

ACI Motors launches country's first hybrid motorcycle

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

ACI Motors Limited has launched Bangladesh's first hybrid motorcycle, the Yamaha FZS Hybrid, marking a new chapter in the country's motorcycle industry with the introduction of advanced technology for local riders.

Subrata Ranjan Das, managing director of ACI Motors Limited, inaugurated the new model as the chief guest at a programme held at Le Méridien Dhaka on Friday, according to a press release. Hiroshi Setogawa, director for sales at Yamaha Motor India, virtually joined the event.

The Yamaha FZS Hybrid has been priced at Tk 349,500, while an introductory offer price of Tk 343,500 has been set for customers who place pre-bookings.

Under the offer, buyers will receive a discount of Tk 6,000, which is available only through the pre-booking system.

Initially, the motorcycle will be available in two colours -- Cyan Metallic Grey and Racing Blue -- across all authorised Yamaha showrooms in Bangladesh.

The launch follows growing anticipation among motorcycle enthusiasts, with widespread speculation surrounding the arrival of a high-technology model. The Yamaha FZS Hybrid has already generated strong interest among bike lovers.

Equipped with cutting-edge technology, the motorcycle features a hybrid engine that operates on a combination of fuel and battery power. It uses a Smart Motor Generator (SMG) for silent starts and power assistance during acceleration, along with an automatic Stop & Start System (SSS) to enhance fuel efficiency.

Compared with conventional motorcycles, the hybrid model offers better mileage, quicker acceleration and reduced carbon emissions, making it more environment friendly.



Subrata Ranjan Das, managing director of ACI Motors Limited, inaugurates Bangladesh's first hybrid motorcycle, the Yamaha FZS Hybrid, for local riders at Le Méridien Dhaka on Friday.
PHOTO: ACI MOTORS

Midland Bank strikes MoU with Best Western Plus Bay Hills on discount benefits



PHOTO: MIDLAND BANK

Md Tajuddin Mahmood, deputy managing director of Best Western Plus Bay Hills, and Md Nazmul Huda Sarkar, deputy managing director of Midland Bank PLC, pose for a photograph after signing the memorandum of understanding at the bank's head office in Gulshan-2, Dhaka recently.

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Midland Bank PLC recently signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Best Western Plus Bay Hills, a hotel of the Goldsands Group located in Cox's Bazar.

Md Nazmul Huda Sarkar, deputy managing director and head of information technology and chief technology officer at Midland Bank PLC, and Md Tajuddin Mahmood, deputy managing director of Best Western Plus Bay Hills, signed the agreement at the bank's head office in Gulshan-2, Dhaka, according to a press release.

Under the partnership, all debit, credit and prepaid cardholders of the bank will enjoy a 40 percent discount on room tariffs (rack rate), a 15 percent discount on banquet hall services and a 10 percent discount on the à la carte menu.

Md Abed-Ur-Rahman, head of cards at the bank, and Md Abu Seheri Forhad, head of sales at the hotel, along with other senior officials from both organisations, were also present.

SBAC Bank signs deal with MAY International Trade Services

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SBAC Bank PLC recently signed an agreement with MAY International Trade Services Limited, a financial advisory firm operating in Bangladesh.

SM Mainul Kabir, managing director and chief executive officer of SBAC Bank PLC, and Syed Aminul Kabir, managing director and CEO of MAY International Trade Services Limited, signed the agreement at the bank's head office in Dhaka, according to a press release.

Under the agreement, MAY

International Trade Services Limited will support SBAC Bank by providing information and related services for international container tracking and vessel screening systems.

Md Rabiul Islam, additional managing director; Md Altaf Hossain Bhuyan, deputy managing director; Md Mazharul Hasan, vice president and head of the international division; and Layla Kowkine Ara, deputy managing director of MAY International Trade Services Limited, along with other officials from both organisations, were also present.



Syed Aminul Kabir, managing director and CEO of MAY International Trade Services Limited, and SM Mainul Kabir, managing director and chief executive officer of SBAC Bank PLC, pose for a photograph after signing the agreement at the bank's head office in Dhaka recently.
PHOTO: SBAC BANK

OpenAI introducing ads to ChatGPT

AFP, San Francisco

OpenAI announced Friday it will begin testing advertisements on ChatGPT in the coming weeks, as the wildly popular artificial intelligence chatbot seeks to increase revenue to cover its soaring costs.

The ads will initially appear in the United States for free and lower-tier subscribers, the company said in a blog post outlining its long anticipated move. Premium Pro and Enterprise subscribers will remain ad-free.

The integration of advertising has been a key question for generative AI chatbots, with companies largely reluctant to interrupt the user experience with ads.

But the exorbitant costs of running AI services may have forced OpenAI's hand.

Only a small percentage of its nearly one billion users pay for subscription services, putting pressure on the company to find new revenue sources.

Since ChatGPT's launch in 2022, OpenAI's valuation has soared to \$500 billion in funding rounds -- higher than any other private company. Some expect it could go public with a trillion-dollar valuation.

But the ChatGPT maker burns through cash at a furious rate, mostly on the powerful computing required to deliver its services.

With its move, OpenAI brings its business model closer to tech giants Google and Meta, which have built advertising empires on the back of their free to use services.

Unlike OpenAI, those companies have massive advertising revenue to fund AI innovation -- with Amazon also building a solid ad business on its shopping and video streaming platforms.

"Ads aren't a distraction from the gen AI race; they're how OpenAI stays in it," said Jeremy Goldman, an analyst at EMarketer.

"If ChatGPT turns on ads, OpenAI is admitting something simple and consequential: the race isn't just about model quality anymore; it's about monetising attention without poisoning trust," he added.

OpenAI's pivot comes as Google gains ground in the generative AI race, infusing services including Gmail, Maps and YouTube with AI features that--in addition to its Gemini chatbot--compete directly with ChatGPT.

OpenAI Chief Executive Officer Sam Altman has long expressed his dislike for advertising, citing concerns that ads could create distrust about ChatGPT's content.

To address these concerns, OpenAI pledged that ads would never influence ChatGPT's answers and that user conversations would remain private from advertisers.

"Ads do not influence the answers ChatGPT gives you," the company stated. "Answers are optimized based on what's most helpful to you. Ads are always separate and clearly labeled."

Mercantile Bank holds annual business summit

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Mercantile Bank PLC yesterday held its "Annual Business Summit 2026" at the Pan Pacific Sonargaon Dhaka.

Md Anwarul Haque, chairman of Mercantile Bank PLC, inaugurated the summit as the chief guest, according to a press release.

Haque expressed his sincere appreciation to the branches, sub-branches and divisional heads for their dedicated efforts in achieving the bank's overall objectives.

"Despite the ongoing instability at both national and global levels, Mercantile Bank's operating profit in 2025 was achieved as expected. Moreover, bringing the level of non-performing loans down to a tolerable limit over the past year is a major success for us, reflecting the bank's firm commitment to good governance, integrity and safeguarding customers' interests," he said.

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Mati Ul Hasan, managing director of the bank, presided over the programme.

Hasan provided important guidelines on the necessary actions to achieve the bank's business targets for 2026. He also urged an increase in agriculture and SME lending to accelerate the rural economy.

Md Abdul Hannan, vice-chairman of the bank; M Khan Belal, chairman of the executive committee; Mohammad Abdul Awal, chairman of the risk management committee; ASM Feroz Alam and Mosharref Hossain, directors; and Tapash Chandra Paul, deputy managing director and chief financial officer, attended the summit.

Md Zakir Hossain, Shamim Ahmed, Ashim Kumar Saha, Md Zahid Hossain and Shah Md Sohel Khurshid, deputy managing directors, were also present at the event.



Lutfar Rahman Opu, founder chairman of Fortress Group, inaugurates the "Fortress Property Expo 2026" at Rupayan Shopping Square in the Bashundhara Residential Area of Dhaka on Friday.
PHOTO: FORTRESS GROUP



PHOTO: MERCANTILE BANK

Md Anwarul Haque, chairman of Mercantile Bank PLC, inaugurates the bank's "Annual Business Summit-2026" at the Pan Pacific Sonargaon Dhaka yesterday.

Fortress Property Expo 2026 kicks off in Dhaka

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Fortress Property Expo 2026 began on Friday at Rupayan Shopping Square in the Bashundhara Residential Area of Dhaka.

Organised by Fortress Group, one of the leading real estate developers in Bangladesh, the exposition will remain open to the public every day from 10:00am to 8:00pm until January 31, according to a press release.

Lutfar Rahman Opu, founder chairman of Fortress Group, inaugurated the exhibition as the chief guest at the realtor's head office in the capital, according to a press release.

Speaking at the event, Opu said the company focuses on aesthetically pleasing designs and internationally standard, earthquake-resistant housing, developed by a team of experienced local and foreign engineers.

"All our projects are handed over to clients within the stipulated time,"

he said, adding that Fortress currently has several ongoing projects in Jolshiri Abashon, Bashundhara and Uttara.

The exposition aims to bring modern housing solutions and profitable investment opportunities under one roof, offering visitors a wide range of options including sky villas, penthouses, apartments and commercial spaces in prime locations across Dhaka.

During the event, special emphasis is being placed on quality construction, contemporary design and the long term investment potential of Fortress Group's projects, the release added.

Customers can choose from more than 80 ongoing projects covering over 21 lakh square feet of development area.

Advisers, investors, landowners, clients, as well as the managing director, directors, chief operating officer and other officials of the company were present at the inauguration ceremony.

Gold falls over 1%

REUTERS

Gold fell more than 1 percent on Friday as investors booked profits after recent record highs, while signs of easing geopolitical tensions further dampened the metal's safe-haven appeal.

Spot gold was down 0.5 percent at \$4,592.29 per ounce as of 01:39 p.m. ET (1839 GMT), after falling as low as \$4,536.49 earlier in the session.

However, the metal is poised for its second consecutive weekly gain, of about 1.9 percent, after scaling a record peak of \$4,642.72 on Wednesday.

US gold futures for February delivery settled 0.6 percent lower at \$4,595.40.

"It's a general retreat in the commodity complex after weeks of aggressive gains, with some profit-taking. The de-escalation of Middle East tensions has also removed some of the geopolitical premium in gold and other metals, especially silver," said Marex analyst Edward Meir.

Geopolitical tensions appeared to ease as protests in Iran subsided, while US President Donald Trump took a wait and see approach and Russia's President Vladimir Putin moved to mediate in Iran and de-escalate the situation.

On the trade front, the US and Taiwan struck a deal on Thursday that lowers tariffs on many of Taiwan's semiconductor exports and channels new investments into US tech, and risks infuriating China.

Meanwhile, the Federal Reserve is expected to keep rates unchanged through the first half of the year, with a first 25-basis point cut projected in June, as per data compiled by LSEG.

Safe-haven gold tends to do well during times of geopolitical and economic uncertainty, as well as when interest rates are low.

"I still think we have a chance of getting to \$5,000 sometime this year, punctuated with these big corrections in the meantime," Meir said.

US dollar gains

REUTERS, New York

The dollar gained on Friday after US President Donald Trump praised economic adviser Kevin Hassett at a White House event and said he may want to keep him in his current role, prompting speculation he is less likely to be named as chair of the Federal Reserve.

"I see Kevin's in the audience, and I just want to thank you. You were fantastic on television today. I actually want to keep you where you are, if you want to know the truth," Trump said.

"We have seen some US dollar buying on this headline, as it underscores that the Fed decision is mostly about political credibility," Adam Button, chief currency analyst at investingLive, said in a note.

"Of the candidates, Hassett is seen as the least independent, which in turn is the most-dovish due to Trump's longstanding desire to cut rates," Button said.

Trump is expected to name his candidate to succeed Jerome Powell in the coming weeks, with Powell's term due to end in May. The leading four candidates for the role are Hassett, Fed Governor Christopher Waller, former Fed Governor Kevin Warsh and BlackRock's chief bond investment manager Rick Rieder.

Betting site Polymarket shows that Warsh is now a favorite to get the role.

The dollar index, which measures the greenback against a basket of currencies including the yen and the euro, rose 0.06 percent to 99.41, with the euro down 0.1 percent at \$1.1594. The index reached a six-week high of 99.49 on Thursday.