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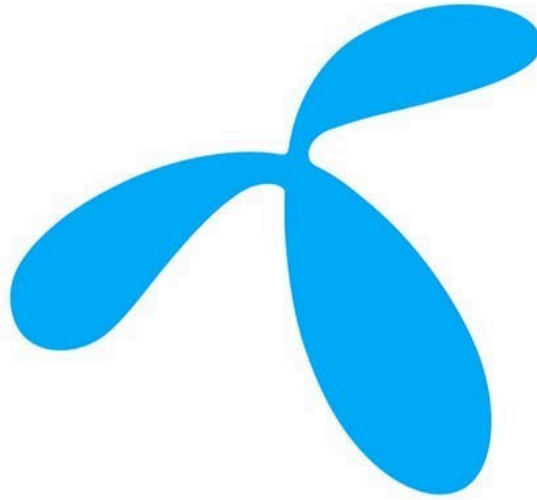
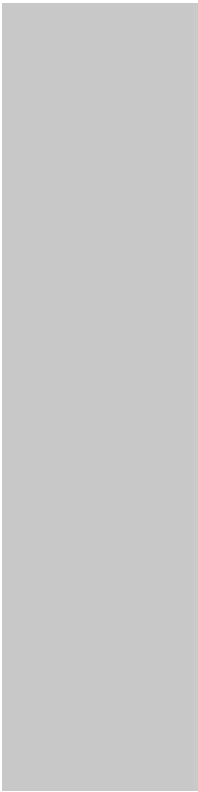
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## Market Abuse Allegations Against GP: Competition commission clears way for full probe

FE REPORT



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The Bangladesh Competition Commission (BCC) has thrown out an attempt by Grameenphone (GP) to block an investigation into allegations of anti-competitive conduct,

dealing a major setback to the country's largest mobile operator and clearing the way for a full probe into its alleged market abuse.

In a ruling on Monday, BCC Chairperson AHM Ahsan, flanked by members Dr Aktaruzzaman Talukder, Wahid Hasan Shah, and Afroza Bilkis, affirmed that the commission had complete authority under the Competition Act 2012 to investigate GP's alleged misuse of its dominance.

"This is not a matter for the Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC). The BTRC will play the role of a regulator, and the competition commission will investigate and take action to eliminate the negative impact on the market," Ahsan said at the commission headquarters in the capital, rejecting GP's bid to deflect the case.

The order follows a September 17 hearing where GP's counsel Barrister Sharif Ahmed argued the matter was under BTRC's jurisdiction.

This was swiftly countered by Robi's lawyer Barrister Sameer Sattar, who pointed to the Competition Act's broad mandate covering "all commercial enterprises involved in buying and selling."

Robi, the country's second-largest operator, lodged the initial complaint on January 21, accusing GP of abusing its significant market power (SMP) through predatory pricing and excessive subsidies in violation of sections 15 and 16 of the law.

The third-largest operator, Banglalink, later filed a similar complaint.

GP was accused of deliberately selling subscriber identity module (SIM) cards below the market price - sometimes for as little as Tk 30, or even free - while rivals were left struggling to survive under unsustainable conditions.

With Monday's ruling, the commission is now set to open an immediate investigation into GP's alleged misconduct.

Should the probe confirm wrongdoing, the operator could face prosecution.

Robi's Chief Corporate and Regulatory Officer Shahed Alam said, "We welcome the decision of the competition commission to rightfully proceed with the investigation into the allegations of abuse of dominance and anti-competitive practices.

"This is a positive step towards ensuring a level playing field, where innovation and fair competition can thrive for the benefit of consumers and the industry as a whole."

GP, however, downplayed the verdict.

In a defensive statement, it said, "We have learned that an order has been issued. However, since we have not yet received any certified copy of the order, it is not possible for us to make any detailed comments at this moment.

"Still, we would like to firmly reiterate that Grameenphone has been conducting its business operations in compliance with the prevailing competition laws of Bangladesh."

The company went on to flatly deny all allegations, insisting that it merely operated under "strict directives" from the BTRC and dismissing the complaints as "baseless" and driven by "negative competitive motives."

Despite GP's denial, the commission's rejection of the company's jurisdictional plea has paved the way for a potentially damaging investigation.

The BCC said the next hearing date would be announced shortly.

*bdsmile@gmail.com*

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