

Business

Survey shows home-working to quintuple in Britain by 2025

UK clothing giant Asos set to create 2,000 jobs

LONDON: Working from home in Britain is expected to quintuple by 2025, intensifying a trend turbo-charged during the coronavirus pandemic, according to a study by consulting firm Deloitte published Friday. After surveying 90 financial directors drawn from some of Britain's biggest companies, it found the global health crisis had "triggered fundamental and lasting changes in business".

As many as 98 percent of those questioned predicted a rise in home-working in the coming years, while more than three-quarters expect the government's current order to work from home to continue through the first half of this year. Almost 60 percent expected the curbs on going to workplaces to be permanently lifted in the third quarter, as the country's COVID-19 mass-vaccination program progresses.

The government imposed a third stay-at-home lockdown this week after a surge in infections linked to a new strain. It intends to review the measures in mid-February. Meanwhile, almost all chief financial officers (CFOs) surveyed expect personal taxes to increase, with nearly two-thirds predicting higher taxes on businesses and an increased state role following huge interventions to prop up the economy.

"By and large, this massive forced experiment in home-working has been very successful," Ian Stewart, chief economist at Deloitte, told the Daily Telegraph. "Sectors have been able to maintain quite a high degree of effectiveness operating from home."

Deloitte UK chief Richard Houston said even after the pandemic, CFOs anticipate greater home-working, diversification of supply chains and investment in technology. "CFOs are optimistic about operating in this changing world, with a return to growth expected this year," he said in a press release, while stressing most CFOs were keeping money back to guard against a prolonged lockdown and business uncertainty.

Houston noted a Christmas Eve trade deal between Britain and the European Union ended one element of uncertainty and was preferable to a "no-deal" Brexit. But he added CFOs "also recognize the challenges that leaving the EU may pose in the years ahead", noting the deal had little provision for professional and financial services. "These high-productivity sectors are major UK successes and make vital contributions to jobs and prosperity," Houston said.

British online clothing retailer Asos on Friday unveiled plans to create 2,000 jobs over the next three years with the creation of a new warehouse in central England. The facility, costing £90 million (\$123 million, 99.5 million euros), will be located in Lichfield in Staffordshire, north of the city of Birmingham, Asos said in a statement.

"We're thrilled to be laying down the foundations for our future growth," said Chief Executive Nick Beighton. He said the decision to invest in additional infrastructure and create a large number of jobs reflects the company's confidence in its future.



This picture shows Yuki Sato, an employee in a startup company, working from home as a result of the COVID-19 novel coronavirus in Tokyo. — AFP

"When fully up and running in 2023, the site will support our ever-increasing customer demand and enable us to develop our offerings and delivery capabilities even further."

The new warehouse will join the group's three other fulfilment centers which are located in Barnsley in northwestern England, Berlin in Germany and Atlanta in the United States. Asos has

enjoyed booming demand during the coronavirus pandemic as consumers flocked online instead of visiting the high street. Sales surged by almost a fifth to £3.26 billion in the group's financial year that ran to October, while pre-tax profit rocketed 329 percent to £142.1 million. The company has more than 23 million customers across the world, including 7.1 million in home market Britain. — AFP

Bitcoin soars past \$40,000 for first time

LONDON: The price of the cryptocurrency bitcoin soared past \$40,000 for the first time on Thursday, rising \$10,000 in just five days. The price of bitcoin was \$40,380 at roughly 1820 GMT, having jumped 10.4 percent during the trading session.

It later lost some ground and Factset data valued it at \$38,950 dollars, up 6.52 percent on the day, at 1850 GMT. The cryptocurrency, which has known wild swings in value, passed \$30,000 for the first time just yesterday. "Investors continue to hop on the cryptocurrency train which appears to be gaining more interest now that the US economy is poised to deliver more stimulus in Biden's first 100 days," said market analyst Edward Moya at currency trading platform Oanda. But its latest meteoric rise is already fuelling talk of a new correction.

Fellow Oanda analyst Craig Erlam warned that even if a correction does not seem imminent, once one emerges "it's going to hurt". And one European analyst who wished to remain anonymous told AFP that "it's starting to get worrying-it's no longer at all the market of a few weeks back-a correction is inevitable."

Others, at Societe Generale, said if a large fall does materialize people will likely look back at "bitcoin's pandemic bubble." Just 12 years old, bitcoin has seen a meteoric rise since March, when it stood at \$5,000, spurred by online payments giant PayPal saying it would enable account holders to use cryptocurrency. After PayPal's announcement in October, analysts at investment banking giant



MARSEILLE: People walk past Bitcoin digital currency ATM shop in Marseille, southern France, on Friday. — AFP

JPMorgan Chase compared the cryptocurrency to gold-and this week predicted the unit could rise to \$146,000, if not higher.

"Bitcoin could compete more intensely with gold as an 'alternative' currency over the coming years given that millennials will become over time a more important component of investors' universe," they said. A number of central banks have meanwhile responded to the rise of cryptocurrencies and the dwindling global use of cash by announcing plans for bank-backed digital units.

Several central banks including those of China and Sweden-but also the US Federal Reserve-are also testing digital applications in response to

Facebook's recent moves to produce its own digital unit, Libra. Unregulated by any central bank, bitcoin emerged as an attractive option for investors with an appetite for the exotic-although criminals have also picked up on its under-the-radar appeal.

Debate has meanwhile raged over the status of the digital asset, launched in late 2008, as to whether it should be seen as a form of money, an asset or a commodity.

After the unit-worth a handful of cents in late 2008 — surpassed \$1,000 for the first time in 2013, it increasingly began to attract the attention of financial institutions and has experienced wild price swings. — AFP

Google pulls Parler from app shop for 'egregious content'

SAN FRANCISCO: Google said Friday it had pulled the Parler app from its mobile store for allowing "egregious content" that could incite deadly violence like that seen at the US Capitol.

The Parler social network has become a haven for far-right personalities who say they have been censored by other social media platforms. "We're aware of continued posting in the Parler app that seeks to incite ongoing violence in the US," Google said in a response to an AFP inquiry.

"For us to distribute an app through Google Play, we do require that apps implement robust moderation for egregious content," the company added, referring to its shop for digital content tailored for Android-powered devices.

Policies and enforcement practices that curb posts inciting violence are agreed to by app devel-

opers whose software is made available at Google Play, according to the Silicon Valley internet titan.

"In light of this ongoing and urgent public safety threat, we are suspending the app's listings from the Play Store until it addresses these issues," Google said. Apple has reportedly warned Parler that its software could be removed from the App Store if it doesn't take measures to prevent users from planning illegal, violent activities on the platform such as the deadly attack in Washington.

Conservatives backing President Donald Trump's claims of election malfeasance have sparked a migration to alternative social media sites that have refrained from filtering unverified claims. The shift has boosted right-wing favorites like Parler, Newsmax and Rumble, which have rejected Facebook and Twitter's approach of labeling and limiting the reach of conspiracy theories.

Facebook and Twitter banned Trump accounts Friday due to fear he would use them to instigate another attack such as the one in the nation's capital on Wednesday. Sites like Parler have attracted Republican lawmakers as well as the Trump campaign. As they have become increasingly important to the political conversation, Twitter and Facebook

clients looking to cut spending. The turnaround in demand from customers in the key financial and banking sectors helped the firm post one of its strongest third quarter performances. "Growing demand for core transformation services... have driven a powerful momentum that helped us overcome seasonal headwinds", TCS chief executive Rajesh Gopinathan said in a statement. "We are entering the new year on an optimistic note, our market position stronger than ever before, and our confidence reinforced by the continued strength in our order book and deal pipeline," he added.

Quarterly revenues rose by 5.4 percent to over 420 billion rupees, the company said. TCS was at the forefront of an IT boom that saw India become a back office to the world as firms in developed nations subcontracted work, taking advantage of a skilled English-speaking workforce. The company earns more than 80 percent of its revenues from Western markets including Britain, the United



This illustration file photo shows social media application logo Parler displayed on a smartphone in Arlington, Virginia. — AFP

States and Europe. Shares of TCS closed almost three percent higher in Mumbai ahead of the results being released. — AFP



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Airbus orders plunge 65%

PARIS: European plane maker Airbus said Friday that it garnered just 268 net new orders last year, a drop of 65 percent year-on-year reflecting persistent fears about the prospects for air travel amid the coronavirus crisis. The new orders take into account 115 cancellations as airlines scaled back their ambitions because of uncertainty about how long international travel restrictions will remain in place.

Deliveries of completed Airbus planes also suffered, falling 34 percent to 566 planes last year. "Based on our 2020 deliveries, we are cautiously optimistic as we look into 2021, although challenges and uncertainties remain high in the short term," chief executive Guillaume Faury said in a statement.

The company scaled back production at its factories by 40 percent last spring, and Faury said in October that no uptick was expected before the third quarter of 2021. Airlines are facing their worst year ever, the International Air Transport Association warned in November, with the Covid crisis likely to have slashed industry revenue by 60 percent in 2020. Even though airlines have reduced costs by \$1 billion a day, grounded fleets and cut jobs, they are still racking up huge and "unprecedented" losses, the IATA said. — AFP

Deutsche Bank to pay \$130m to settle US probes

NEW YORK: Deutsche Bank will pay \$130 million to settle a foreign bribery probe and fraud charges in precious metals trading, US officials announced Friday. The bribery case relates to illegal payments and to false reporting of those sums on the bank's books and records between 2009 and 2016, the Department of Justice said in a press release. The bank "knowingly and willfully" kept false records after employees conspired with a Saudi consultant to facilitate bribe payments of over \$1 million to a decision maker, the DOJ said.

In another case, the bank paid more than \$3 million "without invoices" to an Abu Dhabi consultant "who lacked qualifications... other than his family relationship with the client decision maker," the DOJ said. In addition to criminal fines and payments of ill-gotten gains, Deutsche Bank agreed to cooperate with government investigators under a three-year deferred prosecution agreement.

In the commodities fraud case, Deutsche Bank metals traders in New York, Singapore and London between 2008 and 2013 placed fake trade orders to profit by deceiving other market participants, the DOJ said. The agreement took into account Deutsche Bank's cooperation with the probes, DOJ said. "Deutsche Bank engaged in a criminal scheme to conceal payments to so-called consultants worldwide who served as conduits for bribes to foreign officials and others so that they could unfairly obtain and retain lucrative business projects," said Acting US Attorney Seth D. DuCharme of the Eastern District of New York. "This office will continue to hold responsible financial institutions that operate in the United States and engage in practices to facilitate criminal activity in order to increase their bottom line." "We take responsibility for these past actions, which took place between 2008 and 2017," said Deutsche Bank spokesperson Dan Hunter, adding that the company has taken "significant remedial actions" including hiring staff and upgrading technology to address the shortcomings. — AFP