

Nitol-Niloy brings new Tata cars

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Tata Motors and Nitol-Niloy Group yesterday launched two new sedans and a hatchback for the Bangladesh market.

The new vehicles are: Tata Indigo eCS, Tata Indigo Manza and Tata Indica Vista, said Abdul Musabbir Ahmad, managing director of Nitol-Niloy Group.

"We have sold 100 cars before launching these here," said Ahmad.

The vehicles will be available in Dhaka with a single showroom in Nikunj and one showroom each will be set up in three other cities by 2013, Tata Motors said in a statement.

The minimum price of the cars would be around Tk 13.99 lakh, which would be the cheapest sedan and commercial vehicle in Bangladesh, said Abdul Matub Ahmad, chairman of Nitol-Niloy Group.

"Our aim and vision is that one vehicle must be sold in every two cars sold in the market in the next five years. We need support from the government and our customers to do that."



Nitol-Niloy has close association with Tata Motors for the last two decades, he said. "We are extremely happy that in addition to commercial vehicles, Tata Motors has now placed their confidence on us to market their passenger cars and utility vehicles."

Tata Motors is the market leader with a 70 percent market share in Bangladesh, said Kazi Akramuddin Ahamed, president of the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry.

"I wish the best of luck to Tata Motors and Nitol-Niloy Group in Bangladesh," said Ahamed, also the chairman of Standard Bank.

Bangladeshi customers accept new cars easily, said Johnny Oommen, head of international passenger cars business at Tata Motors.

The joint initiative of the two will give a boost to the bilateral relationship between India and Bangladesh, said Indian High Commissioner Pankaj Saran.

Communications Minister Obaidul Quader launched the cars at Purbani International Hotel in the capital.

Quader said the government plans to bring in 1,000 taxi cabs in the capital in January and 50 articulated buses in March for seven districts.

Taxi service in the city is not good, said Iftekhar Ahmed Tipu, president of Bangladesh Automobile Assemblers and Manufacturing Association.

He also requested Tata Motors to introduce taxi cabs of high capacity in the country to ease traffic movement.

SCOP forms a committee to probe Tazreen fire

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Sramik Karmochari Oikya Parishad (SCOP), a platform of workers and employees, yesterday formed a six-member probe committee to investigate Saturday's Ashulia fire incident.

The committee, to be headed by Shah Md Abu Zafar, will submit a report within four days.

It will also recommend the government to punish the culprits and take necessary steps so that no worker falls victim to fire in future.

The SCOP leaders said fire incidents happen regularly at garment factories because most of the factories are housed in multi-storey buildings, unsuitable for a huge number of workers at a time.



Tore Johnsen, chief executive officer of Grameenphone, and Sayem Ahmed, chairman of the executive committee of Dutch-Bangla Bank, attend the launch of the bank's mobile banking service using the mobile operator's network at a ceremony on Tuesday.

Etihaad expands BusinessConnect to Bangladesh

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Etihaad Airways has recently launched its loyalty programme -- BusinessConnect -- for businesses in Bangladesh, the national airline of the United Arab Emirates said in a statement yesterday.

It is the airline's free mileage earning programme for small and medium enterprises with between two and 50 business travellers, which do not have an airline corporate contract.

BusinessConnect allows registered customers to earn Etihaad Guest miles every time one of their employees takes a flight.

Benefits of the programme include: the traveller earning Etihaad Guest miles for themselves as normal, and in addition, his/her company earning a percentage of those miles as a bonus.

Etihaad Guest miles can be earned on all Etihaad Airways tickets, and there are no blackout periods when redeeming miles against upgrades, free flights, or any product from the Etihaad Guest Reward Shop.

The service was also launched in Belgium, France,

Increase skill for more investment: Swiss envoy

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

The Swiss ambassador to Bangladesh yesterday urged training initiatives for Bangladesh's cheap labour force to attract more investment.

Urs Herren, the ambassador, was speaking at a programme styled '40 years of Switzerland-Bangladesh Relations: Friendship and Business Opportunities' jointly organised by the Swiss embassy, Switzerland Bangladesh Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and Chittagong Chamber of Commerce and Industry at a hotel in the port city.

Herren said there are some bottlenecks to attracting more foreign direct investment to Bangladesh including the power and gas crises and red tape tangles encumbering foreign investment.

Trade and commerce between the two countries increased significantly over the last few years that has made the friendship between Bangladesh and Switzerland even stronger, he said.

Commerce Minister GM Quader said the trade volume between Bangladesh and Switzerland has increased 35 to 40 percent last fiscal year.

Quader urged the Swiss to increase investment in Bangladesh terming it a good place for investment.

Rokia Afzal Rahman, president of Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industries (MCCI), presented the keynote on 'Swiss-Bangladesh Relations: Business Opportunities in Chittagong.'

Trade volume between Switzerland and Bangladesh was \$337 million in the 2011 fiscal and trade growth was a significant 32 percent, she said.

She said Bangladesh could benefit from using the green business technology in which Switzerland excels.

She urged the media to present Bangladesh positively to the outer world to help attract more investment.

Meghalaya tribals press for border haats

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

Tribal chiefs of Meghalaya yesterday demanded immediate opening of at least 38 haats along the border with Bangladesh saying they are beneficial for local residents.

"We have urged the Meghalaya government to take up the matter with the Centre for negotiations with Bangladesh government to speed up the opening of at least 38 border haats," John F Kharshiing, chief of the Grand Council of Chiefs of Meghalaya (GCCM) said in Meghalaya's capital Shillong.

"These haats have a direct impact on the livelihood of the border residents," he said.

Only two border haats, at Kalaichar in West Garo Hills and at Balat in East Khasi Hills district, are currently open and more than 20,000 residents are benefited directly and generate more than Rs50 lakh in income.

The tribal leader demanded 38 more border haats including 17 in East Khasi hills district, four in South West Khasi Hills district, four in South Garo hills, and three each in West Garo Hills and Jaintia Hills districts.

"The Khasi-Jaintia and Garo people inhabiting the entire stretch of 443km long Indo-Bangladesh border have been victims of partition. Not only was the international border closed due to the partition but they have been denied their traditional market and route towards Sylhet and Chittagong," he said.

Urging the authorities to improve infrastructure, particularly bridges, along the border, Kharshiing said these the development work would allow movement along the border as hostile terrain is a serious challenge.

Fire survivors tell stories of utter neglect

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Mahabub Alam, another survivor, said, "The factory officials treat us as prisoners denying free movement."

Shirin Akhtar, founding president of Karmojibi Nari, an organisation to ensure women workers' rights, said the owner must be arrested immediately for the crime his employees have committed.

Unless he is brought to book, it will be difficult to calm down the workers' unrest, said Nazma Akhtar, president of Sammilita Garments Sramik Federation, a platform of garment workers.

Both the global retailers of readymade garments and the local

entrepreneurs fatten their pockets on cheap labour, leaving the workers unsafe, she said.

Major Muhammad Mahboob, director of Fire Service and Civil Defense (operations and maintenance), said garment materials stacked at the ground landing of staircases were extremely flammable and created high heat and dense smog that trapped and choked the workers to death.

A section of garment manufacturers treat the workers as forced labourers and violate labour law and relevant safety rules, said Mikail Shipar, secretary-in-charge to the labour and employment ministry.

The factory inspection department of the ministry, responsible for ensuring safe working environment at factories, currently has a 184-member manpower for the entire country though law requires 314 positions.

For the entire Dhaka division, there are only four inspectors, said the secretary, adding that repeated attempts to enhance manpower has not yielded any result yet.

Md Shafiul Islam Mohiuddin, president of Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association, among others, spoke at the discussion moderated by Prothom Alo Joint Editor Abdul Quayum.

Govt still undecided on internet regulation

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"Otherwise, the government risks being blamed for turning 'Digital Bangladesh' into 'Digital Ruin' ahead of the parliamentary election."

Globally, too, the ITR revision initiative has been criticised.

The Indian government has been discussing the matter with different stakeholders since September.

As per a November 22 BBC report, the European parliament members said that the UN should not be allowed to take over control of internet, adding the ITU was "not the appropriate body" to decide on such issues.

Furthermore, the parliament backed a

resolution which urged member states to reject changes to the ITR which would "negatively impact internet, its architecture, operations, content and security, business relations, internet governance and the free flow of information online", the BBC reported.

While Google, the world's largest search engine, said via a campaign that governments alone should not determine the future of internet.

"The billions of people around the globe that use internet and the experts who build and maintain it, should be included. Internet policy should work like the internet -- open and inclusive."

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AQI Chowdhury, OBE, director of Eastern Bank, inaugurates the bank's 64th branch at Mehdiabagh of Chittagong on Monday. Ali Reza Iftekhar, managing director, was also present.

Two new banks get more time to submit documents

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The BB issued a 'letter of intent' for the new banks on April 17 and asked them to submit all supporting documents within a six-month timeframe, which these two banks failed to.

One of the main conditions for licence application for setting up new banks was that the sponsors must have Tk 400 crore in paid-up capital and the amount must be legally earned.

The minimum shareholding stake of each sponsor shall be Tk 1 crore, with the maximum being 10 percent or Tk 40 crore of the Tk 400 crore paid-up capital.

The central bank has sent the documents to the National Board of Revenue and concerned banks

Power crisis to end by 2017: Muhith

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He added that the government is considering bringing power from Bhutan and Myanmar under regional co-operation.

"So, I do not want to see energy supply as an impediment to economic growth beyond 2017."

He further said the government has plans to generate 50 percent electricity from coal-fired power plants by 2030.

Muhith's comments came at a seminar titled 'Energy Subsidy Reform: Challenges and opportunities', jointly organised by Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS) and the Geneva-based International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD).

The seminar, held at the

capital's Sonargaon Hotel, was to present the findings of a study on energy subsidy in Bangladesh, conducted by the two organisations.

Blasting BIDS's subsidy-related study reports, the finance minister said such study reports do not always capture all the benefits from energy subsidies.

He said a huge subsidy is being provided to the energy sector as part of the government policy to enhance production capacity.

"Government provides subsidies not only to the power and energy sector, but also to the agriculture, health, education and food sectors."

With regards to rental power plants' high-cost electricity,

Muhith said: "The country attained 6.7 percent GDP growth and 41 percent growth in export, because of the power generated by them."

Muhith said it was the food and agriculture sector -- and not the power sector -- that receives the highest amount of subsidy.

Tawfiq Elahi Chowdhury, Prime Minister's energy adviser, said the government has undertaken a massive program to increase the country's power generation capacity.

He said they have added over 3,000-MW of electricity to the national grid during the last three and half years.

According to a recent BIDS study, the country's energy subsidy basket for the current fiscal year stands at around Tk

282 billion (\$3.4 billion), almost 90 percent of the total amount spent on all subsidies.

Nearly 34 percent of these subsidies are off-budget, such as the government loans for Bangladesh Power Development Board at favourable lending rates, it said.

Presently, the government is expending more than 4 percent of its GDP as subsidy for energy prices, which is more than what it spends on health and social welfare programmes, said Mustafa K Mujeri, director general of BIDS.

He urged the government to bring reforms to energy subsidies, by gradually reducing funds and redirecting them to the affected groups.