

BB needs to give virtual currency a thought: Palak

Paperfly offers contactless payment service for online shopping delivery

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The Covid-19 pandemic created a crisis but also brought opportunities for e-commerce entrepreneurs, leading to a massive spike in demand for contactless payments in the country, said Zunaid Ahmed Palak, state minister for ICT division, yesterday.

There is no doubt that people in the past four months have increased the amount of virtual services they usually avail and have now become habituated with virtual payment services, he said.

"I will request Bangladesh Bank to think about virtual payment systems and time has come to think about cryptocurrencies like Bitcoin and other virtual ones," said Palak.

The state minister was launching contactless payment-on-delivery solution "Cashless Pay" for e-commerce, brought

now the demand of time."

Bangladesh Bank definitely will have to look at the security aspects but virtual services need to be launched in the financial sector as well, Palak added.

"Policymaking meetings on the issue are needed. Otherwise we will fall behind."

The government is working to launch an interoperable digital payment platform allowing funds to flow among all mobile and digital financial services and operators while ensuring transparency, he said.

"It is very much likely to increase revenue generation for the government while maintaining transparency and convenience by ensuring inter-transaction facilities."

Currently around Tk 10,000 crore is spent annually for shopping online and Palak expects the Tk 20,000 crore mark to be crossed by 2025.

The event organisers said adoption of



PRABIR DAS

A shopkeeper passes time rearranging products amidst a dearth of customers yesterday in the capital's New Elephant Road, a popular hub for the sale and renting out of wedding attires and associated ceremony items. The ongoing pandemic undeniably put many marriages on hold while those that are still going ahead are limiting ceremonies and gatherings to the minimum, which translates to bad business for these shops.



Zunaid Ahmed Palak

about by Paperfly, one of the country's leading home delivery networks, in collaboration with Mastercard and Eastern Bank.

It aims to bring the convenience of cashless payments to consumers' doorsteps, replacing cash on delivery payments.

As the regulator of the banking sector, Bangladesh Bank has its causes for not allowing trade of global cryptocurrencies, Palak said.

"But I think the time has come to think about it. If needed we will have to move on to launch our own virtual currency which is

digital transactions has increased by at least 10 to 15 per cent in the past four months, especially for Covid-19.

Paperfly launched the digital payment-on-delivery solution in tune with the rising trend of online purchases and consumer preference for online transactions.

The service is available across Bangladesh to all consumers who want to experience the convenience and safety of cashless payments while receiving products ordered online at their doorsteps, replacing the existing cash on delivery (COD) payments, they said.

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Workers of a Savar apparel factory demonstrate for salary

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Savar

Workers of a garment factory in Savar demonstrated in front of their factory gate yesterday, demanding salaries for the month of June and reopening of the factory.

Over 2,000 workers of Dipta Apparels in Shampura area embarked on the protest after blocking a local road around 10:00am and were continuing to do so at the time this report was filed at about 2:30pm.

The workers said there were around 4,000 employed by the factory. On the first of July, the factory authority announced a three-day shutdown citing power outages.

On July 3, the factory authority declared that the closure would be continued till July 11, making yesterday the deadline for reopening.

"As we rushed to the factory today [Sunday] to join work, we found another notice at the factory gate saying the factory has been shut down for an indefinite period as electricity lines were cut off," one of the workers said.

The factory authority shut the factory down

"On finding the factory shutdown notice, we took to the streets demanding reopening of the factory and last month's salary," said a worker

without paying last month's salary, the workers said.

"On finding the factory shutdown notice, we took to the streets demanding reopening of the factory and last month's salary," said another worker, adding that they were also demanding bonuses and the current month's salary before Eid-ul-Azha.

Rafiqul Islam Sujon, president of the Bangladesh Garments and Shilpa Srarnik Federation, said the workers protested as they were worried over losing their jobs and as the factory authority declared the shutdown for an

indefinite period.

Kabir Hossain, vice president of the National Garment Workers' Federation, who was on the spot, told The Daily Star that though the matter was yet to be settled, the workers left the road around 2:30pm due to heavy rain.

"However, the factory authority as well as police informed us that workers' salaries will be paid very soon and the factory will be reopened by next Sunday," he added.

The Daily Star could not reach the factory's production manager, Lokman Hossain, despite repeated phone calls and text messages.

Contacted, Arif Hossen, assistant superintendent of police of Dhaka Industrial Police-1, said the factory authority assured the workers that they would receive last month's salary very soon as it was already in the process of being sent to the workers' bank accounts.

On the shutdown notice, he said the factory did not have that much work orders in the past couple of months and were facing issues over electricity and gas connections.

"We are looking into the matter," he added.

Pandemic pushing telcos to reevaluate, restructure plans



ERIK AAS

In today's digital era, while we can certainly feel our growing reliance on telecom services, many of us are not fully aware of how indispensable they are for the sustenance of the life we are accustomed to living. The Covid-19 crisis has shown us the extent to which telecom services can serve people during a challenging time by ensuring their access to many key facilities that are required to maintain the normal course of life.

A wide array of technological endeavours has been taken all over the world to combat the pandemic, and telecom services have been highly instrumental in implementing the initiatives. While the measures taken by telecom operators during this period are aimed at tackling the current challenges, they are in turn opening up new ways of serving customers and will play a vital role in formulating our future strategies.

In Bangladesh, the telecom operators have also risen to the current challenges and are trying to support the government in combating the pandemic to the best of their abilities. To serve the nation in the hour of need, we are striving to tackle the unprecedented situation through innovative and timely undertakings.

The government declared telecom

as emergency service during the nationwide shutdown to keep communications uninterrupted across the country. Providing service under such circumstances is certainly a demanding task, as we have to run our operations keeping the majority of our employees at home to ensure their safety. However, we are committed to carrying it out regardless of the challenges we face along the way. During such a trying time, nothing deserves a higher priority than the interest of the nation.

From setting up Covid-19 hotline numbers to providing people with necessary healthcare instructions digitally, the telecom operators have played their roles in many key initiatives taken by the government since the beginning of the outbreak.

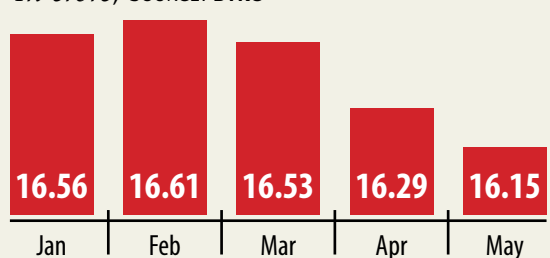
Due to high contagiousness of the virus, allowing the suspects to visit the healthcare institutions directly was not a safe option initially, and hence they were instructed to contact the institutions over the phone. Perhaps this over-the-phone contact module as part of a healthcare procedure has been implemented at such a large scale for the first time in the country. The mobile operators have been thoroughly supportive to the government for ensuring its proper implementation.

Raising people's health awareness by providing authentic health information is another key initiative the telecom operators have taken during the pandemic. Various digital channels are being utilised to keep people informed about the precautions required to ensure their safety.

The telecom operators have also partnered with the Access to Information (A2i) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to develop different platforms for tracing Covid-19 patients.

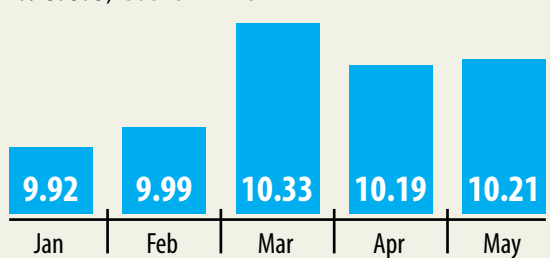
ACTIVE MOBILE CONNECTIONS

In crore; SOURCE: BTRC



ACTIVE INTERNET CONNECTIONS

In crore; SOURCE: BTRC



Because of customers' necessities during the shutdown period, we are providing additional facilities to them as well. Most notably, the demand for mobile internet has been on the rise since the declaration of the nationwide shutdown.

People are spending more time online while staying at home, and since the number of mobile internet users accounts for more than 90 per cent of the total internet users in the country, the load on our networks is mounting. In order to meet customers' demand during this period, we are offering data packs at significantly reduced prices. Even a large bulk of talk-time and data has been provided for free to the most price-sensitive customer bases.

We are also taking a few other initiatives to help our customers deal with some problems that have

arisen due to the Covid-19 crisis. For example, some telecom operators are providing digital healthcare services without taking any charge so that customers can take medical advice from physicians more conveniently when they are in need.

Free e-learning contents are being provided as well to keep students' study flow uninterrupted during the shutdown. Such endeavours are significantly contributing to maintaining normalcy during the pandemic.

Along with testing our ability to operate in challenging situations, the ongoing pandemic is allowing us to reevaluate, reimagine and restructure our plans. The additional efforts we are making during this period will certainly accelerate our advancement as digital service providers in the days to come.

Equipped with more insights and experiences, we will surely be able to make our approaches more customer-oriented and adaptable to varying circumstances. The telecom industry was already undergoing a massive transformation due to digitalisation, and the current situation will surely add a new impetus to this transformation.

We have even found that the new work module has made some of our operations significantly faster. Considering the prevailing condition to be the new normal, we are setting our sights on future endeavours.

On the other hand, people have experienced how crucial digital services can be at a time when our normal course of life is hit hard by an unwanted situation. In the post-pandemic era, it will surely encourage them to embrace the

digital lifestyle further.

This is not the first time the telecom operators are stepping up and taking the challenge to serve the nation. We will capitalise on the measures we are taking this time to take telecom services to new heights and make the industry more future-forward. The experiences we are amassing at present will always remain with us as invaluable lessons.

Bangladesh encountered many challenges in the past and overcame them all through the collective perseverance and resilience of the nation. As challenging as it may seem, the ongoing Covid-19 crisis will surely come to an end one day and Bangladesh will continue to march forward on the path of prosperity.

The writer is chief executive officer of Banglalink Digital

