

Detroit auto show offers nostalgia, glamour

AFP, Detroit

The Detroit auto show arrived Sunday with showman's flair, as the car industry tied its latest offerings to American nostalgia and Hollywood glamour.

But on the sidelines, there were lingering questions about policy and politics.

Arnold Schwarzenegger emerged from a Mercedes-Benz G-Class SUV. The granddaughter of screen legend Steve McQueen arrived in the latest version of the Ford Mustang he immortalized on film.

In a keynote address, US Transportation Secretary Elaine Chao touted just-enacted US tax cuts, which reduced the US corporate tax rate from 35 to 21 percent, saying the move will attract more US investment.

There were also cautious statements about ongoing renegotiations of the North American Free Trade Agreement, on which the North American car industry heavily relies.

But the auto show is about the cars, and automakers did their best to stay focused on their products.

With Americans' appetite for trucks and SUVs expected to remain robust in 2018, brands highlighted a number of new offerings in that category.

Mercedes-Benz debuted a redesigned G-Class SUV, significantly updating the interior with new technologies. The vehicles were made to climb steep ramps as flames shot up from the ground and confetti cannons blasted. As one finally stopped, Schwarzenegger emerged from a passenger seat.

"I have driven G-Wagens now for 25 years," glowed the actor of Austrian heritage.

"I think this car became so historic," he said, "because of its look."

Ford unveiled its own nostalgic offering, showing off a new mid-sized Ranger pickup, redesigned and reintroduced to the North American market.

It also offered a new sports trim of its Edge SUV, as well as a third iteration of a "Bullitt" special edition of its Mustang sports car.

Actor McQueen drove a 1968 Mustang in the thriller film "Bullitt," creating an indelible link between the car and American pop culture. His granddaughter Molly McQueen emerged from the latest special edition, comparing it favourably with the original.

"It is fun. It's fast and effortlessly cool," she said.

In a break from most of the big launches, Volkswagen highlighted a sedan, releasing its updated version of

the Jetta, the German automaker's top-selling vehicle in the US.

The base price of \$18,545 won especially loud applause at a glitzy launch, and was a counterpoint to the pricey SUVs and trucks that can easily cost twice that amount and more.

"As a full-line automaker... you need to have a competitive, strong sedan," VW North American chief executive Hinrich Woeckel told reporters after the launch.

On the sidelines of the flashy announcements, industry insiders were taking a wait-and-see attitude toward talks to revamp the North American Free Trade Agreement, which has generated fears of huge tariffs on Mexican-made imports to the US.

Negotiations have been ongoing for months at the insistence of US President Donald Trump, who has threatened to abandon the agreement if a beneficial deal is not struck.

"There's good conversation going on to modernize Nafta," said Mary Barra, CEO of General Motors. "We're going to continue to interact constructively to make sure people understand the very complex nature of our business."



Md Abul Bashar, general manager for Bangladesh Bank's (BB) financial inclusion department and project director of Second Medium Sized Enterprise Development Project (SMEDP-2), and Abdul Halim Chowdhury, CEO of Pubali Bank, exchange documents of a deal in Dhaka recently. Pubali Bank will be refinanced under SMEDP-2 with financial assistance from Asian Development Bank and BB. SK Sur Chowdhury, deputy governor of BB, and Cai Li, deputy country director of the ADB's resident mission in Bangladesh, were also present.

Month-long trade fair begins in Bagerhat

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bagerhat

A month-long trade fair started in Bagerhat yesterday in a bid to promote local products.

Hasina Newaz, director of Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry and Agrani Bank, inaugurated the fair organised by the Bagerhat Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Sheikh Helal Uddin Stadium.

Around 78 stalls of different companies

will be showcasing their products. Md Nurul Alam, secretary of Bagerhat Chamber of Commerce, said various events including circus, puppet and cultural shows and magic exhibitions would also be arranged.

Mir Sawkat Ali Badshah, a lawmaker; Kamruzzaman Tuku, chairman of the district council, and Liakat Hossain Liton, president of Bagerhat Chamber of Commerce, were present.

Islami Bank had a good 2017: Arastoo

FROM PAGE B1

The weighted average interest rate on deposits, which remained subdued in the last one year, took an upward turn in November due to rising demand from banks.

The interest rate on deposits increased slightly to 4.9 percent in November last year from 4.89 percent the previous month, according to data from the BB.

Private sector credit growth already crossed 19 percent in November, which is way past the target of 16.3 percent set for June this year by the BB.

Moreover, it is a common practice that

expenditure remains high in the election year.

"As inflation management is the major task for central bank, it is bound to mop up money from the market though various tools." But the central bank will have to keep balance between inflation and liquidity flow in the upcoming monetary policy, he added.

Abdul Matin, chairman of the executive committee of IBBL; Zillur Rahman, chairman of the audit committee; Syful Islam, director; and Abdul Hamid Miah, managing director, were present at the press conference among others.

Stocks continue to slide

FROM PAGE B1

Banking equities led the turnover by contributing 22.90 percent of the total turnover. All major sectors witnessed moderate correction. Grameenphone was the highest traded stock with its turnover of Tk 39.50 crore, followed by Square Pharma, Ifad Autos, Mercantile Bank and National Tubes.

Of the total stocks, 40 gained, 256 declined and 40 remained unchanged. DS30 and DSES were 17.64 points and 7.94 points in the red respectively. The port city bourse, the Chittagong Stock Exchange, also closed at a lower level, with its CSE All Share Price Index losing 168 points to close at 18,723. The Selective Categories Index shed 101 points to close at 11,308 points.

Losers beat gainers as 165 issues closed lower, 34 closed higher and 33 remained unchanged at the CSE. The daily turnover at the port city bourse was Tk 17.7 crore.



Tofail Ahmed, commerce minister; Mayank Pareek, president of passenger vehicle business unit at Tata Motors Ltd; and Abdul Matlub Ahmad, chairman of Nitol Niloy Group, the sole distributor of Tata Motors in Bangladesh, attend the launch of Tiago Automatic, a hatchback car of Tata Motors, at a programme in Dhaka on Saturday. Customers in Bangladesh can buy the car equipped with four gear positions -- automatic, neutral, reverse and manual -- for Tk 14.95 Lakh.

Development Forum begins tomorrow

FROM PAGE B1

Muhith said the country's dependence on foreign assistance has come down to a great extent and now the emphasis is being given to FDI instead of loans. In a separate session, the forum will discuss creation of enabling environment for FDI, he said.

About 700 delegates representing Bangladesh government and various development partners will attend the event at Sonargaon Hotel. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina will inaugurate the meeting.

The forum comprises Bangladesh and its development partners and is seen as a platform to discuss the country's development process.

Annette Dixon, vice president of the World Bank; Wencai Zhang, vice president of the Asian Development Bank; Minoru Masujima, deputy director general of Japan's foreign affairs ministry, and Suleiman Jasir Al-Herbish, director general of the Opec Fund for International Development, will also attend the conference.

The forum will start its proceedings with a keynote session on the implementation of the Seventh Five-Year Plan and the SDGs and the challenges Bangladesh confronts in attaining them.

A separate session will also be held on Bangladesh's graduation from LDC.

The Committee for Development Policy (CDP), a subsidiary advisory body of the United Nations Economic and Social Council, has confirmed that

Bangladesh would, for the first time, meet the criteria for graduation during the CDP's triennial review of the LDCs in March 2018. In a separate session, the forum would focus on the probable impact the transition may have on the economy and the possible mitigating steps which could ease the graduation process.

Muhith said the LDC graduation will be celebrated with grandeur. The premier will inaugurate the celebration.

The government plans to formulate a strategic plan to assess the losses and opportunities once Bangladesh graduates from the LDC group, the ERD secretary said.

Bangladesh will enjoy several benefits after coming out of the LDC club, he said.

There will be no limit in World Bank's lending and Bangladesh will get more loans according to its capacity, he said.

After the graduation, the lending rate in case of foreign loan will increase but it will not put any pressure, Muhith said. Bangladesh will face no problem in paying loans at least in the next 25 years, he said.

In the forum, more sessions will take place on agriculture and extreme climate conditions, addressing inequality and fostering quality education and ICT.

Sessions on addressing violence against women and ensuring women empowerment and improving urban service delivery will be held on the last day.

The last meeting of the forum took place in Dhaka in November 2015.

bKash, MTB offer instant remittance service

FROM PAGE B1

State Minister for ICT Zunaid Ahmed Palak inaugurated the service at the Westin hotel in Dhaka.

He said it would expedite digitalisation in the country and help remittance figures surpass previous records.

The state minister laid importance on reducing transfer costs. "We are moving forward towards becoming a cashless society and the Bangladesh Bank is helping the industry ensure the digitalisation of money flow," said Palak.

Lila Rashid, general manager of the payment systems department of the BB, termed the service a new innovation which is helping bring all the dollars into legal channel.

Transparency is a factor in digital transactions and bKash needs to ensure clarity, she said, urging to give importance on proper scrutiny and strict monitoring of agents.

"Lots of transaction patterns are available and both banks and mobile financial service operators need to ensure security," said the central banker.

Kamal Quadir, CEO of bKash, said the service would boost formal remittances inflow, particularly in the rural and remote areas where the presence of bank branches is limited.

He hoped to encourage more commercial banks to partner with mobile financial service providers to deliver remittance in a more efficient, secure and faster way through vast agent networks.

Anis A Khan, managing director and CEO of MTB, said, "The partnership will help us deliver low-cost remittance service at the doorsteps of our customers. This digital transaction will bring more efficiency in remittance delivery system by cutting cost and travelling time."

Oil hovers below \$70 highs

REUTERS, London

Oil hovered below a three-year high near \$70 a barrel on Monday on signs that production cuts by Opec and Russia are tightening supplies, but analysts warned of "red flags" due to surging US production.

International benchmark Brent crude futures were trading 18 cents lower at \$69.69 by 1004 GMT, having risen above \$70 earlier in the session.

US West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude futures were at \$64.22, down 8 cents from their last settlement.

Trading was relatively slow due to a national holiday in the United States.

A production-cutting pact between the Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries, Russia and other producers has given strong tailwind to oil prices, with both benchmarks last week hitting levels not seen since December 2014.

Growing signs of a tightening market after a three-year rout have bolstered confidence among traders and analysts that prices can be sustained near current levels.

Bank of America Merrill Lynch on Monday raised its 2018 Brent price forecast to \$64 a barrel from \$56, forecasting a deficit of 430,000 barrels per day (bpd) in oil production compared to demand this year.

Yarn makers to suffer as Indian cotton traders halt shipment

FROM PAGE B1

Mehdi Ali, president of the Bangladesh Cotton Association, however, said the Indian cotton traders' about-turn is unlikely to cause much damage as the quantity of the cancelled shipment is too little.

"There is nothing to be panicked about. We have lots of other sources of cotton," he said, citing the US, Australia, Brazil and some African countries as alternatives.

Cotton is an agricultural product, so it is vulnerable to the vagaries of nature like droughts and floods, pest attack and so on.

"So, we need to find a very strong alternative to India in order to ensure that our supply does not disrupt in case of any problem in a particular market," Ali added.

After hurricanes raised doubts about the supplies from the US, a top exporter, late last

year, Indian traders signed a flurry of contracts. Now, they are renege on them.

Indian traders have so far shipped 1.5 million bales of the 2.5 million bales contracted since October 1, when the current year began, dealers said.

Global cotton production is up nearly 7 percent to just over 120 million bales since May, according to the latest report of the United States Department of Agriculture.

In fiscal 2016-17, Bangladesh imported 6.5 million bales of cotton, up from 5.5 million bales a year earlier.

At the end of the current fiscal year, Bangladesh may import 7.1 million bales of cotton, according to Ali.

Bangladesh spends about \$3 billion a year for importing the fibre for local consumption.



AHM Mustafa Kamal, planning minister, meets Manmohan Parkash, country director of Asian Development Bank (ADB), at the minister's office in the capital yesterday. They discussed issues of mutual interest and ADB's ongoing projects in Bangladesh.

Farmers Bank selects new chairman

FROM PAGE B1

"I will serve as chairman of the bank as an institutional representative of 12 organisations. The board's decision will take effect after it gets go-ahead from the central bank."

Strengthening the capital base of the trouble-hit bank is one of the major challenges for him, according to Sarfat.

"Besides, the bank has to immediately repay deposits worth Tk 147 crore to the clients. I will try my best to repay the depositors' amount within the shortest possible time."

Alamgir along with the bank's audit committee chairman Md Mahabubul Haque Chisty resigned from its board on November 27 last year after the central bank asked them to quit.

If they had not stepped down, the BB would have removed them under the Banking Companies Act 1991, a BB official said.

In line with the BB directive, the Farmers Bank, established four years ago, restructured its audit, risk management and executive committees in November.

NRBC left without govt funds after media reports

FROM PAGE B1

The four-year-old bank had reformed its board in line with the central bank directives, according to Bangladesh Bank officials.

The banking regulator also removed NRBC's Managing Director Dewan Mujibur Rahman last month over his alleged involvement in a number of loan scandals.

In November 2016, the central bank found 10 counts of wrongdoings by the NRBC board, including violation of credit norms to sanction loans amounting to over Tk 701 crore and outsiders being often allowed to attend meetings.

The BB found former Mercantile Bank

chairman Shahidul Ahsan had drawn benefits from nearly Tk 44 crore-worth shares held by two sponsor-directors in NRBC, which is a breach of the banking companies act.

"Ahsan is the actual beneficiary of the shares held by two NRBC directors -- Kamrun Nahar Sakhi and ABM Abdul Mannan," said the BB probe report, adding that it meant the shares were forfeitable.

Ahsan represented Sakhi, who lives in Canada, in an annual general meeting of NRBC. He also attended several meetings of the bank's board and the executive committee breaching the rules.