

Electric scooters: not so eco-friendly after all?

AFP, Paris
E-scooters touted as zero-carbon urban transport are flooding city streets worldwide, but just how green they are remains an open question.

The companies -- from multinationals to local start-ups -- distributing them insist the omnipresent two-wheel vehicles are a boon for the environment and a curb on global warming.

"Bird was founded to help create a cleaner and more hospitable world that prioritises people over cars," the American firm, one of the global leaders in e-scooters, says on its website.

"Scooters cut the use of vehicles and reduce the volume of traffic on the road," it said. "They also help reduce pollution and improve air quality."

Shared scooters that do not require docking ports can be driven door-to-door, avoid stressful searches for parking spaces, and have zero-emission motors.

On paper, they have the potential to radically reduce urban car traffic: 70 percent of car trips between home and work in France, for example, are five kilometres (three miles) or less, according to the French National Institute for Statistics and Economic Research (INSEE).

"Micromobility could theoretically

encompass all passenger trips of less than eight kilometres (5 miles), which account for as much as



A woman walks past electric scooters of US transportation company Lime parked in a street of Paris.

50 to 60 percent of today's total passenger miles travelled in China, the European Union, and the United States," consulting firm McKinsey said in a report.

In the US, riders made nearly 40 million trips on shared scooters last year, according to the National Association of City Transportation Officials.

Lime, a major player financed by Uber and Google-parent Alphabet,

found that roughly one in every three Lime rides in 26 cities around the world replaces a trip by car.

"From this shift, we estimate that our riders have avoided 15 million miles (24 km) of car travel and prevented 6,220 metric tons of carbon emissions" over a two-year period, the company noted.

But do e-scooters live up to all the hype?

With regard to Lime's claims, a survey by research group 6t of 4,500 commuters in Paris, Lyon and Marseilles revealed that only 19

percent used scooters to go to work or school -- more than 40 percent of usage was by out-of-town visitors.

Without access to e-scooters, 44 percent of respondents said they would have walked, 12 percent said they would have biked, and 30 percent would have used public transport.

Cars barely entered into the picture.

"But this doesn't mean that we should get rid of e-scooters -- absolutely not!", said Jeremie Almosni, head of mobility at the Ademe, the French government agency for energy efficiency.

"The fact that half of usage is recreational is striking," he acknowledged. "But at least this favours a more mixed use of transport. It's definitely a way to get people out-and-about more, and perhaps a way of encouraging them to give up cars."

There is also a lot of uncertainty as to the lifespan of shared e-scooters, which varies with hardware and intensity of usage.

It's a key question, because how long they last is a major part of what determines environmental impact.

"As of today, it is impossible to say whether e-scooters are good or bad for the environment because we lack long-term statistics on life cycles," said Denis Benita, a transportation engineer at Ademe.



Matul Islam Nowshad, senior director for operations and strategic initiatives at Brac; Muhammed Ahsanul Jabbar, an additional secretary to the Energy and Mineral Resources Division; Alexander Yelland, general manager for corporate affairs at Chevron Asia South, and Ismail Chowdhury, director for corporate affairs at Chevron Bangladesh, in Dhaka recently attend the launch of the second phase of a Jibika project being run by Brac and Chevron to strengthen governance of 110 village development organisations.

StanChart group CFO visits Bangladesh



STAR BUSINESS DESK

Andy Halford, group chief financial officer of Standard Chartered Bank, recently came on a second official visit to Bangladesh.

This follows visits by other senior global leadership in recent times, including José Viñals, group chairman of Standard Chartered PLC, which the bank in a statement yesterday said to have emphasised its strong strategic focus on the country.

During his three-day stay, Andy met with policymakers, regulators, key stakeholders and clients.

"It is very exciting to see the progress made by Bangladesh in the few years since my last visit. The growth potential of Bangladesh, as our own research has shown recently, is immense," said Andy.

"I am pleased that the bank is playing a key role in driving this growth, providing financial solutions that match the growth aspirations of Bangladesh," he said.

Andy was appointed group chief financial officer of Standard Chartered PLC in July 2014 and chief financial officer of Standard Chartered Bank in April 2019.

Mercantile Bank elects vice chairmen



STAR BUSINESS DESK

Akram Hossain (Humayun) and Mohd Selim have recently been elected vice chairmen of Mercantile Bank.

The election took place at a 345th board meeting at the bank's head office in Dhaka, says a statement.

Humayun is the chairman and managing director of FARS Group and is also engaged in real estate business.

Selim is the chairman of Synthia Securities and is involved in cloth and fabric business.

Bandwidth block illegal: GP, Robi

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"Arbitration could be a process to resolve disputes and we are also in favour of that. But under the current act there is no provision. So, we need to go by the law and take action in line with that."

He said they are now proposing the government to include the arbitration procedure when the telecom act will be amended.

However, Robi said there is a specific act for arbitration that can amicably solve the problem.

"With regards to the telecom act, nowhere it says that arbitration cannot be used to solve disputes. Hence, we sincerely hope that the BTRC will be interested in pursuing the arbitration process to settle the matter once and for all," said Shahed Alam, chief corporate and regulatory affairs officer at Robi.

Draconian measures like limiting the bandwidth usage of an operator can never serve the interest of the customers in enjoying the quality of service they deserve, he said.

Robi also said the BTRC has set an unprecedented example by resorting to such an extreme measure to press home its demands based on audit that defies all rationale.

Meanwhile, the BTRC sources said they will neither accept nor reject Grameenphone's request for arbitration to resolve the disputed audit claim.

"Whenever we reject Grameenphone's request they will immediately move to the court and we will not give them that scope," said a top official requesting not to be named.

Michael Foley, chief executive officer of Grameenphone, said the company will seek an intervention of the court against the decision of the regulator.

Oil giant Total's chief announces new unit to invest in forests

AFP, Aix-En-Provence, France

The head of French energy giant Total announced Saturday that the company would invest a hundred million dollars annually on a new forest preservation and reforestation project.

"We want to set up a business unit to invest in projects that will preserve forests," chief executive Patrick Pouyanne told a meeting to discuss economic issues in Aix-en-Provence, in the south of France.

The company would spend \$100 million a year on the project, he said.

"The most effective way today to eliminate carbon, for less than \$10 a tonne, is reforestation," he added.

"This is not philanthropy," he added. "It's about investing in the medium- and long-term. A project for the forests, it has to last a long time to be positive for the planet."

Pouyanne was speaking just days after Total said it had begun producing biofuel at a refinery in southern France, a project that has sparked an outcry from environmentalists and farmers over its plans to import palm oil.

Govt to allow rice export amid supply glut

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The bumper production in the current boro and last aman seasons played a vital role in pulling down the prices.

In the last aman season, rice production stood at 1.53 crore tonnes, exceeding the target by 13 lakh tonnes. The total production in 2017-18 was 3.63 crore tonnes, DAE data showed. Bangladesh consumes 3.52 crore tonnes of rice per year, meaning there is a surplus, the US Department of Agriculture said.

According to the Directorate General of Food, Bangladesh has the capacity to store 20.23 lakh tonnes of rice. Under an ongoing food grain procurement programme, the government intends to buy only 1.5 lakh tonnes of paddy from farmers, which is less than 1 percent of the around 1.96 crore tonnes that are estimated to be produced this boro season.



Hossain Khaled, managing director of Anwar Landmark, and Anis A Khan, managing director of Mutual Trust Bank, exchange documents after signing a deal at MTB Centre in Dhaka recently to jointly offer discounts.

Stock investors continue to lose money

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It has lost 88 points since the budget was passed.

Some ongoing issues have shaken investors' confidence, causing the market to fall, said UCB Capital, a stock brokerage house, in its daily market commentary.

The issues include the 32.8 percent average hike in gas price and the imposition of tax on the retained earnings and the stock dividend of listed companies.

The resurgence of a row between Grameenphone, the largest stock, and the government, also contributed to the fall.

On Thursday, the Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission directed the international gateway operators to cut the international internet bandwidth for GP by 30 percent and for Robi by 15 percent on account of non-payment of dues.

In reaction, GP said that the move is illegal and it will seek intervention of courts.

In the meantime, the company lost 2.2 percent of its market capitalisation, the brokerage house added.

A top official of an asset management company said the market has been falling mostly because the new budget has failed to boost investors' confidence. "In fact, it dented investors' confidence in some cases."

Turnover, another important indicator, plunged 18.2 percent to Tk 415.33 crore on the DSE.

Of the traded issues, 87 securities advanced, 239 declined and 27 closed unchanged on the premier bourse.

JMI Syringes dominated the turnover chart with 2.68 lakh shares worth Tk 13.09 crore changing hands, followed by Asian Tiger Sandhani Life Growth Fund, Runner Automobiles, National Life Insurance, and Rupali Insurance.

CAPM BDBL Mutual Fund One was the day's best performer with 10 percent gains, while Global Insurance was the worst loser, shedding 7.64 percent.

Chattogram stocks also dropped with the bourse's benchmark index, CSCX, declining 81.79 points, or 0.81 percent, to finish at 9,902.99.

Losers beat gainers as 162 issues declined, 78 advanced and 25 finished unchanged on the Chittagong Stock Exchange.

'Safe like China' - In Argentina, ZTE finds eager buyer for surveillance tec

REUTERS, San Salvador De Jujuy, Argentina

In Argentina's remote northern province of Jujuy, Chinese telecoms giant ZTE is installing a little slice of the Asian nation's vast surveillance state - security cameras that the local government says will help to curb street crime.

Even this relatively small, little-reported deal is raising concerns in Washington, which is increasingly warning allies not to buy Chinese technology that it says could be used by Beijing to spy on its customers.

ZTE Corp sealed a nearly \$30 million (£24 million) surveillance contract with Jujuy in March to provide cameras, monitoring centres, emergency services, and telecommunications infrastructure. ZTE first made its sales pitch three years ago.

The deal is an example of the tech inroads China is making in Latin America even as the United States warns about the dangers of using Chinese technology, especially related to surveillance. A Chinese official in Buenos Aires told Reuters the Jujuy project could help China expand its tech footprint in the country, by encouraging other cities to adopt similar technology.

Washington has "concerns" about ZTE's project in Jujuy, a spokeswoman for the US State Department's Western Hemisphere Affairs Bureau said in a statement.

"China gathers and exploits data on an unrivalled scale, and uses the information to promote corruption, support arbitrary surveillance, and silence dissent," the spokeswoman said.

The US worries about the project, which

have not been previously reported, show how the United States is scrutinizing both big deals and small in its efforts to slow the spread of Chinese security technology around the globe.

The United States has offered little public evidence to support its warnings to allies, and Argentine and Chinese officials played down concerns about the Jujuy project in interviews and statements to Reuters.

ZTE, which has a small presence in Argentina, declined to share company data on its surveillance technology projects in

Latin America or to comment for this story.

At an event in the provincial capital San Salvador de Jujuy in May, ZTE's general manager in Argentina, Dennis Wang, alongside Governor Gerardo Morales, his security minister and police officials, made a presentation and described how the technology had helped cut crime rates in China.

Jujuy already has close ties to China. A Chinese company is heavily invested in lithium mining in the province and China has provided the financing and technology for a huge solar farm, South

America's largest. Now Jujuy can be "safe like China," the local government said in an announcement about the event.

China's lower crime rate is due in part to its sprawling - and contentious - surveillance apparatus of cameras, facial recognition software, citizen databases and courts controlled by the ruling Communist Party that have high conviction rates.

To be sure, authorities in many democratic nations including the United States and Britain also make wide use of surveillance technology. However, human rights watchdogs say China abuses these powers to suppress dissent and protest by its own citizens.

China has built an extensive video surveillance system and installed smartphone monitoring technology in the northwestern region of Xinjiang, where more than a million Uighurs and other Muslims have been detained in so-called vocational training centres. ZTE and its subsidiaries have been heavily involved in building China's internal surveillance project, according to procurement documents, including the surveillance infrastructure in Xinjiang.

The Chinese official in Buenos Aires dismissed US worries as "anxiety" over the success of Chinese firms, especially in the race towards 5G telecommunications technology that firms like ZTE and Huawei Technologies Co Ltd are spearheading.

The official, who asked not to be named, said Latin American countries had a growing need to improve security, creating an opportunity for China to sell surveillance technology at a competitive price.



Visitors pass in front of the Chinese telecoms equipment group ZTE Corp booth at the Mobile World Congress in Barcelona.