

China cuts mobile fees as users binge on data

China's mobile service operators will eliminate charges for domestic roaming and long-distance calls as data services become their major source of revenue.

The fees will be canceled as of Oct. 1, said Vice Minister of Industry and Information Technology Chen Zhaoxiong at a news conference on Monday.

China began a campaign aimed at faster and more affordable Internet connections in 2015 after users had long complained about roaming fees, which were introduced 23 years ago.

The ministry has made solid progress toward the target with joint efforts by China Mobile, China Unicom and China Telecom, he said.

The official deadline is an ultimatum for the operators, which had unveiled plans to phase out the fees in August 2016, including no longer introducing service plans that charge those fees.

Their efforts witnessed stellar growth in China's 4G mobile service users from fewer than 100 million in 2014 to 770 million, more than half of the world's total.

Carriers are vying for these consumers, unveiling competitive data plans for them to browse through more content on handsets, no matter where they are.

On Feb. 24, China Unicom introduced a plan called "Ice Cream" with no monthly cap on call time and data at a price of 398 yuan (57.7 U.S. dollars), while its rivals rolled out schemes featuring high data quotas.

In 2016, some 9.36 billion gigabytes of data were consumed through mobile Internet use, up 123.7 percent year on year, as users consumed 98.3 percent more data on average monthly, official data showed.

The fee reduction would account for only a single-digit percentage of mobile carriers' revenues and can be counteracted through increased service consumption, said Fu Liang, a telecommunications analyst.

Xi Guohua, former chairman of China Mobile, also said a dent in profits will be outweighed by more consumption, employment and economic growth.

The fees-cutting decision was unveiled after a government work report delivered by Premier Li Keqiang Sunday had promised a raft of measures to ensure faster and more cost-effective information networks.

Among the measures are lower fees levied on small- and medium-sized enterprises for dedicated Internet access and broader access to broadband Internet in rural areas, Chen said.

China will continue to improve the market environment for telecommunications by further opening the market and promoting benign competition, he added.

Quality, efficiency should be growth focus: Li

The country's economic agenda should prioritize quality and efficiency to achieve this year's growth target, and also ensure improving public services such as education and healthcare, Premier Li Keqiang told lawmakers on Monday.

The Government Work Report set a target of around 6.5 percent, which is a medium high-speed growth in line with economic laws for the country's \$11 trillion economy, Li told deputies of the National People's Congress from the Shandong delegation during a panel discussion on Monday morning.

The economic growth will shore up employment, and the focus of this year's work should be on improving quality and efficiency by further reform and opening-up to strengthen intrinsic vitality, Li added.

Shandong reported GDP of 6.7 trillion yuan (\$972 billion) last year, or nearly 10 percent of China's GDP.

The premier said that ensuring medium high-speed economic growth must take supply-side structural reform as its central work while industrial transformation and economic upgrading are promoted.

The premier also called for continued administrative streamlining, lower institutional costs for enterprises and creating an inclusive and fair environment. Meanwhile, entrepreneurship and innovation should be encouraged to boost the transformation of traditional industries and cultivate new growth momentum, he said.

Li said economic achievements will be embodied in boosting employment, education, healthcare, social security, housing and environmental protection.

On Monday, another four members of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee joined discussions of NPC deputies and members of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference.

Zhang Dejiang, chairman of the NPC Standing Committee, said during discussions with deputies from Macao and Hong Kong that the country has made enormous progress—including new achievements while implementing the One Country, Two Systems policy since the 18th Party Congress in 2012.

At a meeting of sectors of the China Democratic League and public figures without party affiliation, Yu Zhengsheng, chairman of the National Committee of the CPPCC, said that General Secretary of the CPC Central Committee Xi Jinping's speech on Sunday should be heeded regarding care and respect for intellectuals.

Wang Qishan, secretary of the CPC Central Commission for Discipline Inspection, called for protecting the sources of the Yangtze and Yellow rivers, while meeting with deputies from Qinghai province.

While talking to deputies from Tianjin, Vice-Premier Zhang Gaoli called for steady economic development and social harmony to usher in the 19th Party Congress.

[West Africa can serve as a model for preventive diplomacy – UN political chief](#)

6 March 2017 – The United Nations political affairs chief today stressed that West Africa could be a model of how the UN can work with local partners in bringing stability to regions or sub-regions.

“The situation in West Africa says a lot of the region's growing capacity to deal with regional problems,” said Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs Jeffrey Feltman at a regular briefing at the UN Headquarters in New York, following a one-week visit to Liberia, Sierra Leone, Burkina Faso, Guinea, The Gambia and Senegal.

The key objective of his visit was to advance sustaining peace initiatives in Burkina Faso and the Gambia – two countries that are in political transition. He also said that the situation in Guinea-Bissau, which he did not visit this time, was also a major topic of discussion during his trip.

The transition in the Gambia is “a very clear case of prevention,” in which the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the African Union (AU) and the UN were “all united behind the will of Gambian people.”

In January, the former President of the Gambia, Yahya Jammeh, decided to facilitate an immediate and orderly transition process and transfer of power to President Adama Barrow after concerted mediation efforts by a number of African leaders to help resolve the crisis in the country following the presidential elections in December.

The situation is still fragile, however. With the legislative polls to be held on 6 April, the cohesion of the seven-party ruling coalition will be

tested, he said.

On Burkina Faso, Mr. Feltman highlighted some progress made since the new leader was inaugurated in December 2015, including the country's improved relationships with its neighbours, in particular with Côte d'Ivoire.

He said he discussed with President Roch Marc Christian Kaboré and other officials the implementation of key reforms that will help consolidate stability in the country, including in the economic and security spheres.

Mr. Feltman said Burkina Faso was successful in rallying international support for its 2016-2020 national plan for economic and social development, with donors pledging 28.6 billion euros at a conference in December.

Mr. Feltman highlighted the contributions of ECOWAS and the UN Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) to these countries' transitions.

"Working with local actors and subregional organizations can make the UN more effective in prevention," he said, underscoring the need to build on the leverage and credibility that local partners have inside countries.

For instance, Liberian President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, who chairs ECOWAS, can talk to fellow Heads of States in West Africa as a peer and as someone who with real leverage and credibility on the ground, he noted.

[UN chief Guterres condemns reported firing of multiple ballistic missiles by DPR Korea](#)

6 March 2017 – United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres has condemned the reported firing of ballistic missiles today by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), three of which landed in Japan's Exclusive Economic Zone.

"Such actions violate Security Council resolutions and seriously undermine regional peace and stability," Mr. Guterres said in a statement issued by his spokesperson in New York.

"The Secretary-General reiterates his call for the DPRK leadership to refrain from further provocations and return to full compliance with its international obligations," concluded the statement.

This is the latest in a series of reported missile launches by the DPRK, all of which have been condemned by the United Nations.

After urgent closed-door talks last month, the Security Council, condemning a

reported incident on 12 February, issued a press statement expressing serious concern that the DPRK conducted these ballistic missile launches after the 15 April, 23 April, 27 April, 28 April, 31 May, 21 June, 9 July, 18 July, 2 August, 23 August, 5 September, and 14 October 2016 launches, as well as the nuclear test of 9 September, “in flagrant disregard of its repeated statements.”

[UN global aviation body adopts new carbon emissions standards for aircraft](#)

6 March 2017 – The United Nations aviation body today adopted new aircraft emissions to curb the impact of aviation greenhouse gas emissions on the global climate.

The Standard will apply to new aircraft type designs from 2020, and to aircraft type designs already in-production as of 2023, according to the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO).

The President of the ICAO Council, Olumuyiwa Benard Aliu, called the decision “pioneering.”

“Air transport [is] the first industry sector globally to adopt a CO₂ emissions design certification standard,” Mr. Aliu said.

The decision by the 36-member States of the ICAO Council follows a move last October curb carbon emissions from passenger and cargo airplanes as of 2020 through a carbon offset mechanism, which is voluntary until 2027.

The ICAO Secretary General, Fang Liu, said the accomplishment is “historic” and places aviation in “an even better position as we look forward to a greener era of air transport development.”