



City Bank in association with Euromoney organised a roundtable on Bangladesh's economy, in Dhaka on March 16. From right, Prof Mustafizur Rahman, distinguished fellow of CPD; Abdul Matlub Ahmad, president of FBCCI; Chris Wright, Asia editor of Euromoney; Sohail RK Hussain, CEO of City Bank; Annisul Huq, mayor of Dhaka North City Corporation; AMA Muhith, finance minister; Sonia Bashir Kabir, country manager of Microsoft Bangladesh; Farooq Sobhan, a former ambassador; Syed Manzur Elahi, chairman of Apex Footwear; Rear Admiral M Khaled Iqbal, chairman of Chittagong Port Authority; and Dilip Pal, CFO of Grameenphone, pose for photographs at the programme.

Tesla raises \$1.2b, tapping market again for funding

REUTERS, San Francisco

Tesla Inc's \$1.2 billion share and convertible debt offering on Friday demonstrates once again the unflagging ability by the luxury electric carmaker and its high-profile head, Elon Musk, to tap Wall Street for sorely needed cash.

In its second such capital raise in the past 12 months, the Silicon Valley company offered stock and convertible notes, roughly 20 percent more than it planned but less than what investors had generally been expecting, ahead of the launch of its crucial Model 3 sedan.

Tesla's stock was up slightly to \$262.42 in afternoon trade on the Nasdaq.

The capital raise removed "an overhang on the stock," in the eyes of investors, wrote analyst Jamie Albertine of Consumer Edge Research, given uncertainty over how Tesla would meet its robust spending needs, from the Model 3 to its massive battery factory in Nevada.

More broadly, the successful offering underscores the ability of Musk to convince Wall Street over and over of his long-term vision - that Tesla will someday become a carbon-free energy and transportation heavyweight.

Despite facing major financial hurdles, and the dilutive nature of stock sales, the triumphant offering confounds Tesla skeptics, who point to the loss-marking company's \$42.37 billion market capitalization - greater than that of Nissan Motor Co Ltd (7201.T), which reported a profit of \$4.7 billion last year.

Apple CEO Tim Cook calls for more global trade with China

REUTERS

Apple Chief Executive Tim Cook expressed support for globalization and said China should continue to open its economy to foreign firms, while speaking at a forum in Beijing on Saturday.

"I think it's important that China continues to open itself and widens the door if you will," said Cook, speaking at the government-sponsored China Development Forum.

Cook's comments come amid rising tensions between the US and China, with protectionist rhetoric from US President Donald Trump sparking concern of increased trade friction between the two countries.

"The reality is countries that are closed, that isolate themselves, it's not good for their people," said Cook, in a rare public speech.

Apple said on Friday it will set up two new research and development centers in Shanghai and Suzhou in China.

It has pledged to invest more than 3.5 billion yuan (\$508 million) in research and development in China.



Tim Cook

Apple has been singled out in Chinese media as a potential target for retaliation in the event of a trade war.

The Global Times warned last November if Trump triggered a trade war with China, Beijing would then target firms from Boeing to Apple in a "tit-for-tat" approach.

Cathay pledges to reduce staff costs after loss

AFP, Hong Kong

HONG Kong's troubled flagship airline Cathay Pacific said Friday it would slash staff costs by 30 percent as part of a major overhaul as it struggles to repair its bottom line.

The announcement came two days after the firm posted its first annual net loss in eight years, saying it had been hit by intense competition and a drop in demand from business travellers. Cathay had already revealed its biggest shake-up in 20 years in January, saying some jobs would go but providing little detail.

Analysts had said the company need to reveal more about its restructuring plans to encourage investor confidence.

Its stocks in Hong Kong closed up 1.44 percent Friday after the latest news.

Cathay said middle and senior management at its Hong Kong head office would be targeted, although it gave no further indication of how many jobs could be axed.

"It is clear that there is a need for an organisational structure that will allow the Cathay Pacific Group to succeed," it said in a statement.

The firm added that it was seeking to create a "leaner, simpler structure" and that management changes would be announced in June.

The move is part of a three-year "transformation programme" designed to breathe new life into the airline.



A Cathay Pacific Airways flight attendant poses at the airline's booth during the Asian Aerospace Show in Hong Kong.

Cathay has been struggling despite an expansion of international air travel in the region as lower cost carriers, particularly from mainland China, eat into its market share.

The airline is also losing premium travellers as it comes under pressure from Middle East rivals that are expanding into Asia and offering more luxury touches.

That has led to promotional prices for Cathay's top tickets as they are sold to leisure travellers. Its \$74 million net loss in 2016 reversed a \$773 million profit in the previous year, with chairman John Slosar warning 2017 would be similarly "challenging".

It was the firm's first annual loss since 2008 at the height of the financial crisis.

SWIFT cuts off last N Korea banks from global finance system

AFP, Brussels

SWIFT, the inter-bank money transfer system, said Friday it has cut off the last North Korean banks on the network, as international pressure mounts on Pyongyang over its nuclear and ballistic missile programmes.

"The DPRK banks remaining on the network are no longer compliant with SWIFT's membership criteria. As a result, these entities will no longer have access to the SWIFT financial messaging service," the Brussels-based group said in a statement.

"Given the increased ongoing international attention on the DPRK, SWIFT has informed the Belgian and EU authorities," it said, referring to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, the country's official name.

The statement did not say how many North Korean banks were involved. The move is significant as it means North Korea no longer has access to SWIFT's global financial transfer system, further isolating the already heavily-sanctioned country.

The United States has led efforts to force Pyongyang to rein in its nuclear and ballistic missile programmes, fearing that its ultimate aim is to be able to hit the US mainland.

US Secretary of State Max Tillerson warned Friday on a visit to South Korea that the North's ambitions had to be halted and that all options, including military, remained on the table.

"If they elevate the threat of their weapons programme to a level that we believe requires action, then that option's on the table," Tillerson said in Seoul.

Fashion renaissance: from slick city to hip Hong Kong

AFP, Hong Kong

SOULESS supermalls housing luxury labels, traditional suit tailors, and markets full of cheap designer knock-offs, Hong Kong's flaccid fashion scene has long struggled to compete with the sartorial cool of Tokyo's Harajuku, or the street style of Hongdae in Seoul.

But a new generation of independent designers in Hong Kong is changing all that with creations that are putting the city on the international fashion map.

Eschewing advertising and straplins for Instagram and hashtags, many choose influencers over models, and pop-up events instead of bricks-and-mortar stores, collectively channelling the "Hip Hong Kong" brand -- at home and abroad.

"Social media is the cornerstone to success as a start-up, brands now have the opportunity of being stocked simply based on their Instagram appeal," says Jasmine Smith, founder of lingerie firm Raven + Rose, pointing to the fact she had a wait list by the time she launched her first collection in the city fuelled by online interest in her images and styling.

Smith has since secured a deal with the Four Seasons, where her designs sit next to international giant La Perla. Her local popularity has helped her springboard internationally: her pieces have

been worn by Madonna's backing dancers, American grunge star Alana, and featured on Asia's Next Top Model.

"Style pockets" she says are now dotted around the city -- from trendy SoHo on Hong Kong island to gritty Kwun Tong and arty Sham Shui Po

shared by thousands.

She is not alone in transforming a loyal local following into international interest. Anais Mak's Jourden brand started as a single line collection in Hong Kong, before being hailed in Vogue and is now stocked at Barneys in the US and Isetan in Tokyo.

expand across Asia.

Ho says: "In the past few years I feel young people are setting up their own brands again. Maybe in response to too much uniform fast fashion."

Luke Grana agrees, suggesting people are tiring of what is on offer from the big brands at both ends of the



A staff member of start-up retailer Grana adjusts a clothes display as customers browse in one of their shops in Hong Kong on March 16.

in Kowloon, these are hotspots where the city's style mavens and upcoming local designers reign supreme.

"What sets Raven + Rose apart is its recognition for those that flirt on the outskirts of what is mainstream," adds Smith. Her #OwnYourBody campaign, which features a range of ordinary women in Hong Kong in her designs, has been

Last month Polly Ho of Loom Loop won acclaim for her show at New York Fashion Week, while Fiona Lau and Kain Picken of Ffixed Studios enjoyed similar success in Paris.

Little more than two years after it launched in Hong Kong, start-up retailer Grana secured millions from Alibaba's entrepreneurs fund. It now ships to 11 countries, with plans to

spectrum.

"We're already beginning to see luxury fashion brands lowering their prices in Hong Kong due to the decline in sales reported over the last six months. Fast fashion brands with lower quality apparel are (also) experiencing a drop in sales," Grana adds.

The government too is keen to capitalise on renewed interest in Hong Kong's fashion scene.

ion scene, allocating around HK\$500 million (\$65 million) to support local talent in the 2016-2017 budget.

The Trade Development Council (HKTDCC) has launched a number of initiatives to showcase emerging brands internationally, collaborating with department stores and staging fashion events in key cities.

"We've noticed lately that the younger generation of fashion designers are rapidly expanding their brands and networks. Many of these talented designers have already built their names locally and are ready to take the next step," says Rebecca Tse of the HKTDCC.

Last November the body organised for up and coming Hong Kong designers to showcase their collections at key Tokyo department stores, as well as for a special fashion week show in the city, and in Copenhagen, and New York.

Tse admits it is a mutually beneficial arrangement. "The international showcases are a chance to show off the hip Hong Kong brand. Showcasing local talented designers is also a great way to show off the city as a fashion metropolis," she explains.

The combination of a rising localism among the city's youth, and a renewed global interest in Hong Kong's cultural scene -- both inspired by the 2014 Umbrella Revolution protests against Beijing -- may also have helped the city's independent fashion scene.

Troubled Alitalia to slash 2000 jobs

AFP, Milan

Troubled airline Alitalia on Friday presented trade unions with plans to cut over 2,000 jobs and slash salaries by up to a third under a cost-cutting survival plan.

Unions said the job cuts would total more than 2,400, nearly a fifth of the company's global headcount, while the company put the total at 2,000 and said there plans to recruit 500 new cabin crew by 2019 as the restructuring hopefully brings a return to profitability.

Company CEO Cramer Ball said the job cuts would mainly come from a 51 per cent reduction in office staff and a 20 per cent reduction in non-flying operational roles.

"Headcount reductions are a painful but necessary action that, alongside other cost reductions, will stabilise our financial situation and create long-term sustainability," the Australian executive said. "These changes are essential if we are to compete effectively in the extremely tough European aviation market."

Union officials told AFP that staff who survive the cull are being asked to accept drastic pay cuts -- up to 28 percent for pilots and up to 32 percent for hostesses and stewards.

The unions called for a strike on April 5 to protest a restructuring plan which is likely to be closely scrutinised by the Italian government, which has been critical recently of the way Alitalia has been managed under the de facto control of Etihad Airways, Ball's former employer.

Extensive jobs cuts have been anticipated for months at the loss-making Italian carrier.

Etihad acquired a 49 percent stake when it saved Alitalia from bankruptcy in 2014.