



**Md Mahbub ul Alam, CEO of Islami Bank Bangladesh, opens the bank's 1,000th agent banking outlet at Banglabazar of Fatullah union in Narayanganj yesterday.**

## Singapore GDP growth seen picking up slightly

REUTERS, Singapore

Singapore's economy is forecast to have expanded at a slightly faster pace in the fourth quarter, with economists expecting the services sector to compensate for a prolonged manufacturing slowdown.

Gross domestic product (GDP) is expected to have expanded 0.8 percent from the same period a year earlier, according to the median of nine economists' estimates. The economy grew 0.5 percent in July-September.

Singapore's export-oriented economy has been hit hard this year by the drawn-out trade war between the United States and China as well as a cyclical downturn in the electronics

sector.

"The fourth-quarter advance estimate is expected to pick up mainly on the back of stronger growth in construction and services (finance, tourism-related and business services) sectors, which will offset the continued weakness in the manufacturing sector," said Maybank Kim Eng economists.

GDP is forecast to have grown 0.4 percent on a quarter-on-quarter, on a seasonally adjusted and annualised basis in the fourth quarter, according to the median of seven forecasts.

That is slower than the 2.1 percent expansion in the third quarter when the economy comfortably avoided a recession that was estimated by some analysts.

Last week, data showed that Singapore's industrial output crashed in November, marking its biggest drop in four years, after rising in the previous two months.

"Our 2020 GDP growth forecast for the Singapore economy remains at 1-2 percent yoy (year-on-year), predicated on a modest manufacturing recovery with the services and construction sectors as providing the growth bulwark," said OCBC economist Selena Ling. She forecast 2019 GDP growth of about 0.5 percent.

Singapore's Ministry of Trade and Industry will release advance GDP estimates for the fourth quarter and the whole year 2019 on Thursday morning.

## Huawei's 2019 revenue to jump 18pc



**People visiting a Huawei stand during the Mobile World Congress introducing next-generation technology in Shanghai, China.**

REUTERS, Shanghai

Huawei Technologies on Tuesday said its full-year revenue would likely jump 18 percent in 2019 to 850 billion yuan (\$121.72 billion), lower than its earlier projections, as a US trade blacklisting curbed growth and disrupted its ability to source key parts.

The world's biggest maker of telecom network equipment and the No. 2 manufacturer of smartphones, was all but banned by the United States in May from doing business with US companies, preventing its access to technology

like Google's Android operating system.

The US government alleges Huawei equipment pose national security risks because they could be used by the Chinese government to spy on users. Huawei has repeatedly denied its products are a security threat.

Huawei's Rotating Chairman Eric Xu revealed the numbers in a New Year's message to employees and customers in which he also forecasted 2020 to be a "difficult year", saying that the firm was unlikely to grow as rapidly as it did in the first half of this year.

Its estimate of 18 percent revenue growth in 2019 is less than 2018, when Huawei's annual revenue rose 19.5 percent.

The company did not break down fourth-quarter figures but according to Reuters calculations based on its previous statements, revenue in the quarter to end Dec. 31 rose to 239.2 billion yuan (\$23.28 billion), up 3.9 percent from a year earlier and slower than the 27 percent increase it reported in the third quarter.

"The external environment is becoming more complicated than ever, and downward pressure on the

global economy has intensified," he said.

"In the long term, the US government will continue to suppress the development of leading technology - a challenging environment for Huawei to survive and thrive."

Xu also said that Huawei shipped 240 million smartphones this year, a 20 percent increase from 2018. Huawei has mainly sold smartphones that were launched before the ban.

The newest Mate 30 smartphone first went on sale in September but it cannot access a licensed version of Google's Android operating system because of the trade curbs.

Xu said in his letter that Huawei would in 2020 "go all out" to build its Huawei Mobile Services ecosystem, which comprises services such as cloud storage and an app gallery, describing it as "the foundation of our ability to sell smart devices in markets outside China".

It is also developing its own mobile operating system known as Harmony, although analysts are skeptical that the system is a viable alternative.

Huawei's reputation was dented earlier this month after details of the dismissal and wrongful detention of a former employee went viral.

In his letter, Xu said they would continue to remove mediocre managers and complacent employees as Huawei needed to rid the company of complacency, and that they would remove managers performing in the bottom 10 percent every year.



**A sales attendant briefs a customer about a comforter of Comfy, a brand of RFL, at a showroom in the capital's Uttara recently. The brand introduced six new types of comforters with prices ranging from Tk 1,795 to Tk 3,590.**

## Uber sues California over gig-economy labour law

AFP, San Francisco

Ride-hailing giant Uber and delivery company Postmates have filed a lawsuit against the state of California, claiming a new law that would treat gig-economy freelancers as employees is unconstitutional.

The legislation, due to go into effect on Wednesday, would mean that -- under certain conditions -- independent contractors are classified as employees and granted the minimum salary and health insurance benefits that entails.

This would include drivers for both Uber and Postmates.

"Plaintiffs bring this lawsuit to protect their constitutional rights and defend their fundamental liberty to pursue their chosen work as independent service providers

and technology companies in the on-demand economy," said the lawsuit filed on Monday.

Uber warned earlier this year that it would oppose any change of status for its drivers, which will cost the company extra in social security costs.

In the suit, Uber and its co-plaintiffs argue the law targets independent service providers while exempting direct salespeople, travel agents, construction truck drivers and commercial fishermen.

"There is no rhyme or reason to these nonsensical exemptions," it said.

Uber and its American rival Lyft have each put aside 30 million dollars to organise a referendum, allowed under Californian law, to replace the legislation with a compromise on social rights that has been put before the state Governor.

## Ghosh flees to Lebanon, says won't be 'held hostage' by Japan's justice system

REUTERS, Paris/Tokyo

Ousted Nissan boss Carlos Ghosn confirmed he fled to Lebanon, saying he wouldn't be "held hostage" by a "rigged" system, raising questions about how one of the world's most-recognized executives slipped out of Japan months before his trial.

Ghosn's abrupt departure marks the latest dramatic twist in a year-old saga that has shaken the global auto industry, jeopardized the alliance of Nissan Motor Co Ltd and top shareholder Renault SA and cast a harsh light on Japan's judicial system.

"I am now in Lebanon and will no longer be held hostage by a rigged Japanese justice system where guilt is presumed, discrimination is rampant, and basic human rights are denied," Ghosn, 65, said in a brief statement on Tuesday.

"I have not fled justice - I have escaped injustice and political persecution. I can now finally communicate freely with the media, and look forward to starting next

week."

Tokyo officials have previously said the system is not inhumane and that Ghosn has been treated like any other suspect.

It was unclear how Ghosn, who holds French, Brazilian and Lebanese citizenship, was able to orchestrate his departure from Japan, given that he had been under strict surveillance by authorities while out on bail and had surrendered his passports.

Ghosn arrived in Beirut on a private jet from Istanbul on Monday, people familiar with the matter told Reuters.

Immigration authorities had no record of Ghosn leaving the country, Japanese public broadcaster NHK said. A person resembling him entered Beirut international airport under a different name, NHK reported, citing an unidentified Lebanese security official.

His lawyers were still in possession of his three passports, one of his lawyers, Junichiro Hironaka, told reporters.

Hironaka, in comments broadcast

live on NHK, said the first he had heard of Ghosn's departure was on the news this morning and that he was surprised. He also said it was "inexcusable behavior".

Japan has extradition treaties with only the United States and South Korea, according to the justice ministry, meaning it could be difficult to force Ghosn to return to stand trial.

While his arrest on financial misconduct charges last year ensured a dramatic fall from grace in Japan, he retains more popularity in Lebanon, where billboards saying "We are all Carlos Ghosn" were erected in his support and he was previously featured on a postage stamp.

Born in Brazil of Lebanese ancestry, Ghosn grew up in Beirut and has retained close ties to Lebanon.

A spokeswoman for the Lebanese embassy in Tokyo said "we did not receive any information" on the matter. Calls to the Brazilian embassy went unanswered. A French embassy spokesman in Tokyo declined to comment.

Ghosn was first arrested in Tokyo in November 2018, shortly after his private jet touched down at the airport. He faces four charges - which he denies - including hiding income and enriching himself through payments to dealerships in the Middle East.

Nissan sacked him as chairman saying internal investigations revealed misconduct ranging from understating his salary while he was its chief executive, and transferring \$5 million of Nissan funds to an account in which he had an interest.

The case cast a harsh light on Japan's criminal justice system, which allows suspects to be detained for long periods and prohibits defense lawyers from being present during interrogations that can last eight hours a day.

Ghosn was initially released in March on a record \$9 million bail only to be arrested on related charges weeks later and then released on bail again at the end of April.

## China's factory activity grows

REUTERS, Beijing

Manufacturing activity in China expanded for a second straight month in December as seasonal demand and signs of progress in trade talks with Washington boosted factories' output and order books.

China's official Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) was unchanged at 50.2 in December from November, the National Bureau of Statistics said on Tuesday, slightly higher than the 50.1 expected in a Reuters poll of analysts.

It also remained above the 50-point mark that separates monthly growth from contraction.

The better-than-expected readings suggested some recovery in the world's second-largest economy this month. Production rose at the fastest pace in over a year while growth of total new orders was only a notch lower than a recent high hit last month.

While the upbeat indicators show the economy ending 2019 on a firmer footing than initially expected, there are deeper concerns such momentum may not continue

next year.

"The extended strength in the official manufacturing PMI certainly looks positive for markets, but we believe this may not be sustainable, and the economy has yet to hit the bottom," Nomura analysts said in a note after the data.

Still, the stability seen recently prompted Nomura to revise up its gross domestic product forecasts for the fourth quarter to 6.0 percent from 5.8 percent.

Zhao Qinghe, a senior statistician with the statistics bureau, attributed the PMI resilience to increasing demand and production ahead of the Lunar New Year holiday, which falls in late January.

Production for sectors such as the textile, pharmaceutical and auto and telecom equipment industries stood at relatively high levels. The survey also showed a boost in firms' willingness to stock up inventories in order to meet production need ahead of the holidays.

The PMI aligns with other recent signs of strength with profits at China's industrial firms growing at the fastest

pace in eight months in November, data showed last week.

Growth in industrial and retail sectors also beat expectations in November as government support propped up demand.

It also co-incides with signs of improvement in Sino-US trade talks, which have boosted global investor confidence and helped Chinese manufacturers book new orders from abroad, even though a final deal is yet to be inked.

New export orders, in particular, rose for the first time since May 2018 in December.

China and the United States have announced a Phase 1 agreement that would reduce some US tariffs in exchange for more Chinese purchases of American farm products, which analysts believe could stimulate China's exports and corporate investment in the near-term.

On Monday, White House trade adviser Peter Navarro said the Phase 1 deal would likely be signed in the next week and cited a report that Chinese Vice Premier Liu He would visit the United States this week.



**Former Nissan Motor Chariman Carlos Ghosn leaves the Tokyo Detention House in Tokyo.**



**Mohammad Eusuf Daud, an architect of Salesforce, a US-based cloud computing firm that provides customer resource management solutions, and Mohammad Zakir Hossain, Salesforce's community leader for Bangladesh, pose at "Dhaka Dreamin '2019 Trailhead" in Dhaka on Sunday. They shared industry trends and latest innovations in technology of Salesforce.**