The Echo of India•Kolkata
Wednesday•April 12, 2017

Oz media notes lack of progress in free trade talks with India

MELBOURNE, APRIL 11 /--/ India and Australia failed to make a headway in finalising the long overdue free trade deal during Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull's first visit to India though he got along well with his counterpart Narendra Modi, the media here said on Tuesday. Turnbull's trip had raised high hopes of breathing new life into the stalled trade negotiations but the two leaders admitted that the progress was "very slow". Turnbull said there was no point in setting arbitrary time frames for the agreement.

"You can sign an agreement any time, its a question of whether its got the provisions that make it valuable and worthwhile from Australia's point of view," Turnbull was quoted as saying by Skynews TV channel. The two covered a range of issues in their formal discussions yesterday including national security, counter terrorism, education and energy and signed six agreements. The Australian newspaper wrote that The Prime Minister cooled hopes for a Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement (CECA) with India by declaring "we've got to be realistic about the timing of the deal, given a history of Indian protection for farmers against agricultural imports". It noted that Australia was also pushing back India's proposals on the flow of temporary foreign workers to Australian projects. Last night, Turnbull had praised Modi for agreeing that progress on free trade deal was 'too slow' and that it should be resuscitated. ABC news website said that Turnbull's comments reflect a change of attitude from his criticism of Indian protectionism ahead of his meeting with Modi.

According to Sydney Morning Herald, Turnbull effectively declared Tony Abbott's dream of an express negotiation phase had been unrealistic, stating that a potentially lucrative free trade agreement with India was now on the backburner. It commented that the downbeat statement - something a reality check - accompanied hopes of increased Australian involvement in India's energy market due to increased exports of coal from Adani Mine as well as new exports of uranium, natural gas and reneweable energy technology. India is Australia's tenth-largest trading partner and our fifth-largest export market. Two-way goods and services trade between Australia and India totalled 18 billion dollars in 2014-15.

Australian Financial Review (AFR) website said that Turnbull has used his Delhi visit to forge closer security ties and make Australia number one educator of Indian students. However, it noted that the prospects of sealing free trade deal were played down during Turnbull's visit. (PTI)

Bombay Dyeing launches denim styled bath linen collection

KOLKATA, APRIL 11 /--/ Bombay Dyeing, a part of the Wadia group has been a pioneer in the home textile industry in India since 1870. Market leaders in both bed and bath linen products, Bombay Dyeing has recently launched their own Denim styled Bath Linen Collection which includes Towels, Bath Mats and Bathrobes under the 'Aspero Denim' brand.

The Aspero Denim Bath Collection is specially crafted keeping in mind the needs, fashion trends & aesthetic requirements of the ultimate Denim lover. These 100% cotton towels are available in fast moving Denim colours mainly Navy Blue, New Port Blue, Carbon Black, Bottle Green, Maroon and Rust. Trendy yet aspirational, these soft by touch & rugged by look Denim towels will surely add 'swag' to your Bath Linen Collection. Aspero Denim Towels come in a complete ensemble of Bath, Hand, Face, Gym (Shoulder) Towels along with Bathmats & Bathrobes. They are designed to give your bathroom a unique and stylish 'Denim look & feel'.

The Aspero Denim range is available across the Bombay Dyeing retail stores and major home textile stores of Mumbai, Delhi, Bangalore, Chennai, Hyderabad, Kolkata, Pune, Ahmedabad and Lucknow. So don't miss a chance to dry off in style with Bombay Dyeing Aspero Denim Bath Collection. The product price ranges from Rs 299 to Rs 2099. (EOIC)

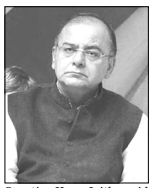
Mission to infuse capital in banks not the last step: FM

NEW DELHI, APRIL 11 /--/ Mission Indradhanush to infuse capital in public sector banks is not the last step as far as their recapitalisation is concerned, Union Finance Minister Arun Jaitley said on Tuesday, asserting that the government was fully supporting them.

Replying to questions on the grave concern expressed by the opposition over the growing non-performing assets (NPAs) in these banks, he said the government was making all efforts to ensure that the health of the banking sector improves and the banks are repaid. He, however, said that the NPA problem related to some big accounts, which are not unduly large in numerical terms, and people have to realise that banks have to be paid back. "There are 20 to 30 large accounts where people have to realise that banks have to be repaid. If the current promoters are not in a position to repay back, then they have to develop alternate corporate strategies so that the companies pay back," he told the members. "The government will fully support the public sector banks because it believes they have a very important role to play...

"The Indradhanush plan which envisages Rs 70,000 crore being given from the central budget is not the last step as far as recapitalisation is concerned," he told the members during the Question Hour. Jaitley said the assessment was that the public sector banks would require about Rs 1.8 lakh crore of capital to be infused in them. "As part of the Indradhanush scheme, the government, from the budgetary resources, had decided to infuse Rs 70,000 crore. "This means Rs 25,000 crore each in the first two years and Rs 10,000 crore this year and another Rs 10,000 crore the next year. The Rs 70,000 crore is to be infused in a phased period of time from the budget," he said. Jaitley, however, noted that the problem of NPAs was due to some people not paying up the banks for the loans taken and the burden comes on to the taxpayer. "As far as the action plan is concerned, several actions have been taken.

These include empowering the banks by statutory changes, all laws have been amended and the Reserve Bank has come out with various schemes from time to time. "There are some other steps which are now being contemplated," he added. (PTI)



Nabard too says loan waivers a bad idea

MUMBAI, APRIL 11 /--/ The National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (Nabard) on Tuesday described farm loan waivers as a "moral hazard" and said such facilities should be targeted only to the needy.

"Debt waivers create a moral hazard from a credit repayment perspective and we cannot have omnibus waivers," NABARD chairman Harsh Kumar Bhanwala told reporters here, a week after UP government announced a INR 36,000-crore farm loan waiver package. With demands for similar measures on in other states like Haryana, Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu, Bhanwala said there is a need to look at the moral hazards which such schemes create and targeting such schemes only to the needy farmers. He said every time a debt waiver is announced, it is taxpayers' money which is used to help bail out the farmers. The comments come days after Reserve Bank Governor Urjit Patel also expressed strong displeasure over such measures. Nabard on Tuesday reported a 4.24 per cent increase in its post tax net for 2016-17 at INR 2,631 crore, and a 16.27 per cent expansion in its outstanding loans at INR 3.08 trillion. Bhanwala said the development finance institution, which primarily refinances banks' agri loans, feels that the financial sector is set to surpass the INR 9 trillion agri loans target for fiscal 2017 set by government and will repeat the performance in fiscal 2018 by exceeding the INR 10 trillion target. Nabard is laying extra focus on long-term irrigation fund and expects to deploy up to INR 25,000 crore for this purposes through identified projects (up from INR 9,000 crore in fiscal 2017) and also to mitigate climate change impact, Bhanwala said, adding the company will also be focusing on micro-irrigation sector this year, and plans to deploy up to INR 2,000 crore in it. He said share of long-term loans has risen to 24 per cent of its total loanbook now from 19 per cent two years ago, and Nabard will continue to focus on increasing this number. Its outstanding borrowing increased to INR 80,000 crore from INR 60,000 crore in the year-ago period and Bhanwala said there would be an increase of INR 15,000 crore in the outstanding borrowing in fiscal 2018. Nabard was able to recover a few of its bad loans in the just concluded financial year and consecutively the non- performing assets ratio has come down to 0.07 per cent.

With the Centre having announced a target to double farmers' incomes in the next five years, Nabard is working with the states to develop action plans to ensure that the targets are met, he said, adding a pilot project of working closely with the communities towards this purpose is being implemented in seven states. As part of the pilot project, it will be working in 10 villages of a district having over 1,000 farmers each in every state and the job will start with identifying the base income structures in each states. On demonetisation, Bhanwala said there was a jump in repayments in the initial days but credit demanded was impacted later. He, however, added despite this, the INR 9 trillion target has been met. (PTI)

NABARD chairman Harsh Kumar Bhanwala

SC to hear pleas on note-ban issue post summer vacation

NEW DELHI, APRIL 11 /--/ The Supreme Court Tuesday said that it would hear after summer vacation a batch of pleas seeking a grace period for exchanging demonetised currency notes. A bench comprising Chief Justice J S Khehar and Justices D Y Chandrachud and S K Kaul said let these matters be fixed for hearing after the summer vacation as counsel for the petitioner sought time to respond to the recent reply of the Centre on the issue. The Centre had recently informed the apex court that it has taken a "conscious decision" not to extend the period beyond December 30 last year for exchanging the demonetised currency notes. It had said it was not legally bound to come out with a fresh notification to grant grace period or window for depositing scrapped currency notes. The Centre had filed an affidavit in response to petitions by private individuals and a firm seeking a window like those given to NRIs and people who were abroad during the period of demonetisation to deposit the scrapped currency notes with the Reserve Bank of India. (PTI)

Troubled Toshiba reports unaudited results after 2 delays

TOKYO, APRIL 11 /--/ Toshiba Corporartion, whose US nuclear unit Westinghouse Electric Company has filed for bankruptcy protection, reported unaudited earnings Tuesday and projected a 1.01 trillion yen (USD 9.2 billion) loss for the fiscal year that ended in March.

Tokyo-based Toshiba's unaudited results showed it racked up a 532.5 billion yen (USD 4.8 billion) loss for the April- December 2016 period. In February, the company, whose products include computer chips and household appliances, had forecast a 390 billion yen (USD 3.5 billion) loss for the fiscal year. Its auditor, PricewaterhouseCoopers Aarata, said it could not reach a conclusion in its review of the figures because of uncertainties related to the acquisition of US nuclear construction company CB&I Stone and Webster. Toshiba was among Japan's most prestigious companies for decades. In recent years it has been selling off some of its most prized businesses to survive. Costs soared after the March 2011 nuclear disaster in Fukushima, because of growing safety concerns and stricter regulations. A souring of sentiment toward nuclear power in some countries, weaker oil prices and the growing appeal of natural gas have also hurt its nuclear energy-based business strategy. Meanwhile, the company's reputation has been tarnished by a scandal over doctoring of accounting books to meet unrealistic profit targets. Toshiba still faces the challenge of decommissioning the Fukushima Dai-ichi nuclear plant, which sank into multiple meltdowns after the 2011 tsunami in northeastern Japan. Its chairman resigned to take responsibility for the mess and its president, Satoshi Tsunakawa, has said the strategy based on Westinghouse was a mistake. He has also promised the company will not take on new nuclear projects. (AP)

City eateries turn cashless with MobiKwik

EOI CORRESPONDENT

KOLKATA, APRIL 11/--/ Foodies in the city can now pay for their cravings using MobiKwik digital wallet which announced its associations with most iconic food outlets in Kolkata.

MobiKwik, which is aiming an annual Gross Merchandise Value (GMV) of $10 billion by end 2017, is planning to spend Rs 300 crore for expansion aimed at growing its user base from current 50 million to 150 million in 2017. Popular eateries like Kalika Mukhorochok at College Street, Lakshmi Narayan Shaw & Sons at Hatibagan (Beadon Street), Paramount Sherbets & Syrups at Bankim Chatterjee Street, Putiram and Malaikari at Surya Sen Street, Kusum Rolls at Park Street, Camac Fast Food Point at Camac Street, Kocoa Mania at Lord Sinha Road, 6 Russel Street, Vardan Market stalls, Raj snacks at Nagore Bazaar, Decker's Lane, Indra Mahal at Esplanade, New Chowringhee at Cabin Esplanade, Lord's More, Maharani Southern Avenue, Tripti at Garia, Baba Ka Dhaba at Garia will now accept payments through MobiKwik.

Vineet Singh, Chief Business Officer at MobiKwik said, "These associations will help customers enjoy delicious flavours at these outlets without worrying about cash. We are glad to partner with these prominent outlets as this will create more awareness about digital payments at these places. We are working to make MobiKwik payments ubiquitous in India."

Customers of these outlets can pay securely with MobiKwik in just two steps with OTP (one-time password). Upon sharing the mobile number with the billing operator, the customer receives an OTP. The OTP needs to be shared with the billing operator to complete the payment process. An OTP is valid for only transaction on a computer system or any digital device.

Andhra to push for same benefits under GST for VAT exempted goods

AMARAVATI, APRIL 11 /--/ The Andhra Pradesh government will urge the GST Council that goods exempted from VAT be extended the same benefit under the new Goods and Services tax regime when it comes into force from July 1. There are certain goods that have been exempted from VAT. We will make a plea to the GST Council that the same exemption be continued even under GST," State Finance Minister Yanamala Ramakrishnudu told reporters here on Tuesday. The GST Council, headed by Union Finance Minister Arun Jaitley, would meet in Srinagar on May 18 and 19 to finalise the tax rate structure and also the commodities. So far the tax rates and also the commodities for different tax structures have not been finalised. It was tentatively decided to have five rates (0, 5, 12, 18 and 28 per cent with luxury goods attracting the highest tax. Tobacco products, high-end cars, soft drinks and coal may attract 28 per cent tax under GST. Otherwise, there will be no burden on the common man, the Finance Minister said. Hitherto, India had a complicated tax structure with too many taxes and too many tiers. GST will eliminate all that and ensure uniform taxation and open up a single market. It will have a very positive impact and in the long-term our revenues will increase, Yanamala said. Referring to the proposed Cess Fund to compensate states that stood to lose revenues under GST, the minister said 2015-16 would be taken as the base year.

BSLI launches 'Swabhimaan'

EOI CORRESPONDENT

KOLKATA, APRIL 11/--/ Birla Sun Life Insurance (BSLI), the life insurance arm of the Aditya Birla Financial Services Group (ABFSG), a significant non-bank financial services company, has launched a unique pan India campaign 'Swabhimaan' to educate, empower and employ women in India.

The second chapter of the campaign was launched in Kolkata today, which witnessed women from various walks of life attending the program and being inspired. 'Swabhimaan' introduced the women to the rewarding career opportunity of a life insurance advisor / protection counsellor, aiming to build a strong team of women advisors in Kolkata. Speaking about the initiative, Anil Kumar Singh, Chief Actuarial Officer, Birla Sun Life Insurance said, "We at Birla Sun Life Insurance believe in counselling and protection for our customers. Taking ahead this philosophy, we have launched Swabhimaan, a distinctive initiative for women which provides them the opportunity to start their career as protection counsellors. Our endeavour is to contribute in making women of Indian more self-reliant and help them contribute to their family income. Through this campaign, we aim to tap the huge talent pool of women professionals and help us strengthen our sales force across cities, enabling productivity."

A recent study conducted by Birla Sun Life Insurance reveals that nearly 1/4th of DSF (Direct Sales Force) advisors are woman. South & West Zones have nearly 1/3rd advisors as woman. Highlighting their achievements, it has been noted that nearly 50% of the advisors are women among top 100 and 40% among top 200 advisors. Out of BSLI's total advisor base in West Bengal around 25% are women advisors who contribute over 33% of the premiums generated from the state. For Kolkata, while 30% of their advisors are women, they contribute close to 37% of the total premium earnings from the city. Once selected as an advisor, the women will be given extensive product training to equip them with need based selling and help them suggest the right solution for the right customer. While they get to touch upon lives of friends and family, and provide much needed financial planning; the initiative will offer women a flexible and long lasting career. As an entrepreneur, the opportunity will allow flexible work hours that will not only supplement family income but will also provide ample time to manage their household.

A unique campaign for women in Kolkata

News In Brief

New CEO of India Ratings

MUMBAI, APRIL 11 /--/ India Ratings, the domestic subsidiary of Fitch Ratings, Tuesday appointed Rohit Sawhney as the chief executive with immediate effect. "With his extensive and diversified track record of leadership and experience, I am confident that as our new CEO, Rohit will build upon India Ratings' market-leading reputation for quality, insightfulness and excellence," said Brett Hemsley, Fitch Group's head of Asia-Pacific.

Hartek bags solar grid EPC orders

CHANDIGARH, APRIL 11 /--/ City-based Hartek Power Tuesday said its solar grid EPC order size increased by 733 per cent to 1,025 MW in 2016-17, compared to 123 MW orders in the previous fiscal. The 1,025-MW solar grid EPC (engineering, procurement and construction) projects won by the company include 30 substation projects of up to 220 KV spread across 10 states, the company said in a statement here. (PTI)

Passenger vehicle sales hit 3m-mark for the first time in 2016-17

NEW DELHI, APRIL 11 / --/ Passenger vehicle sales in India crossed the three million milestone for the first time in 2016-17, with the segment witnessing a growth of 9.23 per cent. For the fiscal ended March 2017, domestic passenger vehicles (PV) sales were at 30,46,727 units as against 27,89,208 in the previous year, according to data released by the Society of Indian Automobile Manufacturers (SIAM). On the sales performance, SIAM Deputy Director Sugato Sen said the year witnessed the highest sales of passenger vehicles, utility vehicles, motorcycles and scooters.

"In terms of passenger vehicles, we crossed the three million mark for the first time," Sen told reporters here. "The growth in PV sales is driven largely by demand for utility vehicles ahead of sedans and hatchbacks," he added. During the year, utility vehicle sales were at 7,61,997 units as against 5,86,576 units in the previous fiscal, a growth of 29.91 per cent. "This is the highest growth rate achieved by the UV segment after 2013-14 when it grew by 52 per cent," Sen said. SIAM Director General Vishnu Mathur said there is a readjustment happening in the Indian passenger vehicle market with demand for utility vehicles rising at a much faster rate ahead of conventional cars. Domestic car sales during the year grew 3.85 per cent to 21,02,996 units as against 20,25,097 units in the previous year. This was the lowest growth since 2014-15, when car sales rose by 5.09 per cent. Maruti Suzuki's Vitara Brezza, Hyundai's Creta, Renault Duster, Mahindra Scorpio and Ford Ecosport are among the popular SUV models in India at present. Mathur said the industry has been able to grow despite challenges of ban on big diesel SUVs and cars in the National Capital region and demonetisation. "As for demonetisation, the impact was for only two months on the PV segment and recovery was quick, but it was prolonged in the two-wheeler segment," he said. In 2016-17, market leader Maruti Suzuki India retained its top position in the domestic PV space selling 14,43,641 units at a growth of 10.59 per cent. Rival Hyundai Motor India was a distant second with 5,09,705 units at a growth of 5.24 per cent followed by home-grown Mahindra & Mahindra in the third spot with 2,36,130 units, down 0.07 per cent. Tata Motors overtook Honda Cars India to occupy the fourth spot with 1,72,504 units, up 15.45 per cent, while the Japanese rival sold 1,57,313 units during the year, down 18.09 per cent.

Total two-wheeler sales during the year stood at 1,75,89,511 units as against 1,64,55,851 in the previous fiscal, up 6.89 per cent. Motorcycles sales in 2016-17 were at 1,10,94,543 units compared to 1,07,00,406 in the previous fiscal, up 3.68 per cent. Market leader Hero MotoCorp sold 56,93,681 units during the year as compared to 56,03,136 in the previous fiscal, up 1.62 per cent. Rival Bajaj Auto posted sales of 20,01,391 units as against 18,98,957 in 2015-16, up 5.39 per cent. Honda Motorcycle and Scooter India (HMSI) had bike sales of 15,36,055 units last fiscal as against 14,94,153 units in 2015-16, a growth of 2.8 per cent.

FIEO to engage with traders in N-E to promote exports

NEW DELHI, APRIL 11 /--/ Apex exporters' body FIEO will spread awareness among traders in the North-East about various outward shipment schemes being run by the government and also organise workshops to address their issues. The seven states of the region hold huge potential for exports, the Federation of Indian Export Organisations (FIEO) said.

"We will increase awareness among the exporters of that region about the government's export promotion schemes. We will also conduct workshops to resolve their issues," new FIEO President Ganesh Gupta told PTI. FIEO has been made the main trade promotion agency of this region by the department of commerce, he said. The North-Eastern states including Assam, Manipur, and Meghalaya have direct access to the South East Asian region and from there "we can promote our exports," he added. Products which can be exported from the region include horticulture, paper, textiles, handicraft items and agricultural goods. Talking about the overall exports of the country, Gupta said shipments are recording healthy growth since September last year and going by this trend, the exports figure may touch about USD 270 billion. During the April-February 2016-17, exports have grow by 2.52 per cent to USD 245.4 billion.

Gupta said that demand in certain developed economies such as the US is gradually picking up and it would help in further boosting the country's shipments.