

SoftBank brings food service robot to labour-strapped Japan

REUTERS, Tokyo

SoftBank's robotics arm said on Monday it will bring a food service robot developed by California-based Bear Robotics to Japan as restaurants grapple with labour shortages and a new socially distanced norm as a result of the novel coronavirus.

The robot named Servi will act as a sort of waiter, using its layers of trays to carry food and drinks and its 3D cameras and Lidar sensors to navigate between kitchen and tables.

Servi will be launched in Japan in January and will cost 99,800 yen (\$950) per month excluding tax on a three-year plan, SoftBank Group Corp said.

The start up first showed a prototype to SoftBank chief executive Masayoshi Son last year and SoftBank led a \$32 million round of investment in the startup in January.

The launch leverages SoftBank's long experience in bringing overseas technology to Japan but reflects the shift away from Son's earlier focus on humanoid robots.

Servi has been tested by Japanese restaurant operators, including Seven & i Holdings at its Denny's chain, as the sector grapples with an aging workforce and deepening labour shortages.

The launch comes as companies are scrambling to employ technology to offer contactless service and ensure social distancing.

SoftBank's humanoid Pepper robot became the face of the company following its 2014 unveiling but failed to find a global customer base.

The firm in 2018 announced cleaning robot Whiz, which employs technology from group portfolio company Brain Corp and has sold more than 10,000 units worldwide. SoftBank is touting the use of Whiz as a coronavirus countermeasure, and said on Monday that Pepper can be used in conjunction with thermal sensors to monitor customers.

Son has shifted from operating businesses to making investments in recent years. This month, SoftBank announced the sale of cellphone distributor Brightstar as it cuts links to the telecoms industry.

The group also owns Boston Dynamics, which developed the four-legged robot Spot.

SoftBank has a history of troubled investments in the robotics sector.



REUTERS/FILE

SoftBank's robotics arm demonstrates a food service robot, Servi, developed by California-based Bear Robotics, as restaurants grapple with labour shortages and seek to ensure social distancing during the coronavirus disease outbreak, in Tokyo yesterday.

Sick of staying home: China expects a Golden Week tourism rebound

REUTERS, Beijing/Shanghai

China expects a significant rebound in domestic travel over the upcoming Golden Week holiday after the sector was pumelled by the novel coronavirus for months, with some flights selling out and travel platforms reporting a surge in hotel bookings.

The pent-up demand is fuelling optimism the Chinese travel industry has reached a turning point, with hopes the eight-day holiday from Oct. 1 will supercharge a tentative pickup seen in recent months, even as some trepidation over the virus lingers.

While the world's second-largest economy is now largely back to normal, though there are still pockets of lingering weakness such as tourism, Capital Economics said in a recent note.

China's resurgent travel industry offers a striking contrast to business in some other parts of Asia as well as in the United States and Europe, where the novel coronavirus is still circulating and gatherings are restricted.

The holiday to mark modern China's founding is traditionally one of its busiest times for travel, and not just at home. Last year, 782 million trips were made, with more than 7 million people travelling abroad, according to government data.

"The demand on tourism that was suppressed for nine months will probably be released in these eight days," said online travel platform Trip.com TCOM.O in a statement, estimating that 600 million trips could be made.

China has largely stamped out its coronavirus epidemic, which emerged in the central city of Wuhan late last year, and many restrictions on domestic travel have been lifted.

Few people, however, are expected to venture abroad due to various quarantine requirements around the world and a dearth of overseas flights.

On Monday, the Foreign Ministry announced that people should avoid international trips unless "truly necessary" due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

But more domestic air bookings were made between Oct. 1 and Sept. 14 than in the year-earlier period, with a surge in August, and economy seats on popular routes, like Beijing to the southwestern city of Lijiang, have sold out, according to travel service provider Qunar.com.

Hotel and airline bookings made during the week of Sept. 8-15 exceeded those made during the same period last year, Alibaba-backed online travel platform Fliggy said, with hotel bookings for Golden Week up by more than 50 per cent.

Spending on hotels during the holiday is expected to recover to last year's level, or even see slight growth, according to the research department of China's Meituan Dianping 3690.HK, whose on-demand service apps span groceries to hotels.

"People want to fly somewhere, there is this pent-up demand as they're sick of staying at

home," said Mei Xin, retail analyst at Huatai Securities.

But still, some coronavirus caution remains.

People often have to show health-tracking QR codes, which have played a key part in containing the virus, and some hotels are asking guests to get coronavirus tests before arriving.

And some families are being asked to stay at home. In cities like Beijing and Shanghai, schools have asked parents and students not to go away for the holidays unless strictly necessary.

Beijing-based television producer Pan Lei, 45, said he felt he had to cancel a family trip to the Yellow Mountain tourist area after getting a notice from his children's schools.

"I lost the money I paid in advance," he said.

But he said it was understandable there were fears of a second coronavirus wave this winter.

"Schools want to cut risks to the minimum."



REUTERS

Passengers wearing face masks walk at the Beijing Daxing International in China on Sept 25.

Not just at home, explore opportunities beyond national boundary

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There was a time when an individual started a career based on a single skill and retired as well. It was possible through one kind of educational background. It does not work nowadays. It is now being said that an individual needs to have a minimum five skills and these skill-sets are changing very fast. Learning is becoming a major skill-set. I have to know how to learn or I would have to have the curiosity to learn.

We have to utilise the power of the internet and digital connectivity to prepare ourselves in line with the new trends so that we can work for foreign companies while sitting at home or foreign companies hire us. For those who are starting their career now, it is going to be differently way of recruitment, way of work and skillset five years down the line.

DS: We are going through a disruption. In

terms of innovation, we are now at a stage where we don't know what the next is. How could our generation prepare for this?

Azman: Of course, we are saying that we have to develop digital skills and prepare ourselves for the new way of work. But first, there is no alternative to some things. An organisation can't function without performance even if other things are okay. Some goals or expectations have been set for me. Its exception may be accepted once or twice, but you must perform and the goals have to be delivered.

Performance alone will not suffice. How are you delivering the performance? Are you doing your work compliantly, with right ethical standards, values and transparency? Can you move to a leadership position where we can create an emotional connection with the people so that my leadership will be

accepted? We have to create a together culture. You have to build a culture of collaboration so that people work to implement your vision, dream and strategy.

We have to accept the disruption and improve our skills. We have to develop products taking into account the consumer and technological trends. It is very difficult to say at the moment what new skills the new generation should acquire now. We have to grow the capability to learn.

None of us was like this. I never had the leadership or technology skill. I never studied these things. We have come to this stage by learning step by step within the organisation.

Organisations were silo in the past. Now it is an agile way of work where there will not be a structure of an organisation. People with various skills will work in a systemically

chaotic situation and together they would develop something. How can we cope if we don't have the curiosity?

Globally, there are large platforms where we could receive training by identifying the areas by ourselves. You do what you like and you do it with a purpose. If you can instill your passion into the purpose in some way, then nobody will be able to stop you. Whatever you want to do, do it well. Try to be Number 1. Be Number 1. Utilise your time in the best possible way.

DS: How can corporates be connected with academia? Is there any platform where leadership can be practised and knowledge will be disseminated?

Azman: Businesses are taught at every university in Bangladesh. So, this type of collaboration can be developed. It can be done if we can start the industry and academia

collaboration rightfully and with a concerted effort and right intention. One or two sessions would not be able to attain the objective. A proper programme has to be developed and the programme has to be incorporated in the curriculum of the universities where we can help develop human capital.

There might be initiatives from the government side. There are private institutions that work on leadership. The real leaders can share their work experience. The new generation CEOs are committed to contributing if there is any opportunity.

DS: Any suggestions for the next CEOs?

Azman: There is no alternative to hard work. You need to have a purpose. If you know your purpose and passion, and if you have your ethical standards and values right, the leaders will find out how to grow up to that level.

Uber wins back London licence despite 'historical failings'

REUTERS, London

Uber has won a legal bid to restore its London operating licence which was taken away by the city's transport regulator over safety concerns, after a judge decided on Monday that it was a fit and proper operator.

Transport for London (TfL) refused to grant the Silicon Valley-based company a new licence in 2019 due to what it called a "pattern of failures". Uber argued it has since assuaged concerns over insurance verification and driver identification.

The US company was also denied a licence by TfL in 2017, a major blow in one of its most important markets, before a different judge restored it on a probationary basis.

"Despite their historical failings, I find them, now, to be a fit and proper person to hold a London PHV (private hire vehicle) operator's licence," Judge Tan Ikram said in his written verdict.

"I do, however, wish to hear from the advocates on conditions and on my determination as to the length of a licence," he said.

Uber, which has apologised for mistakes it has made, has run into regulatory barriers and a backlash in other countries, forcing it to withdraw from some markets.

China's biggest automaker SAIC to have nearly 100 new EV models by 2025

REUTERS, Beijing

SAIC Motor, the biggest automaker in China, plans to have nearly 100 new energy models with its partners by 2025, its president Wang Xiaohu said on Monday.

New energy vehicles include battery electric vehicles as well as plug-in hybrid and hydrogen fuel cell vehicles. Among the nearly 100 models, which include new and existing models, SAIC plans to have over 20 plug-in hybrid models and 10 hydrogen fuel-cell vehicles, Wang said.

Another breather for borrowers

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The central bank's instruction is highly time-befitting as it will help recover the economy from the ongoing economic meltdown, he said.

More instructions will be given to banks to maintain provision against the loans and how much interest of the loans that are enjoying moratorium facility will be transferred to the income segment of lenders, the central bank stipulated in its notice.

As per the banking practice, interest of classified loans and different types of rescheduled loans cannot be transferred to income segment of lenders.

Banks are allowed to transfer the interest of a loan to income segment despite failing to realise the interest from the loans. But banks are instructed not to transfer the interest of the loans, which will become defaulted given the feeble trend of repayment.

This inflates the profit of a bank artificially, which also facilitates shareholders and directors in enjoying profits bypassing the banking norms.

"We will have to wait for the next central bank's notice on how much fund will be transferred to income segment from the loans," said Syed Mahbubur Rahman, managing director of Mutual Trust Bank.

He, however, welcomed the central bank notice saying this would help both lenders and borrowers.

Lub-rreff aims to make Bangladesh 'self-reliant in lubricant production'

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Bangladesh consumes around 1.2 lakh tonnes of lubricants annually, of which 1.04 tonnes is met through imports while about 0.16 tonnes is produced locally, according to the company's data.

Meanwhile, Lub-rreff aims to export its products after meeting domestic needs in order to capture a greater share of the rising global demand, which is being driven by the growth of automotive production worldwide.

"Lub-rreff wants to break the domination of foreign brands and make Bangladesh self-reliant in lubricant production," Yousuf said during a press conference at the existing factory's premises.

The new project, being established right on the brink of the Karnaphuli river, will have an annual production capacity of about 70,000 tonnes.

Having secured all 25 certificates required to break ground, the project will be developed across 16 acres of land and is expected to be complete within the next two years.

As a part of its plans, Lub-rreff will gradually set up a tank terminal, berth operating jetty, bitumen plant, hydrogen

plant and power plant in the area as well.

Luf-rref, whose products are branded as BNO Lubricants, recently introduced Nynas technology based transformer oil and nano technology based lubricants to minimise carbon emissions and ensure engine longevity.

"At present, our market share is 8 per cent, which we aim to increase by 20 per cent with the new plant," said Mofijur Rahman, chief financial officer of Lub-rref.

The lubricants company makes 60 per cent of products with responsibly recycled lubricants while the remaining 40 per cent is made out of imported base oils.

"By recycling old oils, we are contributing to our environment," he added.

About 60 per cent of BNO lubricant products are being used by the automotive sector while 35 per cent is used by various industries, including power transformers, power plant factories and industrial generators.

The remaining 5 per cent is used by the marine sector for their engines, according to company data.

Lub-rref's paid up capital was Tk 100 crore and its revenue rose 11.6 per cent to Tk 153 crore in 2018-19.

US-Bangla officials to talk investment, trade tomorrow

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Bangladesh has already emerged as a leading exporter of personal protective equipment (PPE) to the US as some local garment manufacturers have been exploiting the market potential of this segment, the official said.

The US government considered Bangladesh as an important partner under its flagship Indo-Pacific Strategy (IPS) as well, he added.

Under the IPS, the US plans to invest trillions of dollars to improve the region's infrastructure.

According to the official, the US also wants more trade talk platforms with Bangladesh apart from the existing Trade and Investment Cooperation Forum Agreement (TICFA), which was signed in November 2013.

Locally made LPG cylinders get a cut in VAT

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Currently, two dozen companies are operating in the bottled gas business, mainly by importing LPG.

A section of operators also import LPG cylinders. However, the quantity of imports declined in recent years.

Data from the Department of Explosives showed that LPG cylinder imports dropped 44 per cent to 22.30 lakh units in fiscal 2018-19 from 39.60 lakh units the previous year.

The number of locally made cylinders marketed increased 85 per cent to 20.30 lakh units in fiscal 2018-19 from 11 lakh units the previous year, says data from the explosives department.

Bangladesh Land Port Authority (Ministry of Shipping)

Bangladesh Regional Connectivity Project-1: Development of Sheola, Bhomra, Ramgarh Land Ports and Upgradation of Security System of Benapole Land Port. (IDA Credit Number 6002-BD)

Subject: Request for Expressions of Interest (REOI) for Senior Procurement Specialist (SPS) (Contract Package BLPA/S-4).

Ref No. 18.15.0000.023.11.068.18-1047 Date: 28 September 2020

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh has received an USD 150 million Credit from the International Development Association (IDA) – a member of the World Bank Group – for financing the cost of the Bangladesh Regional Connectivity Project 1 (BRCP-1), being jointly implemented by the Bangladesh Land Port Authority (BLPA), National Board of Revenue (NBR) and Ministry of Commerce. Now the BLPA intends to apply part of the IDA Credit for procuring the services of a Senior Procurement Specialist (SPS) for its Project Implementation Unit (PIU).

2. The Scope of Services:

The SPS will work as a full-time member of the procurement team in PIU, and will be responsible for assisting BLPA so that the procurements are done as per the relevant guidelines. The SPS will have a significant role in assuring the integrity, fairness, and overall quality of procurement in conformance with the requirements of the guidelines of the World Bank and the procurement laws of Bangladesh. He should not have any conflict of interest while working and should keep all the project information confidential. Detailed scope of works (Terms of Services) and other information will be available upon request from the address provided below, either through email or in person. TOR is also available in BLPA's website (www.bsbk.gov.bd).

3. General Qualification and Experience:

- At least graduate in engineering/procurement/supply chain management/commerce/finance/business/management/law/ environmental science or suitable equivalency;
- Minimum fifteen (15) years of general experience out of which ten (10) years of experience as Procurement Specialist/Procurement Consultant or working experience in Procurement team having dedicated/core procurement rule against the designated post. Experience working on projects of the World Bank, ADB or other development partners is highly desired.

4. Specific Skills and Experience:

- Specialized knowledge of procurement of goods; various forms of construction contracts; selection/contracting of consultant services; preparation of bidding/contract documents for the international procurement of goods, works, services; public procurement policies; sustainable procurement; advanced contract management; FIDIC contracts etc;
- Proven experience of FIDIC contract will be preferred;
- Knowledge and understanding of e-Government Procurement (e-GP);
- Should have strong interpersonal and communications skills. Ability to work individually or in team to deliver services with strict deadline and in cross cultural environment.

5. The Bangladesh Land Port Authority (BLPA) now invites eligible Applicants to indicate their interest in providing the services. The Applicants are requested to submit their: (a) CV (*Curriculum Vitae*) with recent photograph, which will indicate that they are qualified to perform the assignment; (b) expected remuneration.

6. The Senior Procurement Specialist (SPS) will be selected in accordance will the "World Bank Procurement Regulations for IPF Borrowers (July 2016)". It is expected that the Consultant's service will be commence at the end of October 2020 at Dhaka. Duration of the consultancy services would be for 30 (thirty) months.

7. Expression of interest (EOI) shall be submitted by **15 October 2020 up to 5:00pm** either in sealed envelope clearly marked "Expression of Interest (EOI) for Selection of Senior Procurement Specialist" in the email's subject line or on top of the envelop or through email sent to the following undersigned address. EOIs received after the last date of submission will not be considered for short listing.

8. The authority reserves the right to accept or reject any or all EOI without assigning any reason, whatsoever.

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