

## GM first to deliver mid-priced, all-electric car

AFP, New York

General Motors began deliveries Tuesday of the first all-electric car model aimed at the middle market, getting a head start on Tesla Motors and other competitors.

GM delivered the Chevrolet Bolt EV to three customers in California, including one in Fremont, where Tesla has a big factory.

The Bolt can travel up to 238 miles on a full charge. It lists for \$37,495, but consumers are eligible for clean fuel tax credits of up to \$7,500, GM said.

GM plans to accelerate deliveries of the Bolt next year as part of its campaign to reposition itself as a mobility company of the 21st century.

Tesla also is working on an all-electric Model 3, but it is not expected to hit the market until the end of 2017.

Other manufacturers also are working on comparable all-electric models, including Ford, whose sedan is called the "Model E" and Fisker, led by Henrik Fisker, who previously designed cars for BMW and Aston Martin.

# India's demonetisation drive drags down Nepal's economy

REUTERS, Kathmandu/New Delhi

INDIA'S scrapping of high-value bank notes last month has dragged down economic growth in neighbouring Nepal with trade, remittances and tourist numbers all down, BMI Research, a group company of the Fitch rating agency, said on Wednesday.

BMI has revised down its forecast for land-locked Nepal's economy, saying that India's demonetisation could shave Nepal's growth down to 2.2 percent for this fiscal year to July 2017, from an earlier estimate of 2.5 percent.

Nepal's \$21 billion economy was already suffering with growth at less than 0.8 percent in the 2015-16 fiscal year after earthquakes in 2015 that killed about 9,000 people.

"The disruption in funds from India is likely to weigh on ongoing reconstruction efforts," the research agency said in a report, adding that Nepal's economy was heavily reliant on India for trade, jobs and aid.

The announcement by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Nov. 8 to ban 500- and 1,000-rupee notes was intended to flush out billions of dollars in unaccounted wealth and hit the finances of militants suspected of using fake currency.

The Nepal Rastra Bank, the central bank, has now banned



REUTERS/FILE

A man works inside the cash counter of a petrol station as people gather around to fill petrol for their vehicle in Kathmandu, Nepal.

Indian currency, saying it wanted a formal communication from the Indian central bank about new Indian bank notes being brought into circulation.

"Until such a notice is received, we will not accept the new Indian notes," said central bank official Rajendra Pandit.

That leaves thousands of Nepalis doing informal trade along the open border with India

without the means to receive or make payments for their business.

Nepali Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal, a former Maoist rebel commander, spoke to Modi after the currency ban to ask for arrangements for the exchange of the now defunct Indian cash held in Nepal, but that has yet to happen.

The inflow of Indian tourists to Nepal, who account for a quarter of about 800,000 visitors a year,

has fallen. Many Indian tourists have traditionally carried Indian currency for payments in Nepal.

In addition, Nepal depends heavily on funds from workers in India, who sent home \$640 million in 2016, or about 2.6 percent of Nepal's gross domestic product.

Thousands of Nepali migrants are returning home as Indian businesses cut production following the cash crunch.

## India's TCS ousts Mistry from board as purge is stepped up

AFP, Mumbai

India's Tata has ousted Cyrus Mistry as a director of its cash cow IT business Tata Consultancy Services as the Indian conglomerate steps up its purge of its former chairman.

TCS said in a statement late on Tuesday that shareholders had voted overwhelmingly at an extraordinary general meeting in India's commercial Mumbai to dump Mistry from its board.

In the statement to the National Stock Exchange of India it said that Mistry is "hereby removed from the office of Director of the Company with effect from the date of this meeting".

Mistry was unceremoniously sacked in October as chairman of Tata Sons, the holding company of India's most famous family conglomerate -- the \$103 billion steel-to-salt Tata Group.

The shock move saw company patriarch Ratan Tata reassert his authority over the sprawling group.

Tata Sons has called for its operating companies to hold EGMs to oust Mistry from their various boards. TCS was the latest, and biggest, to do so.

Tata Industries removed Mistry as director on Monday. Other group companies including Indian Hotels Co. Ltd, Tata Steel, Tata Motors, and Tata Chemicals are scheduled to hold EGMs in the next week to decide Mistry's fate.

TCS said that more than 93 percent of shareholders present at the EGM voted to oust Mistry.

Mistry was sacked as head of Tata Sons on October 24 with Ratan Tata unhappy at the way Mistry was leading the company. The 78-year-old Tata, who led the group for more than two decades, has taken interim charge until a successor is found.

The pair have traded barbs since Mistry's ouster, plunging the group into bitter infighting with directors firmly placed in either camp.

The Tata Group was founded under British colonial rule in 1868. It operates in more than 100 countries and owns high-profile companies such as Britain's Tetley Tea and Anglo-Dutch steel firm Corus.

## How to solve a problem like Trump's business empire

AFP, New York

DONALD Trump's pledge to entrust his business empire to his sons does little to allay concerns about conflicts of interest between the incoming Republican president and the company he has run as an autocrat.

"Even though I am not mandated by law to do so, I will be leaving my businesses (sic) before January 20th so that I can focus full time on the Presidency," the president-elect announced on Twitter late Monday.

"Two of my children, Don and Eric, plus executives, will manage them. No new deals will be done during my term(s) in office," he added.

The brief statement came after Trump postponed until sometime next month a news conference originally scheduled for Thursday at which he intended to unveil arrangements for his business after he takes office.

The 70-year-old, who is the wealthiest man to become US president, has been beset by accusations of conflict of interest ever since his shock electoral defeat of Democratic former secretary of state Hillary Clinton last month.

Those accusations have not been eased by the largely private nature of his conglomerate The Trump Organization, which is not listed on the stock market but whose network of hotels, golf clubs and luxury residential towers stretches across 20 countries, from Britain to Dubai, from the Philippines to India.

The company releases no public statistics and in the absence of tax returns, which the billionaire has still refused to publish, relatively little is known about the extent of its interests.

According to PrivCo, which seeks to provide financial and business information on private companies, The Trump Organization employs about 22,000 people and had revenues of \$9.5 billion in 2014.

Even Trump's personal fortune is in dispute. After launching his presidential bid last June, he declared himself worth \$10 billion. Forbes estimated his fortune at \$3.7 billion in October and Bloomberg at \$2.9 billion in 2015.

The company serves as an umbrella organization for numerous assets, which today mostly revolve around Trump's marketing savvy.

Moving on from big investments of the 1980s -- such as Trump Tower, the company headquarters which opened in 1983 -- the company today mostly licenses the Trump name to a plethora of projects that he does not actually own.

Take for example Trump Tower in Manila, a luxury skyscraper currently under construction in the Philippines' capital. Although he is not the owner, Trump has already been paid as much as \$5 million for allowing use of his name, according to CBS.

The president of the Philippines, Rodrigo Duterte, even named Jose Antonio, the chief executive officer of the company that led the project, a "special envoy" to the United States, magnifying

fears about a conflict of interest.

Over the years, Trump -- who once told CNN he "loves debt" -- has also taken out loans from creditors who are often difficult to identify, leading to fears that they could also exert an influence over the new president.

But if his creditors are unclear, his style of management is very clear, says William Klepper, who teaches executive leadership at Columbia Business School.

"He is a command-and-control type leader. He is more likely to tell people what to do than asking them what they think he could do," he told AFP.

"It is a more autocratic style," Klepper said -- "not uncommon" in a family business -- but less suited to mature companies or democracies when "you would want more of a collaborative, incentive-style leader."

His absence could also affect The Trump Organization, where his adult children, Donald Jr, Eric and Ivanka are all vice presidents.



Donald Trump

If his Twitter feed appears to rule out Ivanka, US media has suggested that his daughter and her husband Jared Kushner will take on some kind of role in the administration and move to Washington.

As a result a Trump presidency could see other executives promoted.

Matthew Calamari, chief operating officer, joined in 1981 as a security guard after impressing Trump while working in security at the US Open, the annual tennis championship in the New York City borough of Queens.

Another loyalist is Allen Weisselberg, the discreet chief financial officer, who worked for Trump's father before joining The Trump Organization.

But even if the sons remain in charge and there are no new deals, multiple conflicts of interest would still remain, says Robert Weissman, president of Public Citizen, a nonprofit that promotes transparency in politics.

"There is only one way to solve the conflict of interest, which is to sell off the family business," he said. "Alternatively, the business would go under the control of a trustee, whose first act would be to sell it."

## Black coal, thin pickings: China's miners face decline

AFP, Mentougou, China

THE global fight against climate change and Beijing's efforts to combat choking pollution have been a disaster for Lu Zhanyong.

Facing unemployment after years working with explosives deep in a coal mine on the outskirts of the Chinese capital, Lu has little hope of finding another job, no rights to farmland in his rural hometown, and fears he is dying of occupational disease.

"They'll just give us contract labourers a bit of severance and send us packing," he said. "But no one wants to hire someone in their 40s."

"There are tens of thousands of miners like us; even if the government wanted to, what could it possibly do for all of us?" he asked.

China's rise to become the world's second largest economy was largely powered by cheap, dirty coal gouged out of the earth by migrant workers like Lu.

But with growth slowing to its lowest rate in 25 years and Beijing beginning to reduce coal's share of the national energy mix, the country's demand for the fuel may have peaked, leaving the miners on the slagheaps of economic history.

All five of Beijing's coal mines, Lu's Da'anshan colliery among them, have been ordered to shut by 2020, the city's main planning body said in November.

Lu came to work for the mine from the distant southwestern province of Sichuan nearly a decade ago.

For now, he makes 4,000 yuan (\$560) a month doing some of the most dangerous underground work, paying 200 yuan to rent a small brick room to share with his wife and 10-year-old son.

It is heated by a single coal-burning brazier and papered in colourful government posters decrying the dangers of undiagnosed HIV or coal gas poisoning.

Among Lu's own greatest fears is that he has silicosis, a common miners' lung disease caused by inhaling fine dust, and may not live

long enough to raise his son.

"Every year the coal mine authorities give us an exam, but they never give us the results," he said.

The hills surrounding his mine are crowned with heavy machinery, swathed in thick grey smog.

Public discontent about coal's environmental toll has grown in China and many of the country's giant state-owned coal mining firms are now unviable and plagued by overcapacity, leading the government to declare a "war on pollution" and attempt to curb output.

The Asian giant set a target of reducing coal production capacity by 250 million tonnes this year, which Premier Li Keqiang announced had been met by the end of October -- although figures for actual output were not yet available.

Its consumption of the fuel -- the country accounts for half of the world's demand for coal and almost half of its production -- had "likely peaked", the International Energy

Agency said Monday.

But critics say that efforts to cut coal use have fallen short of expectations.

Even while China makes cuts to the sector and operates many of its coal-fired power stations at less than half their capacity, it "perversely" has plans to spend as much as half a trillion dollars on building more such units, London-based campaign group Carbon Tracker Initiative said in a report last month.

While coal cuts are crucial for the global battle against climate change, they spell catastrophe for the workers they cast aside.

According to the website of Beijing Coal Group, the state-owned enterprise that owns the mines near the capital, their government-mandated closures will mean the loss of 6 million tons of coal production capacity and the "resettlement" of more than 11,000 workers, mostly migrants.

It did not make clear whether that meant assigning them to other units, sending them home, or simply sacking them.



AFP

A coal factory is seen in Mentougou, on the outskirts of Beijing.

## IBM unveils plan to hire 25,000 in US on eve of Trump meeting

AFP, New York

US technology giant IBM said Tuesday it would hire 25,000 people in the country over the next four years, a day before President-elect Donald Trump meets with tech industry leaders.

About 6,000 of those hirings will occur in 2017, IBM chief executive Ginni Rometty said in an opinion article published in the newspaper USA Today.

IBM, which has undertaken in recent years a restructuring of its activities, will invest \$1 billion on employee training and development in the next four years, said the IBM president, chairman and CEO.

"We are hiring because the nature of work is evolving -- and that is also why so many of

these jobs remain hard to fill," Rometty said, noting that many industries were being reshaped by data science and cloud computing.

"Jobs are being created that demand new skills -- which in turn requires new approaches to education, training and recruiting," she said.

"This is not about white collar vs. blue collar jobs, but about the 'new collar' jobs that employers in many industries demand, but which remain largely unfilled."

Rometty is a member of Trump's Strategic and Policy Forum, a group of US business leaders focused on boosting economic growth and jobs.

The IBM jobs investment news came before the highly anticipated meeting Wednesday of the Republican property tycoon-turned-next

US president and the leaders of several major technology companies.

Among those expected to attend are Amazon's Jeff Bezos, Apple's Tim Cook, Satya Nadella of Microsoft, Larry Page of Alphabet (Google) and Elon Musk of Tesla and SpaceX, according to US media.

Trump is expected to push them to create jobs after saying last week that he would like Apple -- whose coveted iPhones are made in China -- to open a large factory in the United States.

But he will be stepping into hostile territory. The tech sector overwhelmingly supported the Democratic candidate Hillary Clinton during this year's election campaign and has expressed fear about the effect Trump's policies will have on the industry.