

## iPhone sales fuel Apple profit boost

AFP, San Francisco

Apple said Tuesday that surging iPhone sales helped propel a sharp rise in quarterly profits, as the tech giant delivered a record 48 million of the smartphones.

Profits rose 31 percent to \$11.1 billion, while revenues jumped 22 percent from a year ago to \$51.5 billion, Apple said.

The California tech giant, which in September unveiled revamped versions of the iPhone, said the number of units sold jumped 22 percent from last year while revenues lifted 36 percent.

Apple, the world's biggest company by market value, gave back early after-hours gains and dipped 0.2 percent to \$114.30 on the results.

Chief executive Tim Cook said Apple closed the books on its fiscal year, calling it "Apple's most successful year ever," following strong iPhone sales and a range of new or upgraded devices.

"We are heading into the holidays with our strongest product lineup yet, including iPhone 6s and iPhone 6s Plus, Apple Watch with an expanded lineup of cases and bands, the new iPad Pro and the all-new Apple TV, which begins shipping this week," Cook said in a statement.

For the full fiscal year ending in September, Apple booked a whopping \$53.4 billion profit, up 35 percent, while revenues rose 28 percent to \$233.7 billion. Some \$12.5 billion in revenue came from China -- down five percent from the past quarter but double the level of a year ago.

Cook said the fiscal year showed "our largest absolute revenue growth ever" and was helped by "huge inroads into emerging markets generating over \$79 billion of revenue and growing 63 percent despite very strong headwinds from foreign exchange."

The iPhone was the key driver for Apple, bringing in more than 60 percent of its revenues for the past quarter. But iPad unit sales fell 20 percent in the quarter to 9.9 million units.

## Apex brings global trends in local footwear

SHUVASHISH ROY

STYLE is a way of expressing oneself without having to speak. The advertising slogan -- Trending in Paris, now at Apex -- by Apex Footwear rationalises the global styling spirit, as everyone now knows what is trending by virtue of the internet.

"When a product is talk of the town in Milan, we will make it available simultaneously at the Apex store in Dhaka to give the customers the same essence," said Rajan Pillai, chief operating officer of Apex, in a recent interview with The Daily Star.

"We supply to the biggest footwear companies in the world. That is how we are linking the world," Pillai said.

Apex is a pioneer in the manufacture and export of leather footwear from Bangladesh to major global shoe retailers, producing 25,000 leather products a day, he said.

The retail industry in Bangladesh is still at a nascent stage, but has great prospects, he added.

Many global retail brands will enter the Bangladesh market in the next few years, which will intensify competition, Pillai said. "This will be a blessing for the local industry as it will meet international standards and brands can compare quality between brands."

The company's local retail wing was established in 1997 to give Bangladeshi consumers an opportunity to experience quality leather footwear designed according to the latest market trends and technology from Europe.



Rajan Pillai

"Continuous design innovation is one of the secrets of our success. We have our own product development team and planning is design-centric. We have offices in Italy and Taiwan and our local team monitors and tracks what is happening in the local market."

Pillai believes that style evolves every day. "Each day is a page in the fashion story, so we keep innovating and that is why people keep coming back to us."

"We consider our customers as our partners. They are the bread and butter of our business."

Pillai said they have a total of ten brands to meet the need of every customer.

Customer loyalty and brand experience are the two key components to success in retailing, according to Pillai, who has an MBA majoring in international business.

Every individual of the Apex family has a contribution to the growth of the company, he added.

Pillai said there are many challenges in this journey to success, but he believes challenges are parallel tracks and part of everyone's life.

Sharing the company's plan, he said there is scope for expansion. "Our aim is to reach 225 stores of our own by next year, which is now 200." In addition, the company has 253 retail sales dealers that are franchisees of Apex.

"We are evolving by learning from past experiences. We change the ambience in our stores accordingly, to give customers a better experience," he said.

Apex has a fully functional effluent treatment plant, Pillai said. "We are going to venture into e-commerce. We can't open retail stores everywhere, as it is not feasible," he said, referring to the upcoming launch of www.apex4u.com.

Cash on delivery, bKash, Visa and all other available channels of payment can be utilised to purchase online, he added.

Apex is partnering in training programmes with Centre of Excellence For Leather Skill Bangladesh Ltd to help develop skilled professionals.

The interviewer is strategic project planner for business development at The Daily Star and can be reached at roy.tds@outlook.com.

## Fed seen holding rates steady as investor scepticism swirls

REUTERS, Washington

The Federal Reserve is expected to keep interest rates unchanged on Wednesday and may struggle to convince sceptical investors it can tighten monetary policy before the end of the year in the face of US and global economic headwinds.

The world's most powerful central bank hasn't hiked rates in about a decade and markets see virtually no chance it will do so at the end of this week's two-day policy meeting. The Fed is scheduled to announce its rate decision at 2 pm ET (1800 GMT).

A spate of dismal data on the US and global economies has fuelled a public row between Fed Chair Janet Yellen and fellow policymakers, igniting speculation the central bank will wait until 2016 to begin its "liftoff" from near-zero rates.

Forty-six economists polled by Reuters unanimously expect the Fed on Wednesday to keep its target rate for overnight lending between banks steady at 0 percent to 0.25 percent, as it has since 2008 when it embarked on an effort to nurse the economy back from a severe recession.

A narrow majority of the economists expect a rate increase in December. Financial markets assign only a 30 percent chance for a December hike and a 54 percent chance for such a move in March.

Signalling that a rate hike is coming will be difficult in part because Yellen, who has said higher rates will be "appropriate" this year, is not scheduled to hold a news conference after the end of the policy meeting.

The Fed could lay some of the tightening groundwork by using its policy statement to signal it has fewer concerns about global growth. Recent US economic reports, however, have raised doubts about the strength of the world's largest economy, and it could be weeks before central bankers have enough new data to feel comfortable lifting rates.

## Singapore still tops for doing business: World Bank



A boat passes an oil refinery located on Singapore's Jurong Island. REUTERS/FILE

AFP, Washington

SINGAPORE remains the easiest place to do business, while developing countries stepped up their pace of business-friendly reforms in the past year, according to a World Bank report published Tuesday.

Singapore, the dynamic Asian city state, held onto its business-friendly top ranking from last year in the "Doing Business 2016": Measuring Regulatory Quality and Efficiency" report, which covers 189 economies.

There were barely any changes in the report's top 10, according to adjusted data using this year's criteria for both the 2015 and 2016 rankings.

New Zealand remained in the number-two position, followed by Denmark (3), South Korea (4), Hong Kong (5), Britain (6) and the United States (7). Sweden moved up a notch to number eight, switching places with Norway. Finland kept its 10th place.

The World Bank's annual "Doing Business" report, now in its 13th year, looks at the regulatory environment for small and medium-sized companies to see how it hampers or helps them conduct business, from starting up and paying taxes to registering property and trading across borders.

"A modern economy cannot function without regulation and, at the same time, it can be brought to a standstill through poor and cumbersome regulation," said Kaushik Basu, World Bank chief economist.

"The challenge of development is to tread this narrow path by identifying regulations that are good and necessary, and shunning ones that thwart creativity and hamper the functioning of small and medium enterprises."

By surveying and ranking economies, the 188-nation development lender hopes that its "report card" will encourage regulation that contributes to economic growth and prosperity for people.

Progress was tilted to the downside among the five emerging-market powers known as the BRICS: Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa.

China, the world's second-largest economy, slipped one notch to 84th place. Brazil fell to 116th from 111th and South Africa dropped four notches to 73rd.

But Russia, struggling with an economy hit by the plunge in oil prices and Western sanctions over the Ukraine conflict, moved up in the ranks, to 51st place from 54.

And India advanced to 130th place from 134 last year. The International Monetary Fund said in a report early in October that India was poised for the fastest growth of any other emerging-market economy this year, at 7.3 percent, thanks in part to policy reforms.

Of the 189 economies surveyed through June 1, the World Bank found improvements in regulatory frameworks in 122 of them.

Among developing economies, 85 implemented 169 reforms during the past year, compared with 154 reforms the previous year.

Adding the 62 reforms undertaken by high-income economies, a total of 231 reforms were implemented, the report said. Sub-Saharan Africa accounted for about 30 percent of the reforms, followed closely by Europe and Central Asia.

The World Bank highlighted the world's top 10 "improvers" -- economies that implemented at least three reforms during the past year and moved up the rankings scale: Costa Rica (58), Uganda (122), Kenya (108), Cyprus (47), Mauritania (168), Uzbekistan (87), Kazakhstan (41), Jamaica (64), Senegal (153), and Benin (158).

## The night time 'McRefugees' of Hong Kong

BBC NEWS

EARLIER this month, an elderly homeless woman died in a crowded Hong Kong McDonald's restaurant. No-one noticed her for seven hours. The BBC's Juliana Liu spent a night in one 24-hour restaurant to meet the people the city has dubbed "McRefugees".

On a major road in the working class neighbourhood of Sham Shui Po, a pair of bright yellow arches beckons visitors into a 24-hour McDonald's outlet.

Spread out over two floors, it is spacious by Hong Kong standards.

As night falls, the fast-food restaurant becomes a temporary hostel, attracting dozens of the city's poorest people.

Although similar crowds can be found at McDonald's outlets all over Asia - especially in Japan and mainland China - an aging population, unaffordable property prices and stagnant wages all conspire to make the problem particularly acute in Hong Kong.

Here, it is a vibrant community of regulars, many of them elderly, whose cheerful smiles mask desperately sad stories of personal misfortune.

The unofficial leader of the group is Ah Chan, 54, a well-spoken former police officer. He says he rents a tiny room nearby, but spends most of his evenings at McDonald's, where he can while away the hours in comfort chatting with friends.

"This is a familiar place, with familiar faces," he tells me in fluent English. "These people are all wanderers. Some come for a short while, others a long time. Most of them don't have a home. They have nowhere else to go."

At a recent conference on the subject, officials said the best way to tackle poverty was to expand the economy and create jobs.

But this strategy is unlikely to help Chan. Over a paper cup of tap water, he explains his own slide into downward mobility.

After university in the late 1970s, he joined the police department, leaving in 1996 to start a business investing in mainland China.

Over the next seven years, he poured most of his savings, and money from his relatives, into the company. But in 2003, his mainland Chinese partners ran away with the money, he said.

After three years of legal battles, he returned to Hong Kong in 2006, broke and exhausted.

"What happened in China defeated my mind," he says. "I had to take a rest to ease my mind. I'm trying to face what's in front of me. Sometimes, I feel very tough. Other times, the bad memories will influence me."

Chan says he rarely sees his relatives: "I



Many people come for company as the restaurant is nicer than their home. BBC NEWS

can't face them. They trusted me, and I let them down. I can't say I had no responsibility for what happened."

He does casual jobs to make spending money. He also frequents food banks and wears donated clothing.

Indian photographer Suraj Katra began photographing Hong Kong's "McRefugees" in 2013, beginning a project to document what he called a "social phenomenon".

"As a photographer, I found it so ironic that you have such colourful ambience in the background and then these old homeless or poor people in the foreground. I snapped a few photos on my phone."

"I always looked at McDonald's as amazing value in a place like Hong Kong. You get cheap food, good lighting, good air conditioning, good seating and good service. I thought I should document the people who were really making the most of this."

"I come from a much poorer country, India. For me, when I look at these people, I still think they are well-off compared with the homeless in a place like India. It's more organised. At least there is some welfare and a place to sleep."

As we chat, well after midnight, two elderly people snore loudly on the immediate benches near us.

A staff member comes over to explain that someone has locked himself into the bathroom, but otherwise leaves us alone.

In a statement later, McDonalds said it "welcome all walks of life to visit our restaurants any time". It expressed sadness over the recent death, and said it balanced being "more accommodating and caring" to people staying there overnight with ensuring a good experience for all customers.

By this time of night, all the paying patrons have left. Only the "McRefugees" are left.

One of them is David Ho, 66, who until last year worked as a security guard on a monthly salary of HK\$10,000 (\$1,300; £840). But he suffered a stroke, rendering him unable to work.

He survives on a daily cocktail of medicines, which he gets from a public hospital, and a monthly government welfare payment of HK\$3,870.

"You must think I am very lazy. But I am not. I want to work. But I can't find a job at my age. That is why I am taking money from the government," he says.

Even with welfare, Ho cannot afford to live in Hong Kong, which has some of the most expensive property in the world.

The city does provide public housing, but there is a shortage of units and the waiting list is years long.

So, he rents a room across the border in Shenzhen for 1,000 yuan (HK\$1,222; \$157; £103) a month.

Ho misses Hong Kong, so he travels on the train to the Sham Shui Po McDonalds once a week or so, staying for a few days at a time.

As we chat, a steady stream of people continue to arrive, well into the morning hours.

A middle-aged man comes in and sits down just behind us. He listens intently and repeats, parrot-like, everything we say.

By this time, the lights on the second floor, where we have been gathering, are lowered. Nearly everyone has gone to sleep.