



Arouf Chowdhury, chairman of Bank Asia, cuts a cake to celebrate the International Women's Day 2017 at a programme at the bank's corporate office in Dhaka yesterday.

India's Flipkart looking to raise \$1b in latest funding round

REUTERS, Mumbai

India's top e-commerce company Flipkart is holding talks with investors to raise up to \$1 billion in one of its biggest funding rounds so far, a source familiar with developments said on Wednesday.

The source declined to name the potential investors and the exact valuation Flipkart was looking for, but said it hoped the valuation would be in the "double digits", referring to a valuation of \$10 billion or more.

Earlier on Wednesday, Financial Express newspaper, citing unidentified sources, said the expected fundraising could value Flipkart at up to \$8 billion, far lower than the roughly \$15 billion in its last funding round.

A Flipkart spokesman said the company would not comment on market speculation.

Flipkart's latest fundraising comes amid intensifying competition in the e-commerce space from the likes of US internet giant Amazon.com Inc and domestic rival Snapdeal, which is backed by Japan's Softbank Group.

The ensuing heavy losses have hit valuations among India's e-commerce players. Some funds that have invested in Flipkart have recently slashed the value of their holdings, media reports have said, citing securities filings.

Launched by two former Amazon employees in 2007, Flipkart's biggest investor is US hedge fund Tiger Global. Others include Accel Partners, DST Global and Baillie Gifford.

The company has so far raised more than \$3 billion in funding, mostly from international investors.

SWIFT messaging system bans North Korean banks blacklisted by UN



Swift code bank logo is displayed among euro banknotes.

REUTERS/FILE

REUTERS, Hong Kong

Belgium-based SWIFT said on Wednesday it has stopped providing financial services to all North Korean banks under UN sanctions, as international tensions rise over Pyongyang's increasingly aggressive military behaviour.

The financial messaging system said it stopped providing services to the North Korean banks after Belgian authorities withdrew authorisation that had enabled SWIFT to serve the banks.

The withdrawal of the authorisation came in response to

the "current international" situation relating to North Korea and ongoing discussions in the UN Security Council, said the Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication (SWIFT).

The UN Security Council on Tuesday condemned North Korea's recent ballistic missile launches and expressed concern over the country's increasingly destabilising behaviour and defiance of the 15-member body.

"As a result, SWIFT suspended access of UN-designated North Korean entities to the SWIFT financial messaging service," it said.

SWIFT did not say exactly when the services were suspended or how many banks were affected.

SWIFT's move follows a UN panel report last week that found evidence North Korea was relying on continued access to the international banking system to flout sanctions.

The Feb. 27 report by the UN Security Council's Panel of Experts said SWIFT had continued to provide financial messaging services to seven North Korean banks, three of them blacklisted.

The three blacklisted banks named by the UN panel as being in the SWIFT network were Bank of

East Land, Korea Daesong Bank and Korea Kwangson Banking Corp. Bank of East Land was blacklisted in 2013, while the other two were blacklisted last year.

The banks could not immediately be reached for comment.

"At the time of writing, Democratic People's Republic of Korea circumvention techniques and inadequate compliance by Member States are combining to significantly negate the impact of the resolutions," the report said.

SWIFT told the UN panel that it received payment for services to North Korean banks with the authorisation of Belgium, the UN report said.

Belgium told the panel that under national and European law, the receipt of fees from a blacklisted bank can be authorised provided certain European Union provisions are complied with and the authorisations related to amounts of less than 15,000 euros.

On Wednesday, however, SWIFT said Belgium had recently stopped providing these authorisations. The payment messaging system added that it had no authority to make sanction decisions.

"Any decision to lift or impose sanctions on countries or individual entities rests solely with the competent government bodies and legislators," it said.

Some cyber security companies have attributed several attacks on financial institutions via fraudulent SWIFT messages to a group called Lazarus, which has been linked to a cyber attack on Sony's Hollywood studio in 2014.

The US government publicly blamed the Sony hack on North Korea. North Korea has denied involvement.

Oil drops further below \$56

REUTERS, London

Oil dropped further below \$56 a barrel on Wednesday after an industry report pointed to a large rise in crude inventories in the United States, renewing oversupply concerns despite Opec output curbs.

US crude inventories rose by a more-than-forecast 11.6 million barrels last week, data from industry group the American Petroleum Institute (API) showed on Tuesday, ahead of the government's supply report due later on Wednesday.

Brent crude, the international benchmark, was down 29 cents at \$55.63 a barrel at 0950 GMT. US crude fell 40 cents to \$52.74.

If the API report of an inventory rise is confirmed by the US Energy Information Administration report at 1530 GMT, it would be the ninth straight week of increases. Analysts had forecast a 1.9 million-barrel inventory rise.

"All eyes are on the EIA numbers," said

Jeffrey Halley, senior market strategist at Oanda in Singapore. "A big washout of that will see oil test technical support levels."

US crude supplies have continued to rise despite a supply cut that started on Jan. 1 by the Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries plus Russia and other non-members. Data has suggested high compliance with the deal.

Total output reductions have exceeded 1.5 million barrels per day, Saudi Energy Minister Khalid al-Falih said on Tuesday, out of the almost 1.8 million bpd pledged. He also said the results had exceeded the low market expectations.

Oil is also facing headwinds from a likely US interest rate rise next week, a strong dollar and rising US oil production, which has been given a boost by the Opec-led effort to support prices.

The EIA now expects US crude production in 2017 to rise by 330,000 barrels per day, more than previously forecast, according to its monthly outlook on Tuesday.



MIDLAND BANK

Md Ahsan-uz-Zaman, managing director of Midland Bank, launches the bank's Visa branded cards equipped with EMV chip—MDB Visa Platinum, MDB Visa Gold, MDB Visa Prepaid and MDB Visa Debit Card—at a programme at the head office of the bank in Dhaka on Tuesday.



WESTIN DHAKA

From left, Farida Ansari, representative of Unique Hotel and Resorts; Nusrat Jahan Mukta, additional deputy police commissioner of Dhaka Metropolitan Police; Sonia Bashir Kabir, managing director of Microsoft Bangladesh, and Jahanara Alam, former captain of Bangladesh national women's cricket team, pose with awards at a programme at the Westin Dhaka hotel yesterday. The hotel honoured the successful women to mark the International Women's Day.

Australia sues Audi, Volkswagen over emissions cheating

AFP, Sydney

Australia's consumer watchdog Wednesday launched court action against Volkswagen and its subsidiary Audi over an emissions cheating scandal, claiming they engaged in misleading or deceptive conduct.

The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) alleged Audi had installed so-called defeat software to produce lower levels of harmful nitrogen oxides during testing than under normal driving conditions.

It said that Audi Australia marketed up to 12,000 cars as complying with stringent European standards when this was not the case.

Parent company Volkswagen designed and supplied the engines and software to Audi AG for installation, the commission added in a statement initiating Federal Court action.

"Consumers expect that there is some relationship between the per-

formance of the car as set out in the sales brochure and their day to day on-road use," said ACCC chairman Rod Sims.

"We allege that the installation of software which allows the vehicle to meet testing standards but then causes the vehicles to operate differently on the road, and associated representations about the vehicle and its performance, breach the Australian Consumer Law."

The watchdog is seeking pecuniary penalties and corrective advertising.

Skoda-branded vehicles -- owned by Volkswagen in Australia -- were also affected but the ACCC chose not to pursue them, noting its smaller sales volumes.

The latest action followed court proceedings launched by the ACCC against Volkswagen and its Australian subsidiary last year, which relates to the same alleged conduct.

In that lawsuit, the commission claimed that more than 57,000 vehi-

cles sold in Australia between 2011 and 2015 did not operate as Volkswagen advertised.

Since then, Volkswagen and Audi have announced voluntary recalls to update the software.

Volkswagen had no immediate comment but Audi Australia said the court action "does not provide any practical benefits to consumers as the approved technical measures for the vast majority of cars affected by the voluntary recall are either already available or are imminent".

"Audi Australia is reviewing the claims made by the ACCC," it added.

The Dieselgate scandal erupted in September 2015 when Volkswagen admitted it had installed so-called "cheat" software in 11 million diesel-engine cars worldwide.

The scandal damaged the company's reputation, and forced it to set aside more than 22 billion euros (US\$ 23 billion) to deal with fines and demands for compensation.