

High prices upset visitors at Ctg housing fair

MINHAJ UDDIN, Chittagong

Hopeful visitors at the three-day housing fair in Chittagong had to leave disheartened due to the high prices this year.

One such visitor was Abul Hashem, a bank employee, who came to purchase a flat at heart of the city, the GEC Circle.

But his spirit was dampened when he learnt of the price of flats from visiting different stalls: a flat of around 1,200 square feet (sq ft) would set him back by upwards of Tk 60 lakh.

When contacted, the housing companies said the flat prices would have to be dear given the high

construction costs at present.

"If we maintain the quality of the buildings and business ethics, we can not offer flats at a cheap rate," said Sanjay Paul, head of marketing of Secure Proper Management Ltd.

"Those who are offering flats at low prices are either deceiving the customers or are incurring losses," Paul added.

Paul, whose company has 7 projects underway in different parts of the city, said flats ranging from 1,100 sq ft to 1,350 sq ft, depending upon the location, cost Tk 40 lakh to Tk 60 lakh.

The fair, in its tenth edition, was held at the Chittagong Indoor Gymnasium from October 11 to 13.

Confidence crisis keeps stocks down

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Stocks declined for the second consecutive week as investors continued to sell shares in anticipation of a bear run.

DGEN, the benchmark General Index of the Dhaka Stock Exchange, finished the week with 4,482.26 points, after declining 163.81 points or 3.53 percent.

The market gauge dipped below the 4,500 point-mark owing to shaky investor confidence and inactivity of big institutional investors, market analysts said.

"There is no negative news in the market which can hit the market sentiment. Investors should not pay heed to any rumors," said Akter Hossain Sannamat, managing director and chief executive officer of

Union Capital.

Instead, he urged all to take investment decision based on company fundamentals, technical analysis and disclosed information.

"Institutional investors should support the market to boost small investors' confidence," added Sannamat.

"The week started with 'panic sale', with spontaneous participation dropping suddenly. Later, the investors were cautious and preferred the most-traded stocks to take exposure," commented IDLC Investments.

Investors were active in top ten stocks, which represented 40 percent of total turnover on an average, the merchant bank said.

Out of 281 issues that traded on the DSE floor during the

week, 28 advanced, 251 declined and 2 remained unchanged.

Service and real estate gained the most, of 16.09 percent, followed by IT, of 8.6 percent.

But all the major sectors ended up in the red: non-bank financial institutions dropped 5.39 percent, fuel and power 4.44 percent, banks 4.29 percent, pharmaceuticals 2.82 percent and telecommunications 0.78 percent.

United Airways was the top traded stock of the week with its transaction of 8.78 crore shares worth Tk 245 crore.

Aamra Technologies was the biggest gainer of the week, posting a rise of 29.20 percent, while Delta Spinners was the biggest loser, plunging by 28.55 percent.



Obaidul Quader, communications minister, speaks at the launch of operations of Motion Automobile Ltd as the sole distributor of Foton vehicles in Bangladesh, at Ruposhi Bangla Hotel in Dhaka recently. Li Jun, Chinese ambassador in Bangladesh, and Kabir Ahmed Chowdhury, chief executive officer of Motion, were also present.



Intertek Bangladesh awarded ISO 22000:2005 certificates to Hifs Agro Food Industries and Noor Food Products at a programme at SME Foundation in Dhaka on Friday. Ronald Biswas, country manager of Intertek Bangladesh; ABM Khorsheed Alam, managing director of SME Foundation; and Dilip Barua, industries minister, were present on the occasion.

GM studies Opel and Peugeot tie-up

AFP, Paris

US car group General Motors is considering merging its troubled German unit Opel with French carmaker PSA Peugeot Citroen, in which it already holds a 7-percent stake, the business news website L'attribution.fr reported on Friday.

"The project being studied foresees the creation of a joint company, with each of the two manufacturers holding equal stakes," the website cited a source as saying.

Peugeot declined to comment when contacted by AFP.

The company's shares jumped by five percent following the publication of the report.

The report said the tie-up was just at the exploratory stage and had not been submitted to Peugeot's board, although it said that could happen by

Online freelancers remake outsourcing industry

REUTERS, Lipa City, Philippines

Not far from the world of regimented cubicles and headset-toting call centre operators, a quiet revolution is stirring in its slippers.

University librarian Sheila Ortencio, for example, was so poorly paid that half her salary went for childcare, and her meals amounted to dried fish and one fried egg per day. Four years on, she juggles two daughters, a husband and two Pomeranians as she catalogues ebooks online from her parents' couch.

In her freelancing job, she's earned enough money to buy land for a house nearby and make down payments on a condo in the capital.

"I have double the work but, it doesn't bother me because it doesn't feel like work," she says.

Ortencio is one of more than half a million Filipinos registered on freelance website oDesk.com - more than are currently employed by the country's growing business process outsourcing (BPO) industry.

While it's early days, proponents of so-called commercial crowdsourcing contend that a swelling army of global freelancers

is already disrupting traditional outsourcing - from preparing tax statements to conducting research on pediatricians.

"This is all about cost arbitration across borders," says Siou Chew Kuek, a Singaporean researcher who works with the World Bank. "Now you can farm out your work to anyone in the world."

Driving this trend are a dozen mostly U.S. startups that let other small and medium-sized companies carve projects into chunks and then recruit individuals or teams of freelancers to do the work. By leveraging a faster, more ubiquitous and cheaper Internet, the startups can pluck the low-hanging fruit of IT and data-entry outsourcing that big BPO players such as Infosys and Wipro once considered their own.

Australian-U.S. startup 99designs, for example, has paid out \$40 million to some 180,000 graphic designers, with its largest user base outside the United States being in Indonesia. Elance has 266,000 freelancers in India who have earned nearly \$150 million. Odesk has 2.4 million registered freelancers and more than 480,000 clients - companies including Cisco and HP.

"This is moving the entire BPO

industry - that was dominated by these large middlemen organisations that take most of the profits - to the cloud," says Anand Kulkarni, an academic-turned-entrepreneur. "Now you no longer need to be able to afford Infosys rates to be able to get quality results out of an outsourcing system."

For sure, the BPO industry is not necessarily quaking in its boots. The industry was worth \$150 billion last year and is growing at 5-6 percent a year, according to Pradeep Mukherji, an Indian IT consultant and adviser to the World Bank.

Crowdsourcing companies admit it's still an uphill struggle to persuade firms to experiment with outsourcing work to freelancers rather than keeping it in-house or sticking with established BPO players.

For freelancers, many face a precarious career: not always getting paid for work completed, going without healthcare insurance, and job opportunities not always being available. Indeed, many freelancers who have signed up with oDesk have never received feedback from clients - suggesting they have either not tried to pitch for work or haven't

won any yet.

"It's true to say that it's hard to get that first contract," says Panos Ipeirotis, an associate professor at New York University who studies oDesk data.

Such imbalances are feeding a second wave of innovation in the industry. The first outsourcers focused on what oDesk.com CEO Gary Swart calls the eBay model using recommendations, feedback and trust to create a market where companies find good freelancers and freelancers can build a reputation.

But as freelancers build closer relationships with clients, both sides prefer a more structured model where trusted freelancers hire their own team, prompting oDesk and others to tweak their software to accommodate them. Ortencio, for example, manages several other oDeskers on behalf of long-term clients.

In the past couple of years, other startups have tried to mend weak links in the chain. A potential employer posting a project on Elance or oDesk, for example, can be overwhelmed by applicants - making it difficult for them to find the best freelancers quickly, and harder for freelancers to stand out from the crowd.



Officials pose at a programme after Martrade Logistics Belgium NV, Belgium, represented by their local agent -- TM Maritime Ltd -- signed a contract recently for carriage of entire project cargo of Summit Meghnaghat Power Company Ltd from Antwerp, Chennai and Shanghai to Mongla/Chittagong.

Garment makers set up testing lab

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Primarily, 22 different types of tests, mainly the chemical ones, of exportable garment items will be conducted at the lab and in future BGMEA will enhance its capacity.

The lab has been set up with the financial support of Spanish retail giant in clothing Inditex, while Switzerland-based pre-shipment company SGS is providing technical support, said Shafiul Islam Mohiuddin, president of Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA).

Its full-fledged operation will begin in three months, Mohiuddin said, adding that it has already been recognised by different international bodies.

Initially, a total of \$1 million has been spent for setting up the lab, he said.

The trade body signed a deal with Inditex at Luck AÑO in Spain on April 29 to set up the lab.

At present, apparel exporters test the samples of exportable goods from different foreign testing firms at high costs for certification.

Mohiuddin said a good portion of the lab's earning will be spent on the welfare of the workers as the

RMG owners to clear Eid wages within Oct 24

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So far no worker lodges any complaint with the federation regarding Eid payments, she said.

The government and the BGMEA should utilise the regional crisis management committees to monitor whether the salaries and allowances are paid before the Eid, she said.

Earlier, nine such committees in Dhaka and its adjacent areas were formed comprising government high-ups, BGMEA leaders and union leaders.

"We are taking preparation to start monitoring soon, said Rafiqul Islam, joint secretary to the BGMEA.

The union leaders are also monitoring the situation if there is any problem in clearing the payments before Eid, said Amirul Haque Amin, president of National Garment Workers' Federation, another platform of garment workers.

"We expect the government to call us in a meeting soon to reactivate the regional committees, so that we can start monitoring formally," he said.

Millers want rice export ban to go

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Prices of paddy and rice fell earlier this year due to increased production of boro and aman in the past two seasons.

In Dhaka, retail prices of all types of rice were down by about 12 percent from a year ago as of yesterday, according to Trading Corporation of Bangladesh.

"The farmers, who did not sell their produce expecting a price rebound during the off-season, will aim to clear their stocks after the aman harvests. It will cause prices to go down even more."

The government's warehouses are now around with 16 lakh tonnes of grain -- against their storing capacity of 16.17 lakh tonnes.

"Storing capacity has to be increased to protect the farmers from further losses. Otherwise, the government should allow exports," said Khan.

Bangladesh, the world's fourth-biggest rice producer, bagged 3.38 crore tonnes in fiscal 2011-12, a rise by around 1 percent from the previous year, according to Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics.

At present, other than the aromatic varieties,

Big VAT paying firms to go for automation

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The NBR-approved software firms are: Symphone Softech, Unisoft Systems, UY Systems, Ennovia Technologies and Dhruvadi Techno Consortium Ltd.

The move comes at a time when the NBR is planning to make the tax collection system fully automated by 2016, to simplify the process of tax payment and reduce scope for tax dodging.

"We want firms to familiarise themselves with the automation process so that they can link with us when we complete the full automation process by 2016," said Haque.

Unilever, along with a host of companies, have already automated their book-keeping systems voluntarily and now submit the software-generated VAT acknowledgement receipts named Mushak-11 to the NBR.

VAT and other customs duties accounted for 69 percent of the total revenue earnings of Tk 94,331 crore in fiscal 2011-12.

The amount could be higher as only a third of the 7 lakh VAT-registered entities have submitted their



Ashique Un Nabi, executive director for marketing of BTI, a realtor, and Rahat Masood, head for consumer products of ICB Islamic Bank, sign a deal in Dhaka recently. Employees and clients of the two companies will enjoy special services.

Microsoft opens Windows 8 for pre-orders

REUTERS, Seattle

Microsoft Corp opened its Windows 8 operating system for pre-orders on Friday, setting the price for an upgrade to the full version of the software at \$70 for a DVD pack.

Users can also wait for launch on October 26 to download the system onto their computers for \$40, an offer price that will expire at the end of January. PCs running Windows XP, Vista and Windows 7 will be able to upgrade to Windows 8.

Shoppers can reserve the software pack at Microsoft's own stores, Amazon.com, Best Buy, Staples and elsewhere. Microsoft has not yet announced the price of the full soft-

ware to install from scratch, as opposed to the upgrade. The current price for a comparable version of Windows 7 is \$200.

Any customer who buys, or already bought, a Windows 7 PC between June 2 and the end of January 2013 will be able to get an upgrade to Windows 8 Pro for \$15, a move designed to prevent a drop-off in PC sales before the launch of Windows 8.

Microsoft also said PC makers such as Acer, Asustek, Dell, HP, Samsung and Sony were also now taking pre-orders for machines with Windows 8 pre-installed.

The world's largest software company did not mention its own Surface tablet PC, which is expected on the market at the same time as Windows 8. Microsoft has not revealed the price of the product it hopes will challenge Apple Inc's iPad.