Cisco to Set Up Tech Training Centers in Myanmar

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YANGON, Myanmar (AP) — Cisco Systems plans to establish two network training centers in Myanmar, as global technology companies begin to move into one of the least-connected places on Earth.

The announcement Thursday came on the heels of a USAID-sponsored delegation of executives from Cisco, Google, HP, Intel and Microsoft to the fast-opening country.

Levels of cellphone use are lower in Myanmar than in North Korea. The government has made reform of its telecommunications sector, which was long dominated by crony businesses, a priority. Bids from 91 companies from around the world for two nationwide telecom licenses are now under consideration. Increased competition is expected to dramatically reduce the cost of SIM cards, which now run $300 to $500, in time for national elections in 2015.

The USAID technology delegation was geared toward technology education, but is also a step toward commercial engagement.

"Google has a range of potential partnerships, one of which is designed to improve access to online learning ... in addition to a broader range of business opportunities that I think you'll see Google expand into relatively quickly. The same is true of really all the firms," said USAID head Rajiv Shah, who was making his first trip to Myanmar.

USAID resumed work in Myanmar in November, after Washington suspended most sanctions against the country. Since then, USAID has committed $171 million to health, food security, democracy, human rights and rule of law programs. The agency plans to give more money to Myanmar as the country deepens reforms.

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