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From the Desk of the Editor

It's time to understand our role & responsibility

When the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic disease has posed a serious threat to global human health and the India, our neighbouring country is messed with rising death toll, then most people in Bangladesh are ignoring health guidelines. Though some people follow these guidelines scrupulously, a majority of Indians don't think twice before flouting them. Something as simple as a mask is often not worn because people say it's unhealthy or that it's not going to make much of a difference. On the occasion of Eid-ul-Fitre, the rush of homebound people at different ferry ghats and crowd in Eid markets is the bright example of such ignorance which may invite disaster in the days ahead.

When health systems are overwhelmed, both direct mortality from an outbreak and indirect mortality from vaccine-preventable and treatable conditions increase dramatically. Bangladesh will need to make difficult decisions to balance the demands of responding directly to COVID-19, while simultaneously engaging in strategic planning and coordinated action to maintain essential health service delivery, mitigating the risk of system collapse.

The government from its part has requested all citizens to maintain health guidelines. Some of the mandatory measures such as wearing a mask in public spaces, social distancing, self-isolation or quarantining (in both symptomatic or asymptomatic cases) and getting tested if showing symptoms are some of the important guidelines we are expected to follow. Apart from this, we are also expected to wash our hands frequently; sanitise our living and work spaces, including the surfaces we frequently touch during the course of our activities.

It is time, we, the citizens of Bangladesh, understand our own role and responsibility in limiting the spread and transmission of Covid-19.

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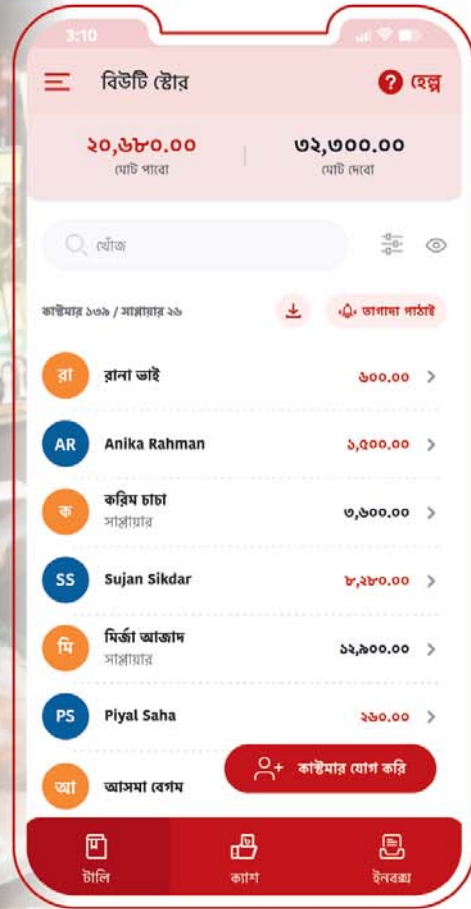
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Message from CHAIRMAN

Pay Heed To The Current Health Advice

Muslims around the world are going to celebrate a subdued Eid al-Fitr on Thursday or Friday, marking the end of the holy month of Ramadan under the shadow of the coronavirus pandemic. The three-day holiday that begins with the sighting of the moon is usually a time for travel, family gatherings and feasts after weeks of dawn-to-dusk fasting.

As the second wave of covid-19 pandemic has hit Bangladesh, this time we will pray at home, our celebrations would be quieter and touch with worry about the virus and the effect of the lock downs and other restrictions put in place to try and curb the spread of COVID-19. It's been 1,400 years since the Islam religion was founded ... even our elders could never imagine that we will have to celebrate Eid in such a way.

However, as citizens- call it common sense or call it 'self-leadership'- we all have a responsibility to heed the current health advice or risk increasingly severe government restrictions.

May this Eid brings you joys unlimited, may all your wishes come true on this holy day and may you and your family be blessed by the grace of Allah. Eid ul-Fitr Mubarak! Let this special occasion of Eid adorn your life with the colors of heaven. I wish a wonderful Eid day for you and your family.

Faruk Ahmed

Bangladesh Journalists' Foundation For Consumers & Investors (BJFCI) is the largest platform of senior journalists working in leading dailies of Bangladesh. It's members are working as Editors, Executive Editors, Economic Editors, Business Editors, News Editors, Chief Reporters, Special Correspondents and Senior Reporters/Sub Editors and committed to protect the rights of consumers and interest of inclusive investors through media interventions. BJFCI raises voice for the rights of consumers and promotes growth finance sector, digital innovations and mobile financial services in line with its vision to build a fair financial society for a better Bangladesh with inclusive growth.

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IFIC AAMAR ACCOUNT: A Game Changer In Banking Landscape

Shamim Ara

A comedian once said "Banks lend you an umbrella when it is sunny and take it away when it rains".

But those days have gone. In today's interconnected digital world, banking is changing too fast keeping the customers at central focus and banks are trying to satisfy their customers playing role of an honest friend in their needs with many product and service innovations.

IFIC AMAR ACCOUNT is a bright example of such innovation. The account is first of its kind in the banking landscape of Bangladesh that offers its customers both deposit and loan facility against a single account.

"Today, business and life are like a bank account you can't take out more than you put in", said Mr. Ahmed, a small businessman living in the capital city Dhaka. "Money is a terrible master but an excellent servant also", he said. "Banks are now customer centric as a matter of survival".

Hit by the ongoing devastating Covid-19 pandemic, Mr. Ahmed was about to close down his firm for lack of a sum of cash he needed urgently to run his business and explore an opportunity to sustain his business. When he discussed his problems with the branch manager of IFIC Bank, Nayapolton branch, he saw a light at the end of the tunnel.

And this light was nothing but an innovative bank account- IFIC AAMAR ACCOUNT he opened some months back. "It is a unique transactional account where one can avail both deposit and loan facilities with a unique customer centric policy- Earn more as your Saving's grow", Mr. Ahmed said.

Mr. Ahmed found that he has a good amount of deposits with high interest income and can avail a sum of money as loan enough to meet his urgent needs. Bank manager instantly disbursed his loan money within a few minutes, which he invested in his business immediately to earn a hefty profits.

"It's an Interest bearing current account that reduces account operation cost with lots of attractive



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benefits. Deposit and loan facility is available against a single account. Low Interest rate. No hidden charges", he said.

For Reaz Ahmed, a shop owner in a shopping mall, IFIC AAMAR ACCOUNT is "a lender of the last resort" that gives money quickly in any urgent needs. " I deposit money regularly and borrow occasionally within my limit. With my mobile phone, I operate my accounts that helps me to reduce interest expense", he said.

Customers can also operate this account with their mobile phone thanks to IFIC bank app which is robust and easy to operate. Slab wise attractive interest rate which is calculated daily and paid monthly is the most attractive feature of this innovative bank account.

Mr. Shah A Sarwar, Managing Director and CEO of IFIC bank launched this banking innovation in September 24, 2016 with a simple ceremony. And the journey of this new product gained momentum within a span of time thanks to his One Stop Service model in the branches for the first time in Bangladesh.

In 2020, the bank introduced free ATM withdrawal for IFIC AAMAR ACCOUNT from any ATM around the country. Since then, millions of people of all walks of lives like businessman, industrialist, professionals, service holder, retired persons, landlords and even farmers and house wives flocks to the IFIC Bank to enjoy benefits of this innovative bank account.

Aamar Account balance stood at BDT 1,456.49 crore with a total of 99,399 no. of accounts in 2019. It is growing geometrically day by day, IFIC bank officials said.

"It's really a game changer in banking landscape", said Mrs Tahera Begum, a housewife residing at Malibagh area under Dhaka city. Her husband works in Malaysia and suggested her to open this account.

"It gives me trust and confidence. Hassle free transaction. High deposit rates with daily interest calculation helped me to build a strong financial base within a short time", Tahera Begum said.

Mrs. Shirin Akhter, an executive of a multinational company has also opened IFIC AAMAR ACCOUNT for, what she said, its unique benefits and operational advantages. " Not only lucrative interest, I can operate this account without visiting bank branch. I can manage my funds with mobile phone".

" I had a deposit account with post office where interest rate dropping. I had no scope to borrow money from the post office to meet my urgent needs", she said.

IFIC bank officials said that 75.64% of AAMAR ACCOUNT holders live in urban areas while 24.36% live in rural areas. Among the account holders, 47.56% are service holders, 18.51% are businessmen and industrialists, 11.32% are house wives and 3.79% are land lord and lady.

At its core, banking is not simply about profit, but about personal relationships. Consumer banking - selling debt to middle class families - has been a gold mine. The challenge for banks is providing value that are comfortable paying for.

"Never spend your money before you have earned it", said Mofazzol Hossain, an executive of a private company. " I have learned it from IFIC bank after enjoying the benefits of IFIC AAMAR ACCOUNT", he said.

Mr. Hossain opened his account with monthly deposit instalment of Tk 10,000 in 2020. After one and half years, he was in need of urgent money at a time when his wife was rushed to the hospital. He borrowed Tk 80,000 against his deposits through IFIC AAMAR ACCOUNT within a short time that enabled him to pay hospital bills timely.

" I borrowed money at 12 per cent interest rate- while bank gives me 10 per cent interest against my deposits. Within a few months I paid loan amount as my loan actually bears only 2 per cent interest", he said.

"Interesting thing is that the branch gave me a loan within half an hour keeping my deposit scheme alive. It is growing day by day and giving me a good signal to my future", Hossain said with a smile. ■

bKash becomes a happy tone to millions of jakat receivers

7 lakh customers donated 200 million Taka to 50 organizations

by Fardin Ishrak Ahmed

Rahima Begum, aged 50 is a widow of Munsobdi village under Matlab upzila of Chandpur district remains alerts when her bkash account rings. She lost her husband two years back and facing hardship to maintain her live with two minor children. With bkash she sometimes receive donations from her affluent relatives who live in different cities.

As Eid is knocking at the door, Rahima Begum already has received some money as donations from her cousins and is expecting zakat funds from more relatives. So, she kept her ears alert to hear bkash ring tone.

"bkash is not just a mobile financial service, its a happy tone to me", she said.

"My relatives love me a lot and always help me in my troubles times. But in this pandemic time, they are far

away from me. bKash helped to get donations and zakat funds from them", she said with a smile.

Rahima Begum is not alone. Millions of underprivileged and poor people are now alert to hear bkash ring tone in these days when millions of people across the country are going to celebrate Eid ul Fitre, the largest religious festival of Muslim community.

"I have received Tk 5000 yesterday from my son in law through bKash app on the occasion of Eid", Ramzan Sheikh, a day labourer residing in Gazipur, the up skirt of Dhaka city said.

"My former boss sent this money as zakat from Chottogram. I expect y relatives will also help me donating some cash to my bkash account as they know I now unable to maintain my family in these pandemic days", he said.





Eid, the biggest religious festival of Muslims, brings the opportunity for the well-off to stand by the underprivileged people through donations including Zakat and Fitra. Over the past few years, many people have been providing financial aid to various charity organizations and individuals through bKash especially during the Eid festival.

"bKash becomes a happy toneto millions of jakat receivers", said Faruk Ahmed, chairman of BJFCI-Bangladesh Journalists' Foundation for Consumers & Investors, the largest platform of senior journalists of leading dailies and media.

"Last year BJFCI donated Tk 1.50 lakh as Eid gift to 30 journalists on the occasion of Eid festival under the corona pandemic through bKash. bKash donation platform has bridged the gap between recipient and dono ", he said.

bKash added 'Donation' icon to its app to make the donation process easier and more systematic. This initiative has enhanced the capacity of the charity organizations to collect donations and enabled the customers to donate more conveniently while sitting at home amid this pandemic.

Since then, bkash officials said 7 lakh customers have donated worth 200 million Taka approximately to 50 organizations till now.

bKash has become a partner to many charity organizations by providing a platform to collect donations for the disadvantaged people. In this context, Kishore Kumar Das, Founder and Chairman of the renowned Bidyanondo Foundation said that bKash has made it easier for our millions of well-wishers to stand by us and donate.

"We have continued our efforts to stand by the people with the small yet meaningful participation of all segments of the society. Technology as the likes of bKash gives us more courage to take this movement forward. We hope for the continued cooperation of all."

At present, bKash users can donate to many organizations such as: Anjuman Mufidul Islam, Bangladesh Thalassemia Foundation, BRAC, Center for Zakat Management, Dhaka Ahsania Mission, Ek Takay Ahar, Esho Sabai, Bagladesh Liberation War Museum, Mastul Foundation, Mojar School, National Liver Foundation of Bangladesh, Obhizatrik Foundation, Quantum Foundation, Sajida Foundation and Shakti Foundation for Disadvantaged Women-Donation.

bKash donation platform has bridged the gap between recipient and donor. Through bKash, one can easily give Zakat/Fitra or make voluntary donations from any part of the country at any time for the welfare of the people in need.

Many marginalized people wait year-long to receive zakat, many become self-sufficient by using the money while others dream to build new home, fulfil basic needs or secure the future of children. By providing zakat through bKash, anybody can be involved in such great initiative to change the lives of many and change the society as well.

To donate, customers need to select 'Donation' from 'More' icon in the bKash app. Then the preferred organization is to be selected. The amount of donation has to be entered in the next step with donor's name and email ID.

If the customers want, they can also keep their identity hidden by selecting 'unwilling to reveal identity' option. After tapping on 'submit' and entering PIN number, the donation process will be completed. In the last screen, customers can see the receipt acknowledgement message.

Customers will get the opportunity to know detailed information about the organization in the next screen after selecting it. Donors can also contact the email shown in that screen if they are interested to know more about the expenditure of the donation. ■

Mobile Banking Leading Eid Shopping

Faruk Ahmed

The Baily Star, a famous shopping mall at Baily Road of Dhaka city was less crowded with shoppers at noon on Monday. In the past, a sales man said this pre-Eid time market remained crowded with huge shoppers. The second wave of Covid-19 pandemic kept most people at their homes.

But salesmen of most shops said they are happy with these sales volume and thanked the government to open shops under the ongoing lockdown. The reason is that people are buying Eid products from them through online. Mobile banking facilities enables them to pay from their homes after receiving products delivered by the shops.

"Its an amazing shopping experiences for thee first time I enjoyed", said a sales man with a smile. " Our spot sales volume is below our expected level, but our online sales volume is beyond our expectation", he said.

The Eid shopping is gaining momentum across the country despite a spike in second wave of COVID-19. The important city's shopping malls located at Malibagh, New Market, Kawran Bazar, Mirpur and old city seem fully crowded where the violations of the standard operating procedures against coronavirus and lockdown continue unabated.

The holy Ramadan is near to end the fasting of millions of Muslims who spend more than billions of taka this time to buy goods for them and gifts for their near and dear ones. And mobile apps that allow them contact less payment to shops in almost everywhere in Bangladesh.

Banks are not sitting idle. They are offering lucrative cash incentives and bonus to the Eid shoppers in

mobile banking transactions. This has pushed up e-commerce transactions and changing retail landscape of Bangladesh. Leading banks say the volume of digital transactions has already jumped in recent days on the occasion of Eid festival.

Millions of younger millennium consumers are now preferring to pay with mobile phone in their shopping to enjoy lucrative offers announced by digital payment operators. Salesmen of super stores, shopping malls and even grocery shops say the





volume of mobile payment particularly with bKash app is increasing day by day as this is more convenience, secure and smart way to pay.

Since Covid-19 hit the country, commercial banks have been engaged in e-commerce or related online activities after the government slapped lockdown-like restrictions in the wake of the deadly second wave that caused an alarming spike in Covid-19 infections and deaths.

Two weeks after getting the government's nod to relax the restrictions, the banks came forward and joined hands with the traders, who opened the shutters of their businesses at the city's prime business centres and shopping malls.

Some banks unleashed their erstwhile offers and some are adopting a slow-go policy because they are still fearful of Covid-19 contagion and exercising caution in terms of allowing in-person sales. Most of the banks are offering discounts, cashback, and buy-one-get-one free buffet/takeaway (dining and iftar) offers besides their online facilities, as restrictions begin to be relaxed.

Dhaka Bank Ltd, BRAC Bank, Mutual Trust Bank Ltd, Bank Asia, Eastern Bank Ltd and Standard Chartered are working on building tie-ups with various merchants to come up with cashback and discount offers on cashless transactions before and after Eid.

Mobile Banking Leads Eid Shopping

People spend billions of taka in Eid markets every year and people working abroad this time send millions of foreign currencies as remittance to their families mostly living in villages. And banks are delivering remittance quickly through mobile banking channels.

In this race, mobile financial service (MFS) operators are playing leading role as more than 60 million

people across the country are using this tool to meet their needs and receive government's various aid funds. Most banks have joined hands with bKash to facilitate their customers digital shopping, send receive money quickly in their needs at affordable cost.

"With bKash app, people are buying goods from shops and commercial banks are sending remittance to the recipients living in villages and even in remote haor and chor areas where banks are yet to reach", Shamsuddin Haider Dalim, Head of Corporate Communications of bKash Limited said.

bKash, a Brac Bank subsidiary, is the leading MFS player in Bangladesh with more than 30 millions customers across the country. Rocket of Dutch Bangla



Bank and Nagad of Bangladesh Post office are also active in this race.

bKash is offering up to 40% instant cashback on Eid shopping, iftar and grocery payment. Eid shoppers are enjoying 5 to 40 percent instant cashback on bKash payment at around 4,500 shopping outlets across the country on the occasion of Ramadan and the upcoming Eid-ul-Fitr.

And this has put magical impact on bKash transactions, which has increased significantly since the government reopened shops last month to

facilitate people eid shopping for their near and dears.

Another reason for such growth is donation and Eid money are now being sent through MFS tool. bKash officials said 7 lakh customers have donated worth 200 million Taka approximately to 50 organizations till now.

A large number of poor people living in rural areas are waiting to receive 'eid money' from their relatives and social and political leaders through mobile phones. bKash added 'Donation' icon to its app to make the donation process easier and more systematic.

This initiative has enhanced the capacity of the charity organizations to collect donations and enabled the customers to donate more conveniently while sitting at home amid this pandemic.

Not only MFS transaction has gone up. Volume of ATM transactions also increased in recent time. Dutch Bangla bank officials said they witnessed higher transactions through their ATM booths in recent days as more people are preferring to buy goods online in these pandemic situation.

To attract Eid shoppers, other MFS operators have already offered cash back offers ranging, discounts and bonuses to shoppers on the occasion of Eid shopping. Many shops also offer discount and other facilities to attract online buyers ahead of the biggest religious festival of Muslims.

Digital hopping through mobile banking and plastic cards is now a craze in Bangladesh. This pushed up e-shopping by 30 per cent last year, according to e-Cab association, an association of more than 900 e-shops.

"The number of e-shopping delivery orders was nearly 20,000 a day last year, which is now more than 25,000. "The yearly turnover of the country's online shopping is Tk 8-Tk 10 billion," said the general secretary of e-CAB.

The main reason for this upward e-shopping trend is mobile payment apps which is very easy, convenient, secured, robust very user friendly. Another obvious reason is most people fear to carry cash mostly in festival time as muggers are too active in roads and in front of ATM booths. So, they use bKash app.

"Before start shopping, I load up my bKash account as this save me a lot of trouble with online shopping and the times I run out of cash at stores that do not accept cards", Tomal, residing in Shanti Nagor said. With bKash app, I feel easy to complete my shopping as most shoppers now accept bKash payment.

Another reason for more use of bKas app is its lucrative cash back offer and people do not prefer to carry cash fearing Covid-19 contamination.

An increasing number of people, mostly city dwellers, choose e-shopping to save time as well as avoid traffic chaos and other hazards in the busy city life. Like regular shopping malls and other shopping places, online shops also offer discount and other facilities to attract buyers ahead of the biggest religious festival of Muslims.

As a result, more shoppers particularly younger millennium consumers are preferring to pay with mobile phone in their shopping. This is pushing up Eid shopping in everywhere from big shopping malls to moving retailers at footpaths. ■



Millions of poor people getting PM's cash aid through bKash

Around 1 million beneficiaries will receive PM's grant through bKash

Express Report

Marginalized people who have lost their jobs during pandemic are the beneficiaries of this aid. Each family is receiving cash aid of 2,500 Taka under this humanitarian initiative of the Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina inaugurated the second phase of this financial aid program via video conferencing from Ganobhaban on May 1. Under this phase 3.6 million Covid-affected families are getting cash aid directly to their mobile financial service (MFS) accounts through G2P system.

bKash, the leading MFS player in the country with nearly 6 millions customers across the country will distribute the cash aid of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to 1.05 million low-income group families affected by Covid-19.

The beneficiary will not need to bear any cash-out charge. Utilizing the benefits of Digital Bangladesh infrastructure, once again, the money is being disbursed through MFS with transparency, swiftness and security to the real beneficiaries through verification of their NID cards.





In 2020, the Prime Minister's cash aid was successfully disbursed through bKash to one million jobless people during pandemic, and this time also the cash aid is reaching to the beneficiaries' bKash accounts within next few days.

"In a unique initiative of the prime minister to stand by families who have lost their livelihoods, financial aid will be provided to each of them before the Eid, bKash said in a media release.

Each family is receiving cash aid of 2,500 Taka under this humanitarian initiative of the Prime Minister. The money is being disbursed digitally with transparency, swiftness, and security to the real victims through verification of NID cards", it said.

During the month of Ramadan and the Eid festival, this money will bring relief to the families and help them greatly in case of emergency. The government will pay

Tk15 from the total cash-out charge, while the remaining Tk31.25 will be borne by bKash.

With the farsighted decision of the government, bKash said, it is becoming possible to disburse financial aid conveniently among the affected families amid such a critical situation.

This is a significant step towards building Digital Bangladesh. Last year too, bKash successfully distributed the cash aid of the prime minister to nearly 1 million families.

The government, however, will pay 15 Taka from the total Cash Out charge, while the remaining 31.25 Taka will be borne by bKash. Being involved in this great initiative, bKash has taken all arrangements to enable the family members to Cash Out the money without any hassle.

With the far-sighted decision of the government, it is becoming possible to disburse financial aid conveniently among the distressed families amid such critical situation. This is a significant step towards building Digital Bangladesh and bKash is working closely with the government to achieve the vision.

bKash is also disbursing the stipends from Prime Minister's Education Assistance Trust, stipends for secondary level students, Social Safety Net allowance under Ministry of Social Welfare, allowance of Ministry of Livestock, allowance of Ministry of Women and Children Affairs, allowance of Bangladesh Cricket Board and the allowance of Ministry of Bangladesh Fire Service and Civil Defense among the beneficiaries. ■

Social safety net

7.6m poor people fail to receive govt allowance in 6 months

Express Report

Mumtaz Bawa, 68, lives in the North Bishil Balur Math slum in the capital. She has been receiving the old age allowance for the last four years. However, this allowance has been stalled for the last six months. Ambia Khatun, 63, a resident of South Paikpara in Kallyanpur area, is also facing a similar problem.

Rabbi Islam, 15, son of a garment worker couple from the same area, has been receiving disability

allowance for more than two years. His allowances too, have been stalled, his mother Fatema Begum told Prothom Alo.

They went to the bank to inquire about the delay, but could barely understand the explanation of the concerned officials. However, they were told that "their money will not be plundered."

An inquiry at the Department of Social Services into the reason behind public allowances being held up, revealed that the allowances under the social security programme have been stuck for six months due to the

digitisation process. Digital accounts of half of the beneficiaries have already been created.

Farid Ahmed Molla, additional director (social security programme) of the Department of Social Services, told Prothom Alo that a decision has been taken to provide allowances in the G2P (government to person) method through mobile financial service. They are hoping to pay all the pending allowances at a go before the Eid-ul-Fitr once the digital accounts of 80 to 90 per cent of the beneficiaries are created.

According to the finance ministry, a total of 123 social safety net programmes under various ministries are in operation in the fiscal year 2020-21, including seven new ones. It has a budget of Tk 955.74 billion (95 thousand and 574 crore).

A total of 8,850,000 beneficiaries are being provided with cash assistance under the old age allowance, allowances for widows, destitute women deserted by their husbands and disability allowance programmes in 2020-21 fiscal year through the Department of Social Services under the Ministry of Social Welfare.

This includes stipends of nearly 100,000 disabled students. A database of the beneficiaries is being

created to provide the allowances electronically through the G2P method using the management information system (MIS) software.

Mobile banking accounts are being opened countrywide through mobile financing services - bKash and Nagad - using the national identity card of the beneficiaries. All the information of the beneficiaries will be preserved in the MIS.

Shamsuddin Haider, head of corporate communications of bKash, told Prothom Alo, "bKash is verifying the data of the mobile numbers sent by the government institution by matching it with the information of national identity cards. bKash has also been asked to ensure that a same number is not included in multiple allowance programmes."

Accounts are being opened of numbers that do not have a bKash account, he added.

4.5 million digital accounts in two months

Mumtaz Bawa, a widow, lives with her son Saddam Hossain, a garment worker, in the slum. Speaking to Prothom Alo, the mother and the son said that they did not know why she is not getting the allowances.



Her fingerprint was collected last month. She was provided with a new SIM card as well. However, she does not have a mobile phone. But her son's mobile has slots for two SIM cards.

The Department of Social Services said around 7.6 million (76 lakh) beneficiaries will be provided with the allowances through mobile financing service (SFS) in the current fiscal year. About 4.5 million digital accounts of the beneficiaries have been activated till 5 April.

Upazila nirbahi officer (UNO) of Gurudaspur upazila in Natore, Md Tomal Hossain, told Prothom Alo that a total of 12,687 beneficiaries are provided with the allowances for widows and destitute women deserted by their husbands, disability allowance and freedom fighter allowances in his upazila. Some 12,108 among them have already been added to the database.

According to the Department of Social Services, the country started paying allowances through Sonali Bank, Agrani Bank, Janata Bank, Bangladesh Krishi Bank and Rajshahi Krishi Unnayan Bank from the 1997-98 fiscal year. In 495 upazilas, cities and district towns, the allowances were disbursed through 80 urban community development (UCD) units under the Department of Social Services.

Since the 2017-18 fiscal year, about 1.2 million elderly women, widowed women and women abused by their husbands and disabled beneficiaries in 77 upazilas of 21 districts have been provided with the allowances through agent banking using biometric methods.

Contract agents of Bank Asia, Modhumoti Bank Limited and NRB Commercial Bank distribute allowances through Union Digital Centre (UDC).

Speaking to Prothom Alo, the additional director (social security) of Department of Social Services, Farid Ahmed said, the beneficiaries will be able to collect their allowances at any place through mobile banking as their accounts are digitised.

Information of the beneficiaries is being verified through the national identity card server of the Election Commission before adding any account to MIS.

When asked how many have been excluded, he said they do not have any official number in this regard. However, very few have been excluded. People from the waiting list are being included in the places of those excluded.

30 pc excluded in an area

Dewan Abdul Mannan, councillor of the ward 11 in Kallyanpur, told Prothom Alo that on 24 March, beneficiaries were called to a local school ground for the digitisation of their accounts.

A total of 529 people, including 313 elderly and 216 disabled, have been added to the MIS. They all have opened Nagad accounts too.

He further said that there were about 750 beneficiaries on the previous list. Some 30 per cent have of them been excluded. When asked why they have been excluded, he said that many of them resorted to illegal means to get on the list. These discrepancies were revealed while verifying the information of the beneficiaries through the national identity card server. Some 225 people are being listed anew.

On 20 July, an observation report by the National Social Security Strategy (NSSS) said more than 46 per cent of the beneficiaries are not eligible for the allowances.

KAM Morshed, senior director of BRAC, said there are mainly three types of discrepancies regarding the disbursement of allowances - including people who do not need the allowance, excluding the eligible people from the list and taking commission from the beneficiaries.

He told Prothom Alo that it cannot be said yet how effectively the introduction of digital banking in this process would resolve these discrepancies. However, it is a positive initiative in a long term perspective.

During the first outbreak of coronavirus in the country last year, a total of 5 million people were provided with the financial assistance through mobile phones from the prime minister's fund. In that continuity, digitisation initiatives have been taken to pay the beneficiaries of social security programmes.

KAM Morshed said the discrepancies in making the list of beneficiaries of the mobile banking method could be stopped with the help of mobile operators. It could be easily determined whether a beneficiary really needs the allowance or not, by making an account of how much money a beneficiary is spending to talk over the phone in a year. ■

Lock down pushes up huge cash withdrawal from ATM booths

Express Report

Immediately after the government imposed stricter lockdown from April 21, banks faced huge cash withdrawals from their branches and ATM booths as the central bank slashed banking hour during the lockdown.

Fear that the lockdown period might be extended up to the Eid festival following rising Covid death toll India and the government's decision to seal boarder area also prompted cash withdrawals, executives of some commercial banks said.

"Now we are facing a huge rush at almost all of our branches and ATM booths," said an official of Sonali Bank. Another executive of a private bank said that they were facing huge pressure from clients. "Most of them are withdrawing cash ahead of the strict lockdown", he said.

"We are facing difficulties in handling a good number of clients waiting in long queues in front of the cash counters", he said.

People were also seen standing in queues on the streets outside the bank branches and ATM booths

amid sweltering heat. Struggling for maintaining social distancing in lines, people said they are withdrawing money to meet their urgent needs and in fear of uncertainty.

Mrs Sayma Islam, a customer of IFIC bank said that the central bank should extend banking hours. "Most banks have kept open a few number of branches when movement is strictly restricted", she said.

However, the situation has boosted digital banking operations particularly mobile banking.

Bangladesh Bank has asked all banks to focus digital banking more to avoid contact. "Bank branches, sub-branches, and its ATM booths located in the sea, land and airports, as well as customs areas should be opened at all times by consulting with the local administration and customs authorities", the central bank said in a circular.

Meanwhile, the daily withdrawal limit from ATM booths has been extended to Tk1 lakh during the strict lockdown period. The central bank asked the banks to keep adequate cash and internet services at their ATM booths to ensure uninterrupted service to their clients.



People stand in long queues inside a branch of Sonali Bank in Dhaka's Motijheel to settle their various transactions, including cash withdrawal last week ahead of the strict lockdown.

Branchless banking gaining ground

Meanwhile, a good number of banks are going towards branchless banking in recent times by way of rolling out different digital products as a part of their efforts to reach out to more people both in rural and urban areas. This helped them cut the cost of operations, said managing directors of some leading commercial banks.

The pandemic also created obstacles for banks to set up branches last year. In such a situation, both banks and customers learnt more techniques to do more branchless banking than before.

The country now faces a second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic, which has already given another boost to digital banking.



Some banks have already allowed clients to open accounts without visiting branches during the times of the pandemic to expedite branchless banking to push the clients' habit further. Customers also reduced bank visits to a great extent and preferring to settle transactions sitting from their homes by using internet or mobile app-based banking in order to protect themselves from the coronavirus.

For example, MTB, which has 118 branches across the country, has decided to expand its financial services in the remotest parts of the country riding on the digital means. The lender carrying out its banking services by collaborating with bKash and other fintechs.

"We are going to introduce a new method that will allow clients to give instalments of their deposit pension scheme (DPS) through mobile financial services (MFS) providers," a senior MTB official said.

IFIC bank officials said they recorded higher volume of transactions through online thanks to its dynamic app that enables customers to pay and transfer funds within own accounts without visiting branches.

People had been barred from going outside of their homes amidst a lockdown that had also compelled banks to close a good number of branches for the time being, leaving clients with no choice but to use technology to conduct transactions.

Online Account Opening

Digital account opening that takes a maximum of six minutes has put an end to fill out paper documents and highlights the changes in the behaviour of banks and customers brought in by the unprecedented crisis. Many people are nervous about leaving their homes, let alone visiting bank branches. They have moved to digital platforms to work, shop, communicate and get entertained.

It prompted many banks to embrace the new system based on the central bank's e-KYC (electronic know





your customers) guideline unveiled in January last year. The guideline, which was formulated just two months before the pandemic hit the country, came in handy as it let the banks and other financial institutions open accounts to help people access the essential service throughout the crisis period.

People earlier had to fill in several papers, including KYC, and submitted many documents to the bank to have an account. A willing customer has to take a picture of his or her passport-sized photograph and the national identification card using the smartphone. The images have to be uploaded to the app. The person needs to insert some information required by the app, including the name of the nominee.

Mutual Trust Bank introduced an instant bank account

opening product named "MTB Simple Account" last month. The account can be opened from any digital devices such as smartphone, laptop and desktop. The debit card will be sent to clients' address. This has helped people to a large extent carry out hassle-free banking from their home or offices.

The digital account opening will help build a less-cash society in the quickest possible time and give a boost to branchless banking in future. The digital financial inclusion programme of the government will receive a shot in the arm as well, industry experts say.

The number of deposit accounts in the banking sector stood at 12.23 crore as of December last year.

Eastern Bank Ltd introduced the product several months ago, said Ahsan Ullah Chowdhury, head of its card and digital banking department. The private commercial bank is operating the digital service under the brand name "EBL Insta Account". "We have received a huge response from clients since rolling out the product, a bank official said.

City Bank launched the digital account-opening product "Ekhoni Account" in September last year, said Mashrur Arefin, managing director of the lender. Some 17,000 clients have so far opened accounts from home.

Dutch-Bangla Bank has come up with the digital product two months ago. Bank Asia, Mercantile Bank, and Southeast Bank have already rolled out the service. IFIC Bank is also offering the service. ■



একাউন্ট খুললেই ATM কার্ড ফ্রি

সমান্বিত গ্রাহকদের ভাষ্-বাংলা ব্যাংকে একাউন্ট খুলে উপভোগ করুন সমগ্র ৭ দিন /২৪ ঘণ্টা ডিজিটাল সেনসেন সুবিধা



সুবিধা সমূহ :-

- ▶ একাউন্ট খোলার সময় কোন কোন ব্যক্তিগত তথ্য নেই।
- ▶ বিশেষ থেকে ডেবিট কার্ডের ডেলিভারি উপর ১% ছেদ।
- ▶ যে কোন শাখার জন্য ৪ টি ডেবিত কার্ডের সুবিধা।
- ▶ আন্তর্জাতিক ট্রানজেকশন DPS ও FDR বিধে ফেরা।
- ▶ সুদূরত্ব থেকে ফিরে যেতে সুযোগ
- ▶ গ্রাহক ফিরে আসলে সুবিধা নিয়ে করতে Nexus Pay
- ▶ বিশেষ সুবিধা :- ব্যক্তিগত ও ব্যবসায়ী দুটির ফিরে যেতে সুযোগ।

গ্রাহকতা : আলিপুর বাজার, মসজিদ মাঠেই ১৪ তলা, কুলাকটা, কলকাতা, পশ্চিমবঙ্গ।
 ১৯১৯-০৪২০০০, ০১৯১৯-০৬৯১৯০০

ডাব্লিউ-বাংলা ব্যাংক
 বাংলাদেশের শীর্ষস্থানীয় ব্যাংক

HSBC Bangladesh digitizes supply chain finance for supplier network

Express Report

The Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation and Unilever Bangladesh recently conducted their first transaction using HSBC's supply chain finance platform, known as the HSCF.

The HSBC Supply Chain Finance (HSCF) is an electronic platform which benefits both the bank's customers and their trade partners through automation and enhanced usability.

The digital solution provides working capital finance at competitive prices to Unilever Bangladesh and its network of suppliers, said a press release.

The solution digitizes the end-to-end process of financing the invoices raised by Unilever Bangladesh's suppliers.

No manual intervention is required from approval of the invoices to crediting the proceeds to suppliers account.

The proposition is small-to-medium-enterprise (SME) friendly as suppliers do not need to set up a credit limit, or need to change their current banking providers.



It also provides 'a single point of truth' when managing data and supports all parties to save time, reduce manual errors and provide quick and timely updates when conducting business.

"We see digitizing Unilever Bangladesh's supply chain finance as an enormous opportunity to make doing business easier not only for our customers, but their suppliers too. The ability to offer competitive working capital finance across an entire supply chain means we can deliver a better experience and add value, especially to SMEs who can realise greater potential from the speed and simplicity of our digital services," said Md Mahub ur Rahman, CEO of HSBC Bangladesh.

"We are happy to partner with HSBC who has brought such innovative solution which will yield robust and cost-effective financial services. ■

More than 2m NBL customers can now Add Money to bKash

Express Report

From now, 2.18 million account holders of National Bank Limited, the first generation bank in private sector, can transfer fund instantly to any bKash account 24/7 from anywhere without any charge.

With this latest integration, 27 commercial banks in the country are now connected to the largest Add Money network of bKash. Recently, bKash and NBL jointly launched the service.

To transfer fund, NBL account holders need to add bKash number as beneficiary first via online



banking/mobile banking app NBLiPower by filling up necessary information. Once added, customer can easily make transactions in few simple steps.

After logging in to bank account with Internet Banking user ID and password, customer needs to find 'Fund Transfer' option, go to 'bKash Transfer', select source bank account and bKash beneficiary from dropdown, insert amount and narration then click on 'Next' button after selecting preferred OTP Channel option. Customer will then need to input the OTP received in his/her selected OTP Channel and click on 'Submit' button to complete the transaction.

বিকাশ অ্যাপের
আকর্ষণীয় অফার
জানতে স্ক্যান করুন



নিজের সুরক্ষায় ঘরে থাকুন যেকোনো প্রয়োজনীয় লেনদেন বিকাশ করুন



বিকাশ অ্যাপে আসলেই ১০০ টাকা বোনাস!

অ্যাপে একাউন্ট খুলে রিচার্জে ৫০ টাকা* বোনাস
দুইবার ২৫ টাকা* রিচার্জে ৫০ টাকা ক্যাশব্যাক

কার্ড থেকে নিজের বা অন্যের বিকাশ একাউন্টে

প্রথমবার ১,০০০ টাকা বা তার বেশি অ্যাড মানি করলে
১০০ টাকা ক্যাশব্যাক*

অফারটি চলবে ১৭ মে, ২০২১ পর্যন্ত

ঘরে বসেই বিভিন্ন অনলাইন শপে

পেমেন্ট বিকাশ করলেই

১০% পর্যন্ত ক্যাশব্যাক/ডিসকাউন্ট

 ১০%	 ১০%	 ১০%	 ১০%	 ১০%	 ১০%	 ১০%	 ১০%	 ১০%
 ১০%	 ৫%	 ১০%	 ১০%	 ১০%	 ১০%	 ৫%	 ১০%	ডিসকাউন্ট

অফারটি চলবে ৩১ মে, ২০২১ পর্যন্ত

*শর্ত প্রযোজ্য

বিস্তারিত জানতে ডিজিট করুন:

www.bkash.com/bn/new_account_bonus | www.bkash.com/bn/add-money-new-user | www.bkash.com/bn/online-offers

bKash offers up to 40% instant cashback on Eid shopping, iftar and grocery payment

Express Report

Customers are enjoying 5 to 40 percent instant cashback on bKash payment at around 4,500 shopping outlets across the country on the occasion of Ramadan and the upcoming Eid-ul-Fitr. Starting on 1st May, this offer will continue till 15th May, 2021. A customer can avail maximum 300 Taka in a day and maximum 500 Taka during the whole campaign as cashback. In addition, cashback on Iftar and grocery payment at various outlets are also available.

Customers can get the offer through bKash app, USSD code *247# or payment gateway.

Customers can avail this offer by making bKash payment for purchasing various lifestyle products and services such as: accessories, clothing, e-commerce, footwear, electronics, superstore items, healthcare, restaurant/cafe, and many more. This offer includes Aarong, Anjan's, Kay Kraft, Banglar Mela, Bibiana, Deshal, Le Reve, Rong, Sadakalo, Sailor, Nogordola, Bata, Zeil's, Lotto, Orange, SaRa, LG Butterfly, Minister, Transcom, Singer, Sony Rangas, Kiva Han, Cafe Euphoria, BAO, Nawab Chatga, Baoxi Kafei, Salam's Kitchen, Khazana Sweets, Peyala, Bangla Shoppers, Boi Bichitra, Al Amin Jewellers, Baby Shop, Gentle Park, Foot Gear, Crescent, etc. and many other renowned shopping outlets.

In addition, bKash customers can enjoy Buy 1 Get 1 offer at After Hours Hotel and Resorts, Platinum Grand, Platinum Residence, Hansa- A Premium Residence, Best Western Plus Maya, Dhaka Regency, Best western Plus Maple Leaf, Asia Hotel and Resorts, Shinepukur Suites and The Way Dhaka. However, customers can avail Buy 1 Get 3 offer on bKash payment at Long Beach Suites Dhaka. Starting on 25th April, the offer will be valid till 14th May, 2021 and available through bKash APP & USSD code *247#.

bKash is also offering up to 40% discount on various Iftar deals at Hotel Radisson, Hotel Sarina, Grace 21, Paragon Convention Hall, Munchery, Beans & Grills,



Hotel Noorjahan Grand, Hotel Fountain and Adi Ashta Banjan Restaurant to make Iftar more enjoyable during this month of Ramadan. The offer will be valid till May 15, 2021.

In order to make payment through bKash app, customer has to type the merchant number by tapping on the 'Make Payment' icon on the home screen or by going to the merchant point and scanning the QR code directly. Customers can easily go to the 'Offers' section of the bKash app as well and check the ongoing offers around them.

To know more details of the 500 Taka cashback offer, customers can visit bKash website: <https://www.bkash.com/payment/>.

On the occasion of Eid, more offers are there for bKash customers. There is a 10% discount available on payment of Walton products at selected outlets across the country. In addition, if a customer purchases a Walton air conditioner, s/he will get a discount of 3,111 Taka which is worth 6 months' electricity bill.

Customers can avail 5% cashback on bKash payment for groceries at the top superstores such as: Shwapno, Daily Shopping, Agora, Meena Bazar, Prince Bazar, Unimart, Gourmet Bazar, etc. A customer will get a maximum cashback of 250 Taka during the offer period upon payment above 1000 Taka or more. The offer will be valid till May 15, 2021. ■

Foodpanda users can now make bKash payment

Foodpanda and bKash partnership to take cashless payment to the next level

Express Report

Food Panda users from now on can pay bills through bKash as both the company has made a unique partnership to serve foodpanda users and foster cashless journey in Bangladesh.

Now, people from anywhere can buy their favorite meals, essentials, or kitchen goodies using foodpanda, and can pay their bills simply with a few taps of the screen with the bKash payment module, said a press release.

To do this, customers have to add their bKash account details to their list of saved payment methods. Once their account details have been added, customers are free to go cashless as they wish.

Users choosing bKash payment will also be able to enjoy exclusive offers in the coming days.

During the month of May, foodpanda users can obtain a discount of 40% off up to BDT 70 on minimum order of BDT 100 by using the code FPBKASH70 on restaurants. On pandamart, customers will receive a





5% discount, up to BDT 50, on minimum order value of BDT 500 by using the code FPBKASH50.

"Digital payment is fast, reliable and more convenient than cash transactions. We enabled digital payment on foodpanda years back, and now we are introducing bKash payment to ensure that a broader customer base is able to enjoy the convenience of cashless payment", Ambareen Reza, Managing Director and Co-founder of foodpanda Bangladesh said after

signing the deal with bKash recently in the city.

"I believe having bKash as a payment partner will further improve accessibility and convenience for our customers."

Mizanur Rashid, Chief Commercial Officer of bKash is also optimistic about the new partnership noting that will bring more convenience to the life of foodpanda users throughout Bangladesh.

"bKash payment module on the foodpanda platform will provide a thousands of foodpanda customers with access to the world of digital payments and enjoy service from their home and offices', he said.

"Our partnership between foodpanda and bKash not only aims to enhance the experience for consumers but also enables the two organizations to widen their scope and appeal to customers who have previously been reluctant to try out the new methods and simpler alternatives', he said.

From payment of utility bills to ordering food online, cashless payment has been adopted by individuals across the country due to the security, transparency and convenience it offers.

Online food delivery platform foodpanda enabled cashless payments a long time ago. The recent pandemic has exposed the health risks that come with carrying or handling cash bills, which are passed around with little regard for hygiene. ■

LankaBangla Finance launched “Shikha” Chatbot

LankaBangla Finance Limited has launched ‘Shikha’ chatbot, a virtual assistance to provide faster, improved and convenient services to the customers. Managing Director and CEO of LankaBangla Finance Limited Mr. Khwaja Shahriar said, “We at LankaBangla has been working relentlessly on updating technology for better service quality. As part of this effort- we have launched the “Shikha” chatbot. Customer will get balance information of deposit, loans, and credit card mini statement, Online Application for deposit, loan and credit card, Recharging mobile balances, and Customers will also be able to know about other different Product Features through

“Shikha” Chatbot. The service will be available from the official website www.lankabangla.com



More than 3.5m small traders use Tally Khata : Dr Khan

Express Report

TallyKhata, a widely used Bangla mobile app for small businesses, has recently introduced its new logo with the release of TallyKhata 3.0 with advanced features. More than 3.5 million users have already downloaded this mobile app, said Dr. Shahadat Khan, CEO of Progoti Systems said.

TallyKhata app is a brand of Progoti Systems Limited. It is available at Play Store to download or update at free of cost. That is why it is very popular among small businesses since it released version 2.0 last year.

"We want to bring the benefits of modern technology to all the businesses in Bangladesh", Dr. Khan said noting that there are more than 10 million small businesses scattered around the country.

"We have developed a simple Bangla business app TallyKhata for them. This enables a merchant to keep complete accounts of the business. It saves time and reduces hassle. It shows income-expense reports and simplifies running the business", Dr Khan said.

Many micro and small merchants such as groceries, pharmacies and wholesalers are using this app to keep record of their daily business transactions. Moreover, more than hundred merchants have



received low-interest loan facilities from banks to expand their business through a pilot project.

New features in TallyKhata 3.0 include sending tagada/reminder message to customers anytime, sending SMS when new customers are added, and customer-list view filter. Auto-logout feature will increase data security of the businesses.

Moreover, some popular features of the previous version have also been improved in this new release.

This is a completely Bangla app. It can be used with a very simple 'Dilam-Pelam' interface. Accounts are maintained automatically and income-expense reports are available. As always, TallyKhata app is completely free and can be used without Internet connection. ■



Prime Bank

Prime Bank customers can now transfer fund to bKash instantly

The customers of Prime Bank can now instantly transfer fund to Mobile Financial Service provider-bKash-through the Internet Banking Service-ALTITUDE.

Fund transfer facility from Prime Bank account to bKash has gone live from May 10, 2021, says a press release issued by Prime Bank.

To transfer fund to any bKash account, the customers will need to log in to Prime Bank internet banking portal and select "bKash Transfer" under Transfer Menu. They can transfer up to BDT 60,000 in a day. Details of transaction

limit and other terms and conditions can be found in Prime Bank website.

This new feature in Internet Banking Service - ALTITUDE - will give more fund transfer options and convenience to the customers. The integration will allow the customers to enjoy wide range of payment services of the leading MFS of the country.

The transaction is fully secured as each transaction requires OTP and PIN sent to the registered mobile number, according to the press release.