

TAMING CORONAVIRUS RAMPAGE

Robi launches AI platform to track coronavirus cases

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Mobile operator Robi has launched an online platform powered by artificial intelligence that will analyse movements of potential COVID-19 carriers and evaluate risks posed to those around them in an effort to help the government contain the novel coronavirus outbreak.

The platform was unveiled by ICT State Minister Zunaïd Ahmed Palak during an online press conference yesterday.

Using the platform, which collects data on network users to compile a list of suspected coronavirus cases, the government will be able to easily decide which areas to put under lockdown.

So far, the Access to Information (a2i) programme under the Information Communication Division has identified 3.70 lakh users who have made various queries on the coronavirus.

Now, with the help of technology and data analytics, the government is trying to ascertain the exact number of people at risk of infection, said Anir Chowdhury, a policy advisor of a2i.

Over the past couple of weeks, numerous individuals have dialled either 333, 16263 or *3332# to get updated details on the coronavirus pandemic and how to deal with it.

The Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) leads the analysis of such questions and whether test kits and other items should be sent out, Chowdhury said.

The national helpline centre "333" has received over four lakh calls related to coronavirus while the DGHS's "16263" service has received about 1.70 lakhs calls on the same issue.

With the support of mobile network operators, the government sent short messages to find if any user developed any symptoms. So far, seven lakh users have replied.

"We are now using different technological tools to form a suspected coronavirus patient list," he added.

Only two questions were asked by the 333



and 16263 operators while the *3332# service asked five questions. With the data collected, the government will now attempt to form a heatmap for the virus.

During the digital press conference, Dr Asif Naimur Rashid, chief information officer of Robi, explained how data analytic solutions function and how it can help the government make data-driven decisions to combat the pandemic.

The analytical solution developed by Robi's

analytics team compiles data from decentralised crowd sources.

Crowdsourcing via mobile phones allows high value data acquisition. Combined with the application of data science to crowdsourced data, Robi's platform can perform robust data validation checks to ensure that the solution works with high quality datasets, Rashid said.

The government is also taking user information from three other operators -- Grameenphone, Banglalink and Teletalk -- for a deeper analysis to form a proper report.

The ICT state minister also said the data complied would be highly protected so as to prevent theft or misuse.

"I assure you that we have taken steps to protect the customers' data so that it does not leak," he said in reply to a question.

Only the customer's mobile number and geographical location will be used for government purposes, Palak added.

Professor Abul Kalam Azad, director general of the DGHS, said he was hoping for the data analytics solution to help eradicate the coronavirus threat.

"We are extremely proud to join hands with the government to combat the ongoing pandemic," said Robi's Managing Director and CEO Mahtab Uddin Ahmed.

If everyone actively participates in this project, then Robi can help the government ramp up its efforts to ensure public health in a targeted manner based on the data modelling provided by the solution, he added.

The National Telecom Monitoring Center will also play a vital role in a coordinated effort to combining all the data compiled on mobile network users.



Earning from leftovers

MIRZA SHAKIL, Tangail

Md Rafiq Miah had like everyone else suspended operations at his home-based garments production workstation in Tangail's Mirzapur following recent government directives on containing the novel coronavirus.

Unwilling to sit back and wait for normalcy to return, he figured out that he could turn the odd pieces of leftover cloth lying around his workspace into face masks, which was in high demand.

Using two of his sewing machines, Rafiq and his wife Nasrin Begum are now making around 100 face masks every day.

These are being wholesaled at Tk 7 while retail at Tk 10 to nearby shopkeepers and hawkers to meet local demand.

The father of three dropped out of school after studying up to class V due to financial insolvency. He had worked in garment factories since 1990 but quit around two years ago.

Returning to his Agchhawali village under Mohera union, he set up 12 sewing machines in his house and employed women in his locality to make clothes for

women and children.

The 50-year-old buys rolls of cloth from markets in Narsingdi and Gazipur to make around 200 clothes every week, which he sells at the weekly market in Karatia of Tangail sadar upazila.

"I closed my small factory on the third week of March. The women and girls who work at my factory also left. I learnt about a crisis of face masks in the markets and that it was selling at a high price," Rafiq said.

He then started thinking of making face masks with the cloths that remain in his factory. "Making face masks is not our job, but we are producing it to adjust with the current situation," he said.

"I, however, am happy to supply my face masks to people at low prices amidst this crisis," he added.

Dulal Hossain of adjacent Korail village, one of Rafiq's customers, says other local shops and markets were selling similar face masks at Tk 20 to Tk 30.

Rafiq's wife Nasrin said, "I had also worked at a garment factory. Later, I started working with my husband after he set up the small factory inside the house."



The demand for bleaching powder rose by more than 20 times in Chattogram in the last three weeks since the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic.

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Price of bleaching powder triples in Ctg as demand soars

MOHAMMAD SUIMAN, Chattogram

The retail price of bleaching powder in Chattogram almost tripled over the past month due to a rise in demand for disinfectants following the coronavirus outbreak.

The wholesale price of the product has also doubled at the Chaktai-Khatunganj market.

Yesterday, wholesale traders were found selling each 50-kg drums of bleaching powder at Tk 3,800 to Tk 3,900, up from Tk 1,850 at the beginning of March.

The 25-kg drums were priced at Tk 1,850 to Tk 1,950 while it was Tk 950 just last month.

Retail prices for the disinfectant hovered between Tk 100 and Tk 110 per kilogramme in Khatunganj, where over 15 wholesalers and retailers were seen selling bleaching powder.

Retailers in Chawkbazar, Kazir Dewri and Bahaddarhat Bazar area are currently selling the product at Tk 120 to Tk 140 per kilogramme, up from a maximum of Tk 40 per kilogramme a month ago.

The demand for bleaching powder has increased by about 20-fold in the last three weeks, Rashed Hossain, a worker at Makhani Lal Bonik shop in Khatunganj, told The Daily Star.

The demand for bleaching powder has increased all over the world, said

Arif Hossain, a Chattogram-based importer, who regularly buys the product from India.

"It had previously been used at tanneries, hospitals and various factories. But now it is used almost everywhere, including homes, offices and shops as a disinfectant against Covid-19," he said.

Bleaching powder is needed every day to disinfect various objects in clinics, said Ariful Islam, an employee of a private clinic, who came to Khatunganj to buy bleaching powder.

"But for the past two weeks, we have been facing a shortage of the powder," he added.

Lentil prices shot up amid rising demand, supply shortage

DWAIPAYAN BARUA, Ctg

Lentil prices shot up in Chattogram in the last two weeks thanks to a sudden rise in its demand as a relief item, countrywide restriction on movement and poor supply.

Wholesale prices of different varieties of red lentil marked a sharp rise by Tk 10 to Tk 20 per kilogram at Khatunganj wholesale hub.

Traders blamed the supply disruption on the shortage of workers to process raw lentils and transport crisis to deliver the goods from the port and warehouses to the market.

Wholesalers at the hub said they are in a shortage of ready grains as only 15 out of 40 lentil processing mills of Chaktai and Khatunganj areas are now in operation.

Moreover, the mills that are open are processing lentil on a limited scale, as most of their workers have left for their village homes since the beginning of the 10-day government holiday on March 26.

A lack of transport facilities is obstructing the imported grains to reach the hub from warehouses, off-docks and the port, said Sanjoy Deb, a mill owner.

The recent upward trend of global lentil prices by around \$100 per tonne also left an impact on the local market, he said.

Demand for the big-sized red lentil imported from Australia and Canada has risen this week as different government and volunteer organisations have recently geared up food donation activities for the low-income people.

The price of big-sized red lentil rose by Tk 12 to 15 a kilo to Tk 70 to Tk 72 against the last week's price of Tk 55 to Tk 60.

The importers have hiked the prices of the raw grain imported from Australia and Canada by Tk 200 to Tk 250 per maund (37.32kg) and have been selling it at Tk 2,150 per maund, said Solaiman Badsha, proprietor of wholesale firm Taibiya Traders at

Khatunganj.

Best quality small-sized lentil grown locally was selling at Tk 128 to Tk 130 per kg yesterday while the price was Tk 110 a kg 15 days ago.

The price of small-sized Indian lentil rose by Tk 10 to Tk 120 a kg.

Good quality yellow petite lentil known as mung dal saw the highest increase. Its wholesale price increased by Tk 20 per kilo to hit Tk 140.

Medium quality mung dal was selling at Tk 128 against the previous price of Tk 112.

Price of split chickpeas known as chana dal, however, saw a little hike as the price rose by Tk 4 a kg to Tk 38.

Retail prices also rose. Retailers in the kitchen markets were selling Australian big-sized red lentil at Tk 78 to Tk 80 a kg while the price was Tk 65 two weeks back.

Indian red lentil was sold at Tk 125 to Tk 128 a kg, up from Tk 120.



Nazmus Saqib, an assistant manager of Singer Bangladesh, hands over washing machines, microwave ovens and irons to Brig Gen AKM Nasir Uddin, director general of Dhaka Medical College Hospital, at the hospital in the capital on Wednesday for suspected coronavirus patients and their attending doctors.

NEXT STEP

Making a DIFFERENCE

Bangladesh is rapidly moving towards middle income status by 2021. Our businesses definitely offer immense opportunities for the growing economy and this diversity needs a stage for the stories untold. See Bangladesh make its mark on the global map as Making a Difference brings you our proudest success stories from across the country.

How to stay productive while working from Home

As coronavirus continues to spread, working from home has become the new reality for many Bangladeshi personnel. To reduce the spread of infection, companies are closing their doors and asking the employees to work remotely. This may cause the employees to struggle with time management, motivation to work and communication among staff members. While all this can be difficult, finding a strategy that works can help you make it through.

START EARLY AND GET READY

Commuting to your office helped you wake up and get energized to work by the time you reached your desk. At home, however, the transition from your bed to your computer can be much more brutal. The mental association between work and your office can make you more productive. Simply getting a project started first thing in the morning is key to work progress.

DESIGNATE A WORKSPACE

For the sake of productivity, dedicate a specific room or zone in your home to work. Try to avoid your bedroom or the couch-spaces associated with leisure time. The

workspace will separate working hours from your spare time,



thereby getting you in the right frame of mind.

LIMIT YOUR HOURS

One of the dangers of working from home is working too much. You should schedule your work hours to match your typical workday. It is also vital to take regular breaks as your brain too, needs to rest. When you have a structure, you become more efficient.

COMMUNICATE REGULARLY

Make a point of emailing and calling your co-workers and especially your boss a few times a day. This will en-

sure they are getting what they need from you and you are receiving the feedback you need to



keep working.

SET SOCIAL MEDIA BOUNDARIES

As much as you are tempted to take a quick peek at your social media accounts, this convenience can be detrimental to your productivity. Try removing them from your browser shortcuts and logging out of every account. This will help counteract your social network's ease of use during work hours.

OROBI BAKHTIAR