

AT to spend \$6 bln on upgrades by 2014

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Algerian state-owned telecoms firm Algerie Telecom (AT) will spend \$6 billion to upgrade its fixed-line and mobile operations over the next five years, the firm's deputy chief executive told Reuters on Tuesday

"From 2009 to 2014, we will invest \$6 billion to upgrade both fixed and mobile operations," Cherif Yaici said on the sidelines of a telecoms conference in Cairo.

"We will invest the money in overhauling our technology and buying new equipment for our entire networks," he added.

The spending is part of a wider \$150 billion government plan to upgrade Algeria's infrastructure, Yaici said.

Algerie Telecom seeks growth of 5 percent in its fixed-line subscriber base and 20 percent growth in mobile subscribers in 2010.

The fixed-line operation -- a monopoly in the North African country of some 35 million people -- has 3 million lines while the mobile unit, called Mobilis, has 9 million customers, Yaici said.

Algeria's telecoms firm is competing in the mobile business against affiliates of Egypt's Orascom Telecom (OT) (ORTE.CA) and National Mobile Telecommunications Co (NMTC.KW) Watania, a unit of Qatar Telecommunications Co QATA.QA.

"Fixed-line faces tough competition from mobile operators in Algeria, as is the case in the rest of the world," Yaici said.

Algerie Telecom, the country's second-largest mobile firm and internet provider, has been slated for privatisation but the process has been repeatedly delayed.