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## Robi subsidiary brings the future of video entertainment to Bangladesh

Muhammad Zahidul Islam

Red Dot Digital, a subsidiary of Robi Axiata, the country's second-largest mobile operator, is set to roll a device on Friday that can possibly change the way Bangladeshis consume video content.

Called the Binge, it is a mixture of internet protocol TV, which is rather popular in the US, and online streaming platform.

By way of a set-top box one would be able to play one of the widest entertainment catalogues, including more than 100 live HD TV channels, both local and international, web series, latest web films, exclusive originals -- but over the

With cable or satellite TV, broadcasters send out signals and viewers receive them, meaning one is only able to watch what's being broadcasted. Unless there is some sort of recording device, one does not get to dictate what's on when. You just tune in when you can and watch what's available.

IPTV is different. Instead of transmitting content via light pulses in fibre-optic cable or radio waves from a satellite, IPTV sends shows and movies through the standard





Instead of broadcasting a range of shows on a specific schedule, most IPTV uses video on demand (VOD) or timeshifted media.

The service comes at a time when the demand for video content has hit the roof as people stay at home to flatten the curve on coronavirus that is tearing through the country at a breakneck speed.

Yesterday, the country saw 21 more deaths from the novel virus and 1,251 new cases of infection to take

deadly virus to 370 and caseload to 25,121.

"A viewer can watch any type of content through Binge. There is something for everyone: thriller, drama, comedy, romance, action and what not," said Ahmed Armaan Siddiqui, director of Red

Dot Digital, which owns the service. The digital generation has entered into a new era of entertainment where viewers would decide what they watch. In this era, they won't need to wait for a particular TV channel to watch a movie or series.

The service would be available both on Android smartphones and big screens and would change the way people in Bangladesh consume entertainment contents,

"Binge is Bangladesh's first Googlethe death toll from the certified online video-streaming service along with an android device that offers endless entertainment," he added.

> Red Dot Digital, an associate company of Robi Axiata, the second-largest mobile phone operator in Bangladesh, has other businesses in the digital service segment in the country.

Binge has been developed by Genex Infosys, a local business process outsourcing company.

With the largest number of content, Binge is going to bring in a revolution in the Bangladeshi entertainment media,'

Subscribers can enjoy the service both on small and big screens with higher definition. They can access Binge directly on their Android smartphones as well as by purchasing a Binge-branded Android smart device.

Even if there is no smart TV at home, customers can still have full HD TV experience using Binge, Siddiqui said.

The price of the Binge-branded Android smart device is Tk 3,499.

Users can avail the service for Tk 399 in subscription charge if they already have a broadband internet connection.

Red Dot Digital is currently importing the devices and plans to assemble them locally in partnership with Genex Infosys, said a senior executive of the project.

The company is partnering with an internet service provider, which will ensure broadband connectivity if a consumer does not have internet connections.

Using the connection for Tk 1,099 per month, customers can also get Wi-Fi service at home and multiple device

To enjoy the content of Binge through smartphones, three packages are available. Users will be charged Tk 10 for a daily package, Tk 30 for a weekly package and Tk 99 for a monthly package, excluding value-added tax, supplementary duty and

Customers will have to download the Binge mobile app from Google Play store to enjoy the service on smartphones.

For all the plans, Red Dot Digital will offer a one-month free trial period.

## No more Uber Eats in Bangladesh from June 2

MUHAMMAD ZAHIDUL ISLAM

In a rather surprising move, Uber Technologies yesterday announced that it is closing down the operations of its food delivery platform Uber Eats in Bangladesh from June 2 as Chief Executive Dara Khosrowshahi attempts to steer the ride-hailing giant through the coronavirus pandemic.

Uber Eats arrived in Bangladesh in April last year and soon gained popularity with its solid service. The food delivery platform was one of the few to be offering its services during the countrywide general shutdown since March 26 to flatten the curve on coronavirus.

"After a year of partnering with local restaurants to offer convenient and reliable food delivery, we have made the difficult decision to discontinue Uber Eats in Bangladesh, on June 2nd 2020," read a notice on the Uber Newsroom vesterday

The notice did not articulate the reasons for leaving Bangladesh.

But as per global media, Bangladesh is not the only market in which Uber Eats is shutting shop; it is doing so in other markets where it saw no clear route to becoming the number one or number two online food delivery



On Monday, in an email to staff, Khosrowshahi said Uber was closing 45 offices and laying off some 3,000 more people and re-evaluating big bets in areas ranging from freight to self-driving technology.

Khosrowshahi's latest restructuring plan comes less than two weeks after the company said it would eliminate about 3,700 jobs and planned to save more than \$1 billion in fixed costs. Monday's decision means Uber is shedding roughly a quarter of its workforce in under a month.

Stay-at-home orders have ravaged Uber's core ridehailing business, which accounted for three-quarters of the company's revenue before the pandemic struck. Uber's rides business in April was down 80% from a year earlier.

However, Uber will continue its ride services in Bangladesh, which has been going from strength to strength since entering the country in 2016.

"Our number one priority now is to do everything possible to minimise the impact on our valued employees, restaurant partners, delivery partners and consumers who have supported us," adds the notice. The notice though took the local startup industry by

About the Uber Eats exit declaration from the market,

AD Ahmad, chief executive and co-founder of HungryNaki, Bangladesh's first food delivery platform, said the San Francisco-based company had burnt a huge amount of cash and already created a handsome customer base in the

"It is true they have brought a good number of customers who were not using the food delivery service before.'

This was good for the overall food delivery industry in

"But in my personal view, burning a huge amount of cash to gain customers is not a decent business model to continue.

A few days ago they also announced the closure of operations in some other markets as they could not create much impact there despite shelling out a pretty sum.

"Burning money is not an acceptable model anymore and that is why they have been criticised in different markets," Ahmad added.

Soon after launching the service in Bangladesh, Uber Eats have been offering huge discounts like Tk 300 to Tk 600 per order.

According to a report of Reuters, Uber Eats is also closing down operations in eight markets including the Czech Republic, Egypt, Honduras, Romania, Saudi Arabia, Ukraine and Uruguay.

In the UAE, it will wind down the Eats app and transition operations to Careem. About 50 full-time roles would be affected, Reuters reads.

Uber said the discontinued and transferred markets represented 1 per cent of Eats gross bookings and 4 per cent of Eats adjusted core earnings losses in Q1 2020.

However, in the US, Uber is in talks to acquire its rival food delivery platform GrubHub, a deal that would help stem losses from the cost-intensive business of building out delivery operations and give Uber an edge in competing with industry leader DoorDash Inc. After its founding in 2009, Uber quickly became one of

the world's hottest start-ups, transforming how millions of people get around. Co-founder Travis Kalanick envisioned a future in which robotaxis roam streets and delivery drones fly overhead -- with Uber at the centre of it all.

As the company grew, it spent big to expand into areas beyond ride-hailing, amassing billions in losses along the way.

Investor enthusiasm started to wane even before the pandemic. Uber had one of last year's most anticipated stock market debuts. The result disappointed, with Wall Street increasingly wanting to see a path to profitability for Uber and other high-profile tech companies.

## BTRC, GP now see solution in talks as the operator pays another Tk 1,000cr

Officials of Grameenphone and the telecom regulator will meet soon to work out an amicable solution to the ongoing tussle over an audit claim, according to Md Jahurul Haque, chairman of the Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory

Grameenphone's Chief Executive Officer Yasir Azman said they were not on the same page with the regulator over the amount of money claimed in the BTRC audit but there was still much scope to find a way out by sitting at the negotiating table.

Both made the remarks while briefing journalists after the top mobile phone operator deposited another Tk 1,000 crore to the BTRC yesterday as per an order of the apex court.

Earlier on February 23, Grameenphone had handed in Tk 1,000 crore to the regulator following the Appellate Division's order to pay the amount within February 24. "We want dialogue and thus we can move forward," Azman said.

As the operator has complied with the order of the apex court, the telecom regulator can now sit with them in presence of representatives from the finance division of the government to find a solution, Haque said.

If there were any flaws in the audit, we can fix them," he said, adding that measures are underway to audit the other operators within a short time.

Earlier, the telecom regulator through two separate audits found that the market leader owed it Tk 12,579.96 crore and Robi, the second-largest operator, Tk 867.23

The audits that looked into the accounts of Grameenphone and Robi since their inception in 1997 until 2014 claimed that the carriers owed the amounts in revenue

shares, taxes and late fees. On November 24 last year, the Supreme



BTRC Chairman Md Jahurul Haque, second from right, receives the pay order of Tk 1,000 crore from Kazi Ehsanul Haque, a general manager of Grameenphone, at the commission office in Dhaka yesterday.

BTRC Tk 2,000 crore by February 23 this year as an advance payment against the overall claim.

In January, the operator expressed its intention to the court to pay Tk 575 crore in 12 equal instalments but the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court turned

down the plea.

Court ordered Grameenphone to give the crore in five instalments against the total claim and the operator will deposit the last instalment of Tk 27.60 crore by May 31.

Replying to a query of the journalists, the BTRC chairman said they were not 'extorting' anyone by dint of regulations.

At a press briefing on November 11 last year, Grameenphone's then CEO Michael Patrick Foley had told reporters that the The court asked Robi to pay Tk 138 telecom regulator was forcing the mobile claim according to the law."

operator to pay an "illegal audit claim of Tk 12,579.96 crore". "We don't want to be extorted, we

don't want to remain under pressure, we don't want to be on the front page of the newspapers globally," Foley had said. When his attention was drawn to the

remarks of Foley, Haque yesterday said: "The BTRC is not an extortionist; we only

## BKMEA seeks 10pc cash incentive on exports



STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BKMEA) has demanded a 10 per cent cash incentive if export-oriented garment items

incentive on export receipts for the next two years.

If a garment exporter uses locally made yarn and fabrics in making garment items, they would be eligible for the cash incentive on export earnings, according to the BKMEA's budget proposal fiscal 2020-21 to the National Board of

Revenue last week. It also called for 4 per cent cash



are made from imported raw materials. Mohammad Hatem, vice-president of the BKMEA, urged the government to retain the tax at source at 0.25 per

Alotofsmallandmediumentrepreneurs may be driven out of businesses because of the global coronavirus pandemic. So, the government should chalk out an exit plan for this category of businesses in the upcoming budget, he said.