned in 3G draft guideline prepared by Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC). In a recent proposal to the finance ministry for approval, the Telecom ministry suggested the revised price after evaluating the market of neighboring countries like India, Pakistan and Thailand where spectrum price ranges below US$ 30 million. It is learnt that the 3G mobile phone service in some countries including India did not succeed due to high spectrum price. The telecom authority even expressed doubt about the demand of license or spectrum if the auction price is kept US$ 30 million. According to the industry insiders, base price of the spectrum should be kept reasonable so that successful bidders invest more money for market creation and fix affordable prices for consumers. They said the more the spectrum price, the higher the service charge for people which will be a barrier to rapid penetration of the service. The economic benefit of the service is tremendous as a large number of IT firms are expected to develop centering the issue. At present six mobile phone operators have 98.293 million users, and internet users have reached nearly 30 million. Mobile operators hoped that the number will increase rapidly after introducing 3G service. Prime minister's office will determine what will be auction price of the 3G spectrum as earlier the office fixed the 2G spectrum price, according to the Finance ministry sources.
(December 19, 2012) thefinancialexpress-bd.com

The telecom regulator is going to introduce new software for illegal call tracking to curb the unauthorized call termination through VoIP in the country, said officials. They said the new software "Telecommunication Traffic Measurement and Anti-Fraud System" would be able to detect any kind of illegal call termination along with the accurate call volume and call sources through its monitoring system. Chairman of Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC), said that they are working with different organizations to introduce the new system. "The Telecommunication Traffic Measurement and Anti- Fraud System would be capable to track any kind of illegal call termination which is being done by modern sophisticated equipment," chairman said. The present monitoring system only monitors the illegal call termination, but, it cannot detect the actual sources of call termination, as now- a- days the illegal calls are being terminated using modern sophisticated equipment. Besides, the telecom ministry recently issued International Gateway (IGW), International Internet Gateway (IIG) and Interconnection Exchange (ICX) licenses to 78 companies, which require strong monitoring system to track any kind of illegal activities. BTRC found that few IGWs are carrying international incoming calls below 3 cents, which is clear violation of the licensing condition. The operators are also collecting the invoiced money in local currency (BDT) by passing the banking channel in contravention of licensing guidelines as well as Bangladesh Bank order 1972.
(December 13, 2012) daily-sun.com

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

Egypt will grant Telecom Egypt a license by mid-2013 to provide mobile services and will later let mobile companies offer fixed-lined services using Telecom Egypt's infrastructure, the industry regulator said. Landline monopoly Telecom Egypt, 80% owned by the state, has been relying on its data business to boost revenue. "Telecom Egypt will be granted the right to offer mobile telephone services," the executive chairman of Egypt's telecom regulator, said in a statement, adding that the offer would be "executed by mid-2013". "Mobile companies will also be given the right to get a license to offer fixed-lined services using the infrastructure of Telecom Egypt," he added without giving a timeframe. Egypt has three mobile operators: Vodafone Egypt, Mobinil, which is controlled by France Telecom, and Dubai-based Etisalat. Telecom Egypt Chief Executive told Reuters last month that Telecom Egypt was in advanced talks with the government on a deal that would allow it to offer mobile services and added the company could look to set up its own independent network. Telecom Egypt last month said third-quarter revenue had risen 6% to 2.48 billion Egyptian pounds (US$401.7 million), against a Reuters forecast for 2.38 billion. Its EBITDA margin of 36.8% was below a Reuters forecast for 41%. **(December 27, 2012) reuters.com**

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

Iran has said it will be promoted to an Internet service provider to other countries after the first phase of the Europe-Persia Express Gateway (EPEG) becomes operational by the end of current Iranian year (ends March 20, 2013). "The EPEG is a communications highway which links Europe to Eastern Asia and once this project is officially inaugurated, Iran will be upgraded to Tier2 level (Internet service provider) from the current Tier3 level (Internet service consumer)," said the deputy head of infrastructure communications co. EPEGs' bandwidth will hit about 3.2 Tbit /s and its length will reach 6,000km, he said. **(December 18, 2012) Fars News**

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

Asiacell has confirmed its intention to proceed with its delayed stock market listing on the Iraq Stock Exchange as part of the terms of its license. Qtel currently owns 53.9% of Asiacell. Asiacell's founding shareholders will offer 25% of their Shares on the ISX and to trading on the ISX is expected to commence on the February 3, 2013. Rabee Securities, Iraq's largest independent brokerage, is acting as sole distributor and selling agent and Melak Iraq, an Iraqi Financial Advisory Firm, is sole adviser to the company in respect of the Offer. **(December 20, 2012) cellular-news.com**

Jordan

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

[Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (TRC)]

The number of Jordanians using their mobile phones to connect to the Internet, which is still relatively low, is likely to rise rapidly in the coming years as mobile providers compete to attract users to their data plans, a local expert said. A survey released last week by the Pew Research Centre found that around 94% of Jordanians own mobile phones, but a minority uses them for Internet access. The report indicated that 96% of mobile phone owners use them to make calls, 68% to send text messages, 47% to take pictures and videos, and only 22% to use the Internet. The Arab Advisers Group predicted a sharp upward trend in mobile Internet use in the Kingdom in the next few years. The Pew report's statistics on mobile Internet use in Jordan were similar to those from other countries in the region. Among Egyptian, Lebanese, and Tunisian mobile phone users, 14%, 24%, and 20%, respectively, use their phones to access the Internet, the survey showed. Mobile penetration in Jordan reached 138% by the end of September, with about 8.767 million users (many Jordanians own more than one mobile phone), while Internet penetration in the country stood at 63%, according to recent figures released by the Telecommunications Regulatory Commission. **(December 28, 2012) equities.com**

The Orange Jordan has opposed the government's intention to license a fourth mobile operator in Jordan being unwise and will have negative effect on the telecom market in the country. Currently there are three mobile operators, namely; Zain Jordan, Orange Jordan and Umniah. Earlier this month, the Telecommunications Regulatory Commission official announced that the door was open for a fourth mobile operator in the Kingdom. Mobile penetration in Jordan reached 138% by the end of September of this year, with about 8.767 million mobile subscriptions, according to official figures. **(December 16, 2012) Jordan Times**

Effective competition has not yet been achieved in the Kingdom's fixed broadband market, the government's policy on ICT and postal sectors indicated. But the Arab Advisers Group, a research and consulting company, said that the service is facing strong competition in the market. The government's 2012 policy on the communications, information technology and postal sectors, which was published on the ICT ministry's website, indicated that the Telecommunications Regulatory Commission will be tasked to facilitate the entry of new competitors into the telecom sector. The policy cited the need to boost competition and enable the provision of new telecom services as the reasons behind the decision. Fixed Internet broadband services rely on ADSL, which is broadband or high speed Internet access. It works by splitting an existing telephone line signal into two, one for voice and the other for data, according to web sources. The Jordan Telecom Group is currently the sole provider of ADSL services in Jordan as it controls the network needed for providing this service, General Manager of the Arab Advisers Group, said, adding that other Internet service providers that offer the ADSL service are re-sellers for the group. "This is the reason why competition in the ADSL market is not effective... However, there is a wide variety of Internet technologies that users can use in the Kingdom," GM noted. "ADSL technology is certainly under pressure currently as there is strong competition by other Internet technologies such as 3G, WiMAX and others," he said, adding that prices of Internet services are competitive in Jordan. The country's three telecom operators provide 3G services as well as other Internet technologies. Internet penetration in Jordan reached 63% by the end of September, while Internet subscriptions stood at 14% with about 874,832 subscribers, according to recent figures released by the TRC. **(December 12, 2012) zawya.com**

The Telecommunications Regulatory Commission (TRC) has announced that it will auction frequencies in the 1800MHz, 2100MHz, 2300MHz and 2600MHz bands, inviting expressions of interest by January 17, 2013. The tender is open to potential new market entrants as well as existing operators, though the regulator stipulated that there was an opportunity for just a single new mobile operator and one broadband fixed wireless access (BFWA) provider. The services allowed through each spectrum band and reserve price are as follows: 1800MHz range – 2G, 3G, and 4G with a price of JOD32.5 million (USD45.6 million) per block of spectrum (2×5MHz); 2100MHz – 3G only and priced at JOD25 million per block (2×5MHz); 2300MHz for BFWA at JOD2 million for a 5MHz block; 2300MHz for 4G at JOD10.8 million for a 5MHz block and; 2600MHz – 4G with a price tag ofJOD18.75 million for each block of spectrum (2×5MHz). 3G services first arrived in Jordan in February 2010, with the last of the nation's three cellcos Orange Jordan, Umniah Telecommunications and Technology, and Zain Jordan introducing the service in June this year. With increasing competition in the wireless data segment driving down the price of services, 3G has seen a surge in popularity, with an estimated 2.23 million customers using the service by end-September 2012. **(December 7, 2012) telegeography.com**

The Telecommunications Regulatory Commission (TRC) has outlined plans to auction of radio spectrum to the incumbent mobile networks -- and for the possible launch of a new mobile network into the country. The regulator is planning auctions in the 1800 MHz, 2.1 GHz, 2.3 GHz and 2.6 GHz bands. The 1800 MHz spectrum will be valid for all sorts of mobile services; with the 2.1 GHz band will be limited to 3G services only. The higher 2.3 GHz and 2.6 GHz bands will be limited to 4G based services.
The reserve prices have been set at:

- 32.5 Million Jordanian Dinars for each frequency band (5+5 MHz) in the 1800 MHz range
- 25 Million Jordanian Dinars for each frequency band (5+5 MHz) in the 2100 MHz range
- 2 Million Jordanian Dinars for each frequency unit (5 MHz) in the 2300 MHz range for Fixed Broadband Wireless Access services.
- 10.8 Million Jordanian Dinars for each frequency unit (5 MHz) in the 2300 MHz range for Mobile Telecommunication services.
- 18.75 Million Jordanian Dinars for each frequency band (5+5 MHz) in the 2600 MHz range
- Applicants for the auction have to submit letters of interest by the 17th January 2013. (December 6, 2012) cellular-news.com

Kuwait

Minister of Communication: Dr. Mohammed Al-Baseeri

[Ministry of Communication (MOC)]

Kuwait's Ministry of Communications (MoC) which besides being the national regulator is also the country's dominant fixed line service provider as well as the international gateway owner and operator and Saudi Arabian cellular operator Zain Saudi has signed an interconnect agreement.

With this agreement, Zain Saudi becomes one of the MoC's international carrier partners. Zain says that significant international traffic is exchanged between Kuwait and Saudi Arabia every year and this accord will offer it a greater share of the international carrier business from Kuwait into and out of its neighbor. **(December 26, 2012) telegeography.com**

Kuwait's Wataniya Telecom (NMTC.KW) plans to launch the 4G LTE, mobile broadband network in Kuwait in the first half of 2013. Wataniya will first embark on a trial launch of the 4G LTE service within 10 days, and then it will start the commercial service in the first half of 2013. In other news, Sheikh Al Thani told Al Rai that Wataniya has completed all requirements and procedures necessary to list its shares on the Qatar Exchange and that the listing is awaiting the completion of measures at the Kuwaiti bourse. When asked about Qtel 's position regarding the minority shareholders in Wataniya after it increased its stake in the Kuwaiti telco to about 92% and whether Qtel prefers to keep these shares in the hands of the minority shareholders in order to maintain the listing of Wataniya on the Kuwait bourse, he said that he wishes that these shareholders remain as Qtel 's partners in Wataniya. There's no reason for delisting Wataniya from the Kuwait Stock Exchange, Sheikh Al Thani told.
(December 6, 2012) Dow Jones Newswires

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

Korea Telecom is bidding for Vivendi's controlling stake in Maroc Telecom, the largest operator in Morocco. The South Korean operator joins other high-profile bidders including France Telecom, Qatar Telecom and Etisalat as it tries to increase its exposure to emerging economies and offset a slowdown in its mature domestic market. Korea Telecom aims to generate 10% of its total revenues from overseas activities in the next three years, up from just 4% last year. Meanwhile, French conglomerate Vivendi is keen to offload some of its telecoms interests and focus resources on its core media business. According to analysts, the sale of Vivendi's 53% stake could fetch as much as US$5.5 billion, but the deal would need the support of the kingdom of Morocco, which owns about a third of Maroc Telecom. Earlier this year, Korea Telecom tried to build a presence in Africa with a move for a 20% stake in South Africa's Telkom, but its approach ran into opposition from the South African government. The operator has rolled out networks in Rwanda and Congo but lacks any investments in the continent's bigger and more affluent markets. Analysts say Korea Telecom may need to pair up with another interested party to stand any chance of buying into Morocco, given its rather limited financial resources. A partnership option may be one of South Korea's state-owned investment groups, such as the National Pension Service (NPS). Indeed, last year Korea Telecom and the NPS set up a fund worth US$745 million for the purpose of making foreign investments. **(December 27, 2012) The Financial Times**

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

The Nepal Telecommunications Authority (NTA) has published its latest market update, Management Information System (MIS) December, 2012 showing that the number of ADSL subscribers in the country stood at 99,572 at that date, up from 97,725 a month earlier. The DSL segment is a de facto monopoly of state-owned Nepal Doorsanchar Company Limited (Nepal Telecom, or NT) which also reported a total of 2.145 million GPRS/EDGE/W-CDMA (data/internet) subscribers at the same date, 123,033 CDMA2000 1xEV-DO users and 4,461 dial-up accounts. In total, there were 5.278 million internet subscribers at mid-October, up from 5.190 million a month earlier, an internet penetration rate of 19.92% (19.60% previously). There were also 45,618 wireless modem or fiber-optic Ethernet connections, 17,981 cable modem subscribers, and over five million GPRS/EDGE/W-CDMA or CDMA2000 1xEV-DO users – including NT's total. The overall dial-up base meanwhile, fell to 15,008 from 15,022. **(December 18, 2012) nta.gov.np**

The Nepal Telecommunications Authority (NTA) concluded that it will utilize the Rural Telecommunication Development Fund (RTDF) for the construction of optical fiber and other relevant projects. It has been three months since the fund provided by Asian Development Bank (ADB) that was meant to support the voice over broadband project has been diverted to the national identity card project. ADB had granted six million dollars to support the voice over broadband project but the project did not materialize due to the government's unwillingness to implement it. The project was expected to be completed by the end of 2014. A total of Rs six billion has been collected in the RTDF and it will take around Rs 3.27 billion to complete the mid-hill optical fiber project. The board meeting of NTA has also agreed to identify possible areas for utilizing Rural Telecom Development Fund to invest the remaining amount, according to a member of the board. RTDF can also be utilized to meet the target set by the World Summit on Information Society (WSIS), an official at NTA opined. WSIS has set a target of connecting all villages and establishing community access points and connecting all universities, colleges and schools using Information and Communication Technology (ICT). Similarly, WSIS has envisaged connecting health posts and all government offices using ICT. It is possible to meet the WSIS target by 2015, if the government genuinely utilizes RTDF to enhance ICT in the rural sector, the official claimed. The fund, by its name, should contribute to the development of rural telecom sector. Telecom operators and internet service providers are required to pay two per cent of their total annual revenue to RTDF every year.
(December 14, 2012) thehimalayantimes.com

The Nepal Telecommunications Authority (NTA) is considering plans to issue a third mobile license to a GSM operator in the country, as it looks to galvanize competition in the local market. Chairman of the authority said that the market has become imbalanced in recent years due to Nepal Telecom (NT) deteriorating badly, and leaving privately owned rival Spice Nepal (Ncell) to grow 'without competition'. The NTA official says such a situation is to the detriment of end users and that introducing competition from another GSM operator from the private sector is 'critical' to redress the current shortfalls. The NTA's plan to award a GSM license to one of the country's three rural telecoms operators or limited mobility service (LMS) providers, through the issuance of a unified license. Four out of six telecoms service providers in Nepal had applied for the new unified service licenses being offered by the regulator. The four – NT, Ncell, Smart Telecom and UTL – all submitted applications on or by September 27, and began paying the requisite license, royalty and frequency fees stated as a condition of obtaining a unified license. The government of Nepal ratified the planned introduction of a unified licensing scheme in May

2012, allowing network operators to deliver fixed, mobile and data services on a single license in return for a fee of NPR357.50 million (US$4.09 million) and the agreement to pay a license renewal fee of NPR20.13 billion for ten years. **(December 13, 2012) MyRepublica**

The number of fixed telephony users in the country fell to 836,361 in mid-October from 836,825 in mid-September, according to latest data. Of the total, 635,609 were PSTN users and 198,752 were WLL users, said Nepal Telecommunications Authority (NTA) that revealed Nepal Telecom grew its PSTN base to 631,810 from 629,906 a month earlier, while STM Telecom Sanchar's base crept up to 5,201 from 5,199 customers. Smart had 598 PSTN public phone centers, similar to a month earlier. Nepal Telecom also ended the period with 124,335 WLL users, down from 126,740 a month earlier, while UTL's WLL base grew to 71,467 from 71,432. Nepal Satellite Telecom's WLL base was stable at 2,950 subscribers. Meanwhile, the number of limited mobility subscribers still stood at 1.15 million in October, similar to September, the data revealed. UTL served 589,184 limited mobility subscribers, up from 582,205, STM had 155 customers, Nepal Satellite had 146,758 subscribers, same as a month earlier, and Smart had 418,847 subscribers, also the same as in September According to the authority, there were also 1,742 Global Mobile Personal Communications (GMPCS) users in the country.
(December 11, 2012) thehimalayantimes.com

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

The TRA has embarked on an initiative to review the current licensing framework in order to identify and remove barriers of entry and enhance the level of competition in the telecommunications sector. The overall objective of the new Licensing Framework is to facilitate the realization of the following broad requirements:

- To increase Internet penetration whilst focusing on high speed broadband access;
- To prepare suitable conditions for effective competition in the provision of infrastructure and telecom services, and promote competition in the provision of these services;
- To expand the provision of full range of telecoms services to the unserved willayats;

In connection with the requirements as above, the TRA wishes to review and modify the current Licensing Framework to simplify entry procedures and license awards. The Consultation document briefly outlines the findings of a study related to the historic and present context of the present licensing framework, together with certain proposals for change. The Authority is seeking the comments of interested parties, stakeholders on the proposals put forward for comment at the present stage of their development. Subsequent to the receipt of comments a substantive Licensing Framework will be set out, in full detail. Last date for submission of comments is January 21, 2013 **(December 24, 2012) tra.gov.om**

Pakistan
Chairman: Malik Farooq Awan
[Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA)]

Pakistan Telecommunication Authority has signed an integrity pact with Transparency International Pakistan (TIP) to ensure transparency in the auction of 3G Spectrum licenses in upcoming months. MoU was signed by Chairman PTA and Chairman Transparency International Pakistan (TIP), while Federal Finance Minister was also present at the occasion. TIP will observe the entire 3G auction process to make sure that bidding remains transparent and corruption free. PTA, cellular companies, industry and other stakeholders are contented with the development. Consultants hired for 3G, in an email to ProPakistani, also welcomed the involvement of Transparency International Pakistan to ensure that the auction is conducted properly. Mainstream media and opposition, with usually limited understanding on technology, had concerns regarding the 3G auction and had fears that corruption could engulf 3G bidding. Pakistan is long trying to sell 3G licenses, which are hurdled over period of time for various reasons. Pakistan Telecommunication Authority is currently aiming to auction 3G licenses in March 2013, a time when government's agreement with Etisalat under privatization of PTCL (for not selling any telecom licenses for seven years) is set to expire.
(December 17, 2012) propakistani.pk

Pakistan's National Accountability Bureau (NAB) has begun an investigation into the Pakistan Telecommunications Authority's (PTA's) hiring of consultants for the planned and long-delayed sale of 3G licenses. The NAB's probe was launched after two members of the PTA, the financial and technical representatives, refused to participate in the process on the basis that the selection of consultants was not transparent and did not follow correct procedures. According to the PTA's Member Technical, the consultants were hired without the approval of the Pakistan Procurement Regulatory Authority (PPRA), flying in the face of regulations and casting suspicion on the selection's credibility. He also complained that Pakistan's PM and the chairman of the PTA had put pressure on the pair to immediately approve the Information Memorandum – the official plans for the 3G auction drawn up with the assistance of the consultants. Member Technical and Member Finance reportedly refused on the basis that the process was not transparent and that they had not been given enough time to fully evaluate the memorandum. Member Technical's complaint has also been passed to the Supreme Court whilst the NAB investigates the matter. **(December 13, 2012) The News**

Prime Minister constituted an oversight committee to monitor the billion dollar 3G license auction, after reports of alleged kickbacks from hiring of consultants for supervising the auction. The decision to establish the oversight committee, which will consist of media persons, civil society officials, National Accountability Bureau officials, technical experts and an economist, was finalized at a meeting of the 3G Auction Supervisory Committee held at the prime minister's house The new committee has been constituted despite a previously existing auction supervisory committee, working under Finance Minister. PM said that the government's aim is to introduce the latest technology in the country and named 3G technology to be a valuable asset which will boost Pakistan's economy, encourage foreign investment and promote economic activity in the country. People of repute, standing and impeccable integrity will be associated with the oversight committee to ensure transparency and due process at every cost, PM said. A presentation was given by a panel of international consultants through video conferencing from Canada, Australia and England. This was the first time that a video conferencing facility was utilized during a meeting at the prime minister's house. It is expected

that 20,000 direct and indirect jobs will be created with the introduction of 3G in the telecom sector.
(December 11, 2012) tribune.com.pk

Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) has withdrawn its directive issued on September 25 about forming an international clearing house (ICH) under which only Pakistan Telecommunication Company (PTCL) was allowed to terminate all incoming international calls. The development came in the wake of Lahore High Court's order that directed the telecom regulator to suspend the formation of ICH, which according to the petitioner, Brain Telecommunication, was a violation of competition rules. Under ICH, all incoming international traffic had to be handled through a centralized gateway, which was supposed to be operated and maintained by PTCL. The long-distance international (LDI) operators had to share the revenues for international incoming traffic based on their respective market share with fixed termination charges. When ICH became effective on October 1, the calling rates for overseas Pakistanis rose phenomenally. PTA's fresh directive, however, has changed the equation. As a result of this development, overseas Pakistanis can make calls to Pakistan on pre-ICH rates now. In late October, the LHC had directed PTA to suspend ICH until further hearings. The petition is still being heard at the LHC. **(December 7, 2012) tribune.com.pk**

Qatar

Executive Director: Mr. Greame Gordon

[The Supreme Council of Information and Communication Technology (ictQATAR)]

The Regulatory Authority of the Supreme Council of Information and Communication Technology (ictQATAR) is seeking comments on its Draft Standard Consultation Process which, when finalized, will be followed by the Regulatory Authority in conducting future public and industry consultations. This consultation process sets out, step-by-step, the tasks that will be undertaken by the concerned parties inside and outside the Regulatory Authority to accomplish the development of key regulatory documents, including a transparent external consultation. The primary objectives of this standard consultation process are:

- to streamline and clarify the consultation procedures followed by the Regulatory Authority;
- to set out clearly the role of the Regulatory Authority and the external stakeholders during the preparation of a consultation document and the consultation phase, with indicative timeframes;
- to accelerate the development of key regulatory documents (e.g., policies, guidelines, instructions) in an open and transparent manner.

All interested parties have been invited to review this Draft Standard Consultation Process and provide their comments and views to the Regulatory Authority by January 17, 2013. All comments received in response to this public consultation will be carefully reviewed and considered by the Regulatory Authority during the finalization of the Standard Consultation Process. **(December 19, 2012) ictqatar.qa**

Saudi Arabia

Governor: Eng. Abdullah A. Al Darrab

[Communication & Information Technology Commission (CITC)]

The Saudi Arabian cellular operator Zain Saudi has signed an interconnect agreement with Kuwait's Ministry of Communications (MoC), which besides being the national regulator is also the country's dominant fixed line service provider as well as the international gateway owner and operator. With this agreement, Zain Saudi becomes one of the MoC's international carrier partners. Zain says that significant international traffic is exchanged between Kuwait and Saudi Arabia every year and this accord will offer it a greater share of the international carrier business from Kuwait into and out of its neighbor.
(December 26, 2012) telegeography.com

Telcos in Saudi Arabia are complaining that a change to the legislation covering the registration of mobile SIM cards for expatriate workers could see their profits cut by up to 20%. According to a report, operators are worried that a new scheme proposed by the Communication and Information Technology Commission (CITC) will lead to foreign workers cutting their mobile contracts. The regulator has ruled that all mobile users must enter their national ID number before they can top up a pre-paid account, but some users from overseas are unable to renew their ID if the company they work for does not employ enough Saudi workers under the state's 'Nitaqat' program, which calls for larger companies to have a workforce comprising of up to 30% Saudi nationals. Saudi Arabia is home to more than eight million expatriate workers. **(December 17, 2012) telegeography.com**

The outlook for the Saudi telecom sector remains bullish despite the saturating mobile penetration levels, with data segment to drive growth, Al Rajhi Capital said in its "Saudi Telecom Sector" report. It forecast that the information and communications technology services will only grow in importance over time. Broadband remains the key growth driver for telecom operators in Saudi Arabia, as increasing Smartphone penetration levels and changing usage patterns of consumers are expected to result in a sharp rise in data consumption. With mobile penetration reaching 187.5 percent in Saudi Arabia, the report said "broadband data is the growth driver for the maturing telecom sector in Saudi Arabia." The report believes the adoption of 4G services will increase with the launch of a number of 4G supporting mobiles phones. Even as 3G users transfer to 4G services, 2G users will continue to migrate towards 3G as most low-end and mid-level phones now support 3G technology. Moreover, fixed broadband subscriptions have increased 10 fold from 0.22 million subscribers in 2006 to 2.21 million at the end of H1 2012. However, mobile broadband has only caught consumer fancy over the past three years, as subscribers rose from 1.31 million at the end of 2009 to 12.62 million at the end of H1 2012. The Kingdom's mobile broadband penetration has reached 43.4% at the end of H1 2012, which is high compared to countries like Germany, Italy and Canada. However, mobile broadband penetration level in the Kingdom is still low compared to the US (76.1%), and the UK (53%). Launch of LTE (4G) services to augment data usage LTE services were launched in Saudi Arabia in late 2011 with all three telecom operators claiming to be the first to launch such service in the Kingdom. This technology can support speeds of up to 100Mbps, compared to 3G speed of up to 7Mbps and 3.5G HSPA+ speed of up to 42.2 Mbps. 3G services were launched in Saudi Arabia in 2006, and data usage has grown exponentially since then. Now with the launch of 4G services, data consumption will get another impetus, as 4G will enable users to watch high quality video content and live mobile TV with ease. 4G will also accelerate access to streaming video and audio data, and accelerate video conferencing. **(December 11, 2012) zawya.com**

Saudi Arabia's telecom regulator said that it would ask mobile phone operators to inactivate chips of expatriates leaving the Kingdom on exit-only visas as part of its efforts to prevent misuse of the facility. The Saudi Communications and Information Technology Commission (CITC) said it was planning to adopt a number of resolutions aimed at preventing the sale of chips without taking identification of their owners. The move comes after CITC noticed that some expatriate workers were selling mobile chips in the name of foreigners who have already left the Kingdom. This is one of the reasons for the rapid growth of the cell phone black market in the country, especially after the CITC insisted that recharge of cell phones should be linked with the identification number of users. The CITC made this system obligatory for security, social and economic reasons after it noticed the presence of a large number of unidentified chips, which could be used for different purposes. CITC said his organization would cooperate with the Interior Ministry and the National Data Center while dealing with matters related to telecom services in the country. Mobile phone users must enter their national ID or iqama number in order to recharge or transfer credit to other mobile users. Shops selling mobile phones have started disposing of a large quantity of unregistered pre-paid SIM cards following the CITC decision. Authorities, who were previously unable to track the owner of the SIM cards, hoped the new measure will prevent the abuse of the Kingdom's mobile phone services. According to one telecom market source, there are millions of unidentified SIM cards in the country. These are leftovers by the pilgrims or given to others by expatriates after leaving the country on final exit visas. One telecom shop owner praised the CITC for taking the new decision saying it would prevent people from taking advantage of the anonymity of unregistered cards offered and from using these cards for various crimes. Most mobile shops have strictly implemented the CITC decision. A warning has been placed on all mobile phone retailers, which included a list of the consequences of violating the decision. This included confiscation of phones and cards, closure of the shop and deportation of expatriate workers. Mobile phone service providers have been told that they should not activate a prepaid SIM card before verifying and validating the personal information of the purchaser. The decision mandates the service provider to re-program its systems to ensure refusal of a SIM card recharge unless the user enters his ID number followed by the recharge number, and the system verifies that the ID number entered matches the ID number provided by the user at the time of SIM purchase.
(December 7, 2012) arabnews.com

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

The Telecommunications Regulatory Commission (TRC) says it will monitor broadband speeds in 2013 to ensure the mandatory minimum speeds are maintained by fixed broadband providers and 3G operators. According to the watchdog, mobile broadband speeds must not drop below 70% of the level advertised by fixed line operators, and below 30% of the level advertised by mobile broadband providers. 'The objective is to establish a standard in the industry, which every player has to comply with in order to ensure the maintenance of the quality of the broadband service in the country, according to our broadband roadmap,' a consultant on broadband at the TRC told.
(December 19, 2012) Daily Mirror Business

Minimum broadband speeds are expected to be imposed and strictly monitored for both fixed and wireless operators from next January, telecom regulator said. The Telecommunications Regulatory Commission (TRC), informed that starting from January 2013, the mandatory minimum broadband speeds maintained by fixed operators and 3G operators should not be below 70% and 30%, respectively of the bandwidth advertised. The objective is to establish a standard in the industry, which every player has to comply with in order to ensure the maintenance of the quality of the broadband service in the country, according to our broadband roadmap. The TRC is also expecting to carry out speed tests to measure the performance of mobile broadband operators in the outskirts of Colombo and the very first such broadband speed test results will be published in February 2013. Since December 2010, broadband speed measurements have been carried out in locations confined to the Colombo area and were published in the TRC's official website. It is learnt that Sri Lanka is the only country to have increased transparency in terms of operator speeds. Commenting on this, the Director General of the TRC told that their major obligation is to protect the rights of broadband users to ensure that subscribers are receiving a reliable and speedy broadband service at an affordable price. For this purpose, the TRC has established international servers in both the United States and Germany with a monthly maintenance cost of Rs.100,000 to provide highly accurate and reliable 'end to end' broadband speed measurements to both service providers and the customers.
(December 17, 2012) dailymirror.lk

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

The relatively low mobile penetration rate and the limited presence of fixed-line services are driving mobile growth in Sudan, especially in remote areas. While mobile broadband is expected to witness the highest growth due to better accessibility, the segment with the highest potential is broadband. The fixed-line segment will also get a boost with the prevalence of new technologies such as code division multiple access (CDMA) fixed-wireless technology. New analysis from Frost & Sullivan, Sudan Telecom Market, finds that the market earned revenues of US$ 2.13 billion in 2011 and estimates it to reach US$ 2.85 billion in 2018. In 2011, Sudan had approximately 24 million mobile subscribers and the penetration rate stood at 55.1%. The number of subscribers in the country is anticipated to triple to 56.8 million between 2012 and 2018. "Sudan has a relatively liberalized telecom sector," said Frost & Sullivan. There are two fixed-line and five mobile operators providing services in the country and all operators have planned network expansion to take advantage of the growing demand in rural areas. However, with close to 40% of the population living below the poverty line, there is substantial pressure on the operators to find fresh revenue streams. In addition, high illiteracy rates restrict the uptake of sophisticated data services. **(December 17, 2012) businesswireindia.com**

Sudan and Yemen are discussing aspects of bilateral cooperation and ways of boosting them especially in the sector of telecommunications and information technology. This came during the meeting of Minister of Telecommunications and Information Technology with the Sudanese ambassador to Yemen. At the meeting, Minister confirmed the keenness of the Yemeni government to promote the relations between the two countries to serve the common interests. For his part, the Sudanese ambassador hailed the rapid development in the services of telecommunications and internet in Yemen despite the difficult circumstances experienced by the country over the past year. The two sides also affirmed the need to benefit from the experiences of the two countries in the various technical and administrative fields and human resources development. The meeting also touched on the importance of joint coordination to address the phenomenon of smuggling of international calls as this has a significant impact on the national economy. (December 11, 2012) sabanews.net

Turkey
Chairman & CEO: Dr. Tayfun Acarer
[Information & Communication Technologies Authority (BTK)]
The Turkish government will sell a stake of around 7% in Turk Telekom through a secondary public offering in February. Work towards selling part of the state's 32% stake has reportedly intensified after the government successfully raised TRY4.5 billion (US$2.5 billion) from selling part of state-controlled lender Halkbank last month, the sources said. 'The current projection is that the 6.68% stake will be sold through a public offering in the first quarter of 2013. A block sale is highly unlikely for a sale of this size,' the source added. The Turkish Treasury currently holds a 30% stake in the telco, while Saudi Arabia's Oger Telecom is the majority owner, with a 55% stake. In 2008 Turk Telekom concluded a successful initial public offering (IPO) for 15% of the government's shares. At that time the IPO was said to be the seventh largest public offering in the world and the biggest ever in Turkey. As a result of this offering, the Turkish Treasury secured a total of US$1.9 billion in revenue. **(December 18, 2012) Reuters**

United Arab Emirates
Director General: Mr. Mohamed Nasser Al Ghanim
[Telecommunication Regulatory Authority (TRA)]
The Telecom Regulatory Authority (TRA) honored various government authorities, private bodies and individuals who contributed to the success of hosting the series of international events organized by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) of the United Nations (UN). During the ceremony, Director General of TRA highlighted the prominent position occupied by UAE on the map of global communications and its role in supporting the efforts of the ITU, in order to enable everyone to benefit from the information and communications technology. He expressed his satisfaction in the role played by the TRA, since the beginning of the year, which started with the ITU World Radiocommunication Conference ending with the World Conference on International Telecommunications (WCIT2012) which concluded on December 14.
(December 18, 2012) albawaba.com

The Ministry of Finance has conducted a number of studies over the last few months about the telecom sector and how to impose fees on it based on international best practices, taking into account the existence of more than one operator in the sector, the need of the sector to invest and expand, the big difference in fees imposed on the two operators of the sector. Based on the results of the studies, the Ministry has presented its findings to the Cabinet of Ministers, where it has been discussed and a decision taken in that respect, to change the method of calculating the fees applied by the Federal Government on the telecom sector. The changes were made with the aim of giving both firms and the shareholders the certainty to know their liabilities for the medium term and of bringing fees on both Etisalat and Du to similar levels gradually. In previous years, fees paid by Etisalat alone were amounting up to AED9bn annually, while the total amount forecasted by the Ministry of Finance for future years for both Etisalat and Du is in the region between AED7.0 to 7.8 billion annually. The new method calculates the fees on both revenue and profit of the Telecom operators. The rates of fees paid to Federal Government in the past and the rates based on the new method are as follows: Etisalat Du % on profits % on revenue % on profits % on revenue 2016 30.0% 15.0% 30.0% 15.0% 2015 35.0% 15.0% 30.0% 12.5% 2014 35.0% 15.0% 25.0% 10.0% 2013 35.0% 15.0% 20.0% 7.5% 2012* 35.0% 15.0% 17.5% 5.0% 2011 50.0% 0% 15.0% 5.0% 2010 50.0% 0% 15.0% 0% 2009 50.0% 0% 0% 0% 2008 50.0% 0% 0% 0% The new method shall ensure that by 2016 the two companies in the sector will be paying equal percentages on both revenue and profit. In addition, and in order to encourage both operators to invest and grow, additional steps have been taken: - Fees will be applied on revenue and profit arising from regulated services. Where the operators provide services that are not regulated by the TRA and are in competition with other companies, this revenue or profit will not be subject to fees by the Federal Government.

- Fees on revenue will be applied to locally operated services only.
- Fees on local profit will be applied after the deduction of fees due on revenue.

Fees on international profits will only apply if the profits were not taxed in the originating country at a similar or higher level. Taking the above into account, the effective rate for Etisalat for the coming years is expected to decrease and be below the 50% it has been paying to date, thus reducing its liability to the Federal Government. As for Du, in the past the company has been provisioning 50% every year in anticipation to an announcement by the Cabinet of Ministers. Going forward, the effective rate of fees to be paid by Du will be increasing gradually to reach the same rate of fees on both profit and revenue as Etisalat, but at the same time giving Du and its shareholders certainty about the liability for the medium term. **(December 12, 2012) menafn.com**

The UAE government has set new royalty rates on the country's two telecommunication operators. The Ministry of Finance said Etisalat will pay a royalty of 15% on its revenues and 35% on profits between 2012 and 2015. In 2016, Etisalat, which is majority-owned by the government, is required to pay a royalty of 15% on revenues and 30% on profits. Meanwhile, Du will be required to pay a 17.5% royalty on profits in 2012 and 5% on revenues. Du's profit royalty will incrementally rise to 30% by 2015 while the fee it pays to the government on its revenue will increase to 15% by 2016. Etisalat has paid 50% of its profit in royalties to the federal government but a profit slump has seen the total amount it pays decline in recent years. It paid US$ 1.58 billion in royalties in 2011, down from AED 7.6 billion in 2010 and AED 8.8 billion in 2009. The Abu Dhabi-based firm operates in about 15 countries and the government said that the royalty applies only on local revenues and profit. However, the operator must pay the difference between any taxes it pays abroad and the UAE's royalty rate. Approximately

90% of Etisalat's profit came from the UAE last year. Du was instructed to pay a royalty of 15% on its 2011 net profit, plus a further 5% of revenue to the government.
(December 11, 2012) Reuters

Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) stated that at the end of September, the number of cell phone users in the country grew to around 13.04 million. The TRA said that of the total, almost 11.39 million were subscribers in the pre-paid mobile service, whereas the remaining 1.65 million were covered by the monthly bill GSM service. The TRA said that the increase in the number of mobile users boosted the UAE's GSM penetration rate to one of the world's highest levels, at 159%. Furthermore, in the January-September period, approximately 850,000 new mobile phone users were added to the market, representing about 77% of the 1.1 million new subscribers in mobile, fixed lines and internet services in the UAE during the 9-month period. It is worth noting that at the end of September, the number of total subscribers to all telecom services by both Etisalat and Du grew to 15.9 million. **(December 6, 2012) menafn.com**

Yemen
Minister: Dr. Ahmed Ebeid Bin Dagher
[Ministry of Telecommunication & information Technology (MCITT)]
Yemen and Sudan are discussing aspects of bilateral cooperation and ways of boosting them especially in the sector of telecommunications and information technology. This came during the meeting of Minister of Telecommunications and Information Technology with the Sudanese ambassador to Yemen. At the meeting, Minister confirmed the keenness of the Yemeni government to promote the relations between the two countries to serve the common interests. For his part, the Sudanese ambassador hailed the rapid development in the services of telecommunications and internet in Yemen despite the difficult circumstances experienced by the country over the past year. The two sides also affirmed the need to benefit from the experiences of the two countries in the various technical and administrative fields and human resources development. The meeting also touched on the importance of joint coordination to address the phenomenon of smuggling of international calls as this has a significant impact on the national economy. **(December 27, 2012) sabanews.net**

Regulatory Activities Beyond the SAMENA Region

ITU

An international telecommunications treaty signed by 89 countries out of a possible 144 will have little impact on how carriers operate or how consumers surf the web or make calls around the world when it comes into effect in 2015. But the acrimonious debate over the treaty - and refusal of so many countries, including the United States and much of Europe, to sign up immediately - have exposed a deep split in the international community. A U.S.-led bloc advocated a hands-off approach to the Internet, while Russia, China and much of Africa and the Middle East sought greater governmental oversight of cyberspace. About 150 nations met in Dubai, under the auspices of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), to update a set of telecom rules dating back to 1988, before the Internet and mobile phones transformed communications. Their failure to find a consensus may herald a new fight over cyberspace. As in a prior version, the International Telecom Regulations spell out guidelines on technical issues such as how carriers charge each other for incoming international phone calls, as well as taxation and accounting. Countries that sign the treaty are supposed to be guided by its principles, although these have no force of law. Users in countries that block certain content will still experience the same version of the Internet, while telecom operators will feel little impact because international call charges are decided via commercial contracts between them. The new version added passages that became flash points: for example, four lines pushed by Russia and China on how governments should protect the security of networks. The United States took a no-compromise position throughout negotiations, refusing to consider any references to the Internet in the treaty. Other countries instead agreed to restrict any explicit Internet provisions to a non-binding resolution that accompanies the treaty. In the end, the debate over the Internet overshadowed all else at the summit, despite the ITU insisting that regulating cyberspace was not on the agenda. As a result, some countries in Africa and the Middle East felt the controversy overshadowed important reforms, such as provisions to improve broadband access to landlocked and island nations, which may be weakened by fewer countries signing the treaty. Other measures include a call for greater transparency in roaming charges, which the ITU hopes will end "bill shock", plus commitments to improve disabled access to telecom services and for governments to reduce telecom equipment waste. A clause calling for countries to stop "unsolicited bulk electronic communications" - spam - drew the ire of the U.S. bloc, which said it could be interpreted by governments to block emails, an accusation the ITU vehemently denied. "Whatever is in place now doesn't seem to be working and this treaty calls on governments - it's a dirty word for some, but somebody has to do it - to cooperate to see what we can do better in that area," said Richard Hill, chief counselor for International Telecommunication Union's Dubai summit. These issues are more vital in developing countries, with other countries having already addressed them to a large extent, so richer nations had less incentive to sign the treaty. "That's certainly the case, but it's no secret they're not signing for political reasons," added Hill. After 12 days of rancorous, largely private negotiations, the bad feeling between the two opposing camps may take some time to ease. Delegates from the pro-treaty group accused the United States and Europe of reneging on a compromise agreement that fell apart on Thursday. ITU officials on Friday gave an upbeat interpretation of the summit, predicting many of the countries that had yet to sign the treaty would do so once they have consulted with their respective legislatures. But the failed attempts by some member states to significantly extend the ITU's remit into the Internet have weakened the 147-year-old organization. "The ITU won't become irrelevant but it tried to claim some of the Internet without having the mandate to do so," said a European delegate who declined to be identified. "It saw an opportunity, but both the triumph and the curse of the ITU is that it can't instigate anything, it depends on member states - some said let's expand the mandate and others said let's not." **(December 14, 2012) reuters.com**

An agreement to update the International Telecommunications Regulations has been reached in Dubai, despite a refusal from major countries such as the US and UK to sign the new treaty. The new pact includes measures that would give countries a right to access international telecommunications services and the ability to block spam, which delegations that declined to sign the amended text argued would pave the way for government censorship and control over the web. Canada, Denmark, Australia, Norway, Costa Rica, Serbia and others followed the US in refusing to sign on these grounds. The UN treaty is not binding for the countries that don't sign. Throughout the treaty negotiations, the US led opposition to efforts by countries including Russia, China and several Middle Eastern nations to include internet regulation in the treaty. The US said more consultation with the private sector was needed, a position also adopted by industry players such as Google, which said the ITU was the wrong venue to discuss internet regulation. Other new articles in the ITR treaty that were passed address changes in the way operators should be taxed and compensated for traffic exchange and provisions on access to communications for people with disabilities and in less developed markets. **(December 14, 2012) Bloomberg**

United States

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) has approved AT&T Mobility to acquire sought-after Advanced Wireless Services (AWS) and 2.3GHz Wireless Communications Services (WCS) spectrum, which it intends to use to support its in-deployment Long Term Evolution (LTE) network in coming years. AT&T lined up a series of separate deals throughout the course of the year and the FCC opted to group them together before approving them all simultaneously this week. By the dint of regulator's approval, AT&T has acquired AWS and WCS spectrum in 608 cellular market areas, covering 82% of the population of the continental United States. Specifically, AT&T will receive 10MHz-20MHz of WCS 'A' and 'B' block spectrum in 473 Cellular Market Areas (CMAs), covering close to 70% of the population; 5MHz-10MHz of WCS 'C' and 'D' block spectrum in 344 CMAs, covering 54% of the US; and 10MHz-30MHz of AWS spectrum in 29 CMAs, covering 2% of the country. August 2012 saw AT&T agree a deal worth up toUS$600 million to acquire San Diego-based spectrum holding company NextWave Wireless, a major holder of 2.3GHz WCS frequencies. WCS spectrum was first auctioned in 1997, but has never been utilized for mobile broadband usage due to technical rules designed to avoid possible interference with satellite radio users in adjacent spectrum bands. The deal effectively combines the nation's two largest WCS spectrum holders (AT&T is the largest and NextWave is the second largest). AT&T went on to strike deals with Comcast and Horizon Wi-Com – two of the last remaining WCS spectrum holders outside of AT&T and NextWave. Additional spectrum has been sourced from the San Diego Gas & Electric Company. **(December 20, 2012) Fierce Wireless**

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) has proposed making available 100 megahertz of shared spectrum in the 3.5 GHz Band (3550-3650 MHz) using small cell and database technologies The Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (NPRM) broadly reflects the views of the President's Council of Advisors on Science and Technology (PCAST), which issued a report this summer recommending spectrum sharing and small use in the 3.5 GHz Band. The proposal lays the groundwork for the widespread deployment of small cell technologies across 100 megahertz of spectrum, while protecting incumbent users in the band. The proposal envisions three tiers of users, each with different levels of rights and protections in the 3.5 GHz Band.

- The first tier, Incumbent Access, would include authorized federal users and grandfathered fixed satellite service licensees. These incumbents would be afforded protection from all other users in the 3.5 GHz Band.
- The second tier, Protected Access, would include critical use facilities, such as hospitals, utilities, government facilities, and public safety entities that would be afforded quality- assured access to a portion of the 3.5 GHz Band in certain designated locations.
- The third tier, General Authorized Access, would include all other users - including the general public
- that would have the ability to operate in the 3.5 GHz Band subject to protections for Incumbent Access and Protected Access users.

A spectrum access system, incorporating a geo-location enabled dynamic database, would govern access to the 3.5 GHz Band. **(December 13, 2012) cellular-news.com**

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) has proposed the creation of a new Citizens Broadband Service in the 3550 MHz-3650 MHz band currently used for military and satellite operations. The proposed service will promote the deployment and use of small cells and spectrum sharing, in order to enable more efficient use of radio spectrum. The 3.5 GHz band was identified by the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) for shared federal and non-federal use in the 2010 Fast Track Report. The FCC's Notice of Proposed Rulemaking also seeks comment on whether to include the 3650-3700 MHz band, which is already used for commercial broadband services. Together, these proposals would make up to 150 MHz of contiguous spectrum available for mobile and fixed-wireless broadband services without displacing mission-critical incumbent systems. **(December 13, 2012) telegeography.com**

Verizon Wireless has lost an attempt to block a regulatory rule requiring it to offer wholesale mobile data roaming rates to other mobile networks. The regulator, the FCC already required such facilities for voice services, but last year expanded that to include mobile data services as well. Verizon Wireless sued to block the change. A US Appeals Court upheld the regulators change, rejecting the mobile networks claim that it amounted to "an unfair government seizure". Roaming services are primarily used by small regional network operators who would otherwise struggle to attract customers, but also often operate in areas where the big networks don't offer coverage. "Enacting data roaming rules is one of many strong actions the FCC has taken in this area, and we will continue to promote broadband investment and innovation," FCC Chairman Julius Genachowski said in a statement. AT&T also opposed the rule change.
(December 5, 2012) cellular-news.com

Ecuador

Telecoms regulator, CONATEL, has awarded state-owned operator Corporacion Nacional de Telecomunicaciones (CNT) spectrum for the provision of 4G services. CNT will use 30MHz in the 700 MHz band and 40MHz in the 2100 MHz band to deploy LTE, and is set to become the first company in Ecuador to do so. CNT is Ecuador's dominant fixed line provider but at the end of September 2012 the company's share of the mobile market stood at just 2.3%.
(December 14, 2012) telegeography.com

European Union

The European Commission has expressed serious doubts about a new proposal from the Czech telecoms regulator (ČTÚ) regarding termination rates which it says would negatively affect consumers in the Czech Republic. The Commission says that the prices proposed by CTU for certain termination services are twice as high as prices in other countries where proper price setting methodologies are applied. CTU has imposed wholesale prices which do not take into consideration next-generation network based efficient technologies. The new price regulation proposed by CTU does not comply with the principles and objectives of EU telecoms rules which require Member States to promote competition and the interests of consumers in the EU. European Commission Vice President Neelie Kroes said: "The European Commission seeks fair regulation and is determined to ensure that the regulated termination rates are set at a proportionate level in all Member States without any unnecessary delay." Moreover, the Commission criticized CTU's proposal to regulate wholesale prices for fixed and mobile termination which would apply only to one Telecom Company providing the fixed line services and to three out of four operators on the mobile market. Other market players would thus remain free from price control without clear justification. This is the second time that the Commission has used its new powers regarding national remedies under Article 7a of the Telecoms Directive in the Czech Republic. The procedure must be concluded within three months. **(December 11, 2012) cellular-news.com**

United Kingdom

OFCOM announced the bidders in the forthcoming 4G mobile spectrum auction, adding that the bidding will start in January 2013. The following organizations have qualified to bid in the auction: Everything Everywhere Limited U.K.; HKT U.K. Company Ltd--a subsidiary of PCCW Ltd: Hutchison 3G U.K. Ltd: MLL Telecom Ltd: Niche Spectrum Ventures Ltd--a subsidiary of BT Group PLC (BT.A): Telefonica U.K. Ltd and Vodafone Ltd. Bidders will be competing to acquire new capacity to roll out superfast 4G mobile broadband services to cities, towns and villages across the U.K. Bidders will be competing for spectrum in two separate bands - 800 MHz and 2.6 GHz. The lower frequency 800 MHz band is part of the 'digital dividend' freed up when analogue terrestrial TV was switched off, which is ideal for widespread mobile coverage. The higher frequency 2.6 GHz band is ideal for delivering the capacity needed to deliver faster speeds. These two bands add up to 250 MHz of additional mobile spectrum, compared to 333 MHz in use. Both bands are being packaged into smaller lots for the auction.
(December 20, 2012) online.wsj.com

The Ministry of Defense (MoD) has unveiled plans to sell off around 200MHz of spectrum, all of which is below 15GHz, which it claims is 'regarded as the most useful and valuable part of the radio spectrum because of its wide range of applications'. With the MoD confirming that it holds around three quarters of all publically held spectrum, and a third of all frequencies below 15GHz, the sale falls in line with the government's previously announced plans; in its 2010 spending review the state said that at least 500MHz of public spectrum below 15GHz will be released by 2020 for new mobile communications uses. In terms of a timeline for the sale process, the MoD notes that the spectrum in question is currently being cleared of military users, and preparations for the auction itself are expected to get underway at the end of 2013, with the sale likely to be completed by mid-2014. Ahead of such developments, the MoD has confirmed it plans to publish a brochure in the early part of next year for interested parties, while it will hold an industry day in 'early summer 2013'.**(December 19, 2012) telegeography.com**

UK wireline incumbent BT is to bid in the upcoming LTE spectrum auction, it has emerged just after regulator OFCOM announced the closing of applications to take part in the sale. It will publish a full list of participants in a few weeks' time, but it is clear that BT, plus the four mobile operators (EE, Vodafone, Telefonica O2 and 3UK) have all paid their £100,000 deposit to take part. The auction will start in January and probably last for several weeks, with operators expected to start rolling out LTE networks in their new frequencies from mid-year. EE (formerly Everything Everywhere) is already turning on commercial LTE services in the UK, using its refarmed 1.8 GHz GSM spectrum. It has been unclear whether BT, which sold its mobile arm in 2001, and since then has relied on MVNO deals to provide wireless services. Even now, it seems unlikely the incumbent would go head-to-head with the cellcos in conventional mobile services, given how overcrowded the UK already is. Instead, it might use spectrum for specialized or vertical services, or merely as an asset. Five years ago - when the UK looked as though it would be Europe's first country to auction 4G spectrum in 2.6 GHz and WiMAX was the main available technology option - BT hinted heavily that it would bid for licenses and deploy a WiMAX network. This would have been mainly to fill in gaps in its wireline broadband and support enterprise applications, and the same thinking could still apply today (though with LTE). Another option, increasingly popular with new wireless entrants, would be to create a wholesale network to support small service providers and to offer offload services for the cellcos. However, BT's obligation to deliver broadband to remote areas does not seem to be part of the strategy. BT is only interested in the high capacity 2.6 GHz spectrum, not the 800MHz digital dividend band, despite its suitability for providing broadband to rural areas. BT has been trialing unlicensed options for this purpose, notably white spaces in the TV spectrum. The Treasury has said it expected the auction to raise a total of £3.5 bn (€4.3bn), though many experts believe this is unlikely to be achieved.
(December 14, 2012) rethink-wireless.com

OFCOM has kicked off the country's long-awaited 4G auction, having called for applications from would-be bidders in line with previously announced plans. Confirming the development on its website, OFCOM stated that interested parties had from between 10.00 and 16.00 yesterday to lodge their applications, in addition to an initial deposit of GBP100,000 (US$160,875). Detailing the next steps in the sale process, OFCOM noted that it will review all applications to ensure bidders are qualified to take part in the auction itself, with the watchdog noting that it would

carry out a range of checks, 'from ensuring the information submitted is correct through to ensuring that there is no overlap between applications, which could distort the auction'. Following qualification of those companies that have indicated their desire to take part in the sale, OFCOM has said it expects to name all successful applicants by 'early in the New Year'. Last month OFCOM published the final regulations and timetable for the 4G mobile spectrum auction, while it also confirmed the reserve prices for the 800MHz and 2.6GHz frequencies, with the combined total standing at GBP1.3 billion (US$2.07 billion). In terms of the timings for the sale process, following the qualification stage in December, bidding is expected to begin next month, with the regulator noting that this stage could take 'a number of weeks'. In either February or March, dependent on how long the bidding process runs for, winning bidders will be informed of which concessions they have secured, and fees will become payable, following which the licenses will be granted. According to OFCOM's proposed schedule, meanwhile, commercial 4G services are then expected to be inaugurated by June 2013, bringing competition to the UK's largest cellco by subscribers EE, which launched commercial Long Term Evolution (LTE) services last month using its existing spectrum holdings in the 1800MHz band. Commenting on the latest development, OFCOM CEO Ed Richards noted: 'We have fired the starting gun on the 4G auction process. In the past year alone, mobile internet usage has doubled. The 4G auction will release crucial capacity to support future growth, helping to boost UK productivity, innovation and drive significant improvements to mobile broadband availability across the UK.'
(December 12, 2012) telegeography.com

The UK government expects to raise around $3.5 billion (US$5.6 billion) from next year's delayed auction of its 4G radio spectrum. The figures were released in an autumn statement about the UK government finances. In its statement, the HM Treasury department said that the "commercial auction for 4G spectrum, being overseen by Ofcom, is due to be completed by March 2013. Following formal assessment, based on independent analysis of the likely valuation of spectrum receipts by the OBR [the Office for Budget Responsibility], the spectrum receipts will be reflected in this Autumn Statement at £3.5 billion." The expectation is higher than the reserve price, which would raise just £1.2 billion (US$2 billion) if the lots were all sold at the lowest possible price. The auction itself is due to take place in January, with licenses awarded in February/March with the expectation that the first networks will launch services in May/June time. **(December 6, 2012) cellular-news.com**

Netherland

Dutch mobile networks have paid EUR3.8 billion (US$5 billion) for blocks of radio spectrum in a lengthy auction carried out by the telecoms regulator. The multi-band auction started on the October 31, and took five weeks to complete the sale of all 41 blocks on offer. The three incumbent operators will also be joined by Tele2, which already has an MVNO, but can now deploy its own network. Most of the licenses have 17-year duration although some were for just four years to bring them in line with the other licenses. Of the spectrum on offer, Vodafone paid EUR1.38 billion for 9 blocks; KPN paid EUR 1.35 billion for 15 blocks, T-Mobile paid EUR910.7 million for 15 blocks and Tele2 paid EUR160.8 million for 2 blocks. In a separate statement, Vodafone clarified that it acquired 17-year spectrum of 2x10MHz in the 800 MHz band, 2x10MHz in the 900 MHz band, and 2x20MHz in the 1800 MHz band. Additionally it acquired 2x5MHz in the 2.1 GHz band for four years. KPN clarified that it secured 2x10MHz in the 800 MHz band, 2x10MHz in the 900 MHz band, 2x10MHz in the 1800 MHz band, 2 x 5MHz in the 2.1 GHz band and 6x5MHz in the 2.6 GHz band. KPN did however cancel its dividend for 2012 and reduced its plans for payments to shareholder in 2013 to help fund the spectrum purchases. Tele2 obtained 2x10MHz spectrum in the 800 MHz band which it said it will use for a LTE network deployment. T-Mobile hasn't released any comment about its acquisitions at the time of going to press.
(December 14, 2012) cellular-news.com

France

France's competition authority stands ready to block some potential mergers among the country's mobile-phone operators, the authority's chief said, as he announced €183 million (US$239.3 million) in fines against two phone companies for alleged anticompetitive behavior. Head of France's Autorité de la Concurrence, said the antitrust regulator will keep a close eye on French operators as they discuss potential deals to merge or share networks in order to cut costs. French mobile-phone operators have been facing off in a brutal price war that has slashed phone bills and eaten into profits, following January's launch of a new cut-rate mobile operator, dubbed Free Mobile, from Iliad SA. In recent months, Vivendi SA's SFR has, for instance, held exploratory talks with operators in France about potential network-sharing deals or even outright mergers, according to people close to the talks. France's government asked the competition authority to render an opinion on the feasibility of network agreements early next year, as it looks to blunt job cuts at the operators. The authority announced that it is levying a €117.4 million fine on France Telecom SA and a €65.7 million fine on SFR for mobile plans between 2005 and 2008 that offered customers unlimited calls, but only to other customers of the same operator. The deals created a "tribal" effect that a hurt smaller operator, Bouygues SA's Bouygues Telecom, the commission said. Both SFR and France Télécom said they plan to appeal the decision, and noted that it is based on fee structures that have since been replaced as the mobile market has evolved. Now most operators offer plans with unlimited calls to any mobile customer. One group of unions also expressed "consternation" about the decision, saying that the fines "can only enrich the state at the expense of the already ailing telecoms sector.
(December 13, 2012) online.wsj.com

France's Bouygues Telecom has won a case against the two larger mobile networks after it accused them of abusing their dominant market position. During 2005-2008, both France Telecom/Orange and SFR offered unlimited voice calls to three other phone numbers that were on the same mobile network. Bouygues Telecom filed a complaint in October 2006 arguing that it was put at an unfair advantage with regards to these unlimited packages compared to Orange and SFR due to its smaller subscriber base and the fact that, at the time, they were the newest entrant on the market. Earlier today the French Competition Authority (ADLC) upheld the complaint, and issued fines of EUR117.4 million against Orange and EUR 67.5 million against SFR. Orange said that it intends to lodge an appeal with the relevant legal authorities against the Competition Authority's ruling. Bouygues Telecom says that it will now consider suing the two companies for compensation.
(December 13, 2012) cellular-news.com

The Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) has launched a consultation on its plans for the development of a spectrum management strategy for the 1800MHz band. The regulator has invited comments from interested stakeholders on the plans, which are 'intended to address increasing demand for access to spectrum in the 1800MHz band from various industry sectors and provide suitable short- and long-term arrangements'. Having issued a paper on a strategy plan for the 1800MHz band back in October 2012, the following month the ACMA held a stakeholder workshop regarding the matter at its Sydney office. In the latest development the regulator has issued the first of three papers, which examines regional and remote apparatus licenses in the 1800MHz band, with the regulator noting: 'The purpose of this paper is to set out the ACMA's proposed changes to current regulatory and licensing arrangements to allow mobile services to operate under public telecommunications services (PTS) apparatus licenses in the 1800MHz band in regional and remote areas of Australia. The proposed changes are temporary and will be in place until long-term planning for the band is completed and implemented.' Two further discussion papers are expected to be released covering: the possible future expansion of spectrum licensing arrangements in regional and remote areas; and the proposal to develop arrangements to encourage greater spectrum sharing within and between industries. No date for the publication of the papers has, however, been announced.
(December 10, 2012) telegeography.com

The Autorite de Regulation des Communications Electroniques et des Postes (ARCEP) has announced a new maximum termination rate for voice calls in French overseas territories. The rate, which is effective from January 1, 2013, has been set at EUR0.01 (US$0.01) per minute and applies to operators in the Antilles-Guyane region (incorporating Martinique, Guadeloupe and French Guiana) as well as Reunion and Mayotte. (**December 5, 2012) telegeography.com**

Norway

The offices of Norway's Telenor were raided earlier today by competition authorities apparently investigating allegations that the company has abused its dominant position in the local telecoms market. The EFTA Surveillance Authority confirmed that its officials, assisted by the national competition authority, carried out the unannounced inspections at Telenor offices. The EFTA Surveillance Authority said that it has reason to believe that the company may have infringed the competition rules of the EEA Agreement. Surprise inspections are a preliminary step in investigations into suspected restrictive practices. The fact that the EFTA Surveillance Authority carries out such inspections does not mean that the companies are guilty of anti-competitive behavior; nor does it prejudge the outcome of the investigation itself. Telenor confirmed that the visits had taken place and said that it complies with all legislation concerning its operations. **(December 4, 2012) cellular-news.com**

Czech Republic

Telecoms regulator the Czech Telecommunication Office (CTU) is considering implementing new measures in a bid to open up the country's mobile market. The watchdog is keen to see a newcomer enter the fray after its market analysis concluded that 'power was concentrated in too few hands'. Specifically, the CTU is mindful that current legislation does not encourage virtual resellers, noting that the absence of wholesale offers that would allow mobile virtual network operators (MVNOs) to set up business there. As it stands, the Czech cellular market is dominated by three heavyweights – Telefonica's local unit Telefonica O2 Czech Republic, Deutsche Telekom's T-Mobile and Vodafone Czech Republic. Going forward, the CTU is considering bringing in fresh rules in the area of price regulation in mobile services in an effort to ease the entry of new players in the market. Separately, it is also running a competitive tender of frequencies for fourth-generation (4G) mobile services, but has yet to set a date for the auction. The three incumbents are set to bid for the 4G frequencies on offer, alongside would-be newcomer PPF Mobile Services, part of Czech financial group PPF. Telecoms regulator the Czech Telecommunication Office (CTU) is considering implementing new measures in a bid to open up the country's mobile market, Reuters reports. The watchdog is keen to see a newcomer enter the fray after its market analysis concluded that 'power was concentrated in too few hands'. Specifically, the CTU is mindful that current legislation does not encourage virtual resellers, noting that the absence of wholesale offers that would allow mobile virtual network operators (MVNOs) to set up business there. As it stands, the Czech cellular market is dominated by three heavyweights – Telefonica's local unit Telefonica O2 Czech Republic, Deutsche Telekom's T-Mobile and Vodafone Czech Republic. Going forward, the CTU is considering bringing in fresh rules in the area of price regulation in mobile services in an effort to ease the entry of new players in the market. Separately, it is also running a competitive tender of frequencies for fourth-generation (4G) mobile services, but has yet to set a date for the auction. The three incumbents are set to bid for the 4G frequencies on offer, alongside would-be newcomer PPF Mobile Services, part of Czech financial group PPF. **(December 26, 2012) reuters.com**

Romania

The National Authority for Management and Regulation of Communications (ANCOM) has issued a draft decision on amendments to the country's general authorization framework under which would-be operators of electronic communications networks and/or services notify and register details of their activities with the watchdog. ANCOM announced that alterations were made following consultation with industry players, to comply with the latest provisions of electronic communications legislation, and largely relate to issues including 'security and integrity of networks and services, providing networks and electronic communications services in special situations, numbering resource requirements, technical requirements for retransmission services/broadcasting and content description of networks and services.' The regulator says the draft ensures 'a higher degree of safety and transparency' and increases the accountability of providers in terms of security and integrity, by obliging them to inform users about 'security incidents' and making it mandatory for all providers to establish communications with public authorities for disaster management purposes. The draft also opens the possibility that registered (authorized) providers will have the right to use certain numbering resources without a separate application. Regarding retransmission of audio/visual media, in order to protect the end-user, providers must agree to a set of industry-specific technical parameters. The decisions await submission for publication to the Official Gazette. **(December 6, 2012) telegeography.com**

Lithuania

The Communications Regulatory Authority (RRT) has set the new maximum termination rates that can be charged by fixed line incumbent TEO LT and mobile operators Omnitel, Bite Lithuania and Tele2. From April 1, 2013 rates will fall gradually from LTL0.0328 (US$0.012) per minute for fixed line calls to LTL0.0211, while mobile termination rates will drop from LTL0.056 per minute to LTL0.036. The regulator said that the rates will be valid until new fees can be determined based on the cost accounting methodology recommended by the European Commission.
(December 20, 2012) telegeography.com

Portugal

Portuguese telecoms watchdog Autoridade Nacional de Comunicacoes (ANACOM) has approved the revocation of the right to use fixed wireless access (FWA) frequencies from Sonaecom-owned telco Optimus. Optimus wants to return spectrum in the 24GHz-25GHz band, noting that it prefers to develop other broadband technologies instead. It expects to migrate all customers currently using its FWA-based services to new platforms by the end of this year. The revocation will come into effect on December 31.
(December 19, 2012) telegeography.com

Croatia

The Croatian Postal and Electronic Communications Agency (HAKOM) issued a decision to reduce annual fees for the use of mobile radio spectrum by 20% in 2013. The regulator states that during the past four years spectrum fees have decreased by over 40% while other regulatory fees have been reduced by 22%, despite HAKOM relying solely on fees from operators for funding as it is not a direct recipient of the state budget. **(December 10, 2012) telegeography.com**

Moldova

Moldova's telecom regulator, the National Regulatory Agency for Electronic Communications and Information Technology (ANRCETI), has announced that it is to auction a new wireless broadband license, offering 50MHz of spectrum between 3750MHz and 3800MHz. According to a report the 15-year concession will be auctioned with a starting price of EUR1 (US$1.30). A commercial launch is expected within one year of the license being issued; a winning bidder which already offers wireless services in Moldova must agree to reach 30% population coverage with the new network within 18 months, while a new entrant will be given 36 months to reach the same level of coverage. The 3600MHz-3800MHz band is generally used for WiMAX-based wireless broadband services. Moldova recently saw the award of spectrum for 2600MHz Long Term Evolution (LTE) 4G wireless services, with cellular operators Orange and Moldcell both going on to launch their first LTE networks towards the end of last month. **(December 7, 2012) telegeography.com**

South Africa

The Independent Communications Authority of South Africa informed all interested stakeholders of its intention to publish the review of the National Radio Frequency Plan (NRFP). The purpose of this review is to ensure that the NRFP reflects the final acts of the recent World Radio Conference of 2012 (WRC 12); and in line with the latest version of the International Telecommunication's Radio Regulations. The goal is also to ensure that it is consistent with the Southern African Development Community Frequency Allocation Plan (SADC FAP). This process is, among others, aimed at reviewing the existing NRFP to ensure that spectrum allocations reflect the usage of the radio frequency spectrum until the next WRC in 2015. The review will also be carried out parallel with the Frequency Migration Plan (FMP) process which is aimed at addressing the frequency migrations identified during the evolution of the earlier national radio frequency plans starting with SABRE 1 of 1997 through to the requirements, following the ITU's World Radio Conferences including the WRC 12. In addition, the Authority will, on December 24, 2012, publish second Draft Frequency Migration Plan which has taken into consideration the comments made in the initial submissions, public hearings and supplementary submissions. It also includes the framework for the development of the 'Spectrum Assignment Plan' on the implementation of specific bands earmarked for migration and those identified in the future National Radio Frequency Plan. **(December 27, 2012) icasa.org.za**

Nigeria

Telecoms regulator, the NCC has warned the mobile networks that they face a second round of fines if their network Quality of Service does not improve. Earlier this year, the regulator hit the networks will collective fines of N1.17 billion (US$7.4 million) after it found that they were missing key performance indicators for network performance. Executive Vice Chairman of the NCC issued the warning at a conference attended by the telecoms industry last week. NCC monitors every month operators for QoS.
(December 16, 2012) cellular-news.com

The Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC) is set to begin testing mobile number portability (MNP), ahead of a planned launch of the long-delayed service in the first quarter of next year. NCC said that the test run of MNP is scheduled to begin this month in order to address any problems before the full introduction of the service. The introduction of MNP was first considered by the NCC in the third quarter of 2007, but the commission has been waiting for the conclusion of SIM registration in the country before it officially launches the service, which enables a subscriber to retain their mobile phone number if they switch provider. The NCC announced in October 2011 that it had selected a consortium of three companies – Interconnect Clearinghouse Nigeria, Saab Grintek and Telcordia – to set up and implement number portability for the first five years. **(December 6, 2012) IT News Africa**

Uganda

Country's already crowded wireless market is expecting a seventh operator to launch in the first half of 2013. Sure Telecom, backed by Cyprus-based Timeturns Holdings, tested its first GSM call late last week, and expects to stage a full commercial launch within the next six months. The telco received its public infrastructure provider (PIP) and public service provider (PSP) concessions in July 2007, but progress since then has been faltering and the telco has repeatedly pushed back its expected launch date, originally scheduled for late-2011. Sure revealed in mid-2011 that it was undeterred by the fierce competition in the Ugandan wireless market and was planning to offset potentially low profitability in that sector by investing in fixed line networks. There are currently six operational cellcos in Uganda namely MTN Uganda, Airtel Uganda, Uganda Telecom Ltd (UTL), Warid Telecom, Orange Uganda and i-Tel, whilst fixed voice and data markets are dominated by UTL and MTN, though a number of WiMAX operators also compete in those segments. Further, Uganda's fixed telephony space has seen rapid growth recently, with the total subscriber base increasing by around 40% annually for the last three years. **(December 19, 2012) Daily New Vision**

Cameroon

Cameroon has awarded its third mobile operator's license to Vietnam's Viettel, a move that breaks its restrictive mobile market structure as it heralds the arrival of 3G mobile technology into the country soon. The new operator, expected to provide 2G and 3G services, will cover 81% of the country when it begins operations, the minister of Posts and Telecommunications said in a statement. Industry experts have said Viettel, which will be investing 200 billion FCFA (Us$394 million) in Cameroon, could cause a major shakeup in the nation's telecommunications landscape especially if it offers cheaper and better services compared to the operators already on the ground. Others have said the country's mobile market, one of the few in Africa that still had only two mobile operators in 2012, will rapidly catch up with others that are fast growing in the region. A forecast by Pyramid Research, a firm which investigates communications, media and technology markets worldwide, says the new competitor and local reseller, Eto'o Telecom, could capture a mobile market share of 6.8% by 2017 and after more than doubling penetration in 2014. Currently, Cameroon has some 11 million subscribers, representing a population penetration level of around 50%. This will send the shares of local operators, South Africa's MTN and France Telecom's Orange Cameroon, plummeting to 48.7% and 44.5% respectively, it adds. Three other operators- India's Bharti Airtel, Maroc Telecom and Korea Telecom- were also in the running for the much-awaited license. Early this year the regulator, Telecommunications Regulatory Agency (ART), stepped in to quell rumors that a new company, founded by Cameroon international football star Samuel Eto'o, had clinched the license for the country's third mobile telephone operator. Claims by the company, Eto'o Telecom, that it had sold out its initial 50,000 SIM cards late last year within days of a pre-launch sale helped propagate the rumors. The company had only been authorized to re-sell telephone traffic for already existing mobile telephone companies, ART said. Also, the re-entry into the market by fixed-line incumbent, Cameroon Telecommunications (CAMTEL) as the third player, had been dropped following controversy regarding its license. **(December 11, 2012) africareview.com**

Australia

The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) has published a discussion paper calling for submissions on two specific measures developed by fixed line incumbent Telstra as part of its plan to migrate customers to the in-deployment National Broadband Network (NBN). The measures in question relate to a specific process that will be used by NBN Co, which is known as the 'pull through process'. Detailing the measure, the regulator noted that in some 'limited circumstances' the company overseeing the construction and management of the fiber infrastructure, NBN Co, 'may need to use an existing copper or HFC line to pull the NBN fiber through the conduit that leads from the street to the premises to connect that premise to the NBN'. As part of the migration plan, Telstra is required to set out procedures for collecting consent from wholesale customers to pull through lines over which they are providing services, as well as outlining what happens if the process is not successful. With the ACCC claiming that Telstra's proposals may have 'important implications for the ability of wholesale customers to minimize disruption to the supply of communication services to consumers', it has invited comments from interested parties on the matter. Submissions must be made before the deadline of February 1, 2013. **(December 18, 2012) telegeography.com**

The Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) has released a set of draft rules directing the country's various telcos to inform consumers of exact mobile costs and charges while roaming overseas. Additionally, the Australian regulator likewise wants mobile carriers and operators to provide mobile users specific information about the costs of calls and data in the country that the consumer is currently in. Telcos will likewise be required to advise customers on mobile roaming reduction tips as well as be provided with tools that will enable them to keep tabs of their mobile roaming usages. ACMA said the proposed rules were meant to standardize the industry's current decrees on mobile roaming rules and costs, after receiving numerous complaints from disgruntled mobile users of excessive bill charges. Complaints ranged from being charged for a whopping $148,000 after a 9-week European holiday. Others were slapped with $38,000 and $18,000 bills. Data collected by ACMA showed disputed roaming charges complaints jumped to more than 4,100, 70% up in 2011-12. The office of the Telecommunications Industry Obmudman, in the last 15 months alone, has received mobile roaming complaints translating to about $8 million in disputed charges. Apparently, consumers were not aware of the risk of being billed for expensive international roaming services. Australian telcos are expected to comment on the proposal until May 2013. **(December 14, 2012) au.ibtimes.com**

The telecoms regulator has releases a draft proposal to manage "bill shock" issues when mobile phone users are roaming overseas. The proposed standard would require telecommunications companies to warn consumers they are roaming; and provide country specific information the costs of calls and data use when they switch on their mobile telephone overseas. The draft Standard also proposes that telcos be required to give their customers a low cost way to decline the use of mobile services while overseas and tools to monitor and manage usage while overseas. These measures build on obligations in the Telecommunications Consumer Protection Code registered by the ACMA earlier this year. "These measures are all aimed at reducing "bill shock", where consumers who use a mobile device overseas can face unexpected high charges upon their return," said ACMA Chairman, Chris Chapman. "These charges can run into hundreds or thousands of dollars for only a limited period of overseas use, as costs accrue not only for calls and texts but, increasingly, high data usage as "ever on" Smartphones become more prevalent." The ACMA is inviting the public and all interested parties to provide feedback on the draft standard. In particular, it is seeking information on any technical impediments to the standard and the likely cost to industry of making the proposed changes. The standard is being developed following a Direction from the Minister of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy in August. The ACMA is not able to regulate roaming charges directly -- the broader issues remain the subject of separate consideration by Government. The Minister's direction requires the ACMA to make the standard by May 2013. **(December 13, 2012) cellular-news.com**

Brunei

Brunei telecoms regulator the Authority for Info-communications Technology Industry (AITI) has released a consultation paper regarding spectrum in the 1800MHz band, which it says is the only vacant frequency band available for 'immediate deployment'. With this in mind, the watchdog notes that the coordination of the re-farming of the 2.5GHz band is 'ongoing'. The 1800MHz band is comprised of 2×75MHz blocks of paired spectrum, and the AITI intends to make available 2×5MHz lots covering the lower and upper band. Going forward, the AITI proposes to distribute two operating licenses, which will be distributed following a so-called 'beauty contest'; concessions will be valid for 15 years apiece and come with an annual charge of just BTN100,000 (US$1,843). The AITI considers the 1800MHz band suitable for the deployment of Long Term Evolution (LTE) technology, and would-be licensees must agree to achieve nationwide coverage within 36 months. The closing date for the consultation is December 14, 2012.
(December 3, 2012) telegeography.com

China

China's telecom industry regulator is mulling plans to launch a pilot program for the telecom resale business, which would allow wireless service providers to resell mobile services next year. There has been market speculation that the MIIT might issue mobile virtual network operator (MVNO) licenses as early as June, however the source said the MIIT has yet to determine a timetable. MVNO licenses allow companies which do not own wireless networks or facilities to resell wholesale services such as wireless call time to other companies purchased from telecom carriers. But the source confirmed that the MIIT has formed a special team to study the mobile telecom resale business and a preliminary plan has been worked out which includes regulations for filing requirements and transaction procedures. The plan is expected to be released in coming weeks. The source said all companies, including private players, that meet the requirements will be allowed to apply for the business. Industry insiders earlier speculated that Internet giant Tencent Inc. would be granted the first MVNO license. The ministry's move follows on a guideline issued June 27 in which the MIIT said it would encourage private sector participation in the telecom resale business. However, the news triggered market concern over competition between existing telecom operators and MVNOs. Telecom industry analyst Fu Liang said telecom operators and MVNOs will likely cooperate in the resale business, as telecom operators will be able to outsource less profitable services to MVNOs, which can repackage the services with added value. "Telecom operators and MVNOs can both contribute to the growth of the mobile telecom market and enjoy the profits together," said Fu. But Fu said that it would be difficult for MVNOs to rely solely on the telecom resale business. Gaming, network infrastructure and e-commerce are all areas that wireless carriers can expand on. "A major concern going forward is whether MVNOs will be mature enough to compete. Traditional telecom operators will be expected to use their market clout in pricing policy to limit the growth of MVNOs," said Fu, adding that the market's development will rely on competition policy. **(December 26, 2012) english.caixin.com**

Thailand

National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission (NBTC) signed and handed over the 2100MHz 3G mobile network operating licenses to the three winners of the mid-October auction, Advanced Info Service (AIS, via its Advanced Wireless Network subsidiary), Digital Total Access Communications (DTAC, via its DTAC Network unit) and True Corp subsidiary Real Future. The 15-year licenses became valid from December 7, allowing the private sector operators to roll out 3G networks and services outside of state revenue sharing build-operate-transfer (BTO) contracts. The three license winners have requested a combined 20 million mobile phone numbers for their 2100MHz 3G networks during the first year, and the NBTC is expected to allocate the numbers by March, with the first services thought likely to be launched in April. Largest cellco AIS alone had been expected to request ten million 3G numbers initially. NBTC also declared that now the 3G licensing process was wrapped up – barring any further problems from pending legal challenges to the auction from a group of senators – the NBTC would focus on its next priority to auction 1800MHz licenses for 4G LTE services. NBTC remarked that all three license holders will be able to establish their new networks in major cities within a few months and complete coverage of 50% of the population within the first year, beating a licensing requirement to cover half the population within two years. The three companies must comply with regulations governing the speed of mobile data transmission and standards of telecoms service quality. Another condition of 3G service launch is that the licensees must offer voice and data service tariffs at rates 15% lower than the average of all operators in the market as of December 7; the NBTC is currently calculating the benchmark prices. AIS expects to launch the first phase of its 2100MHz 3G services by June 2013 at the latest, and some earlier projections said it could launch an initial service by the end of March. This week AIS's board approved a CAPEX budget of THB13 billion (US$424 million) for 2013 to invest in 2100MHz network rollout.
(December 13, 2012) The Nation

A Thai court has rejected an attempt to block the formal hand-over of the recently auctioned 3G licenses to the three mobile networks. The auction of the licenses has been subject to court action after various special interest groups tried to argue that they were flawed and lacked competition. All the licenses were sold at the reserve price. In the latest case, Thailand's Administrative Court ruled that the Office of the Ombudsman could not seek a ban on the issuance of the licenses, because it is not a stakeholder in the original auction. The Office of the Ombudsman is an advisory body and can only submit recommendations to government bodies who themselves then may take action. The Office claims that the auction was not free or fair due to the way it was structured. Other investigations though have found no evidence to support various allegations of collusion between the networks. The regulator is still expected to be able to formally hand over the licenses before the end of this year. **(December 3, 2012) cellular-news.com**

Thailand's Central Administrative Court announced that it has rejected a petition lodged by the Office of the Ombudsman to investigate the 2100MHz 3G license auction held in October, clearing an obstacle for the National Broadcasting & Telecommunications Commission (NBTC) to officially issue the concessions to the three winning bidders, AIS, DTAC and True. A group of senators had submitted the petition alleging that the NBTC's telecom committee's endorsement of the 2100MHz license auction was illegal, on the basis that legislation stated that the regulator's entire board should ratify the result, although the board of the NBTC did subsequently issue its official approval of the telecom committee's decision. **(December 3, 2012) telegeography.com**

Indonesia

The Indonesian Communications and Information Ministry plans to auction the two remaining blocks of 2.1 GHz spectrum. Ten of the twelve spectrum blocks have already been awarded to five mobile operators for 3G services. The auction process has already begun with the start of the selection period. The actual auction is set to take place in March next year. Telkomsel has shown its interest to participate in the auction, as has Indosat. XL Axiata said the operator was serious about gaining more spectrum as well.
(December 21, 2012) The Jakarta Post

Malaysia

The Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) announced the allocation of spectrum in the 2600MHz band to eight operators. The licenses have been issued to: Celcom Axiata, DiGi Telecommunications, Maxis Broadband, Packet One Networks, Puncak Semangat, REDtone, U Mobile and YTL Communications. The Commission said that using the spectrum, operators will be able to offer mobile broadband speeds in excess of 100Mbps. Since the introduction of 3G and WiMAX technology in Malaysia, the demand for better quality mobile broadband service has intensified. Market readiness for 4G technology is also reaching its maturity as increasingly, many of the latest devices in the global market support the use of this technology; hence the economies of scale will bring much benefit to the country. The commission believes that it has struck a balance between ensuring healthy competition in the market and promoting industry development that will help spur growth for existing operators and new market entrants. With this new technology, the people can look forward to improvements in their digital lifestyle. For the business community, cloud services, teleworking, teleconferencing and video type applications can be better experienced whilst on the move.
(December 6, 2012) telecoms.com

Vietnam

The Ministry of Information and Communications (MIC) has cancelled the mobile virtual network operator (MVNO) license of Indochina Telecom (also known as Dong Duong Telecom), after the company failed to roll out commercial services. MIC sent a letter of ultimatum to Indochina Telecom and two other licensees earlier this year, warning the firms that they would lose their concessions if they failed to provide a timeframe for when they expected to begin operations. The Indochina Telecom was awarded a license allowing it to operate as an MVNO in August 2009. At that time, the firm said that it planned to share 3G network facilities with military-owned Viettel and launch services in 1Q10. A second MVNO license was awarded to state-owned VTC Telecom in June 2010, but like Indochina Telecom, the operator has not gone on to launch mobile services.
(December 12, 2012) Viet Nam News

Hong Kong

The Office of the Communications Authority (OFCA) has published an invitation to participate in the auction of 50MHz of radio spectrum in the 2.5GHz/2.6GHz band for the provision of wireless broadband services, including Long Term Evolution (LTE). OFCA said in a statement: 'The monthly mobile data usage in Hong Kong surged to 6,347 terabytes in September 2012, which is about twice and more than four times of the mobile data usage volume recorded during the same period in 2011 and 2010 respectively. Following the release of 90MHz of radio spectrum in the 2.5GHz/2.6GHz band in 2009 [which operators utilized for 4G services], the Communications Authority (CA) will make available an additional 50MHz of radio spectrum in the same frequency band to meet the industry's demand for additional radio spectrum for further development of the fourth generation mobile services.' The spectrum available in the upcoming auction is divided into five 2×5MHz frequency bands. New entrants to the mobile market and incumbent operators may participate, and may bid for one to all of the five bands. The government has set the reserve price at HKD150 million (US$19.4 million) for each frequency band. The actual spectrum utilization fee (SUF) payable will be determined by the auction exercise, to be conducted sometime in March 2013. The frequency bands will be assigned to the successful bidder(s) under unified carrier licenses to be granted by the CA with a validity period of 15 years. The successful bidder(s) will be required to provide within five years from the grant of the license mobile services coverage to a minimum of 50% of the Hong Kong population or fixed services coverage to at least 200 commercial and/or residential buildings in Hong Kong. OFCA will accept bidding applications on February 21 and 22, 2013. **(December 26, 2012) telegeography.com**

Singapore

Telecoms regulator, the IDA says that it has found that all three of the country's mobile operators M1, SingTel Mobile and StarHub Mobile failed to comply with its Quality of Service (QoS) standard for nation-wide outdoor areas for 3G mobile telephone services. The QoS framework for 3G mobile services was revised in January 2012, with more stringent standards kicking in from April 2012 onwards. For example, the standard for outdoor coverage was raised from 95% to 99%, and included an expansion in testing areas. With the implementation of the new standards, IDA audited the mobile operators' networks from April to June 2012, and initiated a joint survey with all three mobile operators in September 2012. The results of the joint survey showed that the nation-wide outdoor service coverage for all three mobile operators was below the QoS standard of at least 99 percent, even though they performed well in providing general mobile coverage. Their respective performances were weaker at newly included testing areas such as housing estates/town centers, outdoor recreational areas, and above ground MRT tracks. IDA has decided to impose a financial penalty of S$10,000 on each mobile operator for non-compliance with the QoS standard for the month of September 2012. In its decision, IDA took into consideration that the more stringent QoS standard for outdoor service coverage was recently increased on April 1, 2012, and that the mobile operators' non-compliance was primarily due to the inclusion of new testing areas accessible largely by foot only, which is a more stringent measurement compared to past tests that relied primarily on nation-wide drive tests.
(December 6, 2012) cellular-news.com

India

India's GSM mobile networks lost nearly 10 million customers in the month of November, according to statistics released by the Cellular Operators Association of India (COAI). The fall follows on from previous months declines as the mobile networks are more aggressive in culling inactive accounts. Bharti Airtel lost the most customers, seeing its customer base shrink by 2.8 million to 183.61 million, while Vodafone dropped by 2.38 million to 150.76 million. Idea Cellular lost 1.56 million customers, ending November with 114.14 million customers. Bharti Airtel, Vodafone and Idea Cellular collectively account for roughly 68 percent of the GSM market in the country. Aircel lost 1.46 million customers, to take its total down to 65.32 million at the end of November. The smaller networks, Uninor lost 437,915 customers, while Videocon lost 379,787 subscribers. The GSM industry as a whole lost 9.4 million customers, ending the month with 663.78 million. (**December 18, 2012) cellular-news.com**

India's mobile networks will have to pay less for the unsold radio spectrum from the recent GSM license auction after the government agreed to reduce the reserve price by nearly a third. The Empowered Group of Ministers (EGoM) decided to reduce the price by 30 percent for the unsold radio spectrum in Delhi, Mumbai, Rajasthan and Karnataka. The second attempt to sell the spectrum is expected to take place in March 2013 in order to fit into the government's current financial year. The EGoM also decided to auction a block of 900 MHz spectrum in Delhi, Mumbai and Kolkata. The reserve price for this spectrum band will be set at double that of the 1800 MHz band due to its better propagation characteristics. They are still deciding what to do with the CDMA allocated blocks of 800 MHz spectrum after all the bidders dropped out due to the high reserve prices.
(December 9, 2012) cellular-news.com

Indian mobile networks are to be required to abolish internal roaming fees from next March, according to plans by the Department of Telecoms. The mobile networks oppose the ban on roaming fees when a customer moves between licensed circles, and say that the loss of up to 10 percent of their revenues would require tariffs to rise. The move could however hit rural customers hardest, as the roaming fees are currently paid predominantly by the higher-spending urban customers. According to an internal DoT note seen by the Economic Times, the department has listed this move amongst 'key initiatives to be completed within the next three months'. The department also wants to expand the provision of Mobile Number Portability to allow migration to accounts in other circles without paying roaming fees. Currently, MNP is limited to accounts that remain within the same circle - or licensed area. **(December 4, 2012) Economic Times**

Javaid Akhtar Malik
Director Regulatory Affairs
SAMENA Telecommunications Council

The Future of Telecommunications Lies in Participation & Cross-Border Consensus

In Light of the Outcomes of World Conference on International Telecommunications 2012

International conferences serve important purposes for the nations of the world. They provide means and opportunities to cross-communicate national priorities; draw global attention to national developmental needs; offer platforms where varied perspectives can be exchanged; and increase the possibility of reaching consensus on matters that have an eventual impact on all nations. Thus an opportunity missed in being able to participate in an international decision-making event is akin to relinquishing the national right to discover new dimensions in international relations.

The World Conference on International Telecommunications 2012 (WCIT-12), organized by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU)—a member organization of the United Nations Development Group and a global body on telecommunications, with membership including 193 recognized countries and around 700 Sector Member, such as the SAMENA Telecommunications Council, and Associates—in the United Arab Emirates at the conclusion of the year 2012, was a decision-making opportunity for securing the future of telecommunications. The fact that participants from over 150 nations and an audience of1600 delegates took part in participating and observing the proceedings of the Conference speaks volumes of its international significance. The congregation of most Member States of the International Telecommunications Union also evidenced that the telecommunications shall remain integral to the success and progress of the human society, and to the economic well-being of all nations of the world.

Many nations—some with a dire necessity to redefine international relations to support their national needs and, equally, to develop their socio-economic machinery, enabled by the provision of and interoperability among next-generation communications technologies—inexplicably, chose not to witness the spectacle that was WCIT-12.

WCIT-12 was a contemporary display of global debate, dialogue, and compromise among nations, regarding the revision of the International Telecommunications Regulations (ITRs) treaty of 1988. The Conference was preceded by the submission of 1275 proposals from various Member States, submitted over the duration of the ITRs preparatory process. Prior to the Conference, the WCIT-12 website had received 13 million visits. During WCIT-12, 600 hours of interpretation were rendered and 700,000 words were translated. The Conference was an organizational marvel, supporting world-class facilities for those who chose to be part its grandeur.

The Conference was an organizational marvel, supporting world-class facilities for those who chose to be part its grandeur.

The World Conference was designed to engage all Member States in ensuring a sustainable future for the telecommunications industry, progress of which, for nearly a quarter of a century, has been governed by the ITRs treaty, signed in 1988 in Australia by 173 UN Member States. Effectively, the ITRs treaty of 1988 has served the countries of the world in adopting policies that facilitate cross-border communication, home-market development, and in realizing benefits that telecommunications services are recognized for providing, globally. The treaty will remain foundational to the progress of telecommunications industry and thus to the connected world of the future.

ITRs revisions discussed, proposed, and agreed upon (albeit not with full consensus) during the World Conference focused on the treaty's text in totality—including its ten Articles, two Appendices, and the Preamble—and its finer textual and contextual details—including, for example, terms such as "Telecommunications", "Authorized Operating Agencies", and "Unsolicited Bulk Electronic Communications". Some key revisions of the treaty included a resolution to create a universal number for emergency services, a provision for enabling greater transparency in mobile roaming prices, a measure to realize energy efficiency in telecoms network operations to attend to environmental needs, and a provision to ease landlocked countries' access to international connectivity and capacity via international submarine or terrestrial networks. The revisions excluded content-related aspects of telecommunications and, most certainly, the over-the-top (OTT) services.

Various points of contention, serving as a justification for refusal to reach global consensus, among other things, did surface. They revolved around catalyzing cooperation among Member States on network security matters, which was seen as a potential cause for concern, given its tendency to be misinterpreted as or used for cross-border information-sharing. Similarly, the use of the term "Unsolicited Bulk Electronic Communications" discomforted some delegations, as the term is not defined in the ITU Constitution and thus is open to interpretation.

Nonetheless, the final revision process of the ITRs, stretching to nearly 400 scheduled meetings, including the plenary sessions, which were webcasted in six languages, succeeded in addressing important aspects of modern telecommunications and their close integration with and importance to the evolving human society.

Exhibit 1: Aspects of Modern Telecommunications

As reiterated by the Secretary General of the ITU during the World Conference and as witnessed by various observers, including the writer himself, and in contrast to what may have been overly communicated prior to WCIT-12, the revised ITRs treaty has clearly avoided making references to or implying governance of the Internet by the ITU, or the latter's control thereof in any implicit way. While not a part of the binding text of the treaty, RESOLUTION PLEN/3 (DUBAI, 2012) – 1 and 2, reading "Member States to elaborate on their respective positions on international Internet-related technical, development and public-policy issues within the mandate of ITU at various ITU forums", passed at the conclusion of WCIT-12, has, however, been included in the Final Acts of the treaty.Nations with their

assessed contributions to the United Nations made, included 144 Member States with the right to vote and sign the ITRs, out of which 89 accepted the thirty-page Final Acts of the treaty. An additional 19 deferred their signatory status until formal approval by their administrations. A new attempt to reach global consensus will be made during the ITU's World Telecommunication/ICT Policy Forum (WTPF) 2013 and the 2014 ITU Plenipotentiary Conference.

AFGHANISTAN
ALGERIA
ANGOLA
SAUDI ARABIA
ARGENTINA
AZERBAIJAN
BAHRAIN
BANGLADESH
BARBADOS
BELIZE
BENIN
BHUTAN
BOTSWANA
BRAZIL
BRUNEI DARUSSALAM
BURKINA FASO
BURUNDI
CAMBODIA
CAPE VERDE
CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC
CHINA
COMOROS
REPUBLIC OF CONGO
REPUBLIC OF KOREA
COTE D'IVOIRE
CUBA
DJIBOUTI
DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
EGYPT
EL SALVADOR
UNITED ARAB EMIRATES
RUSSIAN FEDERATION
GABON
GHANA
GUATEMALA
GUYANA
HAITI
INDONESIA
ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN
IRAQ
JAMAICA
JORDAN
KAZAKHSTAN
KUWAIT
LESOTHO
LEBANON
LIBERIA
LIBYA
MALAYSIA
MALI
MOROCCO
MAURICE
MEXICO
MOZAMBIQUE
NAMIBIA
NEPAL
NIGER
NIGERIA
OMAN
UGANDA
UZBEKISTAN
PANAMA
PAPUA NEW GUINEA
PARAGUAY
QATAR
KYRGYZSTAN
RWANDA
LUCIA
SENEGAL
SIERRA LEONE
SINGAPORE
SOMALIA
SUDAN
SOUTH SUDAN
SRI LANKA
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA
SWAZILAND
TANZANIA
THAILAND
TOGO
TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO
TUNISIA
TURKEY
UKRAINE
URUGUAY
VENEZUELA
VIETNAM
YEMEN
ZIMBABWE

Exhibit 2: Signatories to the ITRs 2012

International cooperation in global telecommunications is integral to the success of the multi-stakeholder telecommunications model. Both the global communications industry and the nations that are developing advanced communications capabilities to meet national socio-economic needs, today, require concerted, cooperative efforts to frame progressive and future-friendly ICT policies.

A policy-influencing and consensus-building platform is what WCIT-12 was intended to serve as, and the opportunity to participate in such international decision-making processes should hold a priority for all stakeholders, as dictated by their relevance to the process.

Conferences and global congregational events that have the potential to shape national policies and agendas are valued by those nations that are keen on exercising their right to speak and, symbolically, demonstrating their national sovereignty. Such participation is integral to strengthening national readiness and openness toward embracing opportunities that international engagements may bring about directly or catalyze, indirectly. While the new ITRs will take effect in 2015 and, until then, the old ITRs will remain in force, it is hoped that all nations will embrace new understandings and compromises on the remaining issues that still require further discussion, to guarantee successful years ahead for the world's telecommunications industry.

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The views communicated here belong to the author and do not necessarily coincide with the SAMENA Council's own position.

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ROAMING NEWS

Nigeria: NCC to release new interconnect guidelines in 2013

Worried by the negative effect of accumulated interconnection bills on telecommunications operations, which has reached over N20 billion over a period of 11 years, the Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC) has begun fresh move to address the situation. One of the moves, according to NCC, is the planned release of fresh guidelines in January 2013 that would facilitate the process of getting quick approval from NCC to disconnect operators that are heavily indebted to interconnect billings, especially those that are reluctant to settle such bills. Director, Legal and Regulatory Services at NCC, Mrs. Josephine Amuwa told THISDAY in Lagos, in an interview during the NCC's organized forum on interconnection indebtedness in the telecommunications industry in Lagos recently. According to her "We have since discovered that getting approval from NCC by the telecoms operators to disconnect other operators that are owing them on interconnect billings, takes a long period of between six months and one year and we are saying that this is not good enough because most operators are taking undue advantage of it and they are holding on to creditors money and depriving the creditors of the opportunity to better utilize their money for network expansion, which they all needed to remain relevant in business. So we are looking at reducing the time period in getting approval from NCC, as well as amending the process of getting the approval in order to disconnect operators that are heavily indebted, and all these will be spelt out in the new guidelines that will be released in January 2013."

Openet Enables Leading EMEA Operator to Offer Data Roaming Service Passes to Better Serve Traveling Subscribers

Openet, a global leader of real-time transaction management software and services, announced a leading EMEA mobile operator is relying on the flexibility and configurability of Openet's PCC (policy and charging control) solutions to enable subscribers to activate roaming-specific data packages when traveling. The Openet PCC solution supported the timely launch of 40 new data roaming packages, offering rich subscriber choice that improved customer experience and increased data roaming revenues by over 35 percent. With 570 million mobile users traveling globally, roaming represents a lucrative potential source of revenue for operators. However, much of this revenue remains untapped because most roamers choose to turn off mobile data or substantially reduce usage for fear of bill shock. To differentiate itself in the EMEA region, the Openet customer expanded its data service portfolio to offer more than 40 new roaming service pass options. "Keeping track of roaming charges is a familiar burden to travelers, often causing them to avoid data services altogether," said Openet marketing vice president Chris Hoover. "Openet's comprehensive PCC ecosystem enables operators to offer dynamic ad hoc services such as data roaming service passes, which increase operator revenue and ensure subscribers have confidence and control over their data spends."

WBA Introduces Wi-Fi Roaming Interoperability Compliancy Program

The Wireless Broadband Alliance (WBA), the industry association focused on driving the next generation Wi-Fi experience, announced the launch of its Interoperability Compliancy Program (ICP), an initiative that will streamline the way WBA members work together on a common set of technical and commercial frameworks for Wi-Fi roaming. Key global players in the Wi-Fi ecosystem such as AT&T, Boingo Wireless, BT, China Mobile, KT, NTT DOCOMO, PCCW, Shaw Communications, Smart Communications and True have confirmed their participation. The program outlines compliancy guidelines for operators with different support levels. These range from simple integration requirements for roaming partners, to delivering support for the latest in session security, to more complex charging models and billing mechanisms required for the implementation of Next Generation Hotspots (NGH).

Many wireless operators have come to see public Wi-Fi as an essential component for mobile connectivity. However there remains fragmentation in the way devices connect to and roam on to Wi-Fi networks. The ICP will help the operator globally overcome these challenges by working together to align guidelines on security, data offload, device authentication, network implementation, network selection, charging models and billing mechanisms. The program will make it easier for operators to enter into roaming agreements. By promoting and advocating a common set of requirements and procedures for Wi-Fi roaming, carriers will better understand how to integrate their networks to support roaming. In addition, the WBA is making a tool available to its members called 'Wi-Fi Roaming Compliancy Check' to be used by operators to promote their compliancy and roaming capabilities in the community.

EC Halts CTU Plan to Regulate Wholesale Termination Rates

The European Commission (EC) has suspended the Czech telecoms watchdog; the Czech Telecommunications Office's (CTU's), proposal to implement regulation on wholesale termination rates, saying such a move would adversely affect consumers in the Czech Republic. Cellular-news writes that the Commission has reservations over the plan, arguing that the prices proposed by the CTU for certain termination rates a double those being levied in other countries where, in its opinion, appropriate price setting methodologies are properly applied. The sticking point apparently centers on the CTU's decision to impose wholesale prices that do not take into consideration next generation network-based 'efficient technologies'. The EC adjudges that the watchdog's proposed pricing regulation is not in line with EU telecoms rules, principles and objectives, which require EU member states to promote competition and the interests of the end user across the continent. Further, the commission has criticized the CTU's decision to regulate wholesale prices for fixed and mobile termination rates which apply to only one fixed line service provider and three out of the four mobile network operators. The EC says such a move would leave the other fixed and mobile players free from effective prices controls 'without clear justification'.

International Roaming Conference Held in Jersey a Success

A four day international roaming conference held in Jersey and hosted by JT, attracted 20 representatives from the world's leading mobile operators including those from the US, Canada, Jamaica, the United Arab Emirates and Ireland. Organized by a subgroup of the Global System for Mobile Association (GSMA), the roaming industry's governing body; the event was designed to bring together the working groups responsible for all commercial elements relating to international roaming.

JT's head of roaming, Cara Murphy is a member of the GSMA and deputy chair of one of the working groups which met in the Island, she says: "It's really important that the international roaming industry has a joined up approach to roaming practices and it is the role of the GSMA and its subgroups to ensure this is achieved. Meeting regularly in working groups like this means that we can draw upon the expertise and knowledge of those who are at the forefront of the international roaming industry so that the GSMA as a wider group can discuss and agree industry standards." Graeme Millar, CEO of JT, said: "The GSMA had a good turnout last week for the program of discussions and we were delighted to host such a successful conference in Jersey. The discussions which took place covered the most pertinent issues concerning the standardization, deployment and promotion of the GSM mobile telephone system around the world and the findings will be relayed back to the GSMA at its annual conference. JT is pleased to make an ongoing contribution towards generating efficiencies and ensuring standards and best practice are adhered to across all global mobile operators."

Boingo, NTT DOCOMO Partner for Global Roaming, Data Offload Solutions

Boingo Wireless, Inc. the Wi-Fi industry's leading provider of software and services worldwide announced the expansion of its relationship with NTT DOCOMO, INC., Japan's premier mobile communications company and the second largest mobile operator in Asia. Boingo is now providing Wi-Fi roaming and data offload services for NTT DOCOMO. The agreement will give NTT DOCOMO access to Boingo's global network of more than 600,000 hotspots, including hundreds of airports, thousands of hotels and restaurants, and myriad metropolitan hotzones worldwide. NTT DOCOMO will extend the Boingo worldwide network of managed and aggregated hotspots to its customers, providing a seamless global user experience.

MTel To cut roaming prices to the Balkans by 50 percent

Mobile phone operator MTel will cut the price for its roaming calls to the Balkans by 50% for the Christmas holidays, the Mobilkom Austria-owned company announced. The proposal applies to packages "MTel Balkan talk" and "Mtel business Balkan talk", which will cost BGN 29.5 (EUR 15.0) and BGN 22.5 respectively, VAT excluded until the end of January 2013.

TECHNOLOGY NEWS

Over-The-Top Mobile VOIP Usage to Hit One Billion

Users of Over-the-top (OTT) mobile VOIP services are predicted to hit one billion by 2017 – or one in seven mobile subscribers - which one research firm says reflects a "dramatic shift" in how voice traffic is carried over the next five years. In its five-year forecast, leading hi-tech analyst house, Juniper Research, found that improvements in network technology, increased competition and the move by telcos to join the OTT space would all come together to give the mobile Internet-voice market a "second wind". However, Juniper says that, as with Skype on the desktop, only a very small proportion will pay for the service, according to the research findings. "Many subscriber sign up to an OTT service without ever planning to pay a cent for it, and some industry players do not have a short-term revenue model at all," comments the report author, Anthony Cox. However, according to Cox, the survey found that that leading mobile VoIP players were becoming increasingly sophisticated in their service offerings, and were developing more ways to monetise their services.

Comcast Building Last-Mile Fiber in Houston to Service Businesses

Comcast Business Services is beefing up its infrastructure in Houston with a last-mile fiber-optic build-out that will connect more than 3,000 small- and medium-size businesses to its Ethernet, Internet, voice and cloud-based services. The fiber build started in August and is slated to be finished early next year. Comcast said the fiber investment was in response to strong demand for Comcast's Business Class offerings, as well as to support broader community efforts to expand the city's telecommunications and information technology infrastructure. Comcast Business Services will be extending its fiber network downtown and into a number of multi-tenant office buildings, including Chase Tower, the largest building in the state. To support the new services, Comcast confirmed that it had hired six new employees for a total of 26 employees on its enterprise sales team. The Houston project is part of a larger effort by Comcast Business Services to pursue network expansions in targeted metro regions to expand its fiber footprint and the reach of its services to more small- and mid-size businesses. Similar efforts are underway in Comcast's hometown of Philadelphia and in Chicago.

Sweden's Telia Launches TV Everywhere

Swedish telco Telia launched its new TV Everywhere service on December 18th, called 'Telia Play+' and offering more than 30 linear channels and a VOD library of over 2,500 movies, along with catch-up services for a limited number of channels. The service will include the full range of channels from Swedish broadcaster TV4, and will initially be available on iOS devices, although an app for Android devices will be made available in January 2013. It will also include a simple search functionality. The top-tier package will cost SEK 149 (US$ 22.33) per month for subscribers of its IPTV service, or SEK 74 per month on a standalone basis, offering channels such as BBC World News, Eurosport, National Geographic, Nickelodeon, Showtime, the Disney Channel, History Channel and Discovery Channel. The children's package will cost SEK 69 per month (or SEK 34 for IPTV subscribers) and offer Disney Channel, Disney Junior, Disney XD, Boomerang, Cartoon Network, Nickelodeon and Nick Jr. Finally, there will also be an HBO package costing SEK 79 per month (or free to IPTV subscribers). Telia had reached 560,000 subscribers for its IPTV service by the end of the third quarter of this year, up 13% from one year earlier.

Greece's Forthnet Launches FTTH pilot in Athens

Forthnet, a competitive telco based in Greece, launched a pilot Fiber to the Home (FTTH) service in Athens over which it will offer a triple play bundle to residential and business subscribers. Leveraging ADTRAN's (Nasdaq: ADTN) GPON (Gigabit passive optical network) equipment, the service provider is serving 2,000 homes with FTTH-based services in the municipality of Nea. The ADTRAN GPON solution allows a simplified migration of Forthnet's customer base to the new FTTH services, while enabling capacity and bandwidth scale for future demands of new media-rich services. With the ADTRAN GPON gear, Forthnet said it will be able to more easily migrate their existing customer base to the new FTTH-based services and scale to access whatever new over-the-top (OTT) and their own bandwidth-hungry services they develop in-house.

Orange Romania to Launch LTE/4G Services Before Christmas

Telecom operator Orange Romania will launch the LTE technology/4G services before Christmas. The launch of the 4G services will be accompanied by a commercial offer both for the business and residential sector, according to company representatives. At the end of September, Orange announced it will launch 4G services by the end of the year in the 1800 MHz frequency. "We are planning to start 4G services before the end of this year, pending the approval of the authorities, and starting with April 2014, it will be able to offer 4G services at its highest efficiency. We will start with 4G in Bucharest and then extend it to the rest of the country. We will be launching mass-market services at affordable prices," said Jean-Francois Fallacher, CEO of Orange Romania, at that time.

Swisscom Rolls Out First LTE in Switzerland

The European LTE landscape is unfortunately a fragmented one that favors large countries with large carriers. We can chalk up at least one victory for the smaller nation states, however: Switzerland is getting its first LTE network on November 29th. The country's main provider, Swisscom, is launching initial 4G coverage in 26 cities and regions using the LTE-equipped HTC One X (One XL abroad), quickly following up with the early December availability of the Galaxy S III, Galaxy Note II and Nokia Lumia 920. A Huawei USB stick and a ZTE hotspot will also be on tap. Customers won't need to spring for a new plan to use the new network on a basic level, although Swisscom's uncommon speed-based phone plans mean they'll be paying a stiff 169 francs ($181) per month to max out the 4G network. We imagine at least some will bite if it means speedy data in Zurich.

Tulix Systems Offering Multi Featured IPTV Billing System

Tulix Systems, Inc. announced that the company is now offering a new IPTV Billing System to its long list of products and services aimed at the IPTV and content delivery market. The Tulix Customer Care and IPTV billing system works for all content providers who offer their programming to their audience on a subscription basis. It also works seamlessly for content aggregators who are offering multiple channels, tiers and varied pricing based upon which package the subscriber chooses. It will easily work for content providers who offer access to their programming on PC, Mac, Multiple mobile devices and platforms and well as ROKU, Google TV, NEO TV and other IPTV systems. The Tulix IPTV Billing System joins a growing inventory of goods and services the company proudly offers to the streaming and content production industry.

China Mobile Sets Up First 4G Network for High-Speed Trains

China Mobile Ltd said on Friday that it has successfully deployed the world's first 4G network for high-speed trains. The mobile network covers the 60-kilometer long Jiaxing section of the Shanghai to Hangzhou high-speed railway. It adopted the homegrown TD-LTE technology, with download speeds reaching 15 megabytes per second. The wireless network will meet business people's daily surfing demands and support high-data traffic services, such as video and picture downloads. The network was designed to work smoothly with train speeds of more than 300 kilometers per hour. China Mobile, the nation's biggest telecom carrier, built 18 base stations for the Jiaxing section. Previously, China Mobile had built the world's first 4G network for a subway in Hangzhou. Download speeds at the Hangzhou subway can reach 40 megabytes per second.

Mobile Services Development Solution Launched for Africa

A new solution targeted at application and software developers in Africa is being launched by Orange. Emerginov is an open environment developed under an open source licence at Orange Labs. Orange is providing the source code for Emerginov to African organizations – institutions, academic organisations, NGOs, etc. - and assisting them in their mobile services development projects. The solution incorporates multiple open source software components and enables the development of applications based on SMS or on vocal interfaces. Together with mobile-embedded technologies, it can provide simple services, giving the mobile user access to expertise or to content in different fields such as health, agriculture and trade. The partners also benefit from an open-ended solution combining conventional telephone resources with access to IT services (web hosting, content storage, access to third-party APIs) from a simple web browser.