

Iran signs \$440m deal with local firm to develop Gulf gas field

DUBAI: Iran signed a \$440 million contract on Saturday with local company Petropars to develop the Belal gas field in the Gulf, Iranian state television reported, saying the country's vital energy sector was active despite U.S. sanctions. "This contract and other upcoming contracts show that we are working under the sanctions. The sanctions have not stopped us and we are active," Oil Minister Bijan Zanganeh said at the signing ceremony in remarks carried by state TV.

Under the deal signed with a subsidiary of the state-run National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC), Petropars is to produce 500 million cubic feet per day of gas, state TV said. Belal, a field shared with Qatar, straddles the maritime boundary between Iran and Qatar in the Gulf. U.S. President Donald Trump pulled out of Iran's 2015 nuclear deal with world powers last year and reimposed sanctions in an effort to curb Tehran's missile and nuclear programmes and the Islamic Republic's influence in the Middle East, notably its support for armed groups in Syria, Yemen and Lebanon. —Reuters

Saudi state TV reports oil exports ongoing

DUBAI: Saudi state TV reported on Saturday that the kingdom's "oil exports are ongoing", citing its own correspondent. The report followed drone attacks claimed by Yemen's Houthis on two Saudi Aramco plants in the kingdom's Eastern Province earlier in the day, which sparked fires Riyadh said had been brought under control. —Reuters



Opal pipeline reduces gas flows after court ruling, Nel raises intake

MOSCOW: Germany's Opal onshore gas link, which connects to the Russian-designed Nord Stream pipeline, has started reducing gas flows after a court ruling, while Nel, another link to the undersea connector, boosted intake, operators' data showed on Saturday. The data showed that flows via Opal have been reduced by around a quarter from the previous day to 32.76 million kWh/h as of 0700 GMT (3.00 am ET). At the same time, Russian gas giant Gazprom has increased supplies via the Nel pipeline, which also connects to the Nord Stream and feeds northern Germany, to 32.74 million kWh/h, up 12% from Friday. The changes in volumes come after Germany ordered the Gazprom and Wintershall DEA-controlled Opal gas pipeline to stop selling a significant amount of capacity to ship gas from the Nord Stream pipeline to the onshore European grid. On Tuesday, Europe's top court had overruled an EU decision allowing Gazprom to ship more gas via the pipeline, meaning that Gazprom has to redirect some of its gas flows through other infrastructure. —Reuters



WASHINGTON: GM recalling 3.5m US vehicles due to braking issue.

India's top trader body seeks ban on Amazon, Flipkart's festive season sale

MUMBAI: A leading Indian trader body asked the government to ban upcoming festive sales on Amazon's local unit and its rival Flipkart, saying their deep discounts violate the country's foreign investment rules for online retail.

The two e-commerce firms typically hold annual festive season sales ahead of key Hindu festivals Dussehra and Diwali, which are due this year in October, when Indians make big ticket purchases such as cars and gold jewellery. Walmart-owned Flipkart's six-day sale begins Sept. 29, while Amazon is yet to announce dates. Both e-tailers promise big discounts on everything from fashion to smartphones to home appliances and have previously said discounts and deals are offered by sellers on their platforms. "By offering deep discounts ranging from 10per cent to 80per cent on their e-commerce portals, these companies are clearly influencing the prices and create an uneven level playing field which is in direct contravention of the policy," the Confeder-

ation of All India Traders (CAIT) said in a letter to the federal trade minister. CAIT, which represents 500,000 merchants and traders in India, also demanded a "blanket ban" on such sales and asked the government to probe the potential violation of FDI norms.

Its demand is unlikely to see government action before this year's sales kick off but it could help frame government policy on deep discounts.

FDI RULES: India does not allow foreign direct investment (FDI) in inventory-driven models of e-commerce, used by Walmart and Amazon in the United States, where goods and services are owned by an e-commerce firm that sells directly to retail customers. It modified e-commerce rules late last year to protect the country's vast unorganized retail sector that does not have the clout to purchase at scale and offer big discounts. Those rules forced Amazon and Flipkart to reconfigure ownership structures and re-jig some key vendor relationships

and agreements. Asked for comment, Flipkart said more than 100,000 sellers on its platform awaited its 'Big Billion Days' sale event. "We empower our sellers with business insights that allow them to decide the best value for their own products, so they can deliver benefits and savings to consumers and scale their businesses at the same time," said Rajneesh Kumar, chief corporate affairs officer at Flipkart Group.

Amazon said more than 500,000 sellers - a bulk of which are small businesses, women entrepreneurs, startups, weavers and artisans - use the festive sale to reach customers. "Sellers decide the pricing for their products on our marketplace," a spokeswoman for Amazon said. "They offer their choice of selection to their customers across the country at prices that they deem fit." Amazon last month said at an open panel discussion, organised by India's competition watchdog, that it abides by all Indian rules and does not influence pricing of products on its website. —Reuters



NEW YORK: A view of logo Wall Street.

PayPal cautious about future of Libra cryptocurrency

SAN FRANCISCO: PayPal is cautious about the future of Facebook-backed cryptocurrency Libra, which is slated to debut with the pioneering digital payments firm as part of its oversight association.

International outcry is mounting over Libra - with central banks, governments and regulators railing against Facebook's upstart cryptocurrency and questions over how it would be regulated. The social media giant unveiled plans in June for Libra - which will roll out in 2020 - to be backed by a basket of currency assets to avoid the wild swings of Bitcoin and other virtual units.

"It's a non-binding commitment," PayPal investor relations vice president Gabrielle Rabinovitch said Thursday of the California-based company signing on to the Libra Association. "And obviously, I think there's a lot of work to happen before we get to that point where it becomes something more than just a very exciting idea."

The nonprofit Libra Association, based in Geneva, will oversee the blockchain-based coin, maintaining a real-world asset re-

serve to keep its value stable.

Facebook envisioned Libra as a new global cryptocurrency, pledging to deliver a stable virtual money that lives on smartphones and could bring over a billion "unbanked" people into the financial system. Hundreds of billions of dollars are transferred annually between migrants and

loved ones in their home countries, and PayPal is a player in that sector. "The goals and ambitions of Libra are very consistent with PayPal's overall ambitions in terms of serving the underserved; democratizing access to capital," Rabinovitch said. "So we very much believe in the potential of Libra." —AFP



Overshadowed by US corruption probe, UAW, GM near contract deadline

DETROIT: Overshadowed by a mushrooming US federal corruption probe into top union officials that has created uncertainty for collective bargaining talks, the contract between the United Auto Workers (UAW) and General Motors Co will expire at midnight on Saturday.

This year's talks between the union and GM, Ford Motor Co and Fiat Chrysler Automobiles NV (FCA) were always going to be tough, with thorny issues such as healthcare costs and profit-sharing on the table at a time when sales of US new vehicles are declining.

Normally when the four-year contracts with Detroit's automakers expire, the question is will contract talks be extended or will union workers go out on strike?

This time things are more complicated. Over the last two weeks, the longstanding federal investiga-

tion into corruption at the union has raised questions about UAW president Gary Jones, who a source said was an unnamed official mentioned in a searing federal complaint this week detailing alleged embezzlement by union leaders.

The union had targeted GM as the first automaker with which it wanted to conclude contract talks. The spreading probe raises fresh questions about the union's options and its leaders' standing with rank-and-file members. Last month, more than 96per cent of GM's hourly workers voted to authorize a strike if necessary, meaning if no deal is reached Jones could call for a walkout without further approval.

GM's workers last went out on a brief two-day strike in 2007 during contract talks. A more painful strike occurred in Flint, Michigan, in 1998, lasting 54 days and costing the No. 1 U.S. automaker more

than US\$2 billion. But the recent strike authorization vote was held before the dramatic events of the last few weeks, which included a late August FBI raid on Jones' home and other locations as part

of the corruption probe.

Sources briefed on the matter this week said GM may seek a temporary extension of the contract and pursue other options including seeking assistance from a third

party. While the UAW has not granted that to GM, it has extended the deadline indefinitely with Ford and FCA. It was not clear if the talks will continue with the current UAW president under investigation, the sources said.

Elected in 2018, Jones was chosen as an outsider with a clean slate because he ran the union's Region 5 - which includes 17 western and southwestern U.S. states far from the epicenter of scandal in Detroit. But the federal complaint this week against Vance Pearson, Jones' former second in command and successor as head of Region 5, listed lavish parties and spending by union leaders in that region, including "UAW Official A."

Sources have confirmed that Jones is Official A. According to the complaint, agents seized US\$30,000 in cash from Official A's residence. —Reuters



Wall Street pauses near record levels awaiting Fed meeting

NEW YORK: US stocks swung to a split finish on Friday, closing little changed as investors took a breather following an extended rally driven by hopes for a lull in the US-China trade war. The three major indices posted their third straight weekly gains, with the benchmark Dow Jones Industrial Average notching an eighth positive close - its longest winning streak in more than a year. But after flirting with new records, the results for the day were underwhelming. The Dow inched up 0.1 percent to close at 27,219.52, about 140 points below an all-time high set July 15 and short of the high point of the day. The broader S&P 500 turned negative, falling 0.1 percent to end at 3,007.39, while the Nasdaq sank 0.2 percent to finish at 8,176.71. Ahead of a new round of trade talks next month, China announced Friday it will exempt American soybeans and pork from its retaliatory tariffs. Adam Sarhan of 50 Park Investments told AFP the day's subdued trading was a "normal and healthy action after a big rally." "This is the perfect area for the market to pause before it tries to reach new highs," he said. "The Fed meets next week and before a big meeting it is normal to see the market pause a little bit. They are waiting for the next big catalyst." Among individual companies, iPhone maker Apple fell 1.9 percent after investment bank Goldman Sachs said the company's new streaming service could weigh on earnings. —AFP