

Apple launches iPhone trade-in programme

Apple began letting US iPhone owners trade in their smartphones for credit toward buying new models. The California company's trade-in program kicked off in the wake of unconfirmed reports of a September 10 event at which Apple will unveil new iPhones, with rumors ranging from a gold handset to a low-price version aimed at emerging markets. 'iPhones hold great value,' Apple spokeswoman Amy Bessette said in an email to AFP.

"So Apple Retail Stores are launching a new program to assist customers who wish to bring in their previous-generation iPhone for reuse or recycling." She would not specify how much Apple is paying for old iPhones, but they can fetch \$300 or so depending on the model at an array of websites or US consumer electronics shops that buy handsets.

The Wall Street Journal earlier this month reported that Apple had asked its Taiwan-based supplier, Hon Hai Precision, to begin shipping two new versions of the iPhone in September, including a lower-cost model. Speculation has centered around whether Apple will shift its strategy of focusing on premium devices priced at the high-end of the market to include a lower-cost handset appealing to people with tight budgets ■

GP to invest \$345m in network expansion

Grameenphone is going to borrow a \$345 million financial package from the IFC, an arm of the World Bank, to expand its coverage in rural areas. It would be the country's highest investment in the telecom arena, officials of the operator claimed.

This type of investment plan means they are going to concentrate more in the 2G and pressure will mount on the government and the telecom and revenue regulators to open up and set things right. "It is certainly a massive expansion and one of the largest investments in the infrastructure," Abu Saeed Khan, a telecom sector analyst and a senior policy fellow (Bangladesh) at Lirne Asia, told recently. This investment plan would make Grameenphone stronger in network capacity and give it an extra mileage over other competitors, sources in the industry said.

Vivek Sood, CEO of Grameenphone, told "The potential to expand telecom services in Bangladesh is huge and IFC's financing will be crucial in helping us improve connectivity and coverage in rural areas, boosting digital inclusion." Grameenphone has a total of 44.67 million active subscribers, with 42.14% market share ■

Citycell 'skips' 3G bidding

Four private mobile-phone operators in Bangladesh have deposited earnest money to bid for 3G spectrum. The country's first private operator, Citycell, however, did not deposit any money, though eligible for bidding. As a result, it will not be able to take part in the much-awaited 3G auction scheduled for Sep 8, Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC) Chairman Sunil Kanti Bose has said. Private operators Grameenphone, Banglalink, Airtel and Robi deposited their earnest money of \$ 20 million to the regulator. Giasuddin Ahmed, Vice Chairman of the regulatory authority, said the auction process had effectively started with the deposition of earnest money. Bose said Citycell had sought an extension of the earnest money deposition deadline citing financial problems. "We have no scope to keep Citycell's requests," he said. "We'll sell spectrums if we have any left after the bidding as per our policy." On Feb 12, the Ministry of Posts and Telecommunication had finalised the licensing policy for 3G services, fixing the spectrum value at \$20 million per MHz. It need not join the auction but will have to obtain the licence by paying the same amount the private operators would to get 3G spectrum. The licence will be valid for 15 years ■

Microsoft CEO Ballmer to retire within 12 months

Microsoft Corp Chief Executive Steve Ballmer unexpectedly has announced his retirement recently. Ending a controversial 13-year reign at the head of the world's largest software company and sending the company's shares up nearly 6 percent.

Ballmer, 57, took over from co-founder Bill Gates in January 2000, but his leadership was questioned throughout his tenure by Wall Street and Silicon Valley, as Microsoft's stock price floundered and the company that drove the personal computer revolution was overtaken by Apple Inc and Google Inc in the shift toward mobile computing.

Ballmer's planned exit comes shortly after activist investing fund ValueAct Capital Management LP took a small stake in the company, and started agitating for a change in strategy and a clear CEO succession plan. There are no obvious candidates to succeed Ballmer at the company that has only had two CEOs in its 38-year history. Many promising executives have left or were pushed out by Ballmer. Only last month Ballmer launched a massive reorganisation to reshape Microsoft into a company focused on devices and services, essentially mimicking Apple. Most industry watchers felt it was too little, too late in the effort to restore Microsoft as a technology leader ■

India is now world's third largest Internet user

India has bypassed Japan to become the world's third largest Internet user after China and the United States, and its users are significantly younger than those of other emerging economies, global digital measurement and analytics firm comScore has said in a report.

India now has nearly 74 million Internet users, a 31 per cent increase over March 2012, the report says. The numbers are lower than other recent estimates, possibly reflecting comScore's methodology that only factors in PC and laptop-based Internet usage. The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) pegged the number of Internet subscribers in India at 164.81 million as of March 31, 2013, with seven out of eight accessing the Internet from their mobile phones.

The comScore report, on the other hand, puts mobile and tabled-based Internet traffic at just 14% of the total. Three-fourths of India's online population is under 35 as against just over half worldwide, the comScore report, India Digital Future in Focus 2013, says, possibly reflecting India's more recent improvements in literacy. Men under 35 and women between 35 and 44 are heavier users. But women account for less than 40 per cent of all Indian users, a far lower sex ratio than that of other countries ■