

TAMING CORONAVIRUS RAMPAGE

Remote work: productivity without compromising safety



SHAMEEM AHSAN

Will coronavirus bankrupt more people than it kills? Well, economists are predicting that it will, in various industries, by the end of 2020. The International Labour Organisation said that nearly 25 million jobs will be lost globally due to the coronavirus pandemic. For countries like Bangladesh, dependency on garment export and foreign remittance means we should embrace ourselves for serious economic strains. Governments around the world are imposing lockdown to reduce the spread of the virus. Many businesses' operations are at halt. However, staying productive during this crisis period may save companies from going out of business in the near future. Remote work is now the safest way to achieve the highest level of productivity in this situation. With the right mindset and tools, in this digital era, anything can be done remotely. As the pandemic has reached local transmission level in Bangladesh, a growing number of companies in Dhaka are asking their employees to work from home. Grameenphone, Unilever and Banglalink were some of the firsts to ask their employees to work from the confines of their homes. Other multinational and local companies, including Robi, Nestle, eGeneration, NewsCred, Magnito Digital, JoomShaper, HandyMama, Sheba.xyz, JoBike, Adcomm, MGH and Cisco, soon followed suit. More and more companies are embracing

this trend every day to stay productive during this challenging time without compromising on the health and safety of their employees and their families. This is not only helping to restrict unnecessary transmission of the disease but also enhancing employers' branding and goodwill among employees and potential employees. However, there is still a large number of companies that are unable to make the decision to work remotely for lack of proper tools and structure. Before asking employees to start working

performance. Given that the policy is ready for implementation, here are some productivity tools that can be used to ensure seamless communication and collaboration between team members to keep them productive from the safety of their home. WHATSAPP AND SLACK FOR MESSAGING WhatsApp is a very popular instant messaging app that is available on both mobile and desktop platforms. It offers messaging, audio/video calls and document sharing among its users. It also has features like group calls and

and share files between them. Google Docs is an online word processor, Google Sheets is an online spreadsheet and Google Slides is an online slide making tool to create and give business presentations. Team members can collaborate with each other in real-time from separate locations using these tools from Google. ZOOM AND GOOGLE HANGOUTS FOR VIDEO CONFERENCING Apart from messaging, another effective way to communicate with colleagues when working remotely is video conferencing. Both Zoom and Google Hangouts offer

MICROSOFT TEAMS WITH OFFICE 365: ALL-IN-ONE Microsoft Teams, which is part of Microsoft's Office 365 suite, is like a Swiss Army knife. It combines all the best features of the apps and tools mentioned above. It offers instant messaging like WhatsApp; channel and group communication like Slack; video conferencing and screen sharing like Zoom and Hangouts; Google Drive-like file storing and sharing through OneDrive; online version of industry standard productivity tools such as Word, Excel and PowerPoint with real-time collaboration; Trello-like project management and planning through Microsoft Planner, brainstorming and note taking through OneNote; and many other integrated tools to achieve business collaboration. After the COVID-19 outbreak took place in Wuhan, Microsoft Teams usage soared 500 per cent in China as many Chinese companies opted for working remotely. Microsoft also came forward to help businesses during this global crisis by offering a limited version of Microsoft Teams for free for six months. Adaptation is the key to survival. The coronavirus pandemic is fundamentally changing the way many organizations operate for the foreseeable future. As governments and businesses around the world tell those with symptoms to self-quarantine and everyone else to practice social distancing, remote work is our new reality. Winning against this virus will come with endurance and that will be the defining moment of our generation. At the same time, it has given us an opportunity to bring about digital transformation to our businesses with the right tools, technology and process re-engineering, not only to survive in the coming days but also to thrive under any future threat.

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from home, it is important to have a work-from-home policy in place, which will help management feel comfortable about productivity and set expectations for the employees. The policy should reflect on who can work from home, admissible working hours, approval process while working remotely, communication channels, responsiveness and availability standards, technology support and requirements, how to ensure data and device security, reporting standards, frequency of team meetings etc. It is also important to set quantifiable and well-defined key performance indicators for employees to measure their remote work

live location sharing, which can be useful for teams that work remotely. Slack is essentially a tool for organisations to collaborate through messaging. It has onboarded 7,000 new customers in just seven weeks since February amid the remote-work boom around the globe. Its workspaces allow any organisation to have communication by channels for group discussions. Slack also allows private messages for sharing information, files, and more all in one place. GOOGLE DRIVE, DOCS, SHEETS AND SLIDES FOR PRODUCTIVITY Google Drive allows users to securely store

this service with features like virtual meeting, screen sharing and call recording with up to 250 people. TRELLO AND JIRA FOR PROJECT MANAGEMENT Managing general projects and assigning tasks among team member has been made easy with Trello, a lightweight project management tool, designed as a Kanban board to visualise task flows of any project. On the other hand, Jira is designed for agile software development teams for project planning and issue tracking. It offers various dashboards and overviews for scrum and agile techniques. It also offers time tracking for each team member.

Car mechanics staring at lay-offs

JAGARAN CHAKMA

Automobile garages have joined the growing list of establishments taking a beating from the global coronavirus pandemic, putting in jeopardy the livelihoods of about 5 lakh auto mechanics and technicians. With people restricting movements to the bare minimum to reduce chances of contracting COVID-19, the use of automobile has significantly gone down. Subsequently, plans to go over to the mechanics for servicing and repair work have been indefinitely shelved. "Customer numbers nosedived since last month as most people are refraining from going anywhere, let alone a garage," said Zahirul Hoque, secretary general of Bangladesh Automobile Workshop Malik Samity. With sparse work available, earnings have plummeted and workshop owners are surely to face a crisis as they tend to have loans to prop up their establishments. "The loans need to be serviced regardless," he said.

Hoque puts the number of small, medium and large workshops existing across the country at about 20,000. They employ more than 5 lakh skilled and semi-skilled auto mechanics and technicians and annually generate several thousand crores of taka in revenue. He estimates that about Tk 1,500 crore was spent by vehicle owners in 2019 solely on servicing. A year's servicing charges for a five-year-old 1,500cc vehicle can amount to about Tk 18,000 on an average and 20 to 30 per cent more for those of higher engine capacities, according to market insiders. Nevertheless, vehicle numbers have continued to rise, leading to a thriving automobile servicing sector. Reliable data is hard to come by, but Haque believes the sector expanded by almost 15 per cent annually for the past five to six years. This growth showcased promises for investors like Syed Samiul Huq, director of Japan SolarTech (Bangladesh). He poured Tk 20 crore into

setting up Auto Trade International, which boasts state-of-the-art tools and equipment, on a 25,000 square feet space in the capital's Tejgaon Industrial Area. Huq said he has been running the workshop with 120 technicians who had been provided advanced training on automobile servicing in Japan and Italy. Despite all this, service requests at his workshop is said to have currently crashed 90 per cent. A decline in revenue for the absence of customers for the past three weeks has also hit HNS Engineering and Services, a concern of HNS Group that provides auto engineering services. The entity's monthly expenses, including the salary of its 50-odd staff, is said to be to the tunes of Tk 16 lakh. As per the government decision, HNS Engineering and Services will be closed until normalcy returns. But, Mohammed Shahidul Islam, chairman of HNS Group, said he has no intention of going for lay-offs as his staff has been with him for years.

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Dhaka stocks find no takers

AHSAN HABIB

Globally, stock market investors are looking to cash out their shares. It's the same here in Bangladesh -- except they are not finding any takers. Yesterday, of the 343 companies, 236's stocks failed to find buyers. The same fate was seen for 242 companies on Tuesday. Among them are many well-performing companies like Brac Bank, Square Pharmaceuticals, Grameenphone, British American Tobacco Bangladesh and Renata, according to data from the Dhaka Stock Exchange. As a result, average turnover on the main board dropped to Tk 120 crore this week from more than Tk 350 crore previously. Some of the investors need money but they are not able to sell shares, which will impact the market in the long run, said a stock broker requesting anonymity. Most analysts blame the scarcity of buyers on the spot of financial engineering the Bangladesh Securities and Exchange Commission (BSEC) did last week. Last Thursday, the regulator fixed the floor price of all stocks by calculating the previous five days' average prices.

"Bangladesh spoils its stock market by interfering with limit-down prices," said Hasnain Malik, head of equity strategy at Tellimer, a London-based market research firm, in a LinkedIn post. Market efficiency could be ruined by changing the floor price of stocks

| AT THE CLOSE OF TRADING YESTERDAY | | |
|-----------------------------------|----------------|---------------|
| | No. of sellers | No. of buyers |
| BRAC BANK | 89.71 lakhs | 0 |
| SQUARE | 8.12 lakhs | 0 |
| Olympic | 3.30 lakhs | 0 |
| grameenphone | 2.54 lakhs | 0 |
| BPCL | 1.32 lakhs | 0 |

to the prior 5-day average (until further notice). It will inhibit efficient price discovery and accurate portfolio net asset value reporting for fund managers. Citing it as a poor policy, he said this may kill off trading liquidity and efficient functioning of the market, particularly for foreign investors, whose portfolios may have to support daily liquidity and have a requirement to report accurate (realisable) net

asset values and who, therefore, need fully functioning price discovery. In the current week, most of the stocks were not even traded on the DSE due to dearth of buyers, he added. Foreign investors dislike illiquid market and the BSEC's price setting have made the market illiquid ultimately, said a merchant banker. "Such policy will impact the market later on while attracting foreign investors and smart investors. Because, they always keep away from illiquid market." The BSEC could have left the market to its own devices and it would have corrected itself, he added. A top official of an asset management company said any artificial price mechanism may not boost the stock market. However, it impacts the investor's confidence in the long term, he said. "So, no developed stock market's regulator pulled a stunt like the BSEC's even though bourses around the world are being battered by coronavirus. With the new policy the market has become buyer-less, so investors can't even sell their shares though they want the bare minimum price," he added.

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SK ENAMUL HAQ

Staff of an automobile workshop in the capital's Kamalapur pass idle times yesterday as service requests have declined with people limiting movements to the minimum to stem the spread of COVID-19.

Germany assures support to Bangladesh's garment exporters

BKMEA says members can shut factories if they don't have enough work orders

REFAYET ULLAH MIRDHA

Gerd Muller, Germany's federal minister of economic cooperation and development, on Tuesday assured that Bangladesh's garment sector will have his country's full support in coping with the coronavirus fallout. Muller issued this notice in response to a letter from Rubana Huq, president of the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA). Huq wrote to the minister on Sunday, urging him to request German retailers to not cancel their work orders with Bangladesh garment factories. Soon after the coronavirus pandemic began, apparel retailers in the west began to cancel their

work orders with Bangladeshi manufacturers. As of 6:00pm yesterday, the total value for work orders cancelled from 936 factories stood at \$2.58 billion while it was \$2.25 billion the day before, according to BGMEA data. Work orders for about 800.18 million pieces of garment products have been cancelled so far, affecting the lives of 1.92 million workers, the BGMEA said. "I greatly hope that we can find an approach that will safeguard the textile industry's survival in both Bangladesh and Germany since millions of people work in that sector," Muller said in a letter. In order to cushion the pandemic's impact on production-based countries

such as Bangladesh, Germany is currently evaluating a number of support measures aimed at ensuring that firms are able to remain in business and safeguard the jobs and incomes of their workers, the response continued. In an emergency situation such as this, the demand for apparel products, particularly protective medical clothing, is changing, he said. "I hope that for the interim, Bangladesh will receive orders for these products," Muller said, adding: "Bangladesh is one of the most important partners to the German textile industry and I understand all of your concerns." The COVID-19 pandemic has had a particularly hard impact on Germany's garment sector with some companies

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