Apple shows ambition to get into self-driving car race

REUTERS, Washington

...... Apple Inc is wading in to the debate over regulation of self-driving cars, declaring it is excited about the potential for automated transportation and calling on US regulators not to restrict testing of such vehicles.

A five-page letter from Steve Kenner, Apple's director of product integrity, to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration is the company's most comprehensive statement yet about its interest in selfdriving vehicle technology. The Nov. 22 letter followed more than a year of industry speculation about the computer and iPhone maker's plans for expanding into transportation.

"The company is investing heavily in the study of machine learning and automation, and is excited about the potential of automated systems in many areas, including transportation," Kenner wrote.

"Executed properly under in an emailed statement. NHTSA's guidance, automated vehicles have the potential to greatly enhance the human experience — to prevent millions of car crashes and thousands of fatalities each year and to give mobility to those without."

Apple urged regulators not to

Egypt sharply

customs duties

Egypt has sharply raised

more than 300 goods,

items, to encourage

domestic production

and curb a ballooning

trade deficit, part of a

broader government

effort to reform the

The finance ministry

said in a statement that

320 categories of goods

targeted manufactured

products that are also

made locally, such as

carpets, ceramics and

Tariffs on carpets

doubled to 60 percent

were also raised on

from 30 percent. Duties

goods that were deemed

non-essential, including

items such as fresh fruit,

The finance ministry

shampoo and tooth-

said the new tariffs

would boost customs

revenues by 6 billion

imports remained at

million) a year, if

current volumes.

Egyptian pounds (\$339

cosmetics.

brushes.

the tariff increases on

ailing economy.

to 60 percent for many

customs duties on

increases

REUTERS

impose too many restrictions on testing of self-driving cars, saying "established manufacturers and new entrants should be treated equally."

Since software would decide what actions to take in potentially dangerous situations, Apple said certain areas need special attention. These include the implications of algorithmic decisions for the safety, mobility and legality of automated vehicles and their occupants, ensuring privacy and security in design, and the impact of the cars on employment and public spaces.

Some analysts forecast millions of jobs will be lost once self-driving cars largely replace truck, taxi and Uber drivers, and eliminate the need for most vehicle repairs, insurance adjusters and other functions.

Apple's letter was prompted by its heavy investment in machine learning and autonomous systems, company spokesman Tom Neumayr said

"There are many potential applications for these technologies, including the future of transportation, so we want to work with NHTSA to help define the best practices for the industry," he said.

In September, the Obama adminis-

tration proposed guidelines for the

details of their systems to regulators. Apple executives have been coy about their interest in cars. Chief Executive Tim Cook has suggested that Apple wants to move beyond integration of Apple smartphones into vehicle infotainment systems.

development of self-driving cars in a

15-point "safety assessment," calling

on automakers to voluntarily submit

But Apple has never confirmed reports last year that it was hiring automotive industry engineers and designers to develop a driverless electric car, or that those efforts have been sharply scaled back this year.

Other companies pursuing selfdriving cars include Alphabet Inc's Google unit, Ford Motor Co, Volkswagen AG, Daimler AG, Tesla Motors Inc and General Motors Co.

Apple has reportedly held talks about investing in British automaker McLaren Technology Group, but McLaren downplayed speculation that Apple had proposed an investment.

Apple joins a range of automakers and tech companies that have raised concerns about the proposed National Highway Traffic Safety Administration policy on self-driving cars, and plans by California state regulators to make complying with the safety assessment mandatory.

Hatil launches campaign

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Furniture brand Hatil launched a new campaign, which will give its customers the opportunity to go on free trips around the world.

Starting from November 27, the campaign allows one lucky couple to go on a free honeymoon round trip to any destination of their choice, Hatil said in a statement.

"Besides, every week six lucky couples will have a chance to win free honeymoon round trips to Langkawi, Phuket and Cox's Bazar," the company said.

To get the chance, a customer will have to buy Hatil furniture worth Tk 10,000 from any of its outlets across the country.

The campaign will end on December 24, according to the statement.

"Hatil always wishes to add value to the life of its customers," said Selim H Rahman, chairman and managing director of Hatil Complex Ltd, the owning company of Hatil.

Muhammed Ali, managing

Bank (UCB); Golam Hafiz

NCC Bank; and Monir H

corporate office of UCB.

director of United Commercial

Ahmed, managing director of

Farazy, managing director of

NEC Money Transfer, attend a

deal signing ceremony, at the

Inward foreign remittance of

NEC Money Transfer, UK will

countrywide network of UCB.

be distributed through the



Chairman of Exim Bank Md Nazrul Islam Mazumder opens the 113rd branch of the bank at Shantinagar in Dhaka on Saturday. Managing Director Mohammed Haider Ali Miah was also present.

India fails to break deadlock on GST

REUTERS

Indian Finance Minister Arun Jaitley's plan to launch a new national sales tax next April got a jolt on Saturday after a two-day meeting with state officials ended without the resolution of a deadlock on who would told reporters after meeting his state counadminister the tax.

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The long-awaited Goods and Services Tax (GST) would transform Asia's No.3 economy into a single market, could boost revenues through better compliance and make life simpler for businesses that now pay a host of federal and state levies.

But a council of federal and regional authorities has been struggling to forge a consensus on how to collect the new tax that will have federal and state elements.

Jaitley doesn't favour dual agencies auditing and scrutinising each taxpayer as he reckons multiple authorities could end up acting at cross-purposes. But states are

reluctant to cede their turf.

While federal and state finance officials will meet again on Dec. 11-12 to discuss the issue, the possibility of a breakthrough at the meeting was not bright.

terparts. "The day we resolve it, I would say it's a done deal." For the GST to come into operation from

"I will keep my fingers crossed," Jaitley

April 1, Indian parliament as well as state legislatures, must pass, in all, four legislations before the end of this year. Parliament's winter session is due to end

on Dec. 16, but the bills can be brought before it only after the council approves

Adding to the uncertainty, some states in the council raked up the issue of compensation for revenues they fear losing following the GST launch as well as Prime Minister Narendra Modi's crackdown on the cash economy.

Govt to supply 10,000 e-cash registers to shops

The law envisages a 15 percent VAT and seeks to end the package or fixed VAT benefit enjoyed by the retailers, including many large and medium retails, although they do not fall under the category. As there will be no package VAT under the

new law, stores that have an annual turnover of above Tk 30 lakh will have to pay a 3 percent turnover tax under the new law. Retails with less than Tk 30 lakh in

annual turnover will remain out of the purview of VAT, according to the NBR.

Rahman of VAT Online Project said the government wants to create a level-playing field for all businesses.

As there will be no package or fixed VAT system, it is necessary to ensure that shops use the sales recording devices, he said.

If businesses do not use the electronic devices to keep sales data, it creates scope for them to suppress the numbers and dodge

the VAT paid by customers. Shops without ECRs will tend to sell

goods at prices lower than the shops with those machines, officials said. "It will create an uneven competition in the market and hurt compliant traders,"

said Rahman. The devices will remain connected with NBR's online system so that none can

manipulate data, he said. In the absence of connection with the NBR, the shops that use the devices may

input data on their will, he said. "Customers should take ECR receipts from the businesses to make sure the VAT

payments are properly sent to the state coffers," Rahman said. Actual figures on the number of installed ECRs are not available. But some revenue

officials earlier said the number of businesses and points of sales using the devices would be close to 5,000.

Muhith to brief Japan on security measures for foreign nationals

FROM PAGE B1

In the last week of October, the Economic Relations Division held a review meeting on the implementation status of the Japanfunded projects where all project directors and officials of Japan's Dhaka embassy were present. The finance ministry official said the Japan-

funded projects are reviewed in every three months and their financial year starts in April. Presently, around 35 Japan-funded pro-

jects are running. The review found that in the first two

quarters-April to September-the disbursement target was 19,557 million yen (about \$172.3 million) while the amount disbursed was 12,267 million yen or nearly 63 percent of the target.

The meeting discussed various barriers to the implementation of the projects with the main focus on security issues.

government has taken in many projects, but

they have concern about some other projects, the finance ministry official said.

After visiting the areas of Kanchpur, Meghna and Gumti bridges, the officials of JICA said the security arrangements the government has made in the area can be an example for other projects. According to project officials, a compre-

hensive security plan has been prepared in line with the suggestions from law enforcement agencies. Security has been enhanced on the three

sites; additional boundary wall, watch tower, CCTV camera, archway and metal detectors have been installed. Around 250 policemen and Ansar members have been deployed.

But the 22 foreign consultants who are involved in many other projects like the city governance project-which has been split into 37 packages-have refrained from Japan is satisfied with the measures the working since the Holy Artisan attack for security reasons.



Salahuddin Alamgir, managing director of Excel Telecom (Pvt) Ltd, the national distributor of

Sohail RK Hussain, CEO of City Bank, and Marnix Monsfort, manager of financial institutions for Asia at FMO, the Dutch development bank, attend the signing of a deal at a programme. FMO will provide \$30 million in loans to City Bank to support import and export requirements of local customers.

Slogans, placards and food: South Korean protests a boon for restaurants

As protesters march through Gwanghwamun Square in downtown Seoul, the centre stage of huge weekly demonstrations calling for South Korean President Park Geun-hye to step down, nearby restaurants hustle to prepare for a busy night.

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Many bars and restaurants in the area, home to government offices and near the presidential Blue House, have been doing roaring business well into the night when the protests are held every Saturday. The boom is a relief for neighbourhood restaurants after a new anti-graft law in September limited the value of meals that could be accepted by civil servants.

Saturday's protest calling for Park to resign over an influencepeddling scandal was the largest yet, with organisers putting the total number of participants at 1.7 million, while police say the crowd at its peak totalled 320,000.

The demonstrations taking place for six straight weekends have been festive and peaceful, with parents bringing children and protesters putting flower stickers on police-bus barricades. It's a contrast to violent anti-government protests South Korea has seen in the past, when activists hurled rocks at police lines and were sprayed with pepper gas.

"We've prepared three to four times more than usual and set up seven more tables outside," said Cho Joung-suk, owner of Gwanghwamun Yeontanjib, a restaurant specialising in grilled eel.

Geun-hye step down now!" and "We are the owners of the country!" Activists marched to within 100

metres (yards) of the Blue House, one holding up a red sign reading "Arrest Park Geun-hye". Cho, who usually shuts the restau-

rant on weekends and closes by midnight on weekdays, said that last week she had customers until around 4 a.m. on Sunday morning.

Kim Min-sung, a student who sat for South Korea's high-stakes university entrance test two weeks ago, was at his third protest.

"I had been studying for the past couple of months but I felt that I had to come out and protest after the exam as the situation had become serious," he said, taking a break at a restaurant specialising in South Korea's famous chicken and beer, or "chimaek", combination.

The anti-Park demonstrations have featured rappers and musical actors taking the stage in Gwanghwamun Square, while protesters carrying LED candles cheer with synchronised waves. In small alleyways, vendors were selling street food, selfie-sticks and the candles.

While many business owners are profiting from the protests, the political crisis helped push consumer sentiment to a nearly 7-1/2 year-low in November. Some merchants say the demonstrations have been disruptive to their business.

Park, whose approval rating stands at just 4 percent, according to a

Nearby, protesters chanted "Park poll released on Friday, has refused calls to step down immediately. Last week, she asked parliament to find a way and a timeline for her to leave office, but the opposition plans to bring an impeachment motion to a vote on Dec. 9.

> Park is accused of colluding with her long-time friend Choi Soon-sil to enable her to meddle in government affairs. Seo Young-pyo, a resident of Jeju Island, 450 km (280 miles) south of Seoul, came to Saturday's protest with his 18-year-old daughter.

"It's not that there is less passion outside of Seoul or on Jeju Island. But Gwanghwamun Square in Seoul is the centre of Korean society and there is a lot to see and learn," he said.

As Saturday night wore on, protesters took breaks for hearty meals and talked politics over drinks. Many joined long queues to use public toilets.

Kim Song-ryul, owner of Geosung Hof, a chimaek restaurant, said the carnival-like mood was a key driver of stepped-up business.

"There are families with young children in strollers who come to the protests and drop by our restaurant. The festive atmosphere really is a change from the past where there was violence," he said.

The recent rise in weekend sales has been a boost for many business owners in Gwanghwamun whose core trade of serving office workers was squeezed by the anti-graft law that limits the value of a meal that can be accepted by a civil servant to 30,000 won (\$25.72).

Business ideas win applause

The farming of edible insects would also create an opportunity for employment, they said.

Around 10 crore people eat edible insects and its global market is worth \$15.9 billion, they said, citing cricket flour, cricket pasta and grasshoppers' drink as some of the food products made from edible insects.

The export of edible insect will open up a new opportunity in agriculture and diversify the export basket, which is heavily dependent on garment.

The team said they have a plan to be the top exporter of edible insects worldwide, overtaking Thailand, the current leader. They have the target to export \$6 billion worth of

The teams were awarded at a gala event held at Senamalancha in Dhaka on Saturday night.

edible insects within next five years. Samsung, and Seungwon Youn, managing director of Samsung Bangladesh, attend the opening of the 54th Samsung outlet on Gulshan Avenue in Dhaka.