

International Business News

Toyota disputes critic who blames electronics

AP, New York
 Toyota Motor Corp plans Monday to try to undercut suggestions that its electronics systems caused the sudden acceleration problems that led to the recall of more than eight million vehicles.
 The automaker plans an event in which it will seek to debunk a critic who claims faulty gas pedals did not cause the sudden acceleration.
 Toyota will aim to duplicate the scenario created by David W. Gilbert, a professor at Southern Illinois University Carbondale. Gilbert told Congress on Feb 23 that he was able to recreate sudden acceleration in a Toyota vehicle by manipulating its electronics.
 The company is calling in the director of Stanford University's Centre for Automotive Research to try to refute the claims. Toyota said Stanford professor Chris Gerdes will show that the malfunctions Gilbert produced "are completely unrealistic under real-world conditions and can easily be reproduced on a wide range of vehicles made by other manufacturers."
 Stanford's Centre for Automotive Research is funded by a group of auto companies, including Toyota.

Icelanders refuse to foot bill for Icesave collapse

AFP, Reykjavik
 Icelanders on Saturday massively rejected a deal to pay Britain and the Netherlands billions for losses in the collapse of the Icesave bank, the government said after partial referendum results.
 "Initial figures indicate clearly that the December amendment to the Icesave legislation of August 2009 will be repealed," the government said in a statement just minutes after polling stations closed at 2200 GMT.
 Some 93.6 percent of voters cast ballots opposing the deal, partial results showed after 50 percent of ballots were counted, said RUV public broadcaster which compiles all electoral statistics.
 Only 1.5 percent of voters had so far voted "yes" to the Icesave deal.
 It remained unclear how many of Iceland's 230,000 eligible voters had cast their ballots Saturday, but an hour before polls closed the turnout rate stood at 54.45 percent, according to RUV.
 Icelanders were asked to vote on whether the country should honour an agreement to repay Britain and the Netherlands 3.9 billion euros (5.3 billion dollars) by 2024.



AFP
 Chinese workers clear a piece of land to make way for the construction of a new highrise condominium in Hefei, east China's Anhui province on Saturday. Premier Wen Jiabao said Beijing would crack down on illegal practices aimed at driving up prices to ensure the "steady and sound development of the real estate market", in a pledged to rein in soaring real estate prices, curb speculative investment and expand low-cost housing amid fears of a damaging property bubble in the fast-growing economy.

British economy faces 'high' risk of relapse

AFP, London
 Britain, which emerged from recession in the final quarter of 2009, faces a "high" risk of relapse, and below-average growth in the next two years, the British Chamber of Commerce warned on Sunday.
 "The UK economic outlook will remain highly uncertain for a considerable time," the BCC said in the group's latest economic forecast.
 "The recovery will be fragile, and the risks of a relapse are high," it added.
 The BCC predicted that the economy will grow 1.0 percent this year, followed by expansion of 2.1 percent in 2011. It shrank by 5.0 percent in 2009.
 The 2010 forecast was unchanged from previous guidance but the 2011 figure was lower than its prior prediction of 2.3-percent expansion.
 "The obstacles to a sustained medium-term recovery now appear greater," the business group said.

3.1m customers face Oscar night without broadcast

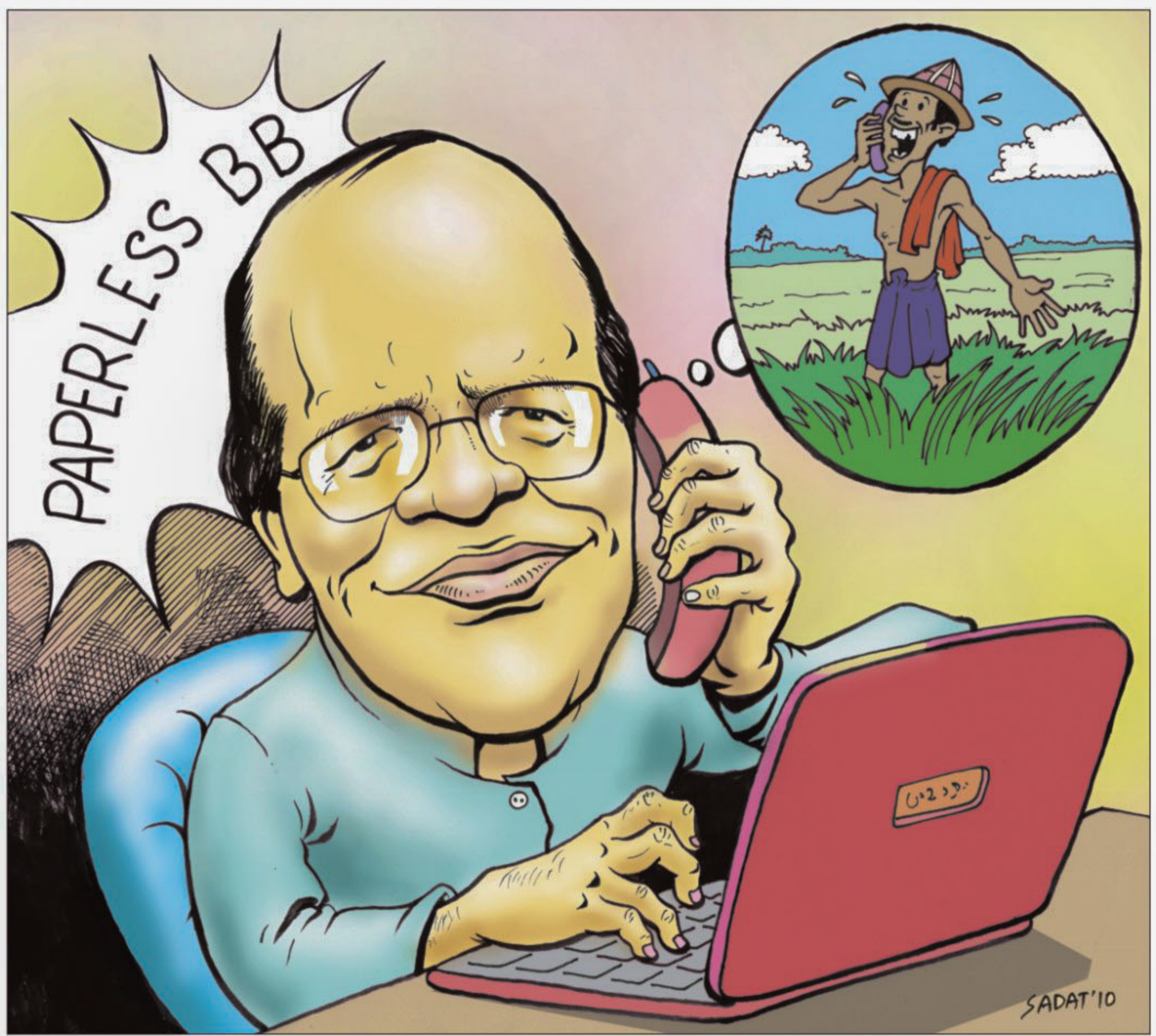
AP, New York
 Millions of cable subscribers faced the prospect of Oscar night without the Academy Awards broadcast Sunday after ABC's parent company switched off its signal to Cablevision customers and the two companies blasted each other for failing to reach a deal in a dispute over fees.
 In duelling statements dispatched early Sunday, the two companies traded blame for the stalemate ahead of one of the most-watched nights of television.
 "Cablevision has once again betrayed its subscribers," said Charissa Gilmore, a spokeswoman for the Walt Disney Co and ABC Television Group, in a statement.
 "Cablevision pocketed almost \$8 billion last year, and now customers aren't getting what they pay for ... again."

AUTOMATION

Unzipping e-footprints at BB

SAYEDA AKTER
 Bangladesh Bank (BB) is advancing fast in its goal to become a 'paperless' central bank by boosting internal communications and introducing new services through software.
 The central bank uses 79 self-innovated software to offer services to users at home and abroad and their own staff.
 "The process of achieving the goal to be a 'paperless' central bank is advancing faster than I can imagine. We have already taken several steps to automate many of our functions," said Atiur Rahman, governor of the central bank.
 "An important feature of BB's ICT is that it uses software that have all been made by its own staff, which helped save money."
 Automated BB services include security access passes, scheduled bank statistics systems, export form matching, banking inspection, Grameen Bank revolving-fund management and SME fund management. It also includes e-recruitment, human resources management and transport management.

On top of that, BB has a website that represents not only the organisation, but also a complete economic scenario of the country.
 Rahman said efforts are underway to introduce an automated clearinghouse from April 1, while the central bank is also set to automate the Credit Information Bureau (CIB) by year-end. "Additionally, we are to introduce e-tendering shortly. Simultaneously, we are set to launch Enterprise Resource Planning by year-end."
 The central bank has put in place an intranet for internal communication, which helps make operations more efficient.
 A total of 3,100 computers at the BB head office and all its branches, including the one in Sadarghat in Dhaka and eight other branches across the country, are connected through a common network or intranet. Under this system, BB employees can interact instantly with one another by mail, voice and videoconferencing.



"Now, internal communication has become easy and effective. It saves us a lot of time to even take a simple decision by communicating with the other branches," said the BB governor.
 Around 2,000 mails are corresponded

among BB staffs across the country every day, said Mohammad Ishaque Miah, system analyst for the central bank.
 BB allocated Tk 70 crore in July to initiate the intranet projects, which have a backup setting -- data recovery centre -- to safe-

guard all operations.
 "You will find Bangladesh Bank to be more tech-savvy in a year or two," the governor said.
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COLUMN

HABIBULLAH N KARIM

Digital innovation fair: An assessment

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on March 4 inaugurated the first-ever government sponsored ICT fair of the country at Bangabandhu Novo Theatre complex in Dhaka.
 The country has had many ICT fairs since the late eighties but those are all sponsored and organised by the private sector. The Digital Innovation Fair is the first by the government, of the government and for the government -- mostly.
 Since taking the reins of the government in January last year, the AL-led coalition has been vigorously advocating the virtues of going digital. The vision of 'Digital Bangladesh by the year 2021' was the cornerstone of the AL election manifesto and has been a guiding principle of the present government from day one. Along the path of achieving a digital Bangladesh, the government has been pro-actively promoting the use of ICT in lowering the cost and time required to deliver government services to citizens and at the same time increase transparency, accountability and overall effectiveness of governmental service delivery mechanisms.
 The Digital Innovation Fair was organised by the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) in collaboration with the Ministry of Science & ICT. The principal driver has been the Access To Information (AZI) project at the PMO, funded by the UNDP.



The main objective was to showcase governmental initiatives and projects on the use of ICT in various ministries, departments and state-owned corporations. Almost all ministries and state bodies had stalls at the three-day long exhibition displaying all kinds of digital work processes and citizen services as well as handing out self-explanatory brochures on the ICT-based services provided by each.
 The whole fair premises had a very festive and colourful ambience about it which is all the more amazing when one realises that that it was organised and manned fully by government functionaries.
 On the opening day, as Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina went round the stalls after the inaugural programme, one could see ministers and secretaries jostling for the attention of the head of the government as they pleaded with her like excited youngsters to visit their respective stalls and when succeeded proffered animated explications of their respective ministry's ICT projects.
 The few private sector representatives on hand watched all this with amazement and great joy. Here are all these captains of the government that the private sector have been chasing for decades to get them (gov-

An operator keys in data provided by a student at the education ministry's stall at the Digital Innovation Fair that ended in Dhaka on Saturday. SSC examinees who are signing up for the ministry's electronic database will get their results by email.

ernment leaders) to listen to their (private sector) pleas to open up their (government leaders) minds and coifers to the use of ICT to bring efficiency, transparency and accountability and now the same public officials were singing those tunes without any provocation.
 I consider this a sea-change in the mindset of the public office holders that will certainly bring good tidings for the people in the coming days. This was unmistakably the result of constant prodding by the AL government's think-tanks on the adoption of ICT in line with their 'Digital Bangladesh' agenda.
 One could easily discern there was a sense of competition among the government offices to outdo each other in proving who is the most ICT-savvy. That is certainly very healthy as it will usher in more and more citizen services being proffered on the ICT platform at higher speeds and lower costs without discriminating between the poor or the rich.

One could see the Election Commission demonstrating the electronic voting machine and the new-fangled uses of the voter/national ID cards or the commerce ministry displaying the online portal for the submission of company's annual returns or the Survey of Bangladesh displaying GPS mappers and loggers that can accurately create digital maps with millimeter level accuracy with permanent geo-referencing. The Dhaka Electric Supply Authority also exhibited their customer complaints resolution system with live phone complaints being played back for all to hear.
 It was also interesting to find the cabinet division excitedly showing off the recently-launched district administration offices' web sites providing real-time linkages to the cabinet division for reporting and monitoring or the home ministry flaunting their latest live digital video streaming of key city points to monitor law-and-order.
 There was hardly any space to walk as hundreds of people thronged the Novo

Theatre to catch a glimpse of the digital lifestyle there are about to be submerged in.
 There is already talk of making the Digital Innovation Fair an annual event as well as holding similar events throughout the country whereby people everywhere will be able to see and gauge the progress of different government offices in the adoption of ICT.
 The six seminars organised concurrently on various policy matters related to materialising the digital Bangladesh vision had capacity crowds comprising of high government officials as well as people of all walks of life. On the whole the fair proved that the government is abuzz with ICT programmes and that ICT is no longer just a buzz-word when it comes to harnessing its potential to empower citizens in all its splendour.
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