

# Star BUSINESS

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## App makers get a boost

Google Play Store now open for business for Bangladeshi developers

MUHAMMAD ZAHIDUL ISLAM

Local mobile software developers can now get a slice of the lucrative Android app market after Google allowed merchant registration from Bangladesh for its Play Store.

Google Play Store is the official app store for the Android operating system, the most used mobile operating system globally.

Until now, local developers could only offer their apps for free on the Google Play Store, making do with only the revenue generated from the ads baked into their apps.

But thanks to Google's move on Tuesday, they can now register paid apps on the Play store and in so doing, better monetise their efforts.

The development comes after Zunaed Ahmed Palak, state minister for ICT, held a series of meetings with Google for the last one year.

"This will take the industry one step forward," he said yesterday.

The move is expected to create 2 million jobs and bring in \$5 billion in foreign currency by 2021, according to Palak.

"Now our local developers can compete with the global players on the same platform, which will ultimately help to boost the industry," he added.

About 5,000 youths were currently engaged in mobile app development and they have posted about 3,500 apps on the Google Play Store, all downloadable for free, according to industry insiders.

One developer said some of his peers earlier opened merchant accounts in other countries and subsequently faced huge challenges in

**BY THE NUMBERS**

- Local app market size: \$100m
- Number of developers: around 5,000
- Number of Bangladeshi apps on Google Play Store: 3,500
- Global app market size: \$420b
- Govt plans to grab 1% of global market by 2021
- Govt has taken a project to boost app development under a Tk 282cr project

bringing their earnings into Bangladesh.

Rashad Kabir, managing director of Dream71, a leading app developing company, said he had opened his account in Australia, which was in some ways a source of discomfort. "Now it will be easy for me to do business and the risks have been reduced too."

"The global app market is currently worth more than \$42 billion and a door has been opened for our few thousand developers to enter this market," said Ashraf Abir, managing director of MCC Ltd, a leading mobile app and games developer.

At present, the export of ICT and information technology-enabled services brings in about \$600 million, according to Kabir.

"This number will jump as all the sector's earnings would now be coming through the direct channels," he added.

The government too is looking to make the most of the latest Google move.

It is aiming to grab one percent of the \$42-billion global market by 2021.

For that end, it has taken up the Skills Development for Mobile Game and Application Project at a cost of Tk 281.97 crore. Under the project, mobile app and game development institutes will be set up across the country by 2018.

Some 525 trainers, 8,750 app developers and 2,800 game animators will get training under the project. Marketing and content experts will also be given advanced training.

About \$100 million worth of mobile apps are purchased from Bangladesh every year, according to top market leaders.

## Bangladesh to see six new denim mills in 2yrs

Organiser says at the opening of Bangladesh Denim Expo



A customer browses through different denim products, at the two-day Bangladesh Denim Expo at International Convention City Bashundhara in Dhaka yesterday.

REFAYET ULLAH MIRDHA

At least six new denim mills will come into operation in Bangladesh in the next two years with an investment of \$100 million.

The increasing demand for denim fabrics from garment makers has encouraged the investors to establish new factories here, Mostafiz Uddin, organiser of Bangladesh Denim Expo, said yesterday.

"The response we are getting from both the local millers and foreigners is huge," he told The Daily Star on the sidelines of the show, at International Convention City Bashundhara in Dhaka.

A total of 65 exhibitors from 12 countries are participating in the seventh edition of the two-day event.

Currently, Bangladesh has 30 denim mills with a capacity to produce 435 million yards of fabrics a year, said Mostafiz, who is also the managing director of Denim Expert Ltd.

Local suppliers can meet only 40 percent of Bangladesh's annual demand for denim fabrics and the rest is met through imports from China, India and Pakistan, he said.

Last fiscal year, Bangladesh exported denim goods worth \$2 billion.

Existing investment in the denim sector is more than \$1 billion and every year more people are showing interest to invest in the sector, Mostafiz said.

"However, it is my request to the investors not to make new investments in basic

denim fabrics," he said.

"We are already strong in basic denim products. Now what we need is very fine fabrics to produce very high-end denim products."

He also said the prices of fabrics declined in Bangladesh due to the price war among the local fabrics producers.

Six months ago, a yard of denim fabrics was sold in Bangladesh at \$2.5, which came down to \$2 now, Mostafiz said.

As a new hub for denim products, many foreign companies are now coming to open offices or factories in Bangladesh, he said.

Landes, a German denim accessories maker, is the latest on the list to start production in its new factory in Savar on November 1.

"We opened the factory in Bangladesh as we think this is the hub for denim business and there are a lot of business prospects here," Manfred Slowik, chief operating officer of Landes, said at his stall at the expo.

The company has already invested \$500,000 in the new factory that has 30 employees, Slowik said.

"By the end of next year, the total workforce in our new plant will be 120 as we are going for new recruitments."

Landes has a target to annually produce 500 million pieces of leather patches—an accessory for making denim trousers—at its Savar plant, Slowik said.

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## Handset vendors revving up for 4G

MUHAMMAD ZAHIDUL ISLAM

Handset vendors are now gearing up for the rollout of 4G service in Bangladesh such that customers can enjoy the fastest data service as soon as it becomes available in the first quarter of 2018.

At present, only 10-12 percent of the handsets in use in Bangladesh are 4G-enabled, which have different configuration than 3G phones, according to industry insiders.

Importers brought in a total of 1.46 crore smartphones to the country between January 2016 and September 2017. Of them, about 50 lakh handsets are 4G-enabled, according to estimates of the Bangladesh Mobile Phone Importers Association (BMPIA).

"The whole handset industry is taking preparations for the upcoming 4G rollout," said Ruhul Alam Al Mahub Manik, president of the BMPIA.

The 4G-enabled handsets are likely to

be pricier, said Manik, whose company Fair Electronics Limited is the sole distributor of Samsung handsets in Bangladesh.

"The 4G-enabled sets' configuration is different -- the price increase will be an issue. But we are trying to lower the price and even compromise on our margin."

Samsung plans to bring down the prices of a few models to less than Tk 10,000, he said, adding that handset importers have started working jointly with mobile operators to settle on the best offers for customers.

Nokia though has already brought out 4G-ready handsets for Tk 9,600.

This is the first 4G handset in Bangladesh to be sold for less than Tk 10,000, said Sandeep Gupta, general manager of SEA new markets of HMD Global, which now develops and markets Nokia-branded phones and tablets.

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## Golden Son fined Tk 43cr, loses bonded warehouse licence

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Customs authorities have cancelled the bonded warehouse licence of Golden Son Ltd and fined the listed firm Tk 43.29 crore for misusing the facility.

The Customs Bond Commissionerate penalised the company, which manufactures garment accessories and household items, for illegally transferring duty-free imported raw materials from the bonded warehouse, according to a post on the website of the Dhaka Stock Exchange yesterday. The order was issued on October 29 and the company has been ordered to pay the fine in 15 days.

Bonded warehouses are authorised by the customs authorities for storing goods on which duties are deferred until the items are removed for domestic consumption. In case of exports, no duty has to be paid.

According to the post, the company has failed to come up with a satisfactory explanation about a complaint brought against it over the illegal transfer of duty-free imported raw materials from the bonded warehouse.

The authorities fined Golden Son as the allegations were "undisputedly proven and established".

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## Bangladesh needs \$928b extra to implement SDGs

Planning Commission study finds

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Bangladesh requires \$928.48 billion additionally from 2017 to 2030 to implement the Sustainable Development Goals, revealed a new study.

This amount would be needed after current costs related to the SDGs are borne by the public and private sectors and external sources. The \$928.48 billion is 19.75 percent of the accumulated gross domestic product under the Seventh Five-Year Plan, according to the report titled "SDGs Financing Strategy: Bangladesh Perspective".

The annual average cost of the SDGs will be \$66.32 billion at constant prices for the period, said the report prepared and published by the General Economics Division (GED) of the Planning Commission.

The report, along with two other books, Bangladesh Voluntary National Review (VNR) 2017 on SDGs and A Training Handbook on Implementation of the 7th Five-Year Plan, was launched at a programme jointly organised by the GED and the UNDP Bangladesh at the conference room of the National Economic Council yesterday.

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Models walk along the catwalk to display clothes made of US cotton, at a fashion show at Le Meridien Dhaka on November 1. Cotton USA organised the event to observe Cotton Day.

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## Muhith plans corporate tax cut before polls

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The government plans to reduce corporate tax in the next fiscal year, said Finance Minister AMA Muhith yesterday.

"It is true that our corporate tax is not that helpful for the development of our capital market," he told a seminar on "Raising Awareness on Various Aspects of the Capital Market".

The Bangladesh Association of Publicly Listed Companies (BAPLC) organised the seminar at Bangabandhu International Conference Centre in the capital.

"We have a plan to bring some real reforms in corporate tax structure," said Muhith.

He said the country's growth was led by public sector investment and the change in corporate tax structure would increase the private sector's contribution through investments.

Private sector investment has remained stuck at around 20 percent of the GDP for the last couple of years.

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## Sri Lanka cuts food taxes

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka drastically cut import taxes on essential foods Wednesday to curb record high inflation before its annual budget presentation.

Finance Minister Mangala Samaraweera said he was slashing taxes immediately on six commonly consumed commodities to cut high living costs.

"Tomorrow I will unveil a budget that will boost the entrepreneurial spirit of our young people," the minister told reporters.

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