Airtel launches mobile services in Rwanda

Bharti Airtel today announced the launch of its operation in Rwanda, expanding its footprint on the continent to 17 countries.

Airtel has already said that it will invest over US$100 million in its operations over the next three years and generate direct and indirect employment opportunities.

Commenting on the launch, Manoj Kohli, CEO (International) and joint managing director at Bharti Airtel, said, "We are delighted to launch our operations and bring Airtel to the people of Rwanda. We believe that Rwanda is an extremely promising market and this launch further strengthens our footprint in eastern Africa. It will be our endeavour to bring world-class and affordable services to our customers in Rwanda and add value to the economy. We would like to thank the Rwandan government for giving us this opportunity, and we are committed to contributing to their aim of bridging the digital divide in the country."

"The government welcomes Airtel into our country. We are looking to partner with the private sector to provide good quality, accessible and affordable telecommunications services," says Dr. Pierre Damien Habumuremyi, prime minister of Rwanda.

Habumuremyi added, "We are especially excited about the prospect of connecting Rwanda with the rest of the East African region and, indeed, with the rest of Africa. As Rwandans begin engaging in business ventures and looking for regional partners, telecommunications companies - like Airtel - that are able to provide access to a pan-African wireless network, become a crucial part of expansion."

Partnership with IBM

Airtel has also partnered with IBM in a move that will enable the teleco to offer superior customer experience in Rwanda. The partnership will see IBM deploy and manage the information technology (IT) infrastructure and applications to further support Airtel's goal of providing innovative mobile services.

"As part of our strategic services agreement, we are happy to assist Airtel with its entry into the Rwandan market and ensure the very highest levels of support," says Steve Martin, IBM vice president and senior project executive at Airtel Africa. "Rwanda is an important market for IBM and we are actively strengthening our local presence and increasing our ability to serve our customers and partners in the country."

Ericsson, the world's leading provider of services and technology to telecom operators, was selected to manage the network from end-to-end, including OSS/BSS solutions and managed services.

Lars Lindén, head of Region sub-Saharan Africa for Ericsson, says, "This solution is using the latest Ericsson portfolio, and will be the first Airtel network designed as an all-IP solution. That means Airtel will be able to provide advanced services to its subscribers, expand quickly to accommodate quick growth, and keep operating expenses down."

Additionally, this launch has set a record. Lindén adds, "The inaugural call was placed on the system on March 7. It took just 83 days to build this network from the start - the fastest Greenfield launch in history in sub-Saharan Africa."

Rwanda is among the growing telecom markets in Africa and, according to the National Statistics Institute of Rwanda, mobile penetration in the country was at 38.4% as of July 2011. The rapidly growing private sector - which includes telecommunications infrastructure and ICT - presents many opportunities for the development of the industry and the country's economy. In fact, according to the World Bank, each 10% of broadband penetration results in a 1.3% increase in per capita GDP growth in developing countries.

Airtel was awarded the license by the Rwanda Utilities Regulatory Agency (RURA) last year to operate 2G and 3G GSM mobile services.

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