



Qordahi during the news conference held Thursday at the Telecommunications Ministry.

Photo by Azize

Broadband Internet just over horizon

GDS unveils high-speed wireless solutions at affordable prices for residential use

BEIRUT: Lebanon has just come closer to offering broadband services, but the digital gap is still wide compared to neighboring countries.

GlobalCom Data Services (GDS), the largest data operator in Lebanon, has unveiled a completed project that would enable Lebanon's three major Internet Service Providers (ISPs) - Cyberia, Ferranel and IDM - to offer wireless Internet solutions with connection speeds that could reach 512 kilobits per second (kpbs) - 12 times the speed of dial-up.

And even more surprising, that connection would cost around \$145, according to the executive director of GDS Mahassen Ajam. However, the pricing scheme has not yet been fully agreed on with the Telecommunications Ministry.

During the news conference, held Thursday at the Telecom-

munications Ministry, Ajam said that there would be an option of three different connection speeds - 128 kpbs (three times faster than dial-up), 256 kpbs (six times faster than dial-up) and 512 kpbs - and tariffs would start at an affordable \$45 a month.

Additionally, customers of this wireless service wouldn't have to use the telephone line, thus will not be charged for the calling cost, as incurred via dial-up. In order not to lose telecommunication revenues, the Telecommunications Minister Jean-Louis Qordahi certified the ministry "has a revenue sharing scheme with GDS."

The only extra cost incurred on customers would be the one-time fee for the installation of a microwave dish, allowing data reception. According to industry sources, this would constitute an investment of around \$150.

GDS stated that the current coverage includes Greater Beirut, Tripoli, Sidon, Jounieh and Jbeil and it expects first-year coverage and capacity to extend to all major Lebanese cities and reach 20,000 subscribers.

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How would GDS provide this service?

If interested, a customer would have to contact one of the three ISPs to verify if his/her area has coverage. If it does, then GDS will install the microwave dish, at the expense of the customer. The customer could then either decide to install a Wi-Fi wireless system, or a home cable connection. Both

options would directly be fed by the microwave dish.

Ajam told The Daily Star on the sidelines of the conference that this project - initiated in close cooperation with the Telecommunications Ministry, Cyberia, IDM and Ferranel - is dedicated for residential users, thus explaining the affordable prices.

But according to sources which wished to remain anonymous, the ISPs cannot guarantee the speeds which are being marketed since the price of bandwidth is still too expensive in Lebanon. "We are paying \$23,000 for a 2 Megabits per second connection," said the source. "In Jordan, that same connection would cost 25 percent of the price. Twenty-five percent of the price, not 25 percent cheaper," the source added. "The possibilities of connection bottlenecks are rather high," he said. - T.E.Z.