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Press Release

COVID-19: community support

Empowering the youth to fight COVID-19 by enriching digital maps

A quick look at the current list of the COVID-19 infected cases tells us that they are distributed across the country. As disease progression and the resulting countrywide lockdown continue, it is critical for our citizens to know the locations of the health facilities that will treat COVID-19 cases or treat patients for non-COVID illnesses, the pharmacies, supermarkets and convenience stores, mobile phone recharge and cash-out points, and their hours of operation. It is also important for the healthcare planners and frontline staff to determine where to plan the next isolation centres and ICUs. It is critical for the food and medicine delivery agents to know all the roads well.

The very popular Google Maps and Open Street Maps are still largely urban in Bangladesh. The rural areas are not fully laid out in these maps, and hence citizens, healthcare professionals and e-commerce delivery agents will suffer the most in rural areas because of lack of proper points of interest in the maps. The a2i Programme of the ICT Division and Cabinet Division, supported by UNDP, and Grameenphone have launched today the “Bangladesh Challenge” campaign to empower the youth of the country who are all staying at home to enrich Google Maps and Open Street Maps.

The initiative was announced at a press conference through video conferencing. Any volunteers who are interested to participate in the challenge can register at: <http://bangladeshchallenge.com> & www.corona.gov.bd. This campaign will be end at 30 April 2020.

The State Minister for ICT Division, Mr. Zunaid Ahmed Palak MP, at the launching session through online platform said, “The government of Bangladesh is proficiently handling the crisis spawned from the emergence of coronavirus and is working towards a complete recovery. However, the aid of the mass people is always a great help for the government. I thank Grameenphone for its assistance to this cause and encourage other corporate entities to do their part.” He added that proper geographical mapping in both Google Maps and Open Street Map through crowdsourcing will help the people of Bangladesh to easily track down any hospitals or pharmacies and will help the communities to make informed decisions in this crucial time of COVID-19.

a2i’s Policy Advisor Mr. Anir Chowdhury said, “We invite the energetic youth to enrich Google Maps and Open Street Maps to help citizens, health professionals and e-Commerce delivery agents who are working at the frontlines in emergency functions during the COVID-19 crisis. The youth can do the entire mapping exercise from the safety of their homes while maintaining physical distancing. We are pleased to partner with Grameenphone on this very important initiative.”

CEO of Grameenphone Mr. Yasir Azman stated, “The entire world has united to fight this highly contagious coronavirus. Each and every one of us can do our part to contribute to this struggle even from the comfort of our homes, especially the youth. We believe that this platform can play a significant role and help with the information necessary for the people in need. Grameenphone wholeheartedly expresses its gratitude for being able to partner with the government of Bangladesh, a2i and other stakeholders in this endeavour.”

The Bangladesh Challenge campaign is designed in a way that everyone can participate from home to build the information database, and everyone can avail the benefits at the same time. This is a great opportunity for the young generation to step up and help to structure their local maps. Expert Mappers will assist the volunteers throughout the whole campaign. Most of the citizens around the country are dependent on digital technology to manoeuvre through their daily lives. However, the penetration of maps around Bangladesh is not very strong. Thus, in this regard, this campaign will be of great significance.

The press conference was attended by Zunaid Ahmed Palak, State Minister for Information and Communication Technology Division; Md. Abul Kalam Azar, Former Principal Coordinator (SDG) to Hon’ble Prime Minister’s Office & President, Bangladesh Scouts; Anir Chowdhury, Policy Advisor, a2i; Yasir Azman, CEO, Grameenphone; and Arif Nezami, Founder and CEO, Preneur Lab. Different partners were also affiliated with a2i in this campaign, including Posts & Telecommunications Division, Preneur Lab, Google Developer Group, Local Guides Bangla, Bangladesh Scouts, Youth Hub, and many more.