Lineage Logistics announces acquisition of Kloosterboer Group

Lineage Logistics, one of the world's leading and most innovative temperature-controlled industrial REIT and logistics solutions providers, today announced it has reached an agreement to acquire Kloosterboer Group, a leading independent integrated platform for temperature-controlled storage, logistics and value-added services in Europe. The transaction is subject to regulatory clearance and completion of the employee consultation process.

Kloosterboer consists of eleven facilities across the Netherlands, France, Germany, Canada and South Africa, totaling 6.4 million cubic meters of capacity and 790,000 pallet positions and employing over 900 team members. A family-owned company with a rich legacy as a vegetable trading company dating back to 1925, Kloosterboer has grown over generations to become one of Europe's best-known supply chain solutions companies. The Kloosterboer family will continue to be involved in the future of the Company, choosing to become investors in Lineage and rolling a part of their sale proceeds into Lineage equity.

"Welcoming Kloosterboer into the Lineage family marks a monumental step toward achieving our vision to become the world's most dynamic temperature-controlled logistics company with the capability to serve customers in different countries around the world," said Mike McClendon, Lineage's President of International Operations & EVP of Network Optimization. "Kloosterboer's strong entrepreneurial culture and management team, combined with their state-of-the-art, strategically located facility network perfectly complement Lineage's international footprint and innovative spirit, which will deliver incredible value to our combined customers."

In line with Lineage's purpose of transforming the food supply chain to eliminate waste and help feed the world, Kloosterboer is recognized by BREEAM (Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Methodology) as a frontrunner in sustainable cold store operations. Kloosterboer's network features nearly 18,000 solar panels, four wind turbines that power operations such as heavy lift equipment, and an annual reduction of CO2 equaling consumption of over 4,100 households.

Nielen Schuman acted as financial advisor to the Kloosterboer family and De Brauw Blackstone Westbroek served as its legal counsel. Rabobank acted as Lineage's financial advisor and Latham & Watkins and Nauta Dutilh served as its legal counsel. (Agencies)

Pandemic relapse hits India's middle class

Bijender and Kanika Gautam, owners of the Ultra Bodies Fitness Studio, take online class from their closed Gyms on the outskirts of New Delhi, India, June 10. Gyms were among the last types of venues allowed to reopen from the 2020 lockdown and they were closed again during the latest outbreaks. The Gautams had been thriving on income from their 100 gym members, making enough to rent their two-story space and pay five trainers. Now, they're relying on whatever they can scrape together from offering online fitness training, and struggling to afford rent and school fees for their two children. (AP)

Decades of progress in alleviating poverty imperiled: experts

NEW DELHI, June 13, (AP) Ram Babu moved from his village to the Indian capital New Delhi in 1980, to clean cars. Soon, he learned to drive and got a job as a tour bus driver. Decades later, he set up his own company, Madhubani Tours and Travels.

In March 2020, a stringent nationwide lockdown to fight the coronavirus pandemic froze economic activity overnight. Babu's business collapsed, and he drove his family back to their village.

"Since March last year, we haven't earned a single rupee," he said. "All of my three buses are standing still for more than a year. We are completely broken."

India's economy was on the cusp of recovery from the first pandemic shock when a new wave of infections swept the country, infecting millions, killing hundreds of thousands and forcing many people to stay home. Cases are now tapering off, but prospects for many Indians are drastically worse as salaried jobs vanish, incomes shrink and inequality is rising.

Decades of progress in alleviating poverty are imperiled, experts say, and getting growth back on track hinges on the fate of the country's sprawling middle class. It's a powerful and diverse group ranging from salaried employees to small business owners like Babu: many millions of people struggling to hold onto their hard-earned gains.

The outbreak of the pandemic triggered the worst downturn since the Great Depression of the 1930s and as it gradually ebbs, many economies are bouncing back. The World Bank foresees 5.6% global growth for 2021, the best since 1973.

India's economy contracted 7.3% in the fiscal year that ended in March, worsening from a slump that slashed growth to 4% from 8% in the two years before the pandemic hit. Economists fear there will be no rebound similar to the ones seen in the U.S. and other major economies.

"Coronavirus was the latest in a series of blows to hit India's economy in recent years," said Mahesh Vyas, chief executive at the Center for Monitoring the Indian Economy (CMIE). "But the shocks brought on by the virus have had a very debilitating effect on the economy and I fear it is going to be long lasting."

The economy was one of the fastest growing when Prime Minister Narendra Modi suddenly yanked most of India's currency out of circulation in 2016, targeting corruption. A major tax reform whose kinks are still being ironed out followed. Modi's flagship Make in India program to energize manufacturing has floundered and unemployment has surged.

The poor are suffering the most from the pandemic. But this is the first time in several decades that India's middle class has taken such a big hit, said Vyas.

After 40 years of hard work, tour company owner Babu was taking home about $2,000 a month. Business was going so well he took out a loan to buy his third tour bus.

In May 2020, he used one of those buses to drive his wife and three children back to Bhugol village in Bihar, one of India's poorest states. He could no longer afford the rent on their modest one-bedroom apartment in New Delhi.

Estimates of the size of India's middle class vary from 200 million to 600 million, but all experts agree that its prosperity is crucial for reviving the economy.

"They are the primary consumers - if their consumption doesn't revive, growth will continue to be slow and the economy will not recover," said economist Arun Kumar.

An analysis from the Pew Research Center, published in March, estimates 32 million Indians had been pushed out of the middle class by the pandemic.

The report defined the middle class as people earning $10 to $20 a day. It estimated the number of India's poor -- those with incomes of $2 or less a day -- has increased by 75 million because of the crisis.

To cushion the impact, the government provided $266 billion in extra spending in May 2020, with over $40 billion meant to help small and medium-sized businesses through measures like collateral-free loans from banks. Another $36 billion was promised in November to help create jobs, boost consumer spending and support manufacturing, agriculture and exports.

But for many, the measures haven't been enough. No relief has yet been announced for the tourism sector, so Babu is still paying business taxes on his buses.

Last year's lockdown destroyed more than 120 million jobs, according to the CMIE. Many returned soon after the lockdown ended in June, but the rebound was mostly of low-paying jobs in sectors like agriculture and construction.

Economists worry about a longer term decline in salaried jobs, of which 12.5 million remain lost, according to CMIE data, and about the fate of small and medium-sized businesses that are the backbone of India's vast informal economy.

Many people have had to settle for far more precarious employment than before, according to the State of Working India 2021 report by researchers at Azim Premji University.

"What this signals is that people in distress are having to resort to any kind of employment, even if it pays substantially less than what they were making and comes with fewer protections," said Rosa Abraham, one of the report's lead authors. "It's clear that the employment recovery we're seeing now is characterized to a significant extent by far more informality."

That's true for Bijender and Kanika Gautam, owners of the Ultra Bodies Fitness Studio on the outskirts of New Delhi.

Gyms were among the last types of venues allowed to reopen from the 2020 lockdown and they were closed again during the latest outbreaks. The Gautams had been thriving on income from their 100 gym members, making enough to rent their two-story space and pay five trainers. Now, they're relying on whatever they can scrape together from offering online fitness training, and struggling to afford rent and school fees for their two children.

"Earlier, we didn't have to think twice about spending money when we went to the market with our children or went out to eat," said Bijender. "But now, the situation is so bad that we are somehow just trying to survive. We don't know if we will be able to keep our business," he said.

On a wider scale, such setbacks on a wide scale may undermine confidence and future growth, said CMIE's Vyas.

"You need that aspiration or drive to go to college, get a good job, save money to buy a home -- you need that ambition to make your life better than what your parents had. This is what makes the economy thrive, and this is a crucial thing that has taken a big hit," he said.

Babu says he fears his life is now moving in reverse. He had hoped his youngest daughter, aged 13, might become a pilot. Now that he's had to pull her out of her school in New Delhi, that seems impossible.

His dreams of buying a home in the city have been crushed by the loans he can no longer repay, he said in a phone call from his village.

"I'm not used to living in the village now. Everything we own, everything we are, it's all in Delhi," he said. "I should have just continued working as a driver, maybe then I wouldn't be in this mess."

Company drops plan for $2.3b methanol plant in Washington

SEATTLE, June 13, (AP): A company backed by the Chinese government ended its seven-year effort to build one of the world's largest methanol plants along the Columbia River in southwestern Washington, following a series of regulatory setbacks and a long debate over its environmental footprint.

Northwest Innovation Works proposed a $2.3 billion project to take fracked natural gas from Canada and convert it into methanol, which it would then ship to China to make ingredients for plastics used in everything from iPhones to clothing to medical devices.

The state Department of Ecology denied a key permit for the project in January, saying it would create too much pollution and have negative effects on the shoreline. On Friday, the company notified the Port of Kalama it was terminating its lease, saying the regulatory environment had become "unclear and unpredictable."

Economic development officials in southwest Washington blasted the state for dooming the project, saying that the company's methods of making methanol from natural gas would have been cleaner than making it from coal, as is done elsewhere. That would have benefitted the environment while creating 1,400 construction jobs and 200 family-wage permanent positions, they argued.

"NWIW did everything right, and their understandable decision to pull out of this project is a real loss for families trying to make ends meet, the future of economic development in our state, and our environment," Port of Kalama Commissioner Troy Stariha said in a written statement.

A review required by the state found that the plant would boost the amount of greenhouse gases released into the atmosphere, but not as much as if the methanol were made elsewhere.

Environmental groups, including Columbia Riverkeeper and the Washington Environmental Council, as well as tribal activists, vehemently opposed it. They celebrated the lease termination as the latest in a string of victories that helped block more than a dozen fossil-fuel developments in the Pacific Northwest, including fracked gas pipelines, liquefied natural gas terminals, coal export terminals, and oil-by-rail developments.

"Projects like this simply cannot go forward as we fight to save our climate," Kristen Boyles, an attorney with the environmental law firm Earthjustice, said in a news release. "The climate-killing emissions from this project would have overwhelmed Washington, and we must keep drawing the line and saying no."

Proton making H2 from oilfields, scaling way up

CALGARY, Alberta, June 13, (Agencies): Last weekend Proton Technologies began loading a trailer with compressed hydrogen from its oilfield. "As we scale up, costs below 25 cents per kg of H2 seem probable," says Chair and CEO, Grant Strem.

The process involves injecting oxygen and CO2 into old oilfields like the one Proton purchased out of bankruptcy. Large old oilfields usually still have most of their oil when they are abandoned. Like in a car engine, oxidizing hydrocarbons releases energy.

This liberates hydrogen within the oil field. Injecting ion-rich waste streams turns CO2 into carbonate, producing additional hydrogen while leaving the carbon locked solidly underground. "Our hydrogen should ultimately have a carbon intensity far below zero since we can inject huge volumes of CO2 with oxygen," added Mr. Strem.

"Big old oilfields are generally co-located with big infrastructure such as wells, powerlines, roads, towns, and pipelines, so we can avoid new environmental disturbances and costs compared to many alternatives," says COO Setayesh Afshordi.

Proton Canada's goal is to supply 10% of humanity's total energy by 2040 - requiring almost 10% of Canada's oil resource, assuming a 50 year production timeline, although some of this is expected to come out of the North Sea. Proton Technologies has sold licences in over 20 countries.

"We plan to scale-up and proliferate quickly as possible because air pollution is a crisis that Proton Technologies expects to help eradicate while crushing the price of energy and making great returns. I don't believe anyone will cure cancer for example, while air pollution reigns. Although decarbonization carrots and sticks all align with Proton, compared to how we utilize oilfields for energy today it is simply much more efficient to oxidize hydrocarbons in the pressure vessels nature put them in," added Mr. Strem.