

App offers vehicle care solution

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

People can now call for help of a mechanic through a mobile application—Vroom—if their car stops working in the middle of a road.

The mechanic will check and try to fix the problem on the spot. If a major breakdown occurs, the vehicle will be taken to the nearest Vroom service centre.

This is how Syed Ahsan Habib, managing director of Vroom Services Ltd, highlighted the uses and benefits of the Vroom app, at its launch at a press meet at Sonargaon Hotel in Dhaka yesterday.

The car owners will get relief from the hassles of car maintenance by using the 24/7 Vroom call centre through the app, he said.

The automated system will provide people with one stop emergency service, Habib said.

A car owner will have to get a Vroom membership card at Tk 3,000 to avail the service, he said.

Vroom introduced the service in partnership with Eastern Bank, Robi Axiata Bangladesh, Rahimafrooz, Green Delta Insurance, Shwapno and Kiksha.com.

Vroom is also partnering with 30 service centres across the country to provide maintenance services to car owners.

Vroom cardholders will get access to top-class vehicle workshops, service centres and fuel stations countrywide, the company said.

It will ensure a win-win situation for car owners, said Habib.

The automated service system will convert the headache for car maintenance into happiness, he said.

The company needs to run some promotional activities to inform and provide innovative services to real customers, said Ali Reza Iftekhar, managing director of Eastern Bank.

Vroom Services Ltd was formed as a company in June 2017.



Syed Ahsan Habib, managing director of Vroom Services Ltd; Ali Reza Iftekhar, managing director of Eastern Bank, and Farzana Chowdhury, CEO of Green Delta Insurance Company Ltd, attend the launch of Vroom, a mobile app for vehicle maintenance services, at Sonargaon Hotel in Dhaka yesterday.



Ratan Kumar Nag, acting managing director of Grameen Bank, hands over a cheque worth Tk 6.17 crore to Ali Reza Iftekhar, finance minister, as dividends against government investment in the microlender at the secretariat in the capital on Sunday.

Highway robbery vexes apparel exporters

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In two separate incidents in December last year, Noman Group was robbed off a total of 120 bales of imported cotton worth Tk 44.97 lakh from the Comilla area, due to which it could not manufacture the work orders in time.

Noman Group's other incident of robbery took place in October this year.

Md Yasin Arafat, manger of Grameen Bangla Transport Agency that was ferrying the consignment, filed a case with the Sitakunda Model Police Station right away. Only one of the robbers has been arrested although the case was filed against at least eight persons.

In 2015, there were 18 cases of highway robbery, in 2016 seven and in 2017 five, according to data from Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association.

Similarly, the Bangladesh Textile Mills Association said in 2012 two incidents of highway robbery were recorded, in 2013 one, in 2015 none, and two each in 2016 and 2017.

"We do not keep such record, but our members complain about robbery incidents often," said Sulov Chowdhury, chief executive officer of Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association.

Contacted, Atiqul Islam, deputy inspector general of police (highway department), said they are working to rein in robbery on highways.

"We also have to work on removing traffic congestion and preventing road accidents," he said.

Every day, a total of 12,000 outgoing and 13,000 incoming vehicles, including cargo vans, ply the Dhaka-Chittagong highway and 2,800 police personnel can be found dotted along the highway, according to Islam.

"It is not possible to provide special safety to the cargo vans of a particular company -- the highway police watch out for all goods-laden cargo vans at a time."

Islam, however, said the number of robbery incidents on the highway has declined significantly over the last two years.

Mokbul Ahmad, president of Bangladesh Covered Van Truck Ponnyo Paribahan Malik Association, said incidence of robbery on the Dhaka-Chittagong highway can be found every month.

"Some organised gangs are active in Dhaka, Comilla and Chittagong areas."

The robbers first stop the vehicles on the highways in the guise of police and later they snatch away the goods threatening the lives of drivers and helpers, Ahmad said.

Sometimes, the robbery also takes place in connivance with the transport drivers, said Mohammed Aminul Islam, officer-in-charge of Joydebpur police station.

"Recently, we held a meeting with the inspector general of police in Dhaka. The IG instructed the goods owners to file cases with the police stations under which the robbery incidents take place," Ahmad said.

A robbery is considered a mere theft, so the robbers, even if they are nabbed by the police, can easily get bail and then go on to commit the same crime over and over again, Ahmad added.



MA Momen Ink makers assoc elects top brass

STAR BUSINESS DESK

MA Momen, managing director of Toka Ink Bangladesh Ltd and Pioneer Printing Press Ltd, has been elected as president of Bangladesh Ink Manufacturer Owner's Association for 2017-18 and 2018-19.

The election took place at the association's annual general meeting for 2016 at a hotel in Dhaka on December 21, according to a statement.

The association also elected Shahab Uddin Khan, managing director of Shahab Ltd, and Shamsuddoha Swapon, managing director of Royal Ink Industries, as vice-presidents.

Jet Airways celebrates 10 years in Bangladesh

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Jet Airways, a premier international airline of India, yesterday celebrated a decade of operations in Bangladesh.

Marking the occasion, the airline announced a flat 10 percent discount on ticket prices for 10 days starting December 21 for travel from Bangladesh to 10 destinations -- Amsterdam, London, Paris and Toronto and India's Kolkata, Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai, Bengaluru and Hyderabad.

Jet Airways is the first privately-owned Indian carrier to provide direct air connectivity between Bangladesh and India.

The first flight from Kolkata to Dhaka took place on December 16, 2007.

The airline now offers daily flights from Bangladesh to Kolkata, Mumbai and Delhi, said a press release.

Its chairman, Naresh Goyal, said, "Air travel between Bangladesh and India has been growing at a steady pace and we're happy that we have

been able to further trade, tourism and people-to-people contact between the two countries."

Jet Airways provides non-stop as well as one-stop services connecting Bangladesh to its 64-city strong network across India, the Gulf, Far East and Europe, including London, Paris and Amsterdam.

Jet Airways offers 21 weekly services across three Indian metros of Mumbai, Delhi and Kolkata, carrying over 300,000 passengers on an average per annum.

Crane operators' demo stalls Ctg port container handling

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The dock workers, merchant workers, lashing workers had already been enlisted in the unit although a shipping ministry order is already there to include the crane operators in the list, said Mir Nawshad Ali, the league's president.

Ali later threatened to wage tougher movements if their demands are not met.

Chowdhury said the demand contradicted the job contracts as the crane operators were employed by the private berth, ship and terminal operators, not the port.

Incoming BGMEA president decided, but not by ballot

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Over the last few years, a section of influential businessmen have taken to deciding the executive committee of the apex trade body of the country's main export earner, doing away with the long-practiced democratic process.

Since the Sammilito Parishad prevailed last time, it is now Forum's turn to preside over the trade body.

"There is no possibility of holding the formal election as we have already reached consensus to select the next president," said Anwar ul Alam Chowdhury Parvez, the leader of the Forum panel.

If everything goes to plan, Shahidul Islam, managing director of Rupa Group and a former vice-president of the BGMEA, will be formally announced on March 7 next year as the BGMEA president for the next two years, Parvez said.

But, as per the election schedule announced by the BGMEA on December 18, the panels will nominate their candidates on December 30 and the withdrawal date of candidature is January 6 next year.

The board will declare the candidates on January 7 next year and the election is scheduled to be held on March 7.

The voters are supposed to elect 35 directors, from whom one president and seven vice-presidents would be chosen.

Faruque Hassan, a leader from the Sammilito Parishad and current vice-president of the BGMEA, said he is

scheduled to compete in the election from his panel as his name was declared earlier.

"Still, I hope an election will be held where both the panels will present their candidates and the general voters will elect their leaders," he added.

Siddiqur Rahman, the current BGMEA president, said: "I heard that leaders from both the panels held a meeting to select the next leaders for the BGMEA."

Islam said all the electoral procedures were followed in his selection.

"Both Sammilito Parishad and Forum leaders have agreed to select me," he added.

Islam clinched the presidential nomination from the Forum panel over Mahmud Hasan Khan (Babu), a current vice-president of BGMEA.

"I do not have any grievance for not being selected as the leaders of the both panels unanimously chose Islam," Babu told The Daily Star by phone.

Asked about the high possibility of no election this time, Babu said it was decided previously that there will not be any election for two terms, including the current one.

He went on to give examples of other trade bodies that selected their leaders by consensus and not by ballot vote: the Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and the Bangladesh Employers Federation.

A stellar year for ICT

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At the same time, it doubled the customs duty on handset import to 10 percent.

"Within the next couple of years, Bangladesh can present itself as a device manufacturing country," said Rezwanaul Haque, chief executive officer of Transsion Bangladesh, a sister concern of Chinese mobile phone manufacturer Transsion Holdings.

Transsion has recently decided to set up a mobile assembly plant in Gazipur next year.

Smartphone sales though have slowed in 2017 after a few years of stellar growth, according to Haque, who is the immediate past secretary general of Bangladesh Mobile Phone Importers' Association.

Importers had planned to bring in 1.10 crore units this year, but the final tally might be 95 lakh, up from 82 lakh in 2016, according to Haque.

"The increase in customs duty has affected the industry to some extent," he added.

However, laptop imports soared 60 percent this year to five lakh units.

In the outgoing year, Bangladesh got its second submarine cable, although the full benefits of the heightened connectivity are yet to be reaped.

The government's allocation of nearly Tk 13,000 crore for the ICT sector is one of the key achievements for the year, said Shameem Ahsan, chairman of eGeneration Group, a leading management consultancy, technology services and outsourcing firm.

"We hope, in 2018 Bangladesh will not only be known as a low-cost solutions provider but also

as one of the leaders in providing innovative solutions and in specialising in cutting-edge technologies," he added.

Export earnings from locally-made software and ICT-related services like outsourcing and freelancing hit \$800 million in 2017, said State Minister for ICT Zunaid Ahmed Palak recently.

"Our next target is to cross the \$1 billion mark by next year and we are on the right track," Palak added.

And giving more hope to this goal is the inauguration of the Sheikh Hasina Software Technology Park in Jessore in the second week of December.

The year also saw a number of Bangladeshi companies strengthen their global footprint.

Datasoft Systems made its foray into the topical business of Internet of Things, winning the commission to build 10,000 smart homes in Tokyo.

They also signed an agreement with the Democratic Republic of Congo to install IoT-based toll management solution for its Matadi Bridge.

In January, Dohatec New Media, another Bangladeshi software developer, set off to establish Bhutan's electronic government procurement system.

Tiger IT, another Bangladeshi firm, opened a factory in Kathmandu to manufacture digital registration plates for the Himalayan country.

Though a couple of ride-hailing mobile apps hit the road in 2016 they got momentum in the outgoing year, said Elius Hussain, CEO of Pathao, which got five lakh registered users in 2017.

Global ride-hailing giant Uber scored 15 lakh registered users from Dhaka in 2017 alone.

E-commerce also passed another good year, with customers taking various services from their mobile devices.

In the outgoing year, the government also completed the arrangements for the launch of the country's first communications satellite Bangabandhu-1. The satellite might be thrown into the orbit by April.

The awarding of the mobile number portability licence is another milestone for the telecom ministry.

The service, which is expected to be rolled out by April, will allow mobile phone users to switch to any operator without changing their existing eleven-digit number.

The government also ironed out all niggles for the much-delayed rollout of the fourth generation of broadband cellular network technology, which would succeed the existing 3G technology.

The BTRC will hold the spectrum auction on February 13, and it will take another couple of months for the service to be rolled out.

There were also some upsets for the ICT industry during the year. US-based consultancy firm Accenture left the country in November and Ericsson scaled back on its operations.

TIM Nurul Kabir, secretary general of the Association of Mobile Telecom Operators of Bangladesh, pointed out that some of the legacy challenges that are hindering the growth of the sector still remain unresolved.

AMTOB hopes all the impediments will be resolved in the coming year and the telecom sector will contribute more to the economy.

Japan jobless rate lowest since 1993

AFP, Tokyo

Japan's unemployment rate in November dipped to its lowest level since November 1993, official data showed Tuesday, offering another sign that the world's third-largest economy is on track to recovery even if the place is slow.

Figures released by the government showed unemployment stood at 2.7 percent last month while jobs-to-applicants ratio improved slightly, up 0.01 percent from the previous month to 1.56 in November -- the highest level in almost 44 years.

The latest data come as Japan has notched up seven straight quarters of economic growth -- the longest positive run for 16 years -- with the upcoming 2020 Olympic Games giving the economy a shot in the arm.

Confidence among Japan's biggest manufacturers is also at an 11-year high, a key central bank survey showed earlier this month, as the world's number-three economy picks up pace.



Abul Kashem Md Shirin, CEO of Dutch-Bangla Bank, opens the bank's 175th branch at New Market in Dhaka yesterday.