

IVANKA TRUMP VISITS CENTER FOR MINORITY-OWNED BUSINESSES

WASHINGTON: Ivanka Trump is learning more about economic policy as she takes on a more visible role in and around Washington. On Wednesday, the first daughter visited the Raymond V Haysbert Center for Entrepreneurship at the Greater Baltimore Urban League, where she participated in a roundtable discussion with minority business owners, mostly from the Baltimore area.

National Urban League President Marc Morial invited Trump, who has stressed her interest in working on policies to benefit women in business. He said he wanted to show her "a highly successful program that is supported by the federal government that makes a difference in the success of small entrepreneurs." "I feel like Ivanka listened very intently and asked some very intelligent questions," Morial said, noting that she wanted to understand which programs worked and could be implemented on a larger scale.

During the roundtable, the business owners shared stories about the challenges they had overcome to achieve their business goals - two said they had previously been homeless - and discussed the public and private programs that helped them achieve, according to a White House official who requested anonymity to provide details of the event.

Morial said there are about a dozen National Urban League entrepreneurship centers operated by local affiliates around the country. Collectively they serve about 10,000 people a year and are supported by public and private funding. Also participating in the roundtable were Linda McMahon, who heads the Small Business Administration, and Dina Powell, an assistant to the president and senior counselor for economic initiatives.

Morial, who has been critical of President Donald Trump, said he was happy to reach out to Ivanka Trump over a shared interest in economic develop-

ment. "We will oppose those things that we are duty bound to oppose, but we will keep our doors open to look for areas of commonality," he said. "I call it an intelligent approach."

Trump stepped away from leadership roles at the family business and her own lifestyle brand to move her family to Washington. For now, her husband, Jared Kushner, is the only one with an official White House position, but she has been an increasingly visible presence in recent weeks, appearing at meetings and press conferences. Her most high-profile outing to date was a meeting on women's economic issues that came as part of Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's visit to the White House. Trudeau's office proposed the joint effort focused on empowering women in the workforce, and the meeting was put together by aides in both countries with input from Ivanka Trump. Female executives from both countries attended, as did the president and Trudeau.

TRUMP WARNED AGAINST DISTORTED TRADE DATA

WASHINGTON: President Donald Trump has reportedly ordered a change to the US trade deficit calculations to bolster his argument against trade deals, but analysts say this could undermine a key economic indicator. The news follows other reports that the Trump team also has directed career staffers at the White House to engineer unusually rosy growth and revenue forecasts to support ambitious budget proposals from the new administration. These moves have stoked fears about the credibility of economic data under Trump.

Over their objections, officials at the office of the US Trade Representative's office last week produced new trade balance data using a methodology that exaggerates deficits with key US trading partners such as Mexico, The Wall Street Journal reported Sunday. The picture of yawning trade gaps could help Trump's stance that the US is getting the short end of the stick in free trade deals. Trump repeatedly has vowed to renegotiate the North American Free Trade Agreement with Canada and Mexico - which he has called a "disaster" - and senior US officials are in Mexico this week for meetings at which trade is one item on the agenda.

The alternate trade data - intended for consumption on Capitol Hill, according to The Journal - could help the Trump administration garner support among lawmakers for what he says is the need to renegotiate those trade pacts. At issue in the new trade figures is the question of "re-exports," or imported goods which transit the United States on their way to be sold in a third country. By excluding those goods from the tally of US exports, but keeping them in the calculation of imports, trade deficits would appear to be much larger than the official data indicate.

'Nonsense data'

Alan Deardorff, professor of international economics at the University of Michigan, said altering the data - which is calculated in a common format in many countries - is problematic. He told AFP that "excluding re-exports from exports but not from imports would create nonsense data."

"If all countries were to do that, then international trade data for the world would have far more imports than exports," he said. Former US treasury secretary Larry Summers, who worked under the Clinton administration, warned that manipulating statistics for political advantage would spur protectionism.

Trump's alternate method would be "Dumb, dishonest and dangerous," Summers wrote on Twitter. "Dumb because if imports subtract, why don't exports add to trade surplus?" he tweeted, adding, "A re-export is just a negative import." Jeannine Aversa, spokeswoman for the Commerce Department's Bureau of Economic Analysis, told AFP that the agency counts re-exports when calculating exports and imports.

And there are currently no proposed changes to BEA methodology, she said. Some lawmakers and critics of the current way of calculating deficits say excluding re-exports could be more accurate. Lori Wallach, head of the Global Trade Watch at the progressive organization Public Citizen, said counting only US-produced exports would nearly double the 2015 US trade deficit with Mexico to \$109 billion from \$60 billion. —AFP



TOKYO: A man walks past an electronic stock indicator of a securities firm. — AP

STOCK MARKETS STRUGGLE AS TRUMP RALLY HITS BUFFERS

'MARKETS APPEAR TO BE CAUGHT IN LIMBO'

PARIS: Global markets struggled to find clear direction yesterday as their recent strong run sparked by Donald Trump's election ran out of steam and investors digested a fresh batch of European corporate earnings reports and minutes from the US Federal Reserve. In London and Frankfurt, stock prices were slightly lower, while the French blue-chip CAC40 index edged higher.

"Markets appear to be caught in limbo, with European equities mixed and US futures pointing to a similar open on Wall Street," said Oanda analyst Craig Erlam. Asian markets had ended the session lower as the recent Trump rally that has inflated global stocks since the beginning of the year finally appeared to have hit the buffers.

The day before, New York's Dow index had racked up a ninth successive all-time high, but analysts said there was a sense that the advance may have gone too far. The dollar picked up slightly but was unable fully to bounce back from Wednesday's sell-off after minutes from

the Federal Reserve's latest board meeting showed policymakers expect a rate hike "fairly soon" but also see increases being gradual. The minutes pointed to "heightened uncertainty" about possible US policies that could lift inflation, hastening the need for rate hikes. But that was not enough for dealers who had hoped for firmer guidance.

US Federal Reserve 'disappoints'

"The minutes of the Federal Open Market Committee ... were hardly a surprise but they did disappoint investors who had been hoping, perhaps unrealistically, that they would hint at a rate increase next month. They didn't, so the dollar retreated," said analysts at MoneyCorp in a note.

In Europe, a flurry of different corporate earnings reports included British bank Barclays said it had returned to profit after slashing provisions set aside for legal and compensation costs linked to foreign exchange and insurance scandals. Its shares gained two percent to

£2.40 in a generally weaker market. The heavily-indebted Spanish telecoms giant Telefonica said its net profit was hit by restructuring costs linked to a voluntary redundancy scheme. But investors were unfazed and the group's shares added 2.2 percent.

World markets and the dollar have been on an upward trajectory since Trump's November US election win betting his big-spending, tax-cutting plans will fire the US and global economy. But Greg McKenna, chief market strategist at CFD and FX provider AxiTrader, said there appears to be some scepticism of the likely effectiveness of Trumponomics as well as worries from some hedge funds that any big news has been priced in.

He added that there were an increasing number of investors betting on a retreat. In Tokyo the Nikkei index ended flat as the dollar dragged on exporters but having pared sharper morning losses. News that Nissan chief executive Carlos Ghosn would resign his post weighed on the carmaker, sending it down 0.6 percent. — AFP