UTTARA BANK

Uttara Bank Chairman Azharul Islam inaugurates the bank's 238th branch at Chanchkoir Bazar of Gurudaspur in Natore yesterday. Managing Director Mohammed Rabiul Hossain was also present.

OECD trims global growth forecast for 2020

AFP, *Paris*

The OECD trimmed Thursday its 2020 global economic growth forecast and said it did not see a strong rebound in 2021 owing to risks stemming from trade tensions.

The Paris-based Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development now estimates that business activity around the world will expand by 2.9 percent next year, a decline of 0.1 percentage points from a previous forecast issued in September.

In 2021, the OECD, which groups the world's wealthiest nations, sees global economic growth edging back up to 3.0 percent, according to its November 2019 Economic Outlook.

OECD chief economist Laurence Boone noted that "for the past two years, global growth outcomes and prospects have steadily deteriorated, amidst persistent policy uncertainty and weak trade and investment flows." She said that while central banks had taken decisive and timely monetary decisions that partly offset negative effects of trade tensions, most governments had not done so on a fiscal level, for example by investing in long-term projects to improve infrastructure, advance digitalisation of their economies and limit climate change.

Owing to "persistent policy uncertainty and weak trade and investment flows," she said the OECD now saw the global economy expanding at "the weakest rate since the global financial crisis" erupted in 2007.

The US economy, the world's biggest, "is expected to slow to 2.0 percent by 2021, while growth in Japan and the euro area is expected to be around 0.7 and 1.2 percent respectively." In China, the second biggest economy worldwide, growth was forecast to "continue to edge down, to around 5.5 percent by 2021", Boone said.

Other emerging economies are expected to recover "only modestly," she added.

World Bank chief tells China it needs 'vital' reforms

AFP, *Beijing*

World Bank chief David Malpass urged China on Thursday to further open up its economy and reduce state subsidies, echoing key demands made by the United States in protracted trade war negotiations.

Malpass made the remarks after a roundtable meeting with Chinese Premier Li Keqiang and the heads of other global institutions, including the International Monetary Fund and the World Trade Organization.

"I encouraged new reforms and liberalisation," he said.

Beijing is struggling to kickstart the economy, which expanded at its slowest pace for nearly three decades in the third quarter amid cooling global demand for its exports and a looming debt crisis at home.

Malpass said Beijing must resolve bilateral trade disputes and improve transparency in lending to avoid a sharp downturn on growth over the coming decades.

"China could improve the rule of law, allow the market to play a more decisive role in allocating resources including debt and investment, reduce subsidies for state-owned enterprises... and remove barriers to competition," he said.

"It is hard to achieve but it is vital for reducing any inequality and building higher living standard," Malpass said.

State-owned behemoths dominate lucrative sectors of China's economy -- including energy, aviation and telecommunications -- where access to private players is restricted.

China's trade partners have also long complained about the lack of an equal playing field and theft of intellectual property.

The country's rubber-stamp parliament in March passed a foreign investment law that promises to address these issues, but local governments are still working on detailed rules needed to implement it.

Li said both domestic and foreign companies registered in China will be treated equally.

"They will have equal access to investment opportunities, equitable access to resources, legal protection in accordance with the law," he said.

Beijing has also announced a timetable to open up its financial sector to foreign investors next year, as it attempts to woo outside capital to shore up an economy battered by the trade war with the United States.

China and the US have slapped tariffs on over $360 billion worth of goods in two-way trade.

Negotiators from both sides have been working towards a partial deal, but US President Donald Trump on Wednesday said Beijing has not made sufficient concessions, making him reluctant to conclude a bargain.

Economic data shows the uncertainty created by the trade spat between the world's two biggest economies is undermining global growth.

IMF chief Kristalina Georgieva warned that implementing all the announced tariffs would cut $700 billion out of the world economy next year.

"What should be our priorities? First, to move from trade truce to trade peace," she said.

REUTERS

Chinese Premier Li Keqiang and World Bank President David Malpass attend a news conference along with others after the "1+6" Roundtable meeting at Diaoyutai state guesthouse in Beijing, China yesterday.

India offers ailing telecom firms two-year moratorium on payments

AFP, *Mumbai*

India has granted the country's beleaguered telecom giants a moratorium on spectrum payments until the end of March 2022, offering much-needed respite after the Supreme Court slapped a massive $13-billion bill on the companies.

Vodafone Idea and Bharti Airtel bore the brunt of last month's court ruling ordering firms to pay a combined 920 billion rupees in past spectrum and licensing fees.

The judgement saw Vodafone Idea record the biggest quarterly loss in Indian corporate history last week after it factored in the $4 billion levy.

But New Delhi offered a measure of relief to the struggling sector late Wednesday, with the cabinet approving a moratorium on spectrum payments for the next two financial years.

"Deferment of spectrum auction instalments will ease the cash outflow of the stressed (telecom providers) and facilitate payment of statutory liabilities and interest on bank loans," the cabinet said in a press release.

Vodafone Idea and Bharti Airtel, which was hit with a $3-billion bill, have warned that the ruling will exacerbate the telecom sector's financial woes.

The announcement didn't appear to do much to help the share price of either firm, with Bharti Airtel down two percent and Vodafone Idea losing four percent on Thursday morning in Mumbai.

In addition to seeking the deferral of payments, the British parent company Vodafone had also asked for a reduction in licensing fees.

Vodafone's chief executive Nick Read said last week that the telecom firm was facing a crisis in India and would not invest any more equity in the country since the South Asian market contributed zero to its global share valuations.

Vodafone Idea and Bharti Airtel have both struggled since India's richest man Mukesh Ambani launched Reliance Jio in 2016. The new mobile operator has offered dirt-cheap internet and free calls.

All three companies have announced plans to raise their charges in the next few weeks in a bid to boost their bottomline and help the sector recover after years of cut-price tariffs.

Many players have exited the sector in recent years or have gone bankrupt trying to compete with Jio, which was the only beneficiary of the October court verdict, escaping with a relatively light $1.8 billion in fees.

China says it's striving for trade deal with US

AFP, *Beijing*

China said Thursday it is still striving to reach a trade deal with the United States, a day after President Donald Trump accused Beijing of not making sufficient concessions.

Negotiators from both sides have been working towards a partial deal that includes bigger Chinese orders for US farm goods and better protections for intellectual property.

But Trump Wednesday accused Beijing of not "stepping up" to the level he expected, making him reluctant to conclude a bargain.

Chinese commerce ministry spokesman Gao Feng said Thursday that negotiators from both sides "will maintain close communication" and were working on finalising a phase-one deal.

"China is willing to work with the US side on the basis of equality and mutual respect to properly address each other's core concerns and strive to reach a phase one agreement," Gao said at a regular briefing.

Top Chinese and US trade negotiators held "constructive" discussions over the phone on a preliminary trade deal on Saturday, Gao said, without offering details.

China has insisted on a rollback of existing tariffs, which Trump said he has not agreed to.

US Congress approval for legislation supporting pro-democracy protesters in Hong Kong has also cast a shadow on the ongoing trade talks.

The Hong Kong Human Rights and Democracy Act requires the president to annually review the city's favourable trade status and threatens to revoke it if the semi-autonomous territory's freedoms are quashed.

Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Geng Shuang declined to comment on whether passage of the bill would derail trade talks.

Panasonic to stop LCD panel production

AFP, *Tokyo*

Japanese electronics titan Panasonic said Thursday it would end its production of liquid crystal display panels by 2021, as Chinese and South Korean manufacturers dominate the global market.

The company, which makes everything from rice cookers to batteries for Tesla vehicles, currently makes LCD panels only for vehicles and industrial uses.

The company said it had attempted to respond to "the tough competition and evolution" of the business, but came to the conclusion that "further continuation of the business would be unviable."

SOCIAL ISLAMI BANK

Md Anwarul Azim Arif, chairman of Social Islami Bank, opens a branch of the bank in Eidgaon of Cox's Bazar yesterday.

French hotels protest 'outrageous' Airbnb-Olympics deal

AFP, *Biarritz*

French hotel owners assailed Airbnb on Wednesday over its new partnership with the International Olympic Committee, warning they would stop working on the planning for the Paris 2024 summer Games to protest against what they call an unfair competitor.

French hotels have long accused home rental platform Airbnb of taking advantage of minimal oversight to undercut their business, and have been lobbying authorities for a crackdown on short-term tourist rentals.

"Airbnb doesn't play by the rules, and must be disqualified," the GNI association of independent hotels said in a statement during an industry gathering in the Atlantic coast resort town of Biarritz.

The GNI said it would file a protest with the IOC's ethics commission, as well as the organising committee for the 2024 summer Games in Paris.

"Hotels are going to suspend their participation in the organisation of the 2024 Games," said Laurent Duc, head of the main UMIH hotel trade group, which organised the Biarritz conference.

"Already the (Airbnb) platform objects to passing on the visitor's tax with clearly identified addresses and owners, as required by law," he told AFP.

In a statement, the UMIH and the GCN alliance of hotel chains called the Olympic partnership "inappropriate".

"It is outrageous to make this company, which spurs deregulation in countries around the world, a global partner of the IOC," it said.

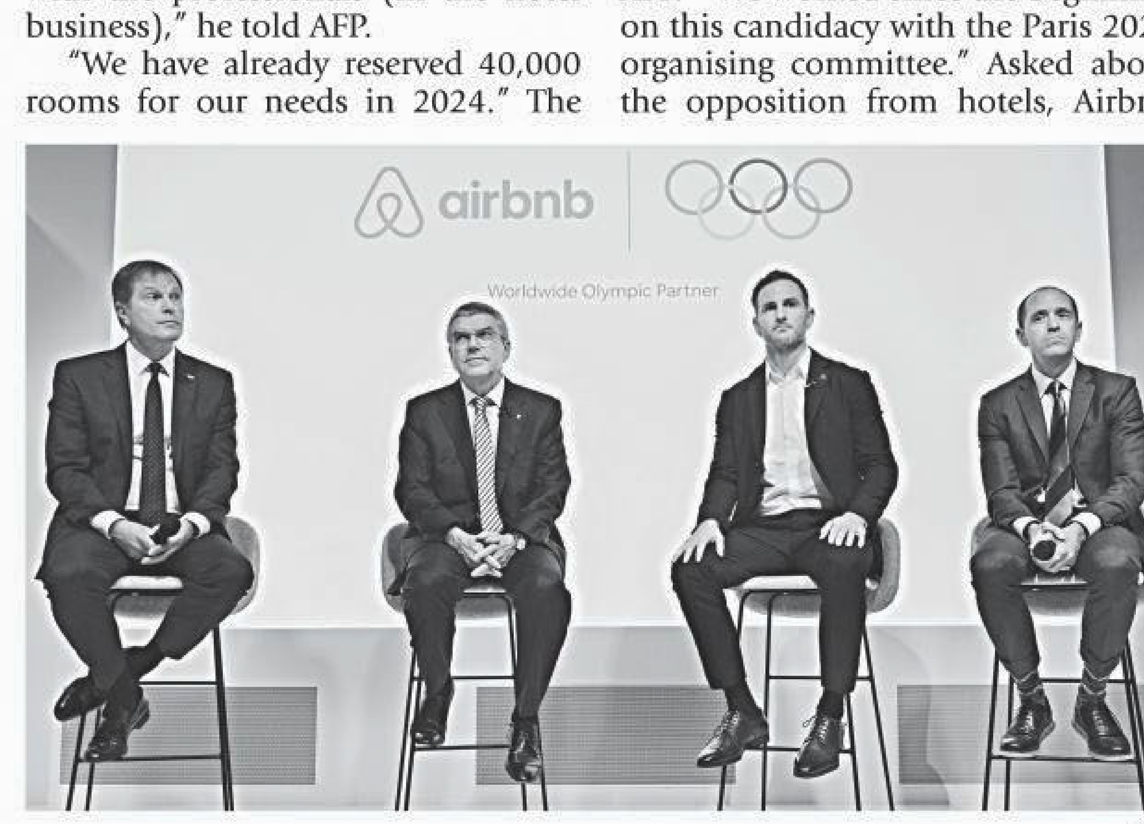
Paris City Hall quickly voiced its support for the hotel sector on Wednesday, calling their "cry of alarm... normal" in view of the general "destabilisation" of the hotel sector caused by the platform.

Tony Estanguet, the president of the organising committee for the Paris 2024 Olympic Games stressed that the hotel business had not been left out in the cold.

"We have already been working with the professionals (in the hotel business)," he told AFP.

"We have already reserved 40,000 rooms for our needs in 2024." The next May, promised to hold a vote on how home-sharing platforms should be regulated, at a time when many residents blame Airbnb for driving up rents.

UMIH president Roland Heguy told AFP. "We worked since the beginning on this candidacy with the Paris 2024 organising committee." Asked about the opposition from hotels, Airbnb



AFP

***From left*, International Olympic Committee Managing Director Timo Lumme, President Thomas Bach, Airbnb co-founder Joe Gebbia and Airbnb Senior Vice President of Communications Chris Lehane take part in an event in London to announce Airbnb as a leading partner of the Olympics on November 19.**

UMIH sued Airbnb in June 2018 for "knowingly violating" rules imposed as part of a crackdown in one of the US giant's biggest markets.

Paris alone has 65,000 listings on Airbnb, and there are thousands more in the nearby suburbs that will house many of the venues for the 2024 Olympics.

Paris mayor Anne Hidalgo has also vowed to tighten oversight of Airbnb rentals after warning IOC President Thomas Bach about the "risks" of the partnership.

Hidalgo, who is up for re-election said in a statement Wednesday that "this historic accord aims to allow host cities to welcome the Games in a more local, authentic and sustainable manner".

It noted that Airbnb had already been a national partner for the 2016 Olympics in Rio de Janeiro and the 2018 Games in Pyeongchang, South Korea, and that "its values are in line with those of the Olympic movement".

Its nine-year deal with the IOC, announced on Monday, puts it in the league of Coca-Cola and Visa as a "Top" partner, the highest sponsorship level.