



Sajjad Hussain, CEO of AB Bank, and Zakaria Swapan, CEO of iPAY Systems Limited, exchange documents after signing a deal. The online payment platform's Wallet users will be able to pay their utility bills using the bank's payment platform.

Modi sees India as \$10tr economy with countless startups

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

With fresh general elections just a couple of months away, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi yesterday laid out his vision for making India a \$10-trillion economy and the third-largest in the world.

Modi said he wants the nation to have countless start-ups and be a global leader in electric vehicles.

Speaking at the Global Business Summit in New Delhi, he said his government inherited an economy in complete policy paralysis, plagued by runaway inflation and rising current account and fiscal deficits.

However, reforms undertaken by his government in the last four and a half years have changed the picture, Modi said. "The change is clearly visible today."

Modi said the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance rule witnessed highest post-liberalisation growth rate of 7.4 percent and the lowest inflation of less than 4.5 percent.

Reforms like goods and services tax (GST) have laid solid foundation for higher gross domestic product (GDP) growth.

"We want to lead the global drive towards renewable sources of energy and we want to give our people energy security. We want to cut down on import dependence. We want to make India a world leader in electric vehicles



India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi attends a South Korea-India business forum at the Lotte hotel in Seoul on Thursday.

and energy storage devices."

The prime minister said the engine of growth for his government is running on two parallel tracks - one providing social infrastructure to all particularly for those who were left out and other providing physical infrastructure for all and particularly for generation next to shape their future as per their dreams.

Modi said it is often lamented that India missed the industrial revolutions bus in the past "but today it is a matter of pride that India is an active contrib-

utor to the fourth Industrial Revolution."

"India may have missed the bus during the first three industrial revolutions, but this time, it is a bus India has not only boarded but will also drive," he said adding "innovation and technology will form the bed-rock of this resurgence."

Modi said the outcomes of his government's focus on Digital India, Start-up India, Make In India and Innovate India are converging and reaping rich dividends.

VW sees steady profits in 2018 results

AFP, Frankfurt

German car giant Volkswagen on Friday reported steady operating profit and rising revenues in 2018, but said its "dieselgate" emissions cheating scandal again inflicted one-off costs of 3.2 billion euros (\$3.6 billion).

Operating profit inched up 0.1 billion euros to 13.9 billion last year, the Wolfsburg-based group said in preliminary results, released unexpectedly ahead of its March 12 annual earnings press conference.

Meanwhile the sprawling 12-brand conglomerate increased unit sales by 0.9 percent to 10.8 million vehicles, a new yearly record - powering annual revenues up 2.7 percent at 235.8 billion euros.

Chief executive Herbert Diess

hailed a "good showing in 2018, especially against the background of the switch to WLTP", new emissions tests that proved a massive bottleneck for the whole industry from their introduction in September.

VW was particularly happy to hit the high end of its profit margin target, at 7.3 percent - slightly down on 2017's level.

But the group said it also spent 3.2 billion euros - the same amount as the previous year - in one-off costs related to its 2015 admission to cheating on regulatory tests for 11 million diesel vehicles worldwide.

VW's preliminary results release came on the same day as a non-binding opinion from the Federal Court of Justice (BGH), Germany's highest tribunal, on claims against the firm over manipulated vehicles.

Senior judges leaned towards backing customers' claims against Volkswagen, potentially pointing the way for future deliberations in lower courts over the 2.4 million such cars sold in Germany.

Despite the legal risks and the costs of a massive push for new electric and hybrid models, the supervisory and executive boards proposed an increased dividend of 4.80 euros per share, up from 3.90 for 2017.

Looking ahead to 2019, the group said it would "slightly exceed" last year's unit sales figure despite challenges from a slowing economy intensifying competition and volatile exchange rates.

Revenues should increase by up to 5.0 percent year-on-year and operating profit between 6.5 and 7.5 percent, bosses forecast.

UK retailers curb investment plans ahead of Brexit

REUTERS, London

British retailers plan the least investment in seven years ahead of the country's departure from the European Union, and job cuts in the sector have gathered pace, a major survey showed on Friday.

Although retailers were the most upbeat about the general business situation in over two years, Brexit and longer-term structural changes were casting a shadow, according to the quarterly survey from the Confederation of British Industry.

The investment intentions balance plunged to -33 in February from -3 in November, the lowest since February 2012, when Britain's economy was still trying to shake off the after-effects of the global financial crisis.

The survey's employment balance was its weakest since August 2017 at -30.

Numerous surveys have shown businesses are holding off on investment while Britain remains at risk of leaving the European Union on March 29 without an interim trade deal.

Official data for the three months to December published earlier this month showed the biggest fall in overall business investment since 2010.

"Until politicians can agree a deal that commands a majority in parliament, is acceptable to the EU and protects our economy, business despair will deepen. A deal must be



Shoppers walk past the Debenhams department store in London.

negotiated, and no-deal averted," CBI economist Anna Leach said.

Retailers face the additional challenge of fierce online competition, leading to companies such as Marks & Spencer and Debenhams shutting stores and others such as Toys R Us UK and electronics retailer Maplin going out of business.

The CBI said February's monthly sales growth balance held at January's reading of zero - above a two-year low recorded in December but below its average for most of 2018.

But retailers were more upbeat about the prospects for March, with the strongest outlook since 2015 - though in January they had been

similarly upbeat about this month.

Since then, official data has shown strong retail sales growth in January, helped by bigger than normal discounts on clothing.

Samuel Tombs of Pantheon Macroeconomics said the CBI data was often more downbeat than the official numbers.

"The continued weakness of the reported sales balance in February should be taken with a pinch of salt," he said, pointing to improving consumer finances despite a more general economic slowdown ahead of Brexit.

Stronger growth in wages, continued job creation and low inflation was boosting spending power, he said.

JPMorgan trades banker offices for shared desks

REUTERS, New York

JPMorgan Chase & Co is tearing down walls and moving its San Francisco investment bankers onto "hot desks," a space-saving layout that has long been a fixture at tech companies, while redesigning offices in Dallas and other cities.

Shared workspaces have been relatively slow to catch on at banks, but JPMorgan is following recent renovations by some rivals, which designers tout as cost cutting and productivity boosting. Still, bankers who covet the status and privacy of personal offices are in for big changes.

When JPMorgan renovated two floors at its Mission Street office in San Francisco last month, it replaced many offices with diner-style booths, designated quiet zones and communal tables for the roughly 250 investment bankers and other employees there.

Noah Wintroub, a San Francisco-based vice chairman of investment banking at JPMorgan who focuses on tech and media companies, said he lobbied for the open-desk layout, though it may be a culture shock for some.

"We have historically been very hierarchical. When you become a managing director you have this kind of office," Wintroub said.

The bank already set up hot desking for investment bankers in Hong Kong, said David Arena, JPMorgan's head of global

corporate real estate. It was able to cut costs by putting more people on fewer floors.

Arena did not say if US renovations will help JPMorgan shrink its real estate footprint. He noted limits to the approach, saying it is "counter-productive if too many people are squeezed into one space."

JPMorgan is also redesigning offices in Phoenix and Columbus, Ohio. It did not say if there were any plans to include hot desks at the bank's New York main office, which is currently under construction.

Goldman Sachs Group Inc tore down walls in its New York asset management office in 2017, and Morgan Stanley, is redesigning its midtown Manhattan headquarters to move brokers, traders and tech employees closer together, according to media reports.

Multiple users sharing one workstation has been common at tech and consulting companies for more than a decade, and a 2015 study by industry group the International Facility Management Association found a majority of businesses now use hot desking for at least some staff.

But the layout was slower to take hold in banking, where a cultural resistance stems in part from the need to take confidential calls in private, according to the report.

Offices were also status symbols, and sitting at a communal table instead of one's own glass office is a big shift for investment bankers.



Tamim Iqbal, a national cricketer, and Ambareen Reza, managing director of foodpanda, pose at a deal signing ceremony at the Four Points by Sheraton Dhaka recently. Tamim became the brand ambassador of the food delivery service provider.

German economy 'in better shape' than thought in Q4

AFP, Frankfurt

The German economy is "in better shape" than feared, analysts said Friday, after detailed data for the fourth quarter of 2018 showed a dashboard with few red lights despite flat growth.

Figures from federal statistics authority Destatis confirmed preliminary readings of 0.0 percent expansion between October and December, adjusted for price, seasonal and calendar effects.

"German economic growth has stalled," the statisticians said in a statement, with the flatline in the final three months of last year following contraction of 0.2 percent between July and September.

That meant Europe's powerhouse only just escaped a technical recession - two successive quarters of negative growth - in the second half of 2018. Nevertheless, "the German

economy is in a better shape than its current reputation," economist Carsten Brzeski of ING Diba bank commented on the release.

Private consumption, government spending and investments all picked up, while both imports and exports grew at around the same pace, leaving the country's trade surplus almost flat. "None of the traditional growth components" were negative, Brzeski noted, arguing the data showed the massive car industry's struggles to adapt to new tougher emissions tests were the main culprit for the slowdown.

Stocks of newly-built cars had piled up in the second and third quarter, he pointed out, before being finally delivered in the fourth after passing the so-called WLTP process introduced in September.

"Inventories were a massive drag" on growth in the final three months, Unicredit analysts agreed,

calculating the effect slowed the economy by "a whopping 0.6" percentage points. "The temporary problems in the car industry mask

solid fundamentals," Brzeski said.

"In a couple of months, the German economy should be able again to show its true colours."



A man works on a track of a rollercoaster at a production plant in Germany.



A sign of JP Morgan Chase Bank is seen in front of their headquarters tower in New York.