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India

Overseas investor tipped to take stake in Reliance Comms

India's Economic Times newspaper reports that strategic investors, including telecom groups from the US and Europe, are in talks with Reliance to acquire about 25 percent of Reliance Communications, India's second-largest mobile operator by subscribers.

Citing an un-named banker, the paper said talks were underway for two-phased transaction, which would see the strategic investor picking up Reliance Comms shares from the secondary market, and then being issued fresh shares through the preferential allotment route.

It said the deal would hinge on whether Reliance Comms could get a big premium over its current market price. Its share price has fallen 70 percent over the past year and is now less than \$US10 billion.

The ET noted that, last month, Japan's NTT DoCoMo acquired a 26 percent stake in Tata Teleservices (TTSL) in a deal that valued the Indian company at around \$US9 billion. "TTSL, which uses the CDMA technology like [Reliance] has around half the number of subscribers as [Reliance], prompting analysts to suggest that the...company could be expecting a valuation of between \$US18 billion and \$US20 billion," the paper said.

AT&T opens first Indian data centre

AT&T has opened its first data centre in India. In Bangalore.

It says that the new data centre will help meet the growing demand from multinational customers in India for online data centres with highly resilient facilities, a wide range of IT infrastructure management services, supported by excellent customer services.

"Data centre customers will have access to a wide range of AT&T's fully integrated managed hosting, application and networking services to support their data and e-commerce needs. Connectivity to the centre can be supported with AT&T's existing suite of managed data services in India."

The new facility is part of AT&T's previously announced \$US1 billion planned global network and portfolio investment for 2008. "The new Bangalore centre underscores AT&T's commitment to the rapidly expanding telecommunications sector in India and highlights the rapidly growing demand in this market," said Gopi Gopinath, chairman and CEO of AT&T Global Network Services India.

China

3G licences to be awarded within weeks

China's minister for industry and information technology, Li Yizhong has announced plans to issue 3G mobile licences before then end of 2008 or early in 2009.

The move is expected to see the three operators investment between them some Rmb200bn (\$29.2b). The largest operator, China Mobile, will be awarded a licence for TD-SCDMA, the country's homegrown 3G standard. China Unicom, the second-largest player, will get a W-CDMA licence and fixed line operator China Telecom will be given a licence for CDMA 2000 licence.

Li said the three operators would be required to reach an agreement on infrastructure sharing before the licences could be awarded. The South China Morning

Post reported that China Mobile, China Telecom and China Unicom had already reached framework agreements on building and sharing new networks.

Telematics company Airbiquity expands into China & APC ***Airbiquity, a provider of wireless connected services, today announced its expansion into China and the APAC region.***

Airbiquity provides wireless communications solutions claimed to enable product suppliers and service providers in the telematics, portable navigation device (PND) and machine-to-machine (M2M) industries to deliver wireless data reliably and ubiquitously.

The company says it plans to offer its full suite of telematics and connectivity solutions to the burgeoning Chinese telematics market. In China, Airbiquity's business name is Ai Bi Ke Communications Technology Co.

Airbiquity also recently established a satellite office in Chengdu from which it will offer full support to its Chinese customers and partners.

"The market opportunity for vehicle-centric information and communication technology (Vehicle ICT) offerings is growing rapidly in the Chinese market," said Thilo Koslowski, vice president, automotive and vehicle ICT at Gartner.

"Mobile phone penetration in China will reach nearly fifty percent by 2010; furthermore we anticipate that by 2012 about 10 percent of all vehicles sold in China will be Vehicle ICT enabled. This will provide the technology foundation to support innovative location, navigation and mapping services in the region."

Airbiquity claims that its connected services solutions are used by the world's leading automakers to enable secure, dependable, two-way data connections between vehicles, devices and service providers. It says its technology is already installed in more than 10 million cars.

"Airbiquity's solutions give users the ability to access a number of voice and data services, including live operator concierge services, real-time traffic, local fuel prices, local weather information, local search of POIs and business listings, send-to-car applications and security services like SOS emergency service, roadside assistance and live car diagnostics."

"China is the next frontier for the connected services and telematics markets. We believe that the country is well positioned for continued long-term growth," said Kamyar Moinzadeh, president and CEO of Airbiquity. "The Chinese market understands the need to integrate a host of features and functions into their telematics programs to differentiate their products."

Singapore

Cisco to open NGN innovation centre

Cisco is to establish EPIC@SG (Enabling Platform Innovation Centre), a technology centre designed to help retail service providers build and deliver services over the next generation national broadband network in Singapore.

With support from the Infocomm Development Authority of Singapore (IDA), Cisco says it will invest up to \$US18 million over the next three years for the development of the centre. Cisco will also hire engineers and key managers to staff the centre, and expects to bring in additional talent to support on-going development work as needed.

According to Cisco, EPIC@SG will provide government agencies, enterprises and RSPs with a platform to conceptualise, develop, test and deploy new services for businesses and consumers.

"The creation of up to 30 next generation services and new RSPs developed through the centre is expected to add between \$US150 million to \$US270 million in revenues to the Singapore economy, as well as create up to 1,800 high-value information technology jobs by 2015."

Wim Elfrink, executive vice president, Cisco Services and the company's chief globalisation officer, said: "EPIC@SG is a key component in our global strategy to bring innovation centres closer to where we see new business models and new world services emerging."

EPIC@SG is expected to be operational by July 2009 and will also serve as a training hub for local technical talent in next-generation networking, applications and services. "Equipped with state-of-the-art facilities, the centre will train local talent on the most advanced network technologies through internship programs with local educational institutions and through on-the-job training with retail service providers," Cisco said.

"EPIC@SG has been designed for government agencies, local and foreign enterprises, small- and medium-sized enterprises, and start-ups. They can come into EPIC@SG's facility to engage the services of experts from Cisco and other partners and make use of Cisco's networking technologies. All applications will be standards-based, built on an open Internet Protocol platform and accessible on any device."

Japan

Nokia's Vertu to be MVNO in Japan

After announcing plans to exit the Japanese market with Nokia-branded cellphones, Nokia has confirmed rumours that it is planning to become an MVNO.

Its upmarket Vertu brand has signed an MVNO deal with NTT DoCoMo to provide communication services to Vertu customers.

In the second quarter of 2009, Vertu will provide a premium membership called, Vertu Club through its partnership with NTT DoCoMo, details of which will be announced later.

On 19 February 2009, Vertu will open its Ginza Flagship Store, its first store in Japan. At the store, pre-orders of handsets will be taken for delivery when Vertu Club is available. It will be the 19th store in the world to be directly operated by Vertu.

Nokia says that those who simply cannot wait until the launch of the Vertu Club in the second quarter of 2009 will be able to purchase SIM lock-free 3G handsets of Ascent Ti, Ascent Ti Ferrari or Signature models for voice calls.

Nokia claims that, "While other handsets are mass produced by the million, a Vertu is hand built in England, one at a time by experienced craftsmen

It says that "In a world of mass production, the desire for exclusivity remains strong. Millions of people own mobile phones, yet among their number are individuals who seek out the very best in everything they buy. Vertu was born to satisfy the demands of this discerning few...After its conception in 1998 and the extensive research and development by specialists in design and engineering that followed, Vertu launched in 2002 and today is recognised as the pinnacle of mobile phone excellence in more than 50 countries around the world"

Taiwan

Chunghwa awards femtocell contract to Alcatel-Lucent

Alcatel-Lucent has been awarded a contract from Chunghwa Telecom to deploy Taiwan's first femtocell network.

According to Alcatel-Lucent Chunghwa Telecom plans to launch its femtocell service with the goal of extending and improving its cellular coverage throughout Taiwan, particularly in homes where the signal sometimes may be either limited or unavailable. The deployment also will enable Chunghwa Telecom to improve the capacity of its network and reduce operational costs.

Alcatel-Lucent will supply Chunghwa Telecom with a comprehensive end-to-end solution including its base station router (BSR) Femto – which incorporates 3G W-CDMA radio access and core network elements into one unit.

The deployment will include the company's service routers and home device manager from Motive, now part of Alcatel-Lucent's portfolio. Additionally, Alcatel-Lucent will be responsible for deployment, project management and end-to-end network integration for the project.

Alcatel-Lucent's BSR Femto will use subscribers' current broadband services to transport voice and data traffic between the individual base stations and Chunghwa Telecom's existing network, offering a cost-effective alternative to traditional backhaul methods. The Alcatel-Lucent solution protects Chunghwa Telecom's existing infrastructure investment because the BSR Femto supports legacy circuit-switched voice and data applications while making possible high-speed packet access (HSPA) data services and advanced capabilities such as mobile TV and IMS applications.

Upon completion of the project, Chunghwa Telecom subscribers will be able to use their current phones to access attractive in-home mobile services that operate seamlessly with their existing mobile phone service. This means they will have the advantage of being able to get a range of services from one provider through a single account and a single, common sign-on procedure.

HTC buys design company One & Co

Taiwanese mobile handset maker, HTC, has acquired San Francisco-based lifestyle design firm One & Company Design.

According to HTC One & Co is "Recognised for its award-winning work with some of the world's best known and most design-savvy lifestyle brands." One & Co will maintain its name and client base. HTC and One & Co have been collaborating since 2006 on the initial incubation and creation of the HTC Touch Diamond. One & Co also has broad design experience in a variety of including footwear, snowboarding and skiing, furniture, packaging, house wares and timepieces.

Bangladesh

Grameenphone IPO shrinks again

Grameenphone has filed its final application for an initial public offering (IPO) to raise US\$65 million. At BDT7.00 per share.

This is the company's third application and less than half its original application to raise \$US150 m. Grameenphone said it had successfully closed the marketing of a pre-IPO private placement of its shares amounting to \$US60 million to local institutional investors on December 4, 2008.

"The pre-IPO placement offer was over-subscribed by three times due to strong support from more than 50 local institutional investors," the company said.

"We are proud of our achievement in having reached this milestone. We remain committed to contributing to the development of the capital markets of Bangladesh and look forward to a successful completion of the largest IPO in the country" said Oddvar Hesjedal, CEO of Grameenphone.

Citigroup Global Markets Bangladesh Private Ltd acted as the placement agent for the pre-IPO placement and has been appointed as the issue manager for the IPO. The company expects the subscription period for the IPO to be late January or early February next year.

Ericsson launches spare parts service for TMIB

Ericsson has launched spare parts management services (SPMS) - part of Ericsson's Professional Services offering. - to support TM International Bangladesh's (TMIB) mobile network.

Ericsson says the deal marks its first SPMS contract in Bangladesh, and will help boost operational efficiencies, revenue and network performance.

Under the agreement, Ericsson will provide TMIB with high-level hardware support for routine as well emergency maintenance. Ericsson will also take over the responsibility of the spare parts and provide TMIB with first-line local support, enabling immediate response to the customer's needs.

According to Ericsson the service will reduce TMIB's investment in spare parts, helping to improve cash flow, and reduce expenditure associated with spare parts inventories.

SPMS is Ericsson's support services secure that networks in more than 140 countries can deliver both preventative and corrective services to more than one billion users worldwide.

New Zealand

Cost of NZ's universal service obligation rises 13 percent

New Zealand's Commerce Commission has released a draft determination setting the cost of providing the local residential telephone service under the telecommunications Service Obligation at \$NZ70.7 million for 2007/08.

Under the TSO Telecom NZ is obliged to provide certain local telephone services to residential customers who may not otherwise be provided with those services at an affordable price. The TSO allows Telecom to recover a portion of its costs of providing this service from other service providers: Vodafone, TelstraClear, WorldxChange, Compass, CallPlus, Woosh, Teamtalk, Aimet and NZ Communications.

The price represents a substantial increase on that determined in prior years. Using the same methodology, the Commission determined the TSO cost for 2004/05 to be \$NZ52.0 million, or 2005/06 to be \$NZ58.2 million and for 2006/07 to be \$NZ62.8 million.

Scrap the TSO says Vodafone

The determination as prompted Vodafone NZ to call for the TSO scheme to be scrapped and replaced with "a more cost effective and viable alternative that takes into account the changes in technology in the 18 years since the TSO was first introduced and [that] focuses support on those in the community who find it most difficult to pay."

Vodafone's GM of corporate affairs, Tom Chignell, said: "Many of these customers are already covered by Vodafone's existing mobile network and as both Telecom and Vodafone commit to invest in mobile broadband out to 97 percent of the country's population, it's difficult to understand just why they are 'commercially non-viable'. It's time for us to completely re-think the way we fund those customers who are disadvantaged whether it's by distance or by income."

Telecom NZ, however, has claimed that the TSO amount should be more than \$70.7m. Yet at the Digital Future Summit in November 2007, the then minister of communications estimated that the entire annual investment in the Telecom rural network was about \$NZ22m covering 231,000 lines, of which, according to the TSO determination, only about 60,000 are not commercially viable.

On this basis, Vodafone argues that Telecom is not investing even the \$NZ23.1m it will receive from other operators, and on a pro rata basis, its investment in the 60,000 commercially non-viable line is mere \$5.5m per annum, in comparison with a supposed 'loss' under the TSO of \$70.7m.

AlcaLu to deploy IP/MPLS mobile backhaul for Telecom NZ ***Telecom New Zealand has selected Alcatel-lucent, its long-term strategic supplier to deploy and IP-MPLS backhaul network for Telecom NZ's new W-CDMA/HSPA mobile network.***

Alcatel-Lucent says the new network will use pseudowire technology, which adapts various traffic and media types from the W-CDMA base stations into IP/MPLS and will also leverage the existing IP-MPLS provided by Alcatel-Lucent for residential and business services. "This supports Telecom's strategic decision to consolidate services onto a converged network infrastructure," it says.

Alcatel-Lucent will deploy its 7705 Service Aggregation Router base station sites to consolidate and aggregate traffic. TNZ has already deployed a carrier ethernet network based on Alcatel-Lucent's 7450 Ethernet Services Switch and an IP-MPLS infrastructure for residential services based on the 7750 Service Router.

Telecom NZ's ULL service "very popular"

New Zealand's Commerce Commission has released its September quarterly monitoring report containing key statistics about telecommunications markets in New Zealand and showing 12,000 ULL services in operation.

Telecom NZ's local access network operator, Chorus, has since May been required to make ULL services available to other service providers under price and non-price terms determined by the Commission in November last year.

The Commission says the service is "Proving very popular...between the launch of this product in May and the end of the reporting period in September, telecommunications companies have purchased over 12,000 lines from Chorus, which they are using to provide competing retail services to customers, including broadband and telephone services." The Commission has also benchmarked for the first time TelstraClear's new mobile phone plan for its residential customers, which TelstraClear launched in September using Telecom's mobile network.

The Commission is required to produce regular monitoring reports as part of its functions under the Telecommunications Act. A new format for the report was adopted last quarter which the Commission says was designed to make the report more informative and user friendly. There are now sections dealing with industry developments during the quarter and the operational separation of Telecom NZ.

The quarterly report used readily available data and statistics. A more comprehensive set of statistics, commentary and analysis of New Zealand's telecommunications markets will be presented in its annual market monitoring report for the 2008 year.

TUANZ wants third mobile operator

The Telecommunications Users Association of New Zealand (TUANZ) says the Commerce Commission's latest telecom statistics demonstrate that New Zealand needs a third mobile network to beef up competition.

"Kiwis are typically paying between 23 percent and 46 percent more for mobile calls than the average of the OECD countries," TUANZ CEO, Ernie Newman, said. "We are in the dearest half dozen OECD countries in terms of mobile phone pricing and this is costing the average Kiwi hundreds of dollars each year.

"The reason lies almost solely in the existence of a network duopoly. Although there are some alternative service providers emerging, these are all dependent on the two existing networks for their connectivity and therefore, for their pricing. To break out of this we desperately need a third network.

A third network has been under construction for some time, but Newman says, it is being slowed by resource management issues and delays in establishing proper competition policy in relation to sharing of cell towers.

He called for the National and local governments and the Commerce Commission to act in concert to break the deadlock.

"Central government needs to review the Resource Management Act so that the process of gaining clearance for new towers is streamlined. Councils need to accelerate the approval process for applications, ensuring that in managing the environmental issues around cell tower sites they also give proper weight to the economic benefit to their ratepayers of competition. [And] the Commerce Commission needs to remain very vigilant around the co-location issues and be ready to act firmly in the event of problems."

Technology

Cisco gears up for the Internet to become the 'medianet'

Cisco is forecasting video to be the dominant consumer traffic on the Internet and has introduced a host of new technologies designed to transform networks into video-optimised networks and to facilitate the creation, hosting and distribution of video content.

Cisco has even coined a new term, 'medianets' to describe these future networks. Writing on the company's official blog, John Earnhardt, Cisco's senior manager, global media operation (and dubbed the company's 'blogger-in-chief') said: "We have introduced some new technologies and solutions that will enable networks to be optimised for a new generation of video and rich media applications and services.

"This new class of technologies is designed to enable advanced communications, collaboration and entertainment experiences through video and rich media-optimised service provider, business, and home networks, known as 'medianets'." Marthin De Beer, SVP of Cisco's Emerging Technologies group, claimed that "The Internet and IP networks as we know them are changing. In the near future, 90 percent of consumer network traffic will be video and rich media..."

To back up this claim, Cisco has released video-specific findings from the Cisco Visual Networking Index Forecast for 2007-2012. It forecasts that professional/traditional broadcast video content will become 80 percent of all Internet video viewed on PCs/laptops by 2012; that traffic associated with user-generated video content will triple from 2008 to 2012; and that more than four billion video streams per month will be delivered through Internet-enabled set-top boxes by 2012. In the past 12 months, Cisco says that global VoD traffic increased by a factor of 2.4.

To embrace future medianet products, Cisco has created the Media Processing portfolio. It is the latest addition to Cisco's list of emerging technologies: all of which Cisco expects to become multibillion dollar revenue earners.

According to de Beer, "media processing embodies the fabric of medianet and will enable a range of new experiences on Cisco medianets, including language translation for live and on-demand video, speech recognition that will make video searchable and the transformation of video to make it available to all connected devices with displays."

New 'media processing' products

Specific product announcements include:

- A media processing platform for businesses that Cisco claims will simplify live and on-demand media sharing across PCs, mobile devices and other digital screens by seamlessly formatting video and rich media for viewing on any device.

"The create once and share anywhere Cisco Media Experience Engine 3000 provides media conversion, real-time post production, editing, formatting, and network distribution capabilities in a single networked solution to help businesses develop targeted visual communications that drive intimacy with employees and customers," Cisco said.

- The addition of an Advanced Video Services Module (AVSM) to Cisco's new Aggregation Services Router, the ASR 9000. This is billed as "a major innovation enabling terabytes of streaming capacity at the aggregation edge while simultaneously offering content caching, ad insertion, fast channel change and error correction."

According to Cisco, it "eliminates the need for standalone content-delivery network elements and inherits all the high-availability characteristics of the router, which optimises the network insertion point for advanced content services and moves content sourcing closer to the consumer."

- Cisco has introduced Cisco TelePresence over Satellite to enable connections where high-bandwidth wired connections are unavailable. and the delivery of multipoint intercompany capabilities for its Telepresence videoconferencing technology. Telepresence over Satellite was recently demonstrated in partnership with Verizon and Wal-Mart to connect troops in Afghanistan and Iraq with their families in the United States.

Huawei claims lead in 21Mbps HSPA devices

Sierra Wireless and Huawei appear to be neck and neck in the race to have the first commercial HSPA modems that will be able take full advantage of the 21Mbps upgrade to Telstra's Next G network.

Telstra and Sierra Wireless have demonstrated 21 Mbps HSPA devices on Telstra's network, but Sierra admits there is much work to be done before its devices are ready for commercial service. Huawei, however is claiming to have demonstrated "the world's first commercial ready HSPA+ [21Mbps] devices," on PCCW's network in Hong Kong.

Although Huawei said it was announcing "the successful completion of the world's first live demonstration of a commercially ready HSPA+ network and device," its press release later said, "Huawei's HSPA+ [network equipment] and HSPA+ mobile broadband terminal E182E will be ready for full commercial use [on PCCW's network] in the early part of 2009."

On the day Telstra demonstrated Sierra Wireless' 21Mbps device on its network, at its investor day briefing on 6 November, Sierra Wireless CEO, Jason Cohenour, told *ExchangeAsia* that much work remained to be done before the device was ready to

go on sale, and he said Telstra was pushing its suppliers hard to enable it to deliver the higher speeds.

"This was a very early demonstration. This is a very cutting edge development effort we are undergoing with Telstra, Ericsson and Qualcomm in preparation for launch of services next year...I wouldn't describe it as even being at alpha yet...Telstra is the kind of operator that likes to push the envelope and be first to market with services." He added "Telstra will be doing customer trials in December...We have lots more field testing to do, and more firmware development."

LG claims first LTE modem chipset

Beyond HSPA at 21Mbps Telstra is planning to upgrade its network to deliver broadband at a, theoretical, maximum speed of 42Mbps and, further in the future, is looking to Long Term Evolution (LTE) beyond that. Supplier Ericsson demonstrated LTE network equipment in Sydney in September but its terminal device was a two metre high box of electronics.

Now, LG Electronics says it has independently developed the first LTE handset modem chip. It claims to have demonstrated the chip at its Mobile Communication Technology Research Lab in Anyang, Korea, achieving wireless download speeds of 60Mbps and upload speeds of 20Mbps.

Nokia Siemens Networks leads in 40G says Ovum

According to Ovum, Nokia Siemens Networks is the clear market leader in deployment of 40Gbps WDM optical transmission technology with a market share of 35 percent, 12 percentage points ahead of its nearest competitor.

Nokia Siemens says it started 40G research in the 1990s and over the past decade claims to have delivered an impressive list of trials which were all industry firsts. It claims also to have been the first vendor to undertake a mass roll-out of optical 40G technology, in 2006. Ovum says that Nokia Siemens is now reaping the rewards for the early start in the technology and expects the market for 40G equipment to be worth \$US600 million in 2009, and three times this figure by 2013.

According to Uwe Fischer, head of Nokia Siemens Networks' DWDM business line, "The current deployment of 40G gives us the experience to lay a solid foundation for the future of optical deployments...Vendors who have been working on 40G will have an advantage over those that skipped (40G) and went right to 100G."

● Huawei to build five city 40G network for China Telecom

Huawei Technologies has been selected to build China Unicom's first 40Gbps optical transport network across five major cities around Beijing in Northern China.

The network will substantially increase China Unicom's network capacity and enable it to meet the increasing demand for high-bandwidth broadband from China's business and residential customers using new multimedia services.

The 40G WDM system adopts Huawei's, claimed, unique C-band extension technology which increases the fibre transport bandwidth by an extra 20 percent and enables transport capacity of 3.84Tbps. It also provides comprehensive encoding technologies and cost-effective services across different application scenarios, Huawei claims.

Huawei claims also to have sold its 40Gbps WDM products in Europe, North America and Asia Pacific and to have deployed the longest 40Gbps trunk in the world without using electrical regenerators: 1,141kms from Moscow to St Petersburg. Recently, Huawei has also made public its 100Gbps and 100GE WDM prototypes and claims to be the first company in the industry to master these end-to-end transport technologies.