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India

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Singapore

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Thailand

True picks Alcatel-Lucent for mobile WiMAX trials

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TOT expands DSL services with Keymile access nodes

Malaysia

Government to build 1250 mobile towers

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Cambodia

Chunghwa to enter Cambodian market

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New Zealand

Vodafone NZ launches fixed broadband over ULL

Former comms minister to chair InternetNZ board

Third cellular operator hires former StarHub chief

First call made on Telecom NZ's new 3G network

Telecom NZ offers free net security software

Pan Asia

Brightstar launches global cellphone accessories business

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Technology

Leading mobile WiMAX vendors pool patents

OECD looks at convergence and next generation networks

WiMAX's prospects analysed

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Tata Comms expands global network to India

Tata Communications has expanded its network reach into Africa through an arrangement with Neotel, South Africa's first converged communications network operator.

According to Tata Comms, the South African government and business process outsourcing (BPO) industry have invested a tremendous amount of time and effort in positioning the country as a preferred BPO or contact centre destination, and the new multi-service PoP established in Johannesburg by Tata Communications in association with Neotel could make this a reality.

Neotel has been delivering voice and data services since 2006. The service portfolio consists of high-speed Internet, VPN, network management and hosting services to customers in South Africa. The new PoP integrates with Neotel's next generation network and IP/MPLS infrastructure for onward national and regional connectivity. It offers MPLS, ethernet, IP and International private leased circuit (IPLC) services, connecting through Tata Communications' global network to over 600 cities in 50 countries and onwards to customers in over 200 countries.

Customers in South Africa can now access Tata Communications' full global suite of products, including solutions for voice and data connectivity, managed security services, application traffic optimisation and management, managed storage and hosted applications, collaboration services, server management, co-location and content.

Tata Communications says it plans to continue to extend its global presence, with a focus on emerging markets in the Middle East, Eastern Europe, South America and South East Asia. Recent additions to the network footprint include China, Egypt, Malaysia and the Philippines.

Nokia is the most trusted brand in India

Nokia has emerged as the most trusted brand in India in the annual survey of Brand Equity commissioned by financial newspaper The Economic Times.

Nokia was ranked 71st in 2005, when it first made an appearance in the survey. It rose to 44th in 2006 and to fourth place in 2007.

The Brand Equity survey was conducted by AC Nielsen ORG-MARG, and is claimed to be the largest of its kind in India. It interviewed more than 8,000 respondents in 12 cities across the country. The sample was spread across socio-economic class, age and income groups, covering consumers aged 15 and older. The list consisted of 300 brands (219 consumer products and 81 service brands).

India is the second largest market for Nokia globally. The company has a manufacturing facility in Chennai, three R&D facilities, and a design centre in Bangalore, keeping Nokia in step with the growing needs of emerging markets.

Singapore

Broadcast Australia teams with PK Media for mobile TV

Broadcast Australia has formed a mobile TV services joint-venture with Singaporean broadcast technology group, PGK Media.

The JV, Singapore Digital, will be majority-owned by Broadcast Australia and will service Singapore's emerging digital television sector with "a particular focus on the development of a market position that will enable the cost effective delivery of mobile TV services and continue Singapore's leadership in digital broadcasting technologies."

The two claim that the JV "couples Broadcast Australia's proven digital broadcast infrastructure knowledge, network management experience and substantial financial strength, with PGK Media's innovation, entrepreneurial skills and local-market knowledge."

"The Singapore Digital joint-venture is indicative of Broadcast Australia's intent to offer specialist digital broadcast solutions on a country-by-country basis," said Broadcast Australia managing director international business group, Chris Jaeger. "It provides a clear indication of our willingness to work closely with leading Asian media-sector players, within a wide range of strategic collaboration models, in the inevitable digitisation of Asian broadcast media."

As part of the joint-venture, Singapore Digital will take over the operation and management of TV2GO, Singapore's nationwide mobile TV trial initiated by PGK Media in 2006. Following a six-month technical trial, the operational phase of the TV2GO trial was officially launched in June 2007. It is Singapore's first nationwide mobile TV trial, and delivers a mix of premium content to around 100 Singaporean trialists.

Broadcast Australia is a 100 percent owned subsidiary of ASX listed Macquarie Communications Infrastructure Group. It claims to be the owner and operator of one of the most extensive terrestrial broadcast transmission networks in the world, providing end-to-end transmission services for radio and television (analogue and digital) broadcasters.

The company's core competencies include planning and network design, engineering design and project management, complex systems integration, site development and installation, operations and network management and in-house repairs and maintenance.

Thailand

True picks Alcatel-Lucent for mobile WiMAX trials

Alcatel-Lucent has announced plans to conduct a trial of WiMAX Rev-e technology with Thai converged telco, True Corporation.

For the trial Alcatel-Lucent will provide True with a WiMAX network operating in the 2.5GHz band, including base stations, wireless access controller, operation and maintenance centre, customer and CPE (including wireless cards for laptop computers) – to deliver Internet broadband access when on the move.

Alcatel-Lucent will also provide its WiMAX engineering expertise and integration services for the trial, which will take place in Phatumthanee province on the outskirts of Bangkok. The trial will also test several applications that improve the overall welfare of the community by leveraging advances in telecommunications technology, according to Alcatel-Lucent.

Thiti Nantapatsiri, True's managing director home/consumer solution & high speed access said, "We plan to offer our customers the advantages of WiMAX-based technologies that allow for seamless and uninterrupted nomadic connection to advanced services for customers in the remote areas of Thailand while on-the-go using WiMAX-enabled devices. With more than 12.5 million mobile subscribers and 570,000 wireline broadband customers under the True Group, we hope to further propel the concept of today's convergence lifestyle with the addition of WiMAX broadband services."

Alcatel-Lucent claims that its WiMAX products "integrate the latest technological innovations, such as 'beam forming' and MIMO'. Beam forming enables a service provider to dramatically reduce the number of radio sites needed to provide coverage – in some instances by as much as 40 percent – while reducing interference and ensuring better indoor penetration of the radio signal. MIMO helps make radio links more robust, nearly doubling the capacity delivered in dense urban environments."

True is the largest wireline service provider in Bangkok, the largest broadband provider in the country and a major player in the wireless, cellular and Internet markets. Principal subsidiary companies in the True Group include True Visions, Thailand's dominant pay television operator, and True Move, a major mobile phone service provider. The group offers services under five product and service categories: TrueMove, TrueOnline, TrueVisions, TrueMoney, and TrueLife. Alcatel-Lucent was recently selected by True Move to support the expansion of its GSM/EDGE network.

TOT expands DSL services with Keymile access nodes

After a public tender, the state-owned Telephone Organisation of Thailand (TOT) has ordered Keymile's MileGate 2500 multi-service access nodes for installation in outdoor cabinets.

The Keymile equipment will be supplied through local systems integrator and Keymile partner Unicomm Engineering in Bangkok. The IP-MSAN MileGate replaces Keymile's multi-service access system UMUX which has been employed at TOT for a couple of years.

TOT will use MileGate systems to expand its broadband services. It aims to increase ARPU by offering more broadband services. Business customers will be supplied with SHDSL services from the MileGate systems.

According to Keymile, to be able to offer enhanced broadband services using DSL technology, the Thai fixed line network operator has to place the access systems closer to its customers' homes or business premises. "Because of their compact and robust design, the MileGate systems can be easily installed in the prevailing tropical conditions in outstations. MileGate 2500 can withstand operating temperatures of +60°C.

Malaysia

Government to build 1250 mobile towers

The Malaysian Government will spend RM500m (\$US152m) to build 1,250 mobile towers over the next two years to ensure mobile phone coverage nationwide.

The Star newspaper quotes energy, water and communications minister, Datuk Shaziman Abu Mansor, saying 600 towers would be constructed under phase one of the project from July to December 2009 and construction of the remaining 650 towers would begin in July next year and be completed by the end of 2010.

"Our focus is on areas with density of fewer than 80 people per sq km," he said, adding that at present 92 percent of the country's land area had mobile phone coverage. The funds will come from a levy on operators by the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC), and that the telcos will be invited to submit bids for the construction of the towers.

The MCMC will also spend a further RM1.5b (\$US458m) on broadband Internet services in the rural areas to bridge the digital divide between urban and rural areas, Shaziman said.

Cambodia

Chunghwa to enter Cambodian market

Chunghwa Telecom is planning to launch telecom services in Cambodia, as part of a plan to expand overseas.

According to the China Post, the company has confirmed a Reuters report to this effect saying it will collaborate with Vietnam's military-run operator Viettel, with

which it had set up a \$US30 million joint venture in May. China Post added that Chunghwa had declined to give a specific timeline for when the services would be launched or any investment figures.

Chunghwa Telecom had said it started investments in Vietnam and Thailand and planned to invest in every Southeast Asian country besides Myanmar.

Viettel, fully owned by the Vietnam military, has become a dominant telecoms operator in Vietnam, taking up about a third of the mobile phone market. It is already active in Cambodia. In 2006, it became Vietnam's first telecoms firm to invest abroad when it VoIP services in Cambodia. It has since expanded into mobile phone, fixed-line and Internet services.

New Zealand

Vodafone NZ launches fixed broadband over ULL

Vodafone New Zealand says it has unbundled half of Auckland's phone lines and by the end of October will have unbundled all the city's 41 exchanges giving customers for the first time a choice of network for fixed broadband services.

It is offering three new price plans - Easy, Ideal and Ultimate - for services on this new network. Easy offers 1GB for \$NZ70 per month at max 7.6Mbps/128kbps; Ideal 5GB for \$80 at 7.6Mbps/128kb and Ultimate 20GB for \$90 per month at 7.6Mbps/800kbps. All services include a home phone service with standard per minute call rates.

Former comms minister to chair InternetNZ board

The Internet Society of New Zealand (InternetNZ) has appointed Paul Swain as chair of its newly-established executive board.

The board was set up following a structural review to provide governance to the executive director's office and report to the InternetNZ council. It will administer the policy and advocacy arm of InternetNZ.

Swain is presently MP for the Rimutaka electorate and serves on Parliament's commerce and finance & expenditure committees. He is standing down from Parliament at the next election. As minister of communications he implemented the Telecommunications Act 2001. One of his first roles will be to join the appointments panel, which is reviewing applications for other executive board positions.

Third cellular operator hires former StarHub chief

New Zealand Communication - which is planning to launch New Zealand's third cellular service - has named the former president of Singaporean mobile operator StarHub, Mike Reynolds, as its CEO.

Chairman Bill Osborne said: "Reynolds' appointment is a major milestone as we progressively build towards entering the market as this country's third mobile phone operator...and we anticipate Reynolds will move rapidly to confirm other key appointments in coming months."

Reynolds joined StarHub in 2001 from BellSouth China, where he was CEO and president. He was initially a senior VP in charge of business markets. He became head of integrated products and marketing in 2004, and President in early 2008.

First call made on Telecom NZ's new 3G network

Telecom NZ says a call from CEO Paul Reynolds to Auckland University student Michael Moka represented the first live test of its new WCDMA 3G network. It has committed to supporting its current network until at least 2012.

Telecom NZ offers free net security software

Telecom New Zealand is offering its residential broadband and dial-up customers free, downloadable security software that it says would normally retail for \$NZ7.95 a month.

The package comes from McAfee and includes a firewall, anti-virus scanner and identity protection and parental controls. Telecom has also formed a partnership with Thomson - the largest modem and gateway provider in the world - to make Thomson ADSL2+ modems available to its broadband customers.

Pan Asia

Brightstar launches global cellphone accessories business

US based Brightstar Corp, has set up a new venture to distribute mobile phone accessories.

Brightstar is one of the largest wireless device distribution and supply chain solutions companies in the world. Its new company, Brightstar Accessories headquartered in Miami, will "focus on the procurement, marketing, sales and distribution of innovative mobile device accessories to operator, retail and dealer customers worldwide. It will be headed by Morten Steen-Jorgensen, the former president of GN Mobile/Jabra, a global provider of wired and Bluetooth headsets.

The company will operate in Latin America, North America, Asia Pacific and Australia (where it is the exclusive supplier of cellphone handset to Telstra) initially and will later expand into Europe. It has not indicated whose products it will represent.

Brightstar chairman, CEO & president, R Marcelo Claure, said: "Worldwide, accessories continue to be a growing part of the wireless marketplace. As devices become more sophisticated and data-centric, the need for high level accessory solutions becomes increasingly critical." According to a report from ABI Research in February 2008, mobile phone accessory worldwide sales in 2008 will exceed \$US40 billion and sales are expected to double by 2012.

Steen-Jorgensen said: "we will lead the charge in providing the highest quality and largest product portfolio in the industry, serving both our supplier partners and over 160,000 points of sale around the world."

Technology

Leading mobile WiMAX vendors pool patents

Six suppliers of WiMAX technology - Alcatel-Lucent, Cisco, Clearwire, Intel, Samsung Electronics and Sprint - have agreed to pool their intellectual property in mobile WiMAX (IEEE802.16e) in a bid to boost uptake.

They have created the Open Patent Alliance (OPA) to hold a pool of their respective 802.16e patents in a move they say is designed to help participating companies obtain access to patent licenses from patent owners at a predictable cost. It is also claimed that the move will help ensure product differentiation and interoperability at a more predictable cost, by charging licence fees only for the features in patents required to develop WiMAX products. However, vendors with IPR said to be crucial to WiMAX technology - Ericsson and Qualcomm - are not members.

According to its backers, "the patent pool will incorporate a variety of royalty licensing solutions, including accounting for cross-licensing among individual members within the pool...[and] the OPA will educate the WiMAX ecosystem about, and serve as a central resource for WiMAX intellectual property rights topics."

The OPA will issue a call for WiMAX essential patents for inclusion in its patent pool. An independent reviewer will serve as the 'patent referee' and will evaluate submitted patents to determine how essential they are to the WiMAX standard and WiMAX Forum profiles. The OPA initially will focus its efforts on the WiMAX standard, but its founders say it may work with other industry groups in the future.

It is the latest ploy by WiMAX vendors to reduce IPR costs compared to rival technologies from the 3G cellular camp, and mimics a move earlier this year by backers of the 3G based long term evolution (LTE)

ABI Research last year produced a study on 4G Intellectual Property and Royalties and in a press release issued at the time said: "One of the major advantages claimed by the WiMAX community over their cellular cousins is that WiMAX will come with a far lower average royalty rate than either LTE or UMB. A favourite phrase among the WiMAX OEM community is that WiMAX has effectively 'democratised' the 4G space. Although ABI Research applauds the move to a more widespread intellectual property holding in the 4G realm, it could be argued that this democratisation of IP will result in more, not fewer, IP royalties."

Research director, Stuart Carlaw, said: "The diversification of IP holdings in 4G technologies and especially WiMAX is something of a double-edged sword. On one hand, the number of companies with vested interests in the technologies' success is far greater; on the other hand, the number of companies likely to succeed in any market is apt to be far smaller than the number of companies that hold IP. The only vehicle left for them to recoup R&D dollars is to look for revenue from licenses.

"Considering that Ericsson and Qualcomm are not supporters of WiMAX and hold IP that is highly relevant to all 4G technologies, it is most likely that there will be little difference in the royalty rates experienced in all 4G standards. More importantly, 4G technologies are likely to see similar royalty rates to those for 3G devices."

The OPA's backers say they expect to secure participation of an additional six to nine investor companies to encompass the WiMAX value-chain and broad geographic representation. Each investor company will have a seat on the OPA board. The OPA will have dedicated staff directed by and accountable to its board.

Move parallels LTE IPR initiative

Earlier this year 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 costs in LTE and avoid the costly and protracted IPR litigation that had bedevilled other technologies in recent years.

They committed to "a framework for establishing predictable and more transparent maximum aggregate costs for licensing intellectual property rights that relate to 3GPP Long Term Evolution and Service Architecture Evolution standards (LTE/SAE)." They invited other holders of relevant IPR to join this initiative - one conspicuous by its absence from this initial partnership is Qualcomm.

The framework is based on the principle of fair, reasonable and non-discriminatory (FRAND) licensing terms for essential patents. This means that the companies agree, subject to reciprocity, to reasonable, maximum aggregate royalty rates based on the value added by the technology in the end product and to flexible licensing arrangements according to the licensors' proportional share of all standard essential IPR for the relevant product category.

OECD looks at convergence and next generation networks

The OECD has issued a new report on convergence and the development of next generation networks and its potential impact on policies and regulations.

Highlights include: concerns that the new fibre networks being deployed by incumbent telephone companies may create a challenge to maintain effective competition; the convergence of video, voice and data can lead to more competition in individual markets for each of these services but the trend towards horizontal integration of infrastructures, market and services could lead to strengthening of market power as few companies can package those services in a single bundled offer to end users; the rollout of fibre networks will take place first in cities, exacerbating the digital divide between urban and rural areas in terms of speed and services offered as the development of fibre networks is often not economically sustainable in rural or remote areas. Rapid growth of new technologies, such as HDTV, mobile TV or 3G, and their demands on spectrum raises question of whether current way spectrum is allocated and managed should be changed. For example, unused or underused spectrum could be assigned to users who will use it most efficiently.

The report is the latest in a series issued in the run-up to the OECD Ministerial meeting on the "Future of the Internet Economy" in Seoul 17-18 June 2008. It is available free from <http://www.oecd.org>

WiMAX's prospects analysed

Overlapping studies of the market for WiMAX services paint a positive picture for the technology in emerging markets, but are not optimistic about its prospects in developed markets.

Both studies, one from Pyramid Research and the other from Frost & Sullivan, see WiMAX competing well against DSL services. F&S says that the 'sweet spot' for WiMAX is its ability to provide voice and data connectivity at speeds of up to 1Mbps in Asia's emerging markets where there is a digital divide. "This massive untapped segment is expected to drive WiMax deployments in the Asia-Pacific, despite competition from 3G technology and the regulatory issues in some countries."

According to the Pyramid report, *WiMAX in Emerging Markets: Strategic and Technological Lessons Learned from Operators*, emerging markets accounted for 70 percent of global WiMAX deployments in 2007. Pyramid says that service providers in these markets have generally positioned WiMAX as a DSL substitute, providing mainly fixed and portable Internet access services. "[These] WiMAX operators....have been adding new customers at a rate of 500-1,000 per month, with more than 70 percent of the current customer base coming from the SME and SOHO segments. While initial deployments have been in underserved areas, these operators are increasingly competing head-to-head with DSL networks. Indeed, in suburban and urban areas, operators claim that more than half of their customers were previously subscribed to DSL or dial-up services, and they have seen unexpected demand in the residential market. In rural areas, almost all their customers are business users."

CPE costs too high

Both F&S and Pyramid see high CPE costs as a barrier to uptake along with regulatory hurdles and lack of support from incumbent carriers in some countries. According to F&S senior industry analyst Marc Einstein. "the real issue facing WiMax is not its technical capabilities, but whether it will get enough traction and stakeholder involvement to graduate from a niche application to a mainstream technology that can be profitably deployed at price points that will drive wider adoption."

Of the 17 Asian countries in the study that were ranked for regulatory support and operator willingness to deploy the technology, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and India topped the list due to excellent incumbent support, favourable regulatory regimes, and considerable untapped growth. F&S says that, as large established operators such as Japan's KDDI and India's BSNL continue to pursue deployments, it believes that WiMax may just get a fresh lease on life in 2009.