

Zuckerberg to integrate WhatsApp, Instagram and Messenger

REUTERS

Facebook Inc Chief Executive Mark Zuckerberg is planning to unify the underlying messaging infrastructure of the WhatsApp, Instagram and Facebook Messenger services and incorporate end-to-end encryption into these apps, the New York Times reported on Friday.

The three services will, however, continue as stand-alone apps, the report said, citing four people involved in the effort.

Facebook said it is working on adding end-to-end encryption, which protects messages from being viewed by anyone except the participants in a conversation, to more of its messaging products, and considering ways to make it easier for users to connect across networks.

"There is a lot of discussion and debate as we begin the long process of figuring out all the details of how this will work," a spokesperson said.

After the changes, a Facebook user, for instance, will be able send an encrypted message to someone who has only a WhatsApp account, according to the New York Times report.

Integrating the messaging services



Facebook Inc Chief Executive Mark Zuckerberg

could make it harder for antitrust regulators to break up Facebook by undoing its acquisitions of WhatsApp and Instagram, said Sam Weinstein, a professor at the Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law.

"If Facebook is worried about that then one way it can defend itself is to integrate those services," Weinstein said.

But Weinstein said breaking up Facebook is viewed as an "extreme remedy" by regulators, particularly

in the United States, so concerns over antitrust scrutiny may not have been a factor behind the integration.

Some former Facebook security engineers and an outside encryption expert said the plan could be good news for user privacy, in particular by extending end-to-end encryption.

Silhouettes of mobile users are seen next to a screen projection of Instagram logo in this picture illustration taken March 28, 2018.

REUTERS/Dado Ruvic/Illustration

"I'm cautiously optimistic it's a good thing," said former Facebook Chief Security Officer Alex Stamos, who now teaches at Stanford University. "My fear was that they were going to drop end-to-end encryption."

However, the technology does not always conceal metadata - information about who is talking to whom - sparking concern among some researchers that the data might be shared.

Any metadata integration likely will let Facebook learn more about users, linking identifiers such as phone numbers and email addresses for those using the services independently of each other.

Facebook could use that data to charge more for advertising and targeted services, although it also would have to forgo ads based on message content in Messenger and Instagram. Other major tradeoffs will have to be made too, Stamos and others said.

Messenger allows strangers to contact people without knowing their phone numbers, for example, increasing the risk of stalking and approaches to children.



UTTARA BANK

Azharul Islam, chairman of Uttara Bank, attends the bank's "1st zonal heads' conference-2019" at its head office in Dhaka yesterday. Mohammed Rabiul Hossain, CEO, was present.

MFS reach widens

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"We observed the presence of only a few select products for mobile payments and that is why the number of transactions might become constant at one point -- might be within the next two years," said Alam, who has conducted different studies on MFS. He said Bangladesh has failed in its objective of providing the full range of mobile money services.

"Till today in most of the cases, we only use this platform for sending money from one place to another, one person to another and that demand has been met under this structure. The MFS operators have failed to design any real product."

For instance, MFS operators do not have any product for farmers and insurance payments so far while there is no loan or savings scheme either, he said. "We also found the playing field was not level when it came to regulation. That is why the sector did not see real investments," Alam opined.

Refuting Alam, Sirajul Islam, spokesperson of the central bank, said 20 percent growth was huge enough and the market was evolving at a very moderate rate.

"See lots of payment options now are available and, on facing these challenges, mobile financial services are securing huge growth which we need to salute," he said.

Market leader bKash said after eight years of growth, it's not unusual to have a comparatively lower growth rate.

"Moreover, the mobile financial service providers had to implement a central bank directive of lowering the transaction ceilings, which might have put an impact on declining transaction value despite the number of active accounts soared," said Shamsuddin Haider Dalim, head of corporate communications of bKash.

In 2017 the central bank lowering down

the transaction volume from Tk 25,000 to Tk 15,000 for a customer in a month.

bKash also have seen strong impact on their remittance solutions where their partner banks such as MTBL, Bank Asia, City Bank and BRAC Bank are bringing foreign remittances and bKash is working as their agent to provide the last mile solutions by delivering local currency in their individual accounts. Not only in transaction volume and user number, the MFS is also booming with regard to all other indicators related to this kind of financial service.

For instance, the number of agents involved in the service has reached 886,473 whereas it was 786,459 a year before.

The total number of registered accounts is now 6.75 crore, which was 5.88 crore at the end of December 2017.

The number of daily transactions on an average was 53.65 lakh, which reached 67.77 lakh at the end of last December, according to Bangladesh Bank data.

The financial service was launched in Bangladesh in 2011 and at one point in 2016 there were 28 MFS licence holders.

Currently only 18 banks have approval for it and a good number of them has rolled out the service so far.

There are two leading operators—bKash and Rocket—who hold around 94 percent of the market share, according to a survey report run by the BIBM two months back.

However, new players are coming to the field. The postal department introduced an MFS platform called Nagad a few months ago which is also leaving an impact on the transaction volume.

Two years ago, there were 28 MFS licence holders who were waiting to launch the service, according to Alam.

But now the number has dropped as the prospect for the industry is bleak, he added.

Don't harass workers

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Between 2013 and 2017, the prices of garment items going to the EU dropped 0.22 percent and to the US 12 percent, said Shafiul Islam Mohiuddin, president of the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry.

But during the period the cost of production increased 29.54 percent, he said. India has created a Rs 25,000 crore-fund to reduce the cost of funds for the garment businesses, said Mostafizur Rahman, a distinguished fellow of the CPD.

"Bangladesh can also create such a fund for helping the garment sector," he said.

The news of the wage hike needed to be widely disseminated among the workers to prevent them from going into unrest, said Khondaker Golam Moazzem, CPD research director, while presenting a paper styled "recent wage debates in the RMG sector: ten lessons learned".

He also called for special awareness initiatives for female workers about their grades, wages and financial issues.

The government can give soft loans to the land owners in the industrial belts so that they construct houses and the workers can rent them cheaply, he added.



SIBL

Md Anwarul Azim Arif, chairman of Social Islami Bank, and Quazi Osman Ali, managing director, attend the opening session of the bank's two-day Annual Business Conference 2019 at Le Meridien Dhaka on Friday.

Set up handset radiation measuring lab

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The report suggested placing radiation measuring devices at public places like shopping centres so that customers can check the radiation issue before purchasing mobile phones. "People are suffering from headache, hearing problems, ear pain and so on," he said, while calling for banning of handsets that emit high radiation.

Mohiuddin Ahmed, president of the association, said the telecom regulator has set up a database of IMEI (International Mobile Equipment Identity) numbers, which will help ensure quality device imports.

"The government now needs to take measures to import safe devices," he said.

Md Shahidullah Sikder, pro-vice chancellor (research and development) of the Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University, also spoke.

China, US among 76 WTO members pushing for new e-commerce rules

REUTERS, Davos, Switzerland

Impatient with a lack of World Trade Organization rules on the explosive growth of e-commerce, 76 members - including the United States, China, the European Union and Japan - agreed on Friday to start negotiating a new framework.

China, which is locked in a trade war with the United States, signaled conditional support for the initiative but said it should also take into account the needs of developing countries, in comments likely to rile Washington.

E-commerce, or online trade in goods and services, has become a huge component of the global economy. A WTO report put the total value of e-commerce in 2016 at \$27.7 trillion, of which nearly \$24 trillion was business-to-business transactions.

On the sidelines of the World Economic Forum in Davos, negotiators from the 76 countries and regions agreed on Friday to hammer out an agenda for negotiations they hope to kick off this year on setting new e-commerce rules.

"I've said for quite some time it was unacceptable that by 2018 ... the WTO won't have a deeper, more effective conversation about a phenomenon that is driving the global economy today," said WTO Director-General Roberto Azevedo.

"China was not an original signatory but now they are. They have reaffirmed their intention to start negotiations on electronic commerce. I think this is a welcome development,"

he told a briefing in Davos.

Japan's trade minister Hiroshige Seko said his country hopes to use its presidency of this year's Group of 20 meetings of major economies to help accelerate negotiations.

"The current WTO rules don't match the needs of the 21st century. You can tell that from the fact there are no solid rules on e-commerce," Seko told a separate briefing. China's WTO Ambassador Zhang Xiangchen said the e-commerce declaration "could have been better drafted" but Beijing was still willing to co-sponsor it.

But Beijing's call for "full respect (to be) accorded to the reasonable requests of developing members" could increase friction with Washington, which says the WTO must stop giving special treatment to countries such as China that call themselves "developing".

Another Asian giant, India, did not join the initiative. It has previously said the WTO should finish off the stalled but development-oriented "Doha Round" of talks before moving into new areas.

"It would always be better if we had every WTO member in it," Azevedo said. "But what is important also is that this group is open. It's an open-ended group, so any member that wants to participate in this conversation can join any time."

Trade experts say the global trade rulebook is rapidly becoming outdated and needs to keep up or become obsolete. A recent study found that 70 regional trade agreements already include provisions or chapters on e-commerce.

New VAT law from July: Kamal

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The missing goods include chemicals, plastic products, vehicles, auto parts, electronic equipment, food items, leather goods, construction materials, ceramics and machinery. They came in 425 containers from several countries, including China, India and the UK, said customs officials.

"No anarchy would be tolerated. Be it government officials, dishonest traders or clearing and forwarding agents, none will be spared," Bhuiyan said. Mis-declaration and evasion would not be allowed, he added.

Commerce Minister Tipu Munshi said the economy would not be able to take strides without duty-free import benefit for raw materials under bonded warehouse.

"Let us not make good businesses suffer for a dishonest business."

The government is working to ease the process of doing business. "We have to make our processes modern so that we do not fall behind," he added.

Prime Minister's Economic Affairs Adviser Mashiur Rahman suggested the easing of rules related to customs.

Shafiul Islam Mohiuddin, president of the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry, said the business community wholeheartedly supported the development drives of the government.

"It is a disgrace to be in the bottom of the Ease of Doing Business rank-

ing," he said, while calling for a harassment-free tax and revenue administration.

Trade will continue to be the right path for Bangladesh, said Wendy Jo Werner, the International Finance Corporation's country manager for Bangladesh, Bhutan and Nepal.

At the event, Benapole Port, Bangladesh Ansar and VDP, the FBCCI, the Airline Operators Committee of Bangladesh and the Federation of Bangladesh Customs Clearing and Forwarding Agents Association were honoured with WCO Certificate of Merit.

As per its modernisation plan, the NBR has signed an understanding agreement with 39 agencies that are related to facilitating cross-border trade to open a digital portal called National Single Window (NSW) to provide one-stop service to businesses, according to a keynote presented at the event.

The NSW is expected to be opened by 2020, it added.

The customs has also taken steps to award firms the title of Authorised Economic Operator (AEO) in order to speed up trade. An AEO will get the privilege to release import and export goods faster than others.

The NBR has also formed the Post Clearance Audit (PCA) units at field offices of customs and opened systems of advance ruling with the objective of helping businesses become aware of the Harmonised System

(HS) Code of the product prior to imports.

To provide answers to queries of businesses, the NBR has also opened a system termed National Inquiry Point, according to the keynote.

The day was also observed in the port city, where stakeholders expressed strong resentment on the shortage of manpower and scanner machines at the Chattogram port that have been causing unnecessary delays in taking delivery of imported goods.

"There are only four gates equipped with scanning machines out of a total of 12," said Mahbubul Alam, president of the Chittagong Chamber of Commerce and Industries.

An initiative was taken to purchase at least six scanning machines five years back but they are yet to arrive, reports our correspondent from the port city.

In the last 10 years, international trade has doubled but manpower at the port has not increased, said Altaf Hossain Bachchu, general secretary of the Clearing & Forwarding Agents Association.

The International Customs Day was celebrated in Benapole Customs House as well with the theme "smart border system for free trade, travel and transport".

A seminar, rally and meeting to raise awareness was organised as part of the day's celebrations, our Benapole correspondent adds.



NRB BANK

NRB Bank Chairman Mohammed Mahtabur Rahman and the bank's top officials pose at its Annual Business Conference 2019 at the Lakeshore hotel in Dhaka yesterday. Md Mehmood Husain, CEO, was present.



SBAC BANK

SM Amzad Hossain, chairman of SBAC Bank, attends the bank's Business Conference 2019 in Bagerhat on Friday. Md Golam Faruque, CEO, was present.