

# HSBC rolls out digital payments solution for apparel sector

STAR BUSINESS DESK

The Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation has launched a digital payments solution for the apparel sector, which is the key and main currency earner of the country's exports with an around 85 per cent contribution.

The HSBC recently signed an agreement with Babylon Group in an effort to migrate the apparel manufacturer's payments onto the bank's online banking platform.

HSBCnet enables all kinds of local payments such as salaries, wages and vendor payments remotely and without any manual intervention.

The solution eliminates paper-based instructions typically required to process local payments, allowing clients to authorise transactions seamlessly – including via mobile application. It supports clients to achieve faster banking turnaround times, reduced costs and greater transparency across the payments cycle with robust security and audit trail features.

The HSBC has also extended remote

printing facilities to Babylon Group, which will allow printing cheques from several office locations across Dhaka, Savar and Chattogram through a centrally managed Cheque Outsourcing Services.

Babylon Group can issue checks from wherever is most convenient, enabling same-day handover, without unnecessary physical movement and couriers under the solution, which would have otherwise taken up 3 to 4 days. "Our vision is to enable simple, fast and secure payments for our customers through our technology propositions," said Kevin Green, head of wholesale banking at HSBC Bangladesh.

"Digitalisation and the fast adoption of technologies continue to be critical for sectors that are vital, such as garments, the largest sector in Bangladesh," he said.

"HSBC is developing and deploying some of the industry's most advanced and innovative technology to make banking easier and more secure for our customers. We are committed to being a key part of our clients' digital transformation as their chosen transaction banking partner," he added.

# Ctg chamber walks the same path as FBCCI

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All of the candidates were backed by ruling Awami League lawmaker MA Latif, also a former president of the CCCI, said the businessmen, on condition of anonymity.

The election was scheduled for June 10. But the polls were not required as the number of candidates was not higher than the posts.

This was the fourth time that no voting was held in the election of the century-old trade body in the port city.

The last participatory election took place in 2013 when Mahbul Alam-Nurun Newaj Parishad, backed by Latif, bagged 20 posts. Alam, chairman of M Alam Group, became president for the first time.

Rules were changed in 2017 to allow a person to contest in the election for more than three consecutive periods. The amendment paved the way for Alam to become the president for the record time.

Contacted, Latif said there was no need for another panel in the election since the previous rivalry among the businesspeople did not exist, and they all wanted to work together. "The members unanimously decided to pick this single panel as the current panel represents the businessmen from various groups," the lawmaker said.

Alam said the Chattogram chamber has set up a "centre of excellence" to develop skilled workforce.

"This will help us create skilled workforce and meet the requirement for such workers at Mirsarai Economic Zone. Then, we will not need to depend on foreign workers," he said in his reaction after the election.

# Alice Labs raises \$5 lakh as seed fund

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"Hopefully all the payments would be made by tomorrow (Wednesday) as we are also working with the banks to convince them into giving loans to small factories," Hassan added.

Incorporated in Singapore in 2018, Alice Labs currently operates in South Asia and Southeast Asia including Bangladesh, Myanmar, Singapore and Nepal serving over 50 e-commerce stores and enterprises, including major brands and retailers like Unilever, Coca-Cola, Giordano, and Maybelline, among others, said Alice Labs.

In Bangladesh, it also serves four local private banks to help them manage and provide automated customer services.

The company said its MyAlice enables businesses to streamline customer service, making it more efficient and customer-friendly. Businesses can connect all of their customer-facing channels, such as website chat and social media messaging platforms, to MyAlice to automate conversations for both sales and service through natural language processing (NLP) and machine learning (ML) with the ability to smoothly transition to a live operator when required, said the company.

Clients are able to automate over 70 per cent of conversations, reduce service costs

by more than 30 per cent and increase sales significantly -- all the while improving customer satisfaction and retention, it added. Rahman said human interference is usually not required in addressing customer's problems.

Alice Labs said through machine learning, MyAlice strives to decode the complex behaviour of shoppers across different regions and help businesses better communicate with them in their native languages, allowing clients to offer highly targeted localised support and better cater to diverse consumer habits. Use of MyAlice can enable clients to reduce customer service-related costs by up to 50 per cent, said Rahman.

"Alice Labs has an edge in being able to service markets that are often overlooked by larger global players," said Rahat Ahmed, founding partner and CEO at Anchorless Bangladesh, a venture capital fund.

Tala Al Jabri, partner at technology-focused venture capital firm HOF Capital, said Alice Labs has managed to produce considerable traction with leading enterprises on a global scale already, and this capital infusion will only further augment Alice's reach.

# Put fight against Covid at the heart of budget: economists

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"Vaccinating three lakh people a day will not work. We have to increase it by 10 times. If we can do that, we will be able to bring the situation under control."

"This is worth spending because it would take the virus out of the country. The return may be as high as 100 times if we compare the price of a dose of a vaccine with the output loss the country has been witnessing."

Bangladesh's healthcare system has always been weak, and the coronavirus has shown that again.

"We have not been able to use the last year in rebuilding the health system. But we can't afford to waste another year," the PRI executive director said.

"If the government upgrades the hospital system on an urgent basis, it will be a permanent improvement and serve the nation in the years to come. This investment will not go waste."

Economists emphasised expanding the government's social safety net programmes to cover both the old poor and the new poor during the pandemic.

The social protection programmes do not cover the new poor and those who have lost their jobs.

"If we spend to protect the poor and vaccinate the people, it will shield them from the pandemic and redirect the economy to a higher growth trajectory."

More should be done for the small and medium enterprises in terms of monetary policy and fiscal measures, said Mansur, also the chairman of Brac Bank, a lender focused on SMEs.

There are hundreds of thousands of SMEs that have received nothing from the government's stimulus package. There has to be a major loan protection scheme for financial institutions so that they can lend without any reluctance, he said.

Bangladesh faces daunting challenges in creating jobs. And Mansur said the challenge could not be overcome by creating jobs in the public sector.

"The solution lies with the private sector. The government has to create an investment-friendly climate."

There should be more focus on social protection and employment rather than economic growth, said Mustafizur Rahman, a distinguished fellow of the Centre for Policy Dialogue.

The health sector should be given priority. "The allocation did not go up as expected in the 2020-21 budget. The expenditure has also been much too low."

Cash transfers have proven to be effective in boosting aggregate demand and multiplier positive effects on the economy, leading Rahman to call on the

government to expand social safety net coverage to support the old and new poor.

There should be a change in the duty structure to support the SMEs and domestic market-oriented industries, he said. He requested the government to use more aid money in financing the budget deficit.

"This will help the country as the sales of high-cost national savings certificates have gone up. The higher sales of savings instruments may create debt distress."

He asked the government to set aside funds to boost food stocks, which are on the decline from a comfortable level.

The price of rice has gone up by 20 per cent, hitting the low-income people. Rice accounts for 30 to 35 per cent of the consumption basket of this group of people.

"The stability of rice price is highly important," Rahman said, calling for the continuation of incentives for the export and remittance sectors.

Rahman and his think-tank CPD have always opposed the black money whitening facility.

"The government might say that it has collected a lot of money because of the facility. But, the point is there are no statistics on the number of honest taxpayers who become disincentivised because of it."

"The scope is sending a wrong signal from a governance perspective. So, the scope should be discontinued."

Monzur Hossain, research director of the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies, said the government might need to unveil an ambitious budget to support the people and the economy. But it may push up the budget deficit to as high as 10 per cent of the gross domestic product.

"But the government should not be concerned about the higher deficit as there is idle money in the banking system."

Bangladesh has been receiving a record amount in budget support from multilateral partners since the pandemic struck the country. Funding for the vaccination drive has also poured in.

Hossain called on the government to raise the number of cash support beneficiaries to at least 50 lakh and support them at least four times a year until the impact of the coronavirus peters out.

The government should use microfinance institutions to channel the stimulus packages to small businesses as they do not have access to banks, he said.

An increase in the allocation for the infrastructure sector will accelerate economic development and create temporary jobs, Hossain added.

# Car rentals boom amid transport restrictions

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"So this time I am going home to celebrate Eid with my family. The situation of the pandemic is bad but my parents are adamant to see me," he said.

"We rented a Hiace-branded microbus for the members of the family with Tk 9,000, up from Tk 4,000-5000 in pre-pandemic times," he said.

Sheba.xyz, a startup that provides various services through its online app and site, connected hundreds of rent-a-car companies with their platform.

Ilmul Haque Sajib, co-founder of the company, said since inter-district bus services had been suspended, the demand for trips with rental cars has also increased from the beginning of this month ahead of Eid.

"Those who can afford it are renting a car and going home to the village with the family. Since the beginning of this month, the demand for Noah, Hiace and other private cars has been increasing," he added.

Around 50 trips have been made every day using Sheba's platform in the last few days, which is twofold that before Eid when the situation was normal.

"Usually, the fare increases by 10-15 per cent centring Eid. However, in the current situation, the rent has increased by another 20 per cent over that," said Sajib.

Abdul Alek, owner of the Central Business Center & Rent A-Car, said the demand for trips before Eid this year was four to five times higher than any other year.

"I have a total of 14 cars but I can't meet the current increasing demand and had to turn down many customers," he said. A driver of a private car claimed that they had to pay bribes to some police personnel at some check posts as such transport services outside Dhaka are now restricted due to the lockdown. This is also a reason for the increase in rent.

Mir Istiar Hossain, owner of the Mir Rent-a-Car on Green Road of the capital, said requests started flooding in from the beginning of this month.

"Especially, the big minibuses are all booked, not a single one is available till Eid."

"Usually, we would make 20 trips every day in the 10 days before Eid," Hossain said. Now the situation is that there is a demand for 100 cars every day. It used to cost Tk 6,000 to go from Dhaka to Sirajganj. Now it has increased to over Tk 12,000.

# Khulna, Barishal traders pleased by customer turnout

FROM PAGE B4

Saidur Rahman Shahin, owner of M Ali Cloth Store, said no new designs for dresses or other clothing were brought in this season. Instead, they continue to offload previous stocks through online sales.

In the past, Tk 10 to 12 lakh of apparel products were sold daily during the seven-day lead up to Eid. Now though, the number has come down to just Tk 7 to 8 lakh.

"We don't expect more sales this time around and we're happy just to pay our staff," Shahin added.

A seller of Topten, a popular clothing brand, said that sales are going well even though no one is buying expensive clothes at the moment.

Saidur Rahman Rintu, president of the Barishal Chamber of Commerce and Industry, said sales were a bit lower this year as long-distance and inter-district transport is closed.

To resolve the issue, he demanded the immediate reopening of such transport facilities.

He went on to say that a considerable number of people in Barishal division have been unable to conduct their Eid shopping due to financial constraints amid the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic.

# Payments industry must continue evolving and innovating

FROM PAGE B4

It can help companies reform and adopt relevant go-to-market strategies by delivering necessary insights.

By creating a unique digital identity for every customer, companies can easily provide a more engaging and personal experience and improve security efficiency.

Innovation and value propositions must align with the new normal of seamless and frictionless digital commerce. As the consumer experience becomes a major competitive differentiator, the payments industry must keep evolving to cater to changing preferences and expectations without compromising safety and security.

We have seen digital payments in e-commerce double in Bangladesh from 15 per cent before the pandemic to 35 per cent now. There has been a surge in merchant categories like grocery, electronics, drugs and pharmacies, wallet loading, hotels and food delivery.

Now, it is time to allow a 5 per cent incentive by the government for digital modes of payments – 3 per cent to users and 2 per cent to the merchants for accepting digital payments. We recommend that this incentive is allowed for the next three years starting from the upcoming budget.

Debit cards should be allowed for contactless payments to ensure more frictionless payments. Credit card acquisition should be simplified, and traveller's quota should be increased to \$25,000 per year.

These efforts will help the people of Bangladesh embrace the new normal and provide an impetus to the nation's goals for financial inclusion and fulfil the 'Digital Bangladesh' vision.

The author is country manager of Mastercard Bangladesh.

# Japanese investors sanguine about business potential in Bangladesh

FROM PAGE B4

DS: Why are Japanese companies interested in investing in Bangladesh? What are the barriers that Bangladesh need to remove to attract more Japanese investment?

Naoki: Bangladesh exhibits tremendous development potential due to its advantageous geographical location in Asia, linking India and the Asean. The Japanese companies will look at the advantages of Bangladesh, such as labour cost, skills availability, logistics, infrastructure, and benefits of EPZs and special economic zones.

Undoubtedly, Japanese investors have high hopes for the business potential in Bangladesh, in readymade garment, power and energy sectors, and other sectors such as ICT, light engineering, pharmaceutical, and agro-based industry.

DS: How do you look at the Japanese Special Economic Zone in Bangladesh?

Naoki: The development of the Japanese Economic Zone in Araihaazar also makes Bangladesh a more attractive destination for Japanese investment. To that end, direct and indirect incentives are required, including corporate tax incentives.

Also crucial is coordinated improvement in investment climate among relevant

ministries and authorities. Then, I believe the Araihaazar Economic Zone will become the No.1 investment destination among many other economic zones in Asia.

Bangladesh has the advantage of attracting Japanese companies as they intend to diversify their production bases. Besides, the Beza Japan office is eager to assist Japanese companies in enhancing the bilateral business relationship.

The Bangladesh Economic Zones Authority (Beza) and Japanese trading giant Sumitomo Corporation have jointly established a new special purpose company (SPC) to run the economic zone. The Jica has provided 21.1 billion Japanese yen for the SEZ in 2015 and 2019 through a yen loan.

The SPC will commence its own development work and sales activity from the end of 2021 and start its operation before the end of 2022. Once the whole development project is complete, the economic zone will accommodate dozens to 100 companies.

Araihaazar will soon become a game-changer to accelerate FDI to Bangladesh, particularly Japanese direct investment. This zone by itself will be a \$1 billion investment project.

# 200 RMG factories yet to pay salary, bonus

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"Hopefully all the payments would be made by tomorrow (Wednesday) as we are also working with the banks to convince them into giving loans to small factories," Hassan added.

Regarding the holidays, he said the factory owners have been allowing extended holidays to the workers in consultation with them. The government has also agreed on extended holidays but on condition it is in consultation between workers and factory management.


Nazma Akter, president of the Sammilito Garment Stramik Federation, a workers' platform, also said more than 90 per cent of factories have paid the salary and bonus to the workers so far.

"We have been receiving phone calls and complaints from workers of different factories that they were yet to be paid," Akter told The Daily Star.

The workers have been working amid the risk of contracting Covid-19 and during the month of fasting. So they need to be paid properly and timely, Akter said.

Many workers have been suffering on the way to their village homes because of a lack of public transports on the roads and highways, she said. Akter demanded justice, condemning police firing rubber bullets on workers of Ha-Meem Group on May 10.

Md Nasir Uddin, inspector general of the Department of Inspection for Factories and Establishments, could not be reached by phone for comment.



## বরিশাল সিটি কর্পোরেশন

নগর ভবন, বরিশাল

Web: [barishalcity.gov.bd](http://barishalcity.gov.bd)

প্রকৌশল বিভাগ

### দরপত্র বিজ্ঞপ্তি

ক্রমিক নং	কাজের নাম	দরপত্রের তফসিলের মূল্য (টাকা)	দরপত্র নিরাপত্তা জামানত (টাকা)	কার্য সমাপ্তির সময়সীমা (দিন)
১।	মন্ত্রণালয়/বিভাগ	৪,০০০/-	৬,৭০,০০০/-	১৮০ দিন
২।	সংস্থার নাম	৪,০০০/-	৬,৭০,০০০/-	১৮০ দিন
৩।	দরপত্র আস্থানকারী	৪,০০০/-	৬,৭০,০০০/-	১৮০ দিন
৪।	সংগ্রহ পদ্ধতি	৪,০০০/-	৬,৭০,০০০/-	১৮০ দিন
৫।	তহবিল ও খাত	৪,০০০/-	৬,৭০,০০০/-	১৮০ দিন
৬।	দরপত্র আস্থান নং ও তারিখ	৪,০০০/-	৬,৭০,০০০/-	১৮০ দিন
৭।	দরপত্র যোগ্যতা	৪,০০০/-	৬,৭০,০০০/-	১৮০ দিন
৮।	দরপত্র তফসিল প্রাদানের স্থান	৪,০০০/-	৬,৭০,০০০/-	১৮০ দিন
৯।	দরপত্র প্রকাশের তারিখ	৪,০০০/-	৬,৭০,০০০/-	১৮০ দিন
১০।	দরপত্র বিক্রয় আরম্ভের তারিখ ও সময়	৪,০০০/-	৬,৭০,০০০/-	১৮০ দিন
১১।	দরপত্র দাখিলের স্থান	৪,০০০/-	৬,৭০,০০০/-	১৮০ দিন
১২।	দরপত্র খোলার স্থান	৪,০০০/-	৬,৭০,০০০/-	১৮০ দিন
১৩।	দরপত্র ক্রয়ের শেষ তারিখ ও সময়	৪,০০০/-	৬,৭০,০০০/-	১৮০ দিন
১৪।	দরপত্র দাখিলের শেষ তারিখ ও সময়	৪,০০০/-	৬,৭০,০০০/-	১৮০ দিন
১৫।	দরপত্র খোলার তারিখ ও সময়	৪,০০০/-	৬,৭০,০০০/-	১৮০ দিন
১৬।	কাজের সংক্ষিপ্ত বিবরণ	৪,০০০/-	৬,৭০,০০০/-	১৮০ দিন

**১৭। শর্তাবলী:**

ক) পাবলিক প্রকিউরমেন্ট আইন ২০০৬ ও তদধীন প্রণীত বিধিমালা ২০০৮ অনুসরণ করা হবে। উল্লেখ্য, স্থানীয় সরকার বিভাগের ১৬/০৮/২০১৬খিঃ তারিখের ৪৬,০৩৯,০১৮.০০.০০.০১৫.২০১৫-১৪০৩নং স্মারকের পত্রের নির্দেশনা মোতাবেক পাবলিক প্রকিউরমেন্ট আইন, ২০০৬ সনের ২৪নং আইনের ধারা ৩১ এর সংশোধিত/সংশোধিত উপ-ধারা (৩) ও (৪) অনুসরণে “(৩) উন্মুক্ত দরপত্র পদ্ধতির অধীন অভ্যন্তরীণ কার্য ক্রয়ের ক্ষেত্রে কোন দরদাতা কর্তৃক দরপত্রে দাপ্তরিক প্রাক্কলিত ব্যয় ১০% (শতকরা দশভাগ) এর অধিক কম বা অধিক বেশি দর উদ্ধৃত করা হলে উক্ত দরপত্র বাতিল বলিয়া গণ্য হইবে, (৪) উপধারা (৩) এ উল্লেখিত দরপত্র মূল্য সমতার ক্ষেত্রে বিধি দ্বারা নির্ধারিত পদ্ধতিতে মূল্যায়ন ও কৃতকার্য দরদাতা নির্বাচিত করিতে হইবে কিন্তু লটারির মাধ্যমে কৃতকার্য দরদাতা নির্বাচন করা যাবে না।”

খ) দরপত্রের তফসিলের নির্ধারিত মূল্য সিডি/বিডি/পিও মেয়র, বরিশাল সিটি কর্পোরেশনের অনুকূলে জমা দিয়ে নির্ধারিত অফিস থেকে ক্রয় করতে হবে।

গ) টেন্ডার সংক্রান্ত যাবতীয় তথ্য অফিস চলাকালীন সময়ে নিম্নস্বাক্ষরকারীর দপ্তর থেকে সংগ্রহ করা যাবে।

ঘ) দরপত্রের সহিত সংযুক্ত অতিরিক্ত শর্তাবলী যথাযথভাবে অনুসরণ করতে হবে।

ঙ) দরপত্র খোলার সময় দরদাতা/প্রতিনিধিগণ উপস্থিত থাকতে পারবেন।

চ) নির্বাচিত প্রতিনিধীকে চুক্তিবদ্ধ হওয়ার পূর্বেই যে কোন তফসিলী ব্যাংক থেকে উদ্ধৃত দরের শতকরা ৫ (পাঁচ) ভাগ হারে পে-অর্ডার/ব্যাংক গ্যারান্টি কার্যসম্পাদন জামানত (Performance Guarantee) হিসেবে (চুক্তিবদ্ধ কাজ সমাপ্ত না হওয়া পর্যন্ত অপ্রত্যাহারযোগ্য) নিম্নস্বাক্ষরকারীর দপ্তরে জমা দিতে হবে।

ছ) কর্তৃপক্ষ যে কোন দরপত্র গ্রহণ বা সকল দরপত্র বাতিল করার ক্ষমতা সংরক্ষণ করেন।

জ) তহবিল প্রাপ্তি সাপেক্ষে বিল পরিশোধ করা হবে।

নির্বাহী প্রকৌশলী  
বরিশাল সিটি কর্পোরেশন  
বরিশাল

জিডি-৯৫২