

## **Bangladesh Wireless Environment an untapped market :**

Telecommunications has not been on the Bangladesh government's priority list for some time. Available resources are directed at other more basic infrastructure requirements. However, there are signs that those in the planning commissions are increasingly motivated to support telecommunications as they view this as a necessity rather than a luxury.

Growth in Bangladesh's mobile telephone sector, from a humble beginning in the early-1990s, has really picked up pace in the past few years, aided by higher subscriber volumes, lower tariffs and falling handset prices. In this report the development of the mobile market in Bangladesh is examined. Bangladesh had more than 1.5 million subscribers by mid-2003. This represented an annual growth of 100% over the previous year. Analysts predict that the market will continue to grow strongly, moving at a compounded annual rate of more than 75%, Bangladesh is a market now for 13 million mobile phones. There is tremendous potential for Wireless Internet in Bangladesh as Bangladesh Telephony infrastructure is relatively poor.

Pacific Bangladesh Telecom Limited (CityCell) has consistently set the benchmark of the telecom industry in Bangladesh First to launch Mobile phone in the Sub-continent, First ever private wireless network in Bangladesh, First to adopt CDMA technology in the sub-continent. Since the inception of Mobile phone in Bangladesh early 1990s when it used to cost \$1500 to get a mobile connection the rate went down to \$100 now, while lowest per minute tariff is about .01 cents.

In November, 1996, licences for cellular mobile telephone were issued to Grameen Phone, Telecom Malaysia International BD Ltd. and Sheba Telecom Ltd. All these are joint-venture companies between Bangladeshi companies and foreign partners.

800,000 fixed line phones operated by BTTB-Government Monopoly. Next five yrs demand for fixed lines will be 3.5 million and experts think that BTTB will be unable to deliver.

### **Cell phone networks in Bangladesh**

<b>Network</b>	<b>System</b>	<b>Subscriber</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
<u>Pacific Bangladesh Telecom -CityCell</u>	CDMA	215,000	800
<u>GrameenPhone</u>	GSM	1,000000	900
<u>Sheba Telecom</u>	GSM	65,000	900
<u>Aktel</u>	GSM	220,000	900

Recently lot of attention is focused on the use of wireless networks, and in particular wi-fi, as a relatively low-cost way of getting fast network access to rural areas and less-developed country like Bangladesh. Wi-fi is not the only wireless networking technology, of course. Packet radio, microwave links and even 3G phone networks could all do a similar job.

But wi-fi is the latest cool thing and - not entirely coincidentally - a growing number of companies and market analysts have started touting it as the next big thing, the focus for a second-generation internet-style boom.

Learn Foundation, a non-profit charity set up in 1997. It has worked to bring computers and the internet to isolated rural areas of Bangladesh, using wireless technology. The Learn Foundation

has already built seven radio towers in seven villages in the region and the target is to establish a broadband network in a 2,500 square kilometre (965 square mile) area.

Grameen Phone launch Wireless Application Protocol (WAP) service on July 1st, 2001 and Short Message Service. Anyone can send short message to Grameen Phone via web. Try <http://www.icq.com/> or <http://203.76.110.210:8181/vas/websms/login.xml> for City Cell. Two leading daily provides SMS news alerts.

Grameen phone ladies provide villagers with a vital link to services such as hospitals and to relatives both at home and abroad, in a country with the lowest number of phones in South Asia. Villagers flock to Village phone ladies to use a mobile to call relatives, friends or business associates, paying for calls by the minute. The Grameen scheme has been hailed as a successful example of introducing technology to the poor. The mobile has literally changed many village phone ladies life. At present 32,000 village phones are in 52 districts, 50,000 Bangladeshi women making a living as Grameen phone ladies, as they are known. Thus emerged Bangladesh's 'telephone ladies,' who gained social importance-not to mention income-from selling wireless service to fellow villagers. The women, who power their phones with solar panels, now make \$500 per month, about the same amount as earned by the typical CEO of a Bangladeshi bank a far cry from the annual average income of US\$380. As for the villagers, thanks to Yunis, there is no more traveling to the city to make phone calls.

There are few local companies engaged in hardware/software development for wireless devices and networks. Recently few universities took initiative where courses in wireless media being taught.

As Bangladesh Telephony infrastructure is relatively poor, mobile phone is creating huge impact especially among poor people in the village; good example is Village Phone and Farmers. Rural areas are greatly benefiting from Mobile phone in Bangladesh.

In the early 1990s, when Iqbal Quadir founder of Grameen Phone was looking for investors to back his idea for a mobile-phone network in Bangladesh, he said he was turned down by an executive at a cell-phone company in New York who told him, "We're not the Red Cross."

At the end of 2001, Quadir showed how Third World ventures can be profitable - and provide a useful service - when GrameenPhone Ltd., the cell-phone company he founded in Bangladesh, made \$27 million in pretax profit. It turned that profit after just five years far sooner than many First World start-ups. "We keep coming down to this basic conundrum of the purchasing power of the poor," says Peter Reiling, president and CEO of Techno-Serve, a nonprofit in Norwalk, Conn. "Iqbal Quadir seems to have found the perfect technology that's within their reach."

Bangladesh is a market now for 13 million mobile phones. There is tremendous potential for Wireless Internet in Bangladesh as Bangladesh Telephony infrastructure is relatively poor.

About Author:

Mr. Sayeedur Rahman brings over 7 years of experience in technical management and development. He is currently working as an Unix System Administrator in the Main Data Center for Governor's Office for Technology, Commonwealth of Kentucky. Mr. Rahman has strong technical background in Unix System Administration and System Engineering. He also has several years of experience as System Analyst and Senior Programmer Analyst for the Commonwealth of Kentucky. Mr. Rahman is also the founder of Bangladesh Information Technology group called BANGLA-IT.

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