

The Business



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Tech stocks lead indices to new highs

NEW YORK: Technology stocks led the S&P 500 and Nasdaq to record high closes on Black Friday, while Amazon and retail stocks got a boost from signs of a strong start to the holiday shopping season.

The benchmark S&P and the blue-chip Dow Jones Industrial Average ended higher for the first time in three weeks, while the Nasdaq Composite posted its best performance since the first week of September.

The stock markets closed early on Black Friday, a day after Thanksgiving, the start of the holiday shopping season that accounts for as much as 40 per cent of retailers' annual sales.

Turnout at US retailers was relatively subdued on Black Friday, with many shoppers flocking to stores to eye items in person while waiting to do their actual bargain hunting online.

On Thanksgiving, US shoppers spent more than \$2.87 billion online, according to Adobe Analytics. Adobe said Black Friday online sales were up 18.4pc at \$640 million and would rise to a record of \$5bn.

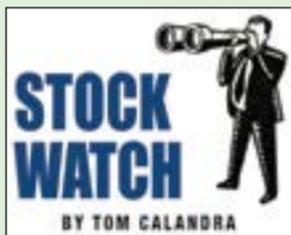
The S&P retail index rose 0.63pc and had hit a record high, led by Amazon's 2.61pc gain.

The online retail giant touted its sales for Cyber Monday, one of the biggest days for online shopping, and said shoppers using its digital assistant Alexa could score deals as early as tomorrow.

"In the retail environment, Amazon is extremely important – the fact that Amazon continued to soar bodes well for the fourth-quarter holiday shopping season and it bodes well for Wall Street," said Adam Sarhan, chief executive of 50 Park Investments.

Brick-and-mortar stores, which have been boosting their online presence, also fared well.

Macy's closed up 2.1pc. The department store operator's chief executive told CNBC the



company was better off this year than last and was seeing very robust online demand.

Kohl's, Gap and J.C. Penney were up between 1.6pc and 1pc.

Target ended 2.8pc lower, with analysts noting that it closed its stores for several hours overnight while rivals stayed open. Wal-Mart inched up 0.2pc.

The Dow rose 31.81 points, or 0.14pc, to 23,557.99, while the S&P gained 5.34 points, or 0.21pc, to 2,602.42. The Nasdaq added 21.80 points, or 0.32pc, to 6,889.16.

The CBOE Volatility index, known as Wall Street's fear gauge, was down 0.21 points to 9.67. It had hit a record low of 8.56.

Eight of the 11 major S&P sectors were higher, led by the technology sector's 0.54pc rise.

The energy index and the materials index were boosted by rising commodities prices.

US oil prices jumped to a more than two-year high as North American markets tightened on the partial closure of a key pipeline linking Canada and the United States.

About 2.68bn shares changed hands in US exchanges in the shortened session. The daily average over the last 20 full sessions is 6.48bn shares. Last year, volume during the session after Thanksgiving was about 3bn.

Advancing issues outnumbered declining ones on the NYSE by a 1.61-to-1 ratio; on Nasdaq, a 1.31-to-1 ratio favored advancers.

The S&P posted 35 new 52-week highs and 1 new low; the Nasdaq recorded 120 new highs and 21 new lows.

Russia ready to support oil output deal

MOSCOW: Russia said yesterday it is ready to support extending a deal among oil producers on cutting output, less than a week before Opec meets in Vienna to discuss policy, although it has yet to say how long it should be for.

Russian Energy Minister Alexander Novak said Russia would discuss the details of an extension of the global deal on November 30, but made no mention of how long this should last beyond its March expiry.

"We see that 50 per cent of oil stockpiles have been removed, the oil price has reached its balance," Novak said.

The Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries, Russia and several other major producers have cut their combined output by about 1.8 million barrels

per day since January to reduce bloated inventories and boost oil prices.

"However, the targets on rebalancing the market have not been reached. Everyone supports the extension, so that the targets are finally reached," Novak said, adding that "different options are under consideration".

Saudi Arabia has been pushing for an extension for nine months until the end of 2018, a position President Vladimir Putin had suggested in October that Russia backed.

Russia, heavily reliant on oil revenues but wary that any sharp rise in prices may be followed by another punishing collapse, has since sent mixed signals about timing.

Russia's TASS news agency reported earlier this week that oil producers and the

Russian Energy Ministry had discussed a six-month extension.

Then on Thursday, Russia's Economy Minister Maxim Oreshkin said Russian economic growth had been hurt by the deal because it dampened investment – the first clearly negative assessment of the pact by a senior Russian official.

Novak's comments were made in Bolivia where he is at a Gas Exporting Countries Forum of leading gas producers.

One of the stumbling blocks for extending the Opec-led deal is a boom in US oil production, which has jumped by 15pc since mid-2016 to a record 9.66 million bpd. Higher US output undermines the impact of output cuts and erodes market share for others, like Russia.

LIC premium income surges 36 per cent

MANAMA: LIC (International) registered first premium income of \$371 million for the first 10-and-a-half months this year, a growth of more than 36 per cent.

This was revealed at the 100th meeting of the board of directors of LIC (International) held at Mövenpick Hotel Bahrain yesterday.

The meeting was attended by LIC of India chairman V K Sharma, managing director Usha Sangwan, Intercol director Abdulrahman Ali Alwazzan and LIC (International) Bahrain chief executive and managing director Rajesh Kandwal.

The board took note of the new business performance of the company as of November 17, 2017.

The profit of the company as of end-September is over \$17 million, higher than last year.

The company said it has already achieved its full year total first premium income and

also non-single premium target.

In terms of new policies written, the company registered a growth of more than 6pc.

While reviewing the results, the board noted that the company's investment income grew about 21pc to \$70m.

Total premium shows a growth of over 25pc as of September.

With the appointment of P K Arora as signing actuary, the risk management framework of the company will get further strengthened and it will be able to launch innovative products, said a statement.

LIC (International) also plans to shortly launch "an innovative medical product" which will also provide critical illness benefits from a broad range of illnesses.



■ Officials at the board of directors meeting



■ A seminar on India as an investment destination with a focus on real estate and non-resident Indians was organised by the Bahrain Chapter of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of India (BCICAI). The seminar was delivered by three tax and investment experts from India – Tarun Ghia, Dhinal Shah and Rajesh Sharma, who are members of the ICAI's central council. More than 200 members of the association attended the event which also coincided with Diwali celebrations. Above, at the event are BCICAI executive committee members with the experts from India.

Amazon workers in wages protest

BERLIN: Workers at half a dozen Amazon distribution centres in Germany and one in Italy walked off the job yesterday, in a protest timed to coincide with "Black Friday" to demand better wages from the American online giant.

In Germany, Ver.di union spokesman Thomas Voss said some 2,500 workers were on strike at Amazon facilities in Bad Hersfeld, Leipzig, Rheinberg, Werne, Graben and Koblenz. In a warehouse near Piacenza, in northern Italy, some workers walked off the job to demand "dignified salaries".

The German union has been leading a push since 2013 for higher pay for some 12,000 workers in Germany, arguing Amazon employees receive lower wages than others in retail and mail-order jobs.