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India to get first direct cable link to the UK

Sixteen telecommunications companies have announced plans to build the \$US700m Europe India Gateway (EIG) cable system that will give the booming economy of India its first direct cable link to the UK.

The 16 companies investing in the project are: AT&T; Bharti Airtel; BT; Cable & Wireless; Djibouti Telecom; Du; Gibtelecom; IAM; Libyan Post, Telecom and Information Technology Company; MTN Group; Omantel; PT Comunicacoes, SA; Saudi Telecom Company; Telecom Egypt; Telkom SA Ltd; and Verizon Business. Alcatel-Lucent and Tyco Telecoms have been contracted to build the system.

The 15,000km EIG cable is scheduled to be operational by mid 2010. It will have thirteen landings: in the United Kingdom, Portugal, Gibraltar, Morocco, Monaco, France, Libya, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Djibouti, Oman, United Arab Emirates and India and will interconnect with other major cable systems connecting Europe, Africa, Asia and North America. It will have a capacity of 3.84tbps when fully lit and provide much-needed diversity for broadband traffic currently relying largely on traditional routes from Europe to India. The builders say this is important, because of the threat of earthquakes in this region.

Ihab Tarazi, Verizon Business vice president of global network planning, said the new system would enable Verizon Business to provide services with reduced latency, reduced provisioning time and increased reliability. He added: "The EIG will give Verizon Business customers a second, diverse landing in France. As with SEA-ME-WE-4, Verizon Business will operate a landing station in Marseilles that will connect directly with the company's recently expanded ultra-long-haul network in Europe."

EIG will also enable Verizon Business to extend its global mesh architecture to the Middle East and India. Meshing is a network design that connects undersea cable systems on land, allowing for instantaneous rerouting of traffic in the event of multiple undersea cable breaks. Currently, Verizon Business operates a seven-way diverse mesh network between the US and Europe and five-way diversity between the US and Japan.

India ripe for mobile location and GPS services

Market researcher Canalys has released highlights from a new survey of around 1,200 Indian consumers examining the market for navigation and location-based services on mobile phones and portable navigation devices.

"The survey results indicate there is significant potential for certain navigation and location-based services, particularly among younger, tech-savvy, middle class consumers," said Rachel Lashford, manager of Canalys APAC.

"While India is still in its very early stages as a market for portable navigation devices, and GPS is not yet widely understood as a technology, it is already a significant market for smart phones, with over 3.5 million shipping there over the past year. This provides a firm foundation for mobile services in the future."

Eighty seven percent of those surveyed said they would be comfortable to let someone see their location if their phone were to broadcast it continuously. Forty five percent said they would want this restricted to people they chose specifically, one-third would be happy to let their spouse or partner see this information. Canalys says these comfort levels were higher than those shown by consumers in several Western European countries surveyed last year. The proportions prepared to let work colleagues or all their social networking contacts see their location were also higher in India.

"Consistent with this willingness to share location information, the ability to track family members or friends was the location-based service in which most expressed interest, with 40 percent citing this as the most or second most useful from a list of applications presented, ahead of being able to discover what was on at local cinemas and book seats and to locate and reserve seats in nearby restaurants," said Canals analyst TY Lau.

"When asked what services they would be prepared to pay for on their mobile phone, getting maps and directions was the second highest rated choice, only marginally behind mobile e-mail and ahead of web browsing, mobile instant messaging, music and mobile TV."

"The interest is there," Lashford added. "As PND prices come down to more affordable levels and more smartphone-based solutions emerge, we expect to see rapid growth in what is a huge potential market."

The Canals consumer mobility survey for India was conducted using an online panel in April 2008. Almost 1200 adult mobile phone owners in India were surveyed: 20 percent from each of Bangalore, Mumbai and Delhi, and the remaining 40 percent from other locations.

United Telecoms taps UTStarcom for Goan GEPON network

United Telecoms has awarded UTStarcom a contract to deploy a GEPON network to deliver IPTV, bandwidth on demand and VoIP services in of Goa.

According to UTStarcom, the network will be the first in India specifically designed to deliver e-governance and triple play solutions. It is an expansion of UTStarcom's recently deployed fibre network for United Telecoms and marks the first time UTStarcom's RollingStream IPTV, GEPON and mSwitch solutions will be integrated into a single customer network for the delivery of end-to-end, triple play services. In 2007, UTStarcom was selected by United Telecoms to deploy its GEPON fibre access solution to serve as the foundation for the new State Wide Area Network in Goa.

The network will provide more than 100,000 subscribers in Goa with high-speed access to new services including broadcast-quality IPTV and e-governance. Additional applications and services will include on-demand entertainment, interactive gaming, VoIP, telemedicine, distance learning and e-commerce.

UTStarcom's RollingStream end-to-end IPTV system presently supports more than 800,000 live IPTV subscribers globally and maintains a current total system capacity of more than one million subscribers as a result of recent successful deployments in China with China Netcom and China Telecom, in India with Bharti Airtel and MTNL/Aksh, in Japan with Softbank, in Latin America with Brasil Telecom and in Taiwan with Markwell.

United Telecom is a Bangalore-based ICT solutions company with experience in setting up telecom networks, e-governance networks and solutions. It was the first Indian company to develop DWDM, on BSNL's networks. UTL's portfolio includes SHDSL modems and BTS for GSM.

Ruckus launches in India

WiFi vendor, Ruckus Wireless, has launched operations in India, headquartered in Bangalore, and has formed a partnership with Dell which is providing Ruckus ZoneFlex Smart wireless LANs to its corporate customers throughout India.

The two companies will jointly market Ruckus Smart WiFi technology and products to the software and peripherals, enterprise, healthcare, retail, education and hospitality industries, as well as to broadband operators delivering triple play (voice, video and data) services to consumers and businesses.

"India is a hyper-growth market for technology and represents a significant market opportunity for us," said Selina Lo, president and CEO of Ruckus Wireless. "Our relationship with Dell in the region enables us to hit the ground running with a unique solution that fulfils a pressing need."

India's WiFi market is expected to grow from approximately \$US260 million in 2008 to nearly \$US900 million by 2011 with rapid adoption of the technology in schools, hospitals and medical facilities, hotels and other public venues, as well as in small and mid-sized businesses, large corporate environments and homes in both rural and urban areas.

Sudarshan Boosupalli, general manager - India operations for Ruckus Wireless, claimed that the company's technology offered "unparalleled reliability and coverage with built in interference avoidance and quality of service to improve the user's experience and allow them to be more productive."

Ruckus Smart WiFi is billed as a new approach to solving two painful WiFi problems: range and reliability. Ruckus claims that: "unlike any other WiFi systems available today, Ruckus Smart WiFi uniquely adapts in real-time to environmental problems, such as obstructions or interference that degrade WiFi performance and coverage."

The technology features "a software controlled antenna array called BeamFlex that reconfigures itself in real-time to use the optimum signal path [and] automatically directing WiFi signals towards the user and away from interference....obviat[ing] the need for extensive RF planning and meticulous AP placement in an enterprise deployment."

Singapore

Axia, SingTel SPH and SP Telecoms team to bid for NetCo role
Axia NetMedia of Canada, SingTel, Singapore Press Holdings and SP Telecommunications have formed a consortium to bid to build Singapore's next generation national broadband network.

Axia NetMedia and SingTel each hold 30 percent of the joint venture, Singapore Press Holdings 25 percent and SP Telecommunications 15 percent.

The consortium, to be known as OpenNet, will be led by Axia and will respond the RFP for the next generation national broadband network - network company (NetCo) put out by the Infocomm Development Authority of Singapore (IDA).

The consortium claims that its proposal exceeds the requirements of the government and its iN2015 blueprint, particularly in areas such as timeline and design.

OpenNet says it proposes "a comprehensive plan for a truly open, better and faster fibre-to-the-home network with guaranteed access, which the entire Singapore population can enjoy [that] will deliver pristine open access, which is accomplished through: no individual parties having control over OpenNet; three of the four OpenNet owners are not integrated telecommunications players hence there are no conflicting interests; the network is specifically designed to enable choice by OpenNet customers, large and small; and interests are aligned as OpenNet's commercial success depends on its customers' success."

In the proposal, OpenNet says it will leverage SingTel's existing extensive high-quality ducting network and turn it into an ultra-fast broadband network. This it says will guarantee reliability because the subterranean ducting system is least vulnerable to damage and will enable it deliver a resilient tamper-proof fibre-to-the-home network at least two and a half years ahead of schedule of the iN2015 vision.

Canada-based Axia NetMedia has extensive experience in planning, designing and operating open access no-conflict next generation networks in Canada and Europe.

The consortium says that, with SingTel's ownership of and SPT's access to existing critical infrastructure, as well as their technical expertise, the consortium can leverage and turn the infrastructure into true ultra-fast broadband networks in a much shorter turnaround time to deliver the next generation NBN and at a fraction of the costs compared to a greenfield operation.

StarHub to trial femtocells

StarHub is to launch the first public trial of femtocells in Singapore using technology from Huawei & ZTE.

200 StarHub customers who have a mobile post-paid service and a MaxOnline Express, MaxOnline Premium, or MaxOnline Ultimate residential broadband connection will receive femtocells supplied by Huawei and ZTE for the six month trial. StarHub says it will use the trial to gather feedback and comments on the home zone service, in consideration for a future commercial launch.

Anil Nihalani, head of mobile services, at StarHub, said: "We have been actively following the developments in femtocell technology, with the view of enhancing current mobile offerings to our customers. Particularly, we will be evaluating the effectiveness of this new technology in delivering 3G and 3.5G mobile services - voice and video calls, as well as SMS, MMS and data services - within the home environment. This trial will enable us to determine whether femtocell technology is a viable technology for use in Singapore."

Vietnam

Taiwan's Chunghwa & Viettel form data centre JV

Chunghwa Telecom has set up a joint venture with Viettel Corporation to provide Internet data centre services in Vietnam.

Viettel is an integrated telecom service provider, providing services including fixed line, mobile and data communication networks and one of the major mobile phone companies in Vietnam. The venture is expected to begin operations in the third quarter of 2008 and is Chunghwa's first investment outside of Taiwan. The initial investment will be \$US30 million, of which 70 percent will be provided by Viettel and 30 percent by Chunghwa. Chunghwa will hold two out of five board seats and will be responsible for appointing the president of the joint venture and designating technical experts; Viettel will be in charge of marketing initiatives and administration.

Chunghwa opened an office in Vietnam in 2006 and says it has made significant progress towards initiating international operations there through its cooperation with Viettel. Chunghwa will initially cooperate with Viettel to offer Taiwan-based companies and customers data centre services in Vietnam, where demand for these services is expected to increase dramatically, in line with Internet growth.

In Taiwan, Chunghwa provides basic data centre services and network monitoring, security, load-balancing, and disaster recovery services. The company expects that the joint venture will expand provide similar services for Taiwanese corporate customers, government authorities and private companies in Vietnam.

IBM & Vietnam National Uni launch Web 2.0 portal for IT education

The Vietnam Information for Science and Technology Advance Innovation Portal has gone live on an IBM cloud computing infrastructure.

The portal will be used by Vietnamese government institutions and universities to develop education programs for Service Science Management and Engineering (SSME), an emerging academic discipline and research area that integrates aspects of computer science, engineering, management science, business strategy, and social science.

The portal runs on IBM Idea Factory, a Web 2.0 social software service and operates in a cloud computing environment and helps virtually connect experts and on-line communities to create ideas, share experiences and debate opinions. Also, IBM and Vietnam National University in Ho Chi Minh City has signed a MoU for SSME education and IT Service Curriculum (ITSC) for students and IT professionals. The program will emphasise ITSC principles and will train students and professionals in using technology for service delivery and better managing people, assets and processes.

To build and sustain a highly skilled and competitive workforce, the Vietnamese government plans to adopt the academic programs nationwide through a joint effort by the Ministry of Education and Training, the Ministry of Science and Technology, and the Ministry of Information and Communications. These programs will offer computing courses in IT Service, free software tools, and business case studies representing real-world challenges.

Associate Professor Le Quang Minh, vice president of Vietnam National University - Ho Chi Minh City, said: "We look forward to using the portal to build skills that will empower students and workers to drive IT innovations and benefit our market. Starting on university campuses, the programs are expected to later expand to country-wide institutions across Vietnam."

According to IBM, beyond supporting teaching and learning, the portal can also be used to support research and development activities among broader academic and business communities to foster new services for local and global markets. "The Innovation Portal and SSME programs help drive Vietnam's agenda for technology and economy development forward. They open up new opportunities for Vietnamese talent to flourish and interact with the world digitally," said Dr Willy Chiu, vice president, high performance on demand solutions at IBM. "When implemented broadly, these resources can give Vietnam a competitive edge in the global market."

Indonesia

Nokia Siemens to upgrade Telkomsel network

Nokia Siemens Networks will upgrade Telkomsel's cellular network to Release 4 architecture with its MSC mobile softswitch.

According to Nokia Siemens Networks the three-year frame work agreement is one of the biggest softswitch network modernisations in Asia Pacific. It includes network planning, implementation, consulting and system Integration. It will help Telkomsel to evolve to an IP architecture and enable it to offer services such as VoIP, expand network capacity and simplify network architecture. Nokia Siemens Networks will commence delivery of products and services in May 2008. There are currently 190 Nokia Siemens customers using mobile softswitching in over 110 live networks.

Tonga

Digicel expands in the Pacific

Digicel has expanded its cellular network in Tonga and has launches pending in Fiji and Vanuatu.

Digicel Pacific CEO, Vanessa Slowe, said: "We have upgraded and expanded our network right across Tongatapu, Vava'u, Ha'apai and Eua to deliver crystal clear, unbeatable coverage throughout the Kingdom of Tonga and introduce mobile service to some communities for the first time ever."

Digicel has opened stores in more than 12 locations throughout Tongatapu, Vava'u, Ha'apai and Eua, offering handsets from \$US25. It has also introduced one flat rate for all on-network calls day or night.

Digicel Tonga sales director, Tapu Panuve, said: "Flat rate pricing structure and postpaid accounts will give our customers a wider range of pricing plans to choose from. With new products like Credit U, Call Me and international roaming it makes mobile communications so much easier and accessible for the people of Tonga."

Tonga has a population of 102,000 with mobile penetration at 35 percent. Digicel employs more than 100 people in Tonga and claims that its presence creates a further 300 jobs. It already has services in Samoa and Papua New Guinea and claims to be the fastest-growing mobile operator in the Pacific. The company was recently granted mobile licenses by the governments of Fiji and Vanuatu, and says it has commitments from several other countries in the Pacific.

Pan Asia

In flight Internet: Intelsat & Panasonic try where Boeing failed ***Two years after Boeing canned its service offering broadband Internet access to airline passengers, global satellite operator Intelsat has teamed up with Panasonic to launch a similar service.***

Intelsat and Panasonic Avionics Corporation have signed a multi-year service agreement to deliver Panasonic eXConnect "an advanced satellite transmission platform that will allow airline passengers the ability to access Internet-based information and entertainment."

The service will use Intelsat's existing GlobalConnex Network Broadband service which is available on Intelsat's global satellite fleet of 53 in-orbit satellites, and regional teleport facilities. By using Intelsat's existing infrastructure, Panasonic says it will be able to introduce eXConnect in key regions around the world, providing an efficient and cost effective means to scale the network capacity as demand grows.

It says that the service will support a wide range of applications useful to both the passengers and crew such as VPN, live television, shopping, streaming media, telemedicine, operational applications and personal devices integrated to the airline's in-flight entertainment systems. "With data rates comparable to ground public Wi-Fi hotspots, eXConnect offers airlines the opportunity to further differentiate their in-flight product with a valuable service to their passengers," according to Panasonic.

Boeing announced plans for its service, Connexion by Boeing, in April 2000 and the first commercial service was launched by Lufthansa in January 2003. It offered Internet connectivity for passengers on commercial airlines via their own laptops. When closure was announced in 2006, the service was available from almost a dozen airlines but not one US-based carrier, despite the prices making the service quite attractive: unlimited Internet access for the duration of a flight for \$US26.95, \$US17.95 for three hours; and \$US9.95 for an hour.

Announcing the closure, Boeing chairman, president and CEO Jim McNerney, said: "Over the last six years, we have invested substantial time, resources and technology in Connexion by Boeing. Regrettably, the market for this service has not materialised as had been expected."

Commenting on Boeing's decision Telecom, Media and Finance Associates (TMF Associates), a US specialist mobile satellite services consulting firm, said that the market opportunity for in-flight communications would be much smaller than many analysts and consultants had been projecting. It had predicted the shut down of the Connexion service several months earlier saying that backers of other systems would need to re-evaluate whether their business projections were simply too optimistic. However, it noted that "other consulting firms have continued to project that a multi-billion dollar market will be realised for in-flight passenger communications over the next five years."

Technology

Nortel shuns multivendor LTE patents initiative

Nortel has shunned an industry initiative designed to ensure that intellectual property disputes and licensing fees do not hamper the introduction of future mobile technology, but has come out with a licence fee for its own intellectual property that it says is competitive.

Last month seven major global telco vendors - Alcatel-Lucent, Ericsson, NEC, NextWave Wireless, Nokia, Nokia Siemens Networks and Sony Ericsson - signed up to an agreement to limit intellectual property licensing fees for the long term evolution of 3G mobile technologies and, hopefully, avoid the costly and protracted IPR litigation that has bedevilled other technologies in recent years. They invited other vendors to join but two significant IPR holders, Nortel and Qualcomm, were both noticeable by their absence.

Now, Nortel has clearly indicated that it intends to go it alone on LTE IPR fees, announcing what it claims is "a competitive handset royalty rate" of about one percent [of the handset sale price], subject to terms, for its portfolio of LTE standards-essential patents. This would guarantee Nortel's income from handset royalties. The fee structure proposed by the seven member initiative called for an aggregate per handset royalty fee in the single digit percentage range, but this would have to be divided up among all owners of IPR required for the handset.

Nortel says it is "taking this exceptional step of publishing its competitive patent royalty rates in order to provide increased transparency and predictability of IPR costs that could help prevent uncertainties in handset costs from inhibiting the growth of the 4G market..[and] in order to help service providers and their handset vendors develop business plans for launching LTE." However the structure proposed by the alliance limiting the total IPR cost to a single digit percentage would seem likely to provide more certainty on IPR costs for handset manufacturers but less for individual IPR owners on the level of licence fees they will receive.

In a statement, Nortel said: "It is Nortel's position that compensation provided through licensing standards-essential patent claims under fair, reasonable and non-discriminatory terms (FRAND) should be based on the significance of the patented technology in the standard and the value of the patented technology to the licensed implementation. That way, innovators that develop technological breakthroughs are appropriately rewarded for their IPR and their portfolio value while standardised technologies can remain accessible to anyone through licenses on reasonable terms."

WiMAX Forum names US applications laboratory

The WiMAX Forum has named the MAXWell Lab at the University of Maryland as the first WiMAX Forum endorsed applications lab in North America.

It says that companies around the world "will benefit from and be able to more quickly take advantage of new applications for the mobile broadband Internet as a result of the WiMAX applications testing and development work at the MAXWell Lab.

The initial focus of the Lab, part of the University of Maryland Institute for Advanced Computer Studies, will be location-aware applications. "With a community of some 45,000 people at the University of Maryland, this is going to be a unique facility because of the size of the potential test bed and large number of live users," said the lab's director, Ashok Agrawala, "Our students, in collaboration with professors, industry leaders, and WiMAX Forum members, will use the new lab to develop breakthrough applications and services, most of which we cannot yet imagine."

The WiMAX Forum has also endorsed the M-Taiwan WiMAX Application Lab in Hsinchu.