Role of ICT in Advancing Growth

Hani Al-Shakhs
Chief Executive Officer
Tawasul Telecom

EDITORIAL

Growth through ICTs

Information and communication technologies are proving their impact on multiple fronts, including on citizens' capacity-building, improving business productivity, addressing environmental needs, introducing better emergency response systems, addressing last-mile healthcare and financial access, and creating new revenue opportunities for telecommunications service providers and application developers. Industry predictions show that ICT related services will continue growing into trillions of dollars.

The trend in the rise of ICTs is causing telecommunications operators to transform accordingly and enrich their product portfolios with diversified digital services. Various telecoms operators, having realized their vision of transforming into smarter players, are using ICTs not only to complement their traditional revenue sources but also to gain new ones; some of which may earlier have been used strictly by information technology service providers. That is, IP-based systems and technologies are now allowing operators to meet more than telephony and basic data service needs: they can now offer new services, specific to their customers and enterprise clients' needs for communications, data access, managed software and hardware services, etc.

Current drivers of the ICTs lies around telephony and data services offered as standard network products, management of other networks connected to operators' own networks, M2M services (which are an area of discussion within the SAMENA Council, currently), data centers, customer relationship management solutions, IT services and strategies, convergent products, to name a few. Because telecoms network operators have strong inherent network capabilities, they are integral to the success of ICTs and the offerings that can be supported through those technologies. At the same time, telecoms operators are entitled to benefitting from new ICT offerings, provided, however, they direct new investments toward creating new platforms and think beyond traditional telecommunications services and assets.

The methods and pace of business transformation on the part of telecoms operators need to be defined very carefully, with the understanding that their evolving role requires being much more active and integrating as well as leveraging their assets and strengths to benefit from the opportunities that ICTs are bringing forth.

Yours truly,

Bocar A. BA
Chief Executive Officer
SAMENA Telecommunications Council

CONTENTS

EDITORIAL

REGIONAL NEWS

Roshan Telecom secures US$65 million IFC funding for 3G

Roshan Telecom has secured US$65 million funding from International Finance Corporation (IFC) for its 3G network. The debt financing will assist the Afghanistan's top telecom player to launch 3G and high speed data services to its six million customers. Since 2003, Roshan has received three earlier rounds of financing totaling almost $200 million. The mobile service provider already invested more than $550 million in infrastructure that provides coverage to over 65 percent of the population in 230 cities and towns in Afghanistan's 34 provinces. Roshan in a statement said it currently offers high-speed data services that are available nationwide and 3G will further complement the existing network infrastructure and provide faster access to services. Other emerging telecom markets such as Brazil and China had a better 3G subscriber base as well as penetration than India. Penetration rates in emerging markets like stands at: Indonesia (11 percent), South Africa (21 percent) and Philippines (11 percent), as per data compiled at the end of the fourth quarter of 2011. "In just a short period of time, the Afghan telecommunications market has grown rapidly and Roshan spearheaded that development. The ability to speak to one another is a basic human need and over ten years," said Karim Khoja, CEO of Roshan.

STC Provides FTTH to the residential complex of King Abdul Aziz City for science and Technology (KACST)

STC signs with King Abdul Aziz City for Science and Technology (KACST) a cooperation agreement in which STC shall provide high-capacity FTTH-based internet services to the Residential Complex of King Abdul Aziz City for Science and Technology. The agreement was signed by STC Vice President for Home Services Eng. Mazyad Nasser Al Harbi and KACST Vice President for Scientific Research Support Dr. Abdul Aziz Mohammed Al Swailem. Eng. Al Harbi said," STC shall spare no effort to provide the best infrastructure to KACST to help it sustain its stance among educational and scientific institutions via multi-play and integrated broadband solutions requiring a solid strategy centered on expanding FTTH across the Gulf states through deploying and operating FTTH infrastructure that attracted more than 100,000 customers with plans to connect around 1.5 million sites in 2014." KACST Vice President for Scientific Research Support Dr. Abdul Aziz Mohammed Al Swailem said," KACST pays greater attention to universities and scientific centers by providing high-capacity FTTH-based internet services that link them with local and international databases and keep them abreast of the latest technical and scientific breakthroughs."

Batelco named Advertiser of the Year at Dubai Lynx International Advertising Festival Awards

Batelco, Bahrain's leading telecoms services provider has been presented with the Advertiser of the Year award at the prestigious Dubai Lynx International Advertising Festival. The award is presented to the company that has distinguished itself for inspiring innovative marketing of their products and encouraging the creative work of their support agencies. Over the past two years, Batelco's advertising, produced by FP7, has won a total of 26 Dubai Lynx awards which has led to this great achievement in being named Advertiser of the Year. Batelco General Manager Consumer Division Muna Al Hashimi was in attendance to collect the award, in front of 1300 industry peers, at the major event held at the Madinat Jumeirah Arena, Dubai. Mrs. Al Hashimi was accompanied by Batelco Senior Manager Marketing and Communication Abdulla Abuidrees and Batelco Manager Public Relations Osama Alsaad.

STC launches Quick Net Recharge Cards

STC launches, for the first time in KSA, 3 categories of Quick Net Recharge Cards for postpaid Quick Net data SIM subscribers. The categories are the SR 50, 10 GB Card for 4 months, the SR 150 Unlimited Card for 1 month, and the SR 300 Unlimited Card for 3 months. Once the customer purchases Quick Net Card from STC outlet, he may recharge his data SIMS by sending a "155" SMS to 1500 * Recharge No.* ID No. then click "Send ", or through www.aljawal.net. sa, my.stc.com.sa, or a USSD from Quick Net modem. Once the customer gets a new recharge credit, he soon gets an SMS featuring the new recharge credit, the new package and the credit left as he inquires about SIM credit through # 166*.

England rugby legend Lawrence Dallaglio opens BT sport contact center

The launch of BT Sport will help boost the economy by creating more than 400 new jobs across the UK, it has been revealed. Rugby legend and TV commentator Lawrence Dallaglio opened the BT Sport contact center that will bring 75 new BT Sport customer service jobs to Accrington in Lancashire. BT and Lancashire County Council invested £3.2million refurbishing the former council building in Accrington, which already employs 150 people. The launch of BT Sport, which will show 38 live Barclays Premier League matches on TV, including 18 of the top pick games previously only shown on Sky, will also safeguard the employment of 187 BT people who are being retrained to work for BT Sport customer support. Gavin Patterson, chief executive of BT Retail, said: "BT Sport is an important new chapter for us and it also promises to give a boost to the UK economy by creating hundreds of new job opportunities across the UK.

du employs green initiatives to support UAE leadership's vision

du offers its congratulations to the people of the UAE on the inauguration of the new Shams 1 concentrating solar power plant. In a showing its support of the UAE leadership's

vision for a greener and more sustainable future, du has implemented several long-running initiatives that contribute to the nation's more environmentally friendly future. "His Highness Shaikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the President of the UAE, has a strong vision for our country that will lead us to a more sustainable future. Under his guidance, our nation has achieved many world firsts, including the adoption of a long term national initiative that will lead us to become more environmentally-conscious. The inauguration of Shams 1 is a strong step towards our greener future, and I offer my congratulations, on behalf of all my colleagues at du, to the leadership and the people of the UAE on this momentous occasion," said Osman Sultan, CEO,du.

In its recognition of the need to be a responsible company, du has demonstrated exemplary practices in both corporate governance and sustainability throughout its operations.

Qtel rebrands as Ooredoo in Qatar

Ooredoo, the group of companies formerly known as the Qtel Group, and the majority shareholder in Nawras, recently unveiled the new brand at a spectacular multimedia and theatrical event in Doha. Qatar Telecom (Qtel) became the first company in the group to unite under the new 'Ooredoo' identity in a move that will bring a new dimension to communications for the entire group of companies. Ross Cormack, Nawras CEO, said, "This is an exciting transition that marks the next step in the evolution of our major shareholder and strengthens our position as part of this global brand. The new identity highlights the customer centric values on which the group was founded. Customers in Oman will benefit from the unity of Ooredoo as all operators in the Group share a common goal to enrich the lives of people in the countries where they operate. Nawras is proud to be a part of Ooredoo." Speaking at the ceremony, H.E. Sheikh Abdullah Bin Mohammed Bin Saud Al Thani, Ooredoo Chairman, said, "We have always put our customers at the heart of our business, and this new name shows that we want to be closer to our customers and engage with them in everything that we do."

du's Work Skills Training Program 2013 teaches 150 Emiratis career-boosting essentials

In line with its efforts to empower Emiratis with the knowledge needed to forge a successful career, du has inducted 150 UAE national students into the third edition of its Work Skills Training Program. The vocationally-focused program is part of du's efforts to promote the social aspect of sustainability in the UAE, and will teach students from several local universities essential workplace skills. Participating universities – American University of Sharjah; United Arab Emirates (UAE) University; Higher Colleges of Technology; Khalifa University in both Abu Dhabi and Sharjah; Zayed University; University of Sharjah; American University in the Emirates, and Abu Dhabi University – each nominated students to join the program. Students in the program will have the chance to meet and interact with corporate trainers, who will teach them essential soft skills that are essential in the workplace, giving them a boost to their future careers. Upon completion, students are presented with a certificate during a Graduation Ceremony.

OPERATOR LEADER'S VISION

Hani Al-Shakhs is Chief Executive Officer of Tawasul Telecom, the leading MPLS service provider in the GCC region. Tawasul Telecom owns and operates the region's only interconnected, highly available MPLS network. Through this network, the company offers end-to-end, fully managed IPVPN services and operates as a one-stop shop for provisioning and support across borders. The Points of Presence are located in Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE, in addition to Egypt and the UK. Through an expansive network of regional and international partners, Tawasul Telecom offers global coverage. All nodes are multi-homed, and each link is carried on a different cable system, thus guaranteeing high availability. Moreover, the services are backed by carrier-grade Service Level Agreements (SLAs).

Mr. Al-Shakhs greatly contributed to foundation of Tawasul Telecom by setting up strong ties with regional operators and international carriers. Under his leadership, Tawasul Telecom increased the reliability of its network, doubled its revenue, and most significantly became most trusted carrier's carrier in the region. With more than 29 years of progressive experience in data communication field, strong technical and business qualifications and an impressive track record of more than 29 years of hands-on experience in strategic planning, business unit development, project and product management, and system engineering strategies, Mr. Al-Shakhs contributes to the continuous telecommunication development in the region.

Prior to Tawasul Telecom, Mr. Al-Shakhs worked as Senior Executive of Information Technology in Gulf Investment Corporation (GIC), a company delivering innovative investment and financial products and solutions to fosters regional economic growth and encourages economic diversification across the GCC region. In addition, Mr. Al-Shakhs served as a Vice Chairman in Oman Fiber Optic Company in the Sultanate of Oman. Oman Fiber is engaged in the design and manufacture of optical fiber and cables; trading of copper cables and cable laying services.

Hani Al-Shakhs
Chief Executive Officer
Tawasul Telecom

Q. **Please tell us about Tawasul Telecom's operations in the region.**

A. Tawasul Telecom is the industry leader in MPLS networking services in the GCC and Middle East, owning and operating the region's only truly redundant MPLS network. Our award winning service is designed to meet today's business connectivity needs including mission critical applications, financial software, and video conferencing. Backed by our world-class service level agreements, Tawasul Telecom is connecting the Middle East to the world.

Increasing demand and fragmented nature of telecoms in the region created an opportunity for Tawasul Telecom to provide easy, flexible solutions to acquiring world-class connectivity in the Middle East.

Q. **Which group of clients are you targeting and what core services are being offered by Tawasul Telecom to its clientele?**

A. Clients that would have most benefit from Tawasul Telecom are enterprises that have branches in the region, clients that require highly available, secure, private data connectivity, as well as the international carriers that have such clients. Our potential clients are specific to their location and service required.

Our target clients summaries to:

- Any Enterprise customer with more than 1 branch is an MPLS target customer
- Companies looking to reduce the costs of network equipment, and technical support staff.
- Any Enterprise relying on "Mission Critical Software" for its day-to-day operations.
- Companies with special privacy and security requirements.

Q. **Tawasul Telecom owns and operates the regions' only interconnected MPLS network. How do you believe it is serving your clients so they may focus on their core businesses?**

A. Tawasul Telecom specializes in its line of business-data connectivity in the region, and focusing on our core business continuously improves our services. Data connectivity is made simple for our local clients as well as for our international clients.

Most of our clients require Low latency, fast Implementation, bandwidth optimization, and we are able to guarantee our services via Service Level Agreements.

Telecom carriers know we provide their level of service and can guarantee it for their clients; financial institutions, aviation services industry, and services industry are able to run their mission-critical-software with full confidence, allowing them to focus their resources on their businesses. Our service level guarantees are based on robust infrastructure that defines reliability and redundancy of the services we provide.

Enabling private clouds for clients in the region simplifies contracting and reporting, support, scalability (easy expansion), bandwidth optimization and Privacy and Security.

Q. **What are the major upcoming ventures under focus by Tawasul Telecom?**

A. Tawasul Telecom will be expanding its network to include Asia through a Point of Presence in Singapore. This network expansion will allow us to tap into an ever-growing demand for high-quality data connectivity services between Asia and the Middle East.

Q. **How do you think Tawasul Telecom can collaborate with SAMENA Council to tackle the industry's key challenges within the region?**

A. It goes without saying that challenges affecting our industry will ultimately affect Tawasul Telecom as well. So we are keen to work with the Council to help strengthen the industry in our region. Our relationships with regional and global tier 1 operators, regional government entities, and technical expertise give Tawasul Telecom a wealth of knowledge and experience we are pleased to share with the SAMENA Council to help tackle existing and upcoming business and technical challenges.

Q. **Increased traffic and relatively flat revenues are a key economic challenge faced by all network operators. What should be the course of action to tackle this key issue?**

A. It is a natural phenomenon that revenues tend to decrease as the number of companies in the marketplace goes up. This creates healthy competition and improves standards industry wide. The challenge is to focus on innovation from a technical side, while continuing to expand into still underdeveloped market segments within the region.

Q. **Tawasul Telecom recently sponsored Capacity Middle East 2013 Conference. Please tell us about the participants' response and the events' outcome?**

A. Capacity events have proven to be an excellent opportunity to meet with our clients and partners, and to develop new relationships with local and global wholesalers.

As for Capacity Middle East 2013, we received very positive feedback during the event, and have made a reputation for ourselves for our service quality. We were able to come away with several very promising opportunities with new carrier partnerships by region. This was possible, in no small part, thanks to our teams, and behind-the-scenes staff that have been so committed to the success of Tawasul Telecom.

Q. **Please tell us about your alliance with Gulf Investment Corporation that is investing $16 million into Tawasul Telecom?**

A. Tawasul Telecom is a green-field project created by Gulf Investment Corporation and National Technology Enterprises Company. The primary goal was for Tawasul Telecom to play a significant role in developing the telecommunications infrastructure across the GCC.

Gulf Investment Corporation's investment represents continued belief and support for Tawasul Telecom's mission. It is also a reflection of Tawasul Telecom's success over the past several years, in continuous expansion of our network, improvement of its redundancy as well as improvement of our service offerings.

Q. What major contributions have you made to the telecom industry that inspired shaping the market trends or technology variation?

A. Tawasul Telecom is the first regional communications technology provider to offer easy-to-procure, fast connectivity across the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) region over a single redundant IP services network. It provides a one-stop managed network solution through the GCC and also operates a pan-GCC IP/MPLS network, which can support its business services and solutions.

In 2011, Tawasul Telecom was selected by Capacity to receive "The Best Niche / New Player" award for its specialized approach to the Middle Eastern market, in which it was able to establish a 'one-stop shop' for enterprises and international telecoms looking for connectivity in the Middle East.

Q. Would you like to share your thoughts with regards to your recent participation in SAMENA's Beyond Connectivity 2013?

A. The telecom industry is continuously growing, and having a regional platform like Samena is a tremendous opportunity for Tawasul Telecom to lend its voice and expertise "Beyond Connectivity 2013" was Tawasul Telecom's first opportunity to meet and work with the Council members. The event offered everything we had hoped for when we joined.

Network Readiness Index 2012

Researchers Note: Network Readiness Index measures the propensity for countries to exploit the opportunities offered by information and communications technology. The NRI seeks to better comprehend the impact of ICT on the competitiveness of nations. The NRI is a composite of three components: the environment for ICT offered by a given country or community (market, political and regulatory, infrastructure environment), the readiness of the community's key stakeholders (individuals, businesses, and governments) to use ICT, and finally the usage of ICT amongst these stakeholders. Help has been taken by the Global Information Technology Reports (2010, 2011 & 2012) published by, The World Economic Forum together with INSEAD. Data for Afghanistan, Iraq,
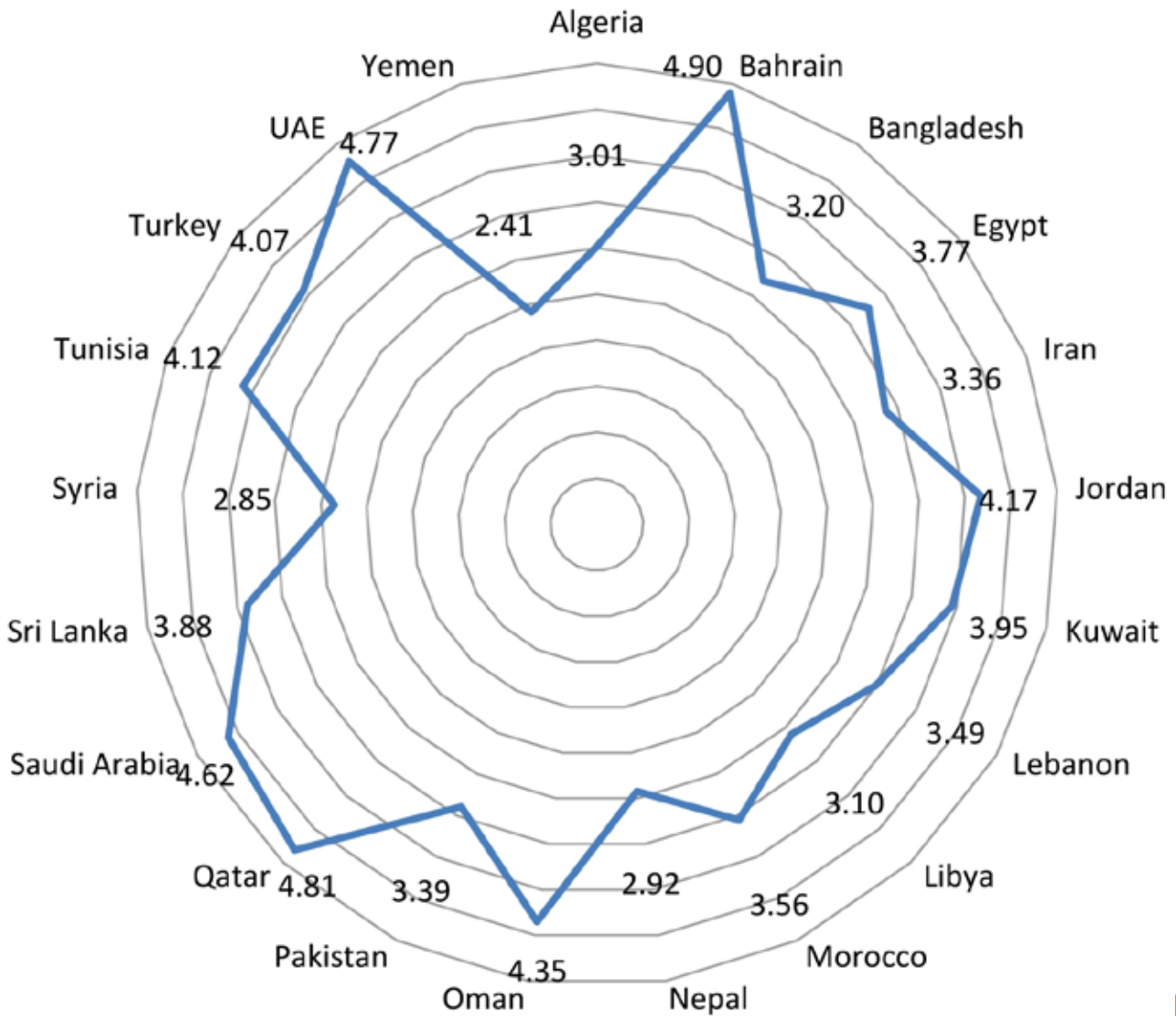
Research Note: Data has been extracted via The Global Information Technology Report 2012 by World Economic Forum & INSEAD and analyzed by SAMENA Council. The Network Readiness Index (NRI) is values between 1 to 7 with 1 being worst and 7 being best. Within SAMENA region Bahrain, Qatar and UAE are the highest ranked whereas Nepal, Syria and Yemen are the lowest ranked countries with respect to Network Readiness Index.

Image Source: SAMENA Telecommunications Council

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

Regional Rankings over 3 Years

Legend: ■ 2010 ■ 2011 ■ 2012

Country	2010	2011	2012
Algeria	18	17	18
Bahrain	2	3	1
Bangladesh	19	16	16
Egypt	9	10	11
Iran	14	15	15
Jordan	6	7	6
Kuwait	15	14	9
Lebanon	16	19	13
Libya	13	11	17
Morocco	20	20	12
Nepal	7	6	19
Oman	3	2	5
Pakistan	12	12	14
Qatar	4	4	2
Saudi Arabia	10	8	4
Sri Lanka	17	18	10
Syria	5	5	20
Tunisia	8	9	7
Turkey	11	13	8
UAE	1	1	3
Yemen	21	21	21
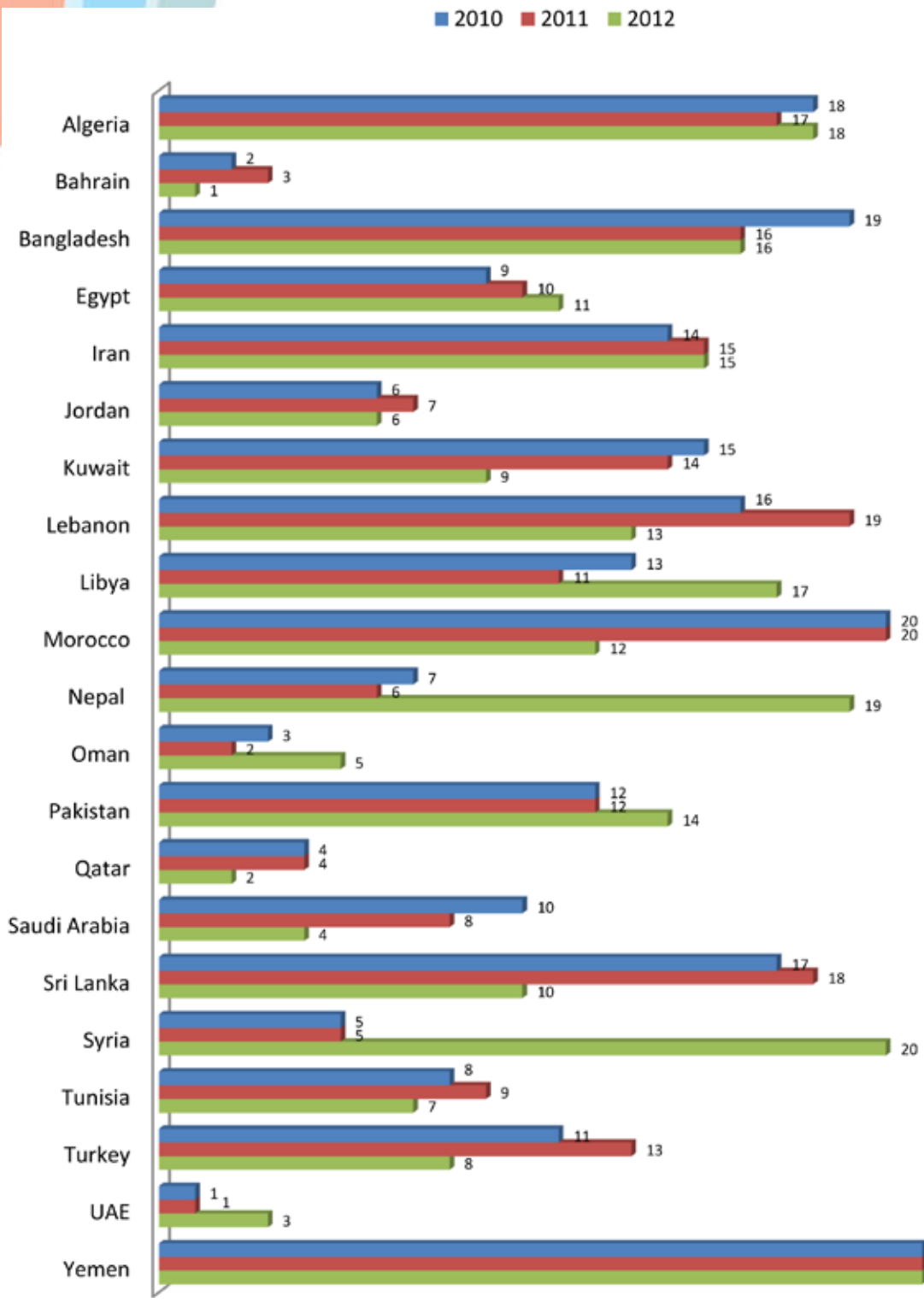
Research Note: Rankings for the year of 2010, 2011 and 2012 have been done based on the data available. UAE was leading in 2010 and 2011 but since then the top position has been taken by Bahrain which shows the overall sophistication within the Bahraini market. Yemen has been constantly placed at the lowest rank which shows that the Yemeni market still requires improved regulations as well as better services.

Image Source: SAMENA Telecommunications Council

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

Regional Average of NRI
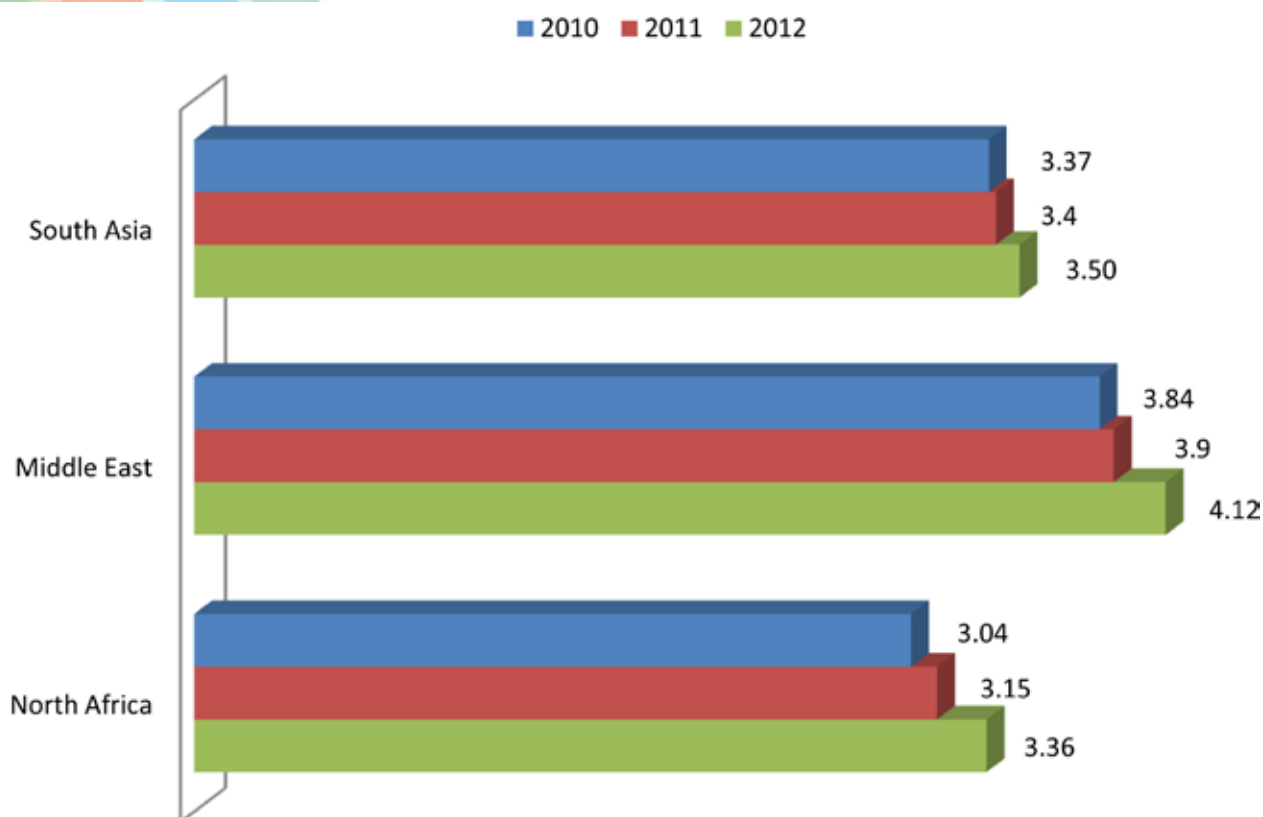
Research Note: A region-wise analysis of the SAMENA region has been done with the help of available data. We see that Middle East Region is faring better within the region in all three years. South Asia is 2nd in all 3 years whereas North Africa is placed 3rd. A significant positive observation is that all 3 regions has seen improved Network Readiness Index over the span of 3 years which shows that the overall services, infrastructure, policies etc. have improved collectively within the SAMENA region.

Image Source: SAMENA Telecommunications Council

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

SATELLITE NEWS

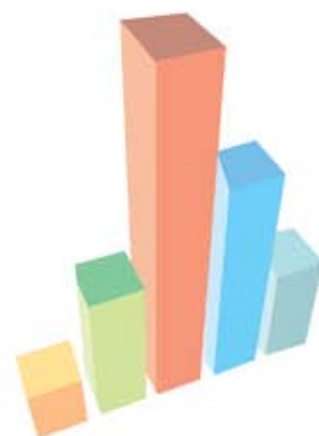## Harris Corporation and NOAA launch new reporting and tracking tool for weather satellite operations

Harris Corporation HRS and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) have developed and successfully deployed a new tool that will help track and report anomalies in critical weather satellite information. Weather forecasters, emergency managers, scientists and other environmental data users throughout the western hemisphere rely on the accuracy and availability of this information to rapidly analyze and disseminate weather information to the public. The Product Anomaly, Ticket, Relationship, Organization, and Notification (PATRON) tool was created for the Geostationary Operational Environmental Satellite, R Series (GOES-R) Ground Segment but was immediately implemented to support other environmental satellites in operation today. PATRON is a trouble reporting and tracking system for satellite weather products created by the National Environmental Satellite, Data, and Information Service's Office of Satellite Products and Operations (OSPO). Any abnormal occurrences in the process of receiving instrument data from the satellite, processing and formatting the data into usable weather products, and distributing the weather products to end users are considered anomalies.

Eutelsat, OneAccess to launch advanced enterprise services on Ka-Sat

Eutelsat Communications and OneAccess have announced a partnership to offer a new performance-enhanced platform for businesses, designed to deliver services operated on Eutelsat's Ka-Sat High Throughput Satellite in a secure VPN environment. According to the companies, the new service makes satellite communications even more affordable for businesses by delivering DSL-like service at DSL-like prices. For this, OneAccess and Eutelsat have developed a dedicated One1520 satellite router that incorporates integrated traffic acceleration, IP routing and IP-VPN secure transport to deliver 20Mbps download and 6Mbps upload. The platform is designed for delivering Internet access to businesses with dispersed networks of offices where maintaining a high-speed, secure, inter-branch communications network is critical. The high-speed broadband enables private networks for fast implementation of integrated backup or traffic offload solutions in highly secure environments, while lowering the total cost of ownership for both users and operators. The solution widens the scope of enterprise services through Ka-Sat, and is set to launch this month.

HISPASAT says Amazonas 3 satellite will launch commercially in April

Spanish-based company HISPASAT has successfully launched its tenth satellite, Amazonas 3, noting that the orbiter is currently in the trial stage but will begin delivering commercial services from April 2013. Hispasat's new satellite is designed to strengthen the firm's presence in the region – and specifically Brazil, as the country ramps up efforts to host the FIFA football World Cup in 2014 and the Olympic Games in 2016. Amazonas 3 was deployed via the Ariane 5 rocket, from the European Space Agency of Jourou, in French Guyana; it is operated by the Brazilian affiliate Hispamar Satellites. The new satellite employs 52 simultaneous transponders, 33 in Ku-Band, 19 in C-Band and nine spot beams in Ka-Band, and will be used to deliver multimedia services in Latin America, in particular satellite broadband internet services and HD DTT channel broadcasting.

Sea Launch and EchoStar reach preliminary agreement for launch services

Sea Launch AG and EchoStar Satellite Services, a wholly owned subsidiary of EchoStar, have announced that Sea Launch has been identified as the intended launch services provider for the launch of a satellite from the ocean-based Odyssey launch platform in 2015. Sea Launch's powerful Zenit-3SL vehicle is ideally suited for launching heavyweight-class spacecraft, with multiple restart capability and heavy-lift performance. Sea Launch's history with EchoStar dates back to 2003. Most recently it launched the EchoStar XI satellite. EchoStar Corporation is a leading global provider of satellite operations and video delivery solutions. EchoStar's wholly-owned subsidiary, Hughes, is the world's leading provider of satellite broadband services, delivering network technologies and managed services for enterprise and government customers in more than 100 countries.

Skycasters contracts iDirect for satellite internet upgrades

Skycasters has selected iDirect's Evolution Series X3 and X5 platform to provide high-speed, high-efficiency IP broadband connectivity for enterprise. The satellite routers feature highly efficient implementation of the DVB-S2 standard, and are designed for broadband requirements such as Internet and VPN, and to enhance access to enterprise networks, VoIP and video conferencing. Skycasters selected the iDirect Evolution product line for its modems' ability to perform ACM, according to Skycasters's President Mike Kister. ACM allows each satellite remote to attain the greatest amount of data throughput by choosing the best coding and modulation schedule available at that time. For example, a device in an area experiencing rain would receive different modulation and coding than a device in an area with clear skies. On the iDirect Evolution platform, the net impact would allow the satellite Internet service to slow down as the weather deteriorates in a specific area, rather than drop out completely.

Nupoint Systems selects Globalstar for M2M satellite connectivity

Globalstar Canada Satellite Co., a provider of mobile satellite voice and data services announced the signing of a three-year manufacturing, airtime and distribution agreement with Nupoint Systems to expand the company's M2M data communication service offerings beyond the reach of terrestrial (cellular) communication. Nupoint products and services integrated with Globalstar satellite data services will be used to provide two-way communications for M2M data collection and monitoring of customer assets including oil and gas wells, mining sites, water management systems, environmental/weather sites, pollution detection systems, early warning systems and remote security. Globalstar successfully launched additional second-generation satellites on Feb. 6. Once deployed, the firm said it will be positioned as the first mobile satellite services provider to complete the deployment of a second-generation constellation of low-earth-orbit (LEO) satellites.

HISPASAT expands broadband satellite based network

Gilat Satellite Networks Ltd. announced that Spanish satellite operator HISPASAT is expanding its broadband satellite-based network with an additional SkyEdge II system. The new contract marks the third segment expansion of the network launched in 2011 in support of the Spanish government's Avanza 100% broadband access program. The SkyEdge II system will support thousands of new broadband users residing in under-serviced areas across Spain expected to join the network by the end of this year. As part of the network, Gilat's SkyEdge II system supports 32APSK Adaptive Coding and Modulation transmission to maximize space segment efficiency. Combined with the beam capabilities of HISPASAT's 1E satellite, the network can boast speeds of up to 100 Mbps per 36 MHz transponder. This is a key feature for providing high quality services for the residential sector at prices low enough to rival those offered by terrestrial networks.

Satellite broadband brings ATM to remote African communities

SatADSL has signed an agreement with SES Broadband Services – a wholly-owned affiliate of satellite provider SES - for the distribution of its broadband solution in remote areas throughout Sub-Saharan Africa. The new solutions will allow ATM operators to deploy cash machines in small towns where terrestrial communication services are not available, unreliable or too expensive. The service has been successfully demonstrated and used by several African banks that are planning large scale ATM deployments. SatADSL currently runs three pilot projects for ATM deployment with banks in Ghana, Cameroon and Zambia. "Financial institutions offer excellent services in the main cities where fiber connections and WiMAX are available. However, in remote locations where the population is less dense, telecommunication links are often not as reliable. SatADSL provides specialized services to support the financial institutions' remote offices as well as cash machines to perform according to their customers' expectations," said Jerome van der Putt, Head of Sales at SatADSL.

REGULATORY NEWS

Hong Kong's regulatory body announces winner of the spectrum auction

The Hong Kong telecom regulator, OFCA says that the four incumbent mobile network operators have successfully bid for a total of 50 MHz of radio spectrum in the 2.5/2.6 GHz band at a total sum of spectrum utilization fees of HK$1.54 billion (US$198 million). Four existing mobile network operators and one new entrant took part in the auction and competed equally with one another for the precious spectrum based on the same set of auction rules. Conducted on an Internet-based software platform, the auction commenced on 18 March 2013 and came to a satisfactory conclusion after a total of 18 bidding rounds on 19 March 2013.

Serbian telecom regulator RATEL names four universal service providers

Serbian regulator the Republic Agency for Electronic Communications (RATEL) has named Telekom Srbija, Telenor Serbia, Mobilkom Serbia (which operates under the VIP Mobile brand) and Orion Telekom as having universal service obligations effective from 1 April 2013. Under the decision, the operators are required to provide services at a set quality and reasonable price to disabled or vulnerable customers. This includes offering free calls to emergency services and implementing special measures to ensure equal access for customers with disabilities to telephony and data services and public telephone directories.

Norwegian regulator receives application for frequencies in the 2GHz band

The Norwegian Post & Telecoms Authority (NPT) has received an application for frequencies in the 2GHz band for use on the Arctic Archipelago of Svalbard. The application reportedly seeks two 20MHz frequency blocks in the 1920MHz-1980MHz and 2110MHz-2170MHz spectrum bands. If the application is approved by the watchdog, the company concerned will retain the right to transfer the spectrum permit or to lease out frequencies to another operator. The permit will be valid until 31 December 2032, and involve an annual license fee of NOK34,000 (US$5,862). If the regulator receives another expression of interest in the spectrum it has said that it may hold an auction for the frequencies; competing bids must be submitted by 19 April. Svalbard, which is midway between mainland Norway and the North Pole, previously hit the telecoms headlines in June 2011 when Telenor launched a Long Term Evolution (LTE) base station there, which it claimed was the northernmost 4G network in the world at that time. The site uses Huawei's SingleRAN LTE solution and is located in Longyearbyen, Svalbard's largest settlement, where temperatures drop to as low as 50 degrees below zero in winter.

Bahrain's TRA has issued a clarification for its upcoming 4G frequency license

Bahrain's Telecommunication Regulatory Authority (TRA) has issued a clarification for its upcoming frequency license auction in the 900MHz, 1800MHz, 2100MHz and 2600MHz bands, stating that participation in the tender process will be restricted to the existing three cellular network operators, Bahrain Telecommunications Company (Batelco), Zain Bahrain and Viva (Bahrain). The definition of existing mobile operator/licensee disqualifies WiMAX operator Menatelecom, which has been given permission to launch fully mobile services and is currently rolling out a 4G LTE network reusing its wireless broadband frequencies; it was previously thought that Menatelecom could be allowed to enter the new spectrum bidding process. The TRA's statement says: 'This change comports with the Decision of the Council of Ministers of the Kingdom of Bahrain promulgated on 24 February 2013. The Decision clarifies the position of the government on the licensing of additional entrants in the telecommunications sector within the framework of the Third National Telecommunications Plan of the Kingdom, which was published on 3 July 2012 and promulgated as Resolution 39 of 2012 of the Council of Ministers.

No plans for issuing 4G mobile license in Ghana so far

Ghana's telecoms regulator has said that it has no plans to issue 4G licenses to the incumbent mobile networks in the near future. The acting Deputy Director General of NCA, Albert Enninful said that none of the six mobile networks would be issued with formal 4G spectrum licenses, but did note that they could reuse their existing spectrum assets if they want. "One of the reasons why we decided to give to new companies is to ensure that they use the frequencies for what they are used for. Technology is going in such a way that you can reform some of the frequencies to do other things." However, the regulator did recently issue three BWA licenses that could be used for 4G services by new entrants to the market who will be allowed to offer fixed wireless services.

Ukraine's regulator approves MNP draft regulations

Ukraine's National Commission for State Regulation of Communications and Informatization (NCCIR, or NKRZI) has announced on its website the approval of draft regulations on the provision of number portability (NP). At a meeting of 28 February 2013 the regulator approved the draft resolution 'On Approval of the services of transferring subscriber numbers and use of personal numbers,' which establishes a regulatory framework for ensuring the rights of the consumer in terms of ordering and receiving number porting services, including mobile number portability (MNP). The implementation of NP was approved by an Administration of State Special Decree of 1 November 2012 (No. 617), registered with the Ministry of Justice of Ukraine on 21 November 2012 (No. 1947/22259), and via Decision No. 619 of 29 November 2012 the draft legal act was adopted and published online for public comment; the NCCIR reported receiving 197 valid comments on the subject.

Unregistered SIM cards to be disconnected: Warns Rwanda's telecom watchdog

Rwanda's telecoms regulator has warned that unregistered SIM cards will be disconnected if the users' identity is not provided to the mobile networks by the end of this July. The warning was issued mainly to the diaspora community who lives outside the country and may not be able to return in time to get their details registered. The affected people are thought to be mainly students studying abroad, diplomats and members of the business community. "Rwandans living in countries that have a roaming agreement with their home network will either come back to Rwanda to register their SIM cards or choose to give their numbers to friends and families to be registered in their names," Jean Baptiste Mutabazi, RURA's head of Communication and Media Regulation told The New Times. The mobile networks have confirmed that they are in discussions with the regulator to see if there is way of allowing overseas customers to register their identity without having to physically return to the country. Around 2.5 million of the country's 5.9 million SIM cards have been registered so far.

T-Mobile & MetroPCS merger approved by regulatory bodies

T-Mobile and MetroPCS announced the two companies received all regulatory approvals needed to go forward with a merger. The Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States told the two carrier's parent companies Deutsche Telekom and MetroPCS Communications that it doesn't see any "unresolved national security concerns" concerning the merger. The approval marked the last regulatory approval the two companies needed to move forward with the proposed merger. Regulatory approval doesn't mean the merger is a done deal, however. On April 12, 2013 MetroPCS will hold a special meeting for its stockholders where they will vote to approve the merger. If the vote succeeds the two carriers will move forward with the proposed merger shortly thereafter. MetroPCS urges its shareholders to approve the merger during the special meeting so the merger can happen.

Czech regulator to introduce symmetric MTRs

Czech telecoms regulator the Czech Telecommunications Office (CTU) has decided to introduce new mobile termination rates (MTRs) for Telefonica Czech Republic and T-Mobile Czech Republic from 1 April 2013. As a result, it aims to dovetail the implementation of symmetrical MTRs for all three incumbent cellcos (i.e. the third being Vodafone), in line with requirements set down by the European Commission (EC). Under its plan, the CTU intends to put in place a single CZK0.41 (USD0.02082) per minute rate (+VAT) for wholesale MTRs, from that date. The postponement is the result of a delay in the delivery of a 'relevant price decision' the regulator said. Further, it is understood that the CTU has also discussed and approved for public consultation, a draft decision intended to regulate pricing for access to the local loop and for related co-location services provided by the incumbent Telefonica O2 CR. Finally, the watchdog also approved plans to start a review of Market 6 (wholesale termination of leased lines) and Market 7 (call termination on mobile networks).

A SNAPSHOT OF REGULATORY ACTIVITIES IN THE SAMENA REGION

Active Consultations & Invitations for Feedback

Bahrain

The Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) has embarked on an initiative to review through a public consultation document namely the current "TRA 3 Year Work Plan (2013 – 2015)". The Authority expects the responses to follow the same structure as set out in the draft work plan. The Authority also invites respondents to substantiate their responses, wherever possible, by providing factual evidence to support their responses.

In the interest of transparency, the Authority will make all submissions received available to the public, subject to the confidentiality of the information received. The Authority will evaluate requests for confidentiality in line with relevant legal provisions and the Authority's published guidance on the treatment of confidential and non-confidential information. April 15, 2013 has been fixed as the last date for submission of the comments. (March 14, 2013) tra.org.bh

Country-wise Policy & Regulatory Developments

Afghanistan
Board Chairman: Mr. Abdul WakilShergul
[Afghanistan Telecommunication Regulatory Authority (ATRA)]
The Afghanistan Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (ATRA) warned telecom companies to identify illegal and unregistered Subscriber Identity Module (SIM) cards or otherwise face strict legal action, ATRA Vice Chairman said. Authority will seize SIM cards issued without proper identification and will close the offending franchises, VC said. Most such companies have ignored Ministry of Communication and Information Technology regulations while issuing SIM cards that terrorists and other criminals use, he said. As part of an on-going crackdown, authorities have shut down three telecom franchises for selling unregistered SIM cards, seized 300 SIM cards and made three arrests, the ATRA said. (March 27, 2013) centralasiaonline.com

Afghanistan based mobile network operator Roshan has secured funding from the International Finance Corporation (IFC), a member of the World Bank Group, to support the rollout of the company's 3G and high speed data services throughout the country. IFC will provide Roshan debt financing for the amount of US$65 million. Since Roshan was founded in 2003, it has concluded three earlier rounds of financing totaling almost US$200 million. All of these previous loans have been fully paid on schedule. To date, the company has invested more than US$550 million in infrastructure to create a state-of-the-art, high quality, network that provides coverage to over 65% of the population in 230 cities and towns in all of Afghanistan's 34 provinces. In just a short period of time, the Afghan telecommunications market has grown rapidly and Roshan spearheaded that development. (March 16, 2013) Khaama Press

Algeria
Chairperson: Ms. Zohra Derdouri
[Regulatory Authority for Post & Telecommunication (ARPT)]
Russian mobile firm Vimpelcom may soon reach a deal to sell a controlling stake in its Algerian business, Djezzy, to Algeria after the government decided to lift a ban on foreign exchange transfers. Vimpelcom took over the Algerian mobile company as part of a US$6 billion deal agreed in 2010 to acquire assets from Egypt's Orascom. Algeria wants to nationalize Djezzy and has pressured Vimpelcom into discussing the sale of a controlling stake. A main point of contention, however, is a ban on foreign exchange transfers enforced by the Bank of Algeria in 2010 on Orascom Telecom Algeria, which operates under the commercial brand Djezzy. The ban prevents it from buying equipment abroad. The government in March 2012 slapped a US$1.3 billion fine on Djezzy for violating the foreign currency regulations, souring the talks and prompting Vimpelcom to announce it was going to international arbitration against Algeria. The Algerian government has decided to lift this foreign currency ban, and Vimpelcom may soon part with its stake. Following the transfer, Djezzy will be renamed Optimum Telecom Algeria, the report said. A source with knowledge of the negotiations said, however, that discussions were continuing and a deal had not yet been reached. The source said it was unclear whether the Algerian government had reached a decision on the money transfers. A spokesman for Vimpelcom declined comment. Vimpelcom chief executive said in January that negotiations in Algeria were still in progress and that it aimed to start investing in Algeria later this year. Vimpelcom said at the time that it hoped to retain an interest in the Algerian business. The Russian company has been reviewing its asset portfolio to focus on its most profitable businesses as part of efforts to boost cash flow and reduce debt and is also looking at options for its Canadian unit Wind Mobile. VTB analyst Ivan Kim said in a research note that if the Algeria deal is resolved and there is a sale of the Canadian business, there could be a "good run" in Orascom's stock and that the news would also be positive for Vimpelcom. He estimated Djezzy could be worth US$5 billion. (March 26, 2013) Daily Vedomosti

Government moved to lift sanctions imposed on Djezzy GSM, allowing it to begin purchasing and importing new technology and equipment, in addition to granting it the right to convert its profits. The decision was made after the intervention of Prime Minister, who received a total of 10 reports from different state bodies analyzing the situation. Banque D'Algerie and the country's finance minister over the last three years sent a total of 10 official reports to the prime minister and the office of the president of Algeria, requesting that sanctions on DJezzy GSM be lifted and that the country's judiciary allow the company to begin importing and purchasing new equipment and converting its profits. The ruling acknowledged the transfer ownership of the company, of which the Algerian government currently owns 51%, and the changing of its name to Optimum Telecom Algeria as opposed to Orascom Telecom Algeria. The decision was officially reached three years ago, and will be brought before company officials within the coming weeks. The move will allow the company to operate in the market alongside other telecommunications corporations and allow them to purchase and new third generation mobile technology. (March 23, 2013) dailynewsegypt.com

Global Telecom Holding (GTH) formerly known as Orascom Telecom Holding (OTH) has reportedly completed the purchase of Med Cable, which operates a submarine cable connecting Algeria to Marseilles in France. The cable connects to Algeria at Algiers and Annaba. The move will improve the international connectivity of Djezzy, GTH's subsidiary in Algeria. (February 19, 2013) telegeography.com

Bahrain
Chairman: Dr. Mohammed Al Amer
[Telecommunication Regulatory Authority (TRA)]
Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) is appealing a verdict of the Urgent Matters Court which ruled in favor of WiMAX operator Menatelecom's objection to a TRA decision excluding the company from an upcoming 4G mobile license auction. A court date for the appeal has yet to be announced, but a deadline of April 30 was set for the Administrative Court to rule on whether Menatelecom should take part in the auction. Fixed-wireless licensee Menatelecom has received permission to offer fully mobile services, and has already issued contracts to roll out a TDD-LTE network re-using its existing 3.5GHz frequencies, but in the run-up to Bahrain's multi-band spectrum auction the TRA cited a government interpretation of national telecoms policy to restrict bidding to mobile incumbents Batelco, Zain and Viva. The ruling came despite earlier indications that Menatelecom would qualify as an existing mobile operator, while the TRA included in the tender licensing conditions such as rollout stipulations for new entrants. An eleventh hour complaint was heard by the Urgent Matters Court on the same day as bidding applications were due (March 21), making it now look certain that the proposed March 31 auction date will be delayed by at least a month. (March 27, 2013) The Gulf Daily News

Telecommunication Regulatory Authority (TRA) announced that it has postponed the multi-band mobile frequency license auction scheduled for the end of this month, including the submission of pre-qualification documents pending further notice. The postponement follows the news reported earlier that Bahraini WiMAX operator Menatelecom had filed a court case against its exclusion from the 4G auction, which has been restricted to the three incumbent cellular network operators, Batelco, Zain and Viva. (March 22, 2013) telegeography.com

Telecommunication Regulatory Authority (TRA) has said fixed broadband prices in the kingdom dropped by up to 53% between 2011 and 2012, while mobile prices have fallen by up to 30%. Despite price reductions in 2012, fixed broadband in Bahrain remains relatively expensive compared to other GCC countries (particularly residential

prices), the watchdog said. The TRA expects faster and new services from the auction of additional spectrum planned next month. (March 21, 2013) Gulf Daily News

An agreement involving the GCC countries and Iran which would help control mobile services spillover has been reached. The GCC nations and Iran have reached a co-ordination agreement on the use of specific frequency bands for preventing and resolving spillover and harmful interference to the mobile service and optimizing the use of the frequency spectrum by the countries in agreement. Technical and administrative measures had to be adopted to resolve the interference issue in the above-mentioned frequency bands and radio services, due to special meteorological conditions in the region and radio ducting which can increase the probability of interference. At the same time, the prediction of propagation of electromagnetic waves becomes more difficult. (March 21, 2013) gulf-daily-news.com

The Telecommunication Regulatory Authority (TRA) has issued a clarification for its upcoming frequency license auction in the 900MHz, 1800MHz, 2100MHz and 2600MHz bands, stating that participation in the tender process will be restricted to the existing three cellular network operators, Bahrain Telecommunications Company (Batelco), Zain Bahrain and Viva (Bahrain). The definition of existing mobile operator/licensee disqualifies WiMAX operator Menatelecom, which has been given permission to launch fully mobile services and is currently rolling out a 4G LTE network reusing its wireless broadband frequencies; it was previously thought that Menatelecom could be allowed to enter the new spectrum bidding process.
(March 19, 2013) telegeography.com

The Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) has released the latest update of the retail price benchmarking study of telecommunications services in Arab countries. The study was commissioned by the TRA on behalf of AREGNET (the Arab Regulators Group). The study compares the costs of baskets of telecommunications services for different consumer profiles (e.g. low, medium, high usage). It is comprehensive in terms of services and geographic coverage, and includes fixed voice services, mobile services, leased lines, and fixed and mobile broadband. It covers all Arab countries, and also includes comparisons with the Organization of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries. Residential and business tariffs are analyzed. This study is important in understanding how Bahrain is performing in terms of developing a competition-led market for the provision of innovative communications services, available to all. In a number of key markets, TRA's decisions to award new licenses and allow new entry have had a dramatic effect on the retail prices paid by consumers for telecommunications prices in Bahrain. The development by TRA of the regulatory framework and its adaptation over time to changing market conditions has also played a role in these outcomes. In June 2012 mobile penetration stood at close to 160%, compared to 130% in 2008, the year of the first benchmarking report. In addition to these 1.9M mobile subscribers, there were 413 thousand broadband subscribers in June 2012, representing a penetration rate of 34% compared to 10% in 2008. Between 2007 and 2011 the percentage of internet users grew from 53% to 77%.
(March 19, 2013) tra.org.bh

Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) has revised its timetable for the upcoming mobile license auction in the 900MHz, 1800MHz, 2100MHz and 2600MHz bands. The TRA intends to provide registrants with answers to all questions that have been submitted in relation to its invitation to tender (ITT) by no later than March 17, 2013. The Authority intends to publish on that date any amendments to the ITT that it deems necessary in line with its responses to the queries. Registrants must submit pre-qualification documentation and information set out in the TRA's invitation no later than March 21, 2013. According to earlier TRA announcements, the auction bidding is scheduled for March 31.
(March 15, 2013) telegeography.com

The leading telecom services operator Batelco has welcomed the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA)'s new ruling which removes regulatory requirement on the company's wholesale international services. Responding to a query Batelco Bahrain chief executive Rashid Abdulla said the company was very pleased with the new ruling. "We have been working closely with the TRA to ensure delivery of the best deals for Batelco's customers and this decision will greatly support our aspirations," observed Abdulla. The sector watchdog announced the finding that Batelco was not dominant in the supply of wholesale international services was an important step in ensuring that regulatory intervention only focused on markets in which there is dominance of market power. This is the first decision in which an operator previously holding a dominant position in a wholesale market has now been found not to be dominant, the TRA said. (March 15, 2013) tradearabia.com

Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) has temporarily postponed its upcoming multi-band mobile frequency auction in order to revise the timetable for the licensing process. It issued the original invitation to tender on 28 January 2013, and a deadline for registration of bidders was set for 11 March, ahead of an auction scheduled for 31 March, but the regulator has decided to amend the auction timetable, which will be published in due course.
(March 14, 2013) telegeography.com

Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) stated that it has set the capital cost for regulated telecommunications services at 9.5%. The TRA stressed that the cost of capital is very important as it affects the cost base of telco operators and the price paid by clients for telecom services. The authority noted that it took into account several factors when setting the new cost, including international best practices, latest available market information, regulatory precedents and the current economic environment. It also said that the 9.5% rate is fair and reasonable, adding that it offers the right investment incentives and prevents excessive profits.
(March 14, 2013) menafn.com

Bangladesh
Chairman: Sunil Kanti Bose
[Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC)]
Telecom authority will start issuing the much-awaited VoIP licenses from March 25 with a view to eradicating the number of illegal VoIP calls. Regarding the issue, the Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC) served a notice. According to the notice, the companies, which submitted their license acquisition fee within the stipulated timeframe, are asked to take licenses from the commission. According to the BTRC, some 844 companies, out of the nominated 1,004, will get licenses for conducting legal VoIP

business. The government hopes that following the issuance of the VoIP licenses the number of illegal VoIP calls will reduce, while the government's revenue will increase. Earlier, the BTRC issued letters to the 1,004 companies, selected by the telecom ministry for receiving VoIP licenses, after they had submitted license acquisition fee of Tk 0.5 million each by February 14. In the first phase 808 companies deposited their fees. The BTRC later expanded the timeframe to February 28 for the rest of the companies. By that time, more than 50 companies submitted their license acquisition fee. At present the local VoIP market size is nearly 70 million calls per day, according to the industry insiders. The regulator took the initiative of issuing VoIP licenses under the name of 'VoIP Service Provider (VSP)' to reduce the number of illegal calls that has increased alarmingly over the last few months. (March 22, 2013) thefinancialexpress-bd.com

Bangladesh's mobile networks have asked the regulator to reschedule a pre-bid meeting to discuss the forthcoming 3G license auction, due to the ongoing legal dispute over the payment of sales taxes on license fees. The six private operators sent a joint letter to the regulator saying that until the VAT issue on their existing GSM licenses is resolved, they cannot be expected to proceed with the 3G auction. The 3G license auction is due to take place at the end of June. (March 12, 2013) The Daily Star

The government indicated that it is not considering an immediate suspension of the operating license of the country's leading mobile provider GrameenPhone, a subsidiary of Norway's Telenor Group, despite a state government commission calling for the prompt withdrawal of the cellco's concession unless Telenor gives up a portion of its stake to reduce its ownership to a minority holding. The special commission came to its conclusions in a preliminary report last month based on its finding that the original licensing agreement in 1996 which created GrameenPhone as a joint venture with Grameen Bank was invalid. Finance Minister told that they will wait to get the final report from the Commission hopefully... within the next two months. (March 6, 2013) Reuters

Egypt
Executive President: Dr. AmrBadawi
[National Telecommunication Regulatory Authority (NTRA)]
Egyptian telecoms service provider Link Dot Net has said internet services in the country have been disrupted by damage to an undersea cable. Submarine cable operator SEACOM confirmed the SMWE4 cable was damaged off the coast of Egypt. "SEACOM is currently in the process of prioritizing and reallocating already available capacity for customers and sourcing further capacity to re-establish a full service," SEACOM said. Internet services were disrupted nationwide last Friday due to damage to international undersea cables, but the service was back to normal by Sunday. (March 28, 2013) Daily Al-Ahram

Telecom Egypt, the country's landline monopoly has reported a 12.8% decline in its full-year net profits to EGP2.61bn, compared to 2011. The company, which is banking on data services to offset lower fixed line income, also reported a 37.1% margin in its 2012 earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation and amortisation (EBITDA), compared with 46.7% in 2011. (March 12, 2013) Reuters

Egypt's Orascom Telecom Holding has said its fourth-quarter loss widened after the telecoms operator recorded

an impairment charge against a loan to its Canadian unit. The Cairo-based company said its net loss attributable to equity holders grew to US$474m from US$125m in the year-earlier period. The operator, which merged with Russia's VimpelCom in 2011, posted a 1.4% rise in fourth-quarter revenue to US$908m, including US$466m from its Algerian unit Djezzy. (March 7, 2013) Bloomberg

Iran
Minister of communication & Information Technology: Dr. Reza Taghipour
[Communications Regulatory Commission (CRC)]
The Iranian government has signed a deal with its neighboring countries to control mobile base station signal leakage across borders. An agreement involving the GCC countries and Iran which would help control mobile services spillover has been reached. The GCC nations and Iran have reached a co-ordination agreement on the use of specific frequency bands for preventing and resolving spillover and harmful interference to the mobile service and optimizing the use of the frequency spectrum by the countries in agreement. Minister of State for Telecommunications Affairs said that such co-operation is critical for guarding the interests of consumers and if we don't enact stronger co-operation in the region, Bahraini consumers who live near the borders may have their mobile phone switch over to a carrier in a neighboring country, which means they'd be billed for long-distance rates. This agreement will help eliminate these concerns. Technical and administrative measures had to be adopted to resolve the interference issue in the above-mentioned frequency bands and radio services, due to special meteorological conditions in the region and radio ducting which can increase the probability of interference. At the same time, the prediction of propagation of electromagnetic waves becomes more difficult. (March 26, 2013) albawaba.com

Iran is currently providing Iraq and Afghanistan with internet, according to an official of the Iranian Telecommunications Infrastructure Company. The company has a number of projects in hand to be an internet service provider in the region, he added. In addition to providing regional countries with internet, another project has been designed to provide European countries with internet services, as well, he noted. (March 7, 2013) zawya.com

Iraq
CEO: Dr. Buhan Shawi
[Communication & Media Commission (CMC)]
Zain Iraq has revealed that it plans to roll out a 3G network as soon as it receives the necessary spectrum from the Communications and Media Commission (CMC). The cellco's CFO, told that the regulator is in the final stages of granting the operator's 3G spectrum, adding: 'A big investment will be required for 3G infrastructure. We are working with Ericsson, Nokia Siemens Networks (NSN) and Huawei. In Iraq, data penetration is less than 10% so there is huge potential for growth. In neighboring countries, where they have 3G, data contributes 20% to 30% to total revenues'. With regards to funding the rollout, CFO said: 'Our revenue for 2012 was USD1.73 billion and we are targeting double-digit growth for the coming years. Last year, Zain Iraq invested more than US$200 million in expanding and modernizing its network; this year we plan to invest 15% of our revenue in the infrastructure'. Finally, regarding ongoing plans for an Initial Public Offering (IPO) CFO commented: 'We are in the final stages of changing the company from a private one to

a joint-stock company. Once we get the approval from the companies' registrar there are other procedures we have to go through before listing on the Iraq Stock Exchange (ISX). The company is hoping to begin its share offering by the end of 1H13, he suggested. All three Iraqi mobile operators are required to float 25% of their shares on the ISX as part of their license conditions, but to date only Asiacell has done so, raising USD1.24 billion last month. (March 4, 2013) The National

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

Orange Jordan has said the introduction of 4G technology in the country is not necessary, as adoption of 3G is still growing and has room for further growth. "3G technology meets the current needs in the country and it was launched a few years ago, the focus should be on introducing further improvements to 3G technology," said Orange Jordan CEO, Jean-François Thomas. "We are not part of the game at present to introduce 4G technology and this is our position," he told reporters on the sidelines of the MENA ICT Forum 2013. (March 10, 2013) Daily Jordan Times

Jordan launched the country's 2013 ICT strategy that includes plans to increase Internet penetration in the Kingdom from the current 63% to 85% by the end of 2017. The strategy entails promoting the ICT sector in Jordan to increase investments in the field from US$250 million currently to US$450 million by the end of 2017. The strategy, which will be implemented in partnership with the Ministry of Information and Communications Technology, includes increasing the sector's annual revenues from around US$2.5 billion currently to some US$3.15 billion by the end of 2017. Under the strategy, employment in the sector will increase from around 16,000 currently to around 20,000 by the end of 2017. Addressing the forum, Minister of Information and Communications Technology said that the remarkable impact of ICT on the macro and micro levels of the economy has been exponentially growing since the early 90s in the country. Citing recent studies on emerging and developing economies, the minister said that every 10% increase in Internet penetration correlates with an incremental gross domestic product increase of 1-2%. "Other studies have indicated that raising broadband penetration in emerging markets to the levels in Western Europe could add US$300 to US$400 billion in gross domestic product and create 10 to 14 million new jobs," said the minister. Internet subscriptions in Jordan stood at 14% with about 874,832 subscribers by the end of September 2012, according to latest available figures released by the Telecommunications Regulatory Commission. Of the total, there were 556,557 mobile broadband subscribers, 198,003 ADSL and 106,843 Wi-Max users. According to a recent report by Cisco Systems, Inc, mobile broadband network users in Jordan enjoy download and upload speeds that surpass the average in Middle East and North Africa (MENA) countries. (March 7, 2013) The Jordan Times

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

A rapidly increasing customer base helped mobile operator Viva Kuwait make an annual profit for the first time in 2012, four years after the Saudi Telecom Co (STC) affiliate launched services. Unlisted Viva reported a net profit of 3.9 million dinars (US$13.69 million) for last year. This compares

with a net loss of 14.4 million dinars in 2011. The operator, which competes with Zain and Ooredoo (Qatar Telecom) subsidiary Wataniya, said its customer base rose by 60% to 1.6 million last year, enabling it to boost its market share to 29% from 20%. Kuwait has no telecom regulator and market share figures are disputed by the rival operators - former monopoly Zain puts its share at 42%, with Viva and Wataniya on 21 and 37% respectively. Viva said its 2012 cash flow was 32.2 million dinars, up from 72,000 dinars a year earlier. It did not publish its annual revenue. STC owns 26% of Viva, which has yet to list on the Kuwait bourse despite completing an initial public offering in September 2008. The company remained reticent in its earnings release, stating only that it had filed a listing request with the stock market regulator in February 2012 and was awaiting a response. (March 21, 2013) arabianbusiness.com

Following the launch of a limited Long Term Evolution (LTE) network last year, Viva Kuwait has announced that its 4G service is now available to all customers. The cellco says that subscribers will be able to enjoy faster speeds at no extra cost or additional fees, and that those users with LTE-compatible handsets will automatically switch to the new network. Viva launched 2G and 3G services in Kuwait in December 2008, and by the end of 2012 the provider had a subscriber market share of 21.2% .(March 15, 2013) telegeography.com

Zain Groupis launching pilot Rich Communications Services (RCS) in its home market of Kuwait under the Joyn initiative backed by the GSM Association (GSMA) and network operators globally. Zain has entered the global inter-operator RCS movement via its Partner Market agreement with the UK's Vodafone Group, making it the first operator to trial Joyn in the Middle East. Joyn services enable customers to chat and enrich messaging or voice calls by exchanging images or video simultaneously during calls, in a private and secure manner, with any member of their contact list that has Joyn, regardless of the user's network or mobile device. (March 7, 2013) The Kuwait Times

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

Lebanon is embarking on an ambitious plan to bolster its telecommunications industry with a tender to run its two state-owned mobile telephone operators. But as with many of the country's economic plans, politics and entrenched financial interests may get in the way. The country wants to become a digital hub for the Middle East, selling excess bandwidth to other countries. It hopes a dynamic telecommunications sector will spur growth in other industries such as education, health and finance. Given Lebanon's large number of entrepreneurial businessmen, and its history as a cultural cross-road for the region, the idea makes sense. But progress is likely to be limited by divisions among the country's many political factions and the government's reliance on telecommunications as a revenue source. "Lebanon is well placed with its geographic location and an educated and multilingual population," said Kenechi Okeleke, an analyst at Business Monitor International in London. "But the government's strict control over the sector makes it really difficult for private sector firms to enter, which will continue to hold back the market." (March 22, 2013) chicagotribune.com

A global boom in the digital sector has attracted the interest of telecom operators worldwide, who are working to carve their role in the ecosystem of mobile content, applications and services, with Lebanon as no exception. Leading Lebanon's push into digital is the Ministry of Telecommunications, which has driven major infrastructural improvements in the sector. Enabled by these developments, Lebanon has witnessed an exceptional growth in 3G subscriptions, jumping from 280,000 users in 2011 to more than 1.3M users today according to statistics provided by Alfa and Touch. Smartphone penetration is also on the rise, with more than 1.8M devices registered across the two networks. Such rapid growth in the sector has enabled Lebanese telecom operator Alfa to begin laying groundwork for the launch of 4G services nationwide. (March 19, 2013) ameinfo.com

The Lebanese government has again extended the operating concessions for the country's two mobile networks as it works on long-delayed plans to revamp the market. The two networks, Alfa and Touch had their licenses extended until June. The government is now preparing a new tender for the licenses, and expects to publish it within the next couple of months. Unlike the current situation where the licenses were renewed annually, the new concessions will be for a fixed term of five years. The long term intention at the moment at least is to combine the two networks into a single government owned infrastructure, and then lease capacity to a number of MVNOs. Attempts to privatize the two networks have been held up by political problems for the past five years and are generally considered to be unlikely to happen now due to the government's dependence on revenues from the telecoms market. The telecoms sector generates more than US$1.6 billion in revenues each year, of which US$1.4 billion goes to the government. Its high take of the revenues has however held back network upgrades and lead to complaints about poor quality of service. The Alfa network is managed by Orascom Telecom, while Touch is managed by Zain. Both companies receive a fixed monthly management fee for operating the networks.
(March 3, 2013) cellular-news.com

Libya
Minister: Osama Siala
[(Ministry of Telecommunications & Informatics)]
The Libyan government has abruptly halted a tender to manage the country's monopoly telecoms operator, state-owned Libyan Post, Telecommunication and Information Technology Co (LIPTIC), and its wholly-owned cellular subsidiaries Libyana and Almadar Aljaded Reuters reports, citing Etisalat CEO Ahmad Julfar. The chief executive confirmed: 'From their side, the government has put it on hold. We are yet to hear from them, but Libya is a good market'. No official explanation from the Libyan government has been forthcoming. In January 2013 a whole host of international players had expressed an interest in securing a foothold in the lucrative Libyan market, including Etisalat of theUAE, France Telecom-Orange (FT-Orange), Digicel Group of Jamaica, the UK's Vodafone Group, Vimpelcom of Russia, Qtel of Qatar (now Ooredoo) and India's Bharti Airtel. However, FT-Orange's Sofrecom unit – a consultancy firm which claims to have worked with 'over 200 major players in over 100 countries' – was said to be the clear front-runner, and already boasted pre-existing ties to Libyana. Vodafone is also in an advantageous position, having previously secured a branding agreement with Al Madar, which is also known as Al Madar Telecomm Company. (March 22, 2013) tradearabia.com

The Libyan government has halted a tender to manage the country's monopoly telecoms operator, state-owned Libyan Post, Telecommunication and Information Technology Co (LIPTIC), and its wholly-owned cellular subsidiaries Libyana and Almadar Aljaded . The chief executive confirmed that from their side, the government has put it on hold and we are yet to hear from them, but Libya is a good market. No official explanation from the Libyan government has been forthcoming. (March 19, 2013) Reuters

Morocco
Director General: M. Azdine El MountassirBillah
[Agence Nationale de Reglementation des Telecommunications (ANRT)]
Inwi the first global alternative telecommunications operator in Morocco has reached 12 million customers three years after its launch. Since its launch in 2010 as the third telecommunication operator, inwi revolutionized the telecommunications landscape in Morocco by democratizing usages and habits, with ANRT's (Moroccan regulation telecom agency) supporting evidence, Moroccans spend 2 times longer on their mobile phone at prices 50% cheapest with a highest mobile market penetration rates in Africa, 81% 2009 to nearly 120% at the end of 2012, which market has seen its value increase as a result of a virtuous growth. Inwi has also succeeded in establishing itself as the first global alternative telecommunications operator in Morocco. In just 3 years the operator increased its customer base by attracting more than 12 million customers at the end of 2012. It's the result, first, of a deeper listening to each Moroccan requirement in order to meet each of its expectations and, second of the implementation of a voluntarist and offensive strategy releasing the usages by providing a transparent and innovative, tailored products and services. Allow everyone to express themselves freely was Inwi's challenge.
(March 4, 2013) zawya.com

Nepal
Chairman: Mr. Digambar Jha
[Nepal Telecommunication Authority (NTR)]
Nepal's Chaudhary Group (CG), which earlier this month acquired an 80% stake in STM Telecom from US-based STM Communications Service Inc via its wholly owned subsidiary CG Telecom, now plans to complete a full takeover by early April 2013. CG has set up a team of former CEOs of banks, telcos and advisory companies in Nepal to advise on the takeover, with the source claiming: 'They have an internal team but CG has been receiving proposals from foreign banks and advisory firms, which they are currently weighing up. They are likely to hire foreign firms for the next phase of the acquisition'. STM, which operates under the brand name Gramintel, has been providing telecoms services to around 5,500 subscribers across 628 village development committees (VDCs) in 52 districts. CG says that going forward its new CG Telecom subsidiary will focus on villages, continuing the legacy of Gramintel, but that it will also look to explore opportunities in urban areas. CG managing director added that CG Telecom will continue using the Gramintel brand and [will] also introduce CGTel for its services in various areas. CG Telecom plans to invest around NPR2 billion (US$23.3 million) to expand its services, including the launch of GSM mobile services, and will buy out the shares of AR Investment in STM Telecom to become its 100% shareholder in time for its relaunch under the new brand. (March 22, 2013) TMT Finance

State-owned fixed and mobile operator Nepal Telecom (NT) has set May 2013 as the date it will roll out a new convergent real-time billing system in the country, allowing subscribers to pay for their various NT services on a single bill. NT spokesperson said that its range of recharge cards will also be integrated under the new system. In the launch phase, the telco will start billing pre-paid GSM and IP CDMA services through the new set-up, adding post-paid GSM in phase two and finally PSTN and ADSL broadband internet services. It could take up to three years for the full implementation it says. The billing platform was supplied by AsiaInfo-Linkage. (March 16, 2013) Daily MyRepublica

Oman
Chief Executive Officer: Dr. Hamed Al-Rawahi
[Telecommunication Regulatory Authority (TRA)]
Oman's digital economy received a boost yesterday with the launch of the Regional Cyber Security Centre (RCSC) for the Arab region. The first International Telecommunication Union (ITU) Regional Centre will be instrumental in providing assistance to Arab countries, helping them to establish national cyber-security centers and assisting them with cyber services at a regional and international level. In cooperation with ITU and IMPACT, the executive arm of ITU's cyber-security initiatives, the RCSC will assist in capacity building, boost the cyber defense preparedness of regional countries, help in setting up Computer Emergency Readiness Teams, and assist with the adoption of the ITU Global Security Agenda framework. Speaking on the sidelines of the RCSC launch yesterday at Knowledge Oasis Muscat, Salem Al Ruzaiqi, CEO of Information Technology Authority (ITA), said the focus would be on building capacities and fostering collaboration between countries. However, each country will maintain its hegemony over managing its own sensitive data, he stated. The Centre will provide assistance to Arab countries to establish national cyber-security centres and will help them gain international recognition, giving them the opportunity to enjoy greater benefits from the services provided by the Regional Centre, in cooperation with ITU and IMPACT." The RCSC will host and share several security-training scholarships, cyber security-related information, expertise, cyber drills, and security-readiness assessments and exercises with countries in the region.
(March 4, 2013) zawya.com

Pakistan
Chairman:
[Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA)]
Supreme Court of Pakistan has asked Competition Commission of Pakistan to hear the ICH and to drive a conclusion of its own with-in 30 days. Supreme Court, while adjourning the hearing said that CCP should explain the jurisdiction of the matter and that CCP will take care of the case from here on and matter will not be heard in Supreme Court again. It may be recalled that Supreme Court had previously directed CCP to hear and resolve the case in 15 days, against which CCP had issued show cause notices to LDI operators; however, Sindh High Court had held CCP from carrying out its procedural investigations on the matter due to a petition filed by telecom operators. Now Supreme Court has once again intervened and has said that ICH case will be decided by CCP only. It is said that CCP will notify LDI operators again to respond to its earlier issued show cause notice. (March 28, 2013) propakistani.pk

The telecom sector generated over US$4 billion as revenue last year and showed an 11% growth compared to 2011. The sector, in view of a challenging economic environment in the country performed relatively better and most telecom indicators showed a positive growth. Figures from Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) for 2012 revealed that broadband subscribers crossed the 2.1-million-mark and cellular subscribers crossed 120 million with teledensity of 72%, up from 68% in January. However, investment remained low in the sector and only US$240 million was invested in 2012 compared to US$493 million in 2011 as basic telecom infrastructure had already been laid down by the telecom operators. The telecom sector had been reeling in from a drop in subscribers following tough government directives. In November 2012, PTA banned the sale of new SIM cards through retail networks with effect from December 1. It also instructed mobile operators to block unverified SIM cards and reduce the maximum number issued against a single computerized national identity card (CNIC) to five. The result was a loss of almost 2.7 million subscribers. Ufone lost more than 500,000 subscriptions in December while Mobilink lost more than 450,000 subscribers. Telenor lost over 245,000 subscribers while Zong lost more than 229,000 customers at the end of December 2012. Warid shed over 211,000 subscribers during the period under review.
(March 27, 2013) tribune.com.pk

Supreme Court has summoned international long-distance (ILD) operators and the Competition Commission of Pakistan (CCP) to explain why the controversial International Clearing House (ICH) cartel is still operating. The Lahore High Court had previously directed the CCP to resolve the ICH case within 15 days, following a petition from local operator Brain Telecom, but subsequent intervention from the Sindh High Court delayed matters. Pakistan's ILD operators created a single international gateway, the ICH, which is able to keep ILD prices artificially high by eliminating competition. Originally proposed and supported by sector watchdog the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) as a means to maximize government revenues by eliminating the grey market, the ICH has seen widespread opposition from Pakistan's competition authority, as well as local and overseas telcos. Most recently US regulator the Federal Communication Commission (FCC) requested that US telcos pay the pre-ICH termination fee of US$0.02 rather than the inflated US$0.088 price set by the cartel.
(March 22, 2013) ProPakistani

The nation's international long-distance (LDI) operators have announced that there will be no change in international termination fees and providers that fail to pay the determined amount will have traffic to Pakistan blocked. The announcement was issued in response to a recent determination from US regulatory body the Federal Communication Commission (FCC) that a recent price hike in termination fees for calls to Pakistan was anti-competitive. Pakistan's LDI operators set the higher rates after creating a single international gateway, the International Clearing House (ICH), which is able to keep prices artificially high by eliminating competition. The FCC has requested that US telcos pay the pre-ICH termination fee of US$0.02 rather than the inflated US$0.088 price. In their announcement, the LDI providers stressed that Pakistan's telcos are subject to the policies and directives of the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) and the Islamabad government, reiterating that the FCC has no authority in Pakistan.
(March 14, 2013) ProPakistani

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

Qatar Telecom (Ooredoo) has confirmed details of its upcoming 4G Long Term Evolution (LTE) network launch, with commercial services initially being made available only to customers in the capital Doha in April. The operator has already installed some 100 active LTE base stations around Doha, while the network will be rolled out to the rest of the country in phases, Ooredoo disclosed, with areas covered in early phases to include The Pearl-Qatar, West Bay (Doha), Katara village, Corniche (Doha) and the Sealine Beach Resort. The new 4G network will operate in the 800MHz and 2600MHz frequency bands, and Ooredoo said it was in talks with vendors to ensure there will be adequate stocks of affordable LTE-enabled mobile devices in the country by the April launch date, while adding that more details on pricing and network availability would be made next month. Ooredoo customers have participated in LTE network tests for the last few months, with the aim of refining network performance via user feedback, while the 4G launch forms part of a wider mobile broadband strategy, with Ooredoo enhancing indoor and outdoor network coverage throughout 2013, including 3G network capacity expansion and improving coverage in high-rise buildings.
(March 18, 2013) Gulf Times

Qatar Telecom (Qtel) has reported that its annual consolidated group net profit climbed by 12.6% in 2012 toQAR2.94 billion (US$807 million), up from QAR2.61 billion in 2011, on total revenues which rose by 6.2% toQAR33.7 billion. In the fourth quarter of 2012 Qtel's group net income increased by 14.6% year-on-year toQAR523 million, up from QAR456 million in 4Q11, while revenues in October-December grew by 6.3% toQAR8.71 billion compared to QAR8.19 billion in the same quarter of the previous year. The group attributed the financial growth to increases in subscriber volumes, as higher annual turnover in Indonesia (Indosat, up by 3% to QAR8.8 billion in 2012), Qatar (up by 9% to more than QAR6 billion) and Iraq (Asiacell, up 16% to QAR6.9 billion) comfortably offset declines at Kuwait-based division Wataniya and Nawras in Oman, which both earlier reported separate financials. Qtel has a presence in 16 countries across the Middle East, Africa and Asia.
(March 4, 2013) telegeography.com

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

Telecoms regulator the Communications and Information Technology Commission (CITC), has threatened to ban voice-over-internet protocol (VoIP) services and mobile messaging services unless telecoms operators are willing to provide a monitoring service by the end of this week. Services such as WhatsApp, Viber and Skype are said to be in the CITC's cross hairs. (March 27, 2013) Daily Arab News

Mobile subscriptions in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia reached around 53.1 million at the end of Q3 2012, a penetration rate of 181.2%, according to the country's telecoms regulator. Prepaid subscriptions constitute the majority (over 85%) of all mobile subscriptions. However, the CITC decision regulating the sale and activation of prepaid SIM cards has resulted in a decrease of the number of subscriptions starting from the third quarter, as service providers have deactivated a large number of unidentified SIM cards, thus affecting the total

number of subscriptions and the penetration rate. Fixed telephone lines stood at 4.74 million at the end of Q3 2012, of which around 3.4 million or 71% were residential lines. This represents a household teledensity of around 68.5% and demand for fixed line service has been relatively stable since 2004. The main reason is the rapid spread of mobile telecom services, ease of subscription, and the gradual decrease in prices; which has led to a lower number of requests from consumers for fixed services. However, the demand for fixed services, especially in major cities, is expected to grow as a result of growing demand for broadband services, especially for the fiber optic network (FTTx) services.
(March 25, 2013) cellular-news.com

The Communications and Information Technology Commission (CITC) has announced the number of mobile subscriptions in the country stood at 53 million at the end of 2012, making the mobile phone penetration rate stand at 181.6% of the population. Of the total, prepaid subscriptions made up the great majority with more than 86%, the regulator said. By the end of last year, the number of internet users climbed to 15.8 million, or 54.1% of the population, the report said. (March 23, 2013) Daily Arab News

Saudi Arabia's IT spending is expected to reach US$4.2 billion in 2013, up 3% in US dollar terms year-on year, with BMI downwardly revising its forecast after the PC market slowed in H112. However, there were major IT projects by organizations including telecoms company Mobily and the justice department of the government. Saudi Arabia has the biggest IT market in the Gulf region and the Kingdom will continue to be a lucrative market for technology products and services over the forecast period as it invests to upgrade its IT and communications infrastructure. The country's relative political stability for the region will also attract vendors, Fast Market Research said in its study.
(March 12, 2013) zawya.com

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

Sri Lanka auctioned a block of airwaves to become the first country in South Asia to roll out a full nationwide mobile fourth-generation (4G) network, a top official said Friday. Anusha Palpita, the Director General of the Telecommunications Regulatory Commission, said he allocated the airwaves to Sri Lanka's largest cellular operator Dialog Axiata for US$26.25 million. He said Dialog, the Sri Lanka unit of Malaysia's Axiata, will roll out a 4G mobile network that will allow users to download content from the Internet at speeds four to five times faster than the currently available 3G. "We will be South Asia's first with a (country-wide) mobile 4G/LTE (Long Term Evolution) network," Palpita said. Right now, Sri Lanka already has fixed-line telephone 4G in key cities, but the new mobile 4G network will allow users to access high-speed Internet with their hand-held devices across the country. The 4G network is expected to be rolled out "shortly", said Palpita, noting the infrastructure is already in place. Sri Lanka became the first country in South Asia to introduce mobile phones in 1989 and the first to roll out a 3G network in 2004. But Palpita said that a vast majority of mobile phones in the country were still older 2G handsets. (March 29, 2013) globalpost.com

Telecommunications Regulatory Commission (TRC) has issued a call for expressions of interest in developing a central equipment identity register, to maintain a list of legal

('white'), illegal ('black') and 'grey' IMEI device codes in the country. Reponses are due by April 22.
(March 12, 2013) telegeography.com

The Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (TRC) has introduced 'National Roaming' to Sri Lanka. Two mobile network operators are offering this service to customers. The facility is available for other operators too, if and when they need it, TRC Director General Anusha Palpita told The Nation. Explaining the nature of the technology, the TRC chairman said the facility enables the customer to switch to another connection if his existing connection encounters a network-coverage issue. (March 3, 2013) nation.lk

Tunisia
President: Mr. Hassoumi Zitoune
[National Telecommunication Commission (INTT)]
The work of the consultation on the review of rates unbundling the local loop has started from February 28, 2013.Maintenance meetings were held with operators of public telecommunications networks and the cabinet appointed by the INT for carrying out the work of this mission. It is expected that the results of this mission will be ready around the end of March 2013. These serve as a basis in the context of the approval of the offer of local loop unbundling in 2013. (March 5, 2013) intt.tn

Turkey
Chairman & CEO: Dr. Tayfun Acarer
[Information & Communication Technologies Authority (BTK)]
The Turkish telecommunication sector earned over 30 billion (US$ 16.47) Turkish Liras last year mostly thanks to four major companies Turkcell, Turk Telekom, Vodafone and Avea which raised their sales income by 9% to 24.4 billion liras in 2012, Turkey's information technology agency report revealed. Turkcell, the biggest mobile operator of Turkey, earned 28.3% of the total revenue, while Turk Telekom's share was 23.5%, Vodafone's 15.9%, Avea's 11.2% and other operators' 21.1%t. The overall growth of the sector was 14% and the growth of net sales income of other operators surged over 35%, showing how while the majority of income comes from giants, the proportion of smaller enterprises is increasing. The report also reveals the total investment amounts of Turk Telekom and the other three operators in the last quarter of 2012. While both Turk Telekom and Turkcell increased their investments by 4.3 and 5.9%, respectively, Avea and Vodafone cut their investments back. Vodafone trimmed its investments by a substantial amount of 26.4 percent.
(March 20, 2013) hurriyetdailynews.com

Turkey's landline operator is planning to auction off its copper landlines in favor of fiber optic cable. The move will see the money going to the Treasury as the country's phone network is public property. Türk Telekom, 55% of which was sold in 2005 to the Dubai-based Oger Telecom, announced on its website this week that it will begin auctioning off its copper lines in April, which Sabah estimated would fetch over US$10 billion in scrap. Türk Telekom's website announced that the auction-ready wire cables it had in storage throughout 81 provinces included 160 grades of conductive wire and was just a small fraction of the estimated 35 million kilometers of copper wire in Turkey's phone system. (March 13, 2013) balkans.com

Turkey's financial industry regulator, the Capital Markets Board, has appointed three independent directors to Turkcell's board, removing three existing directors in the process. The development was revealed in an emailed statement. The move has been welcomed by the company's main shareholders, who have been at loggerheads since 2005 over the control of the group. In recent years the labyrinthine ownership dispute between Turkey's Cukurova Holding, Scandinavian telecoms group TeliaSonera and Russia's Altimo has left Turkcell unable to agree on the composition of its board, and as a result it has not paid a dividend since 2009. (March 12, 2013) Reuters

United Arab Emirates
Director General: Mr. Mohamed Nasser Al Ghanim
[Telecommunication Regulatory Authority (TRA)]
Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) is hosting the Arab Internet Governance Forum (AIGF) under the slogan "We are all Partners," in cooperation with the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) and the Regional Internet Registry in Europe and the Middle East (RIPE NCC). "Internet governance is critical to enabling the broader ICT development of the region," said Mohamed Nasser Al Ghanim, Director General of the TRA. "The TRA hosts this seminal event to highlight the priorities of the region and promote dialogue and cooperation between different sectors and institutions responsible for the management of Internet resources. This meeting is in line with our efforts to enhance the development of the Internet and protect the interests of end-users and operators.
(March 4, 2013) zawya.com

Regulatory Activities Beyond the SAMENA Region

ETNO

At the SAMENA Council's Beyond Connectivity 2013 conference, ETNO and the SAMENA Council, jointly representing telecommunications operators and service providers in Europe, the Middle East, North Africa, and South Asia, both reiterated their commitment to closely cooperate in addressing high-priority industry issues and to collaborate on developing frameworks, which may assist the industry in creating innovative and efficient business models. "In today's converged and interconnected markets, our organizations directly benefit from working together and sharing best practices. Operators in both regions are faced with similar challenges. In today's digital economy, operators have to search for new business models and markets need more efficiency and consolidation. We are faced with new types of competition, coming from outside the telecoms sector and from beyond national boundaries. Our sector is increasingly faced with global challenges which demand global answers", says Luigi Gambardella, ETNO Executive Board Chair. Operators in Europe and in the SAMENA region, while experiencing varying growth rates that tend to depend on numerous market dynamics and conditions, are faced with the same necessity: innovate, seek synergies, and develop new business models to counter declining traditional revenues. Given the fact that telecommunications operators are now competing with new players, which may not necessarily have the same regulatory obligations as do the operators themselves, it has become imperative for the telecom operator community to be engaged with policy-makers and regulators, in order to strive toward a level-playing field. Fragmentation of rules across national borders, among similar challenges, often limits innovation and deprives operators from necessary scale to develop new products. (March 6, 2013) etno.eu

GSMA

The GSMA announced the launch of the Mobile Enabled Community Services (MECS) program, which leverages mobile technology and infrastructure to help improve access to basic energy and water services in underserved communities. The new program is supported by a £4.1million grant from the UK Government's Department for International Development (DFID), which works to alleviate global poverty by delivering UK aid around the world. Currently 1.3 billion people, nearly 20% of the world's population, are without access to energy and 783 million people, 10% of world's population do not have access to 'improved' water resources. This gap is due to challenges such as last mile distribution, operation and maintenance capabilities and costs, and payment ability and collection. MECS will facilitate access to affordable and reliable energy and clean water, which is vital for health and wellbeing and can also help reduce poverty and drive economic growth. "More than 3.4 million people die each year from water, sanitation and hygiene-related causes according to the WHO," said Chris Locke, Managing Director, GSMA Mobile for Development. "Mobile penetration in the developing world has risen exponentially in the last decade; for instance, in Africa, we estimate that mobile will reach 76% of the population by 2014. Through mobile technology, we will be able to support and improve the provision and maintenance of energy and water services, providing a critical resource to underserved communities." The DFID grant will back a two-year program within MECS, which will be implemented by the GSMA's Mobile for Development division, to support the creation of new, innovative mobile-enabled technologies and business models to improve access to energy and water services. DFID and the GSMA will also launch a Challenge Fund open to the mobile industry, start-ups, academia and the not-for-profit sector, which will provide seed funding to companies for research to identify and develop pioneering solutions to overcome the challenges and obstacles to community service provision. Mobile technology and infrastructure are already being used to improve access to energy and water through product distribution via existing channels, pay-as-you-go financing via mobile payments, and remote activation, monitoring and data collection. "The GSMA has proven experience in bringing together mobile operators, energy service companies, community service provider, the development community and other key stakeholders to; foster partnerships; gather and share knowledge. Through the MECS Program and Challenge Fund the GSMA will help to accelerate the development of commercial mobile services for underserved people in emerging markets," continued Locke. (March 28, 2013) gsma.com

SAMENA

On the opening day of the SAMENA Council's Beyond Connectivity 2013 conference, Mohamed Isa Al Khalifa, Group CEO of Batelco and Chairman of the Board of Directors of the SAMENA Council, welcomed industry professionals and decision-makers to the annual conference, and emphasized on the need to define new digital agendas and create an enabling environment within the SAMENA region whereby the adoption of digital services, integrated ICT applications, and digital tools can be accelerated. In his opening address, Mr. Khalifa said, "It is critical for us to collectively work toward ensuring that our future ICT policies are created and harmonized on the pillars of knowledge, collaboration, commonality in developmental goals, and the passion to achieve human success. We need to develop and sustain processes for accelerating digitization in our economies, to guarantee social and economic progress throughout South Asia, the Middle East, and North Africa." Reflecting on the Beyond Connectivity conference's theme, Maximizing Revenues through Digital Excellence, Mr. Bocar BA, CEO of the SAMENA Council announced the finalization of the SAMENA ICT Policy Assessment and Digitization Study, initiated by the SAMENA Council in 2012 with the objective of understanding the state of digitization in the region, benefits of promptly executing national digitization plans, and ICT policy frameworks required to capture those benefits. The study was conducted in collaboration with Booz & Company, a globally renowned management consulting firm. Commenting on the study, Bocar said, "The SAMENA Council's study has shown that digitization requires and will drive substantial investment initiatives throughout the region's expanding ICT ecosystem. Digitization is the future and a proven path to developing digital economies. If existing ICT policies are refined or new ones created with modern digital needs in perspective, the resulting accelerated rate of adoption of digital services will bring about substantial socio-economic benefit throughout the 25 markets that we have assessed in this study." Mr. BA added, "If we focus immediately on understanding and

enabling digitization, we will ensure that its economic as well as human capacity-building impact will be achieved sooner than later." Conducted at a regional level, with special focus given to ten countries, some of the findings of the SAMENA Council's ICT Policy Assessment and Digitization study show that:

- Countries in the SAMENA region are aware of digitization's importance and of the role of the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) sector as an economic enabler. However, an assessment of the extent of digitization across key economic sectors in the SAMENA region shows that most digitization applications in the region are limited in both scale and scope. The most active form of digitization has manifested itself in mobile banking, which comparatively enjoys a higher adoption rate.
- Digitization will impact the society's ability to transform itself and the governments' capacity to realize transparency in governance and achieve economic efficiency.
- Harnessing the benefits of digitization in the SAMENA region would require high investments of $235bn by 2020. The benefits of this investment will be shared by players within the ICT sector, across all economic sectors and the government.

As a part of this study, the SAMENA Council has also introduced a new concept of 'SMART SAMENA', which is built on the notion of accelerating digitization and meeting specific policy imperatives, which have been defined in the study. (March 7, 2013) ameinfo.com

At the SAMENA Council's Beyond Connectivity 2013 conference, ETNO and the SAMENA Council, jointly representing telecommunications operators and service providers in Europe, the Middle East, North Africa, and South Asia, both reiterated their commitment to closely cooperate in addressing high-priority industry issues and to collaborate on developing frameworks, which may assist the industry in creating innovative and efficient business models. "In today's converged and interconnected markets, our organizations directly benefit from working together and sharing best practices. Operators in both regions are faced with similar challenges. In today's digital economy, operators have to search for new business models and markets need more efficiency and consolidation. We are faced with new types of competition, coming from outside the telecoms sector and from beyond national boundaries. Our sector is increasingly faced with global challenges which demand global answers", says Luigi Gambardella, ETNO Executive Board Chair. Operators in Europe and in the SAMENA region, while experiencing varying growth rates that tend to depend on numerous market dynamics and conditions, are faced with the same necessity: innovate, seek synergies, and develop new business models to counter declining traditional revenues. Given the fact that telecommunications operators are now competing with new players, which may not necessarily have the same regulatory obligations as do the operators themselves, it has become imperative for the telecom operator community to be engaged with policy-makers and regulators, in order to strive toward a level-playing field. Fragmentation of rules across national borders, among similar challenges, often limits innovation and deprives operators from necessary scale to develop new products. Bocar BA, CEO of the SAMENA Council, believes that "Cooperation and collaboration are a key to success

in today's business. As our regions increasingly embrace advanced digital services, we realize how important it is to create new enabling policies that could help sustain the pace of technological advancement. Telecoms operators are and will remain a major stakeholder in the industry and it is important that they be equipped to deal with emerging business challenges." New business models are essential for the industry, as they assist stakeholders in exploring new ways to benefit from advanced telecommunications technologies, and help operators sustain investments in establishing next-generation wireless and fiber networks, which have become integral to the realization of digital economies around the globe. Both ETNO and the SAMENA Council see important benefits from increased cooperation in areas such as spectrum, access to content, ICT skills, and new innovative business models. (March 6, 2013) telegeography.com

United States

The FCC informed the National Telecommunications and Information Administration of its plans to auction licenses in the 1695-1710 and 1755-1780MHz bands as early as September 2014. The NTIA recently picked out the 1695-1710MHz band of spectrum to be reallocated for non-federal use. In a statement, Commissioner Ajit Pai advocated offering up the whole swath of spectrum for commercial use. "I continue to believe that we should aim to clear and reallocate the 1755–1780MHz band rather than forcing federal users and commercial operators to undertake the complicated, untested task of spectrum sharing," Pai said. The 1755-1780MHz band has been spied as a good pairing with the 2155-2180 MHz band, another chunk of spectrum Congress has told the FCC to auction by 2015. Last year, the FCC granted T-Mobile special temporary authority to test mobile broadband in the 1755-1780MHz band. In a blog post, T-Mobile indicated its belief that testing would reveal the spectrum to be ripe for LTE deployment. In the same post, T-Mobile cited the AWS-3 band at 2155-2180MHz as a good possible pairing with the 1755-1780MHz. (March 25, 2013) cedmagazine.com

Federal Communications Commission (FCC) chairman Julius Genachowski has notified the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) that the regulator plans 'to commence the auction of licenses in the 1695MHz–1710MHz and 1755MHz–1780MHz spectrum bands as early as September 2014'. FCC commissioner Ajit Pai commented: ' This is the first step in what will be an important process, and I look forward to working with my FCC colleagues, NTIA, and other stakeholders to help American consumers and the economy benefit from this spectrum as quickly as possible. In particular, I continue to believe that we should aim to clear and reallocate the 1755MHz–1780MHz band rather than forcing federal users and commercial operators to undertake the complicated, untested task of spectrum sharing'. In other news, within 24 hours of FCC commissioner Robert McDowell announcing his resignation, the Wall Street Journal has reported that Mr. Genachowski is also preparing to depart the regulator, possibly as early as 30 June, when his current term expires. (March 22, 2013) telegeography.com

T-Mobile and MetroPCS announced that two companies received all regulatory approvals needed to go forward with a merger. The Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States told the two carrier's parent companies Deutsche Telekom and MetroPCS Communications that it doesn't see any "unresolved national security concerns" concerning the

merger. The approval marked the last regulatory approval the two companies needed to move forward with the proposed merger. Regulatory approval doesn't mean the merger is a done deal, however. On April 12, 2013 MetroPCS will hold a special meeting for its stockholders where they will vote to approve the merger. If the vote succeeds the two carriers will move forward with the proposed merger shortly thereafter. MetroPCS urges its shareholders to approve the merger during the special meeting so the merger can happen. (March 22, 2013) gottabemobile.com

Members of the Competitive Carriers Association (CCA) will gain access to one-of-a-kind LTE data roaming hub developed by Transaction Network Services (TNS). TNS said the Data Services Hub is the only roaming hub of its kind in the industry, providing participating operators with the opportunity to connect LTE roaming, Wi-Fi access and interoperability with requisite 3G roaming fallback. The hub was created in response to a formal request for proposal (RFP) issued by CAA, which sought out organizations interested in hosting the service. (March 18, 2013) fiercebroadbandwireless.com

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) has approved T-Mobile USA's proposed merger with MetroPCS, nudging the deal one step closer to completion. The transaction has received approval from the Department of Justice (DoJ) and must now be approved by MetroPCS' shareholders, who are set to vote on the deal on April 12. FCC chairman Julius Genachowski commented: 'With today's approval, America's mobile market continues to strengthen, moving toward robust competition and revitalized competitors. We are seeing billions more in network investment, while the courts have upheld key FCC decisions to accelerate broadband build-out, promote competition, and benefit consumers, including our broadband data roaming and pole attachment rules. Today's action will benefit millions of American consumers and help the U.S maintain the global leadership in mobile it has regained in recent years'..
March 14, 2013) telegeography.com

Canada
Industry Canada has released its final timetable for the auction of the digital dividend 700MHz 4G mobile broadband spectrum band in November this year. As previously announced, Canada will award 700MHz mobile licensees split into 14 geographical areas, each zone offering five blocks of paired spectrum and two blocks of unpaired spectrum, making a total of 98 licensees on offer. A spectrum cap of two paired frequency blocks will apply to all licensees in each of the 14 zones, therefore allowing scope for new or less established entrants in the mobile market; the unpaired blocks will not be subject to a spectrum cap. Furthermore, a spectrum cap of one paired spectrum block from within certain blocks – B, C, C1 and C2 – will apply to all large wireless service providers – i.e. the nationwide operators Rogers, Bell and Telus. Alongside the timetable, Industry Canada also released the 'Revised Frameworks for Mandatory Roaming and Antenna Tower and Site Sharing', including conditions of licensing to prohibit exclusive site arrangements, which expand requirements to offer roaming to all licensees while encouraging more tower sharing. The measure is aimed at accelerating 4G mobile broadband expansion following the digital dividend auction.
(March 8, 2013) ic.gc.ca

Mexico
Federal Chamber of Deputies, the lower house of the bicameral National Congress, has reportedly voted overwhelmingly in favor of telecoms sector reforms that were proposed earlier this month. According to the Financial Times, in a vote on the issue the bill was approved by 414 votes to 50. Under the proposals the government is calling for the creation of a new telecoms regulator – the Federal Telecommunications Institute (FTI) – which will have the power to order those companies adjudged to dominate their market to sell off assets. The new entity would also be able to limit companies from seeking to stall competition through continued litigation, with special courts expected to deal with regulatory disputes, and prohibit companies from blocking regulatory decisions though legal means while they are being challenged in court.
(March 22, 2013) telegeography.com

The government of Mexico has taken aim at the country's dominant operator America Movil with new proposals to encourage competition in the telecoms sector. America Movil has a 70% share of the country's telecom market with 70.37 million subscribers at the end of Q4 2012. To tackle the firm's dominance, the government has called for the formation of a new regulator with far more power than the current body, COFETEL (Comisión Federal de Telecomunicaciones).
(March 15, 2013) developingtelecoms.com

Uruguay
Telecoms regulator Unidad Reguladora de Servicios de Comunicaciones (URSEC), has awarded mobile spectrum to the country's three wireless network operators, following a tender process for frequencies in the 900MHz, 1900MHz and 1700MHz/2100MHz bands. Movistar Uruguay, owned by Spanish telecoms group Telefonica, secured four 10MHz blocks of spectrum in the 1900MHz band (biddingUS$8.002 million for each lot of paired spectrum), while America Movil-owned Claro won two blocks in the 1900MHz band (bidding US$7.6 million and US$7.55 million), as well as two 10MHz blocks of paired spectrum in the 1700MHz/2100MHz band for US$7.6 million apiece. Under the terms of the tender, each block of spectrum had a starting price of US$7.5 million, with licenses valid for a period of 20 years. State-owned incumbent ANTEL did not participate in the tender, but will have to pay US$38 million for reserved spectrum, which includes one block of 10MHz in the 900MHz band and four lots in the 1700MHz/2100MHz band.
(March 15, 2013) BNamericas

Argentine
Argentine mobile operator has been ordered to pay ARS13.5 million (US$2.7 million) in fines and compensation by the Comision Nacional de Comunicaciones (CNC), after customers experienced service failure on the operator's 3G network in the Buenos Aires metropolitan area last week. The Telecom Argentina-owned mobile operator must pay a penalty of ARS6 million and has also been ordered to pay compensation of ARS0.30 to each affected user. In June 2012 Claro was ordered to pay ARS9.2 million to its subscribers following an outage on the America Movil-owned company's network in parts of Buenos Aires, while Telefonica was fined around ARS185 million after an outage on its wireless network left subscribers without service for several hours the previous April. (March 14, 2013) TeleSemana

Venezuela

Telecoms regulator CONATEL has initiated a public consultation on the future usage of the 2500MHz-2690MHz frequency band with the aim of introducing new 4G mobile broadband services such as LTE. The invitation for participation issued by the regulator to operators, manufacturers, public authorities and other stakeholders runs from March 25 to April 9, 2013. Several Venezuelan operators, notably Movilmax, have been issued with wireless licenses for providing wireless broadband internet access, including WiMAX in the 2.5GHz-2.7GHz frequency range, and in mid-2007 Movilmax launched commercial operations in the band, passing 10,000 WiMAX subscribers in 2011; however in April 2012 Movilmax announced it had scrapped plans for a nationwide WiMAX rollout in favor of a switch to TD-LTE technology, but it will require regulatory clearance. Movilmax has revealed aims to begin LTE mobile data service deployment from mid-2013 using its existing frequencies, but its plans could be stalled by CONATEL, backs the idea of holding an open auction for 2.5GHz-2.6GHz 4G licenses. Following 1800MHz/1900MHz license awards in Q3 2012 the three incumbent cellular network operators Movilnet, Movistar and Digitel are planning to launch commercial LTE services this year, initially using the lower bands, while other companies including pay-TV provider DirecTV have expressed interest in operating mobile broadband services, potentially using the 2.5GHz-2.6GHz band. (March 27, 2013) Daily El Mundo

Brazil

The total number of registered mobile phone subscriptions in Brazil climbed by a net 785,750 (or 0.3%) to 263 million by the end of February, according to data published by the national telecoms regulator ANATEL. Net growth eclipsed the gains of 482,000 reported in January this year, it added. In terms of market share, market leader Telefonica (Vivo) saw its slice of the pie erode marginally to 28.83% at end-February, down from 28.91% a month earlier, while second-placed TIM Participacoes (TIM Brasil) ended the period under review with 26.88% of all users, down from 26.92%. While the two market leaders lost ground, number three operator Telecom Americas (Claro), the local unit of Mexico's America Movil (AM), boosted its share to 25.12% from 25.00%. Fourth-placed Oi SA meanwhile, ended the month with 18.83% of the market, compared to 18.85% in January. (March 26, 2013) anatel.gov.br

The president of Brazil has asked the Ministry for Communications to draw up a national project designed to extend the reach of fiber-optic network infrastructure to all Brazilian regions within the next ten years. According to Minister, the government is envisaging an initial budget of BRL100 billion (US$51.2 billion) in the project, which would include private sector partnerships, tax breaks for those involved, funding from national development bank BNDES, and investment from state-controlled telco Telebras. Of the planned total, some BRL25 billion would be ring-fenced for the backbone network, with the remainder set aside for last mile access FTTH and backhaul. (March 11, 2013) BNamericas

Telecoms regulator ANATEL has issued a demand to the country's multichannel multipoint distribution service (MMDS) pay-TV providers, that they vacate the 2.5MHz-2.6MHz bands (set aside for Long Term Evolution [LTE] use) by April 12, due to rising concerns over the planned rollout of 4G services in Brazil. Under the terms and conditions of the 2.5GHz tender of LTE spectrum licenses, 4G operators are required to have their networks up and running in the six host cities of the FIFA Confederations Cup by April 30. However, with MMDS providers dragging their feet, the watchdog has issued an ultimatum that any provider that fails to release 2.5MHz-2.6MHz spectrum in these cities before the deadline risks having their licenses suspended and their base stations closed down. (March 5, 2013) BNamericas

Colombia

The upcoming auction of 4G-suitable spectrum is expected to raise around US$250 million for state coffers. Bidding is slated to begin on June 26, 2013, with 225MHz of airwaves in the 1900MHz, 2100MHz and 2500MHz bands up for grabs. Broadband and TV operators ETB, DirecTV and Avantel have all reportedly expressed an interest in taking part in the auction, along with Une-EPM, which launched nation's first 4G network in June 2012. Incumbent cellcos Tigo, Claro and Movistar are restricted in their bidding, with Claro allowed to bid only for spectrum in the 2500MHz range whilst Tigo and Telefonica are limited to the 1900MHz and 2100MHz bands. In terms of airwaves, there is a single 5MHz block of 1900MHz spectrum on offer, three licenses for 2×15MHz of paired spectrum in the 2100MHz range and four 2500MHz permissions, consisting of three 2×15MHz blocks of Frequency Division Duplex (FDD) spectrum and a single 40MHz Time Division Duplex (TDD) concession. One each of the 2100MHz and 2500MHz licenses has been reserved for new players. New entrants to the market will be subject to less stringent rollout obligations. (March 19, 2013) TeleSemana

The Ministry of Information Technology and Communications (MinTIC) has announced plans for the sale of seven blocks of spectrum for 4G services. The auction will include frequencies in the 2100MHz, 1900MHz and 2500MHz bands. Winning operators will be obliged to provide coverage in small municipalities as well as profitable markets; 50% of municipalities must be covered by July 2014, increasing to all areas by 2018. Further, providers must offer mobile broadband plans including tablets or computers for students and teachers. In terms of airwaves, there is a single 5MHz block of 1900MHz spectrum on offer, three licenses for 2×15MHz of paired spectrum in the 2100MHz range and four 2500MHz permissions, consisting of three 2×15MHz blocks of Frequency Division Duplex (FDD) spectrum and a single 40MHz Time Division Duplex (TDD) concession. One each of the 2100MHz and 2500MHz licenses has been reserved for new players. (March 14, 2013) telegeography.com

Colombia's telecoms regulator and the ICT Ministry have jointly announced plans for a 4G license auction. The process will consist of a single auction, and will offer seven 4G licenses, with two reserved for new entrants to the market. There will be a condition attached that will require coverage in at least half the countries municipalities by the middle of 2014. The auction is due to take place on the June 26 according to a statement put out by the ICT Ministry. (March 13, 2013) cellular-news.com

Chile

Chilean cellco Entel has announced that it may not offer a commercial 4G service, over doubts regarding the suitability of the 2600MHz spectrum. Local news portal quotes Entel general manager Antonio Buchi as saying that 'The 2600MHz band is very useful to relieve the network in general but does not allow a service dedicated 4G network'

as customers would drop to 3G speeds whilst indoors. With quality of service (QoS) likely to fall short of Entel's standard, Buchi claimed that the company was reluctant to sell a product that would not meet customer's expectations. The situation is likely to change once the government makes the 700MHz spectrum available, however. The comments have drawn criticism from the regulator, which says that the company will face punitive measures if Entel does not stick to its commitment to offer 4G services. Entel faces an initial US$1.4 million fine if it fails to offer 4G by April 3 2014. Subsequent fines of US$52 million and US$23 million and the loss of its concession would follow. (March 25, 2013) La Tercera

Cuba

Ministry of Information and Communications (MIC) has been renamed and restructured under Decree Law 308, which was approved by the State Council and published in the Official Gazette No. 7. Now known as the Ministry of Communications, the ministry will be solely responsible for state regulatory functions, while the business operations will be taken over by two senior management organizations served by the ministry – the Correos de Cuba Business Group and the Computing and Communications Business Group. According to the Official Gazette, the move is aimed at allowing for a more precise definition of the ministry's mission and functions, as well as a more rational structure, composition and size. (March 18, 2013) Granma Newspaper

European Union

The European telecoms regulator has published new guidelines on mobile phone 'roaming', reflecting new rules on charges which came into force last year. The document has been published by the Body of European Regulators for Electronic Communications (BEREC), which includes representatives of the national regulatory authorities. The guidance contains new provisions on 'inadvertent' roaming, as well as considering how service providers should deal with automatic connections which occur on ships and planes. BEREC will publish additional guidance on the application of the new wholesale access obligation contained in the regulation, and on the separate sale of roaming services, shortly. It consulted on draft versions of these guidelines in July 2012, just after the new regulations came into force. The wholesale access obligation requires mobile network operators (MNOs) to meet all "reasonable requests" for wholesale roaming access. The 2012 Roaming Regulation came into effect on July 1, 2012. It regulates what can be charged by MNOs for providing roaming services, which occurs when a resident of one EU member state uses a mobile phone on a network based in another member state that the resident is visiting. Consumers will be charged a fee for roaming services, reflecting the charge made by the foreign mobile network operator to the domestic one for terminating calls on its network. The 2012 regulation updated the original Roaming Regulation, which introduced a cap on the roaming fees that can be charged by an MNO to a consumer, as well as a cap on wholesale roaming charges. These caps were challenged in the courts by four major EU mobile networks; however the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) ruled in 2010 that the EU-wide requirements were proportionate and did not undermine the right of countries to govern them. Although technically not banned by the Regulation, "maintaining wholesale charges at their existing level throughout the year with the intention of making a reduction at a later

stage" was "unacceptable commercial practice" and "could have an adverse effect on other operators", the guidelines said. According to the BEREC guidelines, MNOs should take steps "reduce consumer harm of higher bills" as a result of 'inadvertent' roaming. This can occur when the signal from a mobile device is picked up by a different network, without the consumer taking any action. BEREC said that MNOs should recognize that "radio signals do not respect land borders", and should consider implementing "special tariffs" or barring devices from accessing particular networks without consent, particularly where consumers lived close to national borders. The guidelines also recommend technical measures that MNOs could adopt to prevent inadvertent roaming in the first instance. (March 20, 2013) out-law.com

The European Commission (EC) has reportedly ditched an investigation into the region's five largest mobile network operators, the so-called 'E5' – Deutsche Telekom (DT), France Telecom-Orange, Telefonica of Spain, Vodafone Group and Telecom Italia (TI) – after it raised concerns about how industry standards were set and applied by wireless service providers. In March 2012 the EC asked the E5 and the GSM Association (GSMA) to submit information on the way technology standards for future mobile services are being developed. The heads of four of the telcos involved met for the first time in Paris in October 2010, to discuss matters such O/S and their ability to handle an anticipated surge in data traffic on their networks amid the rise in popularity of social networking sites, mobile apps and the proliferation of smartphones. (March 8, 2013) Bloomberg

The European Commission (EC) has suspended the mobile termination rate (MTR) proposal submitted by German telecoms regulator the Federal Network Agency FNA (Bundesnetzagentur), on the grounds that the plan could mean that German consumers would pay unjustifiably high prices for their mobile calls. The EC noted that as part of its proposal, the FNA had opted not to follow the method for calculating MTRs set out in the Commission's 2009 Recommendation on Termination Rates. Instead, the proposal included a price control method which would result in MTRs that are around 80% higher than in member states that comply with the EC's Recommendation. 'The vast majority of member states play ball and are now applying EU telecoms rules in a coordinated way that brings maximum benefit to consumers and to competition. German operators should not be given special treatment,' said EC vice president Neelie Kroes. (March 4, 2013) telegeography.com

United Kingdom

UK based mobile network, EE has lost an appeal against a regulatory decision to halve the mobile termination rates by 2014. EE had challenged OFCOM's 2011 ruling that would see the reduction in MTRs applied progressively by 2014 but lost the case at the Competition Appeal Tribunal. An appeal has also now been thrown out. David Nieberg, a spokesman for EE, told that the company was disappointed with the ruling. EE's rival networks are also separately filing cases against other aspects of the OFCOM decision. The reduction in MTRs is expected to lower mobile revenues by around US$300 million per year. (March 7, 2013) Bloomberg News

Telecoms regulator OFCOM has formally allocated the 4G licenses from the recent auction, following a secondary spectrum assignment phase. Last week, OFCOM announced which parties had won spectrum through the 'principal'

stage of the auction, and the amounts they would pay. OFCOM has now concluded the final 'assignment' stage of the auction, in which parties who had won spectrum had the opportunity to 'top up' their bids, in order to reflect any preference they had over where in the frequency bands their new spectrum would be located. As a result of this stage: Niche Spectrum Ventures (a subsidiary of BT Group) has paid £15.06 million to be allocated the spectrum bands 2,520 to 2,535 MHz and 2,640 to 2,655 MHz. Vodafone has paid £8.06 million to be allocated the spectrum bands 801 to 811 MHz and 842 to 852 MHz, and an additional £4,039,123 to be allocated the spectrum bands 2,500 to 2,520 MHz and 2,620 to 2,640 MHz. None of the other winning bidders from the principal stage (Everything Everywhere, Hutchison 3G UK and Telefónica UK) is required to pay any further amounts as a result of the assignment stage. The total amount paid as a result of the assignment stage is £27.16 million, which will be added to the £2.34 billion paid during the principal stage of the auction. The winning bidders have today been issued with licenses to use the relevant spectrum holdings, and are now free to deploy 4G networks subject to the conditions of those licenses. (March 1, 2013) cellular-news.com

Ireland

Telecoms regulator the Commission for Communications Regulation (COMREG) has published its 'Irish Quarterly Communications Market Data Q4 2012' report showing that revenues from electronic communications fell by 2.4% year-on-year to EUR931.7 million US$1.2 billion) in the last three months of 2012. Although fixed line revenues recovered slightly, growing 1.1% y-o-y to EUR500.3 million, mobile revenues slumped 6.5% to EUR386.5 million and broadcasting revenue dipped 3.0% to EUR44.9 million. The report also shows that total voice call minutes dropped 5.6% on an annualized basis to 4.139 billion minutes, impacted by a 10.6% fall in fixed voice traffic minutes to 1.445 billion and a 2.7% drop in mobile voice traffic to 2.693 billion minutes. At the end of 2012 the country was home to a total of just over 2.1 million fixed subscriptions (i.e. voice, internet, TV as single-play of bundled packages), down 4.0% year-on-year, including 1.463 million fixed voice subscriptions (up 3.1%). Fixed broadband subscriptions reached 1.112 million, up 3.9% year-on-year, while total mobile connections (including HSDPA) reached 5.461 million (-0.7%). The estimated fixed broadband household penetration rate was 57.3% in Q4 2012. The fixed broadband per capita penetration rate was 24.2% at the same date. The watchdog also noted that average broadband speeds continue to increase. In Q4 2012 approximately 21.2% of all broadband subscriptions were equal to or greater than 10Mbps, up from 18.7% in Q4 2011. Meanwhile, narrowband internet subscriptions continued to fall, to reach just 11,437 by end-2012 – down a massive 53% since 4Q11, COMREG said. (March 18, 2013) telegeography.com

Telecoms regulator COMREG has reverted back the original target date of May 20 for the launch of wholesale next generation access (NGA) broadband services, from April 8, amid industry concerns over the interoperability of the product with other operators' networks and ongoing product testing. (March 11, 2013) SiliconRepublic

France

ARCEP introduces a system for measuring and tracking the quality of fixed internet access services. The minister responsible for electronic communications having approved the ARCEP decision of January 29, 2013, the Authority has introduced a system for measuring and tracking the quality of fixed internet access services. The aim is to improve the information available to internet users, and to provide ARCEP with the means to fulfill its duty to supervise the overall quality of fixed calling and internet access services. This system is also part of the work and discussions and that ARCEP has been conducting since 2010 on the technical and economic aspects of net neutrality. To achieve these goals, ARCEP was keen to involve the primary stakeholders in the decision-making process by creating a technical committee made up of operators, of course, along with consumer/user associations (UFC, AFUTT, La quadrature du Net) and experts from INRIA (National institute for research in computer science and control) and AFNIC (French Association for internet domain naming in cooperation). (March 25, 2013) arcep.fr

Telecommunications regulator gave the green light to the country's third-largest mobile phone operator to repurpose a tranche of radio spectrum for a new ultra-high-speed service, rejecting public lobbying by competitors that such a decision would confer an unfair advantage. French regulator ARCEP said that it would allow Bouygues Telecom, a unit of Bouygues SA (EN.FR), to use spectrum in the 1,800 MHz band, which is currently earmarked for basic, so-called 2G, for the newest standard, dubbed 4G or LTE. The move could take effect as early as October 1. Competitors, including France Telecom SA (FTE.FR) and Vivendi SA's (VIV.FR) SFR--respectively the No. 1 and 2 operators in France by subscribers had opposed Bouygues' request to repurpose the spectrum. They argued that France's operators had bid just over a year ago in an auction for other wireless spectrum for 4G LTE, and that allowing Bouygues to use 1,800 MHz amounted to changing the rules in the middle of the game. Those two operators also have spectrum in the 1,800 MHz band, but it is more heavily used than Bouygues', making it difficult for them to make a similar switch, executives at the operators have said. SFR said Thursday that the decision, if implemented, "substantially changes the competitive and economic framework in which we made our bids," adding, "the government and ARCEP appear to have misunderstood the principle of legitimate expectations.
(March 15, 2013) online.wsj.com

VoIP based telephone service provider, Skype has been reported to the French prosecutors after it allegedly ignored several requests to register formally as a telecoms operator with the French regulators. The regulator, ARCEP said that it had reminded the company that while it is not required to obtain administrative approval to become an electronic communications operator in France -- it is however required to declare them beforehand. A failure to comply with this obligation constitutes a criminal offence. The regulator noted that engaging in the business of electronic communications operator, and particularly the fact of providing a telephone service to the public, also implies compliance with certain obligations, which include the routing of emergency calls and implementing the means required to perform legally ordered interceptions. As a result, ARCEP says that it has requested several times that Skype declare itself as an electronic communications operator, which the company has failed to do thus far. The regulator says that as a result, it has apprised the Paris public prosecutor of these facts, which could be classified as a criminal offence.
(March 12, 2013) cellular-news.com

Italy

Telecoms regulator Autorita per le Garanzie nelle Comunicazioni (AGCOM) has set the prices for wholesale access to Telecom Italia's passive network infrastructure and active infrastructure by other licensed operators for the provision of fiber-to-the-cabinet (FTTC) broadband at speeds of up to 30Mbps and fiber-to-the-home (FTTH) internet at speeds of up to 100Mbps. The regulator announced that it has approved the FTTC wholesale access fee for the provision of data and voice-over-internet protocol (VoIP) services at EUR21.51 (US$28) per month, lower than the EUR31.01 rate proposed by Telecom Italia, and established the FTTH fee at EUR24.09 per month (the incumbent had proposed a rate of EUR38). The prices for 2014, 2015 and 2016 will be determined following an analysis of the market.
(March 8, 2013) telegeography.com

Sweden

Telecom regulator PTS has published a broadband survey which shows that 53% of all households and businesses in Sweden had access to broadband internet at a theoretical speed of at least 100Mbps in October 2012, an increase of four percentage points compared to October 2011. The increase was driven by the rollout of direct fiber services, the regulator added. Regarding take-up rates, the PTS estimates that about 27% of all households with access to 100Mbps-plus services in October 2012 subscribed to such a service, an increase of five percentage points compared to one year earlier. The PTS also confirmed that in October 2012, 93% of all Swedish households and businesses had access to mobile broadband via 4G LTE networks, compared with 48% twelve months earlier, with the fastest development occurring in rural areas, where 79% could access LTE compared with just 10% a year earlier. It is noted that the PTS report was compiled before cellcos' 800MHz (digital dividend) band LTE rollouts gained significant momentum in Q4 2012 –via the lower-band 4G rollouts, Swedish operators (including Tele2 Sweden which has also deployed 900MHz LTE) have confidently targeted 99% LTE population in Q1/Q2 2013.
(March 22, 2013) telegeography.com

Austria

The telecom regulator Telekom-Control Commission (TKK) will begin auctioning the country's 800MHz, 900MHz and 1800MHz spectrum bands in September 2013. A total of 28 frequency blocks of 2x5MHz will be on offer. The Commission has set the starting bids for spectrum in accordance with the statutory requirements on the basis of national and international benchmarks, it said. The sum of the minimum bids is approximately €526m, it added. The Commission stated that it is holding the auction in September to give operators six months to carry out preparatory work, as the multi-band auction is the largest allocation of frequencies that has ever taken place in Austria. (March 19, 2013) telecoms.com

Norway

The Norwegian Post & Telecoms Authority (NPT) has received an application for frequencies in the 2GHz band for use on the Arctic Archipelago of Svalbard. The application reportedly seeks two 20MHz frequency blocks in the 1920MHz-1980MHz and 2110MHz-2170MHz spectrum bands. If the application is approved by the watchdog, the company concerned will retain the right to transfer the spectrum permit or to lease out frequencies to another operator. The permit will be valid until December 31, 2032,

and involve an annual license fee of NOK34,000 (US$5,862). If the regulator receives another expression of interest in the spectrum it has said that it may hold an auction for the frequencies; competing bids must be submitted by April 19.
(March 20, 2013) telegeography.com

Ministry of Transport & Communications (MoTC) has said that it expects 100% of the country's households to have access to broadband in the near future at what it has termed a basic good quality. To achieve this aim it has revealed that under the terms of the forthcoming auction of spectrum suitable for mobile broadband services, winning bidders will be required to provide coverage to 98% of the population. Meanwhile, the state will also spend at least NOK150 million (US$26.8 million) on the development of broadband in areas which currently have no coverage. Having said that it has now decided the overall framework for the 800MHz auction, the MoTC has confirmed that operators will be required to reach the 98% mobile broadband coverage level within five years of a concession being issued. Further, it is understood that services offered will be required to provide average downlink rates of at least 2Mbps. As per the auction terms, and with an eye on ensuring competition in the sector, a cap of 2×10MHz will be implemented for the sale of 800MHz frequencies, although this will reportedly only apply to those operators which already have significant mobile spectrum holdings. Frequencies in the 900MHz and 1800MHz bands are also expected to be auctioned simultaneously with the 800MHz spectrum, and the MoTC has said that a cap of 2×20MHz will apply to 1800MHz spectrum, while in the 900MHz band there will be a cap of 2×15MHz.
(March 18, 2013) telegeography.com

Spain

Spanish computer and handset manufacturer Airis is preparing to launch Airis Movil, its mobile virtual network operator (MVNO), next month. At launch the provider will offer a EUR8.3 (US$10.76) per month package including 1GB of data and national voice calls at EUR0.01 per minute. The new unit will be 50% owned by Airis and 50% owned by former Vodafone Spaion CTO Jaime Bustillo. Airis Movil is looking to sign up 50,000 users by the end of the year.
(March 26, 2013) Prepaid MVNO

Slovak Republic

The Telecommunications Office of the Slovak Republic (TU SR) has published a draft decision proposing to reduce wholesale mobile termination rates (MTRs) by 67% to a maximum of EUR0.0122 (US$0.0158) per minute for all three cellular network operators. The regulator set the proposed new mobile call interconnection fee threshold based on a pure long-run incremental cost model (Bottom Up Long Run Incremental Cost). Comments on the draft decision can be made by April 22, 2013. (March 27, 2013) telegeography.com

The telecom regulator Republic Agency for Electronic Communications (RATEL) has named Telekom Srbija, Telenor Serbia, Mobilkom Serbia (which operates under the VIP Mobile brand) and Orion Telekom as having universal service obligations effective from April 1, 2013. Under the decision, the operators are required to provide services at a set quality and reasonable price to disabled or vulnerable customers. This includes offering free calls to emergency services and implementing special measures to ensure equal access for customers with disabilities to telephony and data services and public telephone directories. (March 20, 2013) telegeography.com

Moldova

Telecoms regulator, ANRCETI, has issued a temporary GSM license to Orange Moldova. The 20-month concession will replace the cellco's existing license which expires on Thursday. The temporary extension is due to ANRCETI working on introducing a new set of technology neutral licenses in the 800MHz, 900MHz and 1800MHz bands in 2014, once other concessions held by Orange and rival operator Moldcell have expired. (March 6, 2013) telegeography.com

Slovenia

The Agency for Post and Electronic Communications (APEK) has issued an open call for bidders for the assignment of additional mobile frequencies in the 1800MHz and 2100MHz bands, under a process it expects to complete on June 1, 2013. A deadline for submission of applications is set for April 15. On offer are eight 2×5MHz sub-bands in the 1800MHz range (1710MHz-1720MHz and 1755MHz-1785MHz paired with 1805MHz-1815MHz and 1850MHz-1880MHz) with validity up to January 3, 2016; plus two 2×5MHz sub-bands in the 2100MHz band valid for the period ended September 21, 2021 (1955MHz-1965MHz paired with 2145MHz-2155MHz). License winners must offer services in the specific bands covering at least 30% of the population within one year of the license award, with the frequencies expected to bolster capacity and coverage of mobile broadband networks including 4G Long Term Evolution (LTE). (March 19, 2013) telegeography.com

Kosovo

Government's privatization committee has further postponed the deadline for submission of bids for fixed line incumbent Post and Telecommunications Kosovo (PTK). The sale of a 75% stake in the telco has been pushed back due to unspecified technical problems facing pre-qualified bidders. The new deadline for bids is April 3, 2013. Sale has been delayed several times already, most recently in January, when the government delayed the sale until mid-March to 'avoid a rush that might yield low offers'.
(March 25, 2013) Kosova Press

Hungary

According to data published by the National Media and Infocommunications Authority (NMHH), the country was home to a total of 2.183 million fixed broadband subscribers at January 31, 2013. Of these, xDSL accounted for 770,000 connections, broadly unchanged on the previous month, while cable users increased to 886,000 and the number of fiber-optic lines to homes and businesses (FTTx) reached 325,000. At that date, Magyar Telekom (MTel) led the pack with a market share of 34.9%, ahead of second-placed UPC Hungary with 21.9%, DIGI in third (13.7%), Invitel (9.7%) and others (11.7%). Furthermore, the NMHH reports that the number of subscriptions with bandwidth greater than 30Mbps continues to grow, standing at almost one-third (30.8%) of all connections as of 1 February.
(March 26, 2013) telegeography.com

The National Media and Infocommunications Authority (NMHH), has committed to making full use of its precious mobile frequency spectrum as soon as possible in a drive to boost competition and bring down retail prices. The watchdog said that domestic rates for mobile tariffs and especially those for data plans are currently 'several times' higher than similar packages in other European markets.

It attributes the relatively high costs to the low mobile internet penetration rate in Hungary, which at 18.7% is the lowest in Europe behind Belgium with 25.9%. The NMHH argues that in countries where retail prices are more affordable, the market is typically home to at least four mobile network operators. Its observation is a thinly veiled reference to its failed efforts to license a fourth player in the country. Hungary's highest court, the Curia, annulled a mobile frequency auction that would have facilitated the launch of a fourth network operator in the shape of state-owned vehicle MPVI Mobil. In its February 26 ruling, the Curia adjudged that the tender was 'unlawful', upholding a previous ruling from the Budapest Metropolitan Court and following an appeal by rival telecoms operators against the original license award in January 2012. The Curia's decision means the launch of would-be start-up, state-backed MPVI Mobil, will now be postponed or cancelled.
(March 11, 2013) The Budapest Business Journal

Czech Republic

An auction for mobile phone frequencies in the Czech Republic has been canceled after bids raised too high, prompting fears customers would pay heavily once services were launched. The Czech telecommunications regulator ČTÚ will re-launch the auction under new terms after bids exceeded 20 billion Kč. The auction, for 800, 1,800 and 2,600 MHz bands, would have resulted in the launch of Long Term Evolution (LTE) mobile services in the Czech Republic. LTE, a 4G mobile technology, offers consumers faster download speeds than existing 3G services. The companies taking part in the auction, launched in July, were Telefónica CR, T-Mobile Czech Republic, Vodafone Czech Republic and the private equity fund PPF Mobile Services, which would have been a new entrant to the market. (March 18, 2013) praguepost.com

Serbia

Telecom regulator the Republic Agency for Electronic Communications (RATEL) has proposed to begin rolling out fixed number portability (FNP) from October 2013, the watchdog announced, following a meeting with the Ministry of Foreign and Domestic Trade and Telecommunications (MTT). Previous efforts to implement FNP were derailed when delays at Telekom Srbija in December 2012 forced the watchdog to postpone the introduction of the service indefinitely. RATEL has sent notices to the nation's fixed line providers, proposing to begin the first stage of deploying FNP in October 2013 with the final phase expected to be completed by March 2014. The regulator is expecting to receive responses within the next week.
(March 6, 2013) telegeography.com

Portugal

Telecoms regulator ANACOM reports that the number of mobile broadband users in Portugal reached 3.47 million at December 31, 2012, up by 9.7% quarter-on-quarter and 18.8% year-on-year, whilst 978,000 of the total were USB modem/data card users. According to ANACOM's data, Telecomunicacoes Moveis Nacionais (TMN) had the largest share of mobile broadband users at the end of 2012 with 40.5%, followed closely by Vodafone Portugal (38.3%), while Optimus accounted for 19.9%, and 1.3% of users were signed up to broadband company Zon Multimedia's mobile virtual network operator (MVNO) division. However, mobile broadband data traffic shares in the fourth quarter of 2012 were a different story, as ANACOM reported that Optimus' users accounted for the largest share of traffic (40.4%),

followed by TMN (32.1%), Vodafone (21.4%) and Zon (2.1%). Zon and Optimus are currently in the process of merging. (March 8, 2013) telegeography.com

Nigeria

Nigerian Communications Commission, NCC, has released a new interconnect rate that would guide telecom operators in the country on terminating calls for one another. The new rate apparently became necessary after the expiration date of December 2012 for the old interconnect rate regime, which came into operation in 2009. The new rate, which will begin from April 1, 2013 according to NCC, will see major operators terminating calls on new entrants/ smaller operators' networks at N6.40, while the smaller operators do same on major operators' network at N4.90. It also reviewed the respective rates further downwards for the next three years ending 2015. NCC said it took the step to enable small operators and new entrants remain in business. It described a new entrant as newly-licensed operator entering an existing or new market within 0 to 3 years. It also said that for the purpose of determination, small operator could be defined as an existing operator with a market share of 0 - 7.5% in terms of subscriber base. The current rate, which has attracted several hues and cries from smaller operators since it came into operation, was fixed at a uniform N8.20 per minute. Interconnect rate represents the cost of terminating a call on another network. In other words, it is the rate that a network operator that originates a call pays to the operator on whose network the call is terminated. The interconnect rate is important in telecommunications because it helps in defining tariffs for calls that involve at least two networks. (March 25, 2013) allafrica.com

Telecoms regulator has announced that Mobile Number Portability will go live in the country next week, and also a day earlier than originally planned. Mr. Reuben Muoka, Head, Media and Public Relations of the Commission told the News Agency of Nigeria (NAN).that contrary to the initial announcement of the launch on March 26; the regulatory body had finalized arrangements to begin the service a day earlier. The initial launch will affect just the GSM networks, with CDMA networks required to offer MNP services later on this year. Porting between GSM and CDMA networks is however not expected to be available for some time. Customers seeking to port their numbers will also be required to re-verify their personal ID with the networks. (March 19, 2013) PMNews

Zimbabwe

Telecoms regulator is working on replacing the current mobile licenses with universal licenses when they come up for renewal later this year. The government is making the necessary changes to the law to allow POTRAZ to issue the new licenses, and expects to have the work completed by June. The deadline of June is important as that is when Econet and Telecel's existing licenses expire and need to be renewed. "Licenses are about to expire and because of technological changes that are happening in the industry we cannot continue to issue operators with the old license which only allowed an operator to work within the stipulations of that license. The new license would allow operators to diversify their products. (March 4, 2013) The Herald

Malawi

The Malawi Communications Regulatory Authority (MACRA) has announced the signing of a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with its Mozambican counterpart Instituto Nacional das Communicacoes de Mocambique (INCM) on cross border frequency coordination. Among other things, the MoU aims to manage interference of radio communication systems between the two countries, promote roaming between telecoms operators, and coordinate broadcasting signal distribution activities. MACRA said the signing of the agreement was a response to complaints from members of the public facing cross border interference with neighboring countries including Mozambique, Tanzania and Zambia. (March 6, 2013) telegeography.com

Ghana

Ghana's telecoms regulator the National Communications Authority (NCA) has said that it has no plans to issue 4G licenses to the incumbent mobile networks in the near future. The acting Deputy Director General of NCA said that none of the six mobile networks would be issued with formal 4G spectrum licenses, but did note that they could reuse their existing spectrum assets if they want. One of the reasons why NCA decided to give to new companies is to ensure that they use the frequencies for what they are used for. Technology is going in such a way that you can reform some of the frequencies to do other things. However, the regulator did recently issue three BWA licenses that could be used for 4G services by new entrants to the market who will be allowed to offer fixed wireless services. (March 25, 2013) Citi Business News

Mozambique

The Instituto Nacional de Comunicacoes de Mocambique (INCM) has confirmed that it intends to offer up five 2×5MHz spectrum blocks in the 790MHz-862MHz band in an auction set for June 2013. The deadline for applications has been set for May 13, with the auction itself tentatively scheduled for June 16. The base price for bidding has been set at US$30 million per concession. The Mozambican mobile market is currently home to three operators: mCel, Vodacom Mozambique and Movitel, a subsidiary of Vietnam's Viettel Group. In November 2010 Movitel saw its US$29 million for a cellular concession accepted by the government, despite UNI-Telecom, a joint venture between Angola's Unitel and Mozambique's Energy Capital, bidding USD4 million more. Portugal Telecom's TMN unit brought up the rear, with a bid of US$25 million. The introduction of five 800MHz spectrum blocks is likely to see long-time suitors PT and Unitel renewing their respective interests in Mozambique. With wireless penetration standing at just 47.1% at December 31, 2012, the relatively untapped market is likely to pique the interest of international telecoms players, with a total of 22 bidders expressing an interest in the third mobile license, including Kuwait's Zain Group and France Telecom-Orange. (March 18, 2013) telegeography.com

Senegal

Senegal could get a fourth mobile network operator after the country's President ordered the Council of Ministers to take the necessary steps towards awarding a license. The country currently has three mobile networks: Sonatel, Tigo and Sudatel. Local media cited a press statement from the President office, although no details about the timing of the fourth license tender was offered. The President also called

for SIM cards to be registered by their users as soon as practicably possible. (March 11, 2013) Agence Ecofin

Ukraine

The head of Ukraine's National Commission for the State Regulation of Communications and Informatization (NKRZI) has indicated that 2100MHz 3G mobile frequencies could be released by the Ministry of Defense (MoD) for license awards to all major cellcos in the country 'before the end of the year'. The telecoms regulator and the State Service of Special Communication & Information Protection (Gosspetssvyazi) will work together to prepare necessary amendments to the plan for usage of radio frequency resources by June 2013, and 'maybe' reach the stage of launching a competitive license auction by the end of the year. The statement echoes similar announcements in past years as various government departments including the NKRZI, the MoD, the infrastructure ministry and the National Council on Radiation Protection and Measurements (NCRP) failed to conclude the process of reallocating 2100MHz frequencies from military to commercial usage. (March 28, 2013) Daily BizLigaNet

The National Commission for State Regulation of Communications and Informatization (NKRZI) has announced on its website the approval of draft regulations on the provision of number portability (NP). At a meeting of February 28, 2013 the regulator approved the draft resolution under the draft timetable, introduction of MNP should be implemented on commercial mobile networks by December 1, 2013, while fixed number portability (FNP) should arrive by January 1, 2015. (March 4, 2013) telegeography.com

Indonesia

Indonesian mobile operators PT Telkomsel and PT XL Axiata have each won frequencies in the final phase of bidding for 3G spectrum by the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology (MoCI). The process was run as a 'beauty contest' and saw Telkomsel, which is 65% owned by Telkom Indonesia, winning spectrum at 1970MHz-1975MHz, while XL Axiata was the runner up with spectrum at 1975MHz-1980MHz. (March 11, 2013) TMTFinance

Malaysia

Indonesian mobile operator Telkomsel, a unit of Telkom Indonesia, plans to launch a mobile virtual network operator (MVNO) in Malaysia from mid-year 2013. Telkomsel sales director was quoted as saying that his company believes the MVNO market offer a great opportunity, given the high number of Indonesian ex-pats and students who currently live and work in Malaysia. (March 25, 2013) Indotelko

Three major telcos have been served with fines totaling RM190,000 (US$61,200) by the telecoms regulator for breaching their license conditions, notably on complaints from the public concerning dropped calls. "The telcos were given ample time and reminders to resolve complaints received from their customers concerning the increased occurrence of dropped calls lately. As the regulator of the industry, we have no choice but to fine them for failing to meet accepted standards and levels of service," said Dato' Mohamed Sharil Tarmizi, Chairman of MCMC. DiGi was served four separate fines totaling RM100,000, Celcom Axiata was fined RM60,000 for three separate incidents, and Maxis was issued with two fines totaling RM30,000. The regulator said that the fines were based on tests results

carried out in several locations in the country. More tests are being conducted nationwide to measure the quality of service provided by telcos. Dato' Mohamed Sharil added that MCMC is aware that the telcos have begun upgrading and making efforts to improve their quality of service in the country but stresses that they should speed things up. "The public should not have to tolerate the increasing incidence of dropped calls or poor quality of service." (March 6, 2013) cellular-news.com

China

Plans to allow private MVNOs to operate in China could be approved as soon as May, according to local news reports. Under the plans originally announced in January, private companies will be allowed to offer mobile services directly to consumers through purchasing bandwidth from the three incumbent networks, which have to provide bandwidth at "fair or favorable" prices. The Ministry of Industry and Information Technology earlier said that it would launch a two-year trial of the MVNO concept. Any bidders for MVNO licenses will need to have prior telecom work experience which limits the potential for consumer brands to enter the market. Any bidders must also have a team more than 50 people. Fitch Rating earlier cautioned that the development of the MVNO policy could signal that China's telecoms industry may face growing regulatory risks in the future as the government seeks to increase competition in the market. (March 26, 2013) Shanghai Daily

China's telecoms authority is planning to issue commercial 4G operating licenses later this year, Chinese state news agency quotes minister of industry and information technology Miao Wei as saying, though the minister did not reveal a schedule for the distribution of concessions. 'China has made breakthroughs in research and development of 4G technologies, but is still facing restrictions in commercial use,' the official said, noting that base station construction needed to be hastened and more terminals made available to end users – both of which will require greater financial and technological input. Miao Wei added that the ministry 'will promulgate supporting policies at an appropriate time to guide the construction and development of the 4G network.' 4G services are currently available on China Mobile's trial Time Division Long Term Evolution (TD-LTE) network. The cellco has launched large scale trial networks in Shanghai, Hangzhou, Nanjing, Guangzhou, Shenzhen and Xiamen. China Mobile announced late last month that its networks in Guangzhou and Shenzhen were nearing commercial level, having rolled out 6,500 base stations across the two cities. (March 6, 2013) Xinhua

Taiwan

The National Communications Commission (NCC) has approved plans submitted by Chunghwa Telecom to lower the monthly circuit fees for its ADSL and fiber-to-the-home (FTTH) infrastructure. The monthly circuit use charge and wholesale price will fall by an average of 3.24%. The NCC estimates that the reduced charges would benefit around 1.79 million ADSL and 2.68 million FTTH subscribers; altogether the users would be charged approximately TWD192 million (US$6.3 million) and TWD753 million less each year, respectively. For ADSL services, the biggest reduction will be for 8Mbps/640kbps downstream/upstream connections (TWD19, or 4.95%), while users of 100Mbps/20Mbps FTTH service users would see their monthly charge decrease by 15.86%, or TWD111. (March 28, 2013) The Taipei Times

Thailand

Telecoms regulator, the NBTC has warned the three main mobile networks that their quality of service is failing to meet its higher standards. Although the three networks met the baseline requirements, the regulator said that it was not satisfied with their performance. Despite that, all three operators passed the technical test with good to excellent grades for network quality of voice service. The NBTC carried out a number of drive tests following complaints from consumers, and is currently drafting new tougher requirements that will come into effect later this year.
(March 29, 2013) cellular-news.com

Thailand may need to modify its radio spectrum plans if it is to avoid interference along its borders with neighboring countries, two international groups have warned. The warning follows an announcement by the telecoms regulator, the NBTC that it will use the 700MHz bands for digital television services. The same bands that are used for mobile phone services in a number of countries including several neighboring ones. Both the GSM Association and the ITU have warned that the proposals could be problematic. Secretary to the NBTC's vice-chairman, told that the NBTC will raise this issue at its board meeting for emergency agendas next month, after executives of the GSM Association met the regulator last week. The GSMA says that if Thailand allocates the 700MHz frequency for mobile services it would increase GDP by US$18.9 billion from 2014-2020.
(March 26, 2013) Bangkok Post

The telecom committee of Thailand's National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission (NBTC) has approved in principle the base rates for voice and data service fees of 3G cellular operators using the 2100MHz spectrum band. The voice and data fees must be 15% lower than THB0.92 (US$0.031) per minute and THB0.35 per minute respectively, according to the preliminary ruling, while if the new 2100MHz license holders – AIS, True and DTAC – offer bundled voice and data service packages to customers, the overall rate in the package must be 15% lower than the present market rate. The committee also approved that the license holders must propose their own rates for the committee's consideration on a package-by-package basis before offering them to customers. (March 14, 2013) The Nation

Philippine

The Court of Appeals (CA) in the Philippines has once again upheld the decision of the telecoms regulator, the National Telecommunications Commission (NTC), concerning the award of 3G mobile licenses in December 2005. According to a report from ABS-CBN news, the motion for reconsideration filed by Multimedia Telephony Inc, which laid a claim on the fifth and final 3G concession, was denied by the appellate court in a seven-page resolution submitted by Associate Justice Sesinando Villon. The court had already thrown out Multimedia Telephony's earlier petition in June 2011. In his latest judgment, Associate Justice Villon stated that wherefore, in light of the foregoing, petitioner's motion for reconsideration assailing the decision dated June 13, 2011 is hereby denied for lack of merit. The CA then went on to say that in its opinion, the NTC's process was 'reasonable' and that the watchdog can grant the said 3G frequencies though 'its own set of standards'. (March 20, 2013) telegeography.com

Hong Kong

The telecom regulator, OFCA says that the four incumbent mobile network operators have successfully bid for a total of 50 MHz of radio spectrum in the 2.5/2.6 GHz band at a total sum of spectrum utilization fees of HK$1.54 billion (US$198 million). Four existing mobile network operators and one new entrant took part in the auction and competed equally with one another for the precious spectrum based on the same set of auction rules. Conducted on an Internet-based software platform, the auction commenced on 18 March 2013 and came to a satisfactory conclusion after a total of 18 bidding rounds on March 19, 2013.
(March 21, 2013) cellular-news.com

VelaTel Global Communications has completed the acquisition of a 100% equity interest in China Motion Telecom (HK), a mobile virtual network operator (MVNO) with more than 100,000 customers in Hong Kong, in a deal that was originally announced last November. The total purchase price for the transaction is US$6.4 million, with US$1.6 million paid in cash and the remainder in the form of a promissory note payable within six months.
(March 13, 2013) telegeography.com

Hong Kong's four main mobile networks are reported to be considering a legal challenge to the government's plans to reclaim some of their 3G spectrum. The Communications Authority is currently consulting on what it plans to do with the expiring 3G licenses, but there are concerns that it has already made a decision before the mobile networks have been able to submit their own proposals. The consultation is not due to be decided before October. The licenses are due to expire in late 2016, and the Authority is understood to be favoring a scheme where it renews the licenses as per normal, but also reclaims a third of the 3G spectrum and auctions that off in a fresh process. The government is known to be keen to introduce a fifth mobile network into the market, and China Mobile has previously expressed an interest in a 3G license should one become available.
(March 12, 2013) South China Morning Post

Myanmar

Amsterdam-headquartered international telecoms group Vimpelcom is believed to have pulled out of the race for one of two unified telecoms licenses in Myanmar. It is thought that Vimpelcom has backed out due to Myanmar's complex regulatory environment and uncertain political climate. The group was one of 90 companies to submit as expression of interest (EoI) in the licenses earlier this year, but its participation in the tender was arguably always in doubt in light of its intention to offload its struggling Beeline units in nearby Cambodia and Laos. The concessions themselves are expected to cost somewhere between US$200 million and US$500 million, with the tender tentatively scheduled for June 2013, despite an ongoing investigation into corruption, which industry insiders believe could delay the process indefinitely. (March 22, 2013) TMT Finance

India

Indian regulator the Department of Telecommunications (DoT) has informed Vodafone India and Loop Telecom that their licenses in the Delhi, Mumbai and Calcutta circles will not be extended and that they will need to bid for spectrum in order to continue operations. The 900MHz spectrum held by the companies and Bharti Airtel since 1994 was listed for sale in the failed March 11 auction and will be put on

offer for a further auction. Vodafone criticized the decision, saying that it was against the interests of the telco and its 'several million customers in these cities/circles.'
(March 25, 2013) The Economic Times

The Department of Telecommunications (DoT) has instructed CDMA operators to pay a one-off fee for spectrum holdings above 2.5MHz in the 800MHz range. The charge will be applicable for the remaining duration of the license period with the option for cellcos to pay the fee in a single payment or annually. The levy will be based on the reserve price set for CDMA spectrum for the March 11 auction: operators that refuse to pay the additional fee will be required to hand back the excess spectrum. The total amount payable by the nation's CDMA operators is estimated to be in the region of INR30.33 billion (US$559.59 million). Russian-backed cellco Sistema Shyam TeleServices (MTS India) is reportedly exempt from the payment though, having repurchased concessions in eight circles in March this year after its licenses were cancelled by the Supreme Court in February 2012.
(March 19, 2013) The Economic Times

Telecom operator Bharti Airtel got an interim relief from the Delhi High Court that allowed the company to continue with its 3G Intra-circle roaming facilities till its final order. The court stayed the government order that had asked Airtel to immediately stop 3G services in select regions. The DoT had last week issued a fresh order to the company directing it to stop intra-circle 3G roaming in seven circles where it did not have the spectrum and also levied a penalty of Rs 350 crore (Rs 50 crore per circle) for violating the license terms and conditions. Justice Rajiv Shakdher said "3G roaming to continue until the final order but an interim order will be passed later on Airtel's plea for stay of the government's order". The court also asked Bharti Airtel to keep the earnings from 3G facilities in a separate account and posted the matter for May 8. The court had earlier passed a stay order on a similar petition filed by Idea cellular. Airtel has challenged a Telecommunications Ministry's order asking it to stop providing 3G services in seven zones where it does not have its own airwaves and is offering the services through pacts with other telecom carriers.
(March 19, 2013) businesstoday.intoday.in

A number of India's top telecom executives have been issued with court summons over allegations of improper radio spectrum allocations in 2002. The CBI Special Court is understood to have issued summons to Bharti Airtel's Sunil Mittal, Essar Group's Ravi Ruia and Asim Ghosh, the former Managing Director of Hutchison Max. Special Judge O.P. Saini said that these executives were in control of affairs of the respective companies. The former Secretary of Department of Telecom, Shyamal Ghosh has also been summoned to appear on April 11. The case dates back to a decision in 2002 to allocate additional radio spectrum to the mobile networks based on their subscriber base, and hence need. The initial proposals to award additional spectrum once the networks reached 900,000 customers per circle was reduced to a threshold of just 400,000 customers.
(March 19, 2013) cellular-news.com

India's Sistema Shyam TeleServices Ltd. (SSTL) was the sole bidder in the country's auction of 800MHz spectrum, and says that it won spectrum in eight circles. The spectrum won by SSTL in eight circles is technology neutral and would be valid for 20 years. The company would be required to pay INR 3,639 crores for the license period. The terms include payment of 25% of the final bid amount within 10 days, followed by a payment moratorium until March 2016, after which the balance amount will be paid in 10 equal annual installments. The government has confirmed that SSTL will be able to set off the previous license cost of INR 1,626 crores against the new spectrum cost.(March 11, 2013) cellular-news.com

The Empowered Group of Ministers (EGoM) has allowed Norway's Telenor to adjust the cost of its recently won spectrum by the INR16.58 billion (US$302.04 million) entry fee it paid in 2008, reversing a previous ruling by the Department of Telecommunications (DoT). The Norwegian group won back licenses in six circles in November 2012, bidding via its new JV Telewing Communications, which inherited the assets of its previous venture Uninor after Telenor's acrimonious split from its previous partner Unitech. The DoT had rejected Telenor's previous request to offset its spectrum costs on the basis that it had participated in the most recent auctions through a different company to the one which entered the market in 2008 and had its licenses quashed in February 2012. The DoT's decision meant that Telenor was forced to pay INR13.25 billion – one third of its bid price – 'under protest' as an initial payment for its new concessions, whilst rivals Videocon and Idea Cellular completely offset the upfront price.(March7, 2013) The Economic Times

Javaid Akhtar Malik
Director Regulatory Affairs
SAMENA Telecommunications Council

MAXIMIZING REVENUES THROUGH
DIGITAL EXCELLENCE

Beyond Connectivity 2013

6th & 7th March, 2013

Kempinski Hotel Ciragan Palace
Istanbul, Turkey

The SAMENA Council's annual conference, Beyond Connectivity, was held at Istanbul on March 6th and 7th and discussed a number of issues that have a bearing on future investments in telecommunications infrastructure development and, consequently, will dictate how effectively telecoms operators create new revenue streams to sustain their business, moving forward into the digital space.

- • Moving Toward Sustainability: Cooperation Across the Content Value-Chain
- • Satellite Broadband Applications
- • Motivation for Digitization in The South Asia - Middle East - North Africa Region
- • Harmonization: Digital Dividend, LTE Strategies and Deployment
- • Regional Exchange and Agreements: Mobile Roaming

Industry challenges and major issues such as governance of the Internet, content production and aggregation, new strategies for revamping business models, satellite broadband applications, the need to enable mass adoption of digital services and technologies in the SAMENA region, spectrum harmonization digital dividend requirements, and international roaming, among other, were the focus of Beyond Connectivity 2013, under the following panels:

- • Internet Governance: Implications of New Policy Trends

The event was enabled by sponsorship and partnership support from Turk Telecom, Accenture, du, British Telecom, and others. CEOs and other Industry leaders from around the SAMENA region and beyond shared vital business insights on policy and regulations, market experiences, and the SAMENA region's economic potential, which can be realized through digitization.

The first day of the conference discussed Internet governance in light of new policy trends, cooperation across the content value-chain and satellite broadband applications.

Highlighting the regional industry's growing desire and the impending need to collaborate on Internet governance, sustainability and cooperation, Beyond Connectivity's first day provided a platform for knowledge-sharing on the issues, needs, requirements, and the assessment of business models surrounding the design, creation, aggregation, and the provision of Internet-based digital content.

Speakers from Turkish telecom regulator, Turk Telecom, Accenture, booz & co., Avea, and other valued participants led a comprehensive discussion, covering the subject matter from different angles.

Mohamed Al Khalifa, CEO, Batelco Group and Chairman of SAMENA Council welcoming the guests in his opening speech and emphasized on the need to define new digital agendas within the SAMENA region whereby the adoption of digital services, integrated ICT applications, and digital tools can be accelerated.

Bocar BA, CEO of the SAMENA Council, while highlighting the significance of digitization, reiterated the need for cooperation and collaboration for ensuring success in today's business environment. "SAMENA Region is increasingly embracing advanced digital services and the importance of creating new enabling policies cannot be overlooked. Telecoms operators are and will remain a major stakeholder in the industry and it is important that they be equipped to deal with emerging business challenges."

Hakam Kanafani, CEO of Türk Telekom Group thanked SAMENA Council for organizing BYC in Istanbul and said, "The digital transformation and adapting our way of doing business to this transformation were inevitable and that revenue was going to be the most prior outcome of this transformation." He added that "The digital transformation

is going to play a significant role in maximizing revenues. We at Türk Telekom have made serious investments in fiber infrastructure to further strengthen the infrastructure throughout Turkey."

Dr. Tayfun Acarer, President Information and Communication Technologies Authority (ICTA) Turkey and Chairman of the Telecommunications Board, stressed that the cost reduction is possible with the cooperation of international power. Dr. Acarer said, "New investments in these areas will enable measures to be taken and pointed to advances in the ICT sector. Promotion of local content would lead to a better revenue stream." Dr. Tayfun Acarer observed that that Internet penetration has grown over the last few years and now is one of the better times to monetize their efforts. He also talked about Internet governance and said that a multi stakeholder model should be developed.

Luigi Gambardella, Chairman Executive Board ETNO emphasized the value of cooperation between ETNO and the SAMENA Telecom Council. He was of the opinion that in today's converged and interconnected markets, both organizations directly benefit from working together and sharing best practices. In today's digital economy, operators have to search for new business models and markets need

more efficiency and consolidation. Luigi Gambardella said that "Operators within Europe and the SAMENA region, while experiencing varying growth rates that tend to depend on numerous market dynamics and conditions, are faced with the same necessity which includes the need for innovation, seeking synergies and developing new business models to counter declining revenues." He further highlighted an important point by saying that, "Telecommunications operators are now competing with new players, which may not necessarily have the same regulatory obligations as do

the operators themselves, it has become imperative for the telecom operator community to be engaged with policy-makers and regulators, in order to strive toward a level playing field."

Participants also reflected on the WCIT-12, and how the world congregation received unprecedented attention from the observer community and the stakeholders, especially with regard to varying contexts related to the Internet. Speakers discussed the future of telecommunications in light of affordable access to the Internet. A lot of emphasis was put on handling the issues of security and spam. They also highlighted digitization policy, revenue generation, content, and sustainability across the industry and discussed its significance. The speakers were of the opinion that the telecom operators need to bring diversity in their services and charge different prices for different value added services they provide. Various monetization strategies were discussed for telecommunications operators.

The second day of Beyond Connectivity started with CEO Live Session that provided the panel of industry leaders in the region the opportunity to interact with each other and with the audience in an interactive manner. This interactive session provided an opportunity to these leaders for better understanding of their ideas, strategies and approach toward leadership. Through this live session, participants got the chance to interact with the leaders who are actively involved and learn from those that are actively involved in driving the regional telecoms & ICT ecosystem.

Delving into the fact that ICTs are transforming all industries and that telecom companies can become enablers of "digital economy", panelists were unanimous in accepting the critical need for telecom operators to drive innovation, and

change their business models in order to provide the best and most valuable service to customers, and to ensure their own business sustainability. This strong call-to-action was based on the debate of whether telecom companies need to add more content or go head-to-head with OTT players, eventually becoming OTT players themselves. The panelists drew the attention of the audience to the need for building

better infrastructure, looking at customer usage and adding value, and providing customers what they really need. The session closed with the panel stating that all operators need to fight for a level-playing field and the need for OTT players to be regulated the same way as the telecom companies especially in reference to privacy protection.

The CEOs were generally of the opinion that operators should focus on content, applications and other value-added services besides providing high-speed connectivity to the subscribers. Developing a business model for greater sustainability was given the utmost importance since it is the main challenge being faced by the operators.

The panelist discussed the motivation for digitization within the SAMENA region, the challenges being faced, and the possible ways to overcome these challenges. Another

topic given a lot of importance was roaming, the current challenges to roaming, and the need for higher regional exchange and agreements.

Zakir Syed
Research Analyst (Telecoms & ICT)
Ali Tahir
Research Analyst

SAMENA Telecommunications Council

ROAMING NEWS

European regulators publish new roaming guidelines

The European telecoms regulators have published new guidelines on mobile phone 'roaming', reflecting new rules on charges which came into force last year. The document has been published by the Body of European Regulators for Electronic Communications (BEREC) which includes representatives of the national regulatory authorities. The guidance contains new provisions on 'inadvertent' roaming, as well as considering how service providers should deal with automatic connections which occur on ships and planes. BEREC will publish additional guidance on the application of the new wholesale access obligation contained in the regulation, and on the separate sale of roaming services, shortly. It consulted on draft versions of these guidelines in July 2012, just after the new regulations came into force. The wholesale access obligation requires mobile network operators (MNOs) to meet all "reasonable requests" for wholesale roaming access. The 2012 Roaming Regulation came into effect on 1 July 2012. It regulates what can be charged by MNOs for providing roaming services, which occurs when a resident of one EU member state uses a mobile phone on a network based in another member state that the resident is visiting. Consumers will be charged a fee for roaming services, reflecting the charge made by the foreign mobile network operator to the domestic one for terminating calls on its network.

MPs decide not to cap roaming charges

Roaming charges for mobile phones won't be capped any time soon after the Council of States suspended its work on a motion to reign in prices, despite the National Council overwhelmingly supporting the motion. The Council of States has instead decided to ask the Federal Council to commission a report by next year on how to handle regulation of roaming charges. Zeynep Ersan Berdoz is editor in chief of consumer magazine Bon ä Savoir. She says the process of putting together a report will take two or three years. Ersan Berdoz says that Swiss mobile phone customers pay from three to sixteen times more than European Union customers while roaming.

Digicel Jamaica launches roaming plans for USA

Digicel Jamaica has launched a new roaming tariff plan known as the 'Same Rates A Yaad Same Rates Abroad Plan'. With this plan both prepaid and postpaid customers can access to their mobile internet services as well as send SMSes and make voice calls while roaming across the US at the same standard local rates they pay for mobile traffic in Jamaica.

Verizon to sign first agreement for LTE international roaming

Verizon Wireless expects to sign its first international roaming agreement later this year for customers of its fastest wireless service who travel overseas, according to a top executive for the No. 1 US mobile provider. While Verizon Wireless has 200 partnerships with overseas operators for its older, third-generation mobile service, it has not yet been able to set up agreements for its fourth-generation Long Term Evolution (LTE) data service, which was first offered in the United States in late 2010. Verizon Wireless Chief Technology Officer Nicola Palmer said that roaming agreements have been delayed because many operators are behind in upgrading their networks and some countries have yet to auction the wireless airwaves that carriers would need to upgrade to LTE. "So getting 4G roaming for our customers is going to take a while," Palmer told Reuters at the Mobile World Congress trade show in Barcelona. "These relationships will take some time to put in place."

NCC announces new domestic interconnect rates

Nigerian Communications Commission, NCC, has released a new interconnect rate that would guide telecom operators in the country on terminating calls for one another. The new rate apparently became necessary after the expiration date of December 2012 for the old interconnect rate regime, which came into operation in 2009. The new rate, which will begin from April 1, 2013 according to NCC, will see major operators terminating calls on new entrants/ smaller operators' networks at N6.40, while the smaller operators do same on major operators' network at N4.90. It also reviewed the respective rates further downwards for the next three years ending 2015. NCC said it took the step to enable small operators and new entrants remain in business. It described a new entrant as newly-licensed operator entering an existing or new market within 0 to 3 years. It also said that for the purpose of determination, small operator could be defined as an existing operator with a market share of 0 - 7.5% in terms of subscriber base. The current rate, which has attracted several hues and cries from smaller operators since it came into operation, was fixed at a uniform N8.20 per minute.

Videocon Mobile to make incoming call free for its roaming subscriber

Videocon Mobile Services to make incoming calls free while on roaming by default for all its subscribers. Other players like Aircel also made roaming free recently but it was restricted to specific tariff plans. But the catch is that the subscriber will get the benefit only if he roams on Videocon network. Videocon does not have pan-India operations and offers services in a few circles as of now. Videocon had bought spectrum for six circles in Bihar, Haryana, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh East and Uttar Pradesh West in the auctions held in November 2012. Of this, it has started operations in 4 circles. It also has operations in Punjab. For outgoing local calls, subscribers will have to pay Re 1 a minute and Rs 1.50 a minute for STD calls. Arvind Bali, Director and CEO, Videocon Mobile Services, commented, "To extend the benefits of freedom of movement across our network, we have introduced this offering where our subscribers roaming across Videocon Network will stand to benefit from free incoming calls."

TeleBermuda launches new application for calling overseas without roaming charges

TeleBermuda International (TBI) has launched a new mobile application which is going to allow users to make cheap calls abroad without expensive roaming charges. It's called Qallz and it's available for the iPhone, iPad or Android. Once users download the app and sign up for the service with TBI, they can start making calls starting at 8 cents a minute. Like a cross between a regular cell phone call and Skype, a spokesperson for TBI said Qallz is little bit like a modern-day calling card. "Let's say you're travelling to the States and you want to make a call back to Bermuda or anywhere else. With a calling card, you have to find a phone line, put your PIN number in and all of that," said Karen Carlington, director of residential services for TBI. "With Qallz on your phone, you can actually find a WiFi hot spot and just make a call." "It's like an updated version of a calling card, just easier because it's right there on your device," she added. Qallz, which was developed in-house at TBI with the help of application developers overseas, launched last week. The company says it's already being well received by the business community.

Operators lay groundwork for global LTE roaming

More subscribers, networks with better coverage and devices that can be used in more countries are converging to make LTE roaming a more viable proposition, with some operators already offering such services on a limited scale and more on the way. "We were at Mobile World Congress last month and members of our executive team and our global roaming team were there actively seeking roaming partners, so that we can offer our customers 4G LTE when they are traveling and also offer customers of other providers overseas the option to roam on our network," said Tom Pica, executive director of corporate communications at Verizon Wireless. The first fruits of those deliberations will come in early 2014, when Verizon will start offering its subscribers "LTE roaming in several countries, including Canada," according to Pica, who is convinced the operator's subscribers want that service. Across the Atlantic, TeliaSonera became the first to offer LTE roaming in Europe recently allowing its users in Denmark to access LTE when visiting Sweden. For operators, offering LTE roaming comes with both potential risks and rewards. That services have been slow to materialize has more to do with commercial considerations rather than network complexities, according to Mark Newman, chief research officer at Informa Telecoms & Media.

TECHNOLOGY NEWS

VoIP services expanding to remote regions of Africa

A major pan-African telecoms provider is boosting its service capacity by 40 percent to deliver communication access in some of Africa's fastest growing markets. EvoxTrading is deploying the SBC 5200 solution from Sonus Networks in order to secure its network border, deliver voice termination services and provide interconnect capabilities to its carrier partners. The uptake of VoIP, which has been deregulating across many African countries since mid-2000, is often linked to growing economies with the delivery of advanced voice services and more cost effective access to rural and under-served areas. The new platform is aimed at meeting growing demand for more reliable, scalable and higher performing VoIP and SIP services .The solution provides security, media switching and transcoding services in a single scalable device. This infrastructure will also provide an intelligent SIP interconnection capability between EVOX and their carrier partner networks.

IPTV surges in Korea

South Korea has taken to IPTV in a big way, with the number of subscribers growing from zero to over 6 million in the last four years. According to Hyun-Kyung Kim, senior director Korea Telecom (KT) economics and management lab, this is now equivalent to 25 percent of the country's entire pay-TV market. IPTV services were launched in South Korea in December 2008, with satellite hybrid IPTV following in October 2009. KT now claims a 60 percent market share

in a sector also served by the companies SK Broadband and LG U+. Kim said that KT's hybrid IPTV service ollehtv Skyline (OTS) is characterized by rich content, consisting of 162 channels (the best offer in the country), 130,000+ titles and 145 'varieties' (genres, etc). KT also operates Mobile and N-Screen (ollehtv Now – OTN), giving a seamless service on any screen, anytime and anywhere.

Orange Armenia deploys advanced fiber-optic backbone network

Orange Armenia completed the upgrading works on its fiber-optic data transport backbone network to offer improved high-quality mobile broadband services, company's press service reported. Orange Armenia's upgraded network – which is built around Alcatel-Lucent's optical coherent technology – dramatically increases the speed and capacity of the "backbone" network supporting the delivery of high-bandwidth services such as high-definition video and mobile gaming on its 3G network. The deployment also strengthens the data link between Armenia and Georgia, an important regional gateway to the global Internet. Francis Gelibter, Orange Armenia CEO said that this new upgrade on the network will allow them to offer even better quality and comfort to their clients. In Armenia, the demand for Orange mobile internet keeps growing, with increasing number of customers and volumes of traffic. We are now fully ready to welcome new clients on our network and especially offer them to benefit from our recent offer, where we offer a huge volume of high speed traffic.

Global IPTV subscribers to pass 100 million in 2013

Global IPTV subscriptions are expected to pass the 100 million mark in 2013 and grow to 181.1 million in 2017, according to Pyramid Research. IPTV subscriptions grew at an impressive CAGR of 40 percent between 2008 and 2012 according Pyramid Research Associate Analyst, Guillermo Hurtado. The three largest country-markets (China, France and the US) each had over 10 million IPTV subscriptions at year-end 2012 and together accounted for roughly 53 percent of the global IPTV subscription base. The Asia-Pacific region remains the largest IPTV market, accounting for 45.3 percent (38.2 million) of global IPTV subscriptions as of year-end 2012. He added that between 2012 and 2017, Pyramid Research forecasts that global IPTV revenue will increase at a 16 percent CAGR, reaching US$44 billion at the end of the period.

Richland gets new fiber optic cable

New high-capacity fiber optic cable through Richland and at Rattlesnake Mountain is improving communications in Benton County, including at Hanford. The Department of Energy, city of Richland and Benton Public Utility District worked together on the project, improving communication for all three. Fiber optic cables carry digital information, including for the internet. All the agencies will have increased capacity, speed and reliability, said Jeffrey Dennison, spokesman for DOE contractor Mission Support Alliance. DOE collaborated with the PUD and Richland to add 360 strands of fiber from downtown Richland to north Richland. That will improve communication among Hanford offices in Richland, particularly at the Federal Building, and the Hanford nuclear reservation just north of Richland. For schools, libraries and businesses in Richland, it will provide additional high-speed and reliable fiber optic communication services.

Vodafone, Orange partner for FTTH in Spain

Vodafone Spain and Orange have agreed to co-invest in deploying fiber to the home (FTTH) networks in Spain. The resulting fiber-optic networks will reach 6 million premises in 50 cities by September 2017 at a price of €1 billion, the carriers assert. Vodafone and Orange will each deploy fiber to the premises (FTTP) infrastructure in different, complementary areas. Each company will own the fiber it deploys, but the networks will have the same technical specifications to enable them to operate as a single network, to which both partners will have full access. The companies also will install their own in-building fiber, to which the other is also guaranteed access. Vodafone and Orange expect to begin offering commercial services on the initial parts of the network in January 2014. They expect to reach 800,000 households and workplaces by March 2014, 3 million households and workplaces by September 2015, and 6 million households and workplaces by 2017. This equates to a residential penetration level of around 40 percent. The carriers say they are open to adding other co-investors. Meanwhile, they also say they will collaborate with regulators to ensure sharing of vertical infrastructure at prices based on actual cost, effective access to Telefónica's ducts, and the timely acquisition of all necessary permits.

StarHub launches IPTV on fiber service

Singaporean pay TV operator StarHub TV commercial customers will get to enjoy a new TV viewing experience with the launch of StarHub TV on Fiber. An Internet Protocol Television (IPTV) pay TV service, StarHub TV on Fiber offers businesses access to crystal clear high-definition content and over three times as many TV channels as the existing Digital Terrestrial Television (DTTV) platform. The service will be initially available only to commercial customers such as offices, restaurants and pubs. Delivered over the island-wide Next Generation Nationwide Broadband Network (NGNBN), StarHub TV on Fiber will be able to reach current DTTV customers and beyond, effectively covering commercial customers all over Singapore. StarHub TV on Fiber customers will also enjoy prioritized, managed IPTV access as the service utilizes discrete ports on the optical network terminal. With IPTV access independent of broadband activity, StarHub TV on Fiber promises a superior viewing experience in terms of picture quality, speed and navigation.

Emerging markets to lead explosive IPTV growth

IPTV subscribers experienced strong growth in 2012, according to a report by Multimedia Research Group. The global success of the platform last year was led by escalating rollouts in Asia, thanks to strong growth in maturing markets like China and South Korea. In terms of service provider revenue via subscription, the revenue forecast shows an increase from US$29 billion in 2012 to US$56.8 billion in 2016, a compound annual growth rate of 18.2 percent, or almost double the total from 2012. China has the most IPTV subscribers worldwide and that trend will likely continue, MRG said. But going forward, the fastest growing IPTV regions will be emerging markets like Latin America and the Middle East and Africa, which today have relatively few IPTV services, but hold great promise for the future.

Indonesia's telecommunication firm to install 3G broadband service in 500 cities

A senior official at the cellular business of Indonesia's state-run telecommunication firm, Telkomsel, said that it would expand its information technology broadband service to 500 cities to facilitate government's grand plan on accelerating development across the country. The plan to expand its broadband service followed its win in a tender to expand 3G broadband network to facilitate infrastructure development in the country. The MP3EI program was commenced in Y 2011. It constitutes various massive infrastructure projects across the country to facilitate investors intending to run their investments in the regions. The installation of broadband service in 500 cities across the country, called Broadband City program, is expected to be completed in Y 2014, making the firm has 3G coverage service in 95 percent of Indonesia's territory. The firm also planned to set up 150,000 Node B telecommunication service by Year 2022.

CONNECTING CARS: DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY ON THE ROAD

Bahjat El-Darwiche
Partner

Bassam Hajhamad
Principal

Booz & Company

"M2M provides drivers with connected cars fitted with in-vehicle applications, turning a transport machine into a social, intelligent, and interactive device."

Wireless connectivity is rapidly expanding beyond mobile devices, bringing the benefits of digital technology to many aspects of consumers' lives. The connection of passenger cars to the Internet is the next digital wave, a development that will provide important opportunities for Middle East governments, telecom operators, automotive players, and insurance companies.

Connected devices are possible because of machine-to-machine (M2M) communications. M2M uses wireless data networks, sensors, and software to conduct remote monitoring, measurement and condition recording, in-field data collection, and other sophisticated processes.

Within automotives, M2M's potential is considerable. M2M provides drivers with connected cars fitted with in-vehicle applications, turning a transport machine into a social, intelligent, and interactive device. Already drivers do not have to read maps and plan journeys. They can just put a destination into their GPS and start driving.

Unsurprisingly, the M2M market is expanding rapidly. In the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), the M2M market is estimated to reach over $2 billion by 2016, representing 6.1 percent of the global M2M market, driven mainly by the demand of new vertical services. Automotive M2M services are expected to have a large share of this new revenue by 2016, with 12 million automotive M2M connections, up from just 3 million in 2012.

Such rapid growth presents companies with a tantalizing opportunity. To successfully enter the market, however, they must develop the right business model, and partnerships to provide the end-to-end innovative services that consumers and businesses expect.

In particular, telecom companies will need to determine their growth strategy based on their core capabilities and their positioning in the overall M2M ecosystem. They will have to develop right-to-win capabilities including vertical innovation, solutions development and management, end-to-end horizontal platforms, and commercialization.

By building these capabilities, telecom companies will be able to deliver on the two sets of services required by connected cars: core and value added. Core services include fleet management, usage-based insurance, driver intelligence, and road tolling. Fleet management is the biggest segment today. It is also one of the first successful services in the automotive M2M market because of its significant cost benefits to companies. Companies use this service to improve utilization and tracking of their fleet vehicles, which can reduce costs by optimizing route management and enhancing fleet security. Usage-based insurance service allows insurance companies to analyze driving data of policy holders and lower costs by customizing insurance coverage to match driving patterns and habits.

Similarly, driver intelligence services can monitor the driving behavior of new, young drivers along with older ones. Insurance companies can then personalize premia based on driving behavior rather than age alone. Also, parents can receive reports on the driving behaviors of their teenagers. Finally, road tolling services allow customers to pay tolls through devices attached to their cars, based on their geographic location (geo-fencing). This allows governments, highway, and road operators to reduce costs associated with building and maintaining road toll stations, and saves time for drivers.

Value-added services include driving and green reports, navigation and mapping, remote vehicle diagnostic, weather and traffic reporting, and social media connectivity.

Although few of these services are on offer in the MENA region, providing them will be an important part of the growth in the automotive M2M market. The challenge will be to elaborate the correct business and distribution models.

In terms of business models, successful automotive M2M providers are increasingly subsidizing the cost of devices and set-up fees to promote device penetration in the market. These firms lease device to users, or provide them for free and only charge a monthly subscription. Another model, used for road tolling services, is pay-per-usage which charges a commission for each toll payment or for the distance driven.

There are two distribution models available. The first is a business-to-business-to-consumer (B2B2C) or business-to-government-to-consumer (B2G2C) model that distributes products to insurance companies, telecom operators, or governments which then provide the M2M services to fee-paying customers. In the alternative model, business-to-consumer-to-business (B2C2B), the automotive M2M provider sells devices directly to consumers.

Automotive M2M services in the Middle East are a growth market thanks to the new digitization trends that are driven by government initiatives, combined with growing demand from Generation-C and enterprise customers. Telecom operators in the region can grab the first mover advantage if they move fast to build the correct capabilities, partnerships, and models that will help transform our cars into the next digital device.

SAMENA
TELECOMMUNICATIONS COUNCIL
BUILDING DIGITAL ECONOMIES

Follow Us: