

ITU Africa regional meeting agrees on ICT development strategies

● The International Telecommunication Union's (ITU's) African Regional Preparatory Meeting for the World Telecommunication Development Conference 2010 (WTDC)

agreed in Kampala, Uganda on 16 July on regional strategies to foster the development of information and communication technologies (ICTs) throughout Africa and these strategies and priorities form the basis of next year's WTDC.

On the first day, a high-level panel discussed the impact of the global financial crisis on ICT development in Africa, and considered how ICT could be used to jump-start growth and development going forward.

Taking actions to stimulate investment in the ICT sector emerged as a key theme, especially in broadband networks needed to support the key government and business applications which underpin the entire economy. To this end, panellists emphasised the importance of continued ICT policy and regulatory reform and innovative public-private partnerships.

An agreement was sealed between the ITU and the Minister of Transports, Posts et Telecommunications of Burundi for the development of national ICT broadband networks to deliver free or low cost digital access for schools and hospitals, and for underserved populations in rural and remote areas. This agreement is the first in a series and forms part of a large-scale project for the region launched by ITU as follow up to the Connect Africa Summit in 2007.

The ITU is currently negotiating agreements with additional countries and is working with potential funding partners, including the African Development Bank, to help meet the growing demand for broadband network investment.

The meeting also identified topics to be the subject of study over the next four years – namely, Information and Communication Infrastructure, Cybersecurity and ICT applications, Enabling environment, Capacity building and other initiatives, Least Developed Countries and Small Island Developing States.

StarHub selected for next gen broadband operator

● Singapore communications regulator, the Infocomm Development Authority (IDA) announced its selection of StarHub's proposal for the Next Generation National Broadband Network (NGN BN) operating company.

Singapore's NGN BN comprises three key industry layers – namely the NGN BN network company, NGN BN operating company and the retail service providers (RSPs).

The network company is responsible for the design, construction and operation of the passive infrastructure layer, the operating company for the design, construction and operation of the active infrastructure to provide wholesale broadband connectivity to RSPs, the downstream operators.

The three companies will ensure that downstream operators have effective open access to the NGN BN and enable competition.

Starhub's wholly owned subsidiary, Nucleus Connect, will deploy advanced technologies to support and enable a comprehensive range of ultra-high speed wholesale broadband services to retail service providers at competitive prices which will be regulated by the IDA.

For example, Nucleus Connect will offer a wholesale price of SGD 21 per month for a 100 Mbps home and SGD 121 for a 1Gbps connection, while it will charge offices and schools SGD 75 per month for a 100 Mbps connection, while enterprise users with more demanding requirements can opt for a 1Gbps connection at SGD 860 per month.

Nucleus Connect will work with OpenNet, on a coordinated nationwide network rollout and it's expected to offer commercial services by the first half of 2010, and to be ready to fulfil its Universal Service obligations and meet all reasonable requests for service from 2013.

Thailand's regulator publishes MNP plans



● While the buzz has been about mobile number portability, on 31 October, Thailand's communications regulator, the National Telecommunications Commission published the final details of its plans for mobile number portability (MNP) in that country in July. The new regulations would be effective from August, though operators have up to three months to comply.

The fee to port the number is capped at that for a new prepaid SIM card, while it is left to operators to decide on how they would handle the remaining balance in a porting subscriber's remaining prepaid credit.

About 90% of Thailand's 60 million mobile subscribers use prepaid SIM cards. The churn rate is high and demand to port numbers is limited. One of its largest cellular operators, Advanced Info Service (AIS) believes it would cost around US\$14 million to set up a clearing house to port numbers.

India issues draft of MNP regulations

● **India's telecommunications regulator, the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI)** issued draft regulation which would facilitate mobile number portability in phases starting from September 2009 to March 2010. The first phase will see mobile users in larger cities and the biggest states being able to retain their mobile number.

Based on a steering committee's report and TRAI's decision, a draft request for proposal (RFP) was prepared and submitted to the DoT to initiate the process of selection of MNP operator and subsequently, the DOT issued guidelines for MNP service licence on 1 August 2008.

Its guidelines envisage geographic division of the country into two Number Portability Zones (zone 1 & zone 2) and each operator in each zone was selected. Syniverse Technologies was granted the licence to operate in Zone 1 (Northern and Western India) and MNP Interconnection Telecom Solutions was granted licence for MNP Service Zone 2 (Eastern and Southern India).

OFTA completes 1800MHz radio spectrum auction

● **The Office of the Telecommunications Authority (OFTA)** the executive arm of Hong Kong's Telecommunications Authority (TA) concluded the auction of radio spectrum at 1800MHz for the expansion of the public mobile telecommunications service there.

Three mobile network operators had successfully bid for a total of 9.6MHz spectrum in that frequency band at a total of upfront spectrum utilisation fee of HK\$ 46.1 million.

Demand for public mobile communications services had grown continuously and the number of mobile users had reached 11.58 million by March 2009 or 165% penetration rate and this new spectrum will allow operators to meet increased demand.

The provisional successful bidders are China Mobile Hong Kong, 3.2 MHz; Hong Kong Telecommunications, 3.2 MHz; and SmarTone Mobile Communications, 3.2 MHz.

Fixed-mobile number portability allowed in Hong Kong

● **Hong Kong telecommunications regulator, the Telecommunications Authority (TA)** announced on 10 July, 2009 that telecommunications operators there may provide fixed-mobile number portability (FMNP) on a voluntary basis.

Until then, mobile subscribers could only port their mobile number to another mobile operator, while fixed line subscribers could port to another fixed line operator but now they can port their number between mobile and fixed line services.

The TA believes this move will provide a level playing field for both types of operators, promote cross-platform competition, and satisfy subscriber's need for such portability. However, it is up to individual operators to decide when to collaborate with other operators to provide this service commercially.

In arriving at this decision, the TA had duly considered public demand for the FMNP service, overseas experience in similar services and the feedback received in response to a public consultation on the subject.

Canada considers empowering access to personal information online

● **Two new bills introduced in Canada in June seek to empower its police and national security agency, the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS)** -- Canada's equivalent of the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency and Britain's MI5 -- to access the online communications and personal information of Internet service provider's subscribers.

"We must ensure that law enforcement has the necessary tools to catch up to the bad guys and ultimately bring them to justice. Twenty-first century technology calls for 21st-century tools," Justice Minister Rob Nicholson said while he announced the two bills at a press conference in Ottawa, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) reported.

The Technical Assistance for Law Enforcement in the 21st Century Act would require ISPs to install interception equipment on their networks and provide police with access to subscribers' personal information, including names, street addresses, and IP addresses.

The Canadian Government said that this new law would not give the police and CSIS additional interception powers, as they would still need warrants permitting their interception but would not require warrants when requesting a subscriber's personal information.

Some ISPs currently won't provide personal information without a warrant, which slows down investigations into crimes like child sexual exploitation or online theft.

The ISPs will have to pay for the new intercept equipment but that the Canadian Government may compensate them if they are forced to retrofit existing hardware.

ISPs would have 18 months to make these changes but those with fewer than 100,000 subscribers will have a three-year exemption.

At the same time, amendments to the Criminal Code, the Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters Act (MLACMA), and the Competition Act would let police obtain both telephone and Internet transmissions with a warrant for live data or a production order in the case of historical data, force telcos to retain data related to particular investigations, and allow law enforcement to remotely activate existing tracking devices in cell phones and other devices.

