

Celcom unveils Vodafone 3G data card for enterprises

KUALA LUMPUR: Celcom (M) Bhd is confident its newly-launched Vodafone Mobile Connect Third Generation (3G) Broadband data cards, or Celcom 3GX, will receive overwhelming response from its local enterprise customers.

The new product and services introduced via its partnership with Vodafone are aimed at strengthening Celcom's presence locally and establishing itself as a global telecommunications player.

Chief executive officer Datuk Shazalli Ramly said the Vodafone Mobile 3G Broadband data cards could boost high-speed data packet access (HSPDA).

It would offer Celcom customers the latest 3G technology in enabling download speeds of up to 1.8 megabits per second, as well as upload speeds of up to 384 kilobits per second.

"The Vodafone Mobile Connect 3G

Broadband solution, combined with Celcom 3GX network, brings the power of connectivity and mobility to enterprise customers.

"HSDPA is four times faster than 3G technology and 15 times faster than general packet radio service that can offer customers mobile working experiences," he said at the card launch yesterday.

Shazalli added that as at July, Celcom had 57,000 enterprise customers under its Celcom PowerTools segment, which was introduced in April.

He said Celcom 3GX was now available to existing Celcom enterprise customers, primarily by invitation, while other customers could only subscribe to the service after three months.

"The partnership between Celcom and Vodafone will not only propel Malaysia to the global telecommunications arena, but also

enhance Malaysians' mobile lifestyle and telecommunications needs," Shazalli said.

The strategic alliance also offered Celcom customers cost-effective international roaming services, covering 119 countries with 306 global systems for mobile operators, he added.

In addition, there are 63 countries with 124 general packet radio service operators and 22 countries with 34 3G operators to meet customer demand.

Celcom also launched its first BlackBerry 8707v, comprising the BlackBerry Enterprise Server Software handsets and services, targeted at enterprise customers.

As at July, Celcom registered 7.8 million general subscribers and 90,000 3G users in the local market.

Shazalli said the company was on track to achieve 150,000 3G subscribers by year-end.



From left: Vodafone Asia head of business development Jonathan Kriegel, Science, Technology and Innovation Minister Datuk Seri Jamaludin Jarjis and Datuk Shazalli Ramly at the launch of Vodafone Mobile Connect Third Generation Broadband data card

Good dividend awaits Ireka shareholders

By **GOH EE KOON**
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PETALING JAYA: Ireka Corp Bhd shareholders can look forward to a good dividend following the company's sale of its entire share capital in wholly-owned subsidiary Ireka Hotels Sdn Bhd to Newwood Assets Ltd.

Ireka Hotels owns and operates the 452-room Westin Kuala Lumpur hotel.

In a filing to Bursa Malaysia on Monday, Ireka Corp proposed to allocate up to RM15mil of the net cash proceeds of RM204.6mil for future dividends, up to RM80mil to

repay borrowings, and RM13.1mil for other estimated expenses.

The company also proposed to set aside RM96.5mil for working capital and the expansion and acquisition of related business assets.

"With the proposed RM15mil allocation, based on the company's entire share capital, shareholders might be able to receive a dividend of up to 18 sen per share, after tax," an analyst told *StarBiz* yesterday.



"However, the company might opt to make the payment in stages," he added.

Ireka director and group financial controller Monica Lai said the RM80mil set aside to repay debts would lower the company's gearing to 1.7.

She said the company was also looking to expand its land bank, although this was not currently high on its priority list. "If we do, it will be in niche areas like Kuala Lumpur's city centre and Mont Kiara."

On overseas expansion, Lai said the company was still considering opportunities in India and China.

The latter, she said, held "immense potential" due to its multi-tier cities.

"In China, we've got places we can go into such as Shanghai and Beijing, and even smaller cities like Xiamen."

Ireka is also finalising the details of a joint venture with a Vietnamese company to develop a project in Ho Chi Minh City.

On local projects, Lai said Ireka's high-end condominium, Tiffani by i-Zen, was 65% sold.

By year-end, the company expects to launch a new commercial project comprising office suites and retail outlets opposite Plaza Mont Kiara.

Poll: Most condo dwellers still prefer The Star

PETALING JAYA: The *Star* topped all newspapers in the country in terms of readership growth among condominium dwellers – up four percentage points in the 12 months to June 2006.

Nielsen Media Research (NMR) said that among this group, the percentage of those reading *The Star* rose from 31% to 35%.

In addition, the newspaper retained its leadership position among English-language dailies, the research firm said in a statement to announce the mid-year findings of its syndicated poll, *Nielsen Media Index*.

Compared with the same period last year, a slight decline in English dailies' readership was seen across all titles. Nevertheless, *The Star* remains the leader at 8% (of total adult population), it said.

In the Bahasa Malaysia category, readership of both *Utusan Malaysia* and *Berita Harian* fell from 11% to 9% over the one-year period.

Tabloid *Harian Metro* overtook these more established dailies, attracting 12% of the total adult population.

Sin Chew Daily continued to dominate among Chinese dailies, at 8%. Its closest competitor was *China Press* (6%).

Explaining the 1-percentage point dip in overall newspaper readership, NMR executive director Rebecca Tan said the higher readership during the previous corresponding period had been possibly driven by interest in world events like the 2004 Olympics, terrorist bombings in Indonesia and the tsunami disaster in Aceh.

Among free-to-air TV stations, TV3 still lead, reaching 76% of the adult population, RTM2 continued to be in second place with 59%.

Although overall "past week" Internet usage (i.e. survey respondents who said they had used the Net in the past week) remained stable at 15%, there was a two percentage point increase in users within market centres during the period under review.

HSBC Bank to grow on existing card base

KUALA LUMPUR: HSBC Bank Malaysia Bhd aims to leverage on its one million credit card holders to drive its credit card business further, said deputy chairman and chief executive officer Datuk Zarir J. Cama.

"We see our credit card business growing rapidly in the next one year as our card portfolio matures and customers spend more on their cards," he told a press briefing yesterday.

HSBC's credit card circulation hit one million last month, placing the bank among the country's top three credit card issuers with 12% market share.

Classic cards account for over 50% of total cards issued, Gold at about 30% and the balance, Platinum and Premier cards.

Zarir said the company hoped to grow its market share to 20% but did not state when this would be achieved. He said it would depend on the growth of the market and consumer spending.

Zarir added that most cardholders used their credit cards on day-to-day necessities such as insurance and utility bill payments, petrol and groceries.

General manager for personal financial services, U. Chen Hock, said the credit card business was expected to grow 20% in a few years time as the bank continued to roll out more promotions and special privileges for card holders.

The credit card business made up 16% of the bank's total consumer banking assets worth RM11bil.



From left: Datuk Zarir J. Cama, Nick Sibley, HSBC Bank Malaysia head of cards Linda Yip and U. Chen Hock at the celebration to mark the bank's one millionth credit card in circulation

"Our SmartPrivileges programme has been a great attraction," he said, adding that the bank aimed to add 1,000 merchant partners to its existing 3,000 in a year's time.

The Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corp Ltd head of Asia-Pacific for personal financial

services, Nick Sibley, said HSBC Malaysia's credit card circulation was the group's third highest in the region after Hong Kong and India.

Malaysia accounted for 11% of the banking group's credit card circulation and 10% of receivables in the Asia-Pacific, he added.