Auto show postponed for a week

AFP, Dhaka

Bangladesh's first auto show to woo customers to buy new foreign cars rather than reconditioned ones, has been postponed for a

"The five-day show, initially set to start this Wednesday will now open on May 28," said a spokesman of the Bangladesh Automobile Distributors Association (BADA).

He attributed the delay to tech-

The show, the first of its kind in Bangladesh, is expected to showcase about 18 brands from across the world, including Mercedes Benz, Toyota, Nissan, Volvo, Fiat and India-based Maruti-Suzuki

In the past, Bangladeshis have mostly imported reconditioned cars, particularly from Japan, rather than buying new vehicles from abroad.

Citing environmental concerns the government last year banned the import of reconditioned vehicles, although under pressure from the industry allowed the trade to continue for another three years.

Dhaka Bank to receive Gulshan circle DESCO bills

Dhaka Bank Limited (DBL) on Monday signed an agreement with Dhaka Electric Supply Company Limited (DESCO) for collection of electricity bills of Gulshan circle, says a press release.

Under the agreement, electricity consumers of Gulshan, Banani, Baridhara, Uttara and Daskhinkhan areas will be able to pay their electricity bills at any branch of the bank.

Md. Mahbubul Alam Tayiab, senior vice-president, Dhaka Bank Limited, and AHM Nurul Huda, company secretary, Dhaka Electric Supply Company Limited, signed the agreement on behalf of their organisations.

Shahed Noman, managing director, Majedur Rahman and Mohammad Abu Musa, senior executive vice-presidents of Dhaka Bank, Md, Showkat Hossain, director (Finance), Md, Rafiuddin, chief accountant, AHM Nurul Huda, company secretary, and Toffazal Hossain, assistant manager (Finance) of DESCO, also attended the signing ceremony.

Iraq may break with OPEC

AFP, Washington

Iraq, which sits on the world's second-largest proven oil reserves, after Saudi Arabia, could one day drop OPEC quotas, a Pentagonappointed oil adviser to Iraq said in a newspaper report published Saturday.

"Historically, Iraq has had, let's say, an irregular participation in OPEC (Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries) quota systems," Philip Carroll told The Washington Post.

"They have from time to time, because of compelling national interest, elected to opt out of the quota system and pursue their own path. ... They may elect to do that same thing. To me, it's a very important national question," Carroll said in Baghdad.

Carroll, a former Shell Oil executive, said Iraq's priority is to meet its own energy needs. UN sanctions still block exports, except for

Tripura tea reels under twin handicaps

AFP, Agaratala, India

The tea industry in India's north-eastern state of Tripura is facing closure as separatists step up attacks and prices of the beverage crash at auctions, officials said Sunday.

"The future of the tea industry here is indeed bleak with many planters closing down their gar dens unable to bear the twin bur den of militant threats as well a slump in prices of tea in the weekly auctions, P.K. Sarkar, secretary general of the Tripura chapter of the Tea Association of India (TAI),

Plantation owners are shutting shop and leaving to avoid becom-ing easy targets for the rebels who belong to the state's indigenous tribes, he said.

The state's most powerful outlawed rebel groups, the National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT) and the All Tripura Tiger Force (ATTF), both fighting for independent tribal homelands, have long targeted the tea industry in a lucrative extortion racket.

GrameenPhone eyes 1m new subscribers in three years

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

GrameenPhone Limited plans to rope in one million more subscribers to its existing client base in the next three years hoping to bring 79 per cent areas of Bangladesh under its network, a top official of the company disclosed yesterday.

The largest cellular operator is expected to cross the magic figure of 10 lakh (one million) subscribers the end of 2003, GP's Sales and Marketing Director Mehboob Chowdhury told reporters at a luncheon meeting yesterday.

He said GP has a plan to bring all

its network as a part of its network expansion programme.

At present, GP dominates the mobile phone market with 69 per cent market share with subscriber base of 8.75 lakh.

Bangladesh has some 10.3 lakh mobile phone subsribers using services of four private operators in foreign joint venture.

Telecom Malaysia International Bangladesh (TMIB), service provider of AKTEL, enjoys 14 per cent market share, Pacific Bangladesh Telecom Limited (PBTL), service market share and Sheba Telecom

As a part of its plan to rope in additional one million subscribers, GP plans to introduce more value added services including 'agricultural news service', 'health awareness service' and 'dial a doctor for

Under the value added services, a GP subscriber will be able to know commodity prices simply by dialling a GP number, Chowdhury

GP is also in process to introduce services for blind and hearing

The services are common in Europe while it is being provided in many neighbouring countries, he

He said GP will introduce sales management system by August facilitating online subscription. Under the system, a subscriber will be able to register him/herself through the Internet and services will be extended within 10 minuets.

Chowdhury said as part of the plan GP will open more 400 sales centre all over the country to give prompt services to subscribers.



Mahbubul Alam Tara, chairman of National Credit and Commerce Bank Limited, inaugurates a fortnight-long programme to celebrate 10 years of operation of the bank at its Maghbazar branch in Dhaka on Saturday.

Businessmen seek RMG

QM Shariful Ala (2nd-L), managing director of Delta Brac Housing Finance Corporation Limited (DBH), Ishtiaq H Chowdhury (2nd-R), head of Operations of DBH, SH Aslam Habib (L), head of Finance and Resources, and Dominic D'Cruze (R), executive-Brand and Communications, are seen at a press conference yesterday ahead of the three-day DBH Property Fair-2003 beginning on Thursday.

Three-day DBH property fair from Thursday

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

With a pledge to provide prospective buyers with firsthand information on housing sector a three-day property fair begins on Thursday at Dhaka Sheraton Hotel.

Delta Brac Housing Finance Corporation Limited (DBH) is organising the fair. Holcim (Bangladesh) Ltd, Partex Group, Romana Paint and China-Bangla Ceramic Industries Limited are the cosponsors of the exhibition.

Speaking at a press conference yesterday, the organisers said success of the last two fairs has inspired them to hold the exhibition this year again. Earlier, the DBH had organised the property fair in 2000 and 2001.

Unlike previous fairs, this year the focus of the exposition will be having projects for higher income group, said QM Shariful Ala, managing director of DBH.

The organisers are also hosting a business session on May 24 where buyers and sellers will interact with one another between 9:00 am and 1:00pm. A number of real estate companies are offering special discounts against apart-

Commerce Minister Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury will inaugurate the DBH Property Fair-2003, which will also be attended by Housing and Public Works Secretary Aminur Rahman and Real Estate and Housing Association of Bangladesh (REHAB) President Taufiq M Seraj.

Shariful Ala said the fair will start at 10am and continue till 9pm everyday. It is open to all with an entry fee of Tk 10 for each visitor. Forty-six real estate developers

from Dhaka and Chittagong will participate in the fair, said Ishtiaq H Chowdhury, head of Operations

The participating developers will display their ongoing projects comprising apartments, office and shopping spaces and housing

According to the organisers, the fair will help prospective buyers to make proper purchase decision and DBH will extend spot housing loans at the DBH stall

To make the event more attractive DBH is organising a raffle draw where special gifts will be distrib-

NCC Bank starts its anniversary programme

National Credit and Commerce Bank Limited (NCC Bank) has launched a fortnight-long programme to celebrate the completion of its 10 years' operation.

The chairman of the bank Mahbubul Alam Tara inaugurated the programme at its Moghbazar branch in Dhaka on Saturday, says a press release.

Directors Mostafizur Rahman and Khairul Alam Chaklader, senior executives of head office, branch managers and clients were present at the programme.

The bank stated its commercial banking operation in 1993.

Emirates cargo Capacity up

Emirates has just taken delivery of a Boeing 747-400 freighter providing cargo customers with an extra 120 tonnes of capacity and providing the airline with a freighter fleet of three Boeing 747s, says a press

Emirates SkyCargo now operates two Boeing 747-400s with capacity for 120 tonnes and a Boeing 747-200 with capacity for 110 tonnes. This freighter fleet boosts the Emirates SkyCargo's core capacity.

Ram Menen, director of cargo, said: "Meeting customer needs has always been our focus. By supplementing our core capacity with the freighters, we can provide extra capacity precisely where and when it is needed. The freighters give us tremendous flexibility.

They have also enabled the division to open cargo -- only routes to Amsterdam, Liege, Shanghai, and Bangalore and Taipei, with more planned, as Emirates SkyCargo develops its freighter services on busy trade

Soaring euro dims outlook for European stocks

AFP, London

The surging euro has cast a pall over the outlook for European stocks, with analysts warning that euro-zone exporters in particular will pay a heavy price for the slump in the value of the dollar.

The euro has surged by around 10 per cent against the dollar since the start of the year, trading at about 1.15 dollars on Friday, and many economists see further gains ahead for the single European currency.

While the softer dollar is a boon to US exporters, it is likely to clob-ber many of their euro-zone rivals,

Iraqi dinar soars

AFP, Baghdad

The Iraqi dinar has soared by 23 per cent against the dollar in just a few days, but the spike to levels not seen in six years has not been matched by a fall in prices.

The Iraqi currency, bearing the portrait of ousted leader Saddam Hussein, has been trading since Thursday at between 900 and 1,000 to the greenback -- its highest level since 1997 The dollar bought 1,300 dinars

on Wednesday, down from 3,500 just after the war, 4,000 during the war, and 1,800 before the US-led invasion kicked off on March 20. The dinar's leap has been attrib-

uted to cash dollar injections by the US-headed administration, including emergency payments to This scheme is running with civil servants that flooded the another that gives up to 50 per cent cuts on all routes if the ticket is bought 15 days in advance. market with hard currency while the dinar is still required for every day transactions.

EPZ at Adamjee site forward linkage industries is a wonderful idea. Adamjee Jute Mill,

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Local businessmen yesterday urged the government to develop the abandoned Adamjee Jute Mill site in Narayanganj as an exclusive export processing zone (EPZ) for ready made garment.

They demanded the 200-acre site be handed over immediately to Bangladesh Export Processing Zones Authority (BEPZA) to turn it into an integrated garment village. The garment cluster should

accommodate spinning, weaving, textile, dyeing, finishing and other backward and forward linkage industries which will consolidate backbone of the country's prime export earner, they said. They were speaking at a seminar titled "Role of BEPZA in Economic

Bangladesh Chamber of Industries (BCI) organised the seminar in Dhaka Echoing the idea, BCI President AK Azad said if local RMG industry is to survive the possible post-MFA shock, Bangladesh needs to

develop all sorts of backward and

forward linkage industries reduc-

Development of Bangladesh"

ing foreign dependency. "And to serve the purpose, an exclusive garment EPZ accommodating required backward and

shut for good on June 29 in 2002, will be a perfect place as it sits on a strategic location," he observed.

As RMG sector shares 76 per cent of total exports, he said the government should help develop infrastructure facilities to ensure sustainable growth of the key

Assuring the entrepreneurs, State Minister for Industries Md Rezaul Karim said the government is planning to best utilise the Adamjee infrastructure.

A proposal for making it an exclusive RMG industrial park is already under consideration following a proposal by Finance and Planning Minister M Saifur Rahman after its closure in June last year, the state minister said.

He said with the incentives offered in EPZs, the proposed exclusive RMG export processing zone will enhance the sector's contribution to national economy.

Terming EPZ a key instrument to boost exports, he said in fiscal year 2001-2002, the exports from six EPZs were worth \$1077 million against the total export earnings of \$5986 million showing an 18 per cent share in the country's aggre-

He urged local and foreign entrepreneurs to invest more in EPZs, especially in Mongla, Comilla, Ishwardi and Nilphamari EPZs, in the form of joint venture.

Welcoming the proposal, Executive Chairman of BEPZA Brig General (retd) M Mofizur Rahman said as a facilitator, BEPZA will feel proud to develop Adamjee site as an EPZ for RMG. "But the EPZ should be an

integrated one accommodating backward and forward linkage industries," he suggested.

On poor voltage of electricity in EPZs, he said BEPZA is planning to set up own power plants in EPZs.

About lukewarm response of entrepreneurs to invest in EPZs, he said though they are getting infra-structure facilities and financial incentives, some keep away as they cannot become owner of plots in

"We are working out for a system to make the ownership a mutually beneficial one so that investors feel encouraged to invest in EPZs,' he continued

AM Badruzzaman, vice-president of BCI, Masud Isha, managing director of Grameen Telecom, and directors of the chamber and local businessmen also spoke at the seminar.



Zahid Hossain Chowdhury, managing director of The Trust Bank Limited, and A Quader Chowdhury, managing director of Phoenix Leasing Company Limited, sign an agreement at the bank's head office in Dhaka on Wednesday. Under the deal, Phoenix Leasing Company will get Tk 50 million credit from the bank.

Indian air carriers reduce fares

AFP, New Delhi

With the tourism industry reeling from a double blow of the Iraq war and panic over Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), Indian airlines have launched a price war to fill seats.

State-run Indian Airlines (IA) and private carrier Jet Airways, which together account for 90 per cent of the market, have launched special schemes offering fares of up to 40 to 60 per cent off. "This year, when we saw the

economy was not growing... because of the Iraq war... because of SARS and other factors, we thought we needed to boost the market," said Jet Airways chairman Naresh Goyal.

"That is why we thought of the super apex fare scheme," he added. The scheme offers passengers

around 60 per cent off the standard price on certain routes, provided the tickets are bought at least 30 days before the date of travel. ing. The total capacity (number of aircraft) has increased in the mar-

A Jet Airways spokesman cited "cut-throat competition" as another important reason for the lowered fares.

IA is making an equally strong bid to retain its share of around 48 per cent of the domestic market with two special schemes called the "Super Saver" and "Super Eight." It offers travellers any four

domestic flights for a total price of 25,000 rupees (525 dollars) -- which works out at between 25 and 40 per cent cheaper depending on the choice of routes.

Under the "Super Eight", the airline is offering eight flights for 50,000 rupees, including two flights to nearby countries. The discount works out to around 50

IA spokesman Ashok Sharma cited the slack season between April and September along with the downtrend in tourism as the reason for launching the schemes. "Normal growth is not happen-

ket. So it is a question of survival,

lend Tk 50m to Phoenix Leasing The Trust Bank Limited has extended a credit facility of Tk 50

Trust Bank to

million to Phoenix Leasing Company Limited to refinance in its leasing business to acquire capital machinery for the productive enterprises of the country. An agreement to this effect was signed between the two organisa-

tions at the bank's head office in

Dhaka on Wednesday, says a press

Zahid Hossain Chowdhury, managing director of The Trust Bank Limited, and A Quadir Choudhury, managing director of Phoenix Leasing Company Limited, signed the deal on behalf

of their sides. Shah Jalal Uddin Khan, senior vice-president, Md Masoom, vice

president, Gautam Prasad Das assistant vice president, Kamal Hossain Sarker, senior principal officer of The Trust Bank Limited, Kazi Emdadul Hoque, executive vice president, and Mahmud Hasan, assistant vice president of Phoenix Leasing Company, attended the ceremony.

Thai chain starts selling furniture in Bangladesh With exports over US\$ 100 Stressing the need for ke

in Dhaka, Index Furniture Center (IFC), a Thailand- based international retail furniture chain formally started its business in

Adnan Monsur, Director of Crossroad, a local company which got the IFC franchise, said IFC will market its international quality knocked down furniture through

He was speaking at an inauguration function of the office yesterthe parent company of IFC, has established its presence in over 15 countries, Monsur said, mentioning the BIF Group products include home, hospitality, office and kitchen furniture.

State Minister for Power Iqbal H Mahmud attended the function as chief guest while Ahmed Akbar Sobhan, chairman of Bashudhara Group, also spoke. Speaking at the function, Mahmud said apart from imported

items local producers are making

good quality furniture products.

the prices within the reach of commoners, the state minister said prices should be reasonable so that the ordinary people can buy these Sobhan said IFC products will

be popular as furniture business in Bangladesh is flourishing. Prices of IFC bed sets range between Tk17,000 and Tk25,000, almirah Tk12,000 and Tk 80,000,

sofa Tk one lakh and Tk1.40 lakh,

office furniture Tk 8,000 and Tk

20,000 and table Tk 8,000 and Tk

Mahbubul Alam Tahiab, senior vice-president of Dhaka Bank Limited, and AHM Nurul Huda, company secretary of

Dhaka Electric Supply Company Limited (DESCO), exchanges documents after signing an agreement on electricity bill collection. Shahed Noman, managing director of Dhaka Bank Limited, and Md Showkat Hossain, director (Finance) of DESCO, were also present.