

“Made in Bangladesh” cars: how far are we?

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The personal ownership of a car in Bangladesh has always been an expensive prospect. High import taxes, combined with the lack of an indigenous auto industry in Bangladesh, mean prospective buyers have to pay to double over a car’s original price, sometimes even more.

However, with the massive 1,106% increase in car ownership (from 303,215 units to 4,471,625 units) in the past 15 years, combined with rapid industrialisation, local production of cars has become very close to reality. Some companies have already begun locally assembling cars for forging brands, while others are planning for future joint production. With this in mind, we have put together a summary of all these companies and their achievements to date.

For this article, we are excluding the development of commercial and motorcycle assembly in Bangladesh, as those topics are best covered with their own separate dedicated reports.

Pragati Industries Limited | Multiple brands

Pragati history of local car assembly goes back before our country’s independence, when —Back then it was known as Chandhara Industries— in the 60’s it entered into an agreement with General Motor’s European division to put together the Vauxhall Viva sedan. In more recent times, the Japanese automotive giant Mitsubishi has entered a five-year agreement with Pragati around 2010 to locally assemble the second generation Pajero Sport SUV. Both companies maintain this agreement to this day, with assembly switching to the new third-generation QX model. In recent years, the State-run enterprise reportedly also began working closely with Mitsubishi to make their brand of motor vehicles. In a report published on The Daily Star last year, Industries Minister Nurul Majid Mahmud Humayun said that Japanese Ambassador Ito Naoki had told him “He [Ito Naoki] also said that Japan would provide technical assistance for the production of Bangladesh’s own brand of motor vehicles. He further offered to assist Bangladesh in developing the vendor industry related to automobile and light engineering industries and setting up an Automobile Testing & Research Institute in Bangladesh.”

Other than Mitsubishi, Pragati also assembled 36 Mahindra Scorpio SUVs in 2017. The enterprise also offers the Foton SUV and various other commercial vehicles.

Rangs Limited | Mitsubishi Motors

Although Pragati has been putting together cars with the three-diamond badge for a while, most of their output ended up in the government fleet. The cars that do end up on the consumer market, are sold by Rangs Limited, a concern of Rangs Group. The local industrial giant has been putting together the cars on their own as well, assembling the Mitsubishi Outlander SUV for well over three years, with more than 200 units being successfully completed.

Shoeb Ahmed, divisional director of Rangs Limited, informed daily star in February that for 2021 they hope to assemble 200 SUVs in a single year.

PHP Motors | Proton Holdings Berhad

PHP Motors, a sister concern of the PHP Family based in Chattogram, has been putting together Malaysia’s Proton car as early as 2017. Their facility at Sagarika in Chattogram is capable of the annual production of 1,200 units a year and currently employs about 265 workers to assemble 10-12 vehicles per shift. PHP started with the assembly of the Proton Preve, a decently equipped family sedan, but also began assembling the 2021 Proton Saga, according to PHP Automobile chairman Sufi Mohammed Mizanur Rahman.

Akhtar Parvez, managing director of the company, told The Daily Star last February that PHP currently locally produces 25 of

capable of producing 5,000 vehicles a year. Fair Technology, which has also been manufacturing Samsung smartphones since 2019, hopes to begin production as soon as 2022 and claims the locally assembled cars are likely to be 25 per cent lower than prevailing market rates.

Uttara Motors Limited | Maruti Suzuki

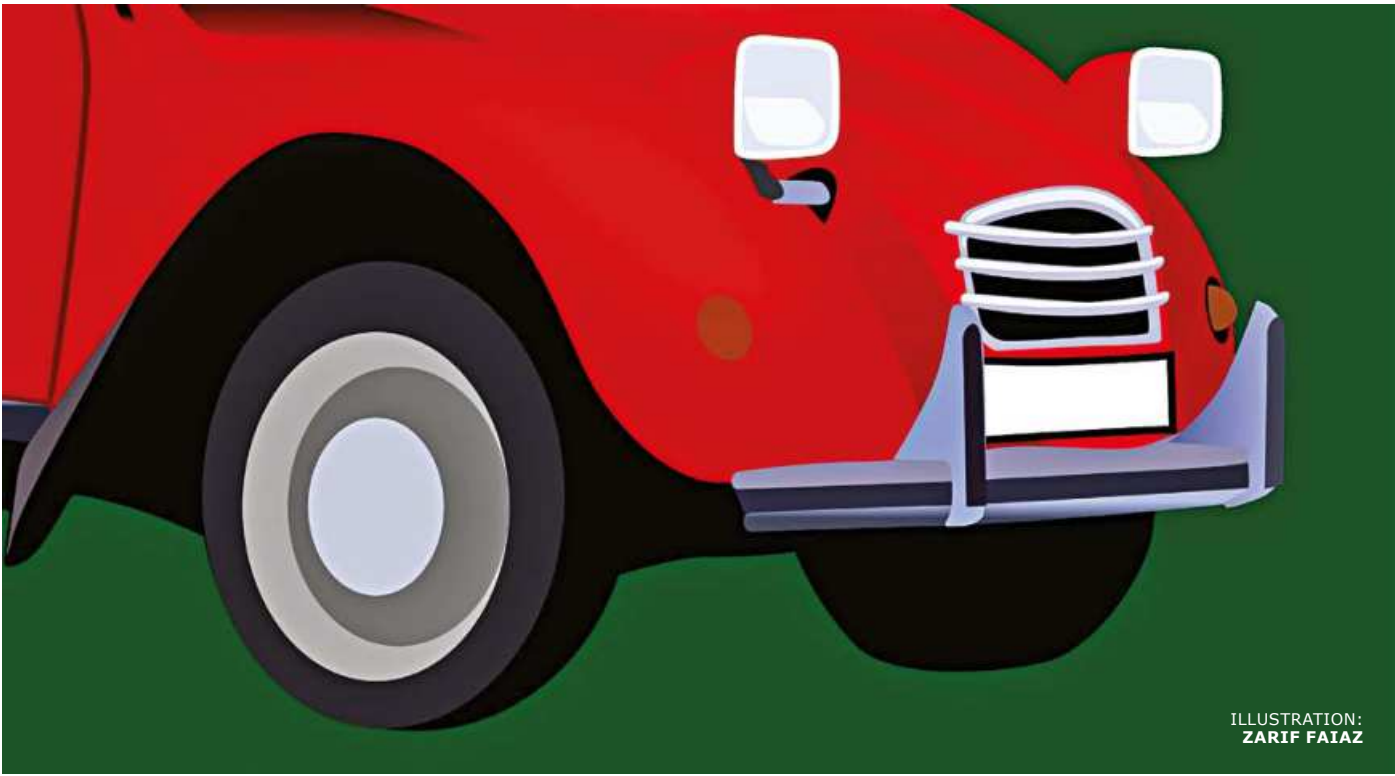
Another dealership that has switched its focus on local car assembly is Uttara Motors Ltd. They are investing \$33.63 million to build a local assembly and manufacturing plant for Maruti Suzuki cars in Bangladesh. The company signed a lease for a 50-acre plot at Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Shilpa Nagar in Chattogram, last march.

Matiur Rahman, Uttara Motors Chairman and Managing Director, said the high-quality plant will generate employment for 800 people.

ship the required equipment on time even though we opened letters of credit earlier on,” said Mir Masud Kabir, managing director of BAIL. “We were on track before the Covid-19 crisis hit but the prevailing situation has not been favourable for us. Regardless, we are maintaining correspondence with our foreign partners via digital platforms to keep the project alive,” he added.

Nitol Motor’s Suvare electric cars project also suffered similar delays because of the Covid-19. The company has finished the construction of the assembly plant building on 10 acres of land in Pabna, but are unable to import the machinery required to build the car themselves.

“As per new target, we will bring the EV within next two and a half years,” informed Abdul Matlub Ahmad, chairman of Nitol-Niloy Group.



the 800 parts required to build a car. He hopes they will be able to manufacture most of the important parts in their factory by next year.

Upcoming projects

Fair Technology Limited | Hyundai Motor Company

Fair Technology Limited’s entry into the Bangladesh auto industry has been recent, but it has already made significant headway toward setting up local production. Being the new sole distributor of Hyundai cars in Bangladesh, the company signed a contract in January with Bangladesh Hi-Tech Park Authority (BHTPA) to establish an assembly plant at Kaliakair, Gazipur. Mohammed Mesbah Uddin, Chief Marketing Officer of the Fair group, told the Daily star last February that they plan to invest \$125 million in the next three to five years to set up a plant

Stalled prospects

Although the companies mentioned above are already producing or soon to start production, many other local automotive ventures had their venture abruptly halted because of the ongoing pandemic.

Bangladesh Auto Industries Ltd. (BAIL), was planning to establish an electric vehicle factory on Bangabandhu Industrial Park. With an initial investment of \$200 million that would total to \$1 billion within the next five years, the company planned to manufacture from two-wheelers to sedans, SUVs, pick-ups, mini-trucks, and multipurpose vehicles. Unfortunately, the pandemic slowed down BAIL’s plans considerably, with all plans being moved back a year. In an interview with The Daily Star Mir Masud Kabir, managing director of BAIL, said “We missed the target as the suppliers could not

Asked about the car, he said the locally designed 25-Kwh battery-electric car would have the size and feel of regular sedans and will cost about Tk 10 lakh to Tk 12 lakh.

In more recent times Bangla cars, a sister concern of the Hossain group, entered talks with Chinese carmaker Dongfeng Motors to start local vehicle production under their own marque. Because of covid complication, however, the plans have been put on hold and the company is assembling DFSK car in their assembly plant at Narayanganj as an interim solution.

Md Abdus Sattar, Chief Technical Officer (CTO) of Bangla cars, informed The Daily Star that the plant is now fully operational, having successfully assembled 6 new DFSK “Glory” crossovers. The company plans to officially inaugurate the assembly plant after Eid, or whenever the lockdown eases.

The hustle culture is a lie, here’s why

OISHEE EERADA MAUDUD

Recent times have seen a significant rise in this culture of putting work above everything else and putting everything you have into working hard. Known as the hustle culture, this lifestyle teaches people that overworking is the only way to earn respect, whether it be from others or yourself. If you are not putting every possible minute of the day into something productive, you do not have what it takes to be successful. If you are not working overtime, are you even working?

Like many health professionals, studies, and others have already, we are here to tell you that the hustle culture is a lie. Hard work is necessary, but overworking yourself to the point where you do not have even a second to yourself is not.

Arijit Saha, who is a Senior Business Analyst at a leading IT company, says, “When you work in a fast-paced work environment, and regardless of where you work, your employer will claim it’s a fast-paced workplace; there is always an emergency that requires you put additional time during odd hours. The company culture will eventually become



toxic if employees consider every single task a high priority.”

Constantly hustling can lead to burnout, have negative health effects, and more

Aside from the fact that it is exhausting, steadfast compliance with the hustle culture can lead to burnout. Yes, burnout is legitimate. The World Health Organisation (WHO) defines it as “a syndrome conceptualized as resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed”. Burnout causes employees to have a pessimistic approach to work. They experience a lack of motivation and energy to work and in turn, a decline in their work competence.

On the risks of overworking, Dr M. Tasdik Hasan, a global mental health researcher, said, “The direct link between overworking and mental health is still unestablished. Such exhausting schedules may lead to disruption in the biological rhythm of the body and can have significant effects on work efficiency, sleep patterns, mental health, psychological or behavioural changes, stress, depression, Type II Diabetes, reproductive outcome, obesity, hypertension and developing cerebro-cardiovascular complications. We should not exclude the risk of suicides as Japan has reported such cases lately.”

Hustle culture also breeds a toxic sense of competition among employees. While healthy competition can motivate employees to do better, if they are taught that hustling is the way to earn promotions and get better opportunities, healthy competition will turn into fierce rivalries with everyone trying to hustle harder than the rest to bring down others. This culture can even hamper the company’s overall productivity.

Corporate employees are not the only ones affected.

While it is tempting to think of corporate overlords cracking whips and being the flag bearers of hustle culture who rob employees of all their joy and sanity, that simply is not the truth. Hustle

culture affects everyone, even university students.

Zarin Fariha, a Bangladeshi student pursuing Philosophy and Sociology at Monash University, Australia, said, “I used to tend to associate productivity with the number of hours I was putting in for work per day. There were days when I would stay up all night to cater to tasks for various occasions in different places, as the mentality of ‘more work equals more efficiency’ had completely grasped me. Having burnouts now and then took a heavy toll on me and I felt there was no energy left in me to go on with my daily activities as usual, which largely included my academic pursuits as well.”

Entrepreneurs are also a major group who have been significantly affected. “Amongst the many prices I paid for such a crazy work schedule, one of the biggest has to be my mental health. To put it bluntly, it has been in extremely poor condition throughout these years. While the underlying causes for my depression aren’t singular, not having any sort of work-life balance certainly damaged it to a severe extent. Ironically, I was consciously overloading myself with even more work as a way of “coping” with my depression, not realising how it was having the opposite effect,” shared Muhammed Asif Khan, co-founder and CEO at Alpha Catering.

The pandemic could not have made it any easier

The Covid-19 pandemic has wreaked havoc on people’s normal routines. Many have lost jobs and tried to switch to new ways of making a living. Some have had to think up new ways to drive sales to somehow save their businesses. Others have had to learn how to deliver a quality performance while working from home. If the stress brought on by the hustle culture and the need to earn more was not enough, this disruption has certainly added to people’s worries.

“The Covid-19 pandemic has resulted in changes to the working arrangements of millions of employees who are now

based at home and may continue to work at home, in some capacity, for the foreseeable future. Also, many people have lost jobs, experienced severe cuts in salaries. All these are impacting their mental health and contributing to them developing different symptoms,” said Dr M. Tasdik Hasan.

What can you do then?

The first change you can implement is the most obvious - schedule your day such that you get enough sleep. As per an article by Harvard Business Review, only 1 to 3 per cent of the population can sleep for only five to six hours each night without the lack of sufficient sleep affecting their performance. It is possible but unlikely that you are among that 1 to 3 per cent. So, do not neglect your sleep.

Secondly, you can also try blocking out times for other activities. If this is not possible on weekdays, try scheduling these time blocks on weekends. Muhammed Asif Khan recounts his own experience, “Today, I exercise regularly, meditate, read far more than I used to (which is something I absolutely love), and also write more often. I don’t work like hell anymore. But strangely, I feel just as productive as in the past, if not more so. And most importantly, I am now happy.”

Lastly, it is normal to want to keep going even when your eyelids start drooping or you feel those acute pangs of hunger. You fear that taking a break would mean losing your momentum and concentration. But not taking breaks leads you to become more prone to distractions and hence less efficient.

It is also important for organisations to understand the value of empathy and their employees’ well-being. As Arijit Saha added, “People need to embrace empathy in the workplace. It is hard to imagine anyone who likes working on their day-offs or out-of-office hours. Setting boundaries is important”, burned-out employees trying to desperately fit into an unhealthy culture can only hurt the organisation in the long run.