

## Russian prosecutors threaten US companies with seizures, lawsuits

MCDONALD'S Corp., Yum! Brands, Inc. and International Business Machines Corp. (IBM) are among companies that received warnings from Russian prosecutors threatening to arrest corporate leaders or seize assets for criticizing the government or withdrawing from the country, the *Wall Street Journal* reported Sunday.

Prosecutors called or visited a broad range of companies to deliver their warnings, including technology, food, banking and apparel firms, the *Journal* reported, citing people familiar with the matter. Threats of lawsuits and the potential seizure of trademarks and other assets has prompted at least one targeted company to limit communications out of Russia with the rest of the firm, and others are seeking to move executives out of the country, the people told the newspaper.

McDonald's declined to comment when reached by Bloomberg News on Sunday. Representatives for Yum and IBM couldn't be immediately reached outside regular business hours.

The move by Russian prosecutors comes as the US and other governments slapped the country with sanctions for the war being waged against Ukraine. Yum, McDonald's and Apple, Inc. are among corporate behemoths that temporarily halted operations or sales in Russia, citing reasons that ranged from opposition to the war to disrupted supply chains and potential repercussions caused by the sanctions and transacting business across the border.

Energy giants exited the country under pressure from their governments. — **Bloomberg**

# Russian default no trigger for global financial crisis — IMF

WASHINGTON — Russia may default on its debts in the wake of unprecedented sanctions over its invasion of Ukraine, but that would not trigger a global financial crisis, International Monetary Fund (IMF) Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva said Sunday.

Ms. Georgieva told CBS's *Face the Nation* program that sanctions imposed by the United States and other democracies were already having a "severe" impact on the Russian economy and would trigger a deep recession there this year.

The war and the sanctions would also have significant spillover effects on neighboring

countries that depended on Russian energy supplies, and had already resulted in a wave of refugees compared to that seen during World War II, she said.

The sanctions were also limiting Russia's ability to access its resources and service its debts, which meant a default was no longer viewed as "improbable," Ms. Georgieva said.

Asked if such a default could trigger a financial crisis around the world, she said, "For now, no."

The total exposure of banks to Russia amounted to around \$120 billion, an

amount that while not insignificant, was "not systemically relevant," she said.

Asked if Russia could access the \$1.4 billion in emergency IMF funding approved for Ukraine last week if Moscow won the war and installed a new government, Georgieva said the funds were in a special account accessible only by the Ukrainian government.

Ms. Georgieva last week said the IMF would downgrade its previous forecast for 4.4% global economic growth in 2022 as a result of the war, but said the overall trajectory remained positive. — **Reuters**

# E-commerce startup ITOOH Homestyle champions Filipino design through tech

A wave of new promising markets has emerged as the digital transformation that has swept the globe in response to the COVID-19 pandemic continues to empower consumers and entrepreneurs, especially those in underserved communities. E-commerce has reached its tipping point, and is now projected to eclipse previous forecasts to be worth \$363 billion by 2025 as more people learn to utilize the potential of digital platforms to ply their trade online.

Beyond this, however, Jules Veloso, Andrew Bercasio, and Enah Baba, co-founders of furniture and home lifestyle e-commerce platform ITOOH Homestyle, recognized the potential for e-commerce platforms to do something more.

Mr. Bercasio, who had previous experience working as one of e-commerce giant Lazada's first employees, and has expertise in business development and marketing, said that they have decided to offer a platform for quality, locally-made furniture online.

"During the pandemic, my two co-founders and I were aggressively looking into various segments in the local e-commerce industry. We were looking into a market that we considered was underserved, especially in the beginning," Mr. Bercasio said in an interview.

At the time, the e-commerce market was saturated with gadgets, accessories, and fashion items sold through marketplaces. There was not quite a market for bigger ticket items, they noticed.

"When you buy furniture, it's really a commitment. It's like buying a car. When you purchase a dining table, you plan to use it for the next five to 10 years. It's not a decision that you can make with just a few clicks, but we hope that as a community, we are slowly learning how to make these purchases online," Mr. Bercasio said.

ITOOH Homestyle aims to change this perception by offering a "one-stop shop for frictionless discovery and purchase of everything homestyle." The platform showcases a variety of quality Filipino brands and merchants, catering to the entire spectrum of budgets and lifestyles through careful curation.

Since launching in July 2021, ITOOH Homestyle has grown to offer 60 brands, with an inventory of around 2,000 unique products ranging from home to outdoor furniture. All of the items are presented with detailed descriptions, precise measurements, maintenance instructions, and a meticulous photo gallery for accurate representation.

"Furniture is an investment piece and people really take their time before they buy them. We're a touch-and-feel market. That's the main barrier that we're trying to break, to educate and hopefully have people trust us and our website, trust the product photos we post online. We make sure to take all of our product photos, refrain from using filters, we don't edit. We are very clear about our descriptions and we want to make



ITOOH Homestyle co-founder Andrew Bercasio

to Manila. I think it's very healthy for consumers. And we don't want anyone to have something from our website that they don't like or don't want to have. That's the trade-off of an e-commerce website, you have to be accommodating," he added.

### CREATING A PLATFORM TO SHOWCASE FILIPINO ARTISTRY

One of ITOOH's goals is to work with a variety of different creative industries such as interior designers, architects, and craftsmen to build its platform. At present, the website offers interior decorating services, in partnership with Grupo Santamaria, an established design firm with a 20-year history.

Mr. Bercasio revealed that the company is working on offering art pieces next, tapping into artists from all over the country and offering them a platform to showcase their work. As with their furniture offerings, ITOOH Homestyle wishes to become a platform in which the creative spirit of the Filipino artist is properly recognized and showcased.

"We all have so many good local brands. We are such good craftsmen that are artistic and creative, and we see that with our furniture design," he said.

He added, "The goal of the company is to be a sort of home online website that everyone will use and love. We want to continue to offer quality home furniture and quality home accessories. We want to champion local designers and craftsmen."

Currently, ITOOH Homestyle offers free delivery to the National Capital Region and Greater Manila, but the company is working on establishing coverage in certain key cities in Visayas and Mindanao, with the target of representing Filipino pieces abroad. They also currently have sale running from March 15 to 31 for selected summer pieces, going up to 50% off retail price.



sure that we're truthful with our offering," Mr. Bercasio said.

ITOOH Homestyle also offers a consumer-friendly return and exchange policy, which encourages buyers to unbox their orders upon delivery for easy returns should they be dissatisfied with the product.

Mr. Bercasio understands the importance of trust in the digital ecosystem, and an accessible and frictionless user experience is one of the most effective ways to build that trust.

"We have a very friendly return or exchange policy. If we deliver the items to you, we encourage our customers to unbox it as soon as it gets delivered so they can see it, sit on it, feel it. And if they end up not liking it, we can accommodate and take it back," he said.

"Our standards of returns and exchanges have also dramatically changed, thanks to the influence of all these foreign brands coming

