



Asia-Pacific Governance Watch

April 2021, Issue 210

UNPAN-AP Editorial Department, RCOCI

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1、 Government Policy and Legislation

Asia-Pacific

World Bank/IMF Spring Meetings 2021: Development Committee Communiqué

1. The Development Committee met virtually today, April 9, 2021.
2. The COVID-19 pandemic has caused an unprecedented public health, economic, and social crisis, threatening the lives and livelihoods of millions. The economic shock is increasing poverty, worsening inequalities, and reversing development gains. As the global economy begins a gradual recovery, uncertainty surrounds near- and medium-term prospects. We call for sustained, differentiated, and targeted financial and technical support for an adequate policy response, strong coordination across bilateral and multilateral organizations, and further support to the private sector. We urge the World Bank Group (WBG) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), in line with their respective mandates, to work closely together and with other partners to contain the impacts of the pandemic. We also ask the WBG to continue its support to countries in achieving the twin goals of ending extreme poverty and boosting shared prosperity and to promote green, resilient, and inclusive development (GRID), as well as support for the SDGs.
3. Timely delivery of safe and effective vaccines across all countries is critical to ending the pandemic, especially as new variants emerge. Developing countries need to strengthen their readiness for vaccination campaigns and develop coordinated strategies to reach vulnerable populations. We commend the WBG for supporting client countries' procurement and deployment of vaccines, and we encourage strong monitoring and accountability mechanisms to ensure fair and efficient distribution. We welcome the WBG's partnerships with WHO, COVAX, GAVI, UNICEF, and others, including private manufacturers, to help ensure that developing countries have fast, transparent, affordable, and equitable access to vaccines. We welcome WBG's ongoing revision of the eligibility criteria for vaccine procurement. We call on IFC to redouble its efforts to support manufacturing capacity for vaccines and pandemic related medical supplies in developing countries. The pandemic has triggered far-reaching consequences, and we must strengthen global preparedness for future pandemics, and at the same time make progress in building robust health systems

with universal coverage.

4. As poorer countries face the crisis with increased resource constraints, limited fiscal space, and rising public debt levels, more of them, including small states, are vulnerable to financial stress. The rapid initial response under the Debt Service Suspension Initiative (DSSI) has provided much-needed liquidity for IDA countries. We welcome the progress achieved by the DSSI in facilitating higher pandemic-related spending. All official bilateral creditors should implement this initiative fully and in a transparent manner. In line with the G20 decision, we support a final extension of the DSSI by 6 months through end December 2021, which is also agreed by the Paris Club. We reiterate our call on the private sector, when requested by eligible countries, to take part in the DSSI on comparable terms. This final extension will allow beneficiary countries to mobilize more resources to face the challenges of the crisis and, where appropriate, to move to a more structural approach to address debt vulnerabilities including through an Upper Credit Tranche quality IMF-supported program. Within this context, we welcome the ongoing efforts to implement the Common Framework for Debt Treatments beyond the DSSI to address debt vulnerabilities on a case-by-case basis and look forward to the coming first meeting of the first creditor committee. In each case, we also welcome implementing the Common Framework in a coordinated manner, including through sharing necessary information among participating official bilateral creditors. The joint creditors' negotiation shall be held in an open and transparent manner and before finalization of the key parameters, due consideration shall be given to the specific concerns, if any, of all participant creditors and the debtor country. In this regard, we note that the need for debt treatment, and the restructuring envelope that is required, will be based on an IMF/Bank Debt Sustainability Analysis and the participating official creditors' collective assessment. We ask the World Bank and the IMF to support the implementation of the Common Framework, in line with their respective mandates. We stress the importance for private creditors and other official bilateral creditors of providing debt treatments under the Common Framework on terms at least as favorable, in line with the comparability of treatment principle.

We recall the forthcoming work of the Multilateral Development Banks (MDBs), as stated in the Common Framework, in light of debt vulnerabilities. We look forward to progress by the IMF and WBG on their proposal of a process to strengthen the quality and consistency of debt data and improve debt disclosure. We also reiterate the importance of joint efforts by all actors, including private creditors, to continue working towards enhancing debt transparency. Bank and IMF support remains critical to enhance debt management and transparency, strengthen countries' domestic revenue mobilization and spending efficacy, and combat illicit financial flows. Looking forward, we urge the Bank and the IMF to help countries design and implement policies to address the root causes of excessive and unsustainable debt. Many middle-income countries also face severe debt distress, limiting their ability to respond to the pandemic. We ask the Bank and the IMF to identify lessons learned

and continue working closely with other organizations and policymakers to address the debt challenges facing middle-income countries, on a case-by-case basis. We welcome the launch of a second voluntary self-assessment of the implementation of the G20 Operational Guidelines for Sustainable Financing. We look forward to further updates on the implementation of the Institute of International Finance Voluntary Principles for Debt Transparency.

5. The effects of the COVID-19 crisis will be felt for years. Mobility restrictions and lockdowns have triggered job losses, especially for women, youth, and vulnerable groups, and can undermine social inclusion. School closures have caused unprecedented disruption to education, especially for girls, damaging human capital, with long-term economic implications. Inflation and depleted incomes have raised household indebtedness and food insecurity. We urge the WBG to scale up its work to address rising levels of food insecurity and to support countries in achieving SDG2 and nutrition for all. It should address the medium and longer-term challenges of food security and nutrition in a programmatic way and in partnership with other multilaterals, while supporting countries in responding rapidly to already deteriorating food security conditions. Fragility, conflict, and violence (FCV) have worsened in many regions. It is urgent to address drivers of FCV, as well as forced displacement and migration. We look forward to the implementation of the FCV strategy. A sustainable and inclusive recovery requires addressing financial sector vulnerabilities, eliminating tax evasion, and mobilizing vital investments. Priorities for investment include quality health care, nutrition, and education; social safety nets; digital and other innovative technologies; sustainable and quality infrastructure; access to energy, including renewable resources; broader opportunities for women and girls; and finance for SMEs and microenterprises. We urge the WBG to help all client countries revitalize trade, support foreign direct investment, and preserve and create jobs. We note the serious impact of the pandemic in many small states and middle-income countries, where new risks and vulnerabilities are arising; and we urge the WBG and the IMF to strengthen efforts to support these countries, in line with their mandates. We welcome the GRID approach and ask the WBG for its effective implementation through country strategies and operations. The WBG is uniquely positioned to tackle the challenges ahead through its convening power, global reach, and capacity to mobilize finance, technical assistance, and knowledge for both the public and private sectors.

6. We commend the WBG's scale-up of climate finance over the past two years, its continuing role as the largest multilateral source of climate investments in developing countries, its emphasis on biodiversity, and its technical and financial support for adaptation, mitigation, and resilience. We also welcome the WBG and IMF's work to assess the impact of climate change on macroeconomic and financial stability. In addressing immediate infrastructure and economic needs, we request that the WBG continue working with clients to address climate change, land degradation, and biodiversity loss, while ensuring affordable and cleaner energy access. We ask the

Bank to ramp up its comprehensive work on biodiversity and work on measuring co-benefits and mainstreaming biodiversity in its operations, as appropriate. We further encourage the WBG and IMF to support a measurable impact in the transition to a low-carbon economy, while considering countries' energy needs and mix, and providing targeted support for the poorest. These efforts will include phasing out of inefficient energy subsidies and other distortive fiscal policies where feasible. The most impoverished and vulnerable populations, including those in FCV situations and small states, are among those most affected by climate change, damaged ecosystems, and natural disasters. We support the WBG's ambitious new target to direct 35% of its financing to climate on average, its commitment for at least 50% of Bank climate financing to support adaptation and resilience, and its crucial convening and knowledge-sharing role and support to a just transition, for countries that request such support. We look forward to the WBG's Climate Change Action Plan for 2021-2025 and recognize its work on disaster risk management, preparedness, and response. We welcome the WBG's proposal to conduct Country Climate and Development Reports and emphasize that Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) should be the primary focus of climate strategies. We commend the WBG's commitment to align its financial flows with the Paris Agreement, and to continue helping countries reach their climate goals, including through NDCs and National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans. We also encourage IFC and MIGA's efforts to mobilize Paris-aligned private sector investments. We support the WBG's and the IMF's important role in preparations for the CBD COP15, UNCCD COP15, and UNFCCC COP26 meetings later this year.

7. A vibrant private sector will be essential for client countries to recover, create jobs, and embrace economic transformation. We urge the WBG to continue its work to help crowd-in private capital and finance, and to support the private sector. This should build on the IFC 3.0 Strategy to create markets. IFC should continue helping companies create jobs, preserve viable businesses, adapt to the changes brought by COVID, and pursue a green recovery. We ask MIGA to continue addressing the needs for short- and longer-term funding of private investors and lenders.

8. We support the frontloading of IDA19 resources from FY23 to FY22 to help the poorest countries in their immediate response to the COVID-19 crisis. We also welcome advancing IDA20 by one year. An ambitious and successful IDA replenishment by December 2021, underpinned by a strong policy framework, will support a green, resilient, and inclusive recovery in IDA countries as they address both the immediate and longer-term impacts of the pandemic. We ask the WBG to propose ways to optimize IDA's balance sheet to make the most of donor contributions and IDA resources, while preserving its AAA rating.

9. The next meeting of the Development Committee is scheduled for October 15, 2021, in Washington, DC.

From <https://www.worldbank.org/> 04/09/2021

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Policy Reset Can Deliver a Stronger, More Resilient, Equitable and Sustainable Post-Pandemic Recovery

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought social and economic disruption worldwide, but is also providing governments with the opportunity to put economies on a more sustainable and inclusive growth path while addressing the underlying challenges, according to the OECD's Going for Growth policy report. Going for Growth 2021: Shaping a Vibrant Recovery analyses pre-existing weaknesses as well as those brought on by the pandemic, and offers policy makers country-specific advice to seize the opportunity for a fundamental reset. OECD Secretary-General Angel Gurría and Italian Minister of Economy and Finance Daniele Franco launched the report shortly after the second meeting of G20 finance ministers and central bank governors under the Italian Presidency on 7 April. Its recommendations provide a basis for G20 discussions on strategies to push forward a vibrant economic recovery and promote higher-quality growth. "The pandemic is a painful reminder that the nature of our past growth was often unsustainable and left many people behind," Mr Gurría said. "The recovery is an opportunity to set our policies right, to achieve growth that is stronger, equitable, sustainable and more resilient. And for this to happen, governments have to act now."

Going for Growth 2021: Shaping a Vibrant Recovery provides a framework for policy reform covering three key dimensions: Building resilience and sustainability: Structural policies can improve the first line of defence to shocks (health care and social safety nets, critical infrastructure), improve public governance, and strengthen firms' incentives to better take longer-term sustainability considerations into account. Facilitating reallocation and boosting productivity growth. Steering growth in a more durable, resilient and inclusive direction requires structural policy action to increase job dynamism and support firms becoming more dynamic, more innovative and greener. Supporting people through transitions. Policies should ensure that people are not left behind in transitions, so that reallocation is socially productive and builds resilience. This requires investments in skills, training and a big push for accessing quality jobs – particularly amongst vulnerable groups – as well as broad-based social safety nets, and better learning and support to access jobs. Going for Growth policy advice includes short country notes for OECD members and a number of Partner countries (Argentina, Brazil, China, India, Indonesia and South Africa).

The report also highlights the crucial importance of countries acting together – in particular in the case of challenges that span borders. Going for Growth identifies a number of areas where international co-operation is needed to enhance the effectiveness of domestic policies and underpin the shift to more sustainable, resilient and equitable globalisation: healthcare, climate change, international trade and the taxation of multinational enterprises. Key recommendations and individual country notes on OECD and key non-member countries are accessible at:

<https://www.oecd.org/economy/going-for-growth/>. You are invited to include this link in media coverage of the report. For further information on Going for Growth 2021 or to arrange interviews, journalists should contact Lawrence Speer (+33 1 4524 7970) or the OECD Media Office (+33 1 4524 9700). Working with over 100 countries, the OECD is a global policy forum that promotes policies to improve the economic and social well-being of people around the world.

From <https://www.oecd.org/> 04/14/2021

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OECD Announces the Creation of the International Programme for Action on Climate (IPAC)

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) is delighted to announce the creation of the International Programme for Action on Climate (IPAC), led by France. The objective of IPAC is to offer participating countries a new steering instrument, complementary to and consistent with the UNFCCC and the Paris Agreement, to pursue progress towards the transition to net-zero greenhouse gas emissions goal and a more resilient economy by mid-century, thanks to a precise evaluation of their action and the sharing of good practices. IPAC would leverage the OECD's proven working methods to develop evidence-based analysis and sharing of good practices and results, building on existing data and indicators, policy tools, advice and guidance developed by the OECD family, including the International Energy Agency (IEA), the International Transport Forum (ITF) and the Nuclear Energy Agency (NEA).

The IPAC programme will have four pillars:

An Annual Climate Action Monitor, building on a set of commonly agreed climate-related indicators, which will provide a digest of countries' progress towards their climate policy objectives, alignment with the Paris Agreement goals and examples of good practices. A dashboard of climate-related indicators. A small number of indicators will be used for benchmarking national efforts and performances and a broader set of indicators will complement the analysis. This will allow for a tailored assessment of countries' progress against national and international objectives in a timely manner. Concise country notes with targeted policy advice, informed by the set of climate-related indicators. The country notes will take into account countries' economic structure, specific social and geographical factors.

An interactive platform for dialogue and mutual learning across countries. The platform will provide online discussion among countries using a dedicated Community site. The IPAC initiative seeks to be broader than OECD membership. It will be open to OECD Key Partners, the six prospective OECD members and G20 countries. IPAC will be funded by voluntary contributions. IPAC will be launched by

Ministers in the context of the 2021 OECD Ministerial Council Meeting, on 31 May – 1 June. For further information or to arrange interviews, journalists should contact the OECD Media Office (+33 1 4524 9700). Working with over 100 countries, the OECD is a global policy forum that promotes policies to improve the economic and social well-being of people around the world.

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New Strategy: Protecting Lives and Creating Durable Opportunities for the Palestinian People

The World Bank's Board of Directors endorsed today a new four-year assistance strategy for the Palestinian territories. The strategy will continue to support resilience of livelihoods and service delivery and will put greater emphasis on transformational investment for a well-connected Palestinian economy and long-term economic returns. "Due to the persisting fragile context, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, resilience strengthening is needed immediately. The new World Bank strategy will act to protect lives and livelihoods and put the jobs agenda at the forefront of its strategy", said Kanthan Shankar, World Bank Country Director for West Bank and Gaza. More than a year into the COVID-19 pandemic, the crisis is unprecedented in an already faltering economy with job and income losses. The GDP contraction of 11.5% in 2020 is one of the sharpest on record and the potential recovery will depend on a broad-based vaccination rollout. Poverty has been in constant increase since 2016 and is now at around 30 percent with 1.4 million people living in poverty. The government's fiscal deficit is over US\$1 billion after aid - the highest in years – and the declining government revenues depresses investment and squeeze out urgent spending. Service providers have struggled to deliver basic and essential services.

The new World Bank Group's strategy is focused on the wellbeing of the Palestinian people, particularly the poor and vulnerable, women and youth. The program will continue to strengthen the Palestinian resilience in times of crisis and provide relief and recovery, including through the emergency social protection and cash-for-work programs. The social response will aim to enhance workforce resilience and capability for better employment through improving quality of education and health. It will increase its support to SMEs and start-ups for job retention and business continuity. "The Palestinian economy will not reach its full potential without a final status agreement. However, institution strengthening is essential to encourage private investment and promote longer-term growth. Transitioning to sustainable development is a smart investment. The strategy explores opportunities that would generate growth and jobs for the local economy and future generations", added Shankar.

Strengthening institutions and upstreaming reforms are critical to unlock the potential of the economy. The strategy will help champion a “well-connected Palestine” to become more integrated into the regional and global markets and develop regional trade, especially energy trade. Developing digital connectivity will stimulate private sector growth, especially for tech startups and the IT services sector. The Bank’s strategy will also aim at strengthening Local Government Units’ financial sustainability and capacity to deliver services. The program over the next four years will help bridge the gender divide, target climate resilience, and help deepens citizen engagement. “More than 36 percent of youth are unemployed in the Palestinian territories, particularly high in Gaza with 66 percent and as high as 91% for women. The new strategy sees the digital economy as a means of securing significant economic opportunities for young people and leading to a more engaged society”, explained Shankar.

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East Asia

CHINA: Top Legislator Stresses Full Implementation of Biosecurity Law

China's top legislator Li Zhanshu on Thursday called for adopting a holistic approach to national security and ensuring both development and security when implementing the Biosecurity Law. Li, chairman of the National People's Congress (NPC) Standing Committee, made the remarks at a symposium held by the NPC Standing Committee in Beijing on the implementation of the law, which will come into force from April 15. Li stressed strengthened efforts in the study and publication of the law to ensure its full and effective implementation. He also urged efforts to establish a monitoring and early warning system, take prevention and control measures in accordance with the law, and speed up the construction of a national legal and institutional framework for biosecurity. Calling the Biosecurity Law, adopted in October 2020, a fundamental, comprehensive, systematic and dominating legal measure, Li said its promulgation and implementation will promote law-based governance.

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China Issues Guideline on Easing Market Access in Hainan Free Trade Port

China on Thursday issued a guideline to support easing market access in the Hainan free trade port in its latest effort to build the resort island into a globally influential,

high-level free trade port. The guideline, jointly released by the National Development and Reform Commission and the Ministry of Commerce, detailed measures to innovate market access in the pharmaceutical and health sectors, optimize financial market entries and development environment, and promote wider entries in the fields of culture and education. China released a master plan for the Hainan free trade port on June 1 last year, aiming to build the province into a globally influential, high-level free trade port by the middle of the century.

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China to Tighten Regulations over Local Financial Institutions

A meeting Thursday urged China's financial regulators to improve regulations of local financial institutions to mitigate risks. Local financial institutions have maintained overall healthy development and played a vital role in serving small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), according to a meeting of the financial stability and development committee under the State Council. Vice Premier Liu He, who is also a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and head of the financial stability and development committee, presided over the meeting. According to the meeting, local financial institutions should focus on their core businesses and prioritize services for local SMEs and residents. While encouraging mergers between well-performing institutions and high-risk ones, the meeting urged regulators to intensify inspections over shareholders, transactions, and data authenticity. Local financial institutions should enhance risk management, conduct prudent operations, and avoid excessive expansions. The meeting also called for efforts to improve the local financial environment and unleash local financial institutions' potential for innovation.

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China Offers Rule-of-law Safeguards for Market Entities

A State Council executive meeting Wednesday passed a draft regulation on the registration management of domestic market entities. It aims to provide rule-of-law safeguards for developing market entities and boost fair competition. During the 13th Five-Year Plan (2016-2020) period, more than 60 million new market entities were added. It has enhanced the economic vitality and created numerous jobs, according to the meeting chaired by Premier Li Keqiang. China will continue to deepen its reforms, seeking to streamline administration and delegate power, improve regulations, upgrade services, and optimize the market-entity registration management system, the meeting said. The draft has detailed unified regulation

measures on the registration of various market entities, including companies, individually-owned businesses and farmer cooperatives. The draft has made it more convenient for market entities to register, with both application materials and procedures being streamlined. Efforts should be made to promote one-stop services, the online processing of registration applications and inter-provincial approval, according to the meeting. Market entities shall register with their real names and be responsible for the authenticity, legality and validity of the materials they submit. The draft has also clarified the legal responsibilities and punishment for illegal acts to safeguard market order, the meeting said.

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CPC Issues New Rules on Work of Primary-level Organizations in Universities

The Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee has issued a set of revised regulations on the work rules for the Party's primary-level organizations in universities. It also issued a circular, which was published Thursday, calling for efforts to prioritize Party-building work in universities. It said the overall Party leadership of universities and colleges should be upheld and strengthened and the systems of the CPC's organization, rules and regulations and work mechanism should be further improved. It also called for enhanced efforts to integrate Party building in universities and the development of the country's higher education to see high-quality development in both respects.

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China Lays Out Priorities on Improving Gov't Transparency in 2021

The General Office of the State Council has released a document laying out the priorities for improving government transparency in 2021. According to the document, information disclosure in fields including market regulations and standards, law enforcement concerning market supervision, and law enforcement against monopoly and unfair competition should be refined. It also requires timely and accurate disclosure of epidemic prevention and control information. By the end of 2021, the existing rules and regulations of all regions and departments will be made public on the government websites, the document reads. It also calls for better public services through the adoption of information disclosure rules for education, health and other key sectors.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 04/23/2021

New Chinese Law to Impose More Personal Information Protection Duties on Internet Giants

A new draft law submitted to China's top legislature for review has proposed imposing more requirements related to personal information protection on the country's big internet platforms. The draft law on personal information protection on Monday returned to the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress (NPC) for a second reading. According to the draft, big internet platforms that possess the personal information of a large number of users must set up an independent body mainly composed of outsiders to supervise how the information is handled. The internet giants are also required to publish social responsibility reports on personal information protection on a regular basis. How big internet platforms collect and use personal information is always opaque, said Zuo Xiaodong, vice president of the China Information Security Research Institute.

The new stipulations, which will put the big internet firms under the independent supervision of the public, are innovations that explore new regulatory measures to protect user data on internet platforms, Zuo said. Targeting prominent problems in the sector such as the lack of transparency in collecting and using user data, the draft also bans "coercive" measures in handling personal information. Internet platforms shall use the minimum amount of personal information possible in ways that have minimum impact on the rights and interests of users, according to the draft. Lawmakers will deliberate the draft in group discussions during the ongoing session of the NPC Standing Committee, which runs from Monday to Thursday.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 04/26/2021

China Mulls Marine Law Revision to Enhance Environment Protection, Epidemic Control

A draft revision to China's Maritime Traffic Safety Law has proposed additional provisions regarding the protection of marine ecological environment and epidemic prevention and control on vessels. The draft was submitted to the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, China's top legislature, for a second reading on Monday. Units and individuals involved in maritime traffic-related activities shall fulfill the obligation of protecting marine ecological environment, according to the draft. Also, in cases where a crew member on board is found to have or suspected of having infectious disease that may cause serious health threat to others, captain of the vessel shall be responsible for implementing emergency

response measures, putting relevant personnel under quarantine if necessary, and timely reporting the situation to authorities, says the draft. The latest version of the draft also revised and added provisions on issues such as compulsory pilotage and improving maritime traffic safety-related science and technologies.

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Food Security Underscored in China's New Draft Law

A draft law on promoting rural vitalization has stipulated more specific and detailed provisions to further ensure China's food security. The draft law was submitted for a third reading at a regular session of the National People's Congress (NPC) Standing Committee on Monday. Stipulations on guaranteeing national food security have been moved to the general provisions, according to the draft law, which adds provisions on implementing a national strategy of ensuring important agricultural products. The draft also includes new stipulations on protecting seed security, which specify the need to strengthen the protection and use of agricultural germplasm resources, and the building of germplasm resource bank, as well as to make breakthroughs in breeding technique, among others.

Chinese farmers' harvest festival, which falls on the Autumn Equinox every year, has been written into the draft law. Lawmakers are expected to deliberate the draft in group discussions during the ongoing session of the NPC Standing Committee, which runs from Monday to Thursday. China's Outline of the 14th Five-Year Plan for National Economic and Social Development and the Long-Range Objectives Through the Year 2035, approved by the NPC in March, also emphasizes the implementation of food security strategy. The outline calls for efforts to ensure absolute security of grain and the supply of important sideline agricultural products, as well as to promote legislation concerning food security.

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Legislation Aims for Streamlined Administrative Approvals

Draft revisions to nine laws involving reforms of government services to spur market vitality were submitted to China's top legislature for deliberation on Monday. The nine laws that are being reviewed by the ongoing session of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress are -- the road traffic safety law, the seed law, the fire prevention law, the law on import and export commodity inspection, the advertisements law, the grassland law, the civil aviation law, the customs law and the

food safety law. The draft revisions are about modifying provisions that are in contradiction with measures for streamlining administrative approval procedures amid China's efforts in improving government services and creating an enabling business environment. The move is also aimed at saving legislative costs by presenting the draft revisions involving nine laws in one single submission, according to an official statement.

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New Chinese Law to Impose More Personal Information Protection Duties on Internet Giants

A new draft law submitted to China's top legislature for review has proposed imposing more requirements related to personal information protection on the country's big internet platforms. The draft law on personal information protection on Monday returned to the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress (NPC) for a second reading. According to the draft, big internet platforms that possess the personal information of a large number of users must set up an independent body mainly composed of outsiders to supervise how the information is handled. The internet giants are also required to publish social responsibility reports on personal information protection on a regular basis. Lawmakers will deliberate the draft in group discussions during the ongoing session of the NPC Standing Committee, which runs from Monday to Thursday.

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China Adopts Law on Preventing Food Waste

Chinese lawmakers on Thursday voted to adopt an anti-food-waste law at a session of the National People's Congress (NPC) Standing Committee. The law will go into effect on the date of promulgation. According to the law, catering service providers could charge customers who leave excessive amounts of food waste a disposal fee, but rates for the charge must be clearly advertised. Approximately 18 billion kg of food is wasted every year in China's urban catering industry, according to a report based on nationwide field research carried out by NPC deputies. The country also sees over 35 billion kg of grain loss at pre-consumption stages including storage, transportation and processing, said the report.

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China Amends Law for More Fairness in Education

Chinese lawmakers on Thursday passed an amendment to the Education Law, aimed at ensuring fairness in education by mandating tougher punishment for those who steal the identity of others to enroll in a school or college. Impostors will have their admission qualifications revoked and slapped with a ban from relevant national examinations for two to five years, according to the amendment, which was approved at the 28th session of the 13th National People's Congress Standing Committee. The amended law stipulates that academic diplomas of impostors will be revoked and those holding public office will be dismissed. Criminal activities will receive criminal punishments. The law stipulates that people who allow others to illegally use their identities for enrollments in schools or colleges shall be barred from appearing in relevant national examinations for up to three years, with all illegal gains confiscated.

The law also demands stringent punishment for public office bearers involved in identity theft in school or college enrollments. Officials who organize activities of identity theft, fraudulently using someone else's identity, illegally substituting for others in admissions, or instigate others to conduct such malpractices, will be sanctioned in accordance with the law. Violators will be prosecuted for criminal liability if the circumstances constitute a crime, the law notes. If the lawful rights and interests related to admissions are infringed upon due to illegal substitute, the victim can request restoration of admission qualifications. The amendment will take effect on April 30, 2021.

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China Adopts New Law to Promote Rural Vitalization

A law on the promotion of rural vitalization was adopted by China's national legislature on Thursday, providing the country a legal guarantee in pursuit of the rural vitalization strategy. The law was adopted after the third reading at the 28th session of the 13th National People's Congress Standing Committee, which opened on Monday. Chinese farmers' harvest festival, which falls on the Autumn Equinox every year, has been written into this law. According to the new law, an assessment system of rural vitalization will be built, along with the establishment of an annual work report system as well as supervision and inspection systems. The law stipulates protecting the permanent basic cropland, building a system to ensure a steady increase in rural income, and strengthening the work involving rural talent.

It also demands efforts to improve the protection system of key ecosystems and the ecological compensation mechanism. The law emphasizes establishing and improving the management system for rural housing safety, and bans the merger of villages against farmers' will. The law containing 74 articles will come into force on June 1, 2021. In 2017, China proposed a rural vitalization strategy as a key move to accelerate the modernization of agriculture and rural areas, and has since adopted a host of policies to chart the roadmap for rural vitalization. In this year's government work report, China has pledged to implement the strategy of rural vitalization in an all-round manner, promoting the stable development of the agricultural sector and increasing farmers' income.

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China's Procuratorates to Enhance Minor Protection Through Legal Supervision

China's Supreme People's Procuratorate (SPP) on Thursday said it would launch a legal supervision campaign for the protection of minors nationwide from May 2021 to December 2022. Procuratorates will carry out supervision in keeping with law, focusing on prominent problems related to minor protection, including special correctional education for young offenders, fulfillment of obligations of upbringing, educating and protecting minors, as well as the implementation of protection measures at schools. The campaign is aimed to let procuratorates shoulder the main responsibility for the judicial protection of minors and to help solve problems that trigger strong public concern in this regard, said Shi Weizhong, a SPP senior prosecutor. Official statistics show that between 2018 and 2020, procuratorates across China approved the arrest of 126,000 criminal suspects for assaulting minors and indicted 171,000.

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JAPAN: Suga Govt 'Would Not Hesitate' to Apply New Emergency Measures to Other Cities

Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga said he would not hesitate to extend emergency-level priority measures to other cities, if necessary, to contain the spread of the novel coronavirus, during an appearance on a Fuji TV program on Sunday. Priority measures are being implemented from Monday for select cities in Osaka, Hyogo and Miyagi prefectures. The prime minister emphasized that the government might consider placing Tokyo and other areas under the measures as the situation

develops. “We have been working to anticipate every possibility,” Suga said when asked if he would apply the measures to Tokyo, where infections are once again on the rise. “I think we should [apply the measures] without hesitation, wherever necessary.” During the program, the prime minister also underscored the need to establish a new “Children’s Agency,” whose purview would include childhood education, welfare and healthcare. “It is the responsibility of politicians and adults to ensure that [child] abuse is never allowed to take place, but the government agencies have been too compartmentalized [to fully address this issue],” he said.

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Diet Deliberations on Digital Bills Commence in Upper House, but Issues Remain

Deliberations on a set of bills related to digital reform are currently underway in the House of Councillors. However, issues that emerged during deliberations in the House of Representatives remain unresolved. The focus will be whether discussions in the upper house will be able to make progress toward the establishment of a government agency in charge of accelerating digitization of administrative procedures and related future policies. During the upper house plenary session on Wednesday, Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga explained the purpose of five bills on digital reform, a signature policy of his administration, stressing that the bills are intended to “realize a digital society, comparable to other countries, in which anyone can enjoy the benefits of digitization to the fullest.” The digital agency is aimed at resolving a lag in the digitization of administrative services that has become apparent amid the novel coronavirus pandemic. Suga expressed a strong desire for the agency to serve as a control tower that can “maintain important systems on its own and establish a framework to respond appropriately to system failures.” The five related bills, including the bill to establish the agency, comprise 63 proposals to create new laws and revise existing ones. The deliberations will involve a wide range of issues.

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Japan, U.S. Agree to Work Together on Climate Change

Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga and U.S. President Joe Biden agreed to launch a bilateral climate partnership during their summit in Washington on Friday. The partnership is aimed at increasing coordination to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to net zero by 2050, a goal set by the two governments, and to lead climate action in the international community. “We confirmed that Japan and the United States will

lead the global [push toward] decarbonization,” Suga said at a press conference after the summit. The partnership consists of three pillars: first, the implementation of the Paris Agreement and the achievement of 2030 targets; second, the development and deployment of clean energy technology; and third, support for decarbonization, especially in emerging countries.

“Japan and the United States are both committed to achieving net-zero emissions by 2050, and we know to do that will require setting and meeting our 2030 goals,” Biden said. “We’ll work together to advance clean energy technologies and help nations throughout the Indo-Pacific region, especially developing countries, develop renewable energies and decarbonize their economies.” The United States is scheduled to host a summit of world leaders to discuss climate change on April 22-23. Biden said he intends to “rally key nations of the world” into making ambitious climate commitments in the lead-up to the U.N. Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP26) to be held in November.

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Gov't Seeks Safety Guarantee over Digital Wage Payout Plan

Japan's labor ministry on Monday proposed reforms that would create a system within the current fiscal year that would allow companies to pay salaries in digital money, a further step in government efforts to introduce digital payrolls and promote a cashless society. The government has been working out the reforms involving revisions to the ministry ordinance amid safety concerns and opposition over digital wage payouts from the banking industry. The planned digital payment is being pushed by the government to help people avoid touching cash amid the coronavirus pandemic. It could also make it easier for foreign blue-collar workers, who often struggle to open bank accounts in the country, to receive salaries without having to do so. The ministry proposed during a meeting of its panel subcommittee on Monday that in pushing for such reforms, mainly through smartphone-based settlement apps, it would be imperative to ensure safety in using this scheme. A revision of the ordinance is necessary to enable digital payments through smartphone-based settlement apps.

Under a draft proposal, the Health, Labor and Welfare Ministry will identify who among the digital salary payment service providers can transmit the funds. They will be chosen based on whether they can compensate for losses that could be incurred by their business failure or illicit withdrawals. The ministry also wants to enable workers to withdraw their salaries in cash through automated teller machines, according to the draft. The government aimed to craft the specifics of the scheme within fiscal 2020 that ended last month, but the plan was delayed due to challenges including how to ensure safety in digital salary payments. "We want to get (the

scheme) institutionalized in the early stage of fiscal 2021" from April, labor minister Norihisa Tamura said in a news conference earlier this month. Although the government has set the goal of raising the ratio of cashless settlements to 40 percent by 2025, the percentage stood below 30 percent in 2019 and lagged behind other developed economies.

Among private companies, Yahoo Japan Corp has said it will pay 50,000 yen each to all of its employees through smartphone payment service PayPay to make up for expenses related to remote working amid the pandemic, including for desks for work purposes and telecommunication tools for web conferences. As a precursor of digital salary payments, the major online service provider is looking into problems linked to the one-off benefit. For the public, concerns over the safety of digital payroll stem from lax regulations for money transfer firms compared to financial institutions. While the government's payoff program can protect a maximum of 10 million yen per depositor in the event of a bank failure, the rule does not apply for money transmitters. Fears persist over fraudulent withdrawals since cases targeting bank accounts linked to e-money services provided by major mobile carrier NTT Docomo Inc were confirmed last year. Conventional banks remain opposed to the deregulation largely because having accounts for salary payments help them promote their businesses to customers.

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Govt Presents Plan for 'Digital Payday' in Japan

The Health, Labor and Welfare Ministry has presented the outline for a plan to allow "digital paydays," in which employees will be able to receive their salaries digitally through such means as payments to smartphone apps. The ministry submitted the plan on April 19 to a subcommittee of its Labor Policy Council, an advisory body to the health, labor and welfare minister comprising representatives of labor and management. As a precondition for launching this payment method, the plan says that operators of fund transfer businesses, which provide the apps, must set up systems which can respond to bankruptcies or illicit cash withdrawals. The Labor Standards Law stipulates that payments of salaries to employees must in principle be made in cash, with remittances into bank accounts or other financial institutions permitted as an exception.

To enable digital salary payments, it will be necessary to revise the regulation for enforcing the law. The plan sets requirements that fund transfer businesses should fulfill — the concluding of a contract with a private-sector guaranty company to be prepared for business failures and assure sufficient cash is available for payments; and providing full compensation in the case of illicit withdrawals through no fault of

the user. The labor minister will designate which business operators have cleared the criteria. In addition, the plan stipulates that companies must not force employees to accept digital payments of their salaries. At the Labor Policy Council meeting on April 19, one member from the labor side noted, "We should not proceed as if this is already a done deal," an indication of deep-rooted wariness about going down this path. The ministry said it will proceed carefully with discussions, using the outline as a springboard.

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Govt. to Regulate Online Advertising

Japan's government plans to require major IT firms by law to be more transparent about their online advertising to prevent putting clients at a disadvantage. At a meeting of the Digital Market Competition Council on Tuesday, the government compiled its final report on ways to regulate online advertising. The report cites concerns that IT giants are taking advantage of their market dominance to mistreat merchants who advertise on their platforms. It says the government will require IT giants by law to set up and disclose their operation policies to prevent disadvantaging clients. Major IT firms will also have to disclose beforehand changes in business transactions with clients, and set up systems to respond to inquiries and complaints about such changes. Regarding targeted online ads based on users' browsing history, the government plans to require disclosure of conditions for collecting users' personal data. Chief Cabinet Secretary Kato Katsunobu stressed that it will be significant for Japan to become a global pioneer by introducing such regulations. He added that Japan will spread the idea of the regulations worldwide to contribute to the international community in setting up rules on digital marketing.

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Revision to Disaster Management Law Enacted

Japan's Diet has enacted a revision to the country's disaster management law to allow municipalities to issue anti-disaster information more understandably. A full chamber of the Upper House approved the revision on Wednesday. The revised law stipulates new heavy rain alerts, including level three, termed "evacuation of elderly people and others," level four, "evacuation order" and level five, "requiring securing safety immediately." The level three alert was previously termed "the level for evacuation preparation" but has been changed to clarify whom it covers, to allow for faster evacuation. The new level three alert is for informing people who need more time to move -- such as the elderly and those with physical disabilities -- to evacuate soon. The level four alert used to contain two sublevels: "evacuation advisory" and

"evacuation order." Since their difference is unclear, municipalities are to use only "evacuation order," meaning everyone in risky places must evacuate. The old level five alert was termed "a notice of a disaster." The new alert is to be issued when a disaster has already happened or is imminent. The revised law is expected to take effect next month.

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Japan Approves World's Largest Trade Deal Including China, ASEAN

The Diet on Wednesday approved the world's largest free trade deal, signed by 15 Asia-Pacific countries including China and the 10-member Association of Southeast Asian Nations, raising the possibility for the pact to enter into force later this year. The Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership will create a free trade zone covering about 30 percent of the world's gross domestic product, trade and population. It will be Japan's first trade deal involving both China and South Korea -- its largest and third biggest trade partners. The pact, signed by the 15 countries last November, will come into effect 60 days after it is ratified by six of the ASEAN members and three of the other countries. As of Wednesday, Singapore and China have completed procedures for ratification. The deal will eliminate tariffs on 91 percent of goods and introduces common rules on investment and intellectual property to promote free trade. The government expects the trade accord will boost Japan's GDP by 2.7 percent and create 570,000 jobs. RCEP groups the 10 ASEAN members -- Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam -- plus Japan, China, South Korea, Australia and New Zealand. India was one of the founding members but skipped all negotiations from November 2019 due to concern that its trade deficit with China would grow.

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S. KOREA: Eying to Set Global Standards for EV Wireless Charging

South Korea said Thursday it will ramp up efforts to promote a homegrown charging technology for electric vehicles (EVs) as an international standard, as the country plans to penetrate deeper into the growing sector. The Korean Agency for Technology and Standards held a virtual meeting with experts from home and abroad to further foster the wireless charging technology for EVs with a capacity of 50 kilowatts, according to the Ministry of Trade, Industry, and Energy. South Korea proposed the technology as a global standard to the International Electrotechnical

Commission last year. The technology will allow EVs to be charged up to 80 percent of their capacity within an hour. The agency said the technology proposed by South Korea holds more potential compared with that suggested by Japan, whose charging capacity stands at 11 kW. The country, meanwhile, is also carrying out studies to find a breakthrough to have cars charged while driving. The technology is expected to be first applied on buses that run on fixed routes before being available in other automobiles. The agency believes the development can lead to stronger demand for EVs once commercialized. The Moon Jae-in administration has been pushing to foster the industry for EVs in line with its green energy policy. South Korea plans to have eco-friendly cars, including hydrogen fuel cell cars, take up 30 percent of the total automobiles registered in the country by 2030, rising sharply from the current estimate of 3 percent.

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Parliamentary Committee Approves Bill on Reining in Conflicts of Interest Among Public Officials

A parliamentary committee passed Thursday a bill prohibiting public officials from seeking personal gains using information related to their job responsibilities. The National Policy Committee of the National Assembly approved the bill on the so-called conflict of interest prevention law, advancing it to the Legislation and Judiciary Committee, the final gateway for legislative bills. There were several unsuccessful attempts to legislate such a bill over the past eight years, but the latest move gained traction after a land speculation scandal involving employees at the state-run housing developer, LH, triggered public outrage over alleged injustice amid skyrocketing home prices. Once passed by the legislation committee, the bill is expected to be put to a vote at the upcoming plenary parliamentary session scheduled for next Thursday.

The bill requires central and regional government officials, executives at state-run companies and members of regional councils, now totaling around 1.9 million nationwide, to avoid having any personal transactions based on information they gathered while on duty. Under the bill, any public official who is planning to conduct personal transactions, including real estate deals, within the domain of his or her public duties is required to declare it in advance. A violation of the proposed law resulting in gains in property could lead to criminal punishment and disciplinary actions. The bill also seeks to prohibit family members of high-ranking government officials or public servants in charge of public employment from seeking job opportunities at public institutions in which their families serve. It also makes it an obligation for public officials in charge of real estate affairs to declare real estate holdings within 14 days of acquiring them.

South-East Asia

INDONESIA: Extending Micro-Scale Restriction Policy till April 19

Indonesia has extended the micro-scale community activity restriction policy from April 5 to 19 to prevent the further spread of COVID-19, said an official on Monday. "The government has extended the policy for the next two weeks," Airlangga Hartarto, coordinating minister for economic affairs and chairman of the COVID-19 handling and economic recovery team, told a virtual press conference. Hartarto added that the previous micro-scale restrictions had succeeded in reducing the number of COVID-19 cases in Indonesia. For example, Hartarto said, the positivity rate in Indonesia was 7.61 percent, lower than the global figure, while the recovery rate in Indonesia reached 89.68 percent, higher than the global figure. But he said the country's COVID-19 fatality rate is 2.72 percent, higher than the global figure. In addition, the government has expanded the implementation of the restriction policy to five other provinces, namely North Kalimantan, Aceh, South Sumatra, Riau, and Papua. Previously, the restrictions were only imposed in 15 provinces, including six provinces in main Java Island, Bali, North Sumatra, East Kalimantan, South Sulawesi, Central Kalimantan, South Kalimantan, North Sulawesi, West Nusa Tenggara and East Nusa Tenggara.

From <http://www.xinhuanet.com> 04/05/2021

PHILIPPINES: Lifting Moratorium on New Mining Agreements

Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte has lifted the nine-year moratorium on new mining agreements to maximize the country's benefit from the industry, the presidential office said on Thursday. "The Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) may continue to grant and issue exploration permits under existing laws, rules, and guidelines," according to an executive order (EO) signed by Duterte on Wednesday. The EO added that those who will get permits "shall be given the right of (the) first option to develop and utilize the minerals in their exploration area upon the approval of the declaration of mining project feasibility." "The DENR shall formulate the terms and conditions in the new mineral agreements that will maximize government revenues and share from production, including the possibility of declaring these areas as mineral reservations to obtain appropriate royalties, in accordance with existing laws, rules, and regulations," the EO said. In 2012, then Philippine President Benigno Aquino III barred the signing of new mineral

agreements. "The Philippines has tapped less than 5 percent of its mineral resources endowment to date," the EO said, adding it will usher in "significant economic benefit to the country." "The mining industry can support various government projects, provide raw materials to other construction and development of other industries, and increase employment opportunities in remote rural areas thereby stimulating countryside development," the EO said.

From <http://www.xinhuanet.com> 04/15/2021

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VIETNAM: Government Sets Out Tasks for New Term

Prime Minister Phạm Minh Chính chaired a Government meeting on Thursday, the first Government meeting since new Cabinet members were elected early this month, to set out tasks for the new term. During the day-long event, participants discussed the Government's action plan to implement the resolution of the 13th National Party Congress, the Government's working regulations, the disbursement of public investment, COVID-19 prevention and control, and the vaccination programme. The preparations for the elections of deputies to the 15th National Assembly and all-level People's Councils for 2021-26, along with the organisation of the national high school examinations, were also under consideration. Given the context of the COVID-19 pandemic that affected the national growth rate in the first quarter (only 4.48 per cent), Prime Minister Chính said the workload of the new cabinet was very difficult and the Government would start its work immediately. He called for solidarity and building a transparent Government with discipline and drastic actions. The people and businesses are regarded as the core of the Government's activities to ensure every person enjoys social advances and equality. He urged every cabinet member to make efforts to strongly take action and work effectively.

"Every cabinet member must set themselves as examples and be humble and willing to listen to various sides," he told the meeting. According to the Prime Minister, the Government will strengthen decentralisation and uphold the responsibilities of collectives and individuals. It looks to maintain an environment of stable peace and extensive international integration for development. The Government's activities will follow resolutions of the Party, National Assembly and Government and the Government will work closely with mass organisations to mobilise national power. The PM asked ministries and sectors, especially heads of ministries and sectors, to take full responsibility for public investment disbursement. The Ministry of Planning and Investment must review the disbursement and propose solutions to disburse investment at a high rate and in an effective manner. The health ministry has been ordered to study and finalise the proposal on vaccine passports and create mechanisms to facilitate organisations and businesses to be qualified to buy vaccines. Regarding preparations for the election of deputies to the 15th National Assembly and people's councils for the 2021-26 tenure in May, Chính asked relevant

agencies and local authorities to step up inspection and ensure public safety and order.

From <https://vietnamnews.vn> 04/15/2021

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Việt Nam to Increase Share of Renewable Energy to 30% by 2045: President

Việt Nam will greatly reduce coal-based power generation and rapidly increase the share of renewables in the total primary energy supply to 20 per cent by 2030 and 30 per cent by 2045, said Vietnamese President Nguyễn Xuân Phúc on Friday night (Vietnamese time) while attending a session within the framework of the virtual Leaders Summit on Climate. President of Nigeria Muhammadu Buhari, President of Poland Andrzej Duda and Spanish President Pedro Sánchez were among speakers of the session. The session, which was chaired by US President Joe Biden, highlighted the broad economic benefits of climate action, with a strong focus on job creation. It covered the economic benefits of green recovery and long-term decarbonisation and the importance of ensuring that all communities and workers benefit from the clean-energy transition. Opening his remarks at the session, President Phúc welcomed the United States' return to the Paris Agreement, saying he believed the renewed leadership and strong commitment that President Biden espoused during the summit's opening session, combined with shared efforts, will lead the countries on the path towards achieving the goals of the Paris Agreement.

Phúc said climate change was undoubtedly a major existential crisis to many countries and to our planet. In Việt Nam, last year alone, extreme weather has taken hundreds of lives and reversed decades of progress in poverty reduction. The Mekong Delta, Việt Nam's rice bowl and the home to 20 million Vietnamese, is suffering immensely from sea level rise, especially towards the end of this century. Transitioning to a green, net-zero emission economy is an inevitable trend and imperative to limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius. This is a challenge, but will certainly bring huge opportunities and benefits in creating jobs, ensuring energy security, and enhancing economic competitiveness and sustainability, he said. "Việt Nam is determined to follow this path. At the same time, we need a suitable roadmap for developing countries where much hardship remains." He highlighted three main points in his speech, including just and inclusive transition which "must ensure equal access to opportunities and benefits, place the people at the centre, and leave no one behind. It must especially be supported by the people, businesses and scientists."

Developed countries must continue to take the lead in emission reduction commitments, at the same time, give greater concrete support to developing countries, including Việt Nam, in finance, new technology development, high-quality

and efficient infrastructure and job creation, he said. “We welcome and look forward to receiving the assistance from the US International Climate Finance Plan and other international financial arrangements, including from international companies and corporations.” The pursuit of climate goals should be compatible with each country’s conditions, including the need to alter lifestyles, modes of production and work. This endeavour must be integrated into national development strategies and plans, he said. Each country must itself make efforts and make good use of international aid and resources. There need also be national mechanisms for oversight and evaluation of implementation to improve their ability to recover, he said. “Việt Nam makes every effort to contribute to global action. We had been quick to submit its Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and mainstreamed them into domestic laws for enforcement. “By 2030, we pledge to reduce emissions by 9 per cent with our domestic resources and by 27 per cent with bilateral and multilateral support.” “Việt Nam will reduce the intensity of greenhouse gas emissions per GDP by nearly 15 per cent by 2030 and methane emissions from agricultural production by 10 per cent. Earlier this month, Việt Nam launched a programme to plant a billion trees by 2025. This project alone is expected to absorb 2 to 3 per cent of Việt Nam’s total emissions by 2030,” Phúc said.

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Health Ministry Issued Guidelines on Handling Covid-19 Vaccine Blood Clots

The Vietnamese health ministry has recently issued guidelines on protocols for diagnosis and treatment of rare brain/abdomen blood clots in the setting of low levels of blood platelets occurring after COVID-19 vaccinations. It stressed that these incidents are serious, but a very rare and unusual complication that seems to occur more among women younger than 60 years old. The incidents that take place after administering COVID-19 vaccines by AstraZeneca and Johnson & Johnson were documented by drug authorities and vaccine safety monitoring agencies in many countries, the ministry noted. The clinical symptoms – including lasting serious headaches, seizures, breathing difficulties and chest pains, abdominal pains, pain and oedema of the lower extremities, but rarely bleeding or skin haemorrhage or internal bleeding – show within four to 28 days after being administered the vaccine. Imaging diagnostics – such as ultrasound and pulse doppler – of sites with clinical manifestations such as abdomen or the limbs can show thrombosis. X-raying and computed tomography (CT) or magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) scans at suspected sites such as in the brain, lung, or painful areas etc. can show signs of thrombosis or bleeding.

The health ministry said that commune- and ward-level health stations and district-level medical centres must monitor people who have received the COVID-19

vaccines, and if the injected person shows any of clinical symptoms, medical staff must perform “emergency measures” and transfer the patient to the higher-level health facilities. Health centres are also told to conduct a platelet count, imaging and X-rays on suspected patients to diagnose the underlying conditions, and contact experts for those with abnormal symptoms. Vaccinated persons who suffer from severe headaches, localised neurological symptoms, seizures, difficulty breathing, chest pain, life-threatening bleeding should also be transferred to higher level. Provincial- and municipal-level health facilities need to conduct tests and treatment of probable conditions that may be encountered in line with diagnosis and treatment guidelines of the Ministry of Health. If the patient’s condition progresses beyond the capacity of their diagnosis and treatment, it is necessary to consult a specialist or to refer to the higher-level medical facilities. Central-level hospitals are supposed to receive the patients with severe reactions to vaccinations, and consult experts for treatment if necessary.

Minister of Health Nguyễn Thanh Long issued Decision No. 1888/QĐ-BYT on April 15 to establish a Steering Committee for safe COVID-19 vaccination, which comprises of senior officials from the ministry and leaders of the ministry’s related departments along with Việt Nam’s leading experts and scientists in diverse fields from immunisation, infection, emergency resuscitation, intensive care, to haematology, cardiology and neurology. The Steering Committee is tasked with guiding medical establishments in performing screening, monitoring and handling of adverse events following COVID-19 vaccinations and promptly assist localities in handling all situations safely. Đào Xuân Cơ, Chair of Việt Nam National Association of Emergency, Intensive Care Medicine and Clinical Toxicology, and Deputy Director of Bạch Mai Hospital, the largest first-tier public hospital in the northern region, said that post-vaccination blood clot incidents could be handled just like any other commonly occurred blood clot.

Cơ reassured that the public could have “peace of mind” for receiving the COVID-19 vaccine given the very small risk, and even if such an incident does happen, the expertise of leading scientists would be available to intervene in a timely manner. However, given the nature of the COVID-19 vaccine approved for emergency use, Việt Nam has been quite cautious in its vaccination drive. “We do screening and counselling before the administration of the vaccine,” Đào Xuân Cơ said. “The injected person is monitored at the vaccination site for at least 30 minutes, then continues to be monitored at home for at least 24 hours and follow-up observations for another three weeks after injection. Hospitals are always ready to prevent severe reactions after injection.” According to the Tuesday report of the National Expanded Programme on Immunisation, a record 50,104 people were inoculated on Monday. Nearly 260,000 people – mostly frontline workers and medical staff – in 42 provinces and cities have been inoculated using AstraZeneca vaccines since the national vaccination drive began on March 8. No rare blood clot incidents have been recorded so far, while the typical reactions (tiredness, mild fever, muscle pains, etc.) were

reported in about 30 per cent of the vaccinated, even lower than the advisory from the manufacturer or European authorities' reports. The country currently has nearly 1 million doses of AstraZeneca vaccine (combined deliveries from the manufacturer and supplied via the COVAX Facility), along with 1,000 doses of Sputnik V vaccine as gift from Russia.

From <https://vietnamnews.vn/> 04/27/2021

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South Asia

INDIA: Telangana Launches New EV Policy, Aims to Lure \$4 bn Investments

With a vision to make Telangana a hub for electric vehicles (EVs) and energy storage systems (ESS), the Government of Telangana rolled out the 'Telangana Electric Vehicle & Energy Storage Policy' on October 30. The policy will be effective for ten years from the date of notification and will be reviewed by the Steering Committee as notified in the policy. Telangana launches new EV policy. Telangana Minister of IT KT Rama Rao and Transport Minister Ajay Kumar were also present at the policy launch. With the launch of the new EV & Energy Storage policy, the State government aims to lure private investments worth \$4 billion and generate employment for 120,000 people by 2030 through shared mobility, charging infrastructure development, and manufacturing activities. In regard with the subsidies and policies available under the Electronics Policy 2016, the new EV policy offers various incentives in the EV and ESS sectors like incentives have been made available for EV manufacturing, energy storage systems and related components in the State through capital subsidies, SGST reimbursements, power tariff subsidies, and more.

Moreover, the policy also lays out a provision of 100 per cent exemption of road tax and registration fee for the first two lakh electric two-wheelers and first 20,000 electric three-wheelers purchased and registered in the State. Besides this, retro-fitment incentives have also been provided at 15 per cent for the first 5000 three-seater autorickshaws for a cost capped at Rs 15,000. The policy added that financing institutions would be encouraged to provide a hire-purchase scheme at discounted interest rates. For EV four-wheelers, 100 per cent exemption of road tax and the registration fee has been provided for the first 5,000 units purchased and registered. The exemptions are also made available for the first 500 EV buses and State Transport Units with an objective to encourage electric buses. As per the new policy, investment of over Rs 200 crore in plant and machinery or providing employment to more than 1,000 people shall be categorised as a megaproject. Further, the policy states that the government would facilitate setting up of an initial batch of fast charging stations in Hyderabad and other towns in a phased manner, by state entities and private players.

Tamil Nadu Announces New Electronics & Hardware Manufacturing Policy

In a bid to increase electronics industry output to \$100 billion by 2025, the Government of Tamil Nadu announced a new Electronics & Hardware manufacturing policy on September 7. The state hopes to contribute 25 per cent of India's total electronic exports to the world by 2025. The new policy also includes skill training for over 1,00,000 people (semi-skilled and skilled) by 2024 to meet the incremental human resource requirement projected by NSDC for Tamil Nadu in Electronics and Hardware Manufacturing sector. The new hardware policy further aims to increase the productivity in Tamil Nadu, especially across focus sectors such as mobile handsets, LED products, chip designs, PCBs, solar photovoltaic cells, medical electronics, and automotive electronics. Similar to the National Policy of Electronics 2019, the Tamil Nadu government will provide assistance for developing core competencies in the sub-sectors. Further, the new policy targets undertake a focused research and development program to achieve the above objectives and foster an environment of research and innovation, foster a conducive environment for ESDM start-ups. The incentives offered by the state would be an addition to what the Centre is offering. Investments made from January 1, 2020, will be considered eligible for availing incentives. The state also looks forward to formulating a special package for ESDM units and MSMEs which will include capital subsidy, interest subvention, low tension power tariff subsidy, generator subsidy, assistance for obtaining intellectual property and assistance in obtaining certifications.

From <https://smartcity.eletsonline.com/> 04/09/2021

DoPT Releases Guidelines for Government Officials Amidst Rising COVID Cases

In light of rising COVID-19 cases, the Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT), Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances and Pension, Government of India, issued guidelines for strict compliance by Ministries and Departments of the Central government, on April 19. The guidelines state that physical attendance of the officers of the level of Under Secretary or equivalent and below is to be restricted to 50 per cent of the total strength. However, the Secretaries and Heads of the Department may regulate the attendance of officials and may direct more officials to attend office. Further, all the Deputy Secretary level officers or equivalent and above have been asked to attend office on a regular basis. While in an effort to ensure no over-crowding in the office premises, the officers and staff should have been asked

to follow staggered timings as 9.00 am to 5.30 pm, 9.30 am to 6.00 pm and 10.00 am to 6.30 pm. Moreover, the guidelines clearly state that all the officials who attend the office shall strictly follow COVID norms including wearing masks, practising physical distancing, using sanitizer and frequently washing hands. Also, all the officials who do not attend the office on a particular day have been asked to remain available on phone and other electronic means of communication at all times from their residence and work from home. However, all those officials residing in containment zones shall continue to be exempted from coming to office till the containment zone is denotified. The guidelines restrict the people with disabilities and pregnant women employees to attend office but they shall adopt work from home.

From <https://egov.eletsonline.com/> 04/21/2021

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PM Modi to Launch e-Property Cards Under SWAMITVA Scheme Today

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will launch the distribution of e-property cards under the SWAMITVA scheme today on the National Panchayati Raj Day at 12:00 noon through video conferencing. As many as 4.09 lakh property owners will be given their e-property cards on the occasion, this will also mark the rolling out of the SWAMITVA scheme for implementation across India. Union Minister Narendra Singh Tomar will also be present at the event. Besides the launch of SWAMITVA scheme, PM Modi will also present National Panchayat Awards 2021 on the occasion. The National Panchayat Awards 2021 are being conferred under the following categories:

Deen Dayal Upadhyay Panchayat Sashaktikaran Puraskar (to 224 Panchayats)

Nanaji Deshmukh Rashtriya Gaurav Gram Sabha Puraskar (to 30 Gram Panchayats)

Gram Panchayat Development Plan Award (to 29 Gram Panchayats)

Child-friendly Gram Panchayat Award (to 30 Gram Panchayats)

e-Panchayat Puraskar (to 12 States)

PM Modi will transfer the award money as Grants ranging from Rs 5 lakh to Rs 50 lakh. The amount will be directly transferred to the bank account of the Panchayats concerned in real time. Such a move has been taken for the first time.

From <https://egov.eletsonline.com/> 04/28/2021

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Central-West Asia

AZERBAIJAN: Approving Three-Year Strategy for Insurance Sector's Dev't

The Supervisory Board of the Azerbaijan Insurers Association (AIA) has approved a three-year strategy for the development and stimulation of the local insurance market, Trend reports citing the AIA. The document covers 2021-2023 and includes eight strategic goals, the association noted. "The concept contains areas such as improving infrastructure in the insurance sector, supporting the application of national professional standards, building an insurance culture by increasing literacy in this area, expanding international cooperation projects and increasing corporate social responsibility together with local participants in the insurance market," the AIA said. Earlier, Executive Director of the Azerbaijan Insurers Association, Elmar Mirsalayev, said that one of the important issues facing the insurance sector is the need to revise tariffs and payments for many insurance products. The Azerbaijan Insurers Association passed registration on December 29, 2006. Currently, 20 insurance companies and one reinsurance company operate in Azerbaijan.

From <https://en.trend.az/> 04/08/2021

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Azerbaijan, Turkic Council Reach Preliminary Agreement on Digital Co-op

A preliminary agreement was reached between the Cooperation Council of Turkic-Speaking States (Turkic Council) and the State Agency for Public Service and Social Innovations under the President of Azerbaijan (ASAN Service) to expand the cooperation in various spheres, the Azerbaijani Electronic Government Development Center told Trend on April 19. According to the center, the parties reached a preliminary agreement on intensifying the exchange of experience in rendering of public services and digitalization, as well as on cooperation in relevant spheres within the creation of a single platform. The ASAN service continues to implement the provisions of the memorandums of understanding signed with the relevant structures of Turkey, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan.

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Azerbaijan's State Committee on Property Issues to Hold Auction for State Properties

The State Committee on Property Issues under the Azerbaijani Ministry of Economy will hold a new auction on May 18, 2021, Trend reports on Apr.23 referring to a source in the committee. According to the source, 123 state properties, including 40 joint-stock companies, 22 small state-owned enterprises and unfinished objects, and 61 vehicles will be put up for auction. The auction can be observed online. All those wishing to partake in the auction on the official website of the committee (emlak.gov.az) or on the privatization portal (privatization.az) must, after registering,

pay a deposit of 10 percent of the initial auction price of the object, thereby obtaining the status of the customer. On the day of the auction, bidding can be joined by selecting the section 'Electronic auction' on the e-services portal (e-emdk.gov.az).

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Azerbaijan Partaking in Preparation of Legal Framework for Using Artificial Intelligence

Azerbaijan is actively involved in the preparation of the legal framework for the use of artificial intelligence (AI), Jan Kleijssen, the Director of the Information Society – Action against Crime Directorate under the Council of Europe, said, Trend reports on Apr.26. Kleijssen had made the remark during the Artificial Intelligence for Digital Governance Conference & Data Competition Confirmation online event organized by the Azerbaijani Center for the Development of Electronic Government. According to him, artificial intelligence plays an important role in the development of several sectors. The rapid development of AI fell in 2020, noted the director. "AI-based face recognition can be effectively used by law enforcement agencies. Today, in the field of using artificial intelligence, measures are being taken to legitimize a number of provisions," said Kleijssen.

He pointed out that AI must meet international safety standards and norms. "Of course, the use of artificial intelligence poses a certain risk. Some organizations, such as Amazon, have moved away from the use of AI. Several structures also restrict the use of artificial intelligence for certain people, for example, people with disabilities, women, disabled citizens," the director further said. According to him, AI is an innovation, in the field of which there are currently a number of gaps. "In order to fill these gaps, our committee has created a special working group that will develop a framework for the application of AI within the framework of legal norms. The first Convention on the Regulation of the Application of Artificial Intelligence Solutions will be created. Azerbaijan is actively involved in the process. We hope that this year we'll provide a report on the document," added Kleijssen.

From <https://www.azernews.az/> 04/26/2021

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Oceania

AUSTRALIA: Super Laws Could Unleash 'Animal Spirits'

Superannuation laws before parliament could encourage funds to chase "asset bubbles" instead of being a stabilising influence on financial markets. McKell Institute spokesman James Pawluk warns the legislative changes could also make it harder

to deal with unpredictable "black swan" events as the bill is drafted for perfectly behaved markets. "The proposed performance benchmarks will make it less viable for funds to adopt a strategy of steering clear of an asset bubble as it's forming, unless they are convinced it will burst or dissipate before the current performance period ends," Mr Pawluk told a parliamentary hearing on Thursday. He said if funds don't chase the bubble and match their peers they could be named and shamed for poor performance and be cut off from members. "The only rational strategy would be to pile in on the bubble, aiming to pull out just before it bursts or hug the index for good or bad," he said.

"These reforms will cause superannuation funds to behave more like retail investors, taking on their animal spirits, rather than acting as sophisticated long-term investors that provide a stabilising influence." Justin Arter, chief executive of building and construction industry super fund Cbus, supported the objective of preventing multiple default accounts and making sure funds meet performance benchmarks. He joined a growing coalition of think tanks, industry, professional, business groups and other funds who warn the legislation must not be passed in its current form. Mr Arter warned "stapling" to be brought in under the bill may see workers tied to a fund when entering the workforce that does not provide insurance tailored to the risk of their present job or next job. "In the case of many workers in hazardous occupations, it will leave many workers worse off," Mr Arter said.

CBus manages over \$59 billion for 771,000 members and is a top-performing fund in Australia's \$3 trillion pool of superannuation savings. Maurice Blackburn Lawyers' personal injury specialist Kim Shaw gave evidence of the high rate of suicide in construction and said industry funds - unlike retail funds - made sure specific risk profiles were covered. She was also concerned about workers being caught out by insurance policy exclusions when struck down by an injury or fatality. The legislation would also put the onus on the trustee of the superannuation fund to show why any payment is justified, and face new penalties. Ms Shaw described it as "an extraordinary intervention in the free market" by the Morrison government. CPA Australia and Chartered Accountants Australia and New Zealand said this change was a narrowing of the current best interests duty that protects account holders. Australian Institute of Superannuation Trustees spokesman David Haynes identified 14 areas where there were "holes" in the legislation and 10 big policy issues where witnesses giving evidence to the hearing said the Morrison government needed a rethink. The committee must report back to parliament by April 22 and the draft bill is scheduled to take effect on July 1. The legislation is yet to clear the lower house or the Senate.

From <https://au.news.yahoo.com> 04/08/2021

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One-Dose Vaccine Ruled Out for Australia

The federal government has decided against buying the one-dose Johnson and Johnson coronavirus vaccine to boost the nation's immunisation stocks. The government was in talks with the pharmaceutical giant, which had asked for initial approval for its vaccine from Australia's medicine regulator. But Health Minister Greg Hunt has ruled out proceeding with the purchase at this stage because it is too similar to the AstraZeneca drug. "The Janssen vaccine is an adenovirus vaccine, the same type of vaccine as the AstraZeneca vaccine," he said through a spokesperson. "The government does not intend to purchase any further adenovirus vaccines at this time." Johnson and Johnson also required a no-fault compensation scheme before it would sell vaccines to Australia, which the government was not committed to introducing.

Labor health spokesman Mark Butler said it was not good enough for the minister to announce his decision through a spokesperson. Mr Butler wants to know the reasons behind the decision, saying Australia needs to secure more vaccine deals. "With this very important vaccine that's rolling out through the US, will start to roll out through the United Kingdom very soon, if there is a decision not to go with it, what are the reasons for that?" he told the ABC. "I think this is the problem Australians and Australian businesses are having right now -- the communication channels from the government have shut down. "We've got a prime minister that's retreated to Facebook and a minister who's making announcements through a spokesperson without clear background information." Labor has spent months calling on the government to secure more vaccine deals, arguing most countries have five or six different options.

Scott Morrison has taken to Facebook to reassure Australians about the vaccine rollout. Mr Morrison has abandoned all vaccine timelines and targets after medical authorities recommended people aged under 50 get the Pfizer vaccine instead of the AstraZeneca jab, which was the country's mainstay. He claimed targets were not possible as COVID "writes its own rules". "Rather than set targets that can get knocked about by every to and fro of international supply chains and other disruptions that can occur, we are just getting on with it," he said. Mr Morrison said Australia's current rate of 1.2 million vaccinations to date was comparable to other major countries. But government figures show Australia's rollout, compared to 12 other nations, is running behind the UK, US, Singapore, Belgium, Italy and Germany.

Business groups have warned the strength of the country's economic recovery depends on the vaccine rollout. They argue if the government is no longer willing to set timetables, it should at least set milestones, so businesses can plan for the future. Qantas is closely monitoring the vaccine program as changes to the rollout threaten the resumption of international flights. The government has abandoned its target of offering all Australians their first vaccine doses by the end of October. Qantas was hoping to resume international services at that time.

NEW ZEALAND: Mental Health Amendment Bill Passes First Reading

The Government has taken a significant step towards delivering on its commitment to improve the legislation around mental health as recommended by He Ara Oranga – the report of the Government Inquiry into Mental Health and Addiction, Health Minister Andrew Little says. The Mental Health (Compulsory Assessment and Treatment) Amendment Bill (the Mental Health Act), which had its first reading in Parliament today, proposes amendments to the Mental Health Act to improve the protection of individual rights and safety of patients, for example by eliminating indefinite treatment orders, and enable more effective application of the Act,” Andrew Little said. “This is an important milestone in our wider work to transform New Zealand’s approach to mental wellbeing, which includes ensuring our legislation is fit-for-purpose and upholds New Zealanders’ rights,” Andrew Little said.

“He Ara Oranga was clear that mental health legislation in Aotearoa needs to take a human rights-based approach involving modern approaches to care and treatment. He Ara Oranga also said the current Mental Health Act has fostered archaic and risk-averse attitudes towards people with mental health conditions. “In addition to eliminating indefinite treatment orders, which have been criticised as a serious breach of human rights, the Bill will allow family members of patients to attend meetings audio-visually. “This is a significant policy reform that has clearly been called for. I’m pleased that we are able to achieve this with this Bill rather than waiting for full repeal and replacement of the whole Act later this year. “This is the first step in a full overhaul of the Mental Health Act. We will continue to progress the full repeal and replace work programme in collaboration with the sector and our communities. “The Mental Health Act is almost 30 years old and is not working the way it should. It has been widely criticised for being out of step with Te Tiriti o Waitangi and New Zealand’s other domestic and international human rights commitments,” Andrew Little said.

Minister Welcomes Bill to Remove Subsequent Child Policy

Minister for Social Development and Employment Carmel Sepuloni has welcomed the first reading of the Social Security (Subsequent Child Policy Removal) Amendment Bill in the House this evening. “Tonight’s first reading is another step on the way to removing excessive sanctions and obligations for people receiving a Main

Benefit,” says Carmel Sepuloni. “Once passed it will fulfil a key promise in our election manifesto and builds on our removal of the section 192 sanction which punished parents for not naming the other parent of their child. “Removing the Subsequent Child Policy will ensure parents are not penalised for having an additional child while on a benefit. The current policy unfairly punishes children who would benefit from having their mother at home during their development years.

“We know that people receiving a Main Benefit often want to work. But we also recognise that forcing a parent to seek employment while they are caring for very young children, reduces flexibility for them to spend valuable time with their children, during the first 1000 days of their life. “Tonight’s first reading is another step towards reforming our Welfare system and ensuring all people receiving income support are treated with dignity and respect,” says Carmel Sepuloni. Once the Bill is passed a transitional period of 28 days will be in place either side of the policy removal date. This transition period covers new Benefit applications and changes in client circumstances, and will ensure a streamlined process for affected clients. Clients who are affected by the policy’s removal will be contacted by the Ministry of Social Development closer to the time.

From <https://livenews.co.nz> 04/06/2021

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Drug-Testing Law to Be Made Permanent

Interim legislation that is already proving to keep people safer from drugs will be made permanent, Health Minister Andrew Little says. Research by Victoria University, on behalf of the Ministry of Health, shows that the Government’s decision in December to make it legal for drug-checking services to operate at festivals over the summer is changing people’s behaviour. “The Drug and Substance Checking Legislation Act 2020 – known as the Drug Checking Act – is already having an impact,” Andrew Little said. “It allows voluntary organisations like KnowYourStuff to test drugs at events like music festivals to verify they are what people think they are, without running foul of the law. “The Drug Checking Act will expire in December, and experts are telling us it should be made permanent,” Andrew Little said.

The Victoria University research says that 68 per cent of surveyed festival-goers who used drug-testing services changed their behaviour as a result. Some disposed of the drugs that had been tested, some reduced the amount of drugs they took, and most [i](87 per cent) said that as a result of talking to the testing team, they understood more about the harmful behaviour involved in taking the drugs. “Testing the drugs has also made it easier for medical staff to treat people who have overdosed, because they know what they’re dealing with,” Andrew Little said. Testing as a result of the new law has revealed that large quantities of drugs being sold as MDMA, or ecstasy, is actually synthetic cathinones, a dangerous drug known also

known as bath salts linked to deaths overseas and hospitalisations in New Zealand. Andrew Little said new legislation would be passed this year so that drug-testing services are not left in a legal grey-area.

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Construction Skills Action Plan Delivering Early on Targets

The Construction Skills Action Plan has delivered early on its overall target of supporting an additional 4,000 people into construction-related education and employment, says Minister for Building and Construction Poto Williams. Since the Plan was launched in 2018, more than 9,300 people have taken up education or employment opportunities in the construction sector through cross-government initiatives. “This is an important milestone and a positive step towards meeting New Zealand’s current and future construction needs,” says Poto Williams. “Our priority is addressing New Zealand’s current skills shortage, so that we have the capability and capacity to meet increasing demand. By surpassing our overall target to get an extra 4,000 people into the sector, we are confident we are well on the way to creating the conditions for a high-performing construction sector in Aotearoa New Zealand.”

The Construction Skills Action Plan, managed by the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE), addresses issues around size and skills of the workforce to ensure the construction industry is well placed to deliver the buildings that New Zealand needs now and in the future. The Plan is a three-year programme of initiatives led by the Ministry of Social Development, Tertiary Education Commission and MBIE. “I’m also pleased to report that three of the initiatives have met their three-year targets early – Mana in Mahi has achieved more than 2,200 placements in the construction sector, Skills for Industry has supported more than 1,600 participants, and Growing Careers and Credentials has supported more than 5,200 enrolments,” says Poto Williams.

“I’m proud of what this Plan has achieved so far – we are reaching into our communities to give people the support they need to build their own futures in construction.” Further initiatives to grow the capacity and capability of the workforce are being supported through the Construction Sector Accord’s people development workstream via the Accord Transformation Plan. The workstream is focussed on attracting a more diverse range of people into construction opportunities, growing the size of the workforce and supporting the upskilling of people and businesses in construction.

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Emissions Report Shows Urgent Action Needed

Every part of Government will need to take urgent action to bring down emissions, the Minister for Climate Change, James Shaw said today in response to the recent rise in New Zealand's greenhouse emissions. The latest annual inventory of New Zealand's greenhouse gas emissions shows that both gross and net emissions increased by 2 percent in the 12 months from the end of 2018. "We've known about the potential impacts of global warming for decades, and yet it is only this Government that has taken action to cut New Zealand's emissions. Whilst we can see from this report that we are acting in the right areas, it also shows we need to step up our response. The time for delay is over," James Shaw said. The Ministry for the Environment's Greenhouse Gas Inventory is the official annual estimate of greenhouse gas emissions and removals in New Zealand since 1990. The report released today includes emissions estimates up to the end of 2019.

The report released today includes emissions estimates up to the end of 2019. It therefore doesn't show the impact of measures introduced by the Government since 2019. These include the clean car standard; a ban on coal-fired boilers; putting a cap on the Emissions Trading Scheme (meaning emissions must fall every year); replacing coal-fired boilers in schools and hospitals; and investing billions in new rail, buses, cycle-ways and walking infrastructure. "Last week thousands of young people joined the latest School Strike for Climate to remind us of this – and to call for urgent action to address the climate emergency we declared last year. Today we can see that they are right to be concerned. "Whereas the period from 2018 to 2019 has taken us further away from meeting the targets we committed to in law, on average New Zealand's emissions have remained flat for the last fifteen years.

"What this makes absolutely clear is that every part of Government must now come together and help to deliver an Emissions Reduction Plan in line with what the Climate Change Commission recommends. If we can do that, then we can reverse the current trend and finally bring emissions down in line with what the science requires. That plan will need to cover every part of the economy – including, but not limited to, finance, energy, transport, and agriculture. "When the Climate Change Commission released its draft advice in January I said that, because of the legislative and institutional framework we have put in place and the roadmap the Commission had provided, I had never felt more confident that a climate-friendly, prosperous future for New Zealand was within reach. "Whether or not we get there is going to depend on the decisions that we make over the next few years. Our best chance to take the actions that will bring emissions down is now; and we clearly have a lot to do," James Shaw said.

The increase in New Zealand emissions in 2018 are mainly due to emission increases in manufacturing industries and construction, public electricity and heat production. "The fact that emissions increased in these sectors shows that the

Government was right last week to announce a ban on new coal-fired boilers and plans to phase-out existing coal-fired boilers by 2037, as well as transitioning away from the use of other fossil fuels,” James Shaw said. Further information Gross emissions refers to New Zealand’s total emissions. Net emissions are gross emissions minus emission removals from land use, land use change, and forestry. The New Zealand Greenhouse Gas Inventory tracks human-generated emissions and removals that have occurred in New Zealand since 1990. It covers carbon dioxide, methane, nitrous oxide and fluorinated gases.

The inventory is one of four current greenhouse gas emissions statistics. The others are: Stats NZ’s experimental quarterly estimates of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, which, because of the time lag producing the Greenhouse Gas Inventory provides more timely data on New Zealand’s production-based emissions. The latest release was published on 8 April. Greenhouse gases by industries and households. This covers only gross emissions. It works by reconfiguring inventory data to provide information on ‘who’ within the economy is emitting, and is designed to understand the economic and social context of emissions Consumption-based emissions, which shows emissions embodied in goods and services consumed by economic residents The 2021 Greenhouse Gas Inventory shows gross emissions were 82.3 million tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent (Mt CO₂-e) in 2019, up 2 per cent from 2018. New Zealand’s net emissions in 2019 were 54.9 Mt CO₂-e, which is also an increase of 2 per cent from 2018.

Gross emissions in 2019 comprised 46 per cent carbon dioxide, 42 per cent methane, 10 per cent nitrous oxide and 2 per cent fluorinated gases. Agriculture and energy sectors were the two largest contributors to New Zealand’s gross emissions in 2019, at 48 per cent and 42 per cent, respectively. Between 1990 and 2019, gross emissions increased by 26 per cent (17.2 Mt CO₂-e). This increase is mostly due to increases in methane from dairy cattle digestive systems and carbon dioxide from road transport. The Inventory is one of New Zealand’s mandatory reporting obligations under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Kyoto Protocol. A copy of the full inventory report is available here. It takes about 15 months to collect and analyse the data for each year and prepare it for publication. Therefore, the effects of the COVID-19 outbreak on emissions will not be fully known until the inventory submission due in 2022.

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Government Takes Step Forward on Counter Terrorism Laws

The Government has introduced the Counter-Terrorism Legislation Bill, designed to boost New Zealand’s ability to respond to a wider range of terrorist activities. The Bill strengthens New Zealand’s counter-terrorism legislation and ensures that the right

legislative tools are available to intervene early and prevent harm. “This is the Government’s first step to implementing recommendation 18 of the Royal Commission into the Terrorist Attack on Christchurch masjidain on 15 March 2019, which called for a review of all legislation related to New Zealand’s counter-terrorism effort to ensure it is fit-for-purpose and enables Public sector agencies to operate effectively,” Justice Minister Kris Faafoi said. “The crimes perpetrated against members of our Muslim community on March 15 two years ago brought terrorism to this country in a way we had never seen before. “I acknowledge the deep grief of the families and communities who lost loved ones, as well as those who were injured or severely traumatised.

“The attack also mirrored how the nature of terrorism has been changing internationally, involving lone actors rather than organised terrorist groups. We need to ensure our laws can respond to that,” Kris Faafoi said. The Bill amends the Terrorism Suppression Act 2002 and Terrorism Suppression (Control Orders) Act 2019. The proposed changes include: making amendments to clarify the definition of a “terrorist act”; create a new offence to criminalise planning or preparation for a terrorist act; create a new offence to more clearly criminalise terrorist weapons and combat training; create a new offence for international travel to carry out terrorist activities; expand the criminal offence of financing terrorism to include broader forms of material support; and extend the eligibility for a control order to include individuals who have completed a prison sentence for a terrorism-related offence if they continue to present a real risk of engaging in terrorism-related activities. Once the Bill has its first reading, the next step is for the Justice Select Committee to call for public submissions on the Bill. “I encourage everyone to have their say on this important piece of legislation,” Kris Faafoi said.

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NZ Upgrade Programme Revs Up Economic Recovery

Transport Minister Michael Wood today marked the start of construction on the New Zealand Upgrade Programme’s Papakura to Drury South project on Auckland’s Southern Motorway, which will create hundreds of jobs and support Auckland’s economic recovery. The SH1 Papakura to Drury South project will give more transport choices by providing a third lane in each direction, a shared path alongside the western side which will link in with the city-wide network, wide shoulders for future bus services and improved local road connections across the motorway. Michael Wood said the NZ Upgrade Programme (NZUP) is part of the Government’s plan to create jobs and boost the economy to help our COVID-19 economic recovery. “About 750 construction staff are expected to be working at some point on the first stage of Papakura to Drury South. Around 110 people are already working on the

project, helping to boost South Auckland's economy.

"This project will mean a quicker and safer commute for many, as well as make the route more resilient with enhanced flood and seismic protections. The shared path will give more people the option to leave the car at home, helping to reduce congestion. "The second Auckland, and thirteenth overall, NZUP transport project starting construction is a significant milestone for the programme, which is investing more than \$6.8 billion in road, rail, public transport and walking and cycling infrastructure to get our cities moving, save lives and future-proof the economy. "NZUP will play a vital role in our economic recovery. Our transport investments will have major flow on effects – it'll support around 1,400 direct full-time jobs for each year of the programme and support an estimated 5,200 jobs in the wider supply chain and economy.

"Other NZUP projects, including SH1/Walnut Ave in Ashburton and stage one of Takitimu North Link in Tauranga, are expected to start construction this year. Work is well underway on Auckland's third main rail line project as well as enabling works for the electrification of the rail line between Papakura and Pukekohe," Michael Wood said. The Papakura to Drury South project will be consented and constructed in phases over the next five years. The first stage works are within the existing motorway boundaries from the north side of Papakura interchange to the BP motorway service centre north of Otūwairoa (Slippery) Creek. They will extend additional lanes being investigated for potential use for T3 and/or freight. Further stages will be lodged and consented progressively in 2021 and 2022.

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Asia-Pacific

World Bank Hands Over Personal Protective Equipment Worth \$1 MLN to the Ministry of Health

The World Bank Country Manager Andrei Mikhnev today handed over personal protective equipment (PPE) worth about US\$1 million to the Ministry of Health. The PPE, purchased under the World Bank's Pandemic Emergency Response Facility Grant, will be used by the public officers at high-risk screening points and health care providers in selected areas.

The PPE set includes:

Single use gloves - 4,103,000 pieces

Single use masks -218,000 pieces
Protective clothing -36,000 pieces
N95 masks -28,500 pieces
Glasses – 6,000 pairs
Face shields -6,000 pieces.

“We are happy to see that this batch of personal protective equipment is delivered to Mongolia at the right moment – the moment when it is needed the most,” - said Andrei Mikhnev, World Bank Country Manager for Mongolia. “During the past year, the World Bank has provided financial and non-financial assistance to support different aspects of the work that Mongolia is doing to overcome the COVID-19 crisis. We look forward to continuing our cooperation with the Ministry of Health and other government organizations to ensure that they are fully equipped to deal with COVID-19 pandemic.” “On behalf of the Government of Mongolia and on behalf of all the health sector workers in Mongolia, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the World Bank for this assistance,” – said M. Battuvshin, Deputy Minister of Health. “It is also important to note that the PPE provided to protect health sector workers and other staff working on the pandemic frontlines is particularly important and timely as the COVID-19 outbreak is spreading rapidly in Mongolia’s capital and provinces.”

In addition to the grant financing, the World Bank has been helping Mongolia meet emergency needs in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic and better prepare for future health crises through Mongolia COVID-19 Emergency Response and Health System Preparedness project, approved in April 2020. Under the project, diagnostic and respiratory equipment and intensive care equipment for reanimation units have been provided for provincial and district hospitals in 21 provinces and 9 districts. Most necessary medical and laboratory equipment to strengthen COVID-19 response has also been provided to Khan-Uul District Maternal and Children’s Hospital of Khan-Uul District, 3rd General Hospital, and Mongolia-Japan Teaching Hospital. These equipment have helped strengthen diagnostic and treatment capacity, patient care and laboratory of the hospitals. In addition, the World Bank Board of Directors approved in February 2021 an additional financing of US\$50.7 million to help provide affordable and equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines and to further strengthen preparedness and response activities.

From <https://www.worldbank.org/> 04/01/2021

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Masatsugu Asakawa to Stand for Reelection as ADB President

Asian Development Bank (ADB) President Masatsugu Asakawa today expressed his intention to stand for reelection as President for the 5-year term after his current term ends on 23 November 2021. ADB Presidents are nominated from ADB’s regional members for a 5-year term and elected by the ADB Board of Governors. “ADB has

worked closely with our developing member countries (DMCs) throughout the global pandemic to design and implement effective solutions for Asia and the Pacific in a timely and tailored manner. We have also continued efforts to address critical long-term development agendas such as gender, climate change, and private sector development, as directed by our Strategy 2030,” Mr. Asakawa said. “If reelected, I commit to strengthening ADB’s focus on supporting DMCs’ recovery from the COVID-19 crisis, to deepening our partnerships with all ADB members and peer organizations, and to ensuring staff well-being. ADB will make every effort to ensure our DMCs can sustain the impressive gains they have achieved and continue their progress toward a resilient, green, and inclusive future.”

Mr. Asakawa was elected as President by the Board of Governors on 30 November 2019 and assumed office on 17 January 2020 to serve the remaining term of his predecessor, Takehiko Nakao. Under his leadership, ADB has made significant contributions to the region’s response to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and recovery planning. In April 2020, ADB announced a \$20 billion comprehensive response package, covering both sovereign and nonsovereign assistance, to help its DMCs mitigate the impacts of the pandemic. In December, ADB launched the \$9 billion Asia Pacific Vaccine Access Facility to provide rapid and equitable support to its DMCs as they procure and deliver effective and safe COVID-19 vaccines. ADB also concluded a successful replenishment of more than \$4 billion for its Asian Development Fund and Technical Assistance Special Fund which are providing critical grant resources to help its most vulnerable DMCs overcome the pandemic and address various long-term development goals.

ADB’s total commitments in 2020 reached a record high of \$31.6 billion, with just over half supporting operations to respond to the pandemic. The remainder was committed to address long-term development issues such as the gender equality gap, the impacts of climate change, and investments in quality infrastructure. These achievements were supported by record-high cofinancing of \$16.4 billion and record-high capital market borrowings of \$35.8 billion. At the institutional level, Mr. Asakawa led ADB staff as they adapted to new work arrangements and continued implementation of the organization’s digital transformation. ADB also launched a new Knowledge Management Action Plan which will enable the development and delivery of the most practical and cutting-edge knowledge solutions to its DMCs, and a culture transformation initiative to empower staff and Management to achieve the goals of Strategy 2030, ADB’s corporate strategy.

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East Asia

CHINA: Vice Premier Stresses Establishing Modern Fiscal, Tax

System

Chinese Vice Premier Han Zheng on Thursday called for solid work on fiscal and tax priorities, urging efforts to establish a modern fiscal and tax system. The Chinese economy is realizing a recovery growth, and this is a hard-won result, said Han, also a member of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee. He made the remarks at a seminar on the modern fiscal and tax system. As the country still faces uncertainties in economic growth, efforts should be made to analyze the economic situation comprehensively, Han said. He urged resolutely curbing the increase in implicit local government debts and prudently reducing the existing debts. The housing market should be better regulated, and efforts should be made to promote its stable and sound development, Han said. He noted that the real estate sector should not serve as a short-term stimulus to the economy. He also stressed defusing the risks of local small and medium-sized financial institutions under the law and regulations and ensuring the payment of old-age pensions on time and in full.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 04/15/2021

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CPC Issues New Rules on Work of Primary-level Organizations in Universities

The Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee has issued a set of revised regulations on the work rules for the Party's primary-level organizations in universities. It also issued a circular, which was published Thursday, calling for efforts to prioritize Party-building work in universities. It said the overall Party leadership of universities and colleges should be upheld and strengthened and the systems of the CPC's organization, rules and regulations and work mechanism should be further improved. It also called for enhanced efforts to integrate Party building in universities and the development of the country's higher education to see high-quality development in both respects.

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Chinese Vice Premier Stresses Building Modern Vocational Education System

Chinese Vice Premier Sun Chunlan has called for stepping up the building of a modern vocational education system to support economic and social development as well as enhancing the competitiveness of the country. Sun, also a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, made the

remarks during an inspection tour in east China's Anhui Province from Thursday to Friday. During the inspection, Sun visited technician colleges and enterprises to learn about reform in teaching and cooperation between schools and enterprises. Vocational schools should have greater say over professional settings, the evaluation and employment of teachers, and teaching reforms, Sun said, calling for efforts to improve the quality of higher vocational schools and promote bachelor-level vocational education. She also stressed improving policies to encourage cooperation between schools and enterprises, and attracting more technical personnel with practical experience to serve as teachers in vocational schools.

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China Sees Major Progress in Building Law-based Government: Ministry

China has announced that important progress was achieved in advancing the building of a law-based government. According to the Ministry of Justice, a mechanism for conducting checks and oversight over the exercise of administrative power has been put in place. China has seen a refined government information disclosure system and a significant decline in illegal administrative actions, it added. The ministry's statistics showed that in 2020, a total of 242,000 administrative review cases were handled, with 14.6 percent of those had been ordered to be rectified. Official data of last year also showed year-on-year decreases of 11 percent and 7.4 percent in regard to the numbers of administrative actions ordered to be rectified through the processes of administrative reconsideration and court review, respectively.

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Chinese Vice Premier Stresses Efforts to Deepen Reform, Opening-up

Chinese Vice Premier Han Zheng has called for unswerving efforts to deepen reform and opening-up and push forward high-quality development during an inspection tour to south China's Guangdong Province. The three-day tour, lasting from Friday to Sunday, took Han to the cities of Guangzhou, Shantou and Chaozhou, where he visited Guangzhou Tower, Haizhu Wetland and a cultural heritage museum, among other spots. Han, also a member of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, stressed the protection of traditional culture and historical sites in city renovations, and urged more efforts to improve the water environment. The vice premier also visited an innovation and

entrepreneurship incubation base in Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, where he talked with young people from Hong Kong and Macao and urged local authorities to improve policies to address their difficulties in housing, education and healthcare. Speaking to researchers at the Guangzhou International Bio Island, Han encouraged them to actively explore technological innovation to make a greater contribution to public health. During the inspection, Han also stressed addressing housing problems in big cities and passing on the revolutionary tradition.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 04/25/2021

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China to Establish Ecological Product Value-realization Mechanism

China has issued a guideline on setting up and improving the mechanism to realize the value of ecological products amid its environmental protection and green development efforts. The country vows to establish a basic policy framework for value realization of the products by 2025, according to the guideline jointly issued by the General Office of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and the General Office of the State Council. Problems related to measuring, mortgages, transactions, and value realization of ecological products will be effectively solved by 2025, and an interest-oriented mechanism for environmental protection will take a basic shape. A sound mechanism for realizing the value of the products will be formed by 2035, and green production and a green way of life will be widely adopted in the country, said the guideline. Measures will promote the trading of rights and interests related to ecological resources, such as improving the carbon-trading schemes, piloting carbon emissions trading, and fine-tuning the system for paid use of pollutant discharge rights. The guideline also stressed more support for green finance, encouraging banks to increase medium- and long-term loan support for entities managing or developing ecological products and reduce financing costs reasonably.

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China to Improve County Business Systems, Streamline IPR-related Administration

China will strengthen the building of county-level business systems and introduce new measures to streamline administration in the field of intellectual property rights (IPR), a State Council executive meeting chaired by Premier Li Keqiang decided on Tuesday. To facilitate circulation, increase farmers' incomes and boost rural consumption, the meeting urged efforts to support the transformation and upgrading

of commercial facilities in counties and promote the growth of the rural commerce network. China will support qualified villages and towns in building business centers that integrate such functions as shopping, entertainment and leisure, while ramping up the development of new rural convenience stores. The meeting encouraged enterprises to develop products and services tailored to the needs of farmers. Industries including rural accommodation and leisure agriculture will be supported to attract urban residents to spend in rural areas. More work will be done to bolster the building of specialized markets in producing areas, expand the coverage of rural e-commerce and facilitate the effective connection between rural households and the market, according to the meeting.

Measures should be taken to ramp up land and financial support for commercial facility construction in county areas. The meeting also stressed the importance of continuously deepening the reform of government functions and streamlining administration in the IPR-related field, so as to stimulate greater impetus and vitality for innovation. It urged efforts to further reduce the period required for reviewing trademarks and patents, while improving the quality of IPR by correcting the tendency of simply pursuing quantity. Basic IPR data should be made public on the premise of ensuring data security to support enterprises' activities in research and development, as well as innovation. In terms of IPR protection, the meeting emphasized whole-chain protection and called for cracking down on illegal agencies, malicious trademark registration and irregular patent applications, in line with the law.

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Top Political Advisor Calls for High-quality Education System

China's top political advisor Wang Yang has urged efforts to build a high-quality education system and boost scientific and technological strength. Wang, a member of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and chairman of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, made the remarks during his research tour to east China's Shanghai and Zhejiang Province from Monday to Wednesday. Wang urged solid implementation of the strategy for invigorating China through science and education, the strategy for developing a quality workforce, and the innovation-driven development strategy. During the research tour, Wang visited universities, research institutions, laboratories, sci-tech platforms, high-tech companies and local communities in Shanghai and Zhejiang. Wang called for properly handling the relations between government and market in allocating resources for innovation, and recognizing the leading role of enterprises in innovation. Efforts should be made to cultivate more high-quality talents for basic research, and support the development of high-quality research universities, Wang said.

SOUTH KOREA: Public Agencies Required to Purchase Only Green Cars

Public organizations will have to choose only eco-friendly cars when purchasing new automobiles, in line with the country's green energy drive, the industry ministry said Tuesday. "In order to speed up the transition, it is necessary to create new demands," the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy said in a statement. The eco-friendly cars refer to electric vehicles (EVs) and hydrogen fuel-cell cars, as well as hybrid models. South Korea launched a rule in 2016 that required public bodies to have eco-friendly cars take up 50 percent of their new vehicles, which was revised up to 70 percent in 2018. The country plans to have eco-friendly cars, including hydrogen fuel cell cars, take up 30 percent of the total automobiles registered in the country by 2030, rising sharply from the current estimate of 3 percent. The government currently plans to require that green cars take up a certain portion of the new automobiles of major buyers, including rental car operators and conglomerates, as well.

From <http://www.koreaherald.com> 04/27/2021

South-East Asia

SINGAPORE: PM Announces Cabinet Reshuffle

Singaporean Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong announced here Friday a cabinet reshuffle, with seven of the 15 ministries to be headed by new ministers starting from May 15. Minister for Education and the Second Minister for Finance Lawrence Wong will replace Heng Swee Keat as the Finance Minister. Ong Ye Kung will transfer from the Minister for Transport to the Minister for Health, and co-chair the multi-ministry task force handling COVID-19 with Lawrence Wong. Meanwhile, Chan Chun Sing will relinquish his post as the Minister for Trade and Industry to become the Ministry of Education. Health Minister Gan Kim Yong will preside over the Ministry of Trade and Industry. Communications and Information Minister S. Iswaran will be Minister for Transport, with Manpower Minister Josephine Teo replacing him at the ministry. Second Minister for Manpower Tan See Leng will move up to head the Ministry of Manpower. Speaking at a press conference, Lee noted that he is making a more extensive reshuffle than is usual this early in the term of government, which began last July after the general election. Lee said he had considered making these changes after the general election, but the country was still in the thick of battling COVID-19. According to him, he is now able to do so as the COVID-19 situation is

more stable. After quitting his post as the Finance Minister, Heng Swee Keat will continue to act as the Deputy Prime Minister and the Coordinating Minister for Economic Policies. He will also continue to co-chair the Joint Council for Bilateral Cooperation, the highest bilateral platform between Singapore and China.

From <http://www.xinhuanet.com/> 04/23/2021

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VIETNAM: Nguyễn Xuân Phúc Elected as State President

The National Assembly (NA) elected Nguyễn Xuân Phúc, Politburo member of the 13th tenure and a deputy of the 14th legislature, as State President for the 2016-2021 term on April 5 morning, during the 14th legislature's 11th sitting. With 468 approval votes by all deputies present, or 97.5 per cent of the total NA deputies, the legislature passed a resolution on the election. The resolution came into force right after it won the approval of the NA. President Phuc was born on July 20, 1954 in the central province of Quảng Nam. He was Politburo member of the 11th, 12th and 13th tenures, member of the Party Central Committee of the 10th, 11th, 12th and 13th tenures, and NA deputy of the 11th, 13th and 14th tenures.

From <https://vietnamnews.vn/> 04/05/2021

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Vietnam's Top Legislature Elects New State Vice President, Senior Legislators

The 14th National Assembly (NA) of Vietnam, the country's top legislature, on Tuesday elected Vo Thi Anh Xuan as the country's vice president. A resolution was adopted by the top legislature with an approval rate of 93.13 percent to elect Xuan as the new state vice president at the ongoing 11th session of the 14th NA, Vietnam News Agency reported. With the resolution coming into force immediately, Xuan officially replaced Dang Thi Ngoc Thinh, who was relieved from duty by the NA on Tuesday morning. Vo Thi Anh Xuan, born on Jan. 8, 1970, joined the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) in 1994. She had been secretary of An Giang's provincial CPV committee since October 2015. Also on Tuesday, the legislators cast secret ballots to relieve several members of the NA Standing Committee, chairpersons of some NA committees, the NA's secretary general and the state auditor general from their posts before electing their successors. On Monday, the NA elected Nguyen Xuan Phuc as the new president of Vietnam and Pham Minh Chinh as the new prime minister.

From http://www.xinhuanet.com 04/06/2021

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Vietnam's Top Legislature Relieves Cabinet Members

The 14th National Assembly (NA) of Vietnam, the country's top legislature, on Wednesday relieved 13 cabinet members from their posts. A resolution was adopted by the top legislature with an approval rate of 94.58 percent to relieve Vietnamese Deputy Prime Minister Trinh Dinh Dung and 12 other cabinet members from their posts at the ongoing 11th session of the 14th NA, Vietnam News Agency reported. The Minister of National Defense Ngo Xuan Lich, the Minister of Foreign Affairs Pham Binh Minh, and the Minister of Finance Dinh Tien Dung, who was appointed secretary of the Hanoi Municipal Communist Party of Vietnam Committee on April 3, were also among the relieved. Following the adoption of the resolution which came into force immediately, Vietnamese legislators listened to and debated on a nomination list to the posts proposed by Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh. The deputies will vote on new cabinet members on Thursday morning. On Wednesday morning, the lawmakers also cast secret ballots to elect a few other senior officials, including chairpersons of the NA's committees, the secretary general of the NA and the state auditor general. On Monday, the NA elected Nguyen Xuan Phuc as the new Vietnamese president and Pham Minh Chinh as the new prime minister.

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NA Approves Appointment of Two Deputy Prime Ministers

The National Assembly (NA) on Thursday approved a resolution ratifying the Prime Minister's proposal on the appointment of two Deputy Prime Ministers. The procedure was conducted as part of the 14th National Assembly's ongoing 11th session. Lê Minh Khái and Lê Văn Thành officially became new Deputy PMs for the 2016-2021 tenure after the resolution was passed by the 14th legislature with "yes" votes from 455 out of 459 participating lawmakers, equivalent to 94.79 per cent of the total number of NA deputies. Khái, born in 1964, is a member of the Party Central Committee in the 12th and 13th tenures, Secretary of the 13th-tenure Party Central Committee, and deputy to the 14th NA. Thanh, born in 1962, is also a member of the Party Central Committee in the 12th and 13th tenures, and deputy to the 12th legislature. At the working session, NA Chairman Vương Đình Huệ said he believed that Khái and Thành will make greater efforts to excellently fulfill tasks in their new posts assigned by the Party, State and people. With the appointments of Khái and Thành, the new cabinet will have a total of five deputy PMs, with Phạm Bình Minh, Vũ Đức Đam and Trương Hoà Bình retaining their posts. The 11th session, the last sitting of the 14th NA, is scheduled to wrap up latter on April 8.

From <https://vietnamnews.vn> 04/08/2021

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Phạm Minh Chính Elected Prime Minister of Việt Nam

The National Assembly (NA) adopted a resolution on the election of Phạm Minh Chính as the Prime Minister for the 2016 – 2021 tenure on Monday afternoon. The resolution won the support of 462 of the 466 legislators present at the sitting, equivalent to 96.25 per cent of the total NA deputies, and took effect immediately after the adoption. "I would like to express my gratitude to the National Assembly for the confidence in electing me to be the Prime Minister of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam. This is an honour for me personally, and also a very heavy responsibility entrusted by the Party, State and People," Chính said in his statement. "I am aware that the Government's activities have a very important position and role in the cause of national construction and development, in defending the independence, sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of the country," he added. In response to the request to continue promoting the innovation in the spirit of the Resolution of the Party's 13th Congress, Chính said the Government and the Prime Minister are well aware of their responsibility to inherit and promote the achievements achieved by the previous Government and Prime Minister. In the near future, the new Government will focus on five main tasks.

Firstly, building an action plan to concretise the implementation of the Party's Resolution.

Secondly, continuing promoting the building of a socialist rule-of-law state: of the people, by the people, for the people; upholding the spirit of law-abiding; strengthening discipline in the State administrative apparatus and society.

Third, effectively managing, mobilising and utilising all resources for national development; promoting the development of strategic infrastructure; attaching importance to the national digital transformation and the digital economic development on the basis of science and technology development.

Fourth, resolutely and firmly defending independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity, and ensuring national defence, security and social order and safety.

Finally, building mechanisms, policies, and conditions to promote the value of human strength, culture and national solidarity; turning human resources into an important resource and driving force in the development and construction of the country. In addition, building effective solutions to improve the quality of healthcare, education and training; attaching importance to developing high-quality human resources, attracting and using talent.

"With the new responsibility assigned to me, I vow to bring my best, overcome all difficulties and challenges; inherit and promote the traditions and precious experiences of my predecessors through the ages," Chính said. Phạm Minh Chính, born on December 10, 1958, was a member of the Party Central Committee in the 11th, 12th and 13th tenures, a Politburo member in the 12th and 13th tenures, Secretary of the Party Central Committee in the 12th tenure, Chairman of the Party Central Committee's Organisation Commission and head of the committee's

sub-committee for internal political protection in the 12th tenure, an NA deputy in the 14th tenure, and Chairman of the Viet Nam – Japan Parliamentary Friendship Group of the 14th NA.

From <https://vietnamnews.vn/> 04/09/2021

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Ministry of Health Sets Up Five Inspection Teams for COVID-19 Control in Southwest

The Ministry of Health has set up five inspection teams for COVID-19 prevention and control measures, including vaccinations, in the southwest from April 18-30. The teams will visit Cần Thơ and the provinces of Kiên Giang, Vĩnh Long, Đồng Tháp, Long An, An Giang, Tiền Giang, Bến Tre, Trà Vinh, Hậu Giang, Bạc Liêu, Cà Mau and Sóc Trăng. On April 18, a team led by Minister of Health Nguyễn Thanh Long travelled to Kiên Giang Province to meet the local Steering Committee for COVID-19 Prevention and Control and checked activity at the international border gate and stations, quarantine areas, and a health centre in Hà Tiên city. Speaking at the meeting, Hà Văn Phúc, head of the province's Department of Health, said that COVID-19 prevention and control at the border has been very stressful because neighbouring countries are seeing an increase in cases. The province is at high risk of community transmission, Phúc said. The control of migration through trails, border crossings and the sea is difficult, he added. The province has already found 142 illegal immigrants. The working conditions for soldiers at border stations are also difficult as they have to ensure strict control of migrants via the border and sea, he said. All COVID-19 patients who enter the province are brought to Hà Tiên District Health Centre for treatment, he said, adding that the centre is small and can treat only 30 patients.

Phúc said the ministry should allow the province to set up a field hospital. The next day, on April 19, Chợ Rẫy Hospital in HCM City sent a team including 13 medical officials to the province to help set up the field hospital and COVID-19 prevention and control activities. The province has three COVID-19 testing machines with the maximum capacity of 600 samples per day, but this number does not ensure rapid tracing as the ministry has required, he added. Phúc said the ministry should give priority to providing two more real-time reverse transcription polymerase chain reaction machines and other items related to COVID-19 tests. Moreover, the province needs 20,000 rapid tests for COVID-19 diagnosis and 10 million pairs of medical gloves. Phúc also suggested that the ministry should give priority to providing COVID-19 vaccines in the next phase of the national vaccination drive. Minister of Health Nguyễn Thanh Long said that the province should prepare for worst-case scenarios if COVID breaks out again. Prevention and control of illegal migrants via the border and sea should be strengthened, Long said, adding that communication to encourage local people to become collaborators in COVID-19

prevention and control should be enhanced. He told the HCM City Pasteur Institute and relevant agencies to help the province upgrade its testing capacity.

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Tax Watchdog Eyes Further Reforms in the Next Ten-Year Period

The tax watchdog was eyeing further reforms in the 2021-30 period with focus on simplifying tax procedures and applying information technology in management to contribute to improving the business climate and bringing Việt Nam to the top 30 in the world in terms of the ease of doing business. Director of the General Department of Taxation Cao Anh Tuấn said that the tax reform strategy in the 2021-30 period aimed at two goals, improving and synchronising tax policies to implement socio-economic development goals and developing a modern and streamlined tax system that operates efficiently. Tuấn said that reforms must ensure the stability, sustainability and transparency of the tax collection revenue while setting up a competitive economic environment appropriate to the country's integration and development process. The highest goal of reforms was to promote production and increase the competitiveness and encourage Vietnamese enterprises to participate in global value chains to create high added value. Accordingly, the corporate income tax would be kept stable at 20 per cent as currently to the end of 2025 and adjustments could be put under consideration from 2026 depending on the Vietnamese economy's situation and the global context.

Regarding value added tax, it was necessary to narrow down the subjects for tax exemption to expand the tax base, from 20 categories of goods and services in 2025 to 12 in 2030. He added that the efforts would be made to speed up the development of an e-government towards a digital government by 2030 and bring Việt Nam to the top 50 countries in the world and third in ASEAN in terms of e-government and digital economy. The Ministry of Finance recently asked the General Department of Taxation to continue to strengthen the application of information technology in tax management. Specifically, priority would be placed on expanding the application of electronic invoices, electronic tax payment, registration fee payment and individual tax payment. By 2022, the tax watchdog targeted that all administrative tax procedures would be conducted electronically with connection to the national public service portal at level 4. Phi Văn Tuấn, Deputy Director of the General Department of Taxation, said that it was important to keep a close watch on the compilation of tax policies to ensure that the administrative reforms really create a more favourable environment for taxpayers and there would be no new procedures. Currently, the tax watchdog was developing circulars and decrees to guide the implementation of the Law on Tax Management No 38, Tuấn said, adding that close watch was being placed on the process to ensure that no new procedures arise in the new circulars. The General Department of Taxation's report showed that electronic tax declaration

was implemented in all 63 provinces and cities nationwide. The tax watchdog also cooperated with 50 commercial banks to facilitate electronic tax payment and refund.

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South Asia

INDIA: Delhi to Get Cloud-based Healthcare Management System

In a high-level review meeting for the healthcare system in Delhi on November 11, Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal directed all the healthcare officials to ensure the implementation of Health Information Management System (HIMS) and e-health cards in all the hospitals run by the Delhi government. The CM asked for the complete implementation of the technology-based solution by August 2021. *kejriwalAs reported by Times of India, CM Kejriwal said, "It is our duty to ensure that there is no inconvenience to the people of Delhi. This management system should be able to provide all healthcare facilities to the people." Every individual will be issued a and e-card which will then be integrated into the HIMS and they all will be able to claim benefits of government healthcare services, he added. Once the systems come in place, the national capital will become the only city in the country to have a cloud-based health management system. The cloud-based system will integrate services like hospital administration, planning & budgeting, services for patients, healthcare delivery, backend processes, and more.*

From <https://smartcity.eletsonline.com/> 04/13/2021

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SRI LANKA: Ministry of Technology Comes Under President's Purview

In accordance with the revision of subjects under Ministries on November 20th, Ministries of Defence and the Technology have been bought under the purview of President Gotabaya Rajapaksa. Simplification of State machinery and market process, expansion of digital governance through the use of information technology as a tool for knowledge exchange are priorities of the newly established Ministry. The establishment of international electronic payment schemes, high-speed data exchange systems, and associated mobile network across the country is within the purview of the new Ministry. President intends to build a culture of technology innovation that will enhance the living standards of the people. All economic sectors including agriculture, industry, and services will become technology dependent in the future. The Government seeks to integrate investment in education with economic sectors to create a society armed with new technology in the 21st Century. The 21st

Century is considered as the knowledge-centric century. In order to make this a reality “Saubhagyaye Dekma” Policy Statement envisages to build a technology-based society.

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Central-West Asia

TURKMENISTAN: New Ambassador of Ukraine Appointed

New Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Ukraine Viktor Maiko has been appointed to Turkmenistan, Trend reports with reference to Turkmenistan's State News Agency. The ambassador has already presented his credentials to President of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov during the meeting. During the meeting an interest in intensifying productive relations in the political, diplomatic, trade, economic, cultural and humanitarian spheres between the countries was expressed. During the meeting, an exchange of views took place on the entire spectrum of interstate dialogue. As earlier the Ministry of Economic Development, Trade and Agriculture of Ukraine told Trend, Ukraine and Turkmenistan are ready to sign a number of documents. "Now comes the preparations for the fifth meeting of the Joint intergovernmental Ukrainian-Turkmen Commission on economic and cultural-humanitarian cooperation, which is scheduled to take place in 2021, the agreement which will be noted in the relevant bilateral documents," the Ministry said. An important task of the parties is to determine the key areas of cooperation, joint initiatives, including the format of participation of the Ukrainian side in the context of the creation of a logistics hub in Turkmenistan, and so on. The report notes that Ukraine considers Turkmenistan as one of the key partners in Central Asia. "According to the results of the 2020 the volume of bilateral trade in goods was \$85.5 million, export amounted to \$56.1 million (an increase of 2 percent), import – \$29.4 million," the ministry said.

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Turkmenistan Launches Online Application Service for Ashgabat City State Notary Office

Notarial Online Nobat application of Turkmenistan's Ashgabat City State Notary Office has been opened, Trend reports with reference to Business Turkmenistan information portal. With the help of this application, making an appointment in the desired department of the notary institution became possible. This service allows to track queue online, and there is also an automatic SMS notification about the approach of the queue. As reported, the website of the Service for State

Registration of Rights to Real Estate and Transactions Related to it under the Ministry of Adalat (Justice) of Turkmenistan was also earlier launched. Turkmenistan is working on the introduction of information and communication technologies (ICT) in all sectors of the national economy. The country also pays special attention to training specialists in the field of ICT. The introduction of ICT into Turkmenistan's economy will facilitate its diversification. The concept of the development of the digital economy in Turkmenistan until 2025 is also aimed at economic diversification. The ongoing reforms allow increasing mutually beneficial cooperation with foreign partners and international organizations.

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UZBEKISTAN: Atabek Nazirov Appointed Head of Direct Investment Fund

Atabek Nazirov was appointed Adviser to the Minister of Investment and Foreign Trade - Director General of the Direct Investment Fund of Uzbekistan. The Fund was established to invest in competitive domestic companies, as well as to form long-term mutually beneficial partnerships with private national and foreign co-investors. It is founded by the Fund for Reconstruction and Development, and its activities are coordinated by the Ministry of Investment and Foreign Trade. Atabek Nazirov was born in 1975 in Tashkent. In 1998, he graduated from the State University of New York in the United States with a degree in macroeconomics. He has extensive experience in investment activities, has worked for major financial and investment companies such as Goldman Sachs and JPMorgan Chase in the United States, Troika Dialog and MDM Bank in Russia, as well as the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development in London.

From <https://uzreport.news/> 04/02/2021

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Oceania

AUSTRALIA: Seeking to Boost Services Exports

The Morrison government wants to boost Australia's service industry exports beyond traditional successes in education and tourism. Trade Minister Dan Tehan wants to help businesses find new overseas markets that will drive growth and create jobs. "Our government is supporting Australia's services businesses to capitalise on untapped export potential," Mr Tehan said on Tuesday. He said Australia had long benefited from its expertise in a wide range of sectors including architecture, engineering and legal services, health and finance, to digital communications and logistics. "The Morrison government will continue to work with industry to boost our

international competitiveness and assist Australian businesses to succeed in global markets," Mr Tehan said. He said Australia was boosting trade and investment ties with India through a new business exchange program. The scheme aims to provide businesses in both nations with market insights and connections to foster commercial partnerships. "Australia and India already share common values, interests and histories and the Australia India Business Exchange will strengthen that friendship," Mr Tehan said. India was Australia's eighth largest trading partner and third-largest market for services export in 2019/20, with two-way goods and services trade totalling \$26.2 billion.

From <https://au.news.yahoo.com> 04/06/2021

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Minimum Wage Debate Heats Up During Review

The Morrison government has cautioned against a major increase in Australia's minimum wage, citing concerns about job creation. In a submission to the Fair Work Commission's annual review, the government notes a continuing uncertain global and domestic economic outlook. "Higher labour costs during this challenging period could present a major constraint to small business recovery and may dampen employment in the sector," the submission says. It urges a "cautious" approach that takes into account the importance of job creation and business viability through the economic recovery post-coronavirus. "The risk of domestic outbreaks and ongoing disruptions to other major economies mean the economic environment remains uncertain," the government says. "Although the vaccine rollout is underway, COVID-19 outbreaks that would necessitate further containment measures remain a significant risk."

The Australian Council of Trade Unions, which is pushing for a \$26-a-week increase, attacked the government's submission. ACTU assistant secretary Scott Connolly said company profits were soaring but the coalition wanted wages to go backwards in real terms. "Make no mistake, while the government didn't have the guts to say it explicitly, it has today given the green light to the Fair Work Commission to freeze the minimum wage, relied on by one in five workers," he said on Tuesday. Mr Connolly said the federal government's hypocrisy was breathtaking. "They say it's fine to get rid of JobKeeper because the economy is recovering, but workers shouldn't have a pay rise because the economy is faltering," he said. "They can't have it both ways." The national minimum wage increased by 1.75 per cent to \$753.80 per week after last year's review but the rise was delayed at least three months for most workers.

In 2019 there was a three per cent minimum wage increase, which was lower than the previous year's 3.5 per cent rise and the 3.3 per cent hike in 2017. The National Farmers' Federation wants the minimum wage frozen until economic conditions improve and market volatility decreases. It argues trends indicating a recovery need

to emerge alongside the rollout of the AstraZeneca coronavirus vaccine. The restaurant and catering industry has called on the commission to stagger any increase to bring it into line with last year's decision. Workers in the pandemic-hit food, retail, accommodation, arts, recreation, tourism and aviation sectors didn't receive the minimum wage boost until February. The National Retail Association is also calling for a delay for that group of workers until November 1. The Restaurant and Catering Industry Association says the commission should freeze the rate if it decides to put its decision into force on July 1.

From <https://au.news.yahoo.com> 04/06/2021

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Morrison Must Not Delay Aged Care Reforms

Aged care consumer groups have challenged the Morrison government to deliver urgent reforms to the trouble-plagued sector. Providers have also outlined a 15-point plan to quickly improve the aged care system. In their formal response to the aged care royal commission, advocacy groups have outlined a handful of key changes they want to see implemented in the upcoming federal budget. They want to see an aged care system that treats older people with respect, ensures greater control over their support and delivers appropriate, safe and timely services at a fair price. Ian Yates from the Council on the Ageing said the reform package should be implemented within the next 12 to 18 months. "The last thing Australians deserve is the government kicking the can down the road on many of the key changes we need," he said on Monday. "The government cannot get away with cherry picking a few recommendations now but saying it will consider the rest later."

The groups want stronger governance, integrity and accountability in the aged care sector with more funding, quality control and consumer influence in the system. They have recommended setting up an implementation task force with an independent chair and senior government officials to drive the reforms. "In the coming year, the Morrison government can give older Australians more choice, control and transparency in aged care than they have ever been allowed before," Mr Yates said. "We recognise the government faces significant challenges in implementing the royal commission's recommendations in full, including the need for major budget funding and a major increase in workforce, but these must be met. "This is Australia's 'line in the sand' moment for giving us the aged care system we deserve and expect." Patricia Sparrow from Australian Aged Care Collaboration, which represents more than 1000 providers, said an overhaul of the sector was urgently needed. "If we are to set up our aged care system to guarantee all older Australians the respect and dignity they deserve we need a total overhaul of the funding model and workforce strategy, not more fiddling at the edges," she said. Ms Sparrow said broad and ambitious reforms were required. "As part of this big picture reform we must see the critical aged care workforce grow and be well supported through better pay,

conditions and training," she said.

From <https://au.news.yahoo.com> 04/12/2021

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Unions Fight Calls for Minimum Wage Delay

Unions have pushed back against big business calls to delay an increase in Australia's minimum wage. Major employer groups have argued any rise in the national minimum wage should not take effect on July 1, in line with a delayed increase at the height of the pandemic. The Australian Council of Trade Unions has made a reply submission to the Fair Work Commission's panel deliberating on the rate. ACTU president Michele O'Neil said putting more money in workers' pockets would help drive pandemic recovery. "The arguments being made by the big business lobby as part of this process are disingenuous and disappointing but not surprising," she said. "They have consistently put the narrow short-term interests of their members - huge corporations who have expanded their profits during a recession - ahead of the national interest and even ahead of public safety."

The Australian Industry Group has warned the last increase was paid by many employers at the start of February, labelling a five-month gap between another rise as "extremely unfair". The ACTU is urging the Fair Work Commission to approve a \$26-a-week increase. The national minimum wage increased by 1.75 per cent to \$753.80 per week after last year's review but the rise was delayed at least three months for most workers. In 2019, there was a three per cent minimum wage increase, which was lower than the previous year's 3.5 per cent rise and the 3.3 per cent hike in 2017. Other industry groups including agriculture, hospitality and retail have backed freezing the rate or delaying the increase.

From <https://au.news.yahoo.com> 04/23/2021

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Authorities Assure Public over Job Probes

Health authorities are urging Australians not to jump to conclusions amid reports of a man dying eight days after receiving a coronavirus vaccination. Chief Nursing Officer Alison McMillan has moved to assure the public robust processes are in place to investigate adverse events following jabs. "More information will be gathered, if necessary an expert group will be brought together to look at these deaths, and in time we may make a determination," she told the ABC on Thursday. "But it's really important not to jump to conclusions here. "We have systems to look at these deaths, unfortunate as they are." A 55-year-old man from Tamworth NSW reportedly died on April 21 after getting his first vaccine eight days earlier. A relative of the man told the Northern Daily Leader he died of blood clots in his lungs. The Therapeutic Goods

Administration would not comment on the individual case, citing patient confidentiality.

"The reporting of an adverse event to TGA post vaccination does not mean the event was caused by the vaccination," the agency said in a statement. "All reports to the TGA of death following vaccination are reviewed to assess the likelihood that the vaccine contributed to the event or medical condition that lead to a fatal outcome." Reviews look at medical history, risk factors, medications being taken at the time of vaccination and any other relevant factors. Expert advice is sometimes sought from specialist investigation groups. The TGA has confirmed six cases of rare blood clots that are likely linked to the AstraZeneca vaccination. Meanwhile, Labor is urging the federal government to boost the quarantine system to stop Australians being stranded in risky situations overseas.

The government has paused flights from India until May 15 as the Asian nation grapples with a widespread coronavirus outbreak. Flights were suspended because returned travellers from India were coming down with the virus in hotel quarantine, putting pressure on the system. Victoria is hoping to set up a separate hotel quarantine system for international students and foreign workers, who would not be included in the state's weekly arrival limits. Treasurer Josh Frydenberg said the state had not yet asked him for funding support, but he expected the quarantine system to be central to discussions into the future. "The virus is still with us for some time to come," he told ABC radio. "When it comes to the quarantine numbers that are coming into the country, NSW has done by far the bulk of the heavy lifting."

Australia will provide millions of pieces of medical and personal protective equipment to India, as well as oxygen concentrators. More than 200,000 people have died of the infection so far in India, as the country clocks about 300,000 new infections each day. Labor foreign affairs spokeswoman Penny Wong said the federal government has had months to boost the number of spaces in hotel quarantine and improve the system. "We still do not have a system of safe national quarantine led by the Commonwealth," she told the ABC.

From <https://au.news.yahoo.com> 04/29/2021

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NEW ZEALAND: Independent Review to Explore Future for Local Government

Local Government Minister Nanaia Mahuta says an independent review of local government will explore how councils can maintain and improve the wellbeing of New Zealanders in the communities they serve long into the future. Announcing the review today Nanaia Mahuta says it will focus on how our system of local democracy needs to evolve over the next 30 years. "Local government plays an important role in

our democratic system, giving people a voice in the leadership of their communities and in the governance of services and publicly owned assets. “Local councils are essential to maintaining and improving our wellbeing and we need to get the right settings for them to continue delivering their important mahi. “They are now facing a wave of reforms that will significantly affect their traditional roles and functions. They have told us the timing is right to determine what our system of local democracy should look like to make sure it is fit for the future, and I agree.

“This also offers an important opportunity to explore how we can embody the Treaty partnership through the role and representation of iwi/Māori in local government. “I have asked the review panel to consider what local government does, how it does it, and how it pays for it. From there, they will explore what local government’s future looks like, including: roles, functions and partnerships, representation and governance, funding and financing. “I am expecting them to report back to me on their findings in April 2023,” Nanaia Mahuta says. Cabinet has confirmed Jim Palmer as Chair of the review panel, who will be joined by four members: John Ombler QSO, Antoine Coffin, Gael Surgenor and Penny Hulse. “I am confident the Review’s panel members have the right mix of professional and cultural backgrounds. They bring a wealth of complementary specialist skills and experience to deliver this important work,” Nanaia Mahuta says.

The panel members will be engaging with a broad range of stakeholders including iwi/Māori, other stakeholders impacted by changes in local government, the public including diverse communities, and local and central government representatives. The Review will start engaging with the sector from May 2021. It will issue an interim report on the probable direction of the Review in September 2021. This will be followed by a draft report for public consultation in September 2022, and a final report in April 2023.

From <https://livenews.co.nz> 04/23/2021

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3、 Management, Capacity Building and Innovation

Asia-Pacific

How the Blockchain Can Help a City Get Smart

As the digital economy grows and matures, the smart cities movement is gaining momentum. For many people this represents the promise of high-tech cities, with autonomous cars on the streets, drones delivering food, and connected devices helping city dwellers to perform a myriad of activities. This article investigates the role

blockchain can play in the administration of a smart city. The 21st century is the century of cities. There is a clear trend of population aggregation in medium-sized and big cities, with urban areas growing all over the world and competing for economic investment, a skilled workforce and cultural prominence. Some cities leading this trend, such as Shanghai, Singapore, Tokyo, London, Dubai or New York, among many others, are already world business and technology hubs, with their world significance (and GDP) sometimes outstripping that of many countries. However, this increasing importance of cities in the world's economy does come with a price. Population growth, environmental demands and economic downturns bring many challenges to cities all over the world, and not only to the largest ones. Gassman, Böhm and Palmié have summarised the most important challenges cities face today: new urbanisation trends that reshape cities and their surroundings, changes in lifestyles and preferences, demographic developments (like the increasing number of elderly people in western countries), overloaded infrastructure, poor air quality, smog, noise, mobility issues, tourism, limited resources and management of the urban commons.

What is a smart city?

The definition of a smart city given above is broad. However, there are a few things that smart cities have in common. The most important one is the digital shadow. It is a prerequisite for any smart city to create a raw input of data about the city, which will come from an interconnected network of sensors, devices, and other digital services and products. Just imagine a city where thousands (or even hundreds of thousands) of sensors record information about air quality, temperature, traffic, energy consumption in buildings, smog, garbage production, or humidity. The data is continuously uploaded to the cloud, creating a digital image of the 'behaviour' of the city, available online at every moment. This digital shadow is possible because of the latest achievements in connectivity, especially the Internet of Things — a set of technologies that connects 'intelligent' objects through the Internet, adding another layer of data. The resulting corpus of data becomes the foundation for many other services and products, created by institutions and companies that might build second-layer solutions. For instance, an app could be created that allows citizens to improve their mobility with eco-friendly and connected solutions. Another app could help building owners improve energy efficiency through data and algorithms that control heating and cooling in real-time. A service that connects government officials and citizens, improving their communication by digital means, could be offered by an app too. Other applications might be related to urban farming, tele-health, air quality, data management, or even toilets-as-a-service! The range of potential solutions that can be built over the digital shadow is vast and is continually growing. These solutions can be broken down into the following six areas:

1. Smart environment – minimising the ecological footprint of a city.
2. Smart living – improving the quality of life in the city.
3. Smart economy – increasing the city's competitiveness.

4. Smart mobility – creating new and sustainable mobility options in the city.
5. Smart government and governance – promoting the participation of citizens and increasing transparency in the public sector.
6. Smart people – preserving and increasing the human capital of a city, helping people to develop their full potential and fostering their participation in social life.

Smart city management model (SCMM)

The SCMM, shown in Figure 1, addresses the main dimensions of any smart city project:

The services areas, in the centre of the figure, summarise the kind of initiatives undertaken in a smart city project. The transformation cycle process, depicted as a circle in Figure 1, shows the necessary steps needed to succeed when building a smart city programme: initiate transformation, determine location, develop concepts and synchronise partners, activate resources, and realise projects as well as operation and instrumentation. The fundamental elements, shown around the perimeter of the figure, are data governance, partner and city participation, financing, technology, business models and communication.

Figure 1: Smart city management model

Smart city initiatives and digitisation are making sweeping changes in the lives of citizens. The move is aimed at providing governance like never before. Digitisation and technology solutions have improved the speed of information exchange, enabling better administration. Smart city and digital governance are meant to improve the quality of life and living standards of citizens, and make public utilities seamlessly accessible to them. Here is how this can be done.

1. Improved project management: A smart governance portal allows key decision makers to automate important reporting metrics for tracking projects. These decision makers will have all the critical information needed to take timely action for completing quality projects as per the schedule.

2. Grievance management: Good governance requires handling citizens' grievances and complaints with urgency. Quite often, administrators lack the necessary data metrics for tracking the execution of these grievances. But with digitisation, citizens can log their complaints through their mobile devices from any location. So, whether it is a water, electricity, transportation or housing problem grievance, all you need to do is log the complaint and track it online. Administrators can also get information about average time to service a citizen fault, best performing departments, departments with maximum pending complaints, etc. This information is necessary for improving the standard of execution as well as citizens' services.

3. Business platform: Smart governance initiatives can help businesses get all clearances from a single digital window. In addition, the government can create online forums for exchange of information between various businesses, provide a platform that can be used by companies to show their innovative work, etc. This

online portal may be used for investor meets, bringing in foreign investments to connect with local businesses. A thriving local business means creation of jobs, increased tax collection and better opportunities for citizens.

4. Tracking the performance of citizens' services: Automation of key citizen services can help decision makers with key data pointers; e.g., the downtime of a key public utility, the electricity outages, the average time to service a fault, etc, can all be analysed with concrete data. The data for various public utilities can be mapped and tracked with smart automation. The quality of roads, transport facilities, water, electricity and Wi-Fi supply, etc, can be improved with digitisation and smart governance.

5. Tourism: Tourism is one of the top revenue generation sources for governments. Promoting tourism creates opportunities for citizens and local merchants. With smart city initiatives, the government can provide tourist interaction services through a portal. Hotel bookings, site visits and grant of visas can also be facilitated through online travel portals. Tourists can use smart city portals for all their queries, feedback and making online reservations. Tourism not only promotes cultural ties but also helps to improve the economic development and prosperity of a city.

6. Healthcare system: Smart city projects and digitisation are meant to improve the quality of public health utilities. Efficient governance means proactively responding to queries and health problems of citizens, and engaging with them through digital channels. Digital governance and smart city management is aimed at creating a positive impact in the lives of its citizens.

Blockchain in smart city administration

Blockchain technology, contrary to popular perception, is not merely the basis of the cryptocurrency Bitcoin. This system for carrying out verifications and secure transactions on the Internet promises to revolutionise the management of smart cities. With blockchain, different city services can be efficiently coordinated, integrated and controlled with transparency, keeping citizens' privacy in mind. The various advantages of using blockchain for governing cities are listed below. Increased transparency and connectivity: Cities can interconnect using blockchain vertical services, such as mobility, energy or security, through a single, open, accessible, transversal system that is able to exchange data with their inhabitants in real-time.

Direct communication: Blockchain makes it possible for government departments and the public to interact digitally, without the need for intermediaries. This would speed up, for example, bureaucratic procedures at registries, town halls, etc.

Integrity of information: With this technology it is possible to encrypt a file totally or partially in order to share only the part that is of interest, privately, securely and without the risk of it being manipulated by a third party.

Efficient management: Blockchain allows both public and city officials to know the origin and destination of each resource. In addition, the latter can find out how city services are being used without compromising people's privacy.

Enhanced security: Blockchain improves the protection of the personal data collected.

Saving energy: Smart blockchain based contracts make it easier for solar-powered households to automatically trade surplus electricity with other members of the grid.

Commuting incentives: Government departments can know which citizens use their cars daily, and offer them discounts and advantages to encourage them to take public transport.

Improved waste management: Blockchain can provide the public and waste collection services with real-time information on containers so that they can always know whether these are full or empty.

Better public participation: Blockchain platforms guarantee the security, reliability, transparency and anonymity of public consultations such as elections, surveys, referendums, etc. In addition, blockchain technology can benefit other services such as water resource management, air quality control, or park and garden care.

OrgBook architecture

The blockchain platform, with its decentralised network based architecture, is commonly used in fintech industries like banking, insurance and capital markets for a lot of use cases like know your customer (KYC), credit risk management, and fee calculations or draft approvals, to name a few. For some years now, there are many use cases being experimented in other domains too, like the healthcare industry for distributed patient and doctor database handling using a secured public network, or the retail industry for processing inventories. The Blockchain LIVE conference of 2019 had some excellent discussions on how to use blockchain to invent options for next generation infrastructure when designing smart cities. One of the key topics for discussion was how blockchain and smart city initiatives marry in terms of solutions and feature provisions. Transparency and security are core fundamentals in smart city planning and infrastructure requirement. There are many use cases in smart city initiatives that can use cloud based blockchain platforms for infrastructure development and management.

In British Columbia, a community effort called the Verifiable Organizations Network (VON) has put together the OrgBook, a searchable public directory of legally registered organisations based on the Hyperledger platform. OrgBook showcases the benefits of an open, unified trusted network of various organisations and associations for the benefit of people and services across a city or province. The implementation of OrgBook in smart city administration using blockchain based distributed network administration really helps in cutting red tape (reducing paper work and delays in administrative matters), and improves the efficiency of public administration with real-time workflow management like social security verification, and address registration/de-registration, to name a few. In blockchain based

architecture like that of OrgBook, smart city administration is handled efficiently by designing various use cases as decentralised solutions (service fabric implementation). The decentralised database is used to display public data in a verifiable and authentic manner, empowering individuals (smart city members or the government authority) or entities (different role based access in administration services) to manage their identity (without the need of manual verifiable services).

The architecture involves the development of a mobility service called Citizen Wallet App, which has the following features:

End users and associated family members to identify, store and share DID (decentralised identifiers) based proofs
Service for associations and member groups to issue/verify DID based proofs

Administrative functions like authorisation of certificates, certificate issuance and public notices

Verification services like authorising identity, providing access rights and approvals

Other solutions in smart city administration

Cloud service providers like AWS and Azure provide blockchain network service components like Hyperledger Fabric using custom cloud service implementation and integration with other cloud service components.

Figure 2: Smart city use cases in Hyperledger OrgBook

For example, Azure provides cloud service integration for Hyperledger solutions (as shown in Figure 2) using:

VPC peering for peer node integration

Interface development using Service Fabric

Resource group management for handling Hyper Fabric

Data store for ledger management services

App services for rule implementation

This architecture can be implemented using AWS based architecture by using VPC peering, peer node services and Fabric components, as shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Azure implementation of blockchain architecture

Future implementations in smart city administration using blockchain

Blockchain could be a great ally in the development of smart cities. Indeed, the need for the use of this technology is closely aligned with the needs of smart cities, which are:

Multiple agents sharing information (society is hyperconnected and will become ever more so; the number of devices per person will also grow). The need to verify that shared data—and updates thereof—are valid. Simplification of management, which gets complicated due to the existence of intermediaries. Fast-paced, agile connections and participants who interact with one another. Given this cocktail, the added value of blockchain lies in the possibility of sharing only the information that a participant wishes to know, while keeping everything else encrypted and inaccessible. Cryptography can be used to prevent manipulation, modification of information and

privacy violations. It seems logical that the 'de-intermediated' agent—the city government—will try to resist the implementation of blockchain. In the world of Blockchain4Cities, however, business models are under no threat. On the contrary, public administrators will have no problem relinquishing their intermediary role so long as all the other roles having to do with control, security, privacy, efficiency, transparency, etc, remain intact. Cities such as Santiago, Toronto, Tel Aviv, Oslo, Milan, London and Stockholm are already developing blockchain based projects. Dubai has become the world capital of blockchain development by launching the Dubai Blockchain Platform and the Dubai Blockchain Policy.

Figure 4: Blockchain Hyperledger architecture in AWS

Handling security and compliance issues in blockchain smart city administration

Smart city administration has many use cases that require an efficient platform like cloud based blockchain architecture to carry out self-healing and auto-scaling services on-the-fly in real-time.

Blockchain based smart city administration uses the advantages of a permissioned ledger based blockchain platform that are listed below.

Shared ledger: This helps to build a multi-transaction system with 'a single point of failure'.

Consensus: This makes the transaction commit/complete only when all the parties (nodes) agree to network a verified transaction.

Immutability: This enables smart administration activity to be transparent and foolproof from tampering.

Smart contract: This sets a defined, rule based transaction communication using a piece of code so that transactions can be coupled with validation, proof verification and tax calculation.

Provenance: Due to the nature of a distributed blockchain, the entire transaction is copied in all the nodes in the platform, and every node travel for a transaction is captured in the history of the transaction for quickly tracking the stages.

These benefits make blockchain based smart city administrations have agility and flexibility with respect to the architecture. Using digital IDs also makes smart city transactions secure.

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Innovative Restoration Plans for Aral Sea Region Announced at Global Disruptive Tech Challenge 2021

From flowering tree plantations that will grow a beekeeping industry to women-centered training in natural resource management to the restoration of salt-dried landscapes - these are some of the disruptive innovations that won the grand prize in the Global Disruptive Tech Challenge 2021: Restoring Landscapes in the Aral Sea Region. The four grand prize winners were announced today during a

virtual ceremony hosted by the World Bank, in partnership with the Global Landscapes Forum (GLF), the Kazakh-German University (DKU), and Plug and Play (P&P). A total of 159 proposals were submitted to the competition from 28 countries across five continents, with more than half of the proposals from Central Asian countries. A distinguished panel of 42 experts from the World Bank and partner organizations from across the globe evaluated the submissions and nominated 24 leading projects. “Today’s winners represent the culmination of many months of work developing and evaluating the most innovative and cutting-edge proposals,” noted Steven Schonberger, World Bank Regional Sustainable Development Director for Europe and Central Asia. “Going forward, we are committed to continuing to nurture, strengthen, and showcase these innovations and to building strong partnerships among entrepreneurs, investors, educational institutions, civil society, and governmental organizations, in order to have a long-lasting positive impact on the Central Asia region and beyond.”

Launched in November 2020, the Disruptive Tech Challenge aimed to identify cutting-edge solutions to address land degradation and desertification challenges in the Aral Sea region. Once the fourth largest lake in the world, the Aral Sea has almost disappeared. With the support of the World Bank and its partners, the governments of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan are making great strides in mitigating the environmental damage to the Aral Sea. “By bringing the Aral Sea issue into the focus of the world’s creative minds, our goal was to crowdsource new solutions to combat land degradation in the Aral Sea,” said Lilia Burunciuc, World Bank Regional Director for Central Asia. “It is great to see how the Global Disruptive Tech Challenge has drawn global attention to this local problem and has stimulated creative minds globally to propose innovative solutions.”

The winning projects are: Agriculture and Land Management: A landscape restoration process, built on using local sediments and waste materials to stabilize dry salty lands developed by NETICS B.V. of the Netherlands. The company’s patented GEOWALL® process is designed to prevent toxic soil from being carried by winds away from the damaged Aral Sea basin. Sustainable Forestry: The Aral Honey Gardens proposal from Uzbekistan envisions planting flowering trees to develop a beekeeping industry that brings about jobs and income, along with reforestation. Socio-Economic Development: The Tajikistan Women Water Forum’s initiative empowers rural women through online technologies, mentoring, and training in water and land management. It aims to connect with projects in Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, and Uzbekistan. Information and Knowledge: The Sentinels for Sustainable Pasture Management app by kartECO-Environmental and Energy Engineering Consultancy of Greece is an online cloud-based system that aims to protect grasslands and reduce rangeland destruction across Central Asia. Each grand prize proposal was awarded \$5,000 and a mentorship for its contribution to restoring the Aral Sea.

Runners-up in the Tech Challenge each won \$1,000 and were recognized in the Rising Star category: Agriculture and Land Management: Nutritive Hydrogel for water preservation plus land and soil aeration, from the Kyrgyz Republic. Sustainable Forestry: A sea within a seed: Regenerative agroforestry solutions for landscape restoration, Uzbekistan. Socio-Economic Development: Aral Basin news on the YouTube channel “Land and Water CA”, Germany. Information and Knowledge: (Shared) Remote sensing of degraded lands using drones to assess crop germination and monitor quality, Kazakhstan; PRO-access, providing open-access information services for better land and water management, The Netherlands. In preparation for Challenge Week, the 24 finalists received extensive training on business and networking with international experts in a series of virtual events, round-tables, lectures and discussions.

“These creative ideas will help to spark a revival in the Aral Sea basin and demonstrate that we all have the power to make significant changes in the world, including confronting the enormous global challenges of climate change,” said Barbara Janusz-Pawletta, Vice-rector for International Cooperation of the Kazakh-German University (DKU). “Sustainability is one of the biggest trends nowadays and we are seeing a growing need for innovative environmental solutions,” said Mike Zayonc, Vice President of Plug & Play. “We strongly believe that the solution to the problems in the Aral Sea can partly be found through entrepreneurship and the involvement of start-ups. That is why we partnered with the Global Disruptive Tech Challenge. We would love to explore investment opportunities among the winning teams and help them scale their solution to a global level.” The Global Disruptive Tech Challenge is organized with the support of the Central Asia Water and Energy Program (CAWEP), a multi-donor Trust Fund financed by the European Union, Switzerland and the United Kingdom. The challenge is administered by the World Bank and informs the Resilient Landscape Program in Central Asia RESILAND CA+, currently under preparation. It is implemented by the Kazakh-German University (DKU), the Global Landscapes Forum (GLF) and Plug and Play (P&P).

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The Riskiest Smart City Technologies

Emergency alerts, street video surveillance systems and smart traffic signals are riskier than other smart city solutions, according to a new report. For their study, researchers at the University of California, Berkeley, asked 76 cybersecurity experts to rank nine technologies according to technical vulnerability, attractiveness to nation-state attackers and potential impact of a successful attack. “According to our survey, not all smart city technologies pose equal risks,” stated the report, *The Cybersecurity Risks of Smart City Technologies: What Do The Experts Think?* “Local

officials should therefore consider whether cyber risks outweigh the potential gains of technology adoption on a case-by-case basis, and exercise particular caution when technologies are both vulnerable in technical terms and constitute attractive targets to capable potential attackers because the impacts of an attack are likely to be great.” Across the three categories, emergency and security alert systems were ranked most vulnerable. Satellite water leak detection was the least technically vulnerable, and smart waste or recycling bins would have the least impact if attacked -- and they are also of the least interest to potential hackers, the report found.

In written responses, 18 of the 76 respondents said that tampering with traffic lights could cause accidents and gridlock and prevent emergency vehicles from reaching their destinations. Ten respondents added that spoofed emergency alerts could cause panic and civil unrest, the report stated. Experts considered nation-states and insider threats as the most efficient at carrying out any cyberattack. They ranked thrill-seekers and hactivists – those who uses hacking to effect social change – as the least. The report’s goal is to help local policymakers determine the right technologies for their smart city initiatives and their related cyber risk. By breaking that risk into three categories, decision-makers can better see what they’re assuming. “Local officials receive a barrage of information about ‘smart city’ solutions to longstanding problems, such as traffic congestion, crime, inefficient use of power and water, and detecting leaky pipes,” the report stated. “Which of these myriad technological solutions hyped by consultancies, conferences and vendors are worth considering? And how should local governments consider the countervailing risks of cyberattack that such new systems may introduce?”

The security of city infrastructure came under the microscope in January, when hackers tried to poison the water supply of Oldsmar, Fla., by boosting the level of a toxic chemical. The White House has indicated that an executive order on industrial control systems is in the works. The report also pointed to other resources for local agencies that want to learn more about the potential risks of various technologies. For instance, the Department of Homeland Security runs training programs, academic institutions such as the Massachusetts Institute of Technology offer online courses and certification programs on smart city cybersecurity and organizations such as the American Waterworks Association and Technology Approval Group have groups that study the cyber risks of smart city tech.

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Five FreshEST Mobility and Smart City Solutions

Are you working in a zoo? An airport, maybe? Or at a telecom company? Do you know what all these different institutions have in common? They all could use mobility and smart city solutions to improve their offerings and their employees’ lives.

Got curious? You should take note of the freshest mobility solutions by five Estonian tech companies.

Bercman Technologies – the smart pedestrian crosswalk

Bercman Technologies has developed an intelligent crosswalk with the primary goal to increase pedestrian crosswalks on unregulated intersections by notifying all road users about the crosswalk. The main focus is to get the drivers' attention – by using backlighting traffic signs and LED lights on the pole. This intelligent crosswalk also detects potentially dangerous situations to prevent accidents on the crosswalk. It combines video camera data with radar sensors to accurately measure the speed of vehicles nearby. With radar and video sensors, the product can also collect valuable data such as counting, classification, and more. In the future, the product will communicate with connected and autonomous vehicles providing extra safety features to encourage widespread adoption of new technologies on the roads.

Who is it for?

Road infrastructure companies

Traffic engineering companies

Telecom companies

Cities and municipalities.

International projects

Bercman demonstrated the Smart Pedestrian Crosswalk in Helsinki, Finland, and received a lot of feedback from the residents that served as valuable data for product development. Currently, Bercman is working on entering markets in the UK and Croatia, where the traffic safety policies are taking a strong focus on pedestrian and micro-mobility safety-related issues. The company also provided smart bus stop hardware for piloting last-mile autonomous on-demand bus shuttle in Estonia and Greece.

Auve Tech – the world's most flexible last-mile transportation ecosystem

Auve Tech specialises in the development and manufacturing of autonomous vehicles. Developing lightweight and compact SAE Level-4 autonomous shuttles, Auve Tech offers a full-scope service that also entails the vehicles' integration to various environments and fleet management. The autonomous electric shuttles, suitable for multiple urban and suburban settings, are developed to ease the last mile transit and delivery challenges.

Who is it for?

Urban environments where public transportation struggles to provide effective solutions for the demand

Suburban environments where public transportation does not cover the last mile

Gated communities and closed service areas such as airports, industrial parks, campuses that need sustainable and smart solutions for the transportation of staff or goods

Zoos, amusement parks, resorts, and other leisure and tourism venues where autonomous last-mile mobility can ease the logistics.

International projects

Auve Tech shuttles have been tested in harsh weather and road conditions. In Lamia, Greece, Auve Tech shuttles served over 300 customers for 46 days, covering a total of 1930 km. In Greece, the company cooperated with the Solaride team, taking advantage of the burning hot sun, and placed solar panels on the shuttles' roofs, which provided an additional energy source. In Tampere, Finland, the autonomous shuttles improved reachability and attractiveness with public transportation. The feedback was marvelous, and the passengers liked the idea of autonomous shuttles covering the last mile.

EyeVi – on-demand mapping technology

EyeVi Technologies offers an on-demand mapping technology. Their complete mobile mapping solution captures high accuracy geodata cost-effectively and fast using AI. The product consists of a sensor-agnostic mapping hardware set and a software package that includes on-the-field application DataCapture, DataFlow processing pipeline, and the EyeVi Visual Interface – an end-user platform. Raw data can be extrapolated, processed, and more than twenty features extracted.

Main customer segments

Road survey and inspection agencies

Infrastructure asset managers

Engineering and design firms

Road consultants

International projects

GIAP and EyeVi revolutionize Polish road networks
<https://eyevi.tech/news/giap-eyevi-to-revolutionize-polish-road-networks/>

Ridango – helping millions of people use public transport simply and seamlessly

Ridango is creating smarter mobility through efficient and future-proof public transport IT solutions. As a tech company, they focus on public transport ticketing, payment, and real-time passenger information systems. Ridango's scalable technology is designed to serve transport systems of any size, large or small. The company is also one of the most proven account-based ticketing and contactless bank card acceptance providers for public transport globally.

Who is it for?

Public Transport Authorities (PTA) & Public Transport Operators (PTO)

Cities, other municipalities, and regions.

International projects

Being, Ridango has successfully executed multiple projects in Nordic countries and the CEE region.

Ridango was the first in the Nordics to bring contactless bank card payments into public transport. In 2019 the company rolled out the contactless bank card payment in Skåne, Sweden, and a little later in Malmö.

The company implemented an account-based ticketing system in Kyiv, the capital of Ukraine, with a population of almost 3 million people. One good example of how Ridango can execute a project, regardless of the size, is Greenland Nuuk's capital with its 19000 inhabitants. Ridango has provided and is operating a ticketing system there since 2016. Compared to Kyiv, it's tiny, but the people in Nuuk still can enjoy all the same benefits of the modern public transport ticketing solution.

Sixfold – the most accurate real-time visibility service in the market

Sixfold solves supply chain visibility challenges. It uses machine learning and AI to improve real-time visibility and deliver valuable business intelligence that customers wouldn't otherwise have access to. This allows them to cut costs, better optimise their supply chain and gain a competitive advantage.

Who is it for?

FMCG & retail

Construction and building materials

Manufacturing

Packaging

Pulp and paper

Businesses in the third-party logistics, chemical, agriculture, and household goods industries.

Big corporations and world-renowned brands among the clientele

Sixfold's real-time logistics visibility platform is a fundamental business tool for many of Europe's largest corporations and world-renowned brands:

Beiersdorf

Nestlé

Coca-Cola European Partners

Tesco

Rockwool

Südzucker

STI Freight Management

Saint-Gobain.

Recently, Sixfold made headlines because the company and a team of volunteers developed an application that facilitates a more efficient distribution and delivery of the COVID-19 vaccines. The app is now being used by family physicians and the Estonian Health Insurance Fund.

Join us on the 22nd of April at 11 AM (+3 GMT) for e-Estonia Digital Discussion on mobility where all five companies – Ridango, Auvetech, Bercman Technology, Sixfold, and Eyevi Technologies share more about their innovative solutions. Attendees of our Digital Discussion will get the chance to go in-depth with each

company in a dedicated breakout session and post all their queries during the panel. Register now by using the following link.

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Four Cities Selected for the Climate Smart Cities Challenge

Nairobi, Stockholm – 14 April 2021 - Curitiba (Brazil), Bogotá (Colombia), Bristol (UK) and Makindye Ssabagabo (Uganda). These are the four cities officially invited to collaborate in the open innovation initiative Climate Smart Cities Challenge, with the aim of developing, testing and scaling cutting-edge solutions to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. With the cities and respective challenges selected, the four cities will work on confirming arrangements, stakeholder engagement and challenge definition with support from the Climate Smart Cities Challenge partners: UN-Habitat, Viable Cities, Vinnova, Teknikföretagen, the Swedish Energy Agency, Smart City Sweden, Business Sweden, Expo 2020 Sweden and Nesta Challenges. The work will result in an open innovation contest which will be launched at the Dubai Expo in October 2021. Maria Rosendahl, Head of Industrial Policy, Teknikföretagen, said: “We are facing an age of unprecedented possibilities. In order to make the most of them we must focus on how we support innovation and development. Whether it is through new business models, aggressive business policy, modern regulations or joint efforts. The focus should be the same.”

The selected cities were chosen from applicants from all over the world through an open call application phase. The Climate Smart Cities Challenge focuses on specific areas that have the potential to reduce GHG emissions and at the same time deliver significant social impact, such as zero-carbon neighbourhoods, freight logistics management and green and affordable residential buildings. It also addresses the capacities needed by local governments to work with a wide range of stakeholders, especially the private sector, in order to lead and deliver innovation that tackles societal problems. Steven Bland, Climate Change and Innovation specialist, UN-Habitat, said: “By opening the process of defining solutions, rather than predetermining them in a call for proposals, new partnerships and collaborations become available that a local government might otherwise have been unaware of. The facilitated challenge definition design process prompts local governments to understand different local (and internal local government) perspectives on the nature of the challenge being explored.”

During the initial open call phase, each city was invited to share their aspirations to reduce GHG emissions, by identifying local challenges that would benefit from a multi-stakeholder and innovative approach, while also able to strengthen the capacity of local governments to procure, test and implement frontier technologies. The City of Makindye Ssabagabo said: “Although the green homes concept is being

adopted fast in urban cities in Asia, Europe and North America, the innovation is relatively new in Ugandan urban settings and this therefore calls for diverse international expertise with the participation of local stakeholders to pinpoint what will work best in order to reduce GHG emissions.” The City of Bogotá said: “Solving this challenge demands a change in strategy. Important stakeholders include freight companies, but also research centers and universities, and local populations in peripheral areas, most often affected by the negative impacts of freight traffic.”

The City of Bristol said: “Where innovation is truly needed is in the model used to deliver housing by multiple stakeholders. Solving this problem could support not only housing that is affordable but also housing that meets a diverse need as well as the sustainable development goals, specifically those relating to health and well-being, and sustainable cities and communities.” The City of Curitiba said: “Curitiba aims at carbon neutrality in 2050. Improved energy efficiency in buildings will have to play a key role. One way to pursue carbon neutrality is by establishing zero-carbon areas in the city of Curitiba. The innovation competition will help identify and test a broad spectrum of low-carbon solutions in an integrated manner.” At the local level, challenge-driven innovation helps to achieve sustainable development goals. Challenge competitions can contribute to the development of mission-oriented policies, by connecting multidisciplinary expertise and cross-sectoral perspectives with societal needs. City leaders are able to ensure that Innovative solutions, originated from challenges, are directed towards improving people’s lives in cities.

Olle Armstrand Dierks, Portfolio Strategist, Viable Cities said: “A real world test might even help reach a tipping point to behaviour change when involving many citizens in it, thus influencing many others. It enables transformative approaches to solving multiple societal challenges in an integrated and holistic way. A testbed can also demonstrate an emerging technology for regulators and engage regulators and policymakers in anticipating and shaping new regulations.” UN-Habitat and partners are working closely to deliver operational, normative and financial support, in order to co-create solutions that will drive positive change and contribute to climate change mitigation and energy efficiency in cities.

Four cities selected for the Climate Smart Cities Challenge

About the partners

UN-Habitat is the United Nations programme working towards a better urban future. Its mission is to promote socially and environmentally sustainable human settlements development and the achievement of adequate shelter for all. UN-Habitat works with partners to build inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable cities and communities. It promotes urbanization as a positive transformative force for people and communities, reducing inequality, discrimination and poverty and provides technical assistance, policy advice, knowledge and capacity building to national and local governments in over 90 countries. Viable Cities is the strategic Swedish innovation programme for climate-neutral and sustainable cities, with the

mission to achieve climate-neutral cities by 2030 with a good life for all within planetary boundaries. It gathers around 85 members from several different research fields, business, public sector and civil society. The programme is the project owner of CSCC, responsible for coordinating the challenge-driven innovation process.

Vinnova is Sweden's innovation agency helping to build innovation capacity that contributes to sustainable growth. It focuses on enabling innovation that address societal challenges, by creating opportunities and incentives for organisations to collaborate and share knowledge and skills. Vinnova supports early stage experimentation and testing of new ideas that can make a difference in the world. In the CSCC, it will be one of the funding partners in the challenge to develop carbon-neutral infrastructures in the selected cities. Teknikföretagen, the Swedish Association of Engineering Companies, works with 4.200 member companies, and has the mission to give its members the best possible competitive advantage, by promoting innovation and development in business. Small and large-scale companies are part of Teknikföretagen's network, accounting for a third of Sweden's exports. The organization is both a donor in the CSCC as well as a supporting partner, connecting its members to the innovative solutions derived from the challenge.

The Swedish Energy Agency works with the promotion of energy efficiency measures and investments in renewable energy technologies, leading society's transition to a sustainable energy system. It also collaborates internationally with the aim to develop and disseminate knowledge for a more efficient energy use to households, industry, and the public sector. In the CSCC, the agency continues to support UN-Habitat and its partners to finance challenge-driven innovation processes and research. Smart City Sweden is the Swedish government platform for sustainable city solutions, working with delegations and decision-makers from other countries interested in implementing Swedish solutions in their local context. The platform supports the CSCC as donors and also contributes with its vast expertise in different areas to explore smart and sustainable city solutions throughout the challenge.

Business Sweden is jointly owned by the Swedish state and the Swedish business sector with a mandate and a mission to help Swedish companies grow global sales and international companies invest and expand in Sweden. Business Sweden supports CSCC with expertise in international business development of smart city solutions as well as local market knowledge in all selected markets (Brazil, Colombia, United Kingdom and Uganda). Nesta Challenges is an UK-based partner focused on facilitating the development of innovative solutions, through the design of challenge prizes and challenge-driven innovation methodologies. It exists to support people, organisations and society in achieving solutions that drive change, improve lives, and solve the most pressing problems. Nesta collaborates with UN-Habitat and partners in the CSCC planning and engagement plans, supporting different stages of the

challenge process.

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New World Bank Research Finds Major Opportunities in Decarbonizing Maritime Transport

The World Bank today published new research on decarbonizing the maritime transport sector with findings that indicate significant business and development opportunities for countries, including for developing and emerging economies. To lower and ultimately eliminate its climate impact, maritime transport needs to abandon the use of fossil-based bunker fuels and turn toward 'zero-carbon bunker fuels', namely shipping fuels which emit zero or at most very low greenhouse (GHG) emissions across their lifecycles. The first report being launched today, "The Potential of Zero-Carbon Bunker Fuels in Developing Countries", identifies two alternative fuels – ammonia and hydrogen – as the most promising zero-carbon bunker fuels for shipping at present, more scalable and cost-competitive than other biofuel or synthetic carbon-based options. The second report, "The Role of LNG in the Transition Toward Low- and Zero-Carbon Shipping", finds that liquefied natural gas (LNG) is likely to play a limited role in the decarbonization of the shipping sector, noting its specific niche applications on pre-existing routes or in specific vessel types. The research further recommends that countries should avoid new public policy that supports LNG as a bunker fuel, reconsider existing policy support, and continue to regulate methane emissions.

By transitioning toward zero-carbon shipping, many countries, especially those with large renewable energy resources, can break into a future zero-carbon fuel market, while modernizing their own domestic energy and industrial infrastructure. The reports evaluate which developing and developed countries may be well positioned to take advantage of this emerging investment opportunity, and present initial case studies for Brazil, India, Mauritius and Malaysia. "The maritime community, particularly in developing countries, has a unique opportunity in the context of these emerging zero-carbon bunker fuels." said Bernice Van Bronkhorst, Global Director for Climate Change at the World Bank. "Not only will they help decarbonize shipping, but they can also be used to boost domestic infrastructure needs and chart a course for low-carbon development more generally." The global maritime transport sector produces around three percent of global GHG emissions and an estimated 15 percent of the world's air pollution annually. The International Maritime Organization's (IMO) Initial Strategy on the Reduction of GHG Emissions from Ships mandates that shipping's GHG emissions be reduced by at least 50% below 2008 levels by 2050, and to be fully phased out as quickly as possible within this century.

"Zero-carbon fuels will need to represent at least five percent of the bunker fuel mix

by 2030 to put shipping on a GHG trajectory consistent with the Initial IMO GHG Strategy, as well as the Paris Agreement's temperature goals," said Binyam Reja, World Bank Acting Global Director for Transport. "This means they need to be scaled up rapidly. These reports will be critical to help accelerate their targeted development and deployment." "It is vital that we address the impacts of maritime transport on ocean health, which is at the heart of the Bank's transition to a Blue Economy. These reports offer policymakers useful tools to achieve a triple win – a healthier ocean, improved air quality and reduced GHG emissions," said Karin Kemper, Global Director for Environment, Natural Resources and the Blue Economy.

The research makes the case that strategic policy interventions are needed to hasten the sector's energy transition and seize opportunities for wider economic, energy, and industrial development in developing countries. For instance, the introduction of a meaningful carbon price would create a level playing field for the development and utilization of zero-carbon bunker fuels. Revenue generated by such a market-based measure can help support developing countries in their energy transitions and accelerate crucial research, development, and deployment of these fuels. Business should also focus on "no-regret" options, such as increased energy efficiency and maximum fuel flexibility. Constructive collaboration between industry stakeholders and policymakers, both at the IMO and on a national/regional level, can also create greater certainty on the availability, pricing, and timing of zero-carbon bunker fuels which can further boost their rapid uptake from 2030.

From <https://www.worldbank.org/> 04/15/2021

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Future Smart Cities Focus on People, Not Technology

By 2050, two and a half billion more people will live in the world's cities - with all the advantages and disadvantages. Already today, cities consume 70 percent of the world's energy and produce 60 percent of greenhouse gases. As we want to seriously counter rising global warming and CO2 increases, we have to start with cities. "The modernisation of existing buildings is a crucial lever in the fight against climate change. According to EU, about 75% of the building stock in EU is energy inefficient. Furthermore, it is estimated that 90% of the buildings in EU in 2050, already exist today. Therefore, there needs to be a renovation wave," says Thomas Hietto, Deputy CEO and Head of Services, Sustainability and Smart City Solutions at Caverion of Caverion. Thomas Hietto: "There is a lot to be done to make our cities smart: connected, networked and collaborative. Smart buildings are one of the key elements in a smart city in this regard, a kind of modular building block that must adhere to the same design principles as the overall smart city, thereby creating an efficient, flexible, safe, adaptable and user-centric environment. The key is to think of the city as an ecosystem, where all the components interact."

For a building itself, the building management system is considered the most important element because it is, so to speak, the nerve center and controller in one. "Smart technology and digitalisation are ways to reduce or even eliminate negative impacts on our climate and environment," says Thomas Hietto. "A green building can have an adaptable design, use energy and other resources efficiently, and use renewable energy and sustainable materials. For example, by increasing local energy production with solar panels, connecting the equipment to advanced building automation systems and controlling them appropriately, we can make the building adaptable, smart and sustainable. The same logic applies to other smart technologies such as ventilation and refrigeration." The new Energy Performance of Buildings Directive will speed up the renovation of existing buildings and further increase the use of smart technology in buildings.

"The best way to get started, is to map out the current state of building automation in your buildings and plan the necessary renovations or upgrades with the help of a competent partner. It is worth investing in a comprehensive building automation system that meets future needs and helps bring savings in energy consumption for years." Also the EU-wide national recovery and resilience plans will have a clear focus on investments and reforms that support climate objectives. "For us all, this will be a unique opportunity to make a win-win for the climate and the recovery. Rethinking and modernising our built environment and making them and European cities smarter and sustainable will open up many possibilities and create significant economic, environmental and social benefits. The whole building industry together should utilise this moment and the financial instruments to improve the energy efficiency and climate neutrality of buildings, which will benefit both people and the planet."

It is estimated that almost 80 percent of Germany's 2015 building stock would have to be refurbished to match the average energy consumption of a new building today. "If you only look at investment costs, you should realise that if you don't invest, the costs will be much higher," says the Deputy CEO. "What if the building can no longer be leased because it no longer meets regulatory standards? What if it can no longer be sold?" "For me, the decision is clear: The change has to happen. If you do it now, you can save costs immediately and secure the value retention of your investment in the future." Caverion, which employs 15,000 people is passionate about making buildings smart and sustainable, looks back on many years of experience in now eleven countries. Caverion's experts provide expert guidance throughout a building's life cycle, focusing on people rather than technology.

From <https://www.caverion.com/> 04/16/2021

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Tallinnovation Smart City Innovation Competition - The 1st Year Follow-Up

Tallinn Innovation Fund was launched in 2020 to support the introduction of smart city solutions in Tallinn with 50,000 euros. The first year results are presented here: <https://innovatsioonifond.tehnopol.ee/en/competition-winners/> Feel free to contact us to get to know more about the winner companies and their solutions! The City of Tallinn and Tehnopol Science and Business Campus launched a Tallinnovation innovation competition to find smart city solutions that will make the city's services and environment even more comfortable and modern for residents and visitors alike. The effort should stimulate cooperation between the city and technology firms, creating opportunities to use innovative software products and services. Those who submit the idea have the opportunity to receive financial support, pilot their project, receive contacts, advice and resources from the City of Tallinn, and use the support of the Tehnopol mentor network. The aim of Tehnopol, the largest research and business campus in the Baltics, is to contribute to the emergence and growth of world-class technology companies in Estonia and to support their expansion into foreign markets. To this end, a comprehensive solution is offered, from commercial real estate to needs-based business development services in three focus areas: smart city, green technology, and health technology. Tallinnovation is an international innovation brand of the City of Tallinn, the aim of which is to involve and introduce the introduction of innovative solutions in Tallinn.

From <https://www.tallinn.ee/> 04/30/2021

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Inclusive Sanitation Needed to Address Service Gap in Asia and Pacific

Developing countries in Asia and the Pacific must reassess their approach and investment priorities to adopt citywide inclusive sanitation (CWIS) to address the region's urban sanitation crisis, according to discussions today at the Online ADB Sanitation Dialogue 2021. "Sanitation continues to be a huge unmet need in Asia and the Pacific, despite the region's progress," said ADB Water Sector Group Chief Neeta Pokhrel. "About 1.2 billion people have no access to basic sanitation services and the region requires \$53 billion per year on average up to 2030 to finance and address the water and sanitation gap." The opening panel of the dialogue focused on how to fix the sanitation crisis using CWIS, which ensures that investments are based on equity, safety, and sustainability, and are directed toward communities who need interventions the most. CWIS aims to galvanize action to help achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 6.2 on sanitation for all by 2030.

The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has underscored the critical role of water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) as a first line of defense to prevent

transmission of the virus, especially among the vulnerable. “Sanitation services for the poor and those living in informal settlements are often badly built and managed, or there may be no access to sanitation infrastructure at all,” said ADB Water Supply and Sanitation Specialist Christian Walder. “Implementing CWIS means shifting from the conventional centralized sanitation infrastructure concept to a service-oriented approach, considering the entire sanitation service chain that is suited for local conditions, especially in urban and informal areas, and which benefits everyone.” The Online ADB Sanitation Dialogue 2021 comprises six webinars and six workshops spread over two weeks until 22 April. The event is a platform for sanitation practitioners, government agencies and decision-makers, and development partners to discuss the strategies that will lead to systemic change on sanitation.

Major partners, such as the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the Urban Climate Change Resilience Trust Fund, as well as related organizations, private sector, and civil society are participating. The Gates Foundation finances the Sanitation Financing Partnership Trust Fund under the ADB-administered Water Financing Partnership Facility, which has been supporting the adoption of CWIS in ADB operations. ADB annual sanitation investments have risen steadily from \$218 million in 2011 to \$717 million in 2020, amounting to a total of \$4.9 billion for 2011–2020, or 21% of ADB’s water portfolio for the period.

From <https://www.adb.org/> 04/12/2021

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ADB, Habitat for Humanity to Support Housing Microloans for Vulnerable Communities

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has teamed with Habitat for Humanity International to help microfinance institutions (MFIs) deliver housing loans to low-income families in rural and peri-urban areas of Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, and the Philippines. The collaboration will expand ADB’s Microfinance Risk Participation and Guarantee Program to include microloans for housing, home improvement, and water and sanitation for vulnerable and climate change-exposed communities. ADB will help MFIs obtain financing for these purposes from commercial banks of up to \$30 million in the first phase. Habitat for Humanity will build the MFIs’ capacity to design, pilot-test, and roll out the loans, with technical assistance from ADB. “Low-income families find it difficult to build resilient houses as they lack adequate and affordable financing options due to the collateral requirements of commercial banks,” said ADB Private Sector Financial Institutions Division Director Christine Engstrom. “MFIs have the networks to reach these communities, but often lack the technical capacities to deliver housing microloans to them. Building on Habitat for Humanity’s technical and training expertise, this inaugural partnership will enable ADB’s Microfinance Program to better address this

market gap.”

“The demand for urban housing in Asia remains largely unmet, giving the private sector a critical opportunity to deliver affordable materials, construction quality, access to energy, gender equity, water supply, and sanitation services, while supporting greater gender equity,” said Habitat for Humanity International Chief Operating Officer Patrick Canagasingham. “With ADB, we will create enabling environments for MFIs through risk-sharing and capacity building, helping unlock local private sector capital for housing.” “This partnership is timely, as micro-housing for the poor and investing in community resilience are key drivers of economic recovery from the pandemic,” said Lead of ADB’s Microfinance Program Anshukant Taneja. An expected 20,000 households will receive housing microloans from partner MFIs in the program’s first phase to enhance construction quality and climate resilience, including upgrading semi-permanent structures and installing sanitation and water connections. ADB also aims to encourage private sector financing through risk-allocation and guarantees. The collaboration will help to empower women, with 90% of financing targeted for women micro-borrowers.

Habitat for Humanity began in 1976 and has grown into a leading global nonprofit, working in more than 70 countries. Habitat’s Terwilliger Center for Innovation in Shelter works with the private sector to pilot new products and approaches for housing finance, materials, and services. From July 2019 to June 2020, Habitat helped more than 1.9 million people in Asia and the Pacific gain access to better housing. ADB’s Private Sector Operations Department will also explore opportunities to work with Habitat for Humanity to scale the organization’s catalytic initiatives, including the MicroBuild Fund, which has deployed over \$140 million in housing finance loans through MFIs, with 19% allocated in Asia and the Pacific. ADB’s Microfinance Program has helped more than 6 million borrowers gain access to microloans.

From <https://www.adb.org/> 04/19/2021

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Five Ways Low Earth Orbit Satellites Will Impact Asia and the Pacific

Despite the rapid spread of internet use across Asia and the Pacific, almost 2.4 billion people, or 55% of the region’s population, remain offline according to the latest data from the UN International Telecommunications Union (ITU). More than 3 billion people live farther than 10 kilometers from high-capacity fiber optic cable infrastructure, making the prospect of accessing broadband internet even more unlikely. Even before COVID-19, broadband internet was essential for building knowledge economies and driving service-based growth. Since the pandemic,

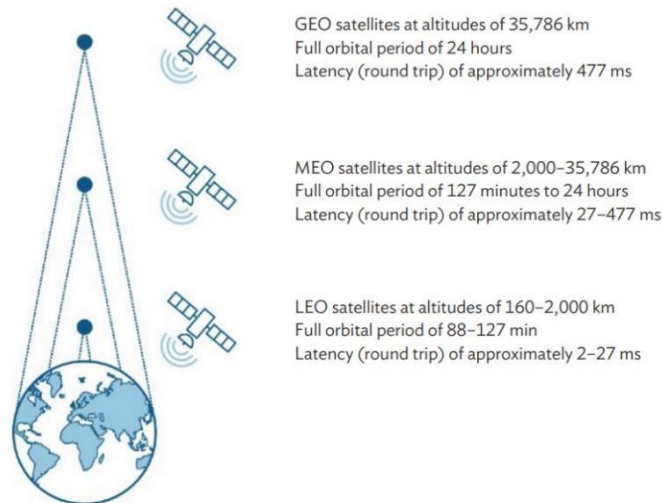
internet connectivity has become even more critical for resilience and is key to the recovery. It expands skills development and economic opportunities for individuals and strengthens community resilience in times of disruption. In contrast, those without high-speed internet capacity are at a big disadvantage.

Satellites are already being used to enable internet access. However, billions of dollars are now being invested in a new generation of satellites that orbit the Earth at a low altitude. These low earth orbit (LEO) satellites can better connect remote and inaccessible regions. Many new groups of these satellites, known as constellations, are in development. However, some are partially deployed, with more than 1,500 satellites in orbit and thousands more in the pipeline. As of 27 April 2021, Starlink, a constellation being built by SpaceX, has already launched 1,445 satellites and is testing its service in North America, Europe, and New Zealand. OneWeb, another satellite broadband provider, has placed 182 LEO satellites in orbit. Other companies, including Asia-based ones, are planning to join in. To better understand the potential and challenges of LEO satellite constellations, ADB has produced a working paper titled “Digital Connectivity and Low Earth Orbit Satellite Constellations: Opportunities for Asia and the Pacific.”

Here are five ways that new LEO satellite constellations may impact ADB’s developing member countries:

1. Global coverage will make high-speed connectivity a reality even in remote regions

Because LEO satellites orbit at altitudes of less than 2,000 km above the Earth’s surface, they circle the planet several times a day. As a result, each constellation requires hundreds or thousands of satellites, blanketing the entire globe, to provide continuous connectivity for any given area. By contrast, traditional satellites are predominantly positioned in geostationary orbits and provide concentrated connectivity service that covers a fixed geographic area. LEO constellations are estimated to be able to increase satellite internet capacity more than 10-fold in just a few years and will distribute their service more evenly across the planet.



2. LEO constellations will improve satellite internet quality, expanding the applications and services that can be used

The low altitude of LEO satellites reduces the time it takes for data to travel between two points, known as latency, from approximately 477 milliseconds inherent in GEO service (because of their distance of 35,786 km above the earth's surface) to less than 27 milliseconds. This means they can be used for applications that rely on low latency, such as high-definition video conferencing or action-based gaming, processing of sensitive financial transactions, or remote operation of machines. Even basic voice calls would benefit, as they are most effective when latency is below 150 milliseconds. Taking advantage of the improved service quality of data communications over LEO, Starlink has partnered with Microsoft to connect its infrastructure directly to Microsoft's cloud and data center infrastructure. Amazon's Project Kuiper is expected to offer cloud services as well. This would further enhance internet quality, particularly for cloud-hosted applications and services, enabling remote communities to access services such as online banking, e-learning, and government services. It would also help them offer products and services online.

3. Competition should reduce broadband prices where LEO-based internet service is permitted

The expansion of global satellite capacity driven by LEO constellations is expected to help reduce costs where service is available. While no new LEO operator has started offering commercial services, Starlink is offering a beta test at competitive rates compared with existing satellite connectivity services and earth-based technologies. The ease of market entry for satellite service providers, and a drop in equipment costs as production is scaled up, will be key to price-competitiveness.

4. LEO connectivity can improve network infrastructure resilience for regions prone to natural disasters

Parts of Asia and the Pacific are particularly vulnerable to communications disruptions caused by natural disasters that damage terrestrial infrastructure, such as typhoons, earthquakes, and volcanic eruptions. Satellite connectivity is already

key to re-establishing communications and supporting disaster response. Landlocked developing countries and small island developing states may have limited, if any, direct international connectivity via terrestrial or undersea fiber optic cable. For these countries, the additional coverage and capacity introduced by LEOs would expand options for redundant or backup connections.

5. Expanding LEO constellations and increasingly affordable rocket launches are benefiting other space technologies and services

Large LEO satellite constellations for broadband data communications have been tried before, particularly in the 1990s, and several high-profile initiatives failed. What has changed since then is the ever-growing demand for high-speed data communications, improvements in satellite technology, and a dramatic reduction in launch costs, led in part by rocket re-use technology. Continued progress in the development of launch technology also has benefits beyond telecommunications, including Earth observation – a rapidly expanding source of real-time data that is used for monitoring crop health, tracking deforestation and reforestation, measuring economic activity, and providing data for predictive analytics in disaster management. Technology development for human space flight and exploration has triggered a wide range of innovations benefiting life on Earth. Among these are water purification systems, home insulation, and adjustable smoke detectors. As the cost of launching satellites continues to come down, this can benefit Earth observation and support development in Asia and the Pacific.

From <https://www.adb.org/> 04/27/2021

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East Asia

CHINA: Xi Stresses Innovation in Equipment Manufacturing Industry

Xi Jinping, general secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, on Monday said that only innovation can help the equipment manufacturing industry become stronger. Xi made the remarks while visiting machinery manufacturer Guangxi Liugong Group Co., Ltd. during his inspection of the city of Liuzhou in south China's Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region. He learned about the company's production, operation and progress in research and development. Xi pointed out that high-quality development is a route that the Chinese economy must take during the 14th Five-Year Plan period (2021-2025), and the high-quality development of the equipment manufacturing industry is the top priority. To achieve high-quality development, innovation is key, Xi said, adding that innovation is the only way to make China stronger and become a frontrunner. China must unwaveringly forge ahead on the path of independent innovation, and make persistent efforts to achieve greater progress, he said.

China Attracts More Foreign Investors with Promising Prospects, Improved Business Environment

Foreign investors keep gravitating toward China as the country maintains a restorative growth momentum and continues to improve its business environment. A recent survey by the Ministry of Commerce (MOC) shows that 96.4 percent of foreign-invested enterprises are optimistic about their business prospects in China. The figure represents a 2.1 percentage-point increase on the beginning of the year, according to the survey of over 3,200 foreign-funded firms. In the first quarter of the year, 10,263 new foreign-funded enterprises were established in China, a surge of 47.8 percent year on year and up 6.7 percent from the same period of 2019, said MOC spokesperson Gao Feng. Aside from the low base of the same period last year, the rapid growth was mainly driven by factors such as the stable recovery of the Chinese economy, continuous improvement of the business environment and enhanced confidence of foreign investors, Gao said. Foreign direct investment (FDI) into the Chinese mainland surged 39.9 percent year on year in actual use to 302.47 billion yuan (about 46.74 billion U.S. dollars) in the first quarter, he said, adding that the figure rose 24.8 percent from the same period of 2019. Among all areas, the western regions in China stand out.

The FDI into China's western region surged 91 percent year on year in the first quarter of this year. Gao has attributed the jump, compared with 38.2 percent in the eastern region and 36.8 percent in central China, to the country's policy guidance. Last year, China revised an industry catalogue that names more sectors encouraging foreign investment. According to the catalogue, eligible enterprises could enjoy a reduced corporate income tax rate of 15 percent, tax exemption on equipment for self-use, and preferential land supply for intensive land projects in the western regions of China. The sub-catalogue of competitive industries in western regions encouraging foreign investment has introduced 34 new items. China has opened more sectors to foreign investors, strengthening their confidence in investments in the country's western regions, he said. With the continuous improvement of infrastructures and the business environment in the western regions, the development potential of the area will be continuously released, said Gao, adding that foreign-funded enterprises would find huge development opportunities there.

JAPAN: Saying It Will Aim for 46% Emissions Cut by 2030

Japan on Thursday nearly doubled its target for cutting carbon emissions, responding to pressure from the United States and some of its own companies as world leaders met for a climate summit hosted by U.S. President Joe Biden. Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga said Japan would aim for a 46% cut by 2030 and look for ways to go even further. Its previous target was a 26% reduction from 2013 levels, a goal that activists had branded unambitious. Other countries also announced stronger action in the lead-up to the virtual summit, with Britain pledging a 78% reduction by 2035. Washington, which announced its own plan to halve emissions as it opened the meeting, is seeking to reclaim global leadership in the fight against global warming after former President Donald Trump withdrew from international efforts. Japan, the world's fifth-biggest carbon emitter, had been under pressure from the Biden administration to set a 50% target, according to sources familiar with discussions held before and during a visit by Suga to Washington last weekend.

Suga said that achieving the new target would not be easy but he would instruct ministers to accelerate plans. "We will continue trying for an even higher cut of 50 percent," he added. U.N. climate scientists say the world's net CO2 emissions must fall to zero by 2050, to limit the rise in global temperatures to no more than 1.5 degrees Celsius compared with pre-industrial levels. Exceeding that amount of warming would unleash the most severe impacts of climate change. Late last year, Suga set a goal for carbon neutrality by 2050, bringing Japan more into line with some other countries at the time. The government is also reviewing energy policy this year and has indicated it will aim for lower use of carbon-emitting fossil fuels in the electricity mix. However, it has so far - to heavy criticism - kept up support for coal due to the slow restart of reactors after the Fukushima nuclear disaster in 2011 led to their shutdown. "All eyes will now be on the pending revision of the Strategic Energy Plan, with huge parts of corporate Japan urging for a target of 50% or more renewables by 2030," Dylan Tanner, executive director of InfluenceMap, a London-based data analysis company, told Reuters.

"Such a number would kick-start both regulatory reform and investment in Japan's power sector in line with global trends towards solar and wind," he added. Aeon Co, Asia's largest retailer, Fujitsu, Ricoh and other companies last year demanded Japan's government speed up a shift to renewable energy and a zero carbon economy in the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. But Japan's motor industry sounded a note of caution on Thursday. "What Japan needs to do now is to expand its options for technology," said Akio Toyoda, president of Toyota Motor speaking in his capacity as head of Japan's automobile manufacturers association. "Policy that bans gasoline-powered or diesel cars from the very beginning would limit such options, and could also cause Japan to lose its strengths," he told a regular press briefing. Japan's powerful business lobby, Keidanren, is dominated by energy-intensive sectors that represent less than 10% of the economy, an InfluenceMap study last year said. Such lobbying has resulted in national policies

that favour coal and hindered attempts to combat climate change, the study said - an assertion dismissed by Keidanren.

From <https://japantoday.com> 04/23/2021

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Gov't Warns Line over Insufficient Personal Data Protection

The Japanese government on Monday ordered messaging app provider Line Corp to take measures to properly protect customers' information after such data were found accessible by a Chinese affiliate without user consent. The administrative guidance, which also requires a report from Line by late May, was issued as the Internal Affairs and Communications Ministry judged the app operator failed to provide a sufficient surveillance system to protect the "secrets of communications" as required by law. Line said in a statement it takes the government's order seriously and vowed to "regain users' trust by implementing the appropriate reforms." The move came after Line, used by over 86 million of Japan's some 126 million people, said last month that users' personal information had been accessible by technicians of its Chinese affiliate. Photos and video footage posted by its users on the online platform were also stored at a server in South Korea.

The communications ministry also said four technicians at the company's Chinese affiliate accessed the app operator's database 132 times, more than what had been declared earlier by Line. On Friday, the government's Personal Information Protection Commission issued a separate administrative guidance and asked Line to report improvement measures within a month to provide a sufficient surveillance system, although there was no clear violation of the personal information protection law. In its data protection guideline, Line has said that customers' personal information can be sent overseas but did not specify the name of any foreign country despite being required to do so under a legal change last year.

The app operator has said that four technicians in the Chinese affiliate accessed its database at least 32 times. They were able to see users' names, phone numbers and email addresses, along with messages reported by users as inappropriate from around the summer of 2018. To better protect customers' information, Line has said data that are stored in South Korea will be transferred to databases in Japan. After the issue came to light in mid-March, Japanese government ministries and other public organizations have temporarily suspended use of the app as a communications tool with the public amid security concerns. Some security experts have expressed concern that personal information of Japanese users may be handed over to Chinese authorities based on the country's national intelligence law. The Line app has also been popular as a major social communications tool in Taiwan, Thailand and Indonesia since the service was launched in June 2011.

From <https://japantoday.com> 04/27/2021

Japan to Offer Aid to Promote Vaccinations

The Japanese government has decided to offer 31 countries in Latin America and Africa about 38 million dollars in emergency aid to help promote coronavirus vaccinations. The aid is part of Japan's commitment to providing developing countries with funds to set up "cold chain" logistics systems to allow coronavirus vaccines to be transported and stored at low temperatures. The government last month decided to offer about 41 million dollars in emergency aid to 25 countries in the Southeast and Southwest Asian and Pacific Island region. The funds will be distributed through the United Nations Children's Fund. At a news conference on Tuesday, Japan's Foreign Minister Motegi Toshimitsu vowed to provide the aid as soon as possible.

From <https://www3.nhk.or.jp> 04/27/2021

SOUTH KOREA: Drumming Up Efforts to Fight Climate Change

South Korea on Tuesday said it will continue to play a role in fighting climate change ahead of the scheduled meeting of the environment decision-making arm of the United Nations slated for later this year. Industry Minister Sung Yun-mo met Alok Sharma, the president for the meeting known as COP26, to discuss a wide array of issues related to climate change and carbon neutrality, according to the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy. The event, scheduled to be held in November last year in Britain, was delayed for a year due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Last year, South Korea declared its plans to accelerate moves to scale back its reliance on fossil fuels as it nurtures eco-friendly industries and builds up a low-carbon economic structure to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050. Sung also said the country will continue efforts to harness green energy by allocating a combined budget worth 73.4 trillion won (US\$65.2 billion) by 2025.

The minister said South Korea is making aggressive efforts to limit its use of coal power by refraining from building new plants while shutting down new ones. Currently, coal accounts for roughly 40 percent of the country's power portfolio. The portion of renewable sources will account for 20 percent of the portfolio by 2030, which will gradually rise to reach up to 35 percent by 2040. Sung, meanwhile, asked Sharma to support the upcoming P4G summit that will be held in South Korea in May. P4G stands for Partnering for Green Growth and the Global Goals 2030, a public-private initiative to tackle climate change and other sustainable development challenges.

From <https://en.yna.co.kr> 04/06/2021

S. Korea to Crack Down on Cryptocurrency-Related Illegalities

South Korea said Monday it plans to crack down on any illegality involving cryptocurrencies, such as money laundering, until June amid skyrocketing prices of virtual money. The interagency crackdown comes as the latest frenzied buying of bitcoin and other cryptocurrencies raises concerns about speculative investments and potential illegal activities, according to the Office for Government Policy Coordination. "There is a need to pay special attention to the occurrence of illegal activities using virtual assets," Koo Yun-cheol, head of the office, said at a vice-ministerial meeting on cryptocurrencies. The Financial Services Commission (FSC), the financial regulator, will require local financial institutions to strengthen their monitoring on withdrawals of virtual money. If any signs of suspected money laundering are detected, they should report them to the state-run Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU), an agency tracking unlawful flows of funds.

The finance ministry and the Financial Supervisory Service, the financial watchdog, also plan to keep close tabs on illegal transfers of virtual assets abroad. The state tax agency will zero in on alleged tax dodgers stashing away assets in cryptocurrencies. Investors have been heavily buying virtual currency as they see it as a lucrative asset amid the new coronavirus outbreak, while the stock market remains dull. Bitcoin topped 80 million won (US\$72,000) per unit in South Korea for the first time in mid-April. The virtual currency is currently trading at some 75 million won, according to local cryptocurrency exchange Bithumb. Daily transactions of cryptocurrencies on 14 local exchanges were valued at \$21.6 billion, according to the virtual asset info website CoinMarketCap. This was heavier than the average daily turnover of 19.1 trillion won in March of Korean stocks by retail investors on the main and secondary stock markets. Bank of Korea Gov. Lee Ju-yeol warned last week that virtual assets are exposed to high price swings, potentially threatening financial stability when excessive investments are made.

From <https://en.yna.co.kr> 04/19/2021

SOUTH KOREA: Acting PM Urges Public to Trust Gov't Virus Response Amid Vaccine Procurement Woes

Acting Prime Minister Hong Nam-ki on Wednesday asked the public to have faith in the government's overall COVID-19 response amid a steadfast growth of new virus patients and concerns over South Korea's vaccine procurement capacity. "We ask that each individual remain alert and attentive in the current situation but also have

faith in our test and medical capabilities, and trust our vaccine administration plan," Hong said during a daily interagency meeting on the coronavirus response. Hong's comments came as the government is currently in the hot seat for what critics said was a slow rollout of the national vaccination campaign and delayed vaccine procurements due to the intensifying global competition to secure vaccines. On Thursday, the number of new daily patients in the country reached 731, further elevating concerns of a new virus wave. The average daily number of cases stayed above 600 in the past week.

Hong explained that the overall virus response situation in terms of resources, such as the number of intensive-care sickbeds, was comparatively better compared with that of late December, and that the number of daily deaths from the virus remained in the single digits thanks to the use of homegrown COVID-19 treatment products. The government will also commit to its plan of completing vaccinations of 3 million people by the end of the month and 1.2 million by the first half of the year, Hong added. To this end, authorities will increase the number of vaccination centers throughout the nation from 175 to 204 by Thursday and up to 264 by the end of the month, he said. During a parliamentary interpellation session later in the day, Hong stated that the government plans to stick to its current social distancing scheme for the time being, noting that "new case numbers are moving along the 700 range." Hong, however, also said he sees the recent spike in people's movement as a signal that calls for an increase in alertness of the government's antiviral measures.

The greater Seoul area, home to half of the nation's 52 million population, is under the Level 2 distancing scheme, the third highest in the five-phase system. The rest of the country is under Level 1.5, except for some municipalities that have adopted Level 2 measures. Kim Boo-kyum, the new prime minister nominee, meanwhile, said he will announce the government's position regarding the current state of vaccine procurement operations during his parliamentary confirmation hearing after accurately examining the situation. "I am speaking with related agencies on the past efforts (regarding the government's vaccine program) and the current situation," Kim told reporters as he arrived at his temporary office in central Seoul. The former four-term lawmaker and interior minister was nominated Friday by President Moon Jae-in as South Korea's new prime minister to replace Chung Sye-kyun in a Cabinet reshuffle.

From <https://en.yna.co.kr> 04/21/2021

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Moon Vows More Support for 'Win-Win' Job Creation Campaign

President Moon Jae-in attended a ribbon-cutting ceremony Thursday for a brand-new car factory in Gwangju, which is a core element of his liberal administration's so-called win-win job creation drive accelerated by a grand social

compromise. The construction of the Gwangju Global Motors (GGM) facilities was completed in the city, 330 kilometers south of Seoul, under a 2019 deal among workers and employers as well as the private and public sectors. Hyundai Motor Company, South Korea's largest automobile manufacturer, has joined the project. GGM is the first full-scale vehicle factory born in the nation in 23 years. The trial production of a light sports utility vehicle (SUV) is under way there for mass production starting in September. It will have the capacity to produce 70,000 cars a year.

"It represents the future of Gwangju and the Republic of Korea, having been created by a grand social compromise between Gwangju citizens, the local government, labor and management," Moon said in a speech during the event held at an industrial complex in Gwangju. He noted that 385 workers have been hired, mostly those in their 20s and 30s living in Gwangju and the nearby province of South Jeolla, for full-time positions. GGM plans to increase the number of employees to over 900 in 2022. They will work at the factory, with their wages maintained at "appropriate levels" and working conditions at the "best level," under the social compromise, according to the president. Moon said the government, emboldened by the success in Gwangju, will provide proactive support for the expansion of such a job creation model. "The government will develop it as another success strategy for our economy via various support," he added.

From <https://en.yna.co.kr> 04/29/2021

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S. Korea Calls for Free Movement of Data at G-7 Digital Ministers Meeting

South Korea called for the free movement of data to vitalize the digital economy on Thursday in this year's Group of Seven (G-7) meeting of digital and technology ministers. South Korea took part in the intergovernmental ministerial meeting virtually after being invited to this year's G-7 meeting set to be held in the United Kingdom in June. Minister of Science and ICT Choi Ki-young said at the meeting that the movement of data as well as electronic transferable records and internet security are integral to secure trust in a digital environment and allow joint global growth, according to South Korea's ICT ministry. The ministers agreed to create a road map that encourages free movement of data based on trust, while responding to challenges such as privacy, intellectual property and security. The ministers also discussed securing democratic values in a digital environment, the ICT ministry said. The G-7 meeting later this year is expected to strengthen ties between existing members -- Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the U.K. and the United States -- as well as countries invited for this year's session -- South Korea, Australia, India and South Africa.

South-East Asia

CAMBODIA: Setting Mechanism for All Foreigners to Get Free COVID-19 Vaccines

Cambodia has set a mechanism to provide free COVID-19 vaccines to all foreigners residing and working in the kingdom, according to a Ministry of Health (MoH) statement. Signed by Health Minister Mam Bunheng, the statement said on Thursday night that all foreigners living or working in Cambodia who are not under the umbrella of the United Nations, international organizations, bilateral organizations, international financial institutions, embassies or local organizations are eligible for vaccinations free of charge. The Ministry of Labor is responsible for preparing the name list of foreigners holding ordinary visas (E) and having work permits issued by the Ministry of Labor, the statement said, noting that these foreigners included investors, businesspeople, skilled workers, artists, medical practitioners, teachers, athletes, consultants and experts, among others. To be eligible for the vaccines, they need valid passports, valid visas and work permits, it said. The statement also advised the local authorities in capital Phnom Penh and provinces to compile a name list of other foreigners who are not mentioned above, such as Cambodian citizens holding foreign passports with visas (K), foreigners who are married to Cambodian citizens, foreigners who retire and foreigners who stay legally for a long time. To get the vaccines, they must have valid passports and visas, it said. The statement said that foreigners who have been registered for vaccination will receive a notification for vaccination at an appropriate time and place in accordance with the MoH's vaccination program. Cambodia began an anti-COVID-19 vaccination drive on Feb. 10. As of Wednesday, more than 756,000 people in the priority groups had been vaccinated against the virus, showed a government report.

From <http://www.xinhuanet.com> 04/09/2021

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SINGAPORE: To Take New Moves in Boosting Maritime Innovation

The Singaporean government will take new moves to boost the city-state's maritime innovation, Senior Minister of State for Foreign Affairs and Transport Chee Hong Tat announced Tuesday at the opening ceremony of the fifth Singapore Maritime Technology Conference. The measures include introducing a new Maritime Innovation and Technology (MINT) Fund grant scheme, launching a digitalization

plan for the bunkering sector, and issuing a call-for-proposal to develop and pilot electronic bill of lading (eBL) solutions. Chee said that Singapore aims to attract more technology firms and work with maritime companies. The country expects to grow the number of Singapore-based maritime technology start-ups from about 30 to 100 by 2025 through PIER71, a joint initiative launched in 2018 between the Maritime and Port Authority (MPA) of Singapore and the National University of Singapore through its entrepreneurial arm, NUS Enterprise. Its mission is to encourage Singapore's maritime industry to accelerate innovation and its adoption and venture into new growth areas through working with technology start-ups.

To support the efforts of PIER71, Chee said that the MPA will set aside 10 million Singapore dollars (7.54 million U.S. dollars) from the Maritime Innovation and Technology Fund to drive the growth and development of maritime technology start-ups in Singapore. Besides, the MPA will set up a new grant scheme called MINT-STARTUP to support both start-ups and scale-ups. Meanwhile, the senior minister of state announced that Singapore is launching a digitalization plan for the bunker sector, which include developing a new MPA system to save the sector an estimated 1,400 man-days annually, and issuing a call for joint industry projects to digitize the end-to-end bunker purchase and delivery process as well as documentations. Besides, Chee said that Singapore has successfully completed an eBL trail between Singapore and Rotterdam ports in January this year, which marks a milestone towards the digitalization of the important Europe-Far East Trade route. To accelerate adoption of eBLs, the MPA will be issuing a call-for-proposal to bring together industry players and solution providers to develop and pilot eBL solutions leveraging recent technology and legislation developments. The Singapore Maritime Technology Conference is one of the key events organized in the Singapore Maritime Week 2021.

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VIETNAM: Ministries Tighten Land Management to Prevent 'Land Fever'

The Ministry of Construction (MoC) and the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (MONRE) have requested provinces and cities review State management on land prices amid 'land fever' in some localities. The MONRE said land prices in some localities and areas have increased dramatically, which could affect socio-economic development and investment projects. The ministry assigned the General Department of Land Administration to inspect the planning, leasing and transferral of land in 26 localities. In Hà Nội and HCM City, the department will inspect the land registration, the issuance of land-use rights certificates, changes of land-use purposes and land-use management in a number of projects which have been slow to put land into use. The MoC also requested localities to publish

information relating to planning, the progress of infrastructure development projects and real estate projects, especially big ones and their merger, establishment and upgrading of administrative units. Earlier, Hà Nội was asked to prevent land speculation when implementing the Red River urban planning after property prices in some areas of the city surged after reports on draft planning for the area were released in June.

Hạ Long City in the northeastern province of Quảng Ninh has reviewed the authentication of transactions relating to land-use rights, while Bắc Giang Province asked communal People's Committees to pay attention to surging land prices. Local authorities were also told to control virtual transactions while actively regulating land funds through the creation of a clean land fund for the auction of land-use rights. Nguyễn Văn Đính, general secretary of Việt Nam Association of Realtors (VARs), said localities should inspect all land-use activities as well as transactions. Đính said localities need to manage those participating in listing and offering land for sale, as well as provide sufficient information on economic development policies and land-use planning to handle news reports that can impact land prices. He added that the State should adjust the law towards digitising land and urban planning to help people conveniently look up real estate product information. At the same time, it is necessary to manage the property exchange floors and brokerage more closely and effectively. In many localities, fake news about project planning and development has been spread. There were even cases of taking advantage of the directions of State leaders and creating fake documents to spread news. This has a very negative impact on the interests of investors who lack knowledge and experience, he said.

In addition, there were also cases offering land for sale not suitable with the law such as forest land, fields and gardens. Many brokers regularly gather in these areas, causing excitement, spreading unwarranted information, pushing prices up to entice investors. He said part of the reason is low interest rates. The cash flow tends to invest in the real estate market, creating 'land fever' in many areas, despite the COVID-19 pandemic. In some localities, the land price frame was increased by 15 to 20 per cent. The limited supply of housing projects, especially social housing, also contributed to make land demand higher. In addition, the demand for investment into land has surged as other sectors have not seen effectiveness due to the pandemic. Land fever would reduce development resources in many sectors. It would prevent the call for investment into localities due to surging land prices, causing a hike in other costs. At a Government press conference, State Bank of Việt Nam's Deputy Governor Đào Minh Tú said as of March 15, real estate loans of the banking sector increased by 2.13 per cent, higher than credit growth of 2.04 per cent for the economy in general. For people and organisations that speculate on real estate, or invest in projects with low solvency or investment efficiency, the SBV always strictly controls and takes limited measures, according to the Deputy Governor. Before the real estate situation showed hot signs, the central bank warned credit institutions. However, the increase of 2.13 per cent was not in all credit institutions, but only a

few.

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Police Launch Traffic Safety Campaign Ahead of Holidays

The Traffic Police Department under the Ministry of Public Security has launched a campaign to ensure safety and order for the upcoming holidays and the elections of deputies to the 15th National Assembly and People's Councils for the 2021-2026 tenure. During the two-month operation starting from April 15 to June 14, police will strengthen patrols and strictly handle traffic violations on roads, railways and waterways. Major General Lê Xuân Đức, deputy director of the department, said police forces, vehicles and professional technical equipment have been deployed to ensure public order and traffic safety during the Reunification Day and May Day holidays, the 131st anniversary of Uncle Hồ's birthday and the elections. Inspection teams will also be set up to handle violations in key areas, for instance when buses stop, park, pick up and drop off passengers in unauthorised places. Violations of traffic regulations, particularly those concerning speed, alcohol use, overloaded trucks and vehicles with expired registrations, will result in strict fines, Đức said. On the railways, the traffic police will work with local authorities, police and the railway sector to inspect, control and handle violations as well as inspect the observance of regulations on railway traffic safety order. The traffic police will also strengthen patrols and control of key waterway routes and areas, focusing on goods transportation, mineral resource exploitation activities, passenger transportation, ports, tourism activities, festivals and entertainment on inland waterways, as well as promptly handle activities causing insecurity and disorder. They will arrange forces at key intersections during the holidays and election venues to handle traffic situations and prevent prolonged congestion, especially on routes connecting Hà Nội and HCM city, tourism sites and key transit points.

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INDIA: Need Faster Ways to Absorb Innovation in Govt SOPs

“This word ‘Innovation’ is misunderstood at times as many bureaucrats and other constituents feel that unless there is a huge change, it’s not an innovation. And, in such a complexity many times improvements do not take place,” Ranjan Dwivedi, Former Director General of Police, Uttar Pradesh, opened his address on this note. He added, “We see many officers make good innovations, however, the process of governance is such that if you want to change a rule it is a long process. The problem

of rule changing or rulemaking does really steps in while absorbing the innovations and changes.” The governance has been designed in this way to ensure that even if someone makes changes to it no harm is caused, cited Dwivedi. Essentially all these improvements indicate changes in the rules of business. Some are reengineering workplaces and some are reengineering processes, however, everything follows a written procedure. Governments function as per certain standard operating procedures (SOPs). Therefore, what the government leaders, policymakers must look at is how to absorb innovations and corrective changes in the SOPs in the fastest manner possible to avoid unnecessary delays, Dwivedi deliberated. Further, he said, “With the inclusion of IT technologies, bringing changes in the procedures shall be eased... We should have the latest and the authentic version on the web and quoting the URL then becomes the latest version and not the official version.” If such changes are introduced then it will become easier to absorb new innovations that the young officers are making, he added.

Shedding light on the way forward for the governance, he said, “The future of e-governance and the use of ICT for governance was always bright. However, the adoption of ICT has been very slow. One of the reasons is that the bureaucracy is extremely conservative... I would say that only 45 to 50 per cent have been achieved of what we could have achieved.” On the impact of COVID pandemic on the governance, Dwivedi highlighted, “COVID has been a blessing in disguise. We see that there is a deadly pandemic with which we have to fight, however, in that silver cloud, there are so many silver linings.” Citing an example of technologies augmenting governance, he said that earlier we had to submit live forms and that as no easy task. But, since the onset of COVID, one can now apply online, get formalities done within a few clicks and gets the service delivered at the doorstep. Contradicting his example above, he said, “But not all is so good. There are services where one can apply online but then has to visit the office for further formalities like for the vehicle registration certificate, one has to visit or take the vehicle to the authority. However, it should be in a way that if I apply only submit the required documents online then there should be no need for me to physically visit an office. So, we’re halfway through.” Concluding his address, Dwivedi pointed out, “Without bringing change and reengineering the business procedures, we cannot completely establish the e-governance or technology-based solutions. So, the government has to find out an easier way to change the rule book to absorb innovative solutions as soon as possible.”

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India Ranked Among Top 50 Nations in Global Innovation Index

In the Global Innovation Index 2020 rankings, India jumped four spots and secured ranked 48th rank by the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO). Amidst the

havoc caused by COVID-19 pandemic, the rankings came in as good news for India and also a sign of the wave of growth and development sweeping through the country. In the previous rankings in 2019, India was positioned 52nd in the world and 81st in the rankings of the year 2015. The ascending trends show a remarkable achievement by India to be in a league of highly innovative developed nations all over the globe. The WIPO had also accepted India as one of the leading innovation achievers of 2019 in the central and southern Asian regions, as it has shown a consistent improvement in its innovation ranking for the last five years. The consistent improvement in the global innovation index rankings is owing to the immense knowledge capital, the vibrant startup ecosystem, and the amazing work done by the public & private research organizations. The scientific ministries like the Department of Science and Technology (DST), the Department of Biotechnology and the Department of Space have played a pivotal role in the enriching the national innovation Ecosystem. The NITI Aayog has been working tirelessly to ensure optimization of national efforts in this direction by bringing policy led innovation in different areas such as EVs, biotechnology, Nanotechnology, Space, alternative energy sources, etc. The India Innovation Index, which was released last year by the NITI Aayog, has been widely accepted as the major step in the direction of decentralization of innovation across all the states of India. A constant thrust in monitoring and evaluating India's position in global rankings has been provided by the NITI Aayog, including the global innovation index. India must aim high and double its efforts in improving its ranking in the global innovation index. The call for 'Aatma Nirbhar Bharat' by the Hon'ble Prime Minister could only be realized if India punches above its weight class and compete with global superpowers in developing scientific interventions. It is time that India brings a paradigm shift and aims to be in the top 25 countries in the next global innovation index rankings.

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How Cloud Computing Technology Affects the SEO Industry

Cloud computing is a collection of services and applications that users can access and use via a web browser. With cloud hosting, it is unnecessary to install software on your system. However, it can be accessed through the service provider's system. Cloud hosting is offered as three basic services: Platform As a Service, Software As a Service, Infrastructure As a Service. Cloud hosting is more popular now than ever before. Many are surprised to realize that cloud hosting can impact the search engine optimization rankings of websites and businesses online. This is because cloud hosting services make it easier and quicker to access platforms and software. Cloud hosting can increase the loading speed of a website. This is essential when discussing the experiences customers have when visiting a website. Customer experience is a major part of search engine optimization ranking as determined by search engines, such as Yahoo, Google, and Bing. Let's look at how cloud hosting

and storage can impact SEO rankings. There is abundant evidence that changing to cloud hosting improves the search engine optimization ranking of many websites. The reason for this is that pages load faster. One of the most important metrics that is used when determining the ranking of a website is user experience. The higher the user experience, that is the more satisfied the user is with their interaction with the site, the higher the site ranks. Users have become impatient. If a website takes more than a few seconds to load, they navigate away. If the experience of switching between pages, accessing videos, or viewing a gallery is cumbersome, users will navigate away. This is where cloud hosting and secure cloud storage solutions have become invaluable. Unquestionably, quicker loading times are the primary way that cloud hosting services affect a website's SEO.

Bots and other malicious programs pose a major threat to websites and online services all the world over. Bots can make it possible for a hacker to get around a website security and give an unauthorized individual the ability to control a website. Some bots make it possible for hackers to have a good view of a website, allowing them to steal information, disrupt functionalities, and engage in other things that will impact the search engine optimization status of the website. One of the best ways to address unwanted malware attacks from bots is a robust web hosting service. Cloud hosting services offer strong security against bots. There's no such thing as 100 percent impenetrable security. However, cloud hosting offers some of the best security possible. One of the biggest benefits connected to cloud hosting is reliability. If your website is constantly down because you are using unreliable hosting, your ranking is going to plummet. However, cloud hosting has proven itself to be a reliable source of hosting. Many cloud hosting providers can promise an uptime of 99.9 percent. Since there is a lot of competition in cloud hosting, hosting providers offer phenomenal customer service. If there is anything wrong with the hosting and you call the provider, you will usually get a quick response. This is an important benefit of cloud hosting, especially when compared to other types of hosting. People use their smartphones for just about everything from listening to the music to using business tools such as accounting apps. More people use their smartphones to access the Internet than accessing the Internet from desktop devices. Successful search engine optimization strategies must be formulated to take mobile users in mind.

Businesses that do not optimize for mobile are going to lose visitors. With over 3.7 billion people around the world using their mobile devices to access the Internet, this is a facet of search engine optimization that cannot be ignored. When you use cloud hosting, analytics and data are made available to search engines that allow the website to be easily tailored to smart phone access. Search engines are interested in knowing the location of hosting compared to the location of where the search is made from. Search engines are going to give higher priority to servers that are hosted locally because these are going to provide faster responses and information that is applicable locally. If someone is in Australia and they are looking for baseball equipment, the searches they are going to get will have an Australian extension. This

only makes sense, especially when thinking about local search engine optimization for small businesses that are not looking to reach a global audience. Before cloud hosting, online businesses would need to purchase and maintain several domain names and websites so that they catered to the geolocations they were trying to target. However, cloud hosting allows for the creation of multiple sites at a low cost. The ease and availability of cloud-based systems to offer local hosting improves a website's chances of ranking well. Another way that cloud hosting improves search engine optimization is that it offers several resources and tools. Since the entire infrastructure is in a centralized place, service providers can offer their clients flexible capacity without it being expensive.

Tools, dashboards, and management consoles can also be offered, which improve the end-user's ability to manage their website remotely. Some of these tools can help website owners build unique strategies for search engine optimization. Cloud-based systems allow the owners of websites to monitor the activity of their users. This information can be analyzed. Changes can then be made in the search engine optimization strategy with the goal of reaching more customers. The popularity of cloud hosting comes from the benefits it offers. It provides a seamless Internet service that is secure and flexible. The number of malicious attacks decreases when using cloud hosting services. The speed of websites increase when businesses opt for cloud services. Websites that have few risks and are optimized for speed attract customers. This plays a role in a high search engine optimization ranking. This leads to improved SERP ranking, which creates a positive chain reaction that will eventually benefit the business's bottom line.

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Telangana Gets Water Resource Management App to Manage Kaleshwaram Lift Irrigation Project

In a significant move to the adoption of technology and enabling better governance, the State of Telangana has started using water resource management app for water management at the Kaleshwaram Lift Irrigation Project (KLIP). For this, Telangana joined hands with VASSAR Labs to deploy and support water management for KLIP. Kaleshwaram Lift Irrigation Project With the implementation of the app, the mega lift irrigation project is now digitally enabled and allows the State authorities to monitor the water levels, pump houses, canals, and reservoirs remotely with the help of a dashboard. To aid the decision making of the authorities, the dashboard displays all the components of the KLIP on a near real-time basis. KLIP is a mega multi-purpose irrigation project developed on the Godavari river in Kaleshwaram, in Jayashankar-Bhupalpally district of Telangana. It is considered the world's largest multi-stage lift irrigation project with its farthest upstream influence is at the confluence of the Pranhita and Godavari rivers. As per the agreement, VASSAR

Labs that has designed the app for KLIP will also provide maintenance support for the system for the next five years.

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Centre Inks MoU with Microsoft to Aid Farmers in Post-harvest Management

The Government of India has inked a pact with Microsoft Corp to provide Indian farmers post-harvest management solutions aiming to level up efficiency and productivity across the entire agriculture sector value chain. The Union Agriculture Minister, Narendra Singh Tomar informed about the pact and said that such technology-powered solutions are a move towards doubling the income of farmers. Adding on the adoption of technology solutions, the Minister said, the government will join hands with other technology players as well to create a vibrant digital ecosystem for farmers. According to the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), Microsoft will use a master database of farmers to address challenges on the individual level or for groups of farmers through its local partner CropData. The government possesses a verified database of over 50 million farmers along with their land records. As reported by a national daily, the Minister said, "Initially, Microsoft will work in 100 villages of 10 districts across states like Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Haryana, Gujarat, and Andhra Pradesh. The company will help farmers with post-harvest management solutions through building a collaborative platform and capturing agriculture datasets such as crop yields, weather data, market demand, and prices."

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Salesforce Collaborates with NASSCOM to Skill the Workforce of the Future Under FutureSkills Prime

Salesforce (NYSE: CRM), the global leader in CRM, today announced a collaboration with NASSCOM's FutureSkills Prime Program. Under Salesforce's One India Talent Program focused on skilling next-generation trailblazers, this collaboration will leverage Trailhead, Salesforce's free online learning platform and will aim to skill 1,00,000 professionals, potential employees and students, in India, by 2024. In a recent study commissioned by Salesforce and YouGov, titled 'The Digital Skills Report', nine out of every ten people surveyed in India believe that the COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the need for digital skills in their organisation. Additionally, 91 per cent of individuals surveyed from India, said that their organisation has plans in place to fill their 'digital skills gap'. To bridge this digital skills gap, Salesforce is leveraging the power of Trailhead, and NASSCOM will

deliver free and continuous learning on the Future Skills Prime portal. The specifically curated learning maps on Trailhead (Trailmix) will aim to empower and accelerate an individuals' journey towards building skills in emerging technologies and increase their aptitude in a digital-first environment. This collaboration will also provide learners with access to Salesforce career fairs in addition to providing mentorship opportunities, soft skills training and authorized certification aligned to the National Occupation Standards. Arundhati Bhattacharya, CEO and Chairperson, Salesforce India, said, "The pandemic has caused every industry to respond to the needs of its customers faster than ever before, with a digital-first approach. As organisations evolve, the role of technology will continue to accelerate the need for a digitally agile workforce. Trailhead is designed to remove barriers to learning by empowering anyone to skill up for the jobs of tomorrow. We are excited to be associated with NASSCOM to provide a platform for continuous learning and bridge the digital skills gap in India".

Speaking on the occasion, Amit Aggarwal, CEO IT-ITES Sector Skills Council, NASSCOM and Co-Architect FutureSkills, said "Our collaboration with Salesforce is poised to skill learners to enhance their employability. It will enable them to build the skills required for the rapidly accelerating cloud-based application development ecosystem. The specially curated learning trail from Salesforce available on FutureSkills Prime will be FREE for all learners. The specific engagements like Trailblazer Connect through mentorship, soft skills and career fair along with instructor-led training, authorized certification aligned to the National Occupation Standards makes this association unique and will play a big role in accelerating the momentum towards achieving our vision of making India the digital talent hub of the world." The Digital Skills report is the outcome of a YouGov survey commissioned by Salesforce in March 2021. The survey reveals interesting results regarding the current capabilities, expectations, and requirements for digital skilling across industries and includes private, public, and not-for-profit organisations with 1 to 100+ employees. These findings are based on a survey conducted with 1056+ middle managers and senior management professionals across India.

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Maharashtra Govt Restricts Access to Local Trains for Healthcare & Government Employees Only

In a major move to break the chain of infection of COVID, the Government of Maharashtra restricted the access to local trains in Mumbai for only healthcare workers and government employees. The restrictions came in force from April 22 night 8:00 pm and will remain effective till 7 am on May 1. As per the statement from the state government, the government entities include civic bodies of Mumbai, Thane and other corporations, zilla parishads, government authorities, statutory

commissions and agencies. Besides these, any other person even notified as under essential services or exempted by the government as per earlier orders including media persons will not be allowed to travel in the local, the statement added. Another statement from the chief minister's office (CMO) said that essential services or those exempted from the curbs can carry their organisation's identity card and travel by private vehicles to their work.

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SRI LANKA: Newest Grocery Tech Platform, Partners with eFutures – To Leverage Companywide Operations as well as Customer Experience

Specializing in groceries and essential items, N7T partnered with EFutures to build a holistic and inter-connected digital presence via e-commerce platform PROVIDORE. The concept was founded on the ambition to create the most user-friendly and functional technology to alleviate the hassles of traditional grocery shopping. "Customer experience shouldn't be a compromise when shopping online", says Meneka Galgamuwa, PROVIDORE CEO. "Fulfilling everyday grocery needs is only part of our service. Together with EFutures, we have built an end-to-end system which provides much needed convenience for today's modern, busy consumer lifestyle". While e-commerce has been prevalent in the country, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic created an influx of consumers into the online space, to purchase essential goods such as groceries. In the midst of it, a number of key problems were prominent. A lack of real-time inventory and gaps within the supply chain led to partially fulfilled orders, together with spotty order status updates. Add to this the losses suffered by smaller producers and local boutique artisans, most of whom had only relied on in-person sales. PROVIDORE aimed to change all of that. With EFutures by its side as its dedicated technology partner, an online e-commerce web presence was created which not only offered a smooth user journey, but was benchmarked to global standards with the expertise of tech-driven teams across the board. From initial market analysis to developing the final product, all aspects, including customer experience, have been unified with solutions that are technologically robust and versatile. "Only a handful of Sri Lankan e-commerce businesses have harnessed the full power of technology to advance their business strategy. Therefore, we were excited to see the technology vision for PROVIDORE. We were one of the main IT solution partners in on the ground floor and we intend to guide PROVIDORE to reach its full technology potential", Prashan Nagendra, CEO of EFutures, commented when asked about the partnership.

Closely integrating with inventory, warehousing and logistics for a supply chain that is free of silos, PROVIDORE has been powered by Magento 2.0 for its online shopping cart system – while Celigo has been used as the middle layer to integrate third-party

vendors offering ERP and warehouse management applications. Since PROVIDORE pays prime focus towards absolute freshness & quality, this technology-powered leverage delivered by EFutures has proved to be advantageous in a number of key ways. Perishable items are ordered fresh from Nuwara Eliya farms daily and are delivered overnight. Once detected in a cart, the system automatically determines delivery and timing options – so that only the freshest produce is sourced and delivered from farm to table within 24 hours. On the other hand, real-time stock updates are also realized on the website, so that users don't have to risk purchasing a product that is already out of stock. This ensures complete order fulfilment, but it also further benefits the purchase and delivery of perishable items. Other features include a saved shopping list; which users can fill up with necessary items that need to be purchased on a regular basis. Add items on the list into your shopping cart with a single click, to checkout with greater ease and convenience. PROVIDORE is now live at www.providore.shop and taking orders. In a short span of time, they have built a loyal customer base, mainly attributed to being able to fulfil everyday household needs, obtain the highest quality fresh fruits & vegetables received daily from Nuwara Eliya, carry an extensive section of local & imported products and finally maintain consistent service levels.

Together with its ongoing partnership with EFutures as its dedicated technology provider, PROVIDORE will continue to bring technology advancements, always striving to better the consumer experience and afford lifestyle conveniences to its consumers. PROVIDORE plans to offer a comprehensive retail experience by introducing new categories such as fashion, cosmetics, electronics etc. while expanding beyond Colombo to other major cities islandwide. A mobile app and new functionality are already in the works and will be launched shortly in the upcoming months. EFutures is a boutique software product engineering agency that focuses on technology companies. With a 150-member team of expert developers and over 2 decades of experience, EFutures has served clients both locally and internationally across a wide spectrum of business requirements – for new and existing projects alike.

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Sri Lanka's Tech Startup Program Spirallation Opens for 2021 Applications

Sri Lanka's apex Government body in driving the tech-startup ecosystem, the Information and Communication Technology Agency of Sri Lanka (ICTA) is now calling applications for its national startup initiative 'Spirallation' for the ninth year running. The Spirallation series has so far supported more than 90 successful startups across multiple industry verticals -including health, finance, agriculture,

education and logistics-and has generated more than 500 job opportunities. The latest round, called as Spirallation 2021 Tech Startup Support Program sets the stage for tech startups to be groomed by offering comprehensive technical and business training hosted by industry experts. Founded in 2010, Spirallation, which acts as an incubator and accelerator program, aims to promote, encourage, and support tech startups and innovation within Sri Lanka with a 1.5Mn grant for each startup in a cohort. As a startup joins the Spirallation program, the grant will be split and presented according to its achievement of already set targets, based on predefined milestones.

Startups will get continuous support from the resource pool throughout the incubation/ acceleration period and beyond. Spirallation also facilitates tech startups to access both local and international markets, provides opportunities to attend international conferences, helps startups grow faster and scale their businesses. Many tech startups that were supported by Spirallation are now successfully operating in fields such as quality education, agriculture, health and wellbeing, banking and financial services, fashion and apparel, and infrastructure. To be eligible, applicable startups need to be listed in StartupSL Platform. New startups (registered or looking to register) can apply and also registered companies that are less than 3 years (calculated as of application date) in existence are also eligible. All applications should be submitted through the registration form in spirallation.com and applications submitted in any other method will not be accepted.

Applications are open till 10th May and interested applicants are invited to register via <https://spirallation.com> As the catalyst in shaping the tech startup ecosystem of Sri Lanka, ICTA pioneers in supporting startups via Spirallation and all other startup related activities in its 'Startup Ecosystem Development' Strategic Business Unit under the Digital Economy Pillar of ICTA. It is initiated with the view of developing new tech-based business ventures in the country, increasing startup quality, providing early-stage funding, knowledge, and everything a startup needs to run a successful business.

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Mobitel Empowers Sri Lanka Police with hi-Tech Body Cameras

As part of supporting the nation's fight against COVID-19, Mobitel, Sri Lanka's National Mobile Service Provider introduced the latest Body Cameras to Sri Lanka Police at an event held at the Police Park Headquarters recently. The landmark event which took place under the patronage of the Senior Deputy Inspector General (DIG) of Sri Lanka Police, Deshabandu Tennakoon had the presence of officials representing both the Police and Mobitel (PVT) Ltd. Further, Mobitel also made a financial contribution to support the ongoing efforts of the Police in curtailing the

spread of COVID-19 along with food packs meant to be distributed among Police personnel who are managing checkpoints for hours to safeguard the people of Sri Lanka. Mobitel believes that Sri Lanka Police need to be appreciated for their outstanding efforts and for tirelessly working around the clock to keep people safe. The contribution showcases Mobitel's unwavering commitment in times of national crisis to partner with the Tri-Forces and the Health Sector while simultaneously helping Sri Lankans avail of its diverse digital healthcare and superior mobile experience during this challenging time. Mobitel is sharing the government's responsibility in facilitating the safety of citizens at this critical time through a variety of other digital measures. As the caring network provider, Mobitel introduced numerous packages ranging from special Pre-Paid plans to Bonus Data add-ons, Free Health Advisory services, Digital Payment solutions, Data extensions and many more to help its customers to carry out their day to day activities without any hassle. Furthermore, both local and international organizations such as the World Health Organization (WHO), UNICEF, and Sri Lanka Health Promotion Bureau are leveraging on Mobitel's superior reach to communicate vital messages about COVID to raise awareness across Sri Lanka. In a time of the crisis facing the nation, Mobitel remains a pillar of strength and refuge not only for its customers but for the rest of the country as well.

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Central-West Asia

AZERBAIJAN: No Shortage of Pcs and Laptops - Azerbaijan Innovation Agency

The Azerbaijan Innovation Agency has denied the information spread in some Azerbaijani media outlets about the lack of computers and laptops in the country, the Agency told Trend on April 2. "HTech Invest, the resident of the Mingachevir High Technology Park, successfully continues its activity in the production of computers and laptops," the Agency said. "The information disseminated in some media outlets does not correspond to reality," Orkhan Nadirov, coordinator of the Innovation Agency for Mingachevir, said. "The activity of the plant continues successfully and we are preparing to expand the production volumes." Nadirov stressed that the Innovation Agency invites startups and IT companies to become residents of the Pirallakhi and Mingachevir Technology Parks. "Residency opens up new opportunities for generating income for companies and solves many problems faced by entrepreneurs," Nadirov said. The residents of these parks are exempt from 18 percent import tax, VAT, customs duties, corporate, land and property taxes.

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Azerbaijan to Be Able to Visually Analyze Trade Indicators Through New Portal

The innovation presented by the 'Trade Statistics Portal' is to inform the interested parties about the commodity nomenclature within Azerbaijan's foreign economic activity, as well as the rates of import and export customs duties in a more modern format, the head of the secretariat of the State Customs Committee (SCC) Anar Suleymanov said. Suleymanov made the remark at an event dedicated to SCC's project on 'Trade Statistics Portal', Trend reports on Apr.7. According to him, through the portal, the SCC publicly presents the documents required for the registration of goods during import or export, related to entrepreneurial activity. He noted that the committee also plans to expand the directions presented on the portal in the future. During the event, an employee of the State Customs Committee, Eldar Abbasov, pointed out that the experience of many developed countries was studied and used to create the 'Portal of Trade Statistics'. "The SCC publishes statistical data on a monthly basis, but in many Western countries, this information is presented visually. Now it has become possible in Azerbaijan," added Abbasov.

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Azerbaijan Continues to Compensate Workers Employed in COVID-Hit Areas

Around 20,442 taxpayers engaged in coronavirus-hit spheres in Azerbaijan were provided with financial support, Trend reports citing the State Tax Service under the Azerbaijani Ministry of Economy. The State Tax Service, in accordance with the decision adopted by the country's Cabinet of Ministers to continue financial support on the payment of a certain part of the salary to employees in the areas affected by the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, provided financial support to 20,442 taxpayers as part of 4th stage in cities and districts, where a toughened quarantine regime was introduced - Lankaran, Shaki, Jalilabad, Bilasuvar, Gakh, Zagatala, Masalli, Ismayilli, Guba, Khachmaz districts. According to the tax service, the total amount of financial support provided surpassed 41.7 million manat (\$24.5 million). Financial support was also provided to 185,856 employees in the coronavirus-affected spheres.

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Azerbaijan Shares Data on Applications Submitted for Participation in Training on Export Management

About 30 local companies have applied to participate in the "Export Academy" project conducted by Azerbaijan Export and Investment Promotion Foundation (AZPROMO) and Club of Exporters to train personnel to meet modern requirements for the development of the country's export potential and international trade, Trend reports on April 26 referring to Azerbaijani Economy Minister Mikayil Jabbarov's message in Twitter. "These trainings will be useful for those who want to be engaged in export or specialize in export management," the minister tweeted. AZPROMO's mission is to meet the needs of businessmen who have applied by rendering targeted services and facilitating the inflow of foreign direct investments and export in efficient ways.

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Azerbaijan to Enhance Capabilities of Digital Trade Hub for Supporting Entrepreneurs

Participants of the Artificial Intelligence for Digital Governance Conference & Data Competition Confirmation online event decided to start providing support to entrepreneurship through a single platform in the coming months, Trend reports on Apr.26. In order to establish more effective cooperation between various structures, especially, the Azerbaijani Agency for Agricultural Lending and Development, the State Customs Committee, and ABAD (Affordable Support for Family Businesses), a decision was made to enhance the capabilities of the Digital Trade Hub platform. Within the framework of this platform, issues related to simplifying the access of entrepreneurs to financial resources and tax benefits were discussed.

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UZBEKISTAN: Creating Fund to Help Cancer Patients

The Uzbek government has initiated a fund for those who are suffering from oncohematological and intractable diseases. The fund includes involving foreign specialists to conduct complex surgeries in the republic. The funds are also planned to be used to purchase the necessary equipment, medicines and medical devices, as well as to reimburse patients for the costs of diagnostics and medical care. The fund's activities are to gain income from the placement of its free funds on bank deposits and 7% of the excise tax on tobacco products. In addition, individuals and legal entities are also welcome to make donations.

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Oceania

AUSTRALIA: RBA Leaves Rates Unchanged, Eye on Housing

The Reserve Bank has left its key interest rates at a record low at its monthly board meeting, while warning it is monitoring developments in the heated housing market. The cash rate has stood at 0.1 per cent since November. So too has the central bank's three-year bond yield target, aimed at keeping rates low, and its term funding facility rate, which assists banks lend to business. RBA governor Philip Lowe reiterated the bank would not increase the cash rate until inflation was sustainably within the two to three per cent inflation target, and wages growth was materially higher. "The board does not expect these conditions to be met until 2024 at the earliest," Dr Lowe said on Tuesday. He noted housing markets have strengthened further, with prices rising in most jurisdictions, while housing credit growth to owner-occupiers has picked up, with strong demand from first home buyers. "Given the environment of rising housing prices and low interest rates, the bank will be monitoring trends in housing borrowing carefully and it is important that lending standards are maintained," Dr Lowe said.

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Women's Refuges May Be Forced to Cut Staff

Treasurer Josh Frydenberg has indicated the federal government is open to providing significantly more money to women's safety groups. The groups are seeking an extra \$150 million to help deal with an increase in demand from women fleeing violence. They were given a boost of that amount during the coronavirus pandemic last year and say demand has not gone away. "I can absolutely understand why demand has not gone away because one in four Australian women have experienced physical violence at the hands of an existing partner or a former partner," Mr Frydenberg told ABC radio on Wednesday. "That's why we're investing \$1 billion in the fourth national action plan as well as our other initiatives. "We will continue to make more money available for this obvious area of need." Mr Frydenberg said the applications would go through the usual processes ahead of the budget in May.

"But I can be unequivocal in saying we are putting a record amount of money into ensuring women's safety and trying to reduce the incidence of domestic violence, which is at an unacceptably high level." Specialist women's safety services and women's refuges will have to cut staff and support without another \$150 million in special funding, peak bodies in NSW and Queensland warn. More than 15 organisations have called on the federal, state and territory governments to repeat the cash injection that addressed the spike in domestic violence during the pandemic.

"We cannot wait for the commencement of the next national plan to provide critical safety and support to those Australian women (cis and trans), children and families who need our help now," the NSW Women's Alliance says.

Ending Violence Against Women Queensland President Emma Iwinska said: "All service sectors across Queensland have been inundated, with women seeking support and are struggling to keep up with demand even with COVID funding." Federal, state and territory ministers responsible for women's safety will meet on Wednesday to discuss the replacement of the nation's first domestic violence national plan, which is due to expire in 2022. The meeting will be co-chaired by federal Minister for Women Marise Payne and federal Women's Safety Minister Anne Ruston. A federal parliamentary committee's bipartisan report last week said the economic cost of violence against women and their children in Australia is estimated at \$26 billion each year. "Billions of dollars in pandemic support was given to corporations who reported huge profits. Surely the safety of women and children should not be allowed to be reduced, at a fraction of that cost," White Ribbon Australia executive director Brad Chilcott said.

Queensland service providers said last year's funding injection had helped address chronic and historical underfunding of the sector. But demand was already rising before the pandemic and the complexities associated with supporting women, children and families had only amplified since it began. NSW frontline organisations reported their busiest year on record, with no signs of the need slowing. Demand for a court advocacy service for NSW domestic violence victims rose 35 per cent last year, or an extra 73,000 calls for help. "We don't have time to waste or wait. This remains a national emergency," Domestic Violence NSW chief executive Delia Donovan said. "Solutions have been provided for years. They are simply not committed to or invested in. Less talk, more action please."

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PM Warns of Risks from Further Lockdowns

Scott Morrison has warned any further restrictions to contain an outbreak of COVID-19 in Australia will not be good for either the economy or jobs. The prime minister met with state premiers on Monday to get Australia's derailed vaccination program back on track, while looking at ways to open up international borders, albeit further down the track. "We can't get ahead of ourselves here ... the thing we need to be very clear about is the pandemic is raging globally," Mr Morrison told reporters in Sydney. "If there are further lockdowns ... because of the introduction of COVID into Australia, then that won't be good for the economy, it won't be good for jobs." What has been good for jobs is Australia's booming housing market, supported by the government's HomeBuilder program, record low interest rates, changing population

dynamics and improving market confidence.

The Housing Industry Association said new home sales were nearly 40 per cent higher in the first three months of the year than during the same period last year. The HomeBuilder scheme was introduced during the depths of the pandemic and late last year was extended to March, although the size of grants was trimmed from \$25,000 to \$15,000. "In December 2020, there was a near record volume of new home sales as households rushed to finalise contracts to build a new home before the end of the (HomeBuilder) \$25,000 grant," HIA economist Angela Lillicrap said. "This same effect can be seen in March as households rushed to get access to the \$15,000 grant." The HomeBuilder program ended last month, but at the weekend the government extended the deadline to begin construction by an additional 12 months. Those who were eligible for the grant before its March 31 conclusion - some 121,000 building applications, according to the government - will now have 18 months after signing contracts to commence construction.

Treasurer Josh Frydenberg said the scheme was costing the government \$2.5 billion but had helped tip some \$30 billion into Australia's construction sector amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Commonwealth Securities senior economist Ryan Felsman said the extension will be a welcome boost for tradies and construction workers as supply constraints and labour shortages risked hampering momentum in the sector. Separately, new research shows the Afterpay revolution provided billions of dollars of benefits to the economy during last year's recession, fuelling jobs growth and helping consumers turn their backs on expensive credit cards. The research conducted by Accenture into the Buy Now Pay Later service provider found Afterpay usage produced \$3 billion in net benefits during the pandemic. Retailers and small and medium-sized business enjoyed \$6 billion in incremental sales, including \$510 million for regional merchants.

Accenture managing director Andrew Charlton said the Afterpay revolution was a win for both consumers and merchants. "For consumers, Afterpay offers the ability to budget and simplifies purchasing without the payment of interest and credit card fees," he said. "For retailers and small business during the pandemic, Afterpay was an invaluable sales channel, allowing them to connect to internet-savvy, budget-conscious consumers." The research estimated Afterpay users saved \$110 million compared to what they would have paid making the same purchases with credit cards. The report also calculated Afterpay spending helped support 63,000 jobs, including 11,000 jobs directly employed by merchants in sales operations. An additional 33,000 jobs were supported indirectly in areas such as logistics, advertising and market research.

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Tech Could End Live Export Monitors: RSPCA

The RSPCA fears a federal government call for technological solutions to live export welfare monitoring, could lead to independent observers no longer boarding ships to do the job. "The risk is that technology will replace independent human observation," Dr Jed Goodfellow from the RSPCA told AAP. His concerns follow a call by Agriculture Minister David Littleproud earlier this month for technological solutions to improve the regulation of the trade. "More than 2.3 million Australian livestock are exported each year by sea and air and Australia is a world leader in ensuring health welfare standards of this livestock," he said at the time. "However maintaining and demonstrating good welfare outcomes currently places considerable regulatory burden on industry, as current monitoring and reporting is largely manual, repetitive and resource intensive."

The government is offering grants totalling \$10 million to fund feasibility studies, which could include temperature monitoring and CCTV. The so called Business Research and Innovation Initiative provides an opportunity to develop solutions to improve government services, according to the Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment. "The current round of the BRII includes exploring opportunities to better use technology to more effectively and efficiently monitor and demonstrate good animal health and welfare outcomes," a spokesman said on Saturday. "This does not mean independent observers will be replaced. Rather, this work is looking at options on how the government's regulation of the trade could be strengthened and improved." However Dr Goodfellow is not so sure. The live export industry has been beset by welfare problems over many years and in 2011 the government briefly banned live exports altogether.

In 2018 the department was granted powers to put independent observers on board high risk voyages, to monitor animal welfare conditions. But they were only placed on some ships and the program was paused in March 2020 due to COVID-19. "Our concern is the government does not intend to replace those observers and they are looking at a technological replacement," Dr Goodfellow says. The chief executive of the Australian Livestock Exporters' Council, Mark Harvey-Sutton, told AAP he completely disagrees with the RSPCA. "There's extensive monitoring on vessels at the moment and technology has the possibility of enhancing that," he said. Mr Harvey-Sutton said all live export vessels have stock hands on board and long haul trips or ships carrying breeding stock would also have qualified vets.

He said there had not been any welfare issues since the government paused its deployment of independent observers on some ships. "Independent observers haven't been present since COVID and there have been no welfare problems ... there's significant onboard monitoring already," he said. Dr Goodfellow concedes technology could help end-to-end monitoring of sheep on voyages and could be used to track key welfare indicators in pens, such as humidity and ammonia levels.

But he says welfare standards must change fundamentally. "You can have all the gadgets in the world but that won't change the inherent animal welfare problems with the trade," he said. Earlier in April, New Zealand announced it would phase out live exports entirely. The national industry service provider, Livecorp, declined to comment on the grants scheme.

From <https://au.news.yahoo.com> 04/25/2021

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Technology – NZ Government Accelerates Move to SaaS with TechnologyOne

WELLINGTON, 19 April 2021—TechnologyOne and the Ministry of Business Innovation and Employment (MBIE) have announced a new procurement framework which will pave the way for 23 NZ government agencies to transition to modern and secure Software-as-a-Service (SaaS) environments. The new streamlined procurement arrangements will offer stronger cybersecurity options and improve services to citizens by allowing agencies to be more flexible and innovate more quickly. Negotiated by MBIE and endorsed by the office of the Government Chief Digital Officer (part of the Department of Internal Affairs), the agreement provides a common contractual framework, providing NZ Government agencies a clear roadmap for their digital transformation to a SaaS platform. It is part of the government's reforms to ICT procurement making it simpler, clearer and faster for agencies and industry to transact services and deliver better outcomes for the community.

Ed Chung, TechnologyOne CEO, said he is proud to be a part of NZ Government's digital transformation, with the new arrangements set to bring forward benefits to citizens, at a time when agility in the public sector is needed. "As the disruption caused by the pandemic enters its second year, we know that strong, secure and resilient IT operations will power the innovations that will drive the country's economy forward and we believe this is an exciting and economically important step for NZ. "The last 12 months have demonstrated the benefits of Software-as-a-Service environments. "The organisations which were able to make the smoothest transitions to remote work this time last year were those who had invested in SaaS," Mr Chung said.

The agreement comes at a good time for government agencies with TechnologyOne's SaaS infrastructure being certified as compliant with the New Zealand Information Security Manual (NZ ISM) for several years already, building on the high-level credentials recently awarded to TechnologyOne by Australia's security authorities. It also comes at a time when public sector organisations around the country are considering the changes required to be ready for the introduction of e-Invoicing, a digital transformation which allows them to do away with paper

invoices to reduce costs and then help them pay suppliers, including small businesses, faster. “The Australian and New Zealand governments use a common standard for e-Invoicing, which means NZ agencies can benefit from work already done across the Tasman,” Mr Chung said.

About TechnologyOne TechnologyOne (ASX: TNE) is Australia's largest enterprise software company and one of Australia's top 150 ASX-listed companies, with locations across six countries. We provide a global SaaS ERP solution that transforms business and makes life simple for our customers. Our deeply integrated enterprise SaaS solution is available on any device, anywhere and any time and is incredibly easy to use. Over 1,200 leading corporations, government agencies, local councils and universities are powered by our software.

For more than 32 years, we have been providing our customers enterprise software that evolves and adapts to new and emerging technologies, allowing them to focus on their business and not technology.

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Asia-Pacific

Minister-Level Meeting of the Coalition of Finance Ministers for Climate Action

The Coalition of Finance Ministers for Climate Action steps up calls for green growth investments as part of a global shift toward an inclusive and resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. The Coalition also shared perspectives on policies to make progress towards decarbonization and manage climate-related financial stability risks. The Coalition invited the United States Secretary of the Treasury Janet L. Yellen, China Minister of Finance Liu Kun, Japan State Minister of Finance Kenji Nakanishi, Republic of Korea Minister of Finance Hong Nam-Ki and representatives from Central Banks and environmental organizations to share their visions for addressing climate change with Coalition Member countries. The Coalition welcomed eight new members. Membership, now at 60, indicates a growing global interest in the use of economic and financial policies to tackle climate change. Member countries now represent about 63% of global GDP. WASHINGTON, D.C., April 6, 2021 –The Coalition of Finance Ministers for Climate Action met today on the margins of the 2021 Spring Meetings of the World Bank Group and the International Monetary Fund under Co-Chair H.E. Matti Vanhanen, Minister of Finance of Finland, outgoing Co-Chair H.E. Rodrigo Cerda, Minister of Finance of Chile, and incoming

Co-Chair H.E. Sri Mulyani Indrawati, Minister of Finance of Indonesia.

The meeting acknowledged the increasing global momentum for action on climate change in the context of the ongoing challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic—many governments are implementing large-scale stimulus packages and using this moment to boost climate ambition. Perspectives were shared on transitioning to a low carbon and climate-resilient global economy, mitigating climate-related financial risks, and pursuing pathways towards decarbonization. Speakers included United States Secretary of the Treasury Janet L. Yellen, China Minister of Finance Liu Kun, Japan State Minister of Finance Kenji Nakanishi, Republic of Korea Minister of Finance Hong Nam-Ki, Chair of the Network for Greening the Financial System Frank Elderson, Malaysian Central Bank Governor Nor Shamsiah Yunus, and representatives from the Institute of International Finance, the International Chamber of Commerce, and the Worldwide Fund for Nature. Lord Nicholas Stern, Chair of the Grantham Research Institute on Climate Change and the Environment, presented preliminary findings from a forthcoming Coalition study on green recovery strategies and recommended fiscal policies for boosting economic growth while pursuing national and global climate objectives—two goals that are increasingly recognized as going hand-in-hand.

The President of the World Bank Group, David Malpass, and Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund, Kristalina Georgieva, delivered opening remarks noting key climate priorities. Several Institutional Partners also shared their perspectives during the meeting including: Tim Adams, President and CEO, Institute of International Finance; John Denton, Secretary General, International Chamber of Commerce; Valdis Dombrovskis, Executive Vice President, European Commission; Angel Gurría, Secretary General, OECD; Werner Hoyer, President, European Investment Bank; Jyrki Katainen, President, SITRA; Benigno López Benítez, Vice President for Sectors and Knowledge, IADB; Manuel Pulgar-Vidal, Global Leader of Climate & Energy, WWF; Odile Renaud-Basso, President, EBRD; Andrew Steer, World Resources Institute. The Coalition welcomed eight new Members—Belgium, Burkina Faso, Japan, Korea, Kyrgyzstan, Malaysia, Rwanda, and the United States—boosting its ranks from 52 to 60 Member countries and demonstrating the growing global interest in using economic policy to combat climate change.

The meeting also marked the formal transition of the Co-Chair role from Chile to Indonesia. Chile, a founding Co-Chair alongside Finland, guided the Coalition into the leading global body that is promoting climate action through economic policy. Member countries expressed their gratitude to Chile for its hard work and dedication to the agenda. Indonesia, a strong supporter of the Coalition since its inception, is the first Co-Chair from the Asia region. Finland's term has been extended for an additional year until April 2022. In addition to the Minister-level meeting, Coalition members contributed compelling video statements on “promoting strong recovery and growth while accelerating the transition to a low carbon global economy” as

inputs into the meeting's agenda. "I warmly welcome the new members of the Coalition. This demonstrates the Coalition's growing role and the importance of its work in the global climate agenda. Our work is based on building trust and confidence, sharing experiences and strengthening expertise and knowledge," said Finance Minister Matti Vanhanen, Finland, Co-Chair of the Coalition of Finance Ministers for Climate Action.

"The Coalition has become a powerful platform for Ministries of Finance to discuss global climate issues and share experiences from a financial and economic perspective. Looking ahead, our work must be a beacon for policy discussions on climate change as well as supporting national policy development," said Finance Minister Rodrigo Cerda, Chile, outgoing Co-Chair of the Coalition of Finance Ministers for Climate Action. "The Coalition gives the world a clear voice on the important role of Finance Ministers in the climate agenda through fiscal and financing policies. Let us use our role as Finance Ministers to drive change and leave a legacy in the fight against climate change. We will save our planet if we work together," said Finance Minister Sri Mulyani Indrawati, Indonesia, incoming Co-Chair of the Coalition of Finance Ministers for Climate Action.

From <https://www.worldbank.org/> 04/07/2021

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Safe Drinking Water and Sanitation Critical for Human Capital, Rural Development, Says World Bank Country Manager

Jan-Peter Olters, World Bank Country Manager for Tajikistan, visited the southern Khatlon region today to discuss the progress of the World Bank-financed Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Project and development challenges in this sector. He met with the region's Deputy Chairman Mirzozoda Nizom and visited a number of water facilities to be rehabilitated with project funds in an effort to provide improved water supply to rural residents. "Efforts to provide safe drinking water to households country-wide require a strong focus on both priority investments and complementary institutional reforms," said Jan-Peter Olters. "Pipelines, pumping stations, and irrigation systems are expensive, given Tajikistan's geography, and modernizing public water utilities is complex. For this reason, close and consistent collaboration with national and regional governments is critical, as is the joint work with water service providers and development partners."

The Country Manager visited the water intake in Levakand district and facilities in Kushoniyon and Dusti to be rehabilitated under the Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Project. Investments in these and other key infrastructure of the Vakhsh inter-district water supply system will substantially improve the quality of water supply services for the current population of 170,000 people, who reside in the five districts of Khatlon. Overall, thanks to the project, around 400,000 people in Khatlon will gain

access to safer drinking water and around 100,000 people, mainly children, will benefit from investments in sanitation facilities and hygiene training in schools. Sanitation facilities in about 200 schools and rural health centers will be constructed or rehabilitated. In partnership with UNICEF, the project will provide comprehensive extracurricular activities to promote the adoption of improved hygiene practices in schools.

In February 2019, the World Bank approved a grant of \$58 million from the International Development Association for the Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Project. The project will finance infrastructure improvements to connect rural households in the Khatlon region to basic water supply services and improve the quality of water supply services for existing connections. Seven districts of Khatlon are covered by the project - Vakhsh, Levakand (Sarband), Kushoniyon (Bokhtar), Dusti (Jilikul), Balkhi (Rumi), Jayhun (Qumsangir) and Vose. The Khatlon region is home to the highest proportion of people living in poverty and deprived of clean water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) conditions.

Apart from infrastructure investments, the project is supporting ongoing water-sector reforms by strengthening water utilities in target districts. The branches of the State Unitary Enterprise "Khojagii Manziliyu Kommunalii" will be restructured and strengthened to improve the quality of its service delivery. Also, to increase access to water and sanitation services countrywide, the project will support the development of the State Program on Drinking Water Supply and Wastewater for the period 2021–30. The World Bank's active portfolio in Tajikistan includes 16 country and regional projects with a net commitment of over \$868 million. The World Bank remains committed to supporting Tajikistan as it strives to improve the lives of its people and meet the aspirations of its young and growing population.

From <https://www.worldbank.org/> 04/10/2021

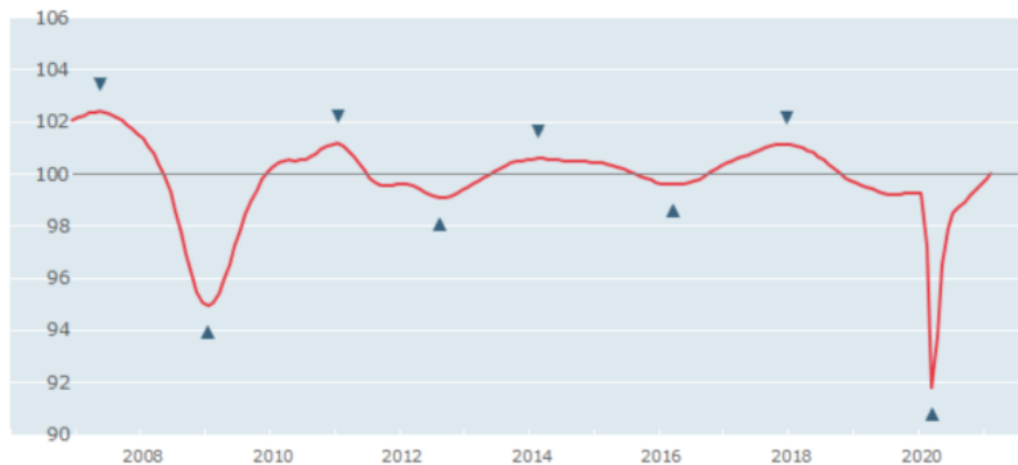
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CLIs Continue to Strengthen in Most Major Economies

The OECD Composite leading indicators (CLIs), designed to anticipate turning points in economic activity relative to trend, continue to strengthen in most major economies. In the United States, the CLI continues to increase at a steady pace, driven an expansion in the consumer confidence. In Japan, Canada and the euro-area as a whole, particularly in Germany and Italy, the CLIs now point to a steady increase. In France, and now the United Kingdom, the CLIs signal stable growth. Among major emerging economies, the CLIs for India, Russia and the manufacturing sector of China continue to expand at a steady pace, but in Brazil the CLI points to slowing growth. The CLIs should continue to be interpreted with care as the changing measures to contain Covid-19 and the progress of vaccination campaigns are likely to engender higher than usual fluctuations in the underlying

components and result in possible revisions. As always, the magnitude of CLI should be regarded as an indication of the strength of the signal rather than as a measure of the degree of growth in economic activity.

OECD area



Visit the interactive OECD Data Portal to explore this data further. The above graph show country specific composite leading indicators (CLIs solid line, left axis and the relative month-on-month growth rate, right axis). Turning points of CLIs tend to precede turning points in economic activity relative to trend by six to nine months. The horizontal line at 100 represents the trend of economic activity. Shaded triangles mark confirmed turning-points of the CLI. Blank triangles mark provisional turning-points that may be reversed

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Commodity Prices to Stabilize after Early 2021 Gains, Supported by Global Economic Recovery

Commodity prices continued their recovery in the first quarter of 2021 and are expected to remain close to current levels throughout the year, lifted by the global economic rebound and improved growth prospects, according to the World Bank's semi-annual Commodity Markets Outlook. However, the outlook is heavily dependent on progress in containing the COVID-19 pandemic as well as policy support measures in advanced economies and production decisions in major commodity producers. Energy prices are expected to average more than one-third higher this year than in 2020, with oil averaging \$56 a barrel. Metal prices are expected to climb 30 percent; and agricultural prices are forecast to rise almost 14 percent. Almost all commodity prices are now above pre-pandemic levels, driven by the upsurge in economic activity, as well as some specific supply factors, particularly for oil, copper, and some food commodities.

“Global growth has been stronger than expected so far and vaccination campaigns are underway, and these trends have buoyed commodity prices. However, the durability of the recovery is highly uncertain,” said Ayhan Kose, World Bank Group Acting Vice President for Equitable Growth, Finance & Institutions and Director of the Prospects Group. “Emerging market and developing economies, both commodity exporters and importers, should strengthen their short-term resilience and prepare for the possibility of growth losing momentum.” Crude oil prices rebounded from record lows reached during the pandemic, supported by a rapid global economic recovery and continued production cuts by the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and its partners. Demand is expected to firm over 2021 as vaccines become widely available, especially in advanced economies, pandemic restrictions are eased, and the global recovery is sustained. Prices are expected to average \$60 a barrel in 2022. However, if pandemic containment falters, a further deterioration in demand could put pressure on prices.

Metal prices are expected to give back some of this year's gains as stimulus-driven growth fades in 2022. A faster-than expected withdrawal of stimulus by some major emerging market economies could pose a downside risk to prices; however, a major infrastructure program in the United States could support prices for metals, including aluminum, copper, and iron ore. An intensification of the global energy transition to decarbonization could further strengthen demand for metals. Agricultural prices have risen substantially this year, particularly for food commodities, driven by supply shortfalls in South America and strong demand from China. However, most global food commodity markets remain adequately supplied by historical standards, and prices are expected to stabilize in 2022. While global food commodity prices have remained stable recently, emerging evidence continues to confirm the effects of COVID-19 on food insecurity that are expected to continue through 2021 and 2022. An increasing number of countries are facing growing levels of acute food insecurity, reversing years of development gains.

“Although food commodity markets are well supplied globally, COVID-19 has severely impacted local labor and food markets around the world, reducing incomes, disrupting supply chains and intensifying food and nutrition security issues that were present even before the pandemic struck,” Kose said. “It is high time for policymakers to address the underlying sources of food insecurity.” A Special Focus section investigates the impact of sharp changes in metal prices on metal-exporting countries. Metals, especially copper and aluminum are a major source of export revenue for 35 percent of emerging market and developing economies, with important implications for economic growth, macroeconomic stability, and, hence, poverty reduction. As metal prices are primarily driven by global demand, these countries can be particularly hard-hit by global recessions, which can trigger both a drop in metal prices and export revenue. Windfall revenues from high metal prices, which tend to be short-lived, should therefore be set aside in anticipation of the longer-lasting negative effects of price collapses that would warrant policy support.

“Metal price shocks are primarily driven by external demand factors, such as global recessions and recoveries,” said World Bank Senior Economist John Baffes. “During a recession, metal exporters may be hurt by both the broader downturn as well as a collapse in prices. Output losses associated with price drops are greater than the gains from price increases, and policymakers should prepare accordingly.”

From <https://www.worldbank.org/> 04/20/2021

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The COVID-19 Pandemic and Its Impact in the Smart City Field

The Covid-19 pandemic is having a huge global impact, clearly. Enterprise IoT Insights talked with technology vendors and market analysts to analyze the impact of the pandemic on smart cities and to understand what new challenges, opportunities and use cases will arise in a post-pandemic scenario.

Georges Karam, CEO, Sequans

“With the COVID-19 pandemic, people realized how important is digital connectivity. We, as a society should learn how to be ready for a crisis and the best way to be ready for the crisis is really to leverage all this innovation in the digital industry in general. So it’s important to highlight that governments are putting a lot of energy supporting now all this digital stuff, whether it’s 5G or the other technologies like AI or cybersecurity.”

Itai Dadon, global head of smart cities, Itron

“Safety and security will be front and center for communities around the world; Smart city technology will increasingly be relied on to help identify public safety threats, including riots, natural disasters, gas leaks, and COVID hotspots, allowing city leaders to take action before these events become hazardous to their communities. As priorities continue to change and increase, agility is a critical capability for cities in order to adapt quickly. This requires an infrastructure that permits cities to understand needs very quickly. IoT technology and smart cities can help municipalities understand what’s going on in real time across the city’s territory and assets. We believe that the pandemic has definitely caused a strain on many cities’ budgets, and that means that we, as vendors of technology and solutions need to adapt, being more creative with the business models we propose – enabling new financing tools.”

Steve Mazur, director of government, Digi International

“COVID definitely slowed the progress of smart cities and impacted many of the projects, particularly those focused on transportation and traffic, as more people were avoiding public transport and public places or choosing to travel in their own vehicles. But in some cities, like New York and Chicago, where multimodal transportation networks play a vital role, COVID actually prompted new smart city

initiatives. As far as public health, many cities across the globe are using technology to monitor air and water quality.”

Greg Corlis, managing director for emerging technologies, KPMG

“I struggle with how the pandemic will benefit the adoption of new smart city technologies. Cities have seen a decline in the use of their infrastructure as a result of the pandemic and in some cases people have been fleeing cities for the suburbs as the work from home culture takes off. One way to potentially look at is, many cities will need to look at upgrading their infrastructure with smart embedded technologies to attract corporations to open offices in their city.”

Suparno Banerjee, head of government and cities, Nokia

“No doubt that the pandemic slowed smart city progress but it also shone a light on the digital divide. It also highlighted that digital transformation can make cities more resilient. We’ve seen from the pandemic that it has encouraged citizens to become more digitally-engaged when it comes to public health information services – through apps and alerts. We will potentially see some degree of city transformation should home working significantly increase post-pandemic. Overall, the pandemic has accelerated the case for pervasive digital transformation to help cities become more resilient.

Brendan O’Reilly, chief technology officer, BAI Communications

“COVID-19 has heightened the need to invest in connectivity infrastructure and solutions that alleviate concerns around public health and safety. An importance example is demand for safe and secure transport, and connected applications already exist to make systems safer by providing real-time warnings about crowding, access problems, or delays to help people make better informed public travel decisions.” Enterprise IoT Insights recently published an editorial report in which smart city managers, technology vendors and analyst discuss the progress already made in the smart city field, the main technologies being used in smart city projects and the key challenges that are currently impacting these initiatives. You can access the report here.

From <https://enterpriseiotinsights.com/> 04/27/2021

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Solving Urban Challenges with Citywide Inclusive Sanitation

Sanitation for all may be enshrined in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 6.2), but achieving this target will require a change from business as usual approaches. The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has highlighted the critical importance of water, sanitation, and adequate hygiene services (WASH) as the primary line of defense against the spread of COVID-19 as well as waterborne diseases. Unfortunately, the hygiene needed to combat disease is a challenge for

the 300 million people in Asia and the Pacific who lack access to a safe water supply, and the 1.2 billion who cannot access basic sanitation services. Further, in the region, some 453 million people still defecate in the open. In the current COVID 19 crisis, such poor sanitation exacerbates the difficulty of quarantining and maintaining social distance, and contributes to the spread of the virus. Sanitation for all may be enshrined in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 6.2), but achieving this target will require a change from business as usual approaches.



Sanitation challenge in cities

In Asia’s ever expanding cities, for example, higher population densities and urban expansion make managing the vast amounts of human waste ever more challenging. By 2030, more than 55% of the region’s population will live in urban areas. Lack of sanitation can have significant impacts on city and national economies, affecting public health, productivity, competitiveness, real estate values, and the overall quality of life. “Governments and their development partners need to radically rethink their approach and investment priorities for sanitation,” says Neeta Pokhrel, Chief of the Asian Development Bank’s (ADB) Water Sector Group. “All people need to have access to adequate and reliable sanitation infrastructure, and they need to use it in order to achieve the maximum economic returns on sanitation project investments. Sanitation services also need to be sustained—financially, environmentally, and technically.”

ADB, its clients, and key development partners have invested immense resources in urban sanitation programs. From 2011 to 2020, the total ADB sanitation portfolio amounted to \$4.9 billion, with the largest share invested in South Asia, followed by in East Asia. ADB plans to sustain this support to its developing members and contribute to achieving SDG 6 with commitments in water and sanitation services that are programmed to reach more than \$6 billion up to 2022. But despite

considerable investments, several issues have held back progress on sanitation services in cities. This includes the lack of capacity at the local or municipality level to operate and maintain sewerage systems and wastewater treatment plants, which are also linked to other underlying issues such as poor design or inappropriate technology choices, lack of finance for operation and maintenance, and low political priority.

Moreover, most investments have been for centralized wastewater treatment and sewerage, which often do not serve newer or informal settlements. Extending such sewer systems to low income and informal settlements can be challenging, costly, and may not be the most suitable and effective for the local context. “Sanitation services for the poor and those living in informal settlements are often badly built and managed or they may have no sanitation infrastructure at all,” says Coral Fernandez Illescas, an ADB Principal Water Resources Specialist. “Sometimes, the solution is not necessarily conventional sanitation. Cities can opt for on-site or non-networked sanitation systems that not only address access but also prioritize safety and health risks, combined with behavior change campaigns that creates awareness on the importance of sanitation and hygiene.”

Citywide Inclusive Sanitation

Citywide Inclusive Sanitation (CWIS) is an evolving concept to more effectively meet the sanitation challenges in the world’s growing urban areas. It builds on current sanitation technologies and good practices to achieve more comprehensive, effective, and sustainable sanitation services in cities.

CWIS programs have the following characteristics:

- They are evidence-based; implementation and design adaptation are driven by health, social, economic outcomes.
- Institutional arrangements, accountability and regulations, with aligned incentives, are established for management, operation and maintenance of the whole sanitation service chain.
- They include a mix of diverse technical approaches that build on existing sewerage and non-sewerage sanitation systems, and incorporate resource recovery and re-use where feasible.
- City leaders demonstrate political will to prioritize investment in sanitation, technical and managerial leadership, and arrange long-term funding for sustainability.
- Non-infrastructure aspects of service delivery are funded, including capacity building, household outreach and engagement, and sanitation marketing.
- Complementary urban services including water supply, drainage, greywater management and solid waste management are integrated with sanitation planning.
- Activities and funding target unserved and underserved groups including women, minorities, informal settlements, people with disabilities.

Institutions may need to be restructured to accommodate a CWIS-driven strategy. Systems and incentives for decision makers and operators also need to be in place to monitor sanitation service performance and allow strategic and tactical changes to optimize performance and service delivery. “CWIS addresses the entire sanitation service chain from access to toilets to treatment and disposal or reuse,” says Christian Walder, ADB Water Supply and Sanitation Specialist. “It’s linked to solid waste management, drainage, water supply, land-use management and housing, and should be planned and managed in a coordinated and integrated way. And fundamentally, it means including all citizens, rich and poor alike, living in formal and informal settlements, both at home and away from home in the city.”

Online ADB Sanitation Dialogue 2021

CWIS was the topic of the [Online ADB Sanitation Dialogue 2021](#), a platform for sanitation practitioners, government agencies and decision-makers to discuss the strategies that will lead to systemic change on sanitation. This is the fourth edition of the Dialogue, with the last version held in 2014. *This article was written by Graham Dwyer, Principal Communications Specialist at ADB's Department of Communications.*

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ADB Should Ramp Up Efforts to Mitigate COVID-19 Impact on Sustainable Development Goals

The Asian Development Bank (ADB), in partnership with other development organizations, must give high priority to efforts to assess and address the implications of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) crisis on the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), according to the 2021 Annual Evaluation Review (AER) conducted by ADB’s Independent Evaluation Department (IED). The report says ADB must help countries address gaps in financing and data availability which have widened due to the pandemic. The AER provides an independent, high-level perspective on the performance and results of ADB. The review covered the period 2018–2020 and focused on ADB’s institutional approach for supporting the achievement of the SDGs. Since the review period coincided with the COVID-19 pandemic, it also included an overview of ADB’s response to the crisis. According to the report, ADB’s partnership and collaboration with United Nations agencies and other multilateral development banks has helped to promote knowledge and innovation for the achievement of SDG targets. However, developing Asia and the Pacific was already lagging in SDG financing and data availability on progress towards SDG achievement prior to the pandemic and the crisis is exacerbating these shortfalls.

“A much greater effort is needed to mobilize public and private financing for achieving

the SDGs,” said IED Director General Marvin Taylor-Dormond. “ADB is well positioned to help countries rebuild their frameworks for SDG achievement, but these efforts, in addition to financial mobilization, will need to be accelerated to offset the devastating impact of the COVID19 pandemic and help countries resume their long-term development goals.” The evaluation notes that ADB’s approach and tools for monitoring SDG support have been adequately articulated and organized at the institutional level, but they now need to be better or more deeply reflected at country and project levels. ADB has already initiated work in generating both public financing, by supporting domestic resource mobilization, and private financing, by tapping into capital markets through thematic bonds for sustainable development and supporting innovative SDG projects. ADB’s sector and thematic groups of in-house development experts are also well positioned to help strengthen ADB members’ ownership of the SDGs.

“2020 posed one of the greatest challenges ADB members have ever faced—the public health and economic crisis triggered by the global COVID-19 pandemic. ADB mobilized resources swiftly to deliver assistance for social protection, health, and macroeconomic stability to minimize loss of life, protect the poor and vulnerable, and mitigate economic hardship,” said IED Director Joanne Asquith. “Nevertheless, recovery from the pandemic could be protracted especially if national vaccine programs are not accelerated soon, and this will have a detrimental impact on long-term development goals”. The evaluation found that the proportion of ADB’s public sector projects assessed successful declined marginally to 70% in the review period from 72% in 2017–2019, although the longer-term trend continues to be positive. ADB’s project performance improved in the Pacific and Southeast Asia but fell in other regions, mainly due to project ownership issues, ambitious and complex designs, inadequate implementation capacity, and delays and cost overruns. The percentage of successful private sector projects, while increasing slightly to 53% in the review period from 51% in 2017–2019, has maintained a declining trend since 2014–2016. The review’s recommendations are aimed at improving the connection between ADB’s sector work and its seven thematic strategic corporate-level operational priorities which include, among others, addressing remaining poverty and reducing inequality in the region, addressing climate change, and accelerating gender equality. On the SDGs, the recommendations are aimed at ramping up partnerships with other development organizations, strengthening the link between institutional strategic intentions and actual operational practices, and deepening institutional engagement on the achievement of the SDGs at the country and local levels.

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ADB, the Nature Conservancy Agree to Joint Action on Nature-Positive Investments

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) and The Nature Conservancy (TNC) today agreed to a new partnership for action on nature-positive investments, environmental sustainability, and action on climate change throughout Asia and the Pacific. The partnership, announced during Earth Day celebrations, will focus on biodiversity and ecosystem protection and restoration; nature-based solutions and sustainable infrastructure; coastal resilience; finance for oceans, freshwater, and biodiversity; sustainable urban planning and development; and gender integration and poverty reduction in nature conservation. “Strengthening our partnership with TNC comes at a critical time,” said ADB Vice-President for Knowledge Management and Sustainable Development Bambang Susantono. “The coronavirus disease pandemic (COVID-19) has been a wake-up call on the importance of protecting ecosystems and biodiversity to protect humanity. It’s vital that we make the recovery from COVID-19 a green and inclusive recovery. We must take actions that address the root causes of the pandemic and avoid future infectious zoonotic disease outbreaks, promote good health, create jobs that are fit for the future, and support women’s empowerment and economic well-being through nature-positive investments.”

“The challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic have also revealed the power and importance of collaboration to address complex issues with the urgency they require,” said TNC Chief Executive Officer Jennifer Morris. “The Nature Conservancy and the Asian Development Bank are demonstrating to the world the power of cross-sector partnerships and community-based conservation to create a brighter future for people and nature.” Under the joint 2-year work plan, ADB and TNC will pilot initiatives aimed at sustainable management of coastal ecosystems and catalyzing investment in development planning tools and digital technologies which will improve ecosystem management, while contributing to ADB’s Action Plan for Healthy Oceans and Sustainable Blue Economies. ADB and TNC will cooperate on technical assistance support for coral reef restoration through an innovative financing and insurance initiative. The partnership will also yield knowledge products and activities that will integrate gender equity in promoting nature preservation and climate action. TNC is a charitable environmental organization founded in 1951 and headquartered in Arlington, Virginia, United States. TNC currently impacts conservation in over 70 countries worldwide and has several national affiliates.

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Developing Asia to Grow 7.3% in 2021 Even as COVID-19 Lingers

Economic growth in developing Asia is set to rebound to 7.3% this year, supported by a healthy global recovery and early progress on coronavirus disease (COVID-19) vaccines, according to a new report from the Asian Development Bank (ADB). The

projected resurgence follows a 0.2% contraction last year, according to ADB's flagship economic publication, Asian Development Outlook (ADO) 2021, released today. The region's growth is forecast to moderate to 5.3% in 2022. Excluding the newly industrialized economies of Hong Kong, China; the Republic of Korea; Singapore; and Taipei, China, developing Asia's economic activity is expected to grow 7.7% this year and 5.6% in 2022. "Growth is gaining momentum across developing Asia, but renewed COVID-19 outbreaks pose a threat to recovery," said ADB Chief Economist Yasuyuki Sawada. "Economies in the region are on diverging paths. Their trajectories are shaped by the extent of domestic outbreaks, the pace of their vaccine rollouts, and how much they are benefiting from the global recovery."

Rising exports are boosting some economies in developing Asia amid strengthening global economic activity, including a rebound in manufacturing. Progress on the production and delivery of COVID-19 vaccines has contributed to this momentum, but the pandemic remains the biggest risk for the region as potential delays in vaccine rollouts or significant new outbreaks could undermine growth. Other risks include increasing geopolitical tensions, production bottlenecks, financial turmoil from tightening financial conditions, and long-term scarring—for instance, learning losses due to school closures. Most economies in developing Asia will see healthy growth this year and in 2022. Central Asian economies are forecast to grow 3.4% on average this year and 4.0% next year. The trade-dependent economies of Southeast Asia will also recover, with the subregion forecast to grow 4.4% this year and 5.1% in 2022 after contracting 4.0% in 2020. Pacific economies, still affected by global travel restrictions and a collapse in tourism, will post modest growth this year at 1.4%, before expanding by 3.8% next year.

Strong exports and a gradual recovery in household consumption will boost economic activity in the People's Republic of China (PRC) this year. The country's gross domestic product (GDP) is forecast to expand 8.1% in 2021 and 5.5% in 2022. East Asia's GDP is expected to grow 7.4% in 2021 and 5.1% in 2022. India's economy, meanwhile, is expected to grow 11.0% in fiscal year (FY) 2021, which ends on 31 March 2022, amid a strong vaccine drive. However, the recent surge in COVID-19 cases may put this recovery at risk. India's GDP is expected to expand 7.0% in FY2022. This year, South Asia's GDP growth is expected to rebound to 9.5%, following a 6.0% contraction in 2020, before moderating to 6.6% next year. Inflation in developing Asia is projected to fall to 2.3% from 2.8% last year, as food-price pressures ease in India and the PRC. The region's inflation rate is forecast to rise to 2.7% in 2022.

The report also examines the costs of pandemic-induced school closures across developing Asia. Countries are using distance learning, but this is only partially effective as many students lack access to computers and the internet. These disruptions will affect the skills students acquire and, eventually, their productivity and earnings as future workers. Learning losses range from 8.0% of a year of

learning in the Pacific, where schools have mostly stayed open, to 55% in South Asia, where school closures have been longest. The present value of students' future earning reductions is estimated at \$1.25 trillion for developing Asia, equivalent to 5.4% of the region's GDP in 2020.

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Pacific to Return to Positive Growth in 2021 — ADB

The Pacific is forecast to return to positive growth in 2021, according to a new report by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) released today. But the region's outlook remains subject to significant risks, and there is considerable variability across the 14 Pacific developing member countries (DMCs). The DMC economies were estimated to have contracted by 5.8% in 2020 as the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic directly impacted tourism and trade flows and affected construction activity, according to the Asian Development Outlook (ADO) 2021, ADB's flagship economic publication. Recovery of 1.4% is forecast for 2021, contingent on improvements in tourism numbers, commencement of delayed construction projects, and resumption of labor mobility and cross-border trade. "The start of the COVID-19 vaccine rollouts, both within Pacific DMCs and among their trade and tourism partner countries, indicate some economic recovery is likely in 2021," said ADB Director General for the Pacific Leah Gutierrez. "However, risks to the recovery remain, particularly in tourism-oriented economies that are feeling the heaviest impacts of the pandemic crisis."

Overall growth in the Pacific subregion this year is likely to be held back by contractions in smaller tourism-dependent economies, including the Cook Islands, where gross domestic product is expected to fall by more than a quarter; Palau, one of the most tourism-dependent economies in the world; Samoa; and, to a lesser extent, Tonga. Travel bubbles are projected to contribute to a gradual recovery in these economies, initially in the Cook Islands and Niue with New Zealand, and Palau with Taipei, China. Overall, growth for the Pacific is expected to improve to 3.8% in 2022. The ADO projects the Cook Islands economy to contract by 26% in 2021 before recovering to growth of 6% in 2022 with the opening of a proposed travel bubble with New Zealand. Samoa's economy is likewise forecast to contract by 9.2% in 2021 before recovering to 3.1% growth in 2022 once full vaccine coverage is achieved and international travelers are able to return. In Tonga, the impact of the twin shocks of Tropical Cyclone Harold and the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020 will continue to constrain the construction and tourism sectors, contributing to a 5.3% contraction in 2021. The ADO projects the Tongan economy to return to positive growth, by 1.8%, in 2022.

Papua New Guinea (PNG), the biggest economy in the Pacific, is expected to grow

moderately at 2.5% in 2021 as it recovers from a pandemic-induced recession in 2020. However, a recent surge in COVID-19 cases threatens prospects for economic recovery. Development partners are assisting with budgetary support and the delivery of COVID-19 vaccinations. Economic growth in PNG is projected to accelerate to 3% in 2022. Fiji, the subregion's second-largest economy and one heavily dependent on tourism, is similarly forecast to expand in 2021, by 2.0%, following an unprecedented 19.0% contraction last year. Fiji's economy is projected to grow further by 7.3% in 2022, assuming a recovery in tourism from effective vaccination programs both domestically and in its major tourist markets. Revived tourism would mitigate some of the impact of COVID-19, but it may take several years for the economy to return to pre-pandemic levels.

The ADO expects the Solomon Islands economy to recover, growing by 1.0% in 2021 and 4.5% in 2022, as fishing and construction rebound. The construction and related sectors are expecting a boost from work on public infrastructure projects, including the Tina River Hydropower Project, upgrades to transport, the rehabilitation and expansion of water supply and sanitation systems, and construction for the 2023 Pacific Games. Logging output is expected to continue to decline, reflecting government efforts to improve sustainability. Vanuatu's economy contracted in 2020 from the effects of the trade and travel restrictions caused by COVID-19 and Cyclone Harold. With growth of 2.0% in 2021 and 4.0% in 2022, a cautious recovery is expected as these restrictions are gradually lifted. However, this will depend on a successful vaccination rollout and establishment of travel bubbles with Vanuatu's main tourism markets.

Economic decline in the North Pacific—Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), the Marshall Islands, and Palau—is forecast to continue in 2021, with negative growth of 1.8% for FSM, 1.4% for the Marshall Islands, and 7.8% for Palau. But these contractions are expected to be more muted compared to 2020, as the ongoing COVID-19 vaccine rollout eases pandemic-related border restrictions that stalled international tourism and impeded trade. The ADB report projects a return to growth for all three North Pacific economies in 2022 (2.0% for the FSM, 2.5% for the Marshall Islands, and 10.4% for Palau) as restrictions are eased further and more business activity resumes. Although free of COVID-19 infections so far, the Central Pacific economies of Kiribati, Nauru, and Tuvalu saw economic expansion slow in 2020 as trade and travel restrictions delayed infrastructure projects. In 2021, growth is expected to improve by 1.5% in Nauru and by 2.5% in Tuvalu as these projects resume. Kiribati will see a small contraction of 0.2% due to continued restrictions on the movement of goods and people while the country awaits the arrival of COVID-19 vaccines. In 2022, the ADO expects construction activity to help Kiribati return to economic expansion, of 2.3%, while Tuvalu will see growth rise to 2.0%. Growth in Nauru is forecast to moderate at 1.0% in 2022 with the impending closure of the Regional Processing Centre in 2021.

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Improve Quality of Life, Economic Opportunities in Cities to Build Sustainable Future — ADB

Improving quality of life, and social and economic opportunities in Asia's fast-growing cities are instrumental in fulfilling their potential as engines of economic prosperity and hubs for sustainability, says *Creating Livable Asian Cities*, a new book released today by the Asian Development Bank (ADB). The publication examines the region's urbanization challenges and presents solutions across five priority areas: smart and inclusive urban planning; sustainable transport that provides equitable access to services and opportunities; sustainable energy sources that are less polluting; innovative finance to bridge resource gaps; and greater climate and disaster resilience. "Urbanization has driven regional productivity growth, but opportunities in cities have not been available to all residents and are further limited by the COVID-19 pandemic," said ADB Vice-President for Knowledge Management and Sustainable Development Bambang Susantono, who co-edited the publication. "Cities in Asia and the Pacific are among the largest and most vibrant in the world, with many experiences and best practices to share. This publication collects these lessons and aims to guide cities to learn from common challenges and opportunities."

Developing Asia is home to 17 of the 33 megacities with more than 10 million residents. More than half of the region's 4 billion population lived in urban areas in 2019 and a billion more are expected to migrate to cities in the next 30 years. By 2050, the region's urbanization rate could reach 64%. To plan for livable and sustainable cities that are people-centered and accessible, the report highlights the need for governments to employ smart and inclusive planning. This includes policies that promote the use of technology, data, and innovation to make urban services—mobility, social infrastructure, resilience management, and utilities, among others—more effective and efficient. For instance, using earth observation technology can help mitigate flood risks and better inform infrastructure projects. Governments should also focus on sustainable transport and energy as these have a direct impact on people's productivity, the vibrance of a city's economic activity, and the environment's sustainability. Increased mobility will help realize urban economic potential and increase inclusion. Sustainable transport solutions, for example, could include using electric vehicles in public transport systems. Sustainable energy options include household and community-level solar grids, which benefit as the price and availability of solar photovoltaic cells become cheaper and more widespread. Other options include waste-to-energy systems that can lead to improved urban sustainability.

Expanded access to finance will be instrumental in helping cities achieve targets outlined in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Cities will account for about 70% of the \$1.7 trillion in annual investment developing countries need to meet the SDGs. The publication lays out innovative financing models such as new forms of private sector partnerships, capital market instruments and bonds for housing finance, and strengthening institutional frameworks and the capacity to apply value-capture mechanisms. Lastly, the report highlights the need to improve the resilience of cities, particularly in response to climate change, natural disasters, and public health emergencies like the COVID-19 pandemic. Tools that can help build a city's resilience include nature-based solutions, financial tools drawn from the insurance industry, and a range of operational approaches drawn from the lessons being learned while cities are responding to the pandemic.

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East Asia

CHINA: Explores Digital Yuan for Cross-border Transactions

China is exploring ways to use its digital yuan for cross-border transactions to meet market demand, the central bank said on Thursday. The People's Bank of China (PBOC) has worked with the Hong Kong Monetary Authority (HKMA) on the technical testing of using the digital yuan for cross-border payments on the Chinese mainland and Hong Kong, said Wang Xin, an official with the PBOC, at a press conference. For this purpose, the PBOC is also cooperating with the HKMA and central banks of Thailand and the United Arab Emirates in a multilateral research project, Wang said. China's digital yuan testing is making steady progress, with more test scenarios coming into use. Several Chinese cities, including Beijing, Shenzhen and Suzhou, have piloted this digital currency since last year.

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Chinese Premier Urges Consolidating Growth Momentum, Ensuring People's Livelihood

Chinese Premier Li Keqiang has called for efforts to deepen reform and opening-up, enhance driving forces for innovation, consolidate the sound foundation of the country's economy, and guarantee people's livelihood. Li, also a member of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee, made the remarks during an inspection tour in southwest China's Sichuan Province from Monday to Tuesday. After visiting local health centers and schools, Li underscored ensuring people's basic education, medical care, and

housing, and allocating more resources to these areas, especially in counties and townships. He also paid visits to several innovative enterprises and encouraged them to increase innovation capacities and continue scientific exploration. Li was briefed on Sichuan's efforts to streamline administration, delegate power, and acquire skills. He called on local authorities to establish a market-oriented, law-based, and internationalized business environment, stimulate the vitality of market entities and make all kinds of talents reach their potential. During exchanges with entrepreneurs from countries in Europe and Asia, Li said China will open the door wider to the world and will become an attractive destination for global investors in the long run. Li encouraged entrepreneurs to jointly protect the stability of global industrial and supply chains and facilitate global economic recovery.

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China Eyes Retail System Upgrading with Digital Currency Development

China is aiming to upgrade its domestic retail system by further developing its digital currency. Gradual steps will expand its use via trials, according to the country's monetary authorities and experts. The development of the digital yuan initially targets China's vast retail market of 1.4 billion people, said Zhou Xiaochuan, former governor of the People's Bank of China, the country's central bank. "We hope to offer the public a more convenient and effective payment method via technological progress," Zhou told a sub-forum of the ongoing Boao Forum for Asia annual conference. Zhou is also the vice chairman of the forum. China began piloting its digital currency in selected regions across the country at the end of 2019. The currency is expected to be issued by the country's central bank and legally backed by the government as an alternative to paper money.

During the pilot programs in cities including Beijing, Shenzhen, and Suzhou, businesses such as groceries, daily necessities, and catering, among others, already supported payments using the digital yuan. The trials have so far been very successful, according to Li Bo, deputy governor of the central bank. Li particularly noted that controllable anonymity, an ideal feature of the digital yuan, has been realized to both help protect user privacy and stamp out financial crimes. China will steadily advance the research and development of digital currencies and actively participate in the formulation of international rules and technical standards. These rules apply to data security, digital currencies, and data tax, according to the outline of the country's 14th five-year plan for national economic and social development and the long-range objectives through the year 2035. "There is no detailed timetable on the progress of the digital yuan," said Li. He added that there are still things to be done before the nationwide rollout of the digital currency, including increasing the number of trials and expanding its scope.

Li said authorities are considering launching trials in more cities and having them cover more usage scenarios to enhance the eco-system of the digital yuan. Efforts will also go into boosting the infrastructure for the yuan's digitalization to improve the security and reliability of the system and to establish a legal and regulatory framework to monitor relevant businesses, Li told the forum. Zhou, meanwhile, stressed that both digital currencies and digital assets should closely serve the real economy, which is a substantial consideration in China's financial regulatory policy creation. Speaking of the use of central bank digital currencies in cross-border payments, Zhou highlighted its complexity as every country needs to ensure its monetary sovereignty. "The priority of the yuan's digitalization is currently to promote its domestic use," said Li. China will cooperate with global partners to work out a cross-border payment solution for digital currencies over time, Li said.

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Senior CPC Official Calls for High-quality Development of Digital China

A senior Communist Party of China (CPC) official on Sunday stressed the importance of pursuing self-reliant, innovation-driven and high-quality development in advancing the construction of a digital China. Huang Kunming, a member of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee and head of the Publicity Department of the CPC Central Committee, made the remarks in a keynote speech at the opening ceremony of the fourth Digital China Summit in Fuzhou, capital city of east China's Fujian Province. Huang said efforts should be made to strengthen science and technology to provide strategic support for the promotion of opening up, and innovation to energize all factors and resources. It is necessary to advance the development of new forms of infrastructure, deepen the integration of the digital economy with the real economy, and foster a healthy digital ecosystem, the official noted. Huang called for the development of smart cities and digital villages to provide more inclusive, convenient, high-quality and efficient digital services so that people can share the fruits of informatization.

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China's Digital Economy Sees Robust Growth amid Pandemic: Academy

China's digital economy maintained a high growth rate of 9.7 percent in 2020 amid the pandemic and global economic downturn, said a white paper on China's digital

economy development released Sunday. The growth rate of the digital economy was more than three times that of the GDP, thus showing its pivotal role in spurring economic development, according to the paper. The paper was issued by the China Academy of Information and Communication Technology at the fourth Digital China Summit in Fuzhou, capital of east China's Fujian Province. It also shows that the scale of China's digital economy reached 39.2 trillion yuan (about 6 trillion U.S. dollars) last year, accounting for 38.6 percent of the GDP, which effectively supported epidemic prevention and control, as well as economic development. The digital economy in Beijing and Shanghai both accounted for more than half of its regional GDP. Last year, 13 provinces, municipalities and autonomous regions achieved a digital economy scale of more than one trillion yuan, with another eight regions exceeding 500 billion yuan in 2020, said the paper. With its digital economy ranking second in the world, China highlights the digital economy development in its 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-2025) to build a digital China.

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Senior Legislator Stresses Workers' Role in Economic, Social Development

A senior Chinese legislator on Tuesday called on workers across the country to contribute more to economic and social development during the 14th Five-Year Plan period (2021-2025). Wang Dongming, vice chairman of the National People's Congress Standing Committee and chairman of the All-China Federation of Trade Unions, extended greetings to workers at a mobilization meeting held in Beijing to mark the upcoming Labor Day. Wang asked trade unions at various levels to carry out vocational skills competitions spanning multiple sectors, protect workers' rights and interests and constantly deepen reform and innovation. Exemplary units and workers were granted national labor awards and honorary titles at the meeting.

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Digitalization Injects Vitality into China's Real Economy

With a super SIM card and app, some Chinese smartphone users will soon be able to make phone calls protected by quantum encryption. Unlike traditional encryption methods that rely solely on algorithms, quantum encryption is protected by the laws of quantum physics and has ultra-high security. Phones equipped with super SIM cards are expected to be rolled out by June this year, said Li Wei, a solutions manager with Anhui-based QuantumCTek Group, the quantum firm that developed the phone. China's scientific and technological workers in this area have made a

number of significant, internationally influential innovations over recent years. In 2020, Chinese scientists developed the quantum computer prototype "Jiuzhang." Two 5G quantum phones, along with other eye-catching tech innovations like unmanned cars and AI-powered drones, were displayed at the fourth Digital China Summit in Fuzhou, capital of east China's Fujian Province, which closed on Monday.

The summit, which was first held in 2018, serves as an important platform to advance the construction of digital China. The development of cybersecurity and informatization should contribute to China's drive to develop a modernized economy and achieve high-quality development, and to the new model of industrialization, urbanization, and agricultural modernization, President Xi Jinping said at a national conference on the work of cybersecurity and informatization in April 2018. Efforts should also be made to develop the digital economy, promote deep integration between the internet, big data, artificial intelligence, and real economy, and make the manufacturing, agriculture, and service sectors more digitalized, smart, and internet-powered, said Xi, also general secretary of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee, chairman of the Central Military Commission, and head of the Central Cyberspace Affairs Commission, at the conference.

RESHAPING THE ECONOMY

According to a report released by the China Academy of Information and Communications Technology, the scale of China's digital economy reached 39.2 trillion yuan (about 6 trillion U.S. dollars) last year, accounting for 38.6 percent of the country's GDP. On a pig farm in the suburban Fuqing City of Fujian, an AI-powered overhead camera moves along a rail, counting numbers of pigs and collecting data on their body lengths and temperatures. The smart solution can finetune the food and water intakes of pregnant pigs at different stages of gestation. "We feed them more food in the early stage, and reduce their intake in the last stage to make the delivery process easier," said Wu Feilong, deputy general manager of the husbandry company Xingyuan. Sensors and cameras also detect nitrogen and carbon dioxide levels in the farm's shed, and the ventilation systems are activated as soon as these levels reach a certain threshold.

Robot assistance, AI and other digital technologies are transforming China's pig-rearing industry, altering the image of odorous, messy pig farms. Digital technologies are also transforming China's manufacturing sector. Some factories in China have already seen their entire production processes undergo intelligent transformations, and are solving deep-seated problems in their respective industries. In the ceramic toilet fixture industry, for instance, manual glazing-induced occupational health issues can be reduced with 5G-assisted robots. Fujian-based firm JOMOO has replaced humans entirely in the toilet-glazing process at its smart factory. Robots can glaze products evenly and lower the chance of employee health impairments.

PEOPLE-CENTERED DIGITALIZATION

In a congratulatory letter to the first Digital China Summit, Xi said digitalization, networking and the application of intelligent technologies, which have been greatly developed, are playing more and more important roles in promoting social and economic development, modernizing China's governance system and capacity, and meeting the people's ever-growing needs for a better life. Digital technologies are revamping the ways companies and individuals access government services, making services including medical care, transportation and housing available to everyone at all times. Assisted by AI technology developed by iFlytek, a leading voice-recognition company in China, a "24/7" government service map in Anhui Province can direct users to the services they need based on vague descriptions.

For instance, if a user searches "I'm giving birth," the system will display options like "Issuance of delivery service registration card," or "Birth insurance record inquiry." Integrating online and offline resources, the system provides both online and offline options. If one chooses offline options, it can direct him/her to the best location based on distance, service time and ratings. So far, the service map has collected information on more than 20,000 government service locations and basically cover all government services frequently used by the people. The map has been visited more than 14 million times and has handled requests and inquiries for 1.7 million users. The application of 5G in the medical field has become a reality. A 5G-connected computer sits quietly in the summit's exhibition hall, demonstrating how doctors use 5G technology to examine and diagnose patients from a distance.

"Through 5G transmissions, we are able to control the CT scanners in remote hospitals on a real-time basis," said Shi Qingke, director of the IT department of the West China Hospital, Sichuan University. Shi said that with its large bandwidth and low latency, 5G allows doctors at high-level hospitals to adjust the parameters of CT machines and the doses of radiation directed at patients so as to obtain better images for patients in less developed areas. China has built more than 1,100 internet hospitals nationwide, and the integration of the internet and healthcare has greatly enhanced people's sense of fulfillment.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 04/27/2021

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Xi Stresses Advancing High-quality Development in Border Ethnic Regions

Chinese President Xi Jinping has called for more efforts to break new ground in promoting high-quality development in ethnic border regions. Xi, also general secretary of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee and chairman of the Central Military Commission, made the remarks during his inspection trip to

south China's Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region from Sunday to Tuesday. Xi called on these regions to better serve and integrate into the country's new development pattern, make new progress in advancing green development, and be more committed to consolidating and developing ethnic unity, social stability and border security. During his inspection tour, Xi went to Guilin, Liuzhou and Nanning, visiting a local revolutionary memorial, an ethnic museum, villages and enterprises to inspect the localities' work in implementing the country's 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-2025).

On Sunday morning, Xi visited a memorial park dedicated to the Battle of the Xiangjiang River during the Long March in the 1930s in the city of Guilin. He presented a flower basket in memory of the martyrs in the battle. Noting that the battle was a life-or-death event in China's revolution history, Xi stressed the importance of CPC members staying true to their ideals and convictions. Xi then visited Maozhushan village in Guilin to inspect the local grape growing industry. He called for efforts to pursue rural vitalization based on local specialty industries and make better use of science and technology in promoting the agricultural sector. He also stressed measures that can ensure farmers benefit more from the development of rural industries. Xi walked through the village, dropping by the home of villager Wang Deli and chatting with the family.

He said that as the CPC is about to celebrate its centenary, the country has scored a complete victory in its fight against poverty. However, he said promoting rural vitalization on all fronts will be no easier than the anti-poverty battle, allowing no letup or sluggishness. On Sunday afternoon, Xi went to a dock on the Lijiang River in the city of Guilin. He called for more efforts in ecological restoration and pollution prevention and control to improve the environment, the ecosystem, and the overall function of the river basin. On Monday, Xi visited a scenic park in Guilin. He lauded the city as a treasure bestowed on the Chinese nation by nature and called for efforts to improve its protection. In the afternoon, Xi went to the city of Liuzhou. Inspecting machinery manufacturer Guangxi Liugong Group Co., Ltd., Xi said the high-quality development of the manufacturing industry is the top priority in promoting China's high-quality economic growth.

He urged efforts to keep a firm hold on the initiative in pursuing innovation-driven development and uphold the overall leadership of the Party in state-owned enterprises. Xi then went to a food-processing zone for local specialty Luosifen rice noodles. He praised the role of local signature industries in developing the real economy and called for more support for private enterprises to help them grow and tackle challenges. On Tuesday morning, Xi visited the Anthropology Museum of Guangxi in the regional capital city of Nanning. As the country's demonstration zone of ethnic unity and progress, Guangxi should continue to play its exemplary and leading role, Xi said. In the morning, Xi also heard the regional Party committee and government of Guangxi report their work.

Xi urged efforts to promote the high-end, intelligent and green transformation of traditional industries, optimize and upgrade their entire industrial chains, and actively cultivate emerging industries. Calling for joint efforts to build the New International Land-Sea Trade Corridor, Xi stressed the importance of strengthening China-ASEAN cooperation and carrying out solid work on pilot free trade zones. Amid the fight against pollution, authorities should incorporate the goal of peaking carbon emissions and achieving carbon neutrality into the overall plan for economic and social development and building an ecological civilization, Xi said. Xi also underscored the introduction of job policies targeting key groups including college graduates and migrant workers, and the protection of the legitimate interests of truck drivers, couriers and food delivery riders.

He also called for maintaining COVID-19 control measures and highlighted the importance of raising public awareness of ethnic unity and progress. Urging Guangxi to utilize its abundant revolutionary resources in boosting Party history learning and education, Xi asked Party members to appreciate the power of belief from CPC's centenary endeavor to maintain firm resolve and the courage to prevail over major difficulties and challenges. All Party members and cadres must realize that socialism with Chinese characteristics is the only path to the development of China, and have complete trust in the CPC in rallying the Chinese people and leading them in following the path to the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, Xi noted.

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China to Further Strengthen Security Measures at Schools

China's Ministry of Public Security has asked local public security organs across the country to strengthen security measures in primary schools, middle schools and kindergartens to ensure the safety of students and teachers. On a video conference on strengthening school security and social stability, the ministry urged local public security authorities to work with education authorities and identify and tackle potential risks on campus. It also called for enhanced security measures on campuses, including equipping full-time security guards, and installing "one-button alarm" systems and surveillance devices. Patrols and safety precaution measures in populated areas should also be strengthened, said the ministry, calling for increased police visibility and the timely handling of illegal and criminal activities. The video conference was held in the wake of a stabbing incident at a kindergarten on Wednesday in south China's Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region. Two people were killed and 16 others injured in the incident.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 04/29/2021

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China's Manufacturing Activity Expands at Slower Pace in April

The purchasing managers' index (PMI) for China's manufacturing sector came in at 51.1 in April, slightly down from 51.9 of March, data from the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) showed Friday. A reading above 50 indicates expansion, while a reading below reflects contraction. The manufacturing sector maintained steady growth in April. The manufacturing PMI continued to expand on the basis of the apparent rebound in the previous month, weakening somewhat but still higher than the level of the same period in 2019 and 2020, NBS senior statistician Zhao Qinghe said. It is worth noting that the manufacturing PMI for small businesses showed a positive improvement in this month's data, said Wen Bin, a chief analyst at China Minsheng Bank. The PMI for small businesses in the manufacturing sector stood at 50.8, up 0.4 percentage points from the previous month, while that for big and medium-sized companies came in at 51.7 and 50.3, down 1 percentage point and 1.3 percentage points, respectively.

The sub-index for production stood at 52.2, down 1.7 percentage points from a month earlier, while that for new orders shrank 1.6 points to 52, indicating a slowdown in the expansion of production and demand in the manufacturing sector. The inventory index of raw materials was 48.3 percent, down 0.1 percentage points from the previous month, below the critical point of 50, indicating the inventory of major raw materials in the manufacturing sector decreased compared with the previous month. Business confidence was generally stable. The sub-index on production forecast stood at 58.3 in April, above the levels in the same periods of the previous two years, despite a drop of 0.2 percentage points from March, Zhao said. The price indexes ran high, as the purchasing price index of major raw materials and the ex-factory price index were 66.9 percent and 57.3 percent, respectively, both 2.5 percentage points lower than the previous month.

Some surveyed enterprises reported difficulties such as chip shortage, poor international logistics, container shortage and rising freight rates. The delivery time index of suppliers in the high-tech manufacturing industry has been lower than 44 for three consecutive months, and the procurement cycle of raw materials of enterprises has been extended, Zhao said. Major PMI indexes came down in April after last month's rapid rebound formed a relatively high base, Wen said, adding that this calls for the need to further consolidate China's economic recovery as challenges persist. The NBS survey also showed that expansion of the non-manufacturing sector continued to gather momentum but at a slower pace. The PMI for China's non-manufacturing sector came in at 54.9 in April, down 1.4 percentage points from March.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 04/30/2021

JAPAN: Scientists Develop E-Health Patches to Help Monitor Pulse

Scientists at Osaka University, in cooperation with JOANNEUM RESEARCH (Weiz, Austria), introduced wireless health monitoring patches that use embedded piezoelectric nanogenerators to power themselves with harvested biomechanical energy. This work may lead to new autonomous health sensors as well as battery-less wearable electronic devices. The study was published in the journal Nature Communications. As wearable technology and smart sensors become increasingly popular, the problem of providing power to all of these devices become more relevant. While the energy requirements of each component may be modest, the need for wires or even batteries become burdensome and inconvenient. That is why new energy harvesting methods are needed. Also, the ability for integrated health monitors to use ambient motion to both powers and activate sensors will help accelerate their adoption in doctor's offices. Now, an international team of researchers from Japan and Austria has invented new ultra-flexible patches with a ferroelectric polymer that can not only sense a patient's pulse and blood pressure but also power themselves from normal movements. The key was starting with a substrate just one micron thick. Using a strong electric field, ferroelectric crystalline domains in a copolymer were aligned so that the sample had a large electric dipole moment.

Based on the piezoelectric effect, which is very efficient in converting natural motion into small electric voltages, the device responds rapidly to strain or pressure changes. These voltages can be transduced either into signals for the medical sensors or to directly harvest the energy. "Our e-health patches may be employed as part of screening for lifestyle-related diseases such as heart disorders, signs of stress, and sleep apnea," said first-author Andreas Petritz. The authors estimate that multilayer patches can harvest up to 200 millijoules per day from biomechanical motions if placed on joints, like knees or elbows. This is enough to monitor cardiovascular parameters several times a day. And the patches are so thin that they are barely perceptible thus making a necessary evil for many patients--daily health monitoring--less unpleasant. "We expect that our findings will assist in the development of other sheet-type sensor systems that can perform precise biomonitoring when affixed to the skin surface," senior author Tsuyoshi Sekitani said. Additional modules allow other features, such as wireless communication with a smartphone or computer.

From <https://www.thejapannews.net> 04/23/2021

Govt to Support Recurrent Education for Working People

The government plans to strengthen its support of recurrent education for working people hoping to change jobs during a challenging job market caused by the pandemic. As there has been a greater risk of employment instability due to the pandemic, the government plans to provide an environment where people can acquire the necessary knowledge and skills to make it easier for them to change jobs or find new employment. The program also aims to create more options for ways of working. "There are companies that continue to grow even amid the coronavirus pandemic," Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga said at a meeting of the Council on Economic and Fiscal Policy held at the Prime Minister's Office in mid-April. "We will expand opportunities for people to acquire skills to move to new workplaces." The government plans to include specific measures to strengthen recurrent education in the Basic Policy on Economic and Fiscal Management and Reform to be decided in as early as June.

Recurrent education refers to the practice of working people, job seekers and the unemployed studying at educational institutions or improving their skills through in-house training to enhance their knowledge and skills. The surplus workforce held by Japanese companies rose to 2.38 million in the October-December 2020 period, and more and more companies are offering early retirement and buyouts, according to an estimate by the Cabinet Office. In response to the pandemic, the government is implementing special measures for employment adjustment subsidies to help companies pay allowances to workers who have been put on leave due to the virus. Although these measures have curbed the unemployment rate, the special measures will be phased out in stages after May. There are fears companies may start to cut back on their workforce in the future, observers said.

The Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology Ministry will start this fiscal year subsidizing universities, junior colleges and other institutions that provide free re-learning opportunities for unemployed and nonregularly employed young people, on the condition they study information technology and nursing care fields for two to six months while balancing their job search and current work. In cooperation with a company that trains IT engineers, a Tokyo-based certified nonprofitable organization, Single Mothers Forum, has been offering free online courses for single mothers to obtain relevant certifications since January. So far 90 people have applied for the courses. "More and more people have financial concerns due to the pandemic," an official of the NPO said. "In the IT industry, where there is a labor shortage, many people can work from home, so I think it will be easier for them to balance work and child rearing."

From <https://the-japan-news.com> 04/28/2021

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Japan to Boost Aid for Large-Scale Facilities Under Emergency

The Japanese government said Friday that it will raise the amount of cooperation money for businesses that have closed their large-scale facilities at its request under the COVID-19 state of emergency. Also, the government will extend until the end of June the period of its employment adjustment subsidy program for companies in areas covered by the emergency that put workers on paid leave amid the epidemic. The period was set to end on Friday. Department stores, shopping centers, electronics retail stores and other facilities with floor space of over 1,000 square meters are subject to the cooperation money system. The government's current support amount of 200,000 yen per day for each compliant business operator was criticized as too small. Under the revamped program, the government will provide 200,000 yen per building for large-scale facilities.

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SDF's Ability to Repel Cyber-Attacks Must Be Strengthened Without Delay

Protecting critical infrastructure from cyber-attacks is a new security challenge. The response capability of the Self-Defense Forces must be improved drastically. As part of this effort, the SDF officially participated in a large-scale exercise hosted by the Cooperative Cyber Defense Center of Excellence, a body accredited by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, for the first time. The exercise simulated successive attacks on operational systems in areas such as electricity, water, air defense and satellites. A team of 27 members mainly from the SDF and private entities involved in important infrastructure projects participated in the "live-fire" cyber defense exercise. It is crucial to deepen cooperation between the SDF and these private entities by taking advantage of such an opportunity. There have been many cases in which sensitive information and crypto-assets have been stolen through cyber-attacks even in peacetime. In the event of an emergency, it is assumed that attacks will be carried out on infrastructure, such as railways and electricity, and internal military systems.

Some people argue that wars of the future will begin in cyberspace. When invading Ukraine, Russia is said to have inflicted extensive damage to the country by cyber-attacks on electric power substations and military systems. In Japan, business operators and the National Center of Incident Readiness and Strategy for Cybersecurity, which is placed under the Cabinet, are tasked with protecting infrastructure and other critical systems in the event of a cyber-attack. However, cyber-attacks are not limited to national emergencies involving armed attacks, and the perpetrators constantly make unauthorized accesses to various systems. Isn't it necessary to make effective use of the SDF cyber unit? In the United States,

intelligence agencies and the military are engaged in protecting critical infrastructure systems. Under the so-called forward defense strategy, the United States monitors systems in other countries even during peacetime to be ready to strike back immediately if it comes under attack.

Japan has also stated its policy to acquire “the capability to disrupt” cyber-attacks in times of emergency in the National Defense Program Guidelines. This is intended to allow the SDF to counterattack in cyberspace. If the SDF attempts to respond to such an emergency under an exclusively defensive defense policy, it is highly likely to be on the back foot. Serious discussions also should be held in the Diet as to what kind of situations the SDF should be allowed to engage in, and to what extent. Reinforcing the SDF cyber defense unit, which currently has 290 members, is an urgent task. Earlier this month, the Defense Ministry established a senior-level post tasked with providing advice on cybersecurity based on expertise and sought applicants for the post from the private sector. The ministry is aiming to secure capable human resources to fill the post by offering annual pay of up to ¥20 million and allowing the person to have another job. It is hoped that a sufficient cyber defense system will be developed by utilizing the strength of the private sector without being bound by conventional ideas.

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Will Digital Vaccination Certificates Be a Shot in the Arm for Intl Travel

The introduction of digital certificates to show one’s record of vaccination against the novel coronavirus has been spreading, mainly in Western countries. While hopes are high for such a certificate system to be used to resume cross-border travel, consideration for people who have not been vaccinated is also likely to be called for. The European Union plans to introduce vaccine certificates by summer to facilitate free movement within the bloc. The system is said to enable certificates of vaccinations and PCR test results to be saved on smartphones and other devices and checked at immigration control. Some countries are considering exempting travelers who have cleared the checks from undergoing testing and quarantine. As the flow of people has been strongly restricted among EU member states amid the pandemic, countries relying heavily on tourism, such as Greece, have strongly urged the EU to introduce such a certificate scheme as soon as possible. With the summer tourist season approaching, these countries apparently aim at revitalizing their economies, while preventing the spread of the virus.

Britain is also considering introducing a vaccine certificate system with an eye to gradually lifting a ban on its people traveling overseas. There is no sign of the pandemic being brought under control anytime soon. Vaccine certificates would

surely be effective in easing travel restrictions in a safe and smooth manner. However, it should not be forgotten that vaccinations are voluntary. Many people refrain from taking the shots for various reasons, such as allergies and concerns about side effects. A number of countries have also put off inoculating young people as they are regarded as having a low risk of developing serious COVID-19 symptoms. Measures are needed to prevent people who have not been vaccinated from suffering major disadvantages. A system should remain in place to allow the unvaccinated to enter countries through procedures such as presenting negative PCR test certificates, even after vaccine certificates spread widely.

In particular, the use of such certificates to remove restrictions on participating in events and activities in one's own country could lead to discrimination and friction against those who have not been inoculated. Careful discussions are essential. Regarding the domestic use of vaccine certificates, the EU leaves decisions to the discretion of each member state. In the United States, there has been a split between states actively using certificates and those opposing the introduction of the certificates, arguing that individual freedom is infringed on. People who have received at least one COVID-19 vaccine dose account for about 50% of the total population in Britain, about 40% in the United States and about 20% in the EU region, while Japan lags far behind. The pressing task for Japan is carrying out its vaccination program more quickly rather than introducing vaccine certificates. However, if Japan is left behind in this international trend, it could raise a barrier for travelers from Japan to destinations abroad. The Japanese government must put the digitization of inoculation records on track in case travelers are asked to present vaccine certificates in the future.

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SOUTH KOREA: After 2 Years into 5G World, Smartphone Users Still Hungry for Wider Coverage, Faster Speeds

When 5G networks were first rolled out in South Korea in April 2019, telecom operators claimed that their ultrafast mobile speeds and low latency would usher in a new era for smartphone users and even power future technologies from autonomous vehicles to virtual reality (VR) content to cloud gaming. Fast forward to 2021, self-driving cars are still a way off and cloud games still work on previous 4G LTE networks. The next-generation networks have instead faced user disappointment due to slower-than-expected speeds and patchy network connection, leading to underwhelming adoption. Average download speeds on 5G were around four times faster than 4G LTE, according to a government report last year, compared with initial promises of being up to 20 times faster. As of February, 19 percent of the country's 71 million mobile subscriptions were on the latest generation networks, compared

with the 73 percent using 4G.

User migration from 3G networks to 4G LTE was relatively faster, with LTE users accounting for 44 percent of total mobile users in July 2013, two years after the network's launch, according to ICT ministry data. While the government touts that telecom operators have installed 5G base stations three times faster than initial targets, with 170,000 as of February, the figure pales compared to the over 970,000 4G base stations across the country. South Korea aims for nationwide 5G coverage by next year, with the network currently available in major cities. Experts point out that 5G has drawn weaker-than-expected market response as it does not improve user experience as much as 4G LTE did 10 years ago.

"When users switched over to LTE from 3G, they had access to new services like video calls that were previously limited due to data speeds," Kim Jong-ki, a research fellow at the Korea Institute for Industrial Economics & Trade, said. "Aside from certain areas, current 5G speeds aren't noticeably faster." User frustration has boiled over, with some angry 5G users preparing a lawsuit against the country's three major telecom operators -- SK Telecom Co., KT Corp. and LG Uplus Corp. -- to seek compensation for poor connection and disappointing speeds. Around 10,000 people have expressed intent to join the collective action, which argues that costlier plans on 5G do not offer improved experience compared with 4G LTE, according to attorney Kim Jin-wook from the law firm Joowon. Cho Eun-young, who is taking part in the lawsuit, said that her phone was always using the 4G network despite being on a 5G plan.

"My phone couldn't find 5G and would use 4G LTE even when it was on 5G priority mode," said Cho, who uses a Galaxy S20 smartphone from Samsung Electronics Co. "I live near Seoul, imagine what it'd be like for 5G users who live outside the capital region." Mobile carriers argue that the technology is still at an early stage. "5G networks are still being deployed and under development," said a telecom industry official, adding that the country leads the world in terms of 5G rollout. South Korea was ranked as the top global 5G market out of 22 countries in terms of 5G deployment progress, network coverage, spectrum availability and regulatory ecosystem, according to a report last October from market researcher Omdia. The government has acknowledged the shortcomings of the country's 5G deployment. "5G services aren't being offered at an acceptable level for the public," Cho Kyeong-sik, the second vice minister of science and ICT, said at a meeting Friday. "Its use in business applications has also fallen short of expectations."

"There are many issues to address, such as developing wide-ranging devices, the availability of the 28GHz band, improving user experience in service and data plans," Kim Dong-ku, a professor of electrical engineering at Yonsei University, said at the meeting. "If such issues aren't resolved, the economic effect from 5G commercialization is expected to decrease." South Korea currently offers 5G on the

3.5 gigahertz (GHz) band for mobile users, compared to the 28GHz band, which unlocks the network's ultrahigh speeds. It has also yet to commercialize standalone 5G, which does not require support from 4G LTE and improves latency. Mobile carriers are nevertheless pushing for widespread adoption and have recently released more affordable 5G data plans. Top wireless carrier SK Telecom targets 9 million 5G users by the end of the year, while smaller rival LG Uplus is aiming for 4 million. "The economic fallout from the pandemic dampened 5G demand last year," research fellow Kim Jong-ki said. "User migration will likely accelerate this year."

From <https://en.yna.co.kr> 04/03/2021

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S. Korea's Wearable Device Market Grows over 50 Pct in 2020 Data

South Korea's wearable device market grew more than 50 percent last year, industry data showed Tuesday, due to rising demand for IT products amid the pandemic-driven stay-at-home trend. Domestic shipments of wearable products, including smartwatches, wireless earphones and electronic wristbands, totaled 12.76 million units in 2020, up 50.7 percent from a year ago, according to the data from market researcher IDC Korea. Wireless earphones accounted for 74 percent of the market with 9.39 million units last year, up 48.9 percent from a year earlier. "With rising trends of online learning and work-from-home amid the pandemic, earphones became the essential item," IDC Korea said. "The market also grew with the expanded lineup of smartphones without a headphone jack." Wristband shipments grew 53.3 percent on-year to 1.76 million units last year, making up 13.8 percent of the market, while smartwatch shipments soared 60 percent on-year to 1.6 million units to represent 12.6 percent of the wearable devices sold in South Korea, the data showed.

From <https://en.yna.co.kr> 04/06/2021

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Online Food Delivery Transactions Hit over 20 Tln Won in 2020

Transactions on online food delivery apps in South Korea last year soared to over 20 trillion won (US\$17.9 billion), data showed Thursday, as stay-at-home practices amid the pandemic propelled demand for online services. Total transactions on food delivery apps, such as Baedal Minjok, stood at 20.1 trillion won last year, up 43.5 percent from the previous year, according to the data from the Ministry of Science and ICT. The latest data from the ministry's survey on the broader online-to-offline industry comes as the COVID-19 pandemic limits in-person contact and accelerates the use of digital services. Total transactions last year on online-to-offline service

apps, which include hotel reservation to housekeeping services, reached 126 trillion won, up 29.6 percent from the previous year. Total sales from companies that operate such services are estimated at 3.5 trillion won last year, up 18.3 percent from the previous year, while the total number of online-to-offline service workers stood at 580,000, up 8.1 percent over the same period. The ministry added that a total of 678 companies in South Korea operated online-to-offline services last year, compared with 555 in 2019.

From <https://en.yna.co.kr> 04/08/2021

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S. Korean Telcos to Share 5G Networks in Remote Areas

South Korea's three major mobile carriers will share their 5G networks in remote coastal and farm towns in a move to accelerate the rollout of the latest generation networks, the ICT ministry said Thursday. The carriers -- SK Telecom Co., KT Corp. and LG Uplus Corp. -- signed an agreement so that 5G users can have access to the high-speed network regardless of the carrier they are subscribed to in 131 remote locations across the country, according to the Ministry of Science and ICT. Under the plan, a 5G user would be able to use other carrier networks in such regions that are not serviced by his or her carrier. The ministry said telecom operators will test the network sharing system before the end of this year and aim for complete commercialization in phases by 2024. The ministry said the selected remote regions are sparsely populated, with a population density of 92 people per square kilometer, compared with those without network sharing at 3,490 people per square kilometer. The move comes as the country races to establish nationwide 5G coverage, with network equipment currently installed in major cities. The three telecom operators promised in July last year to invest up to 25.7 trillion won (US\$23.02 billion) to update their network infrastructure by 2022. As of February, the country had 13.66 million 5G subscriptions, accounting for 19 percent of its total mobile users. South Korea was the world's first country to commercialize 5G in April 2019.

From <https://en.yna.co.kr> 04/15/2021

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World Bank and Korea Forest Service Join Together for 'Green Cooperation' amid Climate Crisis

Korea Forest Service and the World Bank joined together for a workshop in honor of the Korea Green Growth Trust Fund's (KGGTF) Korean Green Innovation Day (KGID) last Friday. The workshop was held for the first anniversary of the joint cooperation between the two organizations, aimed to invigorate cooperation through sharing Korea's success and experience and to promote Korea's KGGTF project to the

World Bank. The Forest Service drew interest from the World bank by introducing projects such as major forest policies including carbon net neutrality and the successful forest rehabilitation, forest management using information and communications technology and the hosting of the World Bank's Side Event through the introduction of the 15th World Forest Congress. The World Bank covered forestry activities and future assignments and opportunities for the forest industry.

Asian Forest Cooperation Organization (AFoCO) introduced forest fire management e-learning program and shared opinions about future cooperation. The event was joined by experts from all around the world, including the Korean Forest Service, World Bank officials and AFoCo. Uzbekistan government's forest experts also participated and shared Korea's policies and ICT. Uzbekistan was invited to promote a stronger cooperation with the Forestry Service as \$350,000 of KGGTF is being invested in the Uzbekistan's forest landscape restoration project (\$178 million in total). In the opening address, director Choi, "At a time when overcoming an unprecedented climate crisis and COVID-19 uncertainties are an urgent priority, forestry holds the key." "The Forest Service will take lead in supporting developing countries and will strengthen its role in climate response through the synergy created by the cooperation with the World Bank."

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S. Korea's 5G Users Top 14 Mln Since Commercialization

The number of 5G users in South Korea stood at over 14 million last month, two years after the networks first went live in the country, data showed Friday, as the country pushes to accelerate adoption of the latest generation networks. As of the end of March, 5G subscriptions stood at 14.48 million, accounting for 20 percent of the total 71.1 million mobile subscriptions in the country, according to data from the Ministry of Science and ICT. South Korea was the first country in the world to commercialize the latest generation networks in April 2019. Top mobile carrier SK Telecom Co. had the most 5G subscribers at 6.74 million, followed by KT Corp. at 4.4 million and LG Uplus Corp. at 3.33 million. Subscriptions to 4G continued to decline, standing at 51.18 million last month, down around 250,000 from the previous month.

Users on 4G still accounted for the majority of mobile subscriptions, accounting for around 72 percent of the total. Telecom operators have pushed for faster user migration to 5G networks from previous generation networks, launching relatively more affordable 5G data plans since late last year. New phones, including Samsung Electronics Co.'s flagship Galaxy S21 series launched early this year, have also boosted user adoption of 5G. Network quality issues, however, have dented user migration, with some angry 5G users preparing a lawsuit against the country's three major telecom operators to seek compensation for poor connection and

disappointing speeds.

From <https://en.yna.co.kr> 04/30/2021

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South-East Asia

CAMBODIA: Trade Volume Up 2.5 Pct in 2020 Despite Pandemic

Despite the global economic fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic, Cambodia's total trade volume remains positive, reaching 35.8 billion U.S. dollars last year, up 2.5 percent compared with the year before, local media reported on Friday. Cambodia's total exports were worth 17.21 billion dollars, up 16.7 percent year-on-year in 2020, and total imports were valued at 18.59 billion dollars, down 7.84 percent, the Khmer Times reported, citing a Ministry of Commerce's annual report. "Despite the fact that the country is facing the spread of COVID-19..., Cambodia's exports and imports performed significantly well in 2020," Minister of Commerce Pan Sorasak said in the report. Cambodia's main trading partners are the United States, the European Union, China, Japan, South Korea, Thailand and Vietnam, among others. The Southeast Asian nation's major export products remain garments at 7.42 billion dollars last year, down 10 percent year-on-year, footwear at 1.11 billion dollars, down 11.6 percent and travel products at 964 million dollars, down 10.6 percent, the report said. However, the kingdom saw a rise in the exports of electrical appliances, bicycles, milled rice, furniture, rubber and vegetables and fruits, among others.

From <http://www.xinhuanet.com> 04/02/2021

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PHILIPPINES: Commits Malaria Eradication by 2030

The Philippines is committed to eradicating malaria in the country by 2030 completely, said Health Secretary Francisco Duque on Monday. According to the Philippines' Department of Health (DOH), the country has succeeded in reducing malaria transmission by 87 percent from 48,569 in 2003 to 6,120 cases in 2020. The DOH said the Philippines also reduced the number of people dying from malaria by 98 percent, from 162 deaths in 2003 to three deaths in 2020. "A shrinking geographic extent of malaria, with 60 provinces officially declared as malaria-free," said the DOH, adding that an additional 19 provinces also reached "the malaria elimination phase with zero local transmission, waiting to be assessed and declared malaria-free provinces." On Monday, the DOH launched new digital tools that will boost the government's malaria elimination strategy. The tools, which are opened to the public, include a web-based, real-time recording and reporting system that will be the primary data for surveillance and monitoring, and evaluation.

Philippine Economy Seen Recovering in 2021, with Stronger Growth in 2022, Says ADB

Public spending on infrastructure and social assistance, better progress in the country's COVID-19 vaccination drive, and a steady recovery in the global economy will underpin the growth of the Philippine economy this year and the next, according to a new Asian Development Bank (ADB) report released on Wednesday. The Asian Development Outlook (ADO) 2021, ADB's flagship economic publication, forecasts the Philippine economy to grow by 4.5 percent in 2021 and 5.5 percent in 2022. The Philippine economy shrank 9.6 percent in 2020, the lowest gross domestic product since 1946, due to the pandemic. The economy grew 6.1 percent in 2019. The report says that "substantial progress" in the country's vaccination rollout will help restore consumer and business confidence, though uncertainties over how the pandemic will unfold globally and domestically can pose risks to growth prospects. "Our 4.5 percent growth forecast is at the lower end of economists' estimates, so there are upsides to this projection," ADB Philippines Country Director Kelly Bird said in a statement. Bird said that "priority should be given to addressing the scarring effects of the pandemic on private sector employment." "Programs supporting workers and firms impacted by labor market, adjustments and reforms to boost productivity growth and investment will help counter the negative effects of the pandemic on employment over the medium term," Bird added.

The report says that the government's expansionary fiscal program and accommodative monetary policy will put the economy on a firm recovery path by the second half of 2021. The report adds that the government plans to strengthen labor market programs and assist in the recovery of sectors badly affected by the pandemic, including agriculture and tourism, will further support a pickup in the economy. However, the report warns that challenges remain, including uncertainties over the course of the pandemic and the emergence of new coronavirus variants across the globe. The report says that the Philippines' COVID-19 vaccine rollout may suffer from global supply shortages in the short term, and local community quarantines could be extended to curb the spread of COVID-19. Over 1.5 million Filipinos have been vaccinated as of April 26. The Philippines aims to vaccinate up to 70 million Filipinos this year. The report forecasts inflation to rise to 4.1 percent in 2021, up from 2.6 percent in 2020, due to rising global commodity prices and other supply-side factors. For instance, it says the African swine fever has disrupted the pork supply in the Philippines. Inflation is expected to ease to 3.5 percent in 2022 as the government takes measures to address supply-side pressures. The current account surplus is forecast to narrow to 2.5 percent of the gross domestic product in 2021 and 1.8 percent in 2022. The report says that merchandise exports are

expected to increase with the rise in global trade, as imports, especially capital goods, rebound to support public infrastructure development. The Philippines now has 1,013,618 confirmed COVID-19 cases, including 16,916 deaths.

From <http://www.xinhuanet.com/> 04/28/2021

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VIETNAM: Digital Transformation a Must for Technical Infrastructure Sector

Digital transformation has become a critical need for technical infrastructure enterprises to survive in the fourth industrial revolution, especially amid the COVID-19 pandemic, speakers said at a seminar on Tuesday in HCM City. Nguyễn Văn Đăng, director of the Gia Định Water Supply Joint-Stock Company under the Saigon Water Corporation (SAWACO), said that digital technologies improve administrative methods and production activities, helping to better serve customers. The water supply sector, for example, uses GIS (Geographic Information System) technology for data sharing among units. This helps to reduce leakage and improve water supply management, with the goal of supplying clean water to all urban residents in Việt Nam. The GIS technology also uses virtual assistants to handle repetitive questions and collect data from customers. It provides information on mangrove forecasting to farmers via telephone, and analyses water levels to help scientists assess the water situation during different seasons of the year. “To successfully implement digital transformation, enterprises must improve the quality of human resources, which will help productivity and thus enhance competitiveness,” Đăng said. “This success depends heavily on the determination of all participants involved, especially the leaders of the company,” he added.

Trần Quang Minh, general director of SAWACO, said that digital transformation has a far-reaching impact, especially in the water supply sector. It can reduce the time to install water metres, increase labour productivity, save costs, and better monitor the water quality at source. Võ Thị Trung Trinh, deputy director of the city’s Department of Information and Communications, said that technical infrastructure businesses need access to preferential loans to implement digital transformation. She said the city plans to provide professional training about digital transformation to businesses. The city will also promote the use of shared databases to share data with industries and sectors related to technical infrastructure, such as electricity and water supply, to better serve customers. HCM City has set a target by 2025 that the city’s digital economy will contribute about 25 per cent of its GDP, she added.

A 2019 report by the US-based McKinsey Global Institute showed that in the construction industry, digital transformation could increase productivity by 14-15 per cent and reduce costs by 4-6 per cent. Việt Nam last year began its national digital transformation programme focused on “a digital government, digital economy and

digital society". Under the programme by 2030, the country will adopt new technologies and models, completely overhaul the way the Government operates, update business operations, change the work style of citizens, and create a safe, secure and humane digital environment. The digital economy is projected to produce 20 per cent of the country's GDP in the near future, with at least 10 per cent of each economic sector part of the digital economy, while annual labor productivity will likely increase at least 7 per cent. Experts said the country is set to be among the top 50 countries in the information and communication technology development index within the next five years. The workshop was organised by the Gia Định Water Supply Joint Stock Company under SAWACO.

From <https://vietnamnews.vn> 04/22/2021

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Social Assistance Helps Disabled People Integrate into the Community

Looking at the disabled people working hard on the sewing machines, Nguyễn Kim Khôi feels happy and wants to be able to help more people. Khôi, a disabled man in Đông Ngạc Ward, Hà Nội's Bắc Từ Liêm District, opened a small sewing workshop in 2009, providing vocational training and jobs for more than 100 people with disabilities. Every day, about 15 people with disabilities come here to learn sewing techniques. After finishing the course, they work at Khôi's workshop and earn VNĐ4-5 million (US\$130-170) a month by sewing flags. In addition to Khôi's establishment, in recent years, Hà Nội has had more and more people with disabilities open vocational training, production and business establishments, creating jobs for themselves and people in similar situations. Some examples are Vụn Art Cooperative in Vụn Phúc Ward, Hà Đông District, Pink Heart Handicraft Cooperative in Hồng Kỳ Commune, Sóc Sơn District and Embroidery Ltd Co in Quất Động Commune, Thường Tín District. Việt Nam has about 6.2 million people over the age of two with disabilities, making up 7.06 per cent of the country's population, according to the Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs (MoLISA).

Of those, more than 1 million are severely disabled. Most live in rural areas and many are victims of Agent Orange. Millions of people and children with disabilities are nurtured and cared for in social welfare establishments. With support from the State budget, organisations for disabled people have also mobilised other resources to improve the living conditions of this vulnerable group. People with disabilities are given care, treatment, orthopaedic surgery, functional rehabilitation, and provided with appropriate assistive devices, health insurance cards and wheelchairs. They are also offered bicycles, scholarships, jobs or new houses. At least 4.1 million people with disabilities, orphans and poor patients have received helps from the Việt Nam Sponsoring Association for People with Disabilities and Orphans so far. Fifty provinces and cities nationwide have implemented community-based functional

rehabilitation programmes. Of which, 18 provinces have rolled out the programme in all districts and communes. According to the Việt Nam National Committee on People with Disabilities, in addition to the social protection policy, the best way to help them integrate into the community is to help disabled people have confidence, support vocational training and create job opportunities.

The country has more than 19,550 people with disabilities who have received vocational training under a project. The Social Policy Bank has offered job support for 118,781 employees, of which 1,738 are employees with disabilities. The Department of Employment, MoLISA, in co-ordination with job service Centres of Quảng Ninh and Bình Dương provinces and Hà Nội Association of People with Disabilities, has created stable jobs for 30 disabled people and supported career counselling and business for nearly 2,000 people. More than 150 families with people with disabilities in eight provinces and cities have been provided animals, plants and production techniques from the Office of the National Committee for People with Disabilities. Nearly 10,000 families have received loans from the Việt Nam Blind Association with a total amount of VNĐ51.65 billion. The protection of rights and support policies for people with disabilities have always been a deep concern of the Government, said MoLISA's deputy minister, Lê Tấn Dũng. Policies, resources and schemes to help people with disabilities are always adjusted to suit reality. Additionally, positive innovations in communication activities have brought many substantial effects in raising awareness in society on caring and taking care of people with disabilities; changing stereotypes about capacities of people with disabilities and promoting vocational training for them. To help them integrate into the community, the Office of the National Committee for People with Disabilities and MoLISA will continue to develop and improve policies, support and amend the law to deal with shortcomings as well as create equal opportunities and reduce social barriers for persons with disabilities, Dũng said.

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Transport Ministry Moves to Expand Use of Automatic Weighing Stations

The Ministry of Transport has called for expanding the use of automatic weighing stations on national highways, prioritising roads with many overloaded vehicles. After six months of piloting the installation of an automatic weighing system on Highway 5, experts from the transport ministry said high-speed automatic weighing technology helped control and reduce the number of overloaded vehicles on the road. The experts also said the automatic weighing minimised corruption in the process of punishing overloaded vehicle' drivers. Nguyễn Văn Huyện, General Director of the Directorate for Roads of Việt Nam (DRVN), under the ministry, said the automatic weighing system has monitored 100 per cent of the number of vehicles using the

road. “The software is controlled by many units, so there is no human intervention in the result of handling violations,” he said. He said that after evaluating the pilot results, DRVN would complete procedures for expanding the use of automatic weighing stations on national highways and major cities and provinces. “We will prioritise key highways with a large number of overloaded vehicles such as the provinces of Ninh Binh, Thanh Hóa, Nghệ An, the gateways in and out to Hà Nội,” he said. DRVN reported that after six months of piloting the automatic weighing system on National Highway 5 (from August 15, 2020, to February 14, 2021), it found 663 of the 466,782 vehicles were overloaded with goods. At the National Traffic Safety Committee’s online conference on April 9, Deputy Prime Minister Trương Hòa Bình said overloaded vehicles were leading to degraded roads in many localities. He said vehicles carrying overloaded goods on road was an act of destroying national property, which should be handled seriously.

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HCM City Gets Scientific with Urban Development

Southeast Asia’s first laboratory to research into urban development opened in HCM City last week. City Science Lab @ HCM City will gather data to analyse, simulate and forecast urban development using modern technologies, and offer advice on urban planning to the city Department of Planning and Architecture based on this. It has been set up by the HCM City Architectural Research Centre and the US’s world-famous Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Lê Hòa Bình, deputy chairman of the city People’s Committee, said there is growing pressure on the city to achieve urban development but the tools available for analysing and managing its planning and development fall short of its rapid growth and a several complex factors affect urban planning. Vũ Chí Kiên, director of the new research centre, said it is adopting MIT’s CityScope platform to simulate and research urban plans under different growth scenarios and would study principles related to urban planning and management globally. HCM City has been running various urban development programmes, including to develop into a smart city and setting up the eastern innovative urban area.

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HCM City Focuses on Developing Infrastructure for e-Commerce

HCM City is focusing on developing its infrastructure for e-commerce amid the rising trend in online shopping, according to the city’s Department of Industry and Trade. Figures from the department show that 62.5 per cent of local consumers use the internet for shopping, while 17.9 per cent choose online payments. The value of

online shopping rose 13.8 per cent annually in recent years, the department reported. According to Hà Ngọc Sơn, head of the Import-Export Management Office under the city's Department of Industry and Trade, the city aims to provide training to at least 70 per cent of public servants in economic sectors on general knowledge on State management over e-commerce activities, focusing on factors supporting such activities. However, Sơn also said the city needs support from the State on planning, land reserves, and financial resources in the form of public investment.

Meanwhile, Trần Thái Sơn, founder and CEO of e-commerce platform Tiki.vn, said shopping demand via e-commerce floors is rising, adding that in HCM City it is double or even triple the country's average. Along with enterprises and e-commerce floors, more small businesses and individuals have also engaged in distributing and selling goods through e-commerce apps, he said, stressing the crucial need to expand infrastructure serving these activities. Experts said that COVID-19 has hindered the development of international trade activities while encouraging sellers and buyers to join the e-commerce market, thus leading to a new trend of exporting goods via e-commerce channels. They said that in order to take part in e-commerce activities, businesses need a network of warehouses and delivery centres, and the city needs to pay greater attention to the development of the logistics sector. Phan Thị Bích Huệ, Chairwoman of the Management Board of the Tây Thái Bình Dương Company, said the southern hub should consider logistics as a spearhead sector. In particular, she pointed out that many logistics firms have faced difficulties in accessing land for their business.

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South Asia

INDIA: Going Online Is a Necessity No More an Option

"E-governance was there from the past 15 to 20 years but the COVID pandemic has flagged it as the most essential thing in governance," Sarvesh Kaushal, Former Chief Secretary to the Government of Punjab, opened his address on this note. "Physical contact has to be minimised for combating the pandemic. There is no way that any government or any organisation can ignore the online handling of its systems or online delivery when everything has to be done contactless one has to go online. G2C and B2C services have no option but to digitise," he highlighted. Pandemic is a tragedy but for the IT applications, it posed as the biggest opportunity, Kaushal added. When asked about the challenges that the Government faced initially in implementing the IT applications, he answered, "Initially we lacked the backbone infrastructure. We did not have efficient connectivity and in many areas, there was no connectivity at all. Also, there existed huge digital illiteracy earlier. In addition, the

hardware was not pocket-friendly, unmanageable in terms of size and was not even available easily.” Unfortunately, there was not an equitable spread of IT transformation and most of it was through central funding which started diminishing with time. The institutionalised and standardised growth of IT was missing and this caused regional imbalances, he added. Speaking on the growth of IT in the past few years, Kaushal said that there have been excellent models of growth but unfortunately most of them have been silos. “So we are basically reinventing the wheel simultaneously at different places, synergy and integration are lacking.” There should be a national policy and a state policy which should be consistent, considering the next 20 to 30 years’ vision, deliberated Kaushal. Pointing out a few solutions, Kaushal said, “There is a need to devise an open-source mechanism which allows integration of efforts so that officers (district/ city leaders or policymakers) do not end up reinventing the wheel every third year.” Emphasising on integration and knowledge sharing, he added, “When some solution is being implemented in Delhi or Kerala and when it is adopted in Patna, then Patna should not start from scratch but it should start from the level where Delhi is at present.”

The national response to the COVID pandemic has brought out the best response in any country including India. The basic governance gets toned up in such times. If all the wheels of governance doing their individual jobs in a complete synergy then technology can be applied to their efforts so that their service delivery becomes effortless and contactless, he pointed out. On the way forward, Kaushal said, “I visualise a quantum jump as the issues are clearly flagged now, especially after COVID, however, for this we need apt manpower and liberal funds from the Centre. The potential to grow is now being tapped with all the goals, challenges, probable outcomes, clearly flagged. Also, the new generation of officers are digitally literate and hence, I see the next five years will be a revolution in the application of IT in governance.”

From <http://egov.eletsonline.com> 04/01/2021

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Chennai Metrowater Accelerates Installation of Digital Water Meters

In order to ensure the judicious usage of water, the Chennai Metrowater has expedited the work to fit digital water meters with automated meter reading (AMR) in commercial properties in the city. As of now, around 5,300 commercial properties using water more than 5,000 kilolitres including hotels, industries, and educational institutions have been provided with the AMR meters. The remaining properties of the total of 12,708 will be provided with the facility soon. According to Metrowater officials, the software for automated reading is in the development process. The software, once developed, will enable officers to read and monitor water meters and raise bills from their area and head offices. An official said that the smart meters are

being procured from Hitron, a French company. In the second phase of the exercise more commercial establishments will be identified for the installation of smart meters and possibly the process will be expanded to cover domestic consumers as well. The project is taken under the Smart City Mission at a cost of Rs 9.5 crore. The initiative will help incorporating a behavioral change among the citizens to track their water consumption and pay as per the amount of water consumed. The Metrowater has begun billing as per volumetric consumption and soon engineers will not have to go door-to-door to raise bills or read meters. In addition, Metrowater has earmarked Rs 5 crore to install smartcard-based water dispensers in some of the filling posts that were not covered during the first phase of the Smart City project.

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India-Denmark Collaborates to Address Water Challenges & SDGs in India Through Atal Innovation Mission

India's premier policy think tank NITI Aayog joined hands with Embassy of Denmark to India to build a world-class innovation ecosystem under the Atal Innovation Mission (AIM). The collaboration is a part of Indo-Danish bilateral Green strategic partnership. AIM, NITI Aayog and Embassy of Denmark to India signed a Statement of Intent (Sol) on April 12. The purpose of Sol is to jointly work towards promoting innovation and entrepreneurship amongst the aspiring entrepreneurs. The partnership would be executed through Innovation Center Denmark (ICDK) under the aegis of the Embassy of Denmark. To realise a world-class innovation ecosystem in India, the Innovation Center Denmark in India will collaborate with AIM to support various current and future initiatives of AIM, NITI Aayog and its beneficiaries in India as well as develop global innovation Green economy partnerships addressing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Dr Rajiv Kumar, Vice Chairman, NITI Aayog, lauded the move saying, "I look forward to this collaboration very much and I hope that whatever we do, we will also focus on water use in agriculture that takes up to 92 per cent of the water. I hope with this collaboration we can bring something very innovative in this field as well besides the others." According to Amitabh Kant, CEO, NITI Aayog, the partnership between India and Denmark holds a great potential. While sharing his thoughts on the occasion, he said, "For impactful innovation across multiple sectors, this partnership upholds a great potential. Through such global collaborations we can align research and development efforts to achieve results in an accelerated manner even in these challenging times." Denmark's Ambassador to India, Freddy Svane, in his address mentioned that water is a substance that cannot be replaced. "We need to use all kinds of innovative thinking to make judicious use of it so that the future generations do not face a lot of water challenges as compared to the current scenario."

Further, he emphasised on three key points Water, Women, and the World. He said,

“Water is the stream of life hence its importance for present and future generations cannot be stressed enough. Women empowerment is key to the growth of a nation and to the sustainability goals of the World. If we do not solve water management and challenges issues, regardless of the location, it will impact lives across the world.” AIM-ICDK shall also explore various areas of collaboration such as AIM-Denmark school students innovation exchange and co-innovation development, hosting Indo-Denmark innovation challenges, facilitating startup-incubator collaborations and exchanges, and promotion of startup and entrepreneurship events and competitions through the networks and channels of both parties. AIM and ICDK have previously collaborated to host the AIM-ICDK Water challenge and the Sol between the two would pave the way for future collaborations that allow innovation exchanges between two countries.

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Digital Lenders Are Busy Helping Indian MSMEs Stay Afloat

As the Covid-19 crisis forces micro, small and medium-size enterprises (MSMEs) in India to stay afloat in the absence of incoming revenue and kick-start their business again, digital lenders have come of age as they have the advantage of speed and adaptability to assess and disburse loans faster, according to a new report. The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) estimates the total addressable credit demand by the country's MSMEs at \$490 billion and the overall supply from formal sources at \$192 billion. "This credit gap of up to \$331 billion suggests that traditional lenders are either reluctant or unable to serve this segment of borrowers. In contrast, alternative lenders like FlexiLoans, Indifi, SMEcorner and ZipLoan see lending to MSMEs as a business opportunity," said a latest Forrester report. These digital lenders offer a wide range of alternative lending options, such as working capital loans from Happy, lines of credit from Indifi, startup loans from Lendingkart, and merchant cash advances from FinBucket. "They use technology such as digital applications, automated underwriting, digital verification, and digital disbursement to improve risk assessment, accelerate loan processing, reduce costs, and enhance experiences," said Arnav Gupta, Analyst at Forrester Research. Digital business lenders use payment and accounting platforms to find borrowers. BharatPe lets payment solution customers know that they can apply for a loan and repay it via a percentage of sales made on the payment platform. Lenders lacking their own payment or accounting platform partner with firms that do. "FlexiLoans offers loans to small businesses based on their activity on Paytm's platform. Digital lenders such as Indifi and ZipLoan work with an ecosystem of companies and marketplaces to gather information on potential borrowers and assess risk before granting loans," Gupta elaborated.

Indifi is working with food delivery startups Zomato and Swiggy to assess a restaurant's credit risk by checking its borrowing history and customer feedback

before issuing a loan. So far, digital business lenders have proliferated thanks to little competition from incumbents. To compete with them, a few Indian banks and NBFCs have started to raise their game — reducing the time to lend, improving risk assessment models, and building end-to-end digital lending processes. Digital lenders put more effort into fine-tuning credit risk assessments using data from alternative sources. They also avoid the cumbersome paper-based application and approval processes that traditional lenders use. Many MSMEs expect flexible loan repayment terms — which the Covid-19 crisis will make more important than ever. Loan repayment flexibility is something that traditional lenders have always failed to offer to businesses. In contrast, many digital lenders offer repayment flexibility as a product feature. "Lendingkart offers business loans that borrowers can repay in equal monthly or biweekly installments, allowing them to adjust their repayments to their sales and invoicing cycles," Gupta noted. Many digital lenders are also extending credit for a cause. "Capital Float offers educational institutions collateral-free loans to improve the quality of education by investing in educational infrastructure. Digital lenders such as FinBucket and Lendingkart offer preferential loans to women entrepreneurs," the report mentioned. FinBucket matches MSME borrowers with lenders such as banks, offering loans under the national government's "Stand-Up India" scheme to help borrowers from different social strata and women entrepreneurs set up their own businesses. Many startups have sought to disrupt India's business lending landscape, dominated by banks and NBFCs.

Firms such as BharatPe, FlexiLoans, Happy, and Paytm are offering credit to small businesses that already use their services and often tie loans to sales flowing through their platform. FlexiLoans partnered with more than 100 merchant platforms to offer merchant POS-based loans; merchants repay these loans via automatic deductions from future sales. To help MSMEs cope with the pandemic, Indifi partnered with PayU to offer lines of credit to merchants, which can borrow up to \$66,000 in revolving credit; they can draw on it when needed, and interest is calculated on the outstanding amount on a given day, said the report. "Digital disruptors threaten to make incumbents irrelevant by delivering more compelling products, services and experiences than traditional firms and at a lower cost. To avoid being disrupted, relentlessly focus on understanding your customers' needs so you can give them more of what they want faster," the report said.

From <https://www.siliconindia.com> 04/22/2021

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Data Centre Trends to Watch Out for the Future

According to the World Economic Forum - data incorporates 500 million tweets, 294 billion emails, 4 petabytes of Facebook information, 65 billion messages sent on WhatsApp, and 5 billion internet searches. By 2025, there will be 463 exabytes (400,000,000,000,000,000,000 bytes) of data created daily! The Data Centres

are pushing towards the edge of the horizon, with new solutions and concepts around the Data Centre domain. IT leaders are being forced to think of new solutions that could optimize their business even more. Businesses are utilizing smarter digital strategies more so ever. The upcoming decade will be full of innovations and drastic data centre operations. Keeping that in mind, here are a few Data Centre trends to watch out for: Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning have been driving a hardware arms race featuring more innovation than the chip sector has seen in years. AI is creating an "insatiable "demand for faster, more power-efficient computing hardware. Edge computing may be a technology paradigm that pushes core processing capacities to the actual area where it's required, frequently at the network's edges. This makes it conceivable to collect and analyze information "on location" instead of transmitting the knowledge back to the unified cloud for computation. Edge computing considers maximized operational efficiency, improved performance and safety, and limits downtime. Edge computing pushes computing power closer to devices. This, in turn, helps automate work and reduces the number of staff required for far-off locations. With such reduced bandwidth requirement and significantly lesser latency, Edge computing can handle massive amounts of data and achieve quicker response time, as compared to cloud computing.

Cloud Enterprises will continue to shape the IT landscape for the times ahead. The ongoing IT migration from on-premises data centers to solo, cloud providers is a huge business and is still gaining momentum. The same holds for Cloud connectivity, whether software, platform or Infrastructure-as-a-Service; the cloud is an integral part of most corporations' IT strategy. With the introduction of 5G, few technologies will immediately get positively impacted upon. 5G offers two advantages. Firstly, lower network latency and secondly, higher speed of data transmission. The speed of data goes up to 20 gigabits per second, and it is 4X to 5X faster than 4G speeds. The high speed of data transmission leads to a lot of data available at the processing end and therefore becomes a big opportunity for AI-enabled applications. One of the most significant advantages of 5G is going to be on IOT devices. The big transformation for IOT devices will be that it would not just be a data collection unit but will transform itself into a decision-making unit. This will drastically reduce the cost of IoT devices. 5G will introduce a boom in the IOT devices market as it will combine the processing power with an ability to make autonomous decisions. This will create a significant impact on the world, which would have more processing power at the devices and create a hyper-connected world. 5G is expected to connect about 50 billion devices and making the hyper-connected world more intelligent with more data shared across. In the upcoming decade, we will see the implementation of Data Centre technologies more than ever. The world will continue to integrate the Internet of Things into daily life, which will result in the need for a more massive presence of Edge computing. 5G infrastructures will also be the standard for connectivity, which will allow us to create and share data at a scale never done before.

From <https://www.siliconindia.com> 04/23/2021

India & World Bank Inks Pact for Developing Green, Resilient & Safe Highways

With an aim to build green and safe national highway corridors in Rajasthan, Himachal Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh, the Government of India and the World Bank signed a \$500 million project on December 22. The move will also include enhancing the capacity of the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH) in mainstreaming safety and green technologies. The project will support MoRTH construct 783 km of highways in the identified states by integrating safe and green technology designs such as local and marginal materials, industrial byproducts, and other bioengineering solutions. The project will help reduce GHG emissions in the construction and maintenance of highways. The agreement was signed by Dr Mohapatra, Additional Secretary, Department of Economic Affairs, Ministry of Finance, on behalf of the Government of India and Sumila Gulyani, Acting Country Director, India, on behalf of the World Bank. Dr CS Mohapatra stated that the Government of India is committed to environmentally sustainable development in its infrastructure projects. This project will set new standards in the construction of safe motorable roads. The selected stretches in the states of Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan and Himachal Pradesh will also help improve connectivity and promote economic development.

The National Highways of India carry about 40 per cent of road traffic. The project will also support analytics to map the freight volume and movement pattern on the National Highway network, identify constraints, and provide innovative logistics solutions. Several sections of these highways have inadequate capacity, weak drainage structures and black spots prone to accidents. The project will, therefore, strengthen and widen existing structures; construct new pavements, drainage facilities and bypasses; improve junctions; and introduce road safety features. Also, infrastructure investments are climate-resilient. To this effect disaster risk assessment of about 5000 km of the National Highway network will also be undertaken under the project along with support to the ministry for mainstreaming climate resilience aspects in project design and implementation. The \$500 million loan from the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD), has a maturity of 18.5 years including a grace period of five years. (With inputs from PIB)

From <http://egov.eletsonline.com> 04/23/2021

Importance of Press Release in Digital Marketing

Press release has been rapidly changing with time. Amazingly, its importance in

digital marketing is increasing. Press releases are mainly used by firms to spread awareness about their brand or new product. If you are wondering whether press releases have an importance in digital marketing then you are thinking right! You must have heard about digital PR while learning some tips about digital marketing. Surprisingly, this is what press release is all about! Digital PR is highly essential for your business as it spreads awareness globally about your brand, products or services. We are sure that you are well aware how digital marketing strategies help you generate leads and efficiently increase conversions. But it is also vital of the business to focus on other marketing strategies that boost conversions and generate leads. Therefore, to achieve digital marketing goals, effective strategies of Public Relations should be implemented. The best part about press releases is that it even allows you to interact with your target audience by spreading awareness about new launches. So are you ready to know some incredible benefits of press release in digital marketing? Well, let's begin! As discussed earlier, press release offer incredible benefits for digital marketing strategies. This ensures that firms market their products and their brand more efficiently and interact with their target audience. Therefore, some important elements that we will highlight are as follows:

Press releases help digital marketers to find out new opportunities by exposing their product and brand to the target audience. It helps them to get new ideas for marketing campaigns to spread more awareness about their business. Creating landing pages is not the only solution to generate more leads towards your business. As the competition is fierce in the digital world, it is vital for you to build a strong connection and deeply engage your target audience about your brand and product. You definitely would want to increase the reach of your site. Well, this is also ensure by press releases. They help to increase more traffic to your side and to generate more leads. This is because people are more influenced by the print media and all the new stories. So pulling a highly engaging press release will encourage people to search about your web and know about your business; hence increasing traffic and generating leads. The increase your brand visibility a highly engaging press release will attract the journalists towards your brand. They will be encourages to take more media converge of your business. This will even spread more awareness about your existence to the masses and the prospects that you would want to cater to. Most importantly, press release even helps you to build your business and brand as high authority. This increases the credibility of your brand that is always beneficial to boost the conversion rate. These major benefits can be ensured by press release distribution service. So if you want to boost the image of your brand then make sure you hire the best press release distribution service for your business.

From <https://www.siliconindia.com> 04/24/2021

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SRI LANKA: MoU Signed Between ICTA & enact e.V, Germany to Collaborate Between Startup Ecosystems

The Embassy of Sri Lanka in Germany initiated and facilitated the signing of a MOU between the Information and Communication Technology Agency (ICTA) of Sri Lanka and ENPACT e.V. in Berlin, Germany, which represents the Berlin Senate's startup initiative "AsiaBerlin", on 08 April 2021, with a view to fostering a strong bridge between Berlin, the startup capital of Europe and Sri Lanka's startup ecosystem. Chief Executive Officer of ICTA Mahinda B. Herath and Managing Director of ENPACT Jan Lachenmayer placed their signatures on the MOU in a virtual ceremony. During the ceremony, Secretary to the Ministry of Technology of Sri Lanka Jayantha De Silva welcomed the MOU and highlighted some of the initiatives being implemented in the digital transformation journey of Sri Lanka, including the establishment of "Techno Parks," across the island, as a part of the vision of the President, to build a technology-centric economy. The Chairman of ICTA Prof.

Lalith Gamage briefed on the strategy of Sri Lanka to nurture the startup and innovation ecosystems and emphasized that the MOU was a great initiative to share knowledge and encourage technology-focused investments, and related services. Managing Director of ENPACT Jan Lachenmayer welcomed the initiative by the Embassy to connect the relevant Sri Lankan agency for collaboration and expressed his confidence that the MOU will pave way for greater collaboration for innovation and create opportunities for both parties. The virtual ceremony, moderated by AsiaBerlin Ambassador Aravindh Panch was followed by a webinar on AgriTech and WaterTech, attended by around 60 participants, globally. In the panel discussion moderated by Head of Corporate Innovation of enpact Matthias Schmidt-Rex, Ambassador of Sri Lanka in Germany Manori Unambuwe, highlighted the importance of technology infusion to the agriculture sector in Sri Lanka and the emphasis placed by President Gotabaya Rajapaksa on same, in the country's development agenda. Ambassador Unambuwe further stated that the MOU between ICTA and ENPACT was a significant milestone, to foster innovation and opportunities between both startup ecosystems, especially in the fields of AgriTech and WaterTech.

Deputy Head of Division for Energy, Digitalization and Innovation of the Berlin Senate Dr. Rainer Seider while welcoming the participants, thanked the Embassy of Sri Lanka in Germany's endeavours in promoting cooperation between the two countries. AsiaBerlin Ambassador and CTO and co-founder at Vitreo Mike Richardson, Advisor at BASF Ronnie Tan, Pandsan Ventures of Singapore Christopher Aw and Director of Global Innovation at Thai Union Group of Thailand Tunyawat Kasemsuwan presented business models and case studies of innovations by startups in the fields of agriculture and water. The participants held in-depth discussions during the virtual breakout sessions that followed.

From <https://www.lankabusinessonline.com/> 04/19/2021

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ADB Projects Sri Lanka's Economic Growth to Rise to 4.1-pct in 2021

The Asian Development Bank's (ADB) flagship annual economic publication, the Asian Development Outlook (ADO) 2021, forecasts a significant rebound in Sri Lanka's economy as domestic and global economic activity strengthens and vaccination campaigns gather momentum domestically and abroad. ADB projects Sri Lanka's economic growth to rise to 4.1% in 2021 and moderate to 3.6% in 2022. Growth in the near term will come from increased private consumption supported by low interest rates and as pent-up demand is released, as well as recovery in investment supported by low interest rates, stronger global demand, and base effect following contraction in 2020. Progress in the development of the Colombo Port City and Hambantota Industrial Zone will foster foreign direct investment and support growth, which will also benefit from various reforms planned by the government.

"The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic reached Sri Lanka's shores just as the country was recovering from terror attacks in April 2019. The economy suffered from the simultaneous supply and demand shocks but showed resilience in the last quarter of 2020. That momentum has carried into 2021 and will support growth," said ADB Senior Country Economist for Sri Lanka Utsav Kumar. "At the same time, Sri Lanka faces significant economic challenges stemming from high public debt and external financing requirements. Measures to attract nondebt creating capital inflows, enhance domestic revenue mobilization, and expenditure management will be critical to reducing vulnerabilities." The base effects of high food inflation in 2020 and good agricultural growth are expected to keep annual average inflation contained at 4.5% in 2021, before rising to 5.0% in 2022. The current account deficit is expected to edge lower to 1.1% of the gross domestic product in 2021. Exports will grow as demand recovers in major export markets.

Domestic demand recovery and higher oil prices will raise imports, but continued import restrictions are expected to limit import growth and help contain the deficit. Uncertainty of the ongoing pandemic, pace of vaccination, limited fiscal space, debt vulnerabilities, structural issues, and extreme weather pose a risk to the strength of the recovery. Tourism is Sri Lanka's third-largest foreign exchange earner behind worker remittances and garment exports. The sector was devastated with the dual blow of the 2019 terror attacks and the pandemic. Resurrecting this sector calls for a new strategy to attract and win back the confidence of both domestic and international travelers.

From <https://egov.eletsonline.com/> 04/25/2021

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E-Learning for Continuing University Education

In response to the ongoing concerns in relation to the COVID – 19 virus, the Sri Lankan government has encouraged all Universities, Campuses, Higher Education Institutes to promote e-learning to ensure uninterrupted university education during this prevailing situation. This timely and valuable decision should be highly appreciated because e-learning has the power to move towards more effective and efficient teaching and learning process in any situation, if we use it correctly with a clear understanding. However, in the Sri Lankan higher education sector, E-learning is still at the initial stage. Therefore, to help you to understand more on the e-learning environment, I decided to share the meaning of e-learning and to inform you on how to make e-learning a success. What is e-learning? E-learning is a very broad, inclusive term for learning which occurs through the medium of information and communication technologies (ICTs). Different terms are used to describe learning through ICT and these terms provide different/varying meanings – they are not synonyms. Commonly used terms are;

Digital teaching and learning (DTL),

Virtual learning communities (VLC),

Technology enhanced learning (TEL),

Mobile learning, web-based learning,

Online learning, distributed learning,

Computer assisted instruction (also called computer-based training or internet-based learning),

Computer mediated communication,

Virtual classrooms,

I-campus

Computer-driven interactive communication.

The term electronic learning represents as “e-learning”. However, due to these inconsistencies of terms and their meanings, there are diverse and conflicting definitions of e-learning. This makes it difficult to find a single definition of e-learning. As studied by researchers, it is a risk in adopting an inclusive definition of e-learning because e-learning definition connects its different elements and features, which can obstruct the understanding of the concept. Therefore, following definitions can be selected as an appropriate definition of e-learning based on technological and teaching/learning perspectives.

The Commonwealth of Learning who empowers individuals through learning that leads to economic growth, social inclusion and environmental conservation, defines e-learning as “using information and communication technologies (or ICT) to expand access to education and to enhance and transform teaching and learning”. E-learning is part of a teaching and learning continuum that starts with face-to-face teaching in support of the use of information and communication technologies (ICT) at one end and fully online distance learning at the other end. As we move along the continuum from fully face-to-face teaching, technology is used to replace the face-to-face elements. Initially, this has very little impact on how teaching is organized and how learning occurs because the technology is used primarily to

enhance the face-to-face teaching. But as we move further along the continuum, the nature of teaching and how it is organized is increasingly affected by the use of ICT. In a blended learning environment, fewer face-to-face sessions are held as technology is used increasingly to deliver teaching and to facilitate learning. And the nature of the face-to-face sessions changes. Instead of coming to class to listen to a teacher, students come to discuss, and to work and collaborate in small groups. Once we reach the right end of the continuum there is no longer any face-to-face teaching and we have fully online learning in which all teaching is technology-mediated. During this interim crisis period, fully online teaching and learning is expected to continue with a collaborative and constructivist perspective. The educational institutes around the world are shifting towards to more constructivist approaches because they understood that the new ways of teaching and learning are required to meet the needs of a new generation of learners i.e. digital natives. Sri Lanka also understood the importance of new pedagogy to move towards student-centered and activity-based teaching and modern assessment. By doing this, students will benefit from modern pedagogical and assessment methods via online.

How to make e-learning sustain and success? Most of higher education institutes in Sri Lanka use their own Learning Management Systems (LMS) as an e-learning method which mostly apply as a supplementary tool to the face-to-face education. During the closure of universities in the light of the rapidly changing situation due to the ongoing Covid – 19 outbreaks in Sri Lanka, the University Grants Commission requested that the use of e-learning for continuing university education to students wherever possible. Therefore, continuing education through fully online mode could be a newer experience for universities, their academics as well as students. Hence, higher education institutes should use strategic dimensions to formulate and implement coherent internal and external processes in order to optimize the learning potential of integrating e-learning into their programs and courses. During this interim crisis period, we cannot expect that all universities have fulfilled the following strategic dimensions but after the prevailing situation in the country returns to normalcy, to face into any situation in near future all universities or higher education institutes should revisit and refine their strategic planning processes and plans for e-learning systematically through building the capacity of universities to drive, sustain and scale up their e-learning practices. Otherwise, due to the sudden requirement e-learning would continue somehow based on capacity of individual departments or faculties but that has limited sustainability and scalability within and across programs in the university. Therefore, it is important to adhere to the following strategic dimensions by each university for building the e-learning capacity and thereby making e-learning success. These strategic dimensions were identified from previous research on e-learning/blended learning implementation.

1. A clear vision should be grounded in the institution's philosophies for learning and teaching in e-learning environments. Therefore, the universities should design a

shared institutional vision by anticipating the ultimate goal and outcomes they want to achieve from institutional, student, as well as academic staff perspectives.

2. Universities should empower students to be future-ready with 21st century skills like collaboration, communication, critical thinking, creativity and computational thinking, it's becoming increasingly important to equip students with the technology skills they'll need to thrive in a digital economy. Skills like cloud computing, artificial intelligence, machine learning, productivity and more are already in demand in organizations around the world, yet jobs remain unfilled, and the talent gap persists and is set to widen. Therefore, universities can no longer be places for gaining content knowledge through the transmission of PowerPoint presentations; the curriculum should therefore develop higher-order thinking and 21st century competencies at the program and course levels. As an appropriate approach to meet these curricular outcomes, e-learning must therefore be pedagogically appropriate.

3. Academic staff has a crucial role for the successful implementation of e-learning. Although academics are experts in their respective fields, they may not have the expertise and experience to plan for and implement e-learning in their courses. Hence, the introduction of e-learning challenges academic staff to rethink their roles in a technology-enhanced learning environment. Therefore, universities should definitely provide continuing professional development for e-learning.

4. Although today's students can be branded as "Digital Natives", it has to be accepted that not all university students own digital devices that support e-learning. However, to support such university students, a couple of years back the Sri Lankan government has introduced laptop loan scheme. This is a special offer that provides an interest free bank loan of Rs. 75,000 to all government university students to purchase a computer of their choice. On the other hand, students mostly use technology for the purposes of entertainment and communication. They lacked experience of using technology for learning, generating and constructing knowledge. Therefore, providing learning support such as technical support and educational guidance to use technological tools strategically for their learning is essential.

5. The integration of e-learning into current learning and teaching practices in higher education requires establishing an appropriate plan for technological infrastructure, facilities, and technical and service support. Lack of knowledge of pedagogy, lack of understanding of how technology and content influence and constrain one another, and how teaching and learning change when particular technologies are used are all perceived to have a strong influence on academics' technology integration. President Gotabaya Rajapaksa has instructed the Telecommunications Regulatory Commission of Sri Lanka (TRCSL) to provide free Internet facilities for all undergraduates in State universities, who had registered for e-learning. This is timely important decision, so students may without interruption continue with their education. Not only during the crisis period but in everyday life, providing equity of access to IT/ICT, supplying rural broadband services, establishing National broadband policy, and decreasing cost of access to internet and other technologies are important to upscale e-learning opportunities.

6. National and institutional level policies are essential for organizational change and development. Universities should formulate an e-learning master plan and corresponding policies, specific guidelines and mechanisms to promote academics staff to engage in e-learning. This will help each university to promote and motivate their all academic staff members to use e-learning equally and equity, otherwise those who have capacity and self-interested on e-learning will only engage with it and other academics may eliminate from e-learning.

7. In terms of e-learning, university should build up two types of partnership: internal and external. Internal partnership encompasses inter-faculty collaboration for working together with the technology and teaching to promote and support e-learning. External partnership includes public and private sector collaboration to access and explore different learning technologies and shape the direction of future e-learning practices in universities with industry experts.

8. E-learning practices have to informed and driven by research and evaluation because revisions and modifications are always mandatory for the quality improvement of learning and teaching in universities. As informed by previous research, pilot projects need to be conducted to test possibilities and potentials before moving to large-scale implementation of e-learning is deliberated. This kind of pilot projects may help universities to identify and address potential problems and evaluate academic staff and students' reactions to a new initiative before moving to its large-scale implementation. However, due to the urgency of current situation in Sri Lanka we should continue e-learning without thinking whether we did the pilot project or not. After the prevailing situation in the country returns to normalcy, we should consider this as a pilot project to identify issues and academics and students' reactions. So that we will be able to implement successful e-learning program in near future under any circumstances. The above mentioned strategic dimensions allow universities or higher education institutes to reflect upon their existing e-learning strategies, identify gaps in these strategies with respect to their vision for how e-learning may enhance learning and teaching and possibly develop new strategies or revise existing ones to address these gaps. There is no argument that e-learning is the best solution for education in the prevailing situation in the country due to COVID-19. Therefore, we should take this situation as a lesson to go forward with e-learning.

From <http://www.dailynews.lk> 04/30/2021

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Central-West Asia

AZERBAIJAN: May Introduce Global Payment Systems to Work Locally

The Central Bank of Azerbaijan (CBA) is negotiating with foreign payment systems, the CBA General Director Farid Osmanov said at the 'Baku Transit Forum 2021: Smart City' online event, Trend reports. "Current infrastructure of Azerbaijan allows introducing such payment systems as Apple Pay and Google Pay," he said. According to Osmanov, this issue does not directly depend on Azerbaijan. "These systems may appear in Azerbaijan this year," Osmanov said.

From <https://en.trend.az/> 04/06/2021

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Azerbaijan Increases Competitiveness in Foreign Trade

The goal of the 'Trade Statistics Portal', created by the State Customs Committee (SCC) of Azerbaijan, is to visualize the country's foreign trade turnover for interested parties, Anar Suleymanov, Head of the State Customs Committee's secretariat, said, Trend reports. He made the statement at an event dedicated to the project of the SCC, Trade Statistics Portal. According to Suleymanov, the portal will provide statistical data to interested parties wishing to do business and support business research. This will create a basis for increasing Azerbaijan's competitiveness in trade, the SCC representative said. The head of the SCC secretariat said that the development of the portal began 18 months ago. Today, this resource is in the public domain, he noted. As Suleymanov said, the portal will provide an opportunity to find any information in eight areas, in particular, export and import indicators for 99 goods. "The new project will create conditions for a more transparent and quick introduction of e-commerce, efficient use of available resources," the SCC representative added.

From <https://en.trend.az/> 04/07/2021

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Meetings Held in Azerbaijan With Representatives of State Bodies to Switch to G-Cloud

Azerbaijan's AzInTelecom LLC under the Ministry of Transport, Communications and High Technologies of Azerbaijan held meetings with three more representatives of state structures, for whom the transition to the 'Government Cloud' (G-Cloud) is envisaged, Trend reports. The purpose of the meetings was to discuss a number of regulatory, financial, and technical issues regarding the transition to G-Cloud. In order to ensure the implementation of the decree of the president of Azerbaijan 'On the creation of a government cloud', the decree of the Cabinet of Ministers 'On the concept of a government cloud' and measures for the provision of 'cloud' services, AzInTelecom has already approved a transition plan to G-Cloud. "The meetings were held with representatives of the Council for State Support of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) under the president of Azerbaijan, the Azerbaijan Industrial

Corporation, and the Food Safety Agency of Azerbaijan," AzInTelecom said. Such state structures of Azerbaijan, as the Ministry of Defense, the Ministry of Justice, the State Housing Construction Agency, the Azerbaijan Mortgage and Credit Guarantee Fund, and the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection of Population of Azerbaijan will switch to the G-Cloud. In total, the transition of 36 structures is envisaged.

From <https://en.trend.az/> 04/16/2021

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Azerbaijan, Turkic Council Discuss Creation of Joint Digital Tools

Representatives of the Data Processing Center (DPC) under the Azerbaijani Ministry of Transport, Communications and High Technologies met with delegates from the Turkic Council member countries, Trend reports referring to a source in DPC. According to the source, the parties discussed the creation of joint digital tools, issues of cooperation in the development of applications based on open data, a joint registration system for mobile devices, and mutual recognition of e-signatures. Besides, DPC specialists presented three projects and spoke about their advantages. In conclusion, the parties discussed the prospects for cooperation.

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Azerbaijan Considering Possibilities of Using Alternative Energy in Agriculture

The possibilities of using alternative energy in agriculture are being considered in Azerbaijan, Trend reports with reference to the country's Ministry of Agriculture. Upon the organization of the Agrarian Science and Innovation Center of Azerbaijan for farmers and entrepreneurs, an online presentation was held on the application of innovative systems in agriculture. According to the ministry, the presentation was about the 'smart' greenhouse, the use of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) in agriculture, the use of automatic irrigation systems, remote control technology and other innovations. Speaking at the event, Chairman of the Agrarian Science and Innovation Center Akbar Abbasov spoke about the ongoing projects related to the use of innovative methods and modern technologies in the agricultural sector. "Later, in the course of the event, the farmers were shown new water purification systems used for irrigation of cultivated areas. New water treatment systems allow changing the chemical and physical properties of collector-drainage water and transforming it into irrigation water suitable for agriculture, which, in turn, contributes to the improvement of irrigation water supply for agricultural land," said the ministry.

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TURKMENISTAN: Launching Online Services for State Registration of Rights to Real Estate

The website of the Service for State Registration of Rights to Real Estate and Transactions Related to it under the Ministry of Adalat (Justice) of Turkmenistan has been launched, Trend reports with reference to the State News Agency of Turkmenistan. With the launch of the digital platform, work has been established on the exchange in electronic format of information necessary for the state registration of rights to real estate. Also, an intelligent queue system with an electronic ticket pass was put into operation. An information and telecommunications network connection has been formed between the Service, its territorial bodies, and other state agencies. The creation of the official portal of the Service will allow citizens to apply for legal services in an online format. The Service for State Registration of Rights to Real Estate and Transactions is a state body that performs state administration in the field of state registration of rights to immovable property and transactions related to it. According to the law of Turkmenistan, the rules of state registration for the following types of real estate objects are established: land plots; buildings, constructions, objects of unfinished construction; residential and non-residential premises; enterprises as property complexes; real estate that is part of a property complex; other types of real estate in cases established by regulatory legal acts of Turkmenistan.

From <https://en.trend.az/> 04/19/2021

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Turkmenistan Launches Online Application Service for Ashgabat City State Notary Office

Notarial Online Nobat application of Turkmenistan's Ashgabat City State Notary Office has been opened, Trend reports with reference to Business Turkmenistan information portal. With the help of this application, making an appointment in the desired department of the notary institution became possible. This service allows to track queue online, and there is also an automatic SMS notification about the approach of the queue. As reported, the website of the Service for State Registration of Rights to Real Estate and Transactions Related to it under the Ministry of Adalat (Justice) of Turkmenistan was also earlier launched. Turkmenistan is working on the introduction of information and communication technologies (ICT) in all sectors of the national economy. The country also pays special attention to training specialists in the field of ICT. The introduction of ICT into Turkmenistan's economy will facilitate its diversification. The concept of the development of the digital economy in Turkmenistan until 2025 is also aimed at economic diversification. The ongoing reforms allow increasing mutually beneficial cooperation with foreign partners and international organizations.'

From <https://en.trend.az/> 04/27/2021

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UZBEKISTAN: IMF Forecasts Economy to Grow 5% in 2021

According to the updated World Economic Outlook published by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) on April 6, Uzbekistan's economy is expected to grow 5% in 2021, and 5.3% in 2022. Inflation by the end of this year is set to comprise 10.3%, and 11.2% in 2022, which is slightly higher than the forecast of the country's Central Bank. The domestic regulator earlier in March said it was expecting inflation to slow to 9,0-10,0% by year-end. The current account balance against GDP is to make up -6,4% in 2021, and -5,9% in 2022.

From <https://uzreport.news/> 04/07/2021

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Winncom Wins Tender to Expand External Internet Channel in Uzbekistan

A worldwide distributor and provider of complete networking solutions Winncom Technologies Corp. has won a tender to expand an external Internet channel in Uzbekistan. According to a decree signed by Uzbek Cabinet of Ministers, the U.S. company is committed to expanding the capacity of the International Packet Switching Center to 1,800 Gbit / s. The \$25.9mn project is expected to pay off in six years. Domestic bank Alokabank is to allocate \$19.9 worth of loans to finance the project. Winncom Technologies Corp. was founded in 1993. It is engaged in the construction of operator networks and the supply of equipment. Its clients in Uzbekistan are Uzbektelecom, National Bank, Ucell, Digital TV and others.

From <https://uzreport.news/> 04/21/2021

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Customs Value of Goods Imported to Uzbekistan Now Available Online

The State Customs Committee has launched a new interactive service "Information on the customs value of goods imported to Uzbekistan". It is available on the committee's website. The service allows getting information about the minimum and maximum customs value of a certain product imported into the country. Its operation is fully automated. It is enough to enter a ten-digit product code of the foreign trade nomenclature. "Information about the goods is formed on the basis of

combining the customs value of all imported goods subject to duties for the last year," the committee said in a statement.

From <https://uzreport.news/> 04/29/2021

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Oceania

AUSTRALIA: Jobless Likely Fell Ahead of Job Keeper End

Economists expect the unemployment rate may have fallen even further before the successful JobKeeper wage subsidy ended last month. Key labour force figures for March will be released on Thursday with predictions centring on the jobless rate declining to 5.7 per cent, after the surprise drop to 5.8 per cent in February. Economists expect a further 35,000 people to have joined the workforce in the month. Westpac economists point to a number of leading indicators, including weekly payrolls, job vacancies and various business surveys, that all suggested labour demand continued to strengthen through March. However, the next few months will be closely monitored after the end of JobKeeper, which may slow the rapid rate of decline in unemployment, or even see a temporary rise. The Morrison government's COVID-19 vaccination program has also been thrown into disarray after health authorities recommended the AstraZeneca vaccine should not be given to people under 50 because of the risk of blood clotting.

"The move away from the AstraZeneca vaccine in Australia will further slow the vaccine rollout in Australia, particularly given the heavy reliance on it, which in turn poses a downside risk to Australia's economic recovery," AMP Capital chief economist Shane Oliver said. "But overall, we see the risk as small and not enough to justify any changes to economic forecasts." Trade Minister Dan Tehan told Sky News' Sunday Agenda program the government still hopes to get all Australians vaccinated by the end of the year with at least one dose. Previously the government was aiming for October. The week is also dominated by a series of confidence surveys, which may provide some clues as to what impact the vaccine delay and the end of JobKeeper will have on household spending, business investment and future labour hiring.

The ANZ-Roy Morgan consumer confidence index last week suffered its biggest drop since the start of the pandemic in the wash-up of the COVID-19 lockdown in Greater Brisbane and the end of JobKeeper. This weekly survey is released on Tuesday, as is the influential monthly National Australia Bank business survey. The monthly Westpac-Melbourne consumer sentiment survey is due on Wednesday. Meanwhile, Australian shares look set for a steady opening after Wall Street continued to show optimism about the economic recovery on Friday. The Dow Jones Industrial Average

and the S&P 500 reached new record closing highs, while the Nasdaq ended the day at its best closing level in almost two months. The Dow jumped 0.9 per cent to 33,800.60, the Nasdaq rose 0.5 per cent to 13,900.19 and the S&P 500 climbed 0.8 per cent to 4,128.80. Australian share futures were six points higher, or 0.08 per cent, at 6980. On Friday, the benchmark S&P/ASX200 index closed down 0.05 per cent at 6995.2. However, over the week, the market put in its best performance in nine weeks.

From <https://au.news.yahoo.com> 04/11/2021

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Facebook to Launch Australian News Service

Facebook plans to introduce a dedicated news product by the end of the year, as executives deny the company tried to intimidate the parliament during the media bargaining code negotiations. The government agreed to change the code after the tech giant banned Australian users from accessing news. The social media giant's vice president of policy for the Asia Pacific region Simon Milner faced questions at a Senate inquiry on Monday about the news ban. Asked if it was a move to intimidate the parliament, Mr Milner said: "Absolutely not". A raft of other pages including emergency services were netted in the news ban. "There were certainly errors in our enforcement for which we're truly sorry," Facebook's director of policy in Australia Mia Garlick told the inquiry. The company has not yet been designated under the code and is instead working to sign commercial deals with Australian news companies.

Ms Garlick said there were deals or letters of intent with six news organisations - Seven, News Corp, Schwartz Media, Private Media, Solstice Media and Sky News. Facebook is talking with other companies in a bid to sign more deals but Mr Milner would not say how many they hoped to strike by the end of the year. Ms Garlick would not say how much the deals were worth. "Historically we've paid tens of millions of dollars to publishers and these deals that we're concluding at present are three-year deals," she said. Facebook is not looking at standard offers for smaller publishers. The social media behemoth plans to introduce its Facebook News product - a separate feed only containing news - to Australian users by the end of the year. One of the company's main gripes over the media code, which would force it to pay for content from Australian news organisations, was that the value it added was not properly taken into account. Ms Garlick said Facebook users were referred to news websites 5.1 billion times last year, at an estimated value of \$407 million.

From <https://au.news.yahoo.com> 04/12/2021

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House Prices Rises 'Positive' for Economy

Treasurer Josh Frydenberg says the rise in house prices is a positive sign for the Australian economy. Analysts expect a 15 per cent gain in prices in 2021, a step up from earlier predictions. The Reserve Bank is closely monitoring the market, in particular trends in borrowing and lending standards. "It's positive that the price of houses has been going up," Mr Frydenberg said on Friday during a visit to Perth. "It means people are feeling more comfortable in the value of their home, that's going to give them greater confidence to spend, that spending will generate economic activity and that is good news for the economy." Elliot Clarke from Westpac said the bank's February forecast for a 10 per cent gain in prices in 2021 would be achieved by June.

"While a moderation is likely, as was outlined this week, a sudden loss of momentum near term seems unlikely. "As a result, Westpac now expects a 15 per cent gain in 2021." However, Westpac expects housing price growth to moderate to around five per cent next year. Capital Economics' Marcel Thieliant described the current housing market as "red hot" and expects rent inflation to have risen one per cent quarter on quarter when the latest figures are released next week. Mr Frydenberg, who will deliver the latest budget on May 11, said the economy was "bouncing back strongly", however Australians needed to be realistic about the ongoing challenges of the pandemic.

From <https://au.news.yahoo.com> 04/23/2021

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Greater Role for a Public Forestry Service

A greater role for a public forestry service has been outlined by the Forestry Minister, to drive the focus on regional economic development, skills training, and a low-emissions future. Stuart Nash today announced Te Uru Rākau (Forestry New Zealand) will be renamed Te Uru Rākau – New Zealand Forest Service, and will shift its operational headquarters from Wellington to Rotorua. "The name change is small but significant. It signals a more hands-on role for a public forestry service, with specialists and advisors working alongside the sector," Mr Nash said. "We will lift planning and advisory capabilities within Te Uru Rākau – New Zealand Forest Service so it can offer a professional advisory service and share its forestry management expertise. "It will provide more on-the-ground support to iwi, private landowners, farm foresters, local councils, timber processors, training institutes, and other forestry organisations. The Forest Service will maximise opportunities for the forestry and wood processing sector.

"Forestry will be a key part of our climate change response. In areas like biofuels, forestry can support our move away from fossil fuels. Innovative building products made from local wood will replace products such as concrete and steel. "For Māori, there is huge potential across the whole forestry system, as landowners, community

leaders, investors and guardians of the environment. We will continue to support Māori aspirations for land management, economic development, and job creation. “By retaining more wood processing onshore, we create local jobs and further support rural communities. Wood processing plants offer the opportunity to create high-tech, high-value products and by-products to diversify the income streams of foresters. “Farmers, foresters, and conservationists share an objective to plant more trees in the right places, whether to diversify farm incomes, stabilise erosion-prone hills, increase wood supply for processing, or create more permanent indigenous forests for biodiversity or recreational use.

“Forestry is the third largest primary exporter by value so it’s important we keep innovating to support regional development, drive economic growth and meet our climate and environmental goals. “That will feed into our vital work on the Industry Transformation Plan and the delivery of the Government’s Fit for a Better World – Accelerating our Economic Potential roadmap.” “In the past three years forestry policies prioritised regional economic development, by supporting extensive tree planting and job creation. We are now building on those achievements to transition to a professional advisory and management service. “Te Uru Rākau – New Zealand Forest Service will continue to work alongside local communities on the remaining tree planting projects that endure from the One Billion Trees funding.

“More than 258 million trees have been planted towards the goal of one billion trees by 2028. The dedicated fund to kick-start the public-private sector programme was time-limited, and last year it stopped accepting new applications for funding. “It has served its purpose as a cornerstone of the programme by building momentum for new planting. Approximately \$23 million of the fund is unallocated and will be reprioritised towards the new work of Te Uru Rākau – the New Zealand Forest Service, making it cost-neutral. “The operational headquarters will be based in Rotorua in a new wooden building that highlights the potential of timber construction, and reflects Rotorua’s central location in our largest plantation forest region. “Expert forestry planning, management, and advisory services are the key to maximising long-term environmental and economic gains. The future for forestry is not only bright from an economic perspective, it holds the key to a more sustainable future,” Mr Nash said.

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NEW ZEALAND: Government to Phase Out Live Exports by Sea

The Government has announced that the export of livestock by sea will cease following a transition period of up to two years, said Agriculture Minister Damien O’Connor. “At the heart of our decision is upholding New Zealand’s reputation for high standards of animal welfare. We must stay ahead of the curve in a world where

animal welfare is under increasing scrutiny,” Damien O’Connor said. “This decision will affect some farmers, exporters, and importers and a transition period will enable the sector to adapt.” Live exports by sea represent approximately 0.2 percent of New Zealand’s primary sector exports revenue since 2015. “I acknowledge the economic benefit some farmers get from the trade, but I also note that support of it is not universal within the sector.”

Damien O’Connor said the Ministry of Primary Industries (MPI) review of live exports, which started in 2019, identified mixed perceptions of the activity. “There is split opinion about its long-term value and how it fits with the story we want to tell internationally to consumers. In its review submission, the independent National Animal Welfare Advisory Committee (NAWAC), which advises ministers on animal welfare issues, advised that the practice should stop.” Damien O’Connor said improvements had been made to the practice over recent years, but despite everyone’s best efforts, the voyage times to our northern hemisphere markets will always pose animal welfare challenges. Damien O’Connor said officials had spoken to key trading partners about the decision.

“I recognise the importance of our trade relationships with our international partners and we’re committed to working with them as we transition away from the shipment of livestock. New Zealand has an opportunity to boost trade through our cutting-edge scientific work into dairy cow genetics and germplasm use.” “During the transition period, exporters will meet the extra requirements that we introduced following the independent Heron report, which was carried out after the tragic loss of the Gulf Livestock 1 in September 2020. I’ve asked MPI to provide further advice on improvements to animal welfare during the phase out. “I want to thank all of those who took part in the wider review. The Government is committed to high animal welfare standards,” Damien O’Connor said. There have been no livestock exports for slaughter since 2008.

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5、 Public Finance

Asia-Pacific

COVID-19 Spending Helped to Lift Foreign Aid to an All-Time High in 2020 but More Effort Needed

Foreign aid from official donors rose to an all-time high of USD 161.2 billion in 2020, up 3.5% in real terms from 2019, boosted by additional spending mobilised to help

developing countries grappling with the COVID-19 crisis, according to preliminary data collected by the OECD. Within total Official Development Assistance (ODA) provided by members of the OECD's Development Assistance Committee in 2020, initial estimates indicate that DAC countries spent USD 12 billion on COVID-19 related activities. Some of this was new spending and some was redirected from existing development programmes, according to an OECD survey carried out in April and May 2020. Most providers said they would not discontinue programmes already in place. Total ODA equated to around 1% of the amount countries have mobilised over the past year in economic stimulus measures to help their own societies recover from the COVID crisis. Meanwhile the global vaccine distribution facility COVAX remains severely underfunded, OECD Secretary-General Angel Gurría said during a virtual presentation of the aid data.

“Governments globally have provided 16 trillion dollars’ worth of COVID stimulus measures yet we have only mobilised 1% of this amount to help developing countries cope with a crisis that is unprecedented in our lifetimes,” Mr Gurría said. “This crisis is a major test for multilateralism and for the very concept of foreign aid. We need to make a much greater effort to help developing countries with vaccine distribution, with hospital services and to support the world’s most vulnerable people’s incomes and livelihoods to build a truly global recovery.” © OECD - COVID-19 related ODA expenditures for top donors (graph) Foreign aid rose in a year that saw all other major flows of income for developing countries – trade, foreign direct investment and remittances – decline due to the pandemic, and domestic resources under increased pressure. Total external private finance to developing countries fell 13% in 2020 and trade volumes declined by 8.5%. (See the OECD’s Global Outlook on Financing for Sustainable Development 2021.)

The rise in 2020 ODA was also affected, however, by an increase in loans by some donors. Of gross bilateral ODA, 22% was in the form of loans and equity investments, up from around 17% in previous years, with the rest provided as grants. The 2020 ODA total is equivalent to 0.32% of DAC donors’ combined gross national income, up from 0.30% in 2019 but below a target of 0.7% ODA to GNI. Part of the rise in the ratio was due to the fact that GNI fell in most DAC countries. Six DAC members – Denmark, Germany, Luxembourg, Norway, Sweden and the United Kingdom – met or exceeded the 0.7% target. Among non-DAC donors, whose assistance to developing countries is not included in the ODA total, Turkey provided aid equivalent to 1.12% of its GNI. ODA rose in 16 DAC countries, with some substantially increasing their aid budgets to help developing countries respond to the pandemic. The largest increases were in Canada, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, Norway, the Slovak Republic, Sweden and Switzerland. ODA fell in 13 countries, most notably in Australia, Greece, Italy, Korea, Luxembourg, Portugal and the United Kingdom. G7 donors provided 76% of total ODA and DAC-EU countries 45%. ODA provided by EU Institutions jumped by 25.4% in real terms as they mobilised funds for COVID-19 related activities and increased sovereign lending by 136% over 2019.

Short-term support to help with the COVID-19 crisis focused on health systems, humanitarian aid and food security, according to the OECD survey. Aid providers indicated they would focus in the medium-term on making diagnostics and vaccines available to countries in need, as well as offering support to address the economic and social repercussions of the pandemic. “At the outset of the pandemic, DAC donors said that they would strive to protect ODA volumes. I am grateful and proud to say that they have done that and more. Donor countries have stepped up to support developing countries struggling with the health and economic fallout of COVID-19, even as their own economies and societies have been battered,” said DAC Chair Susanna Moorehead. “The next few years will be tough and the finance we provide must work harder than ever. If we really are going to build forward better and greener, we must focus on the most vulnerable countries and the most vulnerable people in them, especially women and girls.”

Bilateral ODA to Africa and least-developed countries rose by 4.1% and 1.8% respectively. Humanitarian aid rose by 6%. Excluding aid spent on hosting refugees within donor countries – which was down 9.5% from 2019 to USD 9.0 billion and mainly concerned Canada, Iceland and the Netherlands – ODA rose by 4.4% in real terms in 2020. ODA makes up over two thirds of external finance for least-developed countries. The OECD also monitors flows from some non-DAC providers and private foundations. Preliminary data released by the OECD each April is followed by final statistics published at the end of each year with a detailed geographic and sectoral breakdown. (See the 2019 ODA breakdown.) Net ODA has risen for the most part steadily in volume terms from just below USD 40 billion (in 2019 prices) in 1960. It has more than doubled in real terms (up 110%) since 2000, when the Millennium Development Goals were agreed, despite the impact of the 2008 crisis on provider economies.

Links to aid data and background information:

[2020 ODA statistics in detail](#)

[More information on ODA \(including Frequently Asked Questions, eligible countries, and all OECD aid data including charts on donors & recipients since 1960\)](#)

For further information, journalists should contact Catherine Bremer in the OECD Media Office (+33 1 4524 80 97.)

The DAC is an OECD committee that serves as a forum for 30 donors and observer bodies. ODA is defined as official financing flows to promote the economic development and welfare of low and middle-income countries. Net ODA is total ODA spent minus repayment of loan principals by recipient countries. Working with over 100 countries, the OECD is a global policy forum that promotes policies to improve the economic and social well-being of people around the world.

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World Bank Prices Dual Tranche 2-Year and 7-Year Benchmarks Catering to a Wide Range of Investors

The World Bank (International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, IBRD, Aaa/AAA) today priced two Sustainable Development Bonds – a USD 3 billion 2-year bond maturing in April 2023 and a USD 5 billion 7-year bond maturing in April 2028. The transactions provided options for a wide variety of investors seeking short-term and medium-term investment opportunities in the Supranational, Sovereign and Agency (SSA) market, where supply for 2- and 7-year maturities is limited. The transactions, which attracted over 250 orders with the order book reaching USD 14 billion across both tranches, appealed to a broad and globally diverse group of investors seeking high credit quality alongside sustainable investment. There was strong demand from central banks and official institutions, banks and bank treasuries, as well as, pension funds, insurance companies and asset managers. Barclays, BMO Capital Markets, TD Securities, and Wells Fargo Securities are the lead managers for both transactions. The bonds will be listed on the Luxembourg Stock Exchange.

The 2-year tranche priced at a semi-annual yield of 0.229%. This equates to a spread vs. the reference US treasury of +6.98 basis points. The 7-year tranche priced at a semi-annual yield of 1.377%. This equates to a spread vs. the reference US treasury of +8.88 basis points. *“World Bank funding in the capital markets continues to support our member countries’ efforts to implement a green, resilient and inclusive recovery to the coronavirus pandemic,”* said **Jingdong Hua, Vice President and Treasurer, World Bank**. *“Investors have a critical role to play in channeling resources to sustainable development, particularly now. We are pleased to be able to meet investors’ demand and delighted with the broad participation across both tenures while providing additional liquidity to the USD curve. We thank investors for their steadfast support.”*

Investor Distribution: USD 3 Billion 2-Year

By Geography		By Investor Type		
Americas	56%	Central Banks/Official Institutions		55%
Asia	22%	Asset Managers/Insurance/Pension Funds		26%
Europe/Middle East/Africa	22%	Banks/Bank Treasuries/Corporates		19%

Investor Distribution: USD 5 Billion 7-Year

By Geography		By Investor Type		
Europe/Middle East/Africa	39%	Central Banks/Official Institutions		45%

Asia	32%	Banks/Bank Treasuries/Corporates	43%
Americas	29%	Asset Managers/Insurance/Pension Funds	12%

Lead Manager Quotes

*"With this dual-tranche benchmark issuance the World Bank has once again delivered a hugely successful transaction," said **Lee Cumbes, Head of Public Sector EMEA, Barclays**. "With a combined orderbook reaching in excess of USD 14 billion during the book build, investors have again demonstrated their strong appetite for the World Bank credit across the USD curve. Significantly, the 2-year reoffer level achieved the tightest USD SSA print vs. mid-swaps since 2018, with the 7-year, at USD 5 billion, also being the joint largest print in this tenor ever in SSA history (equaling only IBRD's own efforts in 2020). As the World Bank continues to play a crucial role it is a privilege for Barclays to have worked on this transaction." "Amidst a primary market that felt reminiscent of January, there was incredible investor demand for World Bank paper on the short and long end of the USD curve," said **Sean Hayes, Head of US Syndicate & Credit Sales, BMO Capital Markets**. "After kicking off 2021 with USD 3.5 billion of 2-year and 7-year SOFR floating rate notes, World Bank returns to the same tenors in fixed rate space to start Q2 with an USD 8 billion sized bang. It's a feat you really only see the World Bank accomplish – over USD 14 billion of interest leading the way in support of two more liquid references on World Bank's curve, both pricing at single digits over US Treasuries."*

*"We congratulate the World Bank for an exceptional dual-tranche sustainable development bond transaction," said **Laura O'Connor, Managing Director, Fixed Income Origination & Syndication, TD Securities**. "Amidst a busy primary pipeline, the 2-year and 7-year bonds responded to the investment needs of investors from both the public and private sector. Well done to the World Bank team on another outstanding USD benchmark transaction!" "Wells Fargo congratulates the World Bank for yet another successful USD benchmark issuance!" said **Carlos Perezgrovas, Head SSA Origination, Wells Fargo Securities**. "This dual-tranche offering allowed World Bank to raise its target size in the front-end at the tightest spread vs. mid-swaps for a 2-year printed in the SSA sector, and also highlighted strong investor demand for duration with a sector record order book in the 7-year tranche. Once again, the World Bank exemplified its name and quality in the market, and as always it is a pleasure working with the funding team."*

Transaction Summary

	2-Year Benchmark	7-Year Benchmark
Issuer:	World Bank (International Bank for Reconstruction and	

	Development, IBRD)	
Issuer rating:	Aaa /AAA	
Amount:	USD 3 billion	USD 5 billion
Settlement date:	April 20, 2021	April 20, 2021
Maturity date:	April 20, 2023	April 20, 2028
Issue price:	99.793%	99.987%
Issue yield:	0.229% semi-annual	1.377% semi-annual
Denomination:	USD 1,000	USD 1,000
Coupon:	0.125% p.a., payable semi-annually in arrear	1.375% p.a., payable semi-annually in arrear
ISIN:	US459058JV60	US459058JW44
Listing:	Luxembourg Stock Exchange	
Clearing system:	Fedwire, Clearstream, Euroclear	
Lead managers:	Barclays, BMO Capital Markets, TD Securities, and Wells Fargo Securities	

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World Bank to Provide US\$70 Million for COVID-19 Vaccination in El Salvador and Honduras

The World Bank Board of Directors approved additional financing of US\$50 million for El Salvador and US\$20 million for Honduras to implement COVID-19 Emergency Response Projects. These financial resources will help El Salvador and Honduras purchase and deploy COVID-19 vaccines and strengthen the countries' immunization and related health delivery systems. "Widespread and accessible COVID-19 vaccination is essential to protect lives and foster an inclusive, sustainable economic recovery. This financial support will enable affordable and equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines for El Salvador and Honduras and will play a critical role in strengthening the countries' capacity to deliver quality health services for their citizens," said Michel Kerf, World Bank Director for Central America and the Dominican Republic. "We will continue to work with Central American countries and the Dominican Republic as they continue to combat the pandemic and focus on building back better and improving the living conditions of their populations, particularly the poorest and the most vulnerable."

The US\$50 million Additional Financing for the COVID-19 Emergency Response Project in El Salvador will help finance the procurement of vaccines and key

deployment activities such as the purchase of medical supplies, personal protective equipment and vaccine cold-chains, and support communications, human resources, and information systems. The new loan expands the US\$20 million COVID-19 Emergency Response Project for El Salvador, approved by the World Bank in April of 2020, to strengthen the national public health system. The additional financial resources are part of a broader health response to the pandemic, under the coordination of the Government of El Salvador and supported by multiple development partners, including the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), the Pan-American Health Organization/World Health Organization (PAHO/WHO) and the Central American Bank for Economic Integration (CABEI).

The US\$20 million Additional Financing for the COVID-19 Emergency Response Project in Honduras will provide resources to help the Government purchase vaccines and strengthen health systems for a successful vaccine deployment. The credit will also support activities such as the procurement of supplies, contracting and training of human resources, upgrading vaccination monitoring and evaluation systems and communication efforts. The additional financing scales-up the US\$20 million COVID-19 Emergency Response Project in Honduras, approved in April of 2020. Investments will be made in coordination with other partners and donors supporting vaccines deployment, including the PAHO/WHO, IDB, CABEI, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), among others. The US\$50 million loan for the Additional Financing for the COVID-19 Emergency Response Project in El Salvador has a final maturity of 18 years, including a grace period of 5 years. The US\$20 million credit for the Additional Financing for the COVID-19 Emergency Response Project in Honduras has a final maturity of 30 years, including a grace period of 5 years.

World Bank Group Response to Covid-19

The World Bank, one of the largest sources of funding and knowledge for developing countries, is taking broad, fast action to help developing countries respond to the health, social and economic impacts of COVID-19. This includes US \$12 billion to help low- and middle-income countries purchase and distribute COVID-19 vaccines, tests, and treatments, and strengthen vaccination systems. The financing builds on the broader World Bank Group COVID-19 response, which is helping more than 100 countries strengthen health systems, support the poorest households, and create supportive conditions to maintain livelihoods and jobs for those hit hardest.

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World Bank Financing for COVID-19 Vaccine Rollout Reaches \$2 Billion

The World Bank announced today that it has reached \$2 billion in approved financing

for the purchase and distribution of COVID-19 vaccines for 17 developing countries. This financing is part of the \$12 billion envelope over 24 months for developing countries to acquire and deploy vaccines and strengthen their vaccination systems. For poorer countries financing is on grant or highly concessional terms. The Bank expects to support 50 countries with \$4 billion financing for COVID-19 vaccines by mid-year. The \$2 billion funding is supporting COVID-19 vaccination in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Cabo Verde, Cote d'Ivoire, Ecuador, El Salvador, Eswatini, Ethiopia, The Gambia, Honduras, Lebanon, Mongolia, Nepal, Philippines, Rwanda, Tajikistan, and Tunisia. "Access to vaccines is key to altering the course of the pandemic and helping countries move toward a resilient recovery," said World Bank Group President David Malpass. "Our programs are helping developing countries respond to the health emergency and have financing available for vaccines. As the world attempts to carry out the largest vaccination effort in history, we have stressed the need for countries with excess vaccine supplies to release them as soon as possible, and for financing commitments to COVAX to be encashed."

The Bank's vaccine finance package is designed to be flexible. It can be used by countries to procure doses through COVAX or other sources. It can also finance other key deployment and health system strengthening activities, such as medical supplies, personal protective equipment, vaccine cold-chains, training health workers, data- and information systems and communications and outreach campaigns to key stakeholders which are key to ensure vaccination acceptance. The Bank has aligned its eligibility criteria of COVID 19 vaccines with the revised eligibility criteria of COVAX and other Multilateral partners. Additionally, IFC, the Bank's private sector development arm, has a \$4 billion health platform to increase the supply and local production of personal protective equipment in developing countries and unlock medical supply bottlenecks in emerging markets, particularly in medical equipment and vaccines.

The Bank is working with governments and partners (UNICEF, the Global Fund, WHO, and GAVI) to assess the readiness of over 140 developing countries to deploy vaccines. Initial findings show that while 85% of countries have developed national vaccination plans, only 30% have plans to train the number of vaccinators needed and 27% have put public engagement strategies in place to address vaccine hesitancy. "To get a vaccine into someone's arm, there is a whole system of interdependent actions that needs to function properly," said Axel van Trotsenburg, World Bank Managing Director of Operations. "We are working together with the international community and partners to accelerate the rollout of COVID-19 vaccines. Vaccines are a key element in how we return to school, to work, and to growth." Since the beginning of the crisis, the World Bank Group approved \$108.6 billion to help countries fight the health, economic and social consequences of the pandemic. The Bank is assisting over 100 countries with COVID-19 health emergency projects reaching 70% of the world population

World Bank Group Response to COVID-19

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World Bank Steps Up Support to Small States in Response to COVID-19 Pandemic

IDA has been the leading multilateral provider of concessional resources to small economies, which have been hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic. Robust IDA support for recovery is needed now more than ever, agreed a group of country representatives convened recently for the Small States Forum. The Bank is in discussions with the international community on committing to a strong IDA20 replenishment to ensure appropriate levels of support to countries for immediate crisis response as well as getting back on track to their long-term development trajectories. IDA has been at the forefront of support to small states, recognizing their unique vulnerabilities, and has provided: (i) exceptional access to concessional resources, (ii) increasing financing volumes, and (iii) granting the most concessional terms available. The need for additional financial resources has increased considerably as many governments have had to tackle urgent COVID-19 impacts without losing sight of longer-term development objectives.

COVID-19 has had severe economic impacts on small states — these are 50 countries that comprise the Small States Forum and face unique development challenges due to their small population and economic base. These countries are particularly vulnerable to external shocks, natural disasters, and climate change. In 2020, real GDP for the small states is estimated to have contracted by 6.1 percent, compared to a 1.8 percent contraction for all emerging markets and developing economies. The most affected countries are island economies relying on tourism. International arrivals in tourism-reliant small states collapsed between 35 to 84 percent, resulting in a 17 percent contraction of output on average. These states are also expected to recover slower than other economies. Most are expected to return to their pre-crisis levels only in 2022, provided that access to vaccines enables them to reopen and potential tourists to resume traveling.

To date, the Bank's emergency COVID-19 response has reached more than 100

countries. Since the start of the outbreak, overall financial support to roughly 30 small states has exceeded \$1 billion of which around \$600 million has been geared toward the COVID-19 response. “The COVID-19 pandemic shows how important concessional financing is for small states and other countries vulnerable to shocks. The World Bank has been leading the way. We appreciate the increased financing made available so far and ask IDA donors to support a strong and advanced IDA20 replenishment. A critical challenge now is to help us to secure expeditious access to vaccines, so that we can reopen and rebuild our devastated economies,” said H.E. Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum, Attorney-General and Minister for Economy and Minister responsible for Climate Change, Government of Fiji; and Chair, Small States Forum. “COVID-19 is having a disproportionate impact on small states, with thousands of jobs lost and significant damage to the tourism and transportation industries among others. The World Bank Group is committed to strong recovery for these economies, complementing large-scale crisis response support with enhanced efforts to boost resilience and preparedness. IDA is making a vital contribution to small states, and a robust IDA20 replenishment will help us to sustain this good momentum,” said Axel van Trotsenburg, World Bank Managing Director of Operations.

Convening every year on the sidelines of the World Bank Group/IMF Spring and Annual Meetings, the Small States Forum provides a platform for dialogue and knowledge sharing on how the World Bank Group and the broader development community can best support small states. This group of countries makes up more than one fifth of World Bank members, and despite their diversity, these countries share unique vulnerabilities associated with the small size of their economies and high exposure to natural disasters and other external shocks, including the current COVID-19 pandemic. The Forum, which met most recently on April 10, provided an opportunity to exchange knowledge and to discuss policy options for safely reopening small economies, with a special focus on the challenges that members face to access vaccines and secure concessional financing.

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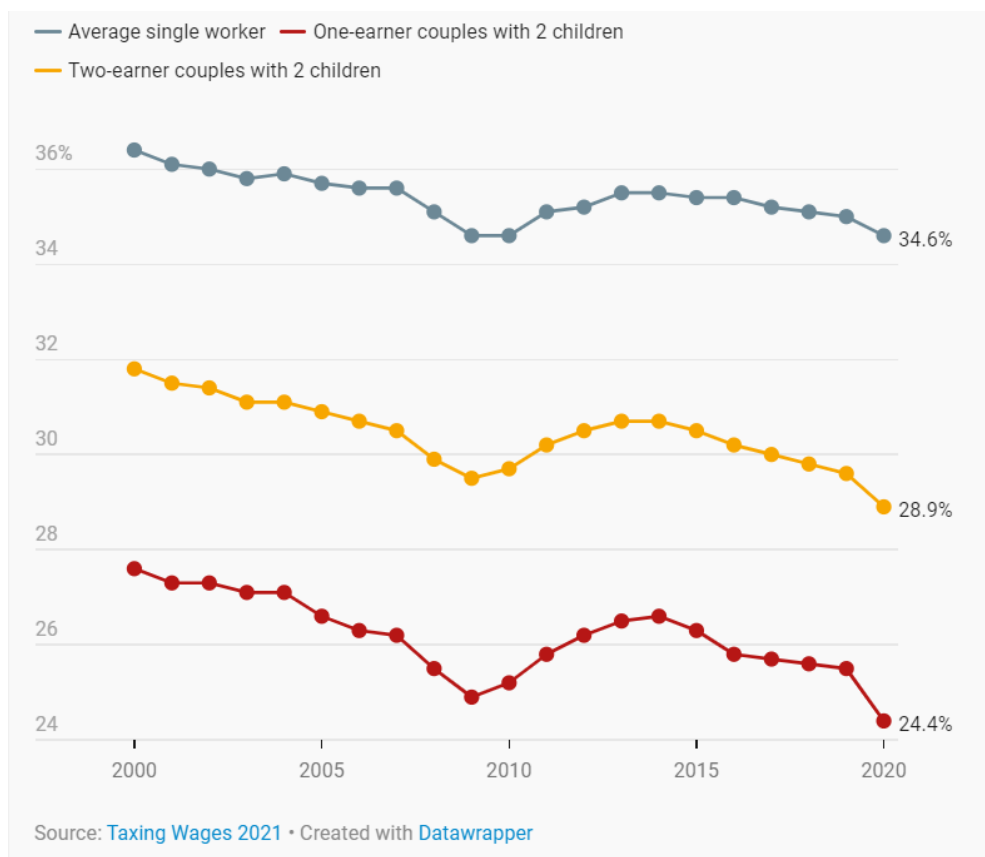
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Labour Market Disruption & COVID-19 Support Measures Contribute to Widespread Falls in Taxes on Wages in 2020

The COVID-19 crisis has resulted in the largest decrease in taxes on wages since the global financial crisis of 2008-09, according to a new OECD report. Taxing Wages 2021 shows that declining household incomes coupled with tax reforms linked to the pandemic are driving widespread declines in effective taxes on wages across the OECD. The report highlights record falls across the OECD during 2020 in the tax wedge – the total taxes on labour paid by both employees and employers, minus family benefits, as a percentage of the labour cost to the employer. The tax wedge for a single worker at the average wage was 34.6% in 2020, a decrease of

0.39 percentage points from the previous year. This is a significant fall, but is smaller than the decreases seen in the global financial crisis – 0.48 percentage point in 2008, and 0.52 percentage points in 2009. The tax wedge increased in 7 of the 37 OECD countries over the 2019-20 period and fell in 29, mainly due to lower income taxes. The drop in the tax wedge was even more significant for households with children, bringing tax rates on these family types to new lows. The average tax wedge for a one-earner couple at the average wage with children in 2020 was 24.4%, a decrease of 1.1 percentage points versus 2019. This is the largest fall and lowest level seen for this household type since the OECD started producing Taxing Wages in 2000.

The COVID-19 crisis resulted in the largest tax wedge decrease since the global financial crisis. Income tax plus employee and employer social security contributions minus cash benefits as % of labour costs, by household type, average for OECD countries 2000-2020



Between 2019 and 2020, the tax wedge for this household type decreased in 31 countries, and rose in only 6. It decreased by more than 1 percentage point in 16 countries. The largest decreases were in Lithuania, the United States, Poland, Italy, Canada and Korea. The only increase over 1 percentage point was in New Zealand. The gap between the OECD average tax wedge for the single average worker (34.6%) and the one-earner couple with children (24.4%) has widened by 0.7 percentage points since 2019, reflecting policy changes that provided additional support to families with children during the COVID-19 crisis. The falls in country tax

wedges for the single worker, the one-earner couple with two children, and the single parent resulted predominantly from changes in tax policy settings, although falling average wages also contributed in some countries. By contrast, increases in the tax wedge were almost all driven by rising average wages, offset only slightly by policy changes.

Of the ten countries where specific COVID-19 measures affected the indicators, support was primarily delivered through enhanced or one-off cash benefits, with a focus on supporting families with children. The report shows that labour taxation continues to vary considerably across the OECD, with the tax wedge on the average single worker ranging from zero in Colombia to 51.5% in Belgium. Further information and individual country notes: <https://www.oecd.org/tax/taxing-wages-20725124.htm>. Media enquiries should be directed to David Bradbury, Head of the OECD's Tax Policy and Statistics division (+33 1 4524 1597), or to Lawrence Speer (+33 1 4524 7970) in the OECD Media Office (+33 1 4524 9700). An embeddable data visualisation for this publication is available at: www.compareyourcountry.org/taxing-wages

Please use the '+share/embed' button to customize this tool for your country and language and to generate the embed code for your website. Working with over 100 countries, the OECD is a global policy forum that promotes policies to improve the economic and social well-being of people around the world.

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The World Bank Provides \$250 Million to Empower Angolan Girls and Tackle Learning Poverty

The World Bank approved a \$250 million Investment Project Financing (IPF) to support Angola's efforts to empower girls and tackle learning poverty, twin agendas at the heart of boosting the country's human capital. Angola scores .36 on the Human Capital Index, dramatically lower than what its GDP would predict and below the Sub-Saharan Africa average. The government's revised National Development Plan (2018-2022) prioritizes investments in human capital, with a focus on girls' and women's empowerment. The World Bank loan marks the first comprehensive investment in this area, expanding both supply and demand for health and education services, using a spatial approach that targets particularly vulnerable municipalities. "There is no more direct a route to achieving Angola's future prosperity than to empower girls," said Jean-Christophe Carret, World Bank Country Director for Angola. "Empowered girls stay in school longer, learn more, are healthier, and have more options for fulfilling life goals. Keeping girls in school is the best way to eliminate child marriage, and results in fewer adolescent pregnancies, which are correlated with high maternal mortality, and babies that are born underweight. The virtuous cycle sparked by girls' empowerment is vast and self-perpetuating."

The project comes at a crucial moment for Angola, as COVID-19 school closures risk accelerating the dropout rate of adolescent girls and contribute to learning losses for untold numbers of students. To combat this, the project consists of three components. Component 1 improves access to sexual and reproductive health services, while strengthening the information and knowledge of girls, boys, parents, and community leaders to boost uptake of these services. For out of school youth, the project scales up second chance education, incorporating life skills and adolescent health information. It also introduces a scholarship program reaching 900,000 youth entering secondary school, with a registration bonus for girls. Under Component 2, support will be provided to improve teaching and learning outcomes, and 3,000 new classrooms will be built. Component 3 ensures efficient monitoring and management of the project and supports research to inform education policy development.

From <https://www.worldbank.org/> 04/29/2021

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ADB Sells Record \$5 Billion 5-Year Global Benchmark Bond

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) returned to the US dollar bond market with the pricing of a \$5 billion 5-year global bond, proceeds of which will be part of ADB's ordinary capital resources. "With investor interest in excess of \$14 billion, this represents ADB's largest orderbook for a global benchmark bond to date and is a hugely impressive outcome for ADB and the regional members it supports in Asia and the Pacific," said ADB Treasurer Pierre Van Peteghem. "A coming together of factors contributed to the record \$5 billion final print in the post-Easter issuance window, including attractive swap spreads and pick-up versus US Treasuries, and relatively low issuance supply in March. We continue to be delighted with the consistent and deep support provided by investors across sectors which helped underpin the momentum for this trade." The 5-year bond, with a coupon rate of 1% per annum payable semi-annually and a maturity date of 14 April 2026, was priced at 99.942% to yield 15.25 basis points over the 0.75% US Treasury notes due March 2026. The transaction was lead-managed by BMO Capital Markets, Credit Agricole CIB, Deutsche Bank, and Goldman Sachs International. The issue achieved wide primary market distribution, with 33% of the bonds placed in Asia; 48% in Europe, Middle East, and Africa; and 19% in the Americas. By investor type, 53% of the bonds went to central banks and official institutions, 21% to banks, and 26% to fund managers and other types of investors. ADB plans to raise around \$34 billion to \$36 billion from the capital markets in 2021.

From <https://www.adb.org/> 04/08/2021

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ADB Approves \$18.9 Million for Rollout of COVID-19 Vaccines in the Pacific

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has approved \$18.9 million in grants to help four developing member countries (DMCs) in the Pacific roll out safe and effective vaccines against the coronavirus disease (COVID-19). The grants to Samoa (\$8 million), Tonga (\$5.5 million), Tuvalu (\$1.5 million), and Vanuatu (\$3.9 million) will support their COVID-19 vaccination programs for a combined population of almost 600,000 people. The project is financed by ADB's \$9 billion Asia Pacific Vaccine Access Facility launched in December 2020 to offer rapid and equitable vaccine-related support to ADB's DMCs. "These countries have incurred considerable costs in preventing COVID-19 transmission, and their health systems have been put under extreme pressure," said ADB President Masatsugu Asakawa. "These grants will provide a platform to introduce safe and effective COVID-19 vaccines in these countries, strengthen health systems to receive and administer the vaccines, and raise community awareness about vaccination timetables." The grants will expand an existing ADB-supported vaccine program originally established to support the procurement of rotavirus, pneumococcal conjugate, and human papilloma virus (HPV) vaccines through the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). The rollout of COVID-19 vaccines in the four countries aims to help enable the gradual reopening of their economies and reestablish the free movement of people. As of March 2021, ADB had committed more than \$750 million, including in cofinancing and technical assistance, to support Pacific countries respond to the pandemic.

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Green and Social Finance Central to Asia-Pacific's Sustainable Recovery

Green and social finance must be nurtured to ensure that Asia and the Pacific's recovery from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic is inclusive, resilient, and sustainable, according to Asian Development Outlook (ADO) 2021, released by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) today. Governments should use policies to support the development of social and green finance—financing instruments designed to promote environmental and social goals—according to the report's theme chapter, Financing a Green and Inclusive Recovery. The report urges governments to use fiscal measures, legislation, and regulation to accelerate the growth of green and social finance. Regulations that enforce common standards for information disclosure and impact measurement can help ensure that green and social finance is effective, sustainable, and attractive—especially for the private sector.

“COVID-19 has disproportionately hurt the poor, but it also presents an opportunity to build back better,” said ADB Chief Economist Yasuyuki Sawada. “This ‘Great Reset’ requires vast investment in the environment and in social sectors such as health and education. It can only happen through concerted efforts by the region’s governments and the private sector, especially since government revenue has been hit hard by the pandemic. Governments should strengthen the market infrastructure and ecosystem for green and social finance so that it can flourish and contribute to a sustainable and inclusive recovery.” Green and social finance has grown rapidly in recent years, especially in the private sector. Changing investor preferences toward sustainable development goals have played a big role. Over \$30 trillion, or one-third of global assets, are now under management guided by environmental, social, and governance considerations. Firms are using green and social finance to hedge sustainability risks, attract “patient investors,” and gain greater resilience to shocks. While high-income economies still dominate the market, developing Asia is the leader among emerging markets in green, social, and sustainability bonds, according to the report.

The report also documents how green and social finance benefits investors, firms, and society. Evidence suggests that companies using green finance have enjoyed better stock performance and greater resilience during the pandemic. Asian green bond issuers also improved their environmental performance scores by 30% on average, two years after issuance. Cities that issue more green bonds see significant improvements in air quality, leading to health benefits. The report outlines several financing tools that can promote a green and inclusive recovery, including stimulus packages, microfinance, and carbon pricing. Innovative financing mechanisms like impact bonds help connect private sector capital to social programs. One example is the “Educate Girls” Development Impact Bond, which helped improve education outcomes for marginalized school-age girls in India. Multilateral development banks, like ADB, can also help green and social finance grow, the report notes. They can do so by providing direct financing and by catalyzing capital from public and private sources through blended finance, credit enhancement, loan guarantees, and other innovative instruments. They can also play a crucial role in helping strengthen market infrastructure and ecosystems, government policy, knowledge, and capacity in developing economies.

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CHINA: Central Bank Conducts 10 Bln Yuan of Reverse Repos

China's central bank on Thursday conducted 10 billion yuan (about 1.53 billion U.S. dollars) of reverse repos to maintain reasonably ample liquidity in the banking system. The interest rate for the seven-day reverse repos was set at 2.2 percent, according to a statement on the website of the People's Bank of China. A reverse repo is a process in which the central bank purchases securities from commercial banks through bidding, with an agreement to sell them back in the future. China will adopt a prudent monetary policy that is flexible, precise, appropriate and moderate in 2021, according to this year's government work report.

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China to Make Direct Allocation of Fiscal Funds to Primary-level Governments a Regular Practice to Better Benefit Businesses and People

China will implement the direct allocation of fiscal funds on a regular basis, to amplify the role of public money in benefiting businesses and the public, the State Council's executive meeting chaired by Premier Li Keqiang decided on Wednesday. "Past practices have shown that the direct-benefit mechanism is a major creative step in exercising macro regulation," Li said, "Last year, the central government directly channeled 1.7 trillion yuan of much-needed fiscal funds to prefecture and county-level governments, to support their tax and fee cuts. This has served as an important underpinning for keeping the economic fundamentals stable and won extensive support from market players and the people." As required by the Government Work Report, the direct allocation mechanism will become a regular practice this year, and the central government's subsidies for public well-being will all be included in the mechanism. The total amount of funds under the mechanism will reach 2.8 trillion yuan.

To date, the central government has directly transferred a total of 2.6 trillion yuan to local governments, of which more than 2.2 trillion yuan has been allocated to the fund users. "Different from the funds last year, which all came from additional budgetary funds, this year's directly funneled funds are mainly from existing budgetary funds. The allocation of funds and interests involved will be adjusted through reform," Li said. Going forward, the usage of the directly-funneled funds needs to be better targeted. With a focus on reinforcing the economic recovery, the funds will serve as an important measure to offset the impact of phasing out some provisional support policies, and will continue to be mainly used to support employment, people's basic needs and market entities. The funds should go where the needs of the people and businesses lie, and help ensure salary payment and normal functioning of primary-level governments. "Though the economic recovery is firming, circumstances facing market entities are still uneven. And primary-level governments are still in need of support.

Hence, more directly-funneled funds shall be channeled to the prefecture and county level," Li said. Sub-national governments must ensure that the remaining directly-funneled funds are effectively delivered and utilized, and that relevant policies are executed in a timely manner. On top of the funds allocated by the central government, sub-national governments will be encouraged to place more local budgetary funds under the direct allocation mechanism in light of local conditions. Provincial-level governments should continue to act as involved intermediaries in the distribution of these funds, rather than detached onlookers, and see that more funds reach the primary level to bolster the capability of prefecture and county-level governments for policy execution. Stringent oversight will be enforced over the directly funneled funds. Finance, audit and other relevant departments must strengthen oversight, and follow the allocation, disbursement and utilization of the funds on an on-going basis.

Problems identified must be promptly addressed, and the local authorities and officials in charge will be admonished and relevant information made public as deemed necessary. Any irregularity such as fraudulent claims, withholding funds or diverting funds for non-designated purposes, will be seriously dealt with. Those involved will be held to account. Every effort needed will be made to ensure that the funds will be used where they count the most to benefit businesses and the people more effectively. "The directly-funneled funds must be put under strict oversight, to maximize the effects of the precious funds. More fiscal resources will be pooled to support public well-being, including compulsory education, basic medical care and basic housing needs, as well as farmland irrigation and water conservancy projects. These efforts will deliver concrete benefits to the people," Li said.

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China Mulls Strengthening Budget Review, Supervision

Chinese lawmakers are deliberating a draft revision of a decision on strengthening the review and supervision of the central government budget, as part of efforts to build a modern fiscal system. The revised draft was submitted at the ongoing session of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress (NPC), the top legislature, on Monday. Consisting of 12 articles, the draft covers topics including budget implementation and auditing supervision, and the regulation of budget adjustment review. It also specifies the role of the NPC in reviewing and supervising the central government budget. The draft summarizes and incorporates related reform measures, experience and effective practices of the NPC's budget review and supervision work in recent years, aiming to ensure the full implementation of budget law, said Shi Yaobin, director of the Commission for Budget Affairs with the NPC

Standing Committee. The move is necessary and feasible because of new situations in the new era and the new development stage, Shi added.

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JAPAN: Prefectural Governors Seek COVID Financial Aid for Businesses

Japan's prefectural governors on Saturday asked the central government to provide financial support for businesses across the country, a day after a fresh state of emergency was declared in Tokyo and other areas as coronavirus case numbers surge. The country needs stronger countermeasures against the pandemic at a time "highly contagious variants are raging," Kamon Iizumi, the president of the National Governors' Association, said during an online meeting. A set of requests made to the government by the association included financial relief for not only the tourism industry but primary industries such as farming. Restrictions imposed under the state of emergency in prefectures with major cities will have far-reaching economic consequences, the governors said. Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga declared a state of emergency Friday in Tokyo and the western prefectures of Osaka, Kyoto and Hyogo, banning restaurants and bars from serving alcohol, asking department stores and movie theaters to close and barring fans from professional sports from Sunday through May 11.

Fears are growing that more contagious variants of the coronavirus will exacerbate the burden on the already strained health care system after quasi-state of emergency measures in nearly a dozen prefectures centering on shorter business hours and event attendance caps had a limited impact on slowing new infections. The governors stressed a need for the government to strongly urge people to refrain from moving across prefectural borders during a string of national holidays starting late this month collectively known as Golden Week. The state should compensate holidaymakers for their canceled travel plans to substantially reduce the movement of people, the association said in its proposal. As for coronavirus vaccinations, the association asked the government to clarify details around vaccine distribution to the entire population after Suga unveiled a plan on Friday to complete the delivery of doses for those aged 65 and older by the end of July.

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Bank of Japan Lifts Growth Forecast, Keeps Policy Unchanged

Japan's central bank on Tuesday raised its growth forecasts for the world's third-largest economy, citing expected stronger demand, and left its ultra-loose

monetary policy in place. But it acknowledged that the outlook remains "highly unclear" and could change depending on how the still-raging coronavirus pandemic evolves and affects the domestic and international economy. Still, it revised up its forecast for the 2020-2021 fiscal year that ended on March 31, projecting the economy would shrink 4.9 percent, compared with the 5.6 percent contraction it predicted in January. For the current fiscal year, it now expects 4.0 percent growth, against its January forecast of 3.9 percent, while it lifted its expectations for the fiscal year ending in March 2023 to 2.4 percent, from 1.8 percent previously. "The projected growth rates are higher, mainly for fiscal 2022, on the back of stronger domestic and external demand," the Bank of Japan explained.

It said while Japan's economic activity was expected to stay lower than pre-pandemic levels "for the time being", it expects to see the virus's impact "waning gradually". But the picture was not all positive, with the bank forced to once again revise down its inflation forecasts, putting the long-held two percent goal even further from reach. The BOJ has consistently fallen short of hitting the target it considers key to turbocharging the stuttering economy, despite a barrage of stimulus and monetary easing packages. The new forecasts project inflation of just 0.1 percent for the fiscal year ending in March 2022, down from a previous outlook of 0.5 percent. The bank sees that rising to 0.8 percent for the year ending March 2023, and only hitting 1.0 percent in the year ending March 2024. The bank said it would continue its existing monetary policy "as long as it is necessary" to achieve the two percent goal.

And, repeating the language of previous decisions, it said it would "not hesitate to take additional easing measures if necessary", adding that it expects short- and long-term policy interest rates to remain at current or lower levels. "The Bank of Japan kept policy settings unchanged today and by predicting that inflation will remain well below its two percent target by FY2023 signaled a prolonged period of inaction," said Marcel Thieliant, senior Japan economist at Capital Economics. "With the slow vaccine rollout set to gather pace over the coming months, activity should start to recover again before long, lowering the need for additional stimulus," he added in a note. Parts of Japan, including economic powerhouses Tokyo and Osaka, are currently under a third virus state of emergency that includes the closure of shopping malls as well as restaurants and bars serving alcohol. The country began vaccinations in February, but has only so far approved the Pfizer formula and is inoculating medical workers and the elderly.

From <https://japantoday.com> 04/28/2021

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SOUTH KOREA: To Review Post-Pandemic Fiscal Policy Official

South Korea will review its post-pandemic fiscal policy as an economic recovery from the coronavirus outbreak will raise the need to normalize its expansionary fiscal

spending, a senior government official said Wednesday. Second Vice Finance Minister Ahn Do-geol said the government's priority is placed on supporting an economic recovery with increased fiscal aid, but the country will also make efforts to enhance fiscal soundness in the face of the growing national debt. "There is a need to preemptively prepare for how to manage the state coffers after the economy returns back to a normal recovery track," Ahn told reporters. Under the 2022 budget guidelines, the country plans to maintain an expansionary fiscal policy next year to underpin an economic recovery, but it will also seek to curb the growth of the national debt. South Korea's government debt grew by the largest-ever amount last year as it implemented expansionary fiscal spending to cope with the COVID-19 pandemic. The central and provisional government debt reached a record 846.9 trillion won (US\$757 billion) as of end-December, up 123.7 trillion won from the previous year.

The country's total liabilities came to a record 1,985.3 trillion won, up 241.6 trillion won from a year earlier and marking the largest yearly gain since 2012. The sharp rise in total liabilities resulted from an increase in accrued liabilities on pension programs and sales of government bonds, according to the finance ministry. But Ahn dismissed views by critics that the total liabilities are growing at a faster pace, saying the country has taken into account the occurrence of future debt more broadly than other nations. Meanwhile, the vice minister raised the need for the private sector to provide support to an envisioned state scheme to compensate losses for smaller merchants hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic. "The government would face limitation in providing compensation solely with state support as the pandemic has incurred massive economic damage," Ahn said.

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S. Korea to Invest 42 Bln Won in Illegal Drone Response Tech by 2025

South Korea said Sunday it will spend 42 billion won (US\$37.6 million) by 2025 to develop a response system against illegal drones amid growing security threats from the fast-developing technology. A consortium of 23 companies and research institutes -- which includes the Korea Atomic Energy Research Institute, the Korea Aerospace Research Institute and aerospace and defense firm LIG Nex1 Co. -- will develop a response system that spots and neutralizes the illegal unmanned aircraft, according to the Ministry of Science and ICT. The ministry said such drones pose security threats to major public infrastructure and facilities, such as airports and nuclear power plants, given recent advances in technologies, such as artificial intelligence and swarm robotics.

The ministry said current response systems against illegal drones are ground-based technologies and that the consortium will develop an aerial system by developing

patrol drones that can detect illegal counterparts and neutralize them by either physical means, such as firing a net, or by hijacking its control system. The ministry said it will work with the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy and the National Police Agency for the project, with 6.6 billion won set aside for this year. Fears about potential unmanned attacks have lingered for years in South Korea since South Korean military authorities discovered crashed North Korean drones in border areas, including the front-line island of Baengnyeong in 2014.

From <https://en.yna.co.kr> 04/18/2021

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S. Korea to Invest 105 Bln Won in Promising Digital New Deal Companies

South Korea said Wednesday it will invest 105 billion won (US\$94 million) this year to support budding companies in promising tech sectors, such as 5G networks and artificial intelligence, as part of the country's digital New Deal initiative. Last year, South Korea unveiled the digital New Deal program, which aims to invest 58.2 trillion won to develop key future technologies from smart factories to big data solutions and create 900,000 jobs by 2025. The Ministry of Science and ICT said it signed a memorandum of understanding with the Korea Telecommunications Operators Association to further support tech startups and small companies under the digital New Deal program through investment funds. Under the agreement, the ICT ministry will provide 60 billion won, while the Korea Telecommunications Operators Association, which includes the country's three major mobile carriers -- SK Telecom Co., KT Corp. and LG Uplus Corp. -- will offer 45 billion won. The ICT ministry said it expects the move to lead to more investment and help nurture promising companies in the tech sector. South Korea has set aside 12.7 trillion won this year for its digital New Deal program.

From <https://en.yna.co.kr> 04/21/2021

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S. Korea to Invest 114 Tln Won by 2030 to Expand Railway Network

South Korea will invest 114.7 trillion won (US\$102.7 billion) over the next decade to expand the railway network for major cities across the nation, the transport ministry said Thursday. The fourth nationwide railway plan aims to extend the railway from the current 4,274 kilometers to 5,137 km by 2030 to allow people to travel across the nation in less than three hours, the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure and Transportation said. The project would raise the railway transportation capacity to about 17 percent in 2030 from 11.5 percent in 2019, the ministry said. The plan aims

to have a vast railway network in major cities to ease traffic congestion, especially in the Seoul metropolitan area, and help residents in satellite cities to more conveniently commute to city centers.

From <https://en.yna.co.kr> 04/22/2021

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Ruling Party Moving Toward Adopting Income Tax on Cryptocurrency Transactions

The ruling Democratic Party (DP) is moving toward introducing income taxation on cryptocurrency transactions starting next year despite growing investor calls for delaying the taxation plan, according to party officials Wednesday. The stance by the ruling party is expected to lend further weight to the government's ongoing taxation plan as it is seeking to levy a 20 percent tax on income from transactions of cryptocurrency starting next year. "The government's determination to go ahead with the taxation has been confirmed ... the matter should be decided in consideration of fairness in connection with (income tax) levied on other similar assets or products," a party official told Yonhap News Agency. Another party official also said the DP has no plan to suspend or postpone the taxation plan as some cryptocurrency investors have demanded. "There's no possibility of putting off the taxation, and the party and the government haven't even discussed suspending the taxation plan," a member of the DP's policy committee noted.

A day earlier, Finance Minister Hong Nam-ki also reiterated that the government will press ahead with the taxation on transactions of cryptocurrency, which financial authorities categorize as "virtual assets," not virtual currencies. The taxation plan, however, drew a strong backlash from investors amid a recent bull run in the local cryptocurrency market. Daily transactions of cryptocurrencies on 14 local exchanges were valued at \$21.6 billion as of April 15, according to the virtual asset info website CoinMarketCap. This was heavier than the average daily turnover of 19.1 trillion won in March of Korean stocks by retail investors on the main and secondary stock markets. As investors' calls for halting the taxation plan increased, however, several lawmakers from within the ruling party argued that taxing cryptocurrency income is premature at a time when codes of regulations for the cryptocurrency market have yet to be prepared.

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South-East Asia

CAMBODIA: Joint Programs Launched to Support Sustainable

Financing

The United Nations in Cambodia, in close cooperation with the Ministry of Economy and Finance (MEF), has launched two joint programs to expand financing options for the Cambodian government, said a joint press statement on Thursday. Both programs have been designed to meet growing demands for development investments and to maintain financial lifelines for micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs), particularly women-owned enterprises, the statement said. The programs would support the realization of the Cambodia Sustainable Development Goals (CSDGs), it said. The first program, the Integrated National Financing Framework to Catalyze Blended Finance for Transformative CSDG Achievement, will be implemented by two UN agencies and the second program, Unlocking Cambodian Women's Potential Through Fiscal Space Creation (A Credit Guarantee Scheme for Women-owned Enterprises) will be carried out by four UN agencies, the statement said. "Adapting the principles of the Integrated National Financing Framework to the Cambodian content will allow the government to build a demand-driven financing framework, enable the expansion of development resources, and implement a sound financing strategy," Pauline Tamesis, UN resident coordinator to Cambodia, said. "The credit guarantee scheme, as part of the innovative financing system, will further provide low-cost and reliable financing to MSME businesses in Cambodia," she added. MEF's secretary of state Ros Seilava, co-chair of the joint programs' steering committee, said both joint programs are in line with the government's priorities to move the policy and legislative agenda towards the identification and attraction of new and sustainable sources of finance for development. "The partnership between MEF and UN Cambodia for these joint programs will specifically contribute to the implementation of the government's economic response plan to respond, recover and build resilience from COVID-19, while accelerating the achievement of the CSDGs," said the official.

From <http://www.xinhuanet.com> 04/08/2021

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MALAYSIA: International Reserves Stand at 108.6 Bln USD

Malaysia's central bank, Bank Negara, said on Wednesday that its international reserves stood at 108.6 billion U.S. dollars as of March 31. The central bank said in a statement the reserves level has taken into account the quarterly foreign exchange revaluation changes. It said, the reserves position is sufficient to finance 8.8 months of retained imports and is 1.2 times total short-term external debt. The international reserves consist of 100.9 billion U.S. dollars in foreign currency reserves, 1.4 billion U.S. dollars in International Monetary Fund Reserves Position, 1.2 billion U.S. dollars in Special Drawing Rights, 2.1 billion U.S. dollars in gold and 3 billion U.S. dollars in other reserves assets.

From <http://www.xinhuanet.com> 04/07/2021

VIETNAM: Finance Ministry Studies Legal Framework for Cryptocurrencies

The Ministry of Finance is studying the legal framework for managing cryptocurrencies on stock exchanges which would pave the way for legal cryptocurrency transactions in Việt Nam. The ministry said on Tuesday a research group in charge of studying virtual assets and currencies had been set up and started to study and develop the legal framework for the management of cryptocurrencies. The establishment of the research group aims to implement the Prime Minister's Decision No 1255/QĐ-TTg approving the project of completing the legal framework to manage virtual assets, digital currencies and cryptocurrencies and the Government Office's requirement to review and evaluate the situation of cryptocurrency use in Việt Nam. Currently, there are no regulations about the issuance, trading and exchange of virtual assets and cryptocurrencies nor regulations on an official agency to manage virtual assets. Thus, the trading and exchange of cryptocurrencies via platforms such as Binance and Coinbase or through direct agreements carry a lot of risks, the ministry said. Management agencies have repeatedly warned investors over cryptocurrencies. Recently, the State Securities Commission advised investors to be cautious when investing in virtual assets and currencies while asking public companies, securities companies, fund management companies and investment funds not to conduct the illegal issuance, trading and brokerage of virtual currencies. The ministry said it would promote the research to propose a mechanism to manage activities related to virtual assets and currencies to promote creativity and economic growth and at the same time ensure safety and security for the financial market and protect the rights and interests of investors as well as other market participants. In addition, the ministry will enhance communication to raise awareness of virtual assets and cryptocurrencies and provide warnings about risks that might arise without regulation. Deputy Governor of the State Bank of Việt Nam Đào Minh Tú previously said under the current regulations, bitcoin and other similar virtual currencies were not legal means of payment in Việt Nam.

From <https://vietnamnews.vn/> 04/01/2021

More Than \$4 Billion Found Involved in Economic Violations in Q1

Nearly VNĐ96 trillion (US\$4.16 billion) and 772ha of land were found to be involved in economic violations uncovered by the Government Inspectorate in the first quarter of this year. The agency made recommendations to collect more than VNĐ5 trillion

(US\$216.87 million) of the reported sum to the State's budget. The Government Inspectorate is a ministry-level agency that performs State administration of inspection, citizen reception, complaint and denunciation settlement and anti-corruption throughout the country. Reports released on Thursday showed that inspectors conducted 1,644 administrative inspections and 35,614 specialised inspections and examinations in the first three months of this year. They issued 18,911 decisions to tackle administrative violations with total fines of VNĐ992 billion. As many as 269 organisations and collective units were recommended to be fined. The inspectors transferred documents about 10 cases and five people for further investigation. In the first quarter of this year, the Government Inspectorate also issued 3,063 papers that helped fix or improve documents on salary and benefits regimes.

After conducting more than 400 inspections relating to salary and benefits regimes, inspectors found 36 violations and recommended compensation of nearly VNĐ25 billion to affected people. As many as 1,118 State officials and employees were moved to other positions to prevent possible corruption. The inspectors also found seven leaders of organisations lacked responsibility, which resulted in corruption. Inspectors also worked with other agencies, ministries and localities to boost anti-corruption/anti-waste communication. More than 284,400 State officials and employees attended more than 6,600 training classes on anti-corruption. Nearly 61,000 books and materials on anti-corruption regulations were published. According to the Government Inspectorate, for the rest of this year, the agency will concentrate on unannounced inspections. During the inspections, as soon as any sign of criminal violation is found, the inspectors will transfer the case to investigative agencies for a timely resolution instead of waiting until the inspection is completed. Besides planned inspections, the Government Inspectorate will timely inspect cases that Central Committee on Anti-corruption or Prime Minister assigns.

From <https://vietnamnews.vn> 04/19/2021

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Central-West Asia

AZERBAIJAN: Additional Banks Integrated into Instant Payments System

As part of the measures to expand the coverage of the instant payments system in Azerbaijan, three more banks have been integrated into it, Trend reports on April 5 with reference to the Central Bank of Azerbaijan (CBA). "Bank Respublika, Pasha Bank, and Bank VTB provided their clients with the opportunity to use the functionality of the instant payment system," the CBA said. Thus, individuals, legal entities, and state agencies were able to conduct settlements 24/7 through simplified identifiers (FIN, mobile phone number, e-mail) on bank accounts. The system of

instant payments, created by the CBA as part of the state program to expand digital payments for 2018-2020, approved upon decree #508 of the president of Azerbaijan dated September 26, 2018, was launched on October 1, 2020. Some 19 banks, the State Treasury Agency of the Azerbaijani Ministry of Finance and Azerpost LLC have been integrated into this platform today.

From <https://en.trend.az/> 04/05/2021

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Central Bank of Azerbaijan Talks Adaptation of Payment Terminals to Updated Banknotes

Azerbaijani media have recently reported on the difficulties faced by citizens when trying to pay with updated banknotes of 1, 5 and 50 manats through the terminals of non-bank providers of payment services, Trend reports citing the Central Bank of Azerbaijan (CBA). On October 20, 2020, all commercial banks and terminals of non-bank providers of payment services were informed about the need to adapt cash systems (ATMs, payment terminals, cash counting and processing systems) to updated banknotes, the CBA said. The Central Bank stated that the results of the monitoring carried out by the CBA show that the adaptation of cash systems to the updated banknotes has been ensured to a great extent. "In order to study the difficulties related to the adaptation of payment terminals to updated banknotes of 1, 5 and 50 manats, promptly eliminate the relevant problems and complete the adaptation processes as soon as possible, the CBA organized a meeting with representatives of non-bank providers of payment services, and these organizations were given recommendations and instructions to take appropriate measures," the statement reads.

From <https://en.trend.az/> 04/12/2021

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Azerbaijan Developing Mobile Platform for Money Transfers

A mobile platform for transferring funds is being developed in Azerbaijan, Chairman of the Center for Analysis of Economic Reforms and Communication (CAERC) of Azerbaijan, Doctor of Economics, Vusal Gasimli said, Trend reports. Gasimli made the speech at the online event entitled 'The Role of Financial Institutions in the Development of the Digital Ecosystem'. According to the CAERC chairman, this project is being implemented in stages within the legislative framework of Azerbaijan. "Our country holds a leading position in this area in a number of regions of the world. The expansion of the digital ecosystem of Azerbaijan is carried out in different directions," Gasimli said. He also said that a number of business areas and related industries are being digitalized in Azerbaijan: trade, training, provision of services. "Digitalization and the construction of 'smart' projects in Azerbaijan's Karabakh

region, that had been liberated from Armenian occupation, will give an additional impetus to the development and acceleration of the process of digitalization and the construction of new infrastructure in the country," Gasimli said.

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Azerbaijan Needs to Ensure Efficient Online Opening of Bank Accounts - ABA Head

Azerbaijan needs to ensure effectiveness of the procedure for online opening of a bank account, the Head of the country's Banks Association (ABA) Zakir Nuriyev said. Nuriyev made the remark at 'Role of Financial Institutions in Development of Digital Ecosystem' online event, Trend reports on Apr.14. "According to statistics, approximately 21 percent of all transactions with payment cards in Azerbaijan are carried out in a non-cash form. By the end of 2020, the turnover of e-commerce amounted to 3.7 billion manat (\$2.18 billion)," the head of ABA said. "In order to form a digital ecosystem that meets international standards, it's necessary to improve the online contacts between banks and their customers and to ensure the effectiveness of the procedure for opening a bank account in this format," he added.

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State Tax Service of Azerbaijan Talks Tax Fees for Online Services

The State Tax Service under the Ministry of Economy of Azerbaijan has commented on the tax fees charged from bank cards, Trend reports citing the service. In Azerbaijan, 18-percent VAT on non-cash payments with cards is charged only for services, e-commerce operations from abroad, said the service. The comments were issued following the spread of information on social networks that the 18-percent VAT was being charged for local payments as well. "In recent days, information appeared on social networks that some citizens receive notifications about the withdrawal of large amounts from their cards. These citizens report that they were charged with VAT amounts not previously withdrawn for services rendered from abroad in previous periods," the service said. "In accordance with the provisions of the law, banks are obliged to withhold VAT on amounts paid for services provided via e-commerce. In this case, banks calculate and pay tax on each transaction, acting as a tax agent," the tax service added. The State Tax Service informs that there are no changes in the tax legislation of Azerbaijan, and no new provisions on additional tax obligations have been introduced for citizens and taxpayers.

VAT is not charged on the following transactions for non-cash payments made by individuals: - payment for the purchase of goods from abroad; - payment for services for booking hotel services and air tickets abroad; - payment for physical work performed abroad. VAT is not levied on amounts paid to enterprises and organizations operating in the country by bank transfer by means of plastic cards. Thus, in settlements for goods, works, and services purchased from VAT payers operating in the country, the amount of VAT is reflected in the final price. As is seen, no additional taxes are applied on non-cash payments made within the country, on the contrary, the legislation provides for appropriate benefits for non-cash payments for both entrepreneurs and citizens. For example, for entrepreneurs working in the field of retail trade and public catering, incentives for income tax and simplified tax are applied in accordance with the amount of income received by non-cash through a POS terminal. At the same time, citizens, when refunding part of the VAT for purchases made in a non-cash manner, receive 5 percent more than for purchases made in cash (with cash payments, a citizen is refunded 10 percent VAT, with non-cash payments - 15 percent VAT).

According to the legislation, the activity of buying and selling goods, providing services, and performing work using information systems (including downloading via the Internet e-books, music, audio-video materials, graphic images, virtual games, software, posting advertisements, other similar works) are considered services carried out in the form of electronic commerce.

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Share of Non-Budgetary Organizations in Compulsory Social Insurance Receipts Increases in Azerbaijan

Share of non-budgetary organizations in receipts from compulsory state social insurance in Azerbaijan increased by 13.8 percent in the first quarter of 2021, compared to the same period of 2020, Minister of Economy of Azerbaijan Mikayil Jabbarov wrote on Twitter, Trend reports. At the same time, the share of non-budgetary organizations in total receipts for compulsory state social insurance reached 61 percent, having risen by 2.2 percent on annual basis, Jabbarov wrote. Earlier, Jabbarov said that as a result of transparency in the labor market, receipts from compulsory state social insurance increased, and thereby helping to reduce the dependence of the State Social Protection Fund of Azerbaijan on the budget.

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TURKMENISTAN: Dayhanbank Introduces New Type of Loan

Dayhanbank State Commercial Bank of Turkmenistan introduces a new Talyp karzy ("Student loan") loan, Trend reports with reference to Turkmenportal information portal. The loan amount is up to 42,000 Turkmen manat (over \$12,000), and the interest rate is 8 percent per annum. The loan is provided in the non-cash form to citizens of Turkmenistan to pay for training in secondary special and higher educational institutions for a period of 3 years. As it was reported earlier, work is underway to introduce digital technologies into Turkmenistan's banking sector. The introduction of digital technologies into the banking sector of the country will expand the range of banking services and the capabilities of the national payment system provided to customers, as well as increase the competitiveness of credit institutions. In general, the country's financial sector is constantly expanding. In particular, mobile applications are being introduced to pay for various services and goods, the number of non-cash payments is increasing, and payment for goods and services is being implemented through banking terminals.

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UZBEKISTAN: Tax Committee Changes Invoice Issuance System

The State Tax Committee has introduced changes in the invoice processing system. From April 23, taxpayers would be able to draw up additional or corrected invoices upon receiving a basis for adjusting the tax base. The downward adjustment of the tax base is made by issuing additional invoices with negative indicators, which correct the information in previously issued invoices drawn up within the last 12 months.

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AUSTRALIA: IMF Confirms Australia's Outperformance

The International Monetary Fund's upgrade of the Australian economic outlook confirms the nation has outperformed all major advanced economies over the past year, Treasurer Josh Frydenberg says. The IMF is expecting the economy to grow by 4.5 per cent this year and 2.8 per cent in 2022. In January, the Washington-based institution expected the economy to grow by 3.5 per cent in 2021. "What this report confirms is that we've outperformed all major advanced economies over the last year," Mr Frydenberg said on Wednesday. "They're still a long way to go, but Australians can see the light at the end of the tunnel." In its latest World Economic

Outlook, the IMF is also projecting a stronger recovery for the global economy in 2021 and 2022 compared to its previous predictions made in January.

The world economy is now expected to grow by six per cent in 2021 and 4.4 per cent in 2022, compared with 5.5 per cent and 4.2 per cent respectively previously. But the fund warns a high degree of uncertainty surrounds these projections, with many possible downside and upside risks. "Much still depends on the race between the virus and vaccines," it says. "Greater progress with vaccinations can uplift the forecast, while new virus variants that evade vaccines can lead to a sharp downgrade." Despite the Reserve Bank's efforts to fuel the economy through record low interest rates, the IMF expects Australian inflation to be still below the central bank's two to three per cent target band at the end of next year. It forecasts the rate of inflation to be 1.7 per cent this year and 1.6 per cent in 2022.

The IMF also does not expect Australia's unemployment rate to be comfortably below six per cent until next year, forecasting a rate of 5.5 per cent in 2022. The jobless rate did unexpectedly dip to 5.8 per cent in February, but there is now uncertainty about the employment outlook after the government's JobKeeper wage subsidy program came to an end last month.

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More Money for Struggling Travel Agents

Travel agents struggling through the COVID-19 pandemic will be able to apply for additional funding to help their businesses survive. The federal government has announced it will provide an extra \$130 million to travel agents, on top of \$128 million already being shared out under the COVID-19 Consumer Travel Support Program. Round two of the program, made up of the new funds, will open later this month for eligible travel agents, inbound tour operators and tour wholesalers. The government is finalising payments to travel agents under round one of the program, which tourism minister Dan Tehan says has supported about 3000 operators. The financial support has been used in part to refund or give travel credits to Australians whose plans have been impacted by domestic and international border closures. Travel agents who received a round one payment will be entitled to a second payment ranging between \$7,500 and \$100,000.

To be eligible, the business must have had a turnover of between \$50,000 and \$20 million in the 2019 calendar year and have received the JobKeeper extension. "Before COVID-19, domestic tourism made up approximately 77 per cent - or \$107 billion - of tourism spend and we want to see that level of spending return," Mr Tehan said on Saturday. He urged travellers to book their holidays through their local travel agent to support them. The Australian Federation of Travel Agents, Australian

Tourism Export Council and Council of Australian Tour Operators have worked closely with government on the design of the second round of funding, Mr Tehan said. For more information, visit the Austrade website.

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States Should Hold Off Electric Car Taxes

A leading business lobby group says Australian governments should be supporting businesses and individuals to buy electric vehicles rather than slapping taxes on them. Australian Industry Group chief executive Innes Willox says new taxes on electric vehicle usage that are being developed in several states is putting "the cart before the horse". He believes such taxes should not be implemented until clean vehicles are better established and the taxes are better designed. "Road infrastructure needs to be paid for and it will be important in the long term to maintain the tax base as batteries and fuel cells replace petrol tanks in Australia's vehicle fleet," Mr Willox said in a statement. "But Australia is currently well behind our peers in that transition. Our slow uptake of clean vehicles is holding back national progress towards emissions targets - and increasing the pressure on every other part of the economy to deliver cuts."

He said all sides of politics have the opportunity to develop coherent, and preferably nationally coordinated, incentives that are consistent with overall plans for achieving a net zero emissions economy by 2050. But he said unfortunately the most advanced EV tax proposal is due to start in Victoria on July 1 and looks like being a major disincentive that would undermine any other supportive policies. "Victoria and the rest of the states should slam the brakes on these taxes and spend the next several years working together with the Commonwealth on a solution that is roadworthy, he said. "That road pricing work should prioritise national consistency; ease of use; and effective incentives both for efficient road use and emissions reduction."

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Morrison Vows Climate Action in Budget

Scott Morrison has flagged new measures to combat climate change in next month's federal budget, admitting natural disasters have tested the nation's resilience. The prime minister on Friday continued his charm offensive in Western Australia, addressing a business breakfast in the mining epicentre of Karratha in the state's Pilbara region. He was later due to visit an ammonia plant before heading to Kalbarri to inspect the widespread damage inflicted by Tropical Cyclone Seroja. Mr Morrison said the nation had faced significant challenges, with Seroja preceded by floods and

bushfires across much of the country. "We have gone through a period in this country where the resilience has been tested," he told the function. "And a key focus of the government, and you'll see more of this in the budget and announcements in the weeks ahead, it's about addressing all of those practical issues.

"There are things we can and must do to address Australia's climate challenges." Mr Morrison said reducing emissions could not come at the expense of the resources industry, which he hailed as the backbone of the national economy. He said companies such as Andrew Forrest's Fortescue Metals Group were showing leadership with their drive towards using renewable energy to power their operations. Fortescue has set a target of achieving carbon neutrality by 2030, exceeding Australia's goal of "preferably" reaching net-zero emissions by 2050. "What we have to be able to do in meeting that challenge is demonstrate how we can do that and ensure that the heavy industries that exist in our country are part of that solution," Mr Morrison said. "And that they're there in 2050, and not just there but stronger than they are today.

"One of the genuine concerns that people around the country have about those type of commitments is that they see it being achieved at the expense of these sorts of jobs and industries. "My commitment is to ensure that we meet these commitments and at the same time and going further, continue to see a stronger heavy industry, whether it's in manufacturing, whether it's in resources or the many other sectors that are so reliant on an energy economy." The prime minister on Thursday night shared a beer with workers at Fortescue's Christmas Creek camp where he stayed the night. He attended the morning shift changeover at the mine's ore processing plant on Friday morning and was invited by Mr Forrest to join in with daily stretching exercises to the strains of Jimmy Barnes' Working Class Man.

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Millions Face Impact of Tax Offset Removal

Millions of Australians will be worse off when a tax stimulus measure finishes at the end of this financial year. The \$1080 low and middle income tax offset (LMITO), which benefits people with a taxable income of between \$48,000 and \$90,000, is due to end in June. Analysts at the Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre estimate some 3.4 million taxpayers will lose out from its removal, 50 per cent of whom will be women. The LMITO, which is claimable when people submit their tax return, was due to end in the 2019/20 financial year. But it was subsequently extended as a stimulus measure in the last budget when a series of other personal income tax changes were also introduced. Bankwest Curtin analysts say the removal of the LMITO effectively cancels out the benefits of these changes to tax thresholds for \$48,000-\$90,000 earners, making them no better off than they were in 2019/20. Treasurer Josh

Frydenberg is due to hand down his 2021/22 budget on May 11.

Whether Mr Frydenberg has a change of heart over the LMITO remains to be seen. "The government doesn't comment on budget speculation," a spokesperson for the treasurer told AAP. A survey by the Australian Financial Review found 61 per cent of the 530 people polled believed the treasurer should be focused on stimulating the economy, while 31 per cent say he should be repairing the budget. Economists expect the budget will be in a far better shape than predicted just a few months ago given the boost to revenues from a much stronger than expected economy, sharply lower unemployment and rising commodity prices. In the mid-year budget review released in December a \$197.7 billion budget deficit was forecast for the 2020/21 financial year and a \$108.5 billion deficit for 2021/22. AMP Capital chief economist Shane Oliver believes the deficit could now be \$125 billion for 2020/21 and around \$50 billion 2021/22.

In the government's most recent monthly financial accounts, it showed the deficit for the 2020/21 financial year to February was \$134.6 billion, \$23.1 billion smaller than had been anticipated after eight months. Notably, the iron price struck a 10-year high of \$US178 per tonne on Friday compared with \$US55 per tonne assumed at the time of the mid-year budget review. As a rule of thumb, for every \$US1 rise in the price of iron ore, the government gains \$A250 million in revenue a year.

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Ocean Protection Gets \$100m in New Funds

Better protecting oceans and marine life is the focus of a \$100 million package announced by the federal government as it faces pressure from the US to do more on climate change. The funding will go towards ocean management and methods to draw carbon out of the atmosphere involving seagrass and mangroves. Environment Minister Sussan Ley said the funding would help tourism, research and fisheries. "The oceans are critical to the fight against climate change," she told reporters in Sydney on Friday. "If you consider the oyster reefs that were once all along our coastlines, between them and the seagrass, the mangrove and the salt marsh, you have one interconnected ecosystem that stores four times as much carbon as terrestrial ecosystems.

"But we need to work harder on the methodology and part of this package will do that. It will allow blue carbon accounting so that we can calculate exactly how much carbon you can store in these systems and bring it to life." The money will also go towards supporting Indigenous protected areas. Michelle Grady, the Australian director of Pew Charitable Trusts, says the funding will help give oceans a fighting chance in what is now a global race to bring endangered marine life back from the

brink. "Australia's marine life and marine industries are at risk from plastic pollution and marine debris, overfishing, noise pollution and the devastating impacts of climate change," she said. This includes sea level rise, acidification, and warming seas which is destroying coral reefs and giant kelp forests.

"Australia is a world leader in marine conservation, with the world's largest system of marine parks forming a circle of protection around our coastline," Ms Grady said. "But for many years we've seen a major gap in Australia's ocean stewardship - investment in sound management for our ocean territory." Australia's environment ministers are also planning to phase out a range of "problematic and unnecessary" plastic products over the next four years. Lightweight plastic bags, straws, utensils and stirrers are among the list of products the ministers want to eliminate by 2025. The government has announced bans on waste exports, which started in January with glass. Bans on plastic, paper and tyres will be staggered, beginning from July through to July 2024.

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Big Govt Debt Here for a Decade: Report

Ahead of next month's federal budget a new analysis indicates the blowout in government debt in response to funding support for Australians during the pandemic is sustainable. However, it could be a decade before it starts to steadily decline, the independent Parliamentary Budget Office says in a report released on Wednesday. Faced with the first recession in nearly 30 years, the Morrison government hurled money at protecting the economy through support measures such as the JobKeeper wage subsidy and JobSeeker coronavirus supplement. This funding saw government debt as a proportion of the economy expand from 28 per cent of GDP to an expected 40 per cent in 2020/21 and to more than 50 per cent in 2022/23. It is expected to remain above 50 per cent for at least the next decade. Government debt is forecast to rise to just over \$990 billion in 2021/22 and to over \$1 trillion the following financial year.

"Public debt levels may become concerning if they result in governments having to devote an ever-increasing share of their revenue to meeting their interest expenses," the PBO warns. This could lead to a need to significantly increase taxes, cut spending, sell assets and/or further increase debt, it says. Its Fiscal Sustainability report expects Australia should be able to sustainably maintain its debt over the next 40 years. This is provided future governments are able to implement policies to achieve budget balances similar to historical precedents, even modest deficits. "Debt is likely to steadily decline ... for at least 13 years from 2030/31," the PBO says. "The main driver of the debt reduction is the historically low interest rates on debt issued over the past year, coupled with the expectation that interest rates are likely to

remain low for the next decade."

Meanwhile, business, unions and representatives of parents continue to press the case for the May 11 budget to reform early childhood education, while making the workplace free and safe for women. "Achieving these changes would benefit all in our nation," the Business Council of Australia, the ACTU, Chief Executive Women, The Parenthood and Goodstart Early Learning said in a joint statement. They believe the 2021/22 budget is an opportunity to make safety and economic security of all women a priority, while investing and reforming early childhood education. They want to see disincentives to increase women's workforce participation removed and further amendments to the government's paid parental leave scheme that would see it increase to 26 weeks, and greater flexibility in how it is split between parents. They also want new funding for domestic, family and sexual violence services, and paid leave for victims with a goal towards 10 days.

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NEW ZEALAND: 1 April Changes Raise Incomes for 1.4 million New Zealanders

Changes to the minimum wage, main benefit levels and superannuation rates that come into force today will raise the incomes for around 1.4 million New Zealanders. "This Government is committed to raising the incomes for all New Zealanders as part of laying the foundations for a better future," Minister for Social Development and Employment Carmel Sepuloni says. "Over the last financial year the average wages for working New Zealanders lifted 3.1 percent, this means Superannuation and Benefit Levels will also be lifted by the same amount. "This is the second rise in Main Benefits under the new indexation to wage rates. Under the previous indexation to the Consumer Price Index, beneficiaries would have only received a 1.15 percent rise. "This change builds on the introduction of the \$5.5 billion Families Package, Winter Energy Payment and the \$25 per week main benefit rate rise last year.

"Today also sees the largest rise in abatement levels in two decades. This means that people receiving a main benefit and in part time work can keep more of what they earn. "We recognise we have more to do, but we are making good progress," Carmel Sepuloni said. People earning minimum wage will also receive more money in the hand from today. "Today's rise to \$20 per hour is estimated to boost wages across the economy by \$216 million, giving New Zealanders more money to spend at local businesses," Minister for Workplace Relations and Safety Michael Wood said. "This will lift the incomes of around 175,500 New Zealanders – which means \$44 more each week before tax for Kiwis working full time on the minimum wage. "There are many Kiwis who earn the minimum wage who have gone above and beyond in our fight against COVID. I think everyone agrees those who served us so well during

lockdown – including supermarket workers, cleaners, and security guards – deserve a pay rise,” Michael Wood said.

Other changes today include: – The starting-out and training minimum wages will rise to \$16.00 per hour, to remain at 80 per cent of the adult minimum wage. – A new top tax rate of 39 percent on income earned over \$180,000 will apply. – Student Allowance payments will increase 1.15 percent. – Annual General Adjustment to increase Foster Care Allowance and the Orphan’s Benefit and Unsupported Child’s Benefit by 1.15%.

From <https://livenews.co.nz> 04/01/2021

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\$5.7 Million Investment to Support Disabled People in Sport and Recreation

Sport and Recreation Minister Grant Robertson has today announced how \$5.7 million will be allocated to create better quality experiences for disabled tamariki and rangatahi. The investment, via Sport NZ’s Disability Plan, will see \$2.1 million provided to 15 Parafeds/D-Sport and seven National Disability Sport Organisations (NDSOs) over the next three years and \$3.6 million for two new contestable disability funds. “More needs to be done to improve the range and quality of physical activity on offer for disabled people. “This investment will significantly increase Sport NZ’s investment in the sector to ensure disabled tamariki and rangatahi can participate in quality and equitable play, active recreation and sport of their choice,” Grant Robertson said. The two new Contestable Disability Funds will support national and regional organisations to deliver initiatives and programmes that increase the opportunities being provided to disabled participants. The funds will support the expansion of proven programmes, as well as the development of innovative new programmes. The two new funds will complement the investment being made through Tū Manawa which is providing opportunities for disabled tamariki and rangatahi to be active. To date just over \$2 million of Tū Manawa funds have been approved by Regional Sport Trusts for disabled young people.

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Asia-Pacific

More Than 35,000 Micro and Small Enterprises in Benin Will Receive Grants to Mitigate the Impact of COVID-19

The World Bank approved \$25 million in additional financing from the International Development Association (IDA)* to help Benin support micro and small enterprises impacted by the COVID-19 crisis. This additional financing, along with the reallocation of \$10 million within the Cross-Border Tourism and Competitiveness Project, will generate \$35 million to provide a lifeline to normally viable enterprises impacted by the crisis and, to the extent possible, protect existing jobs. Roughly 22,916 informal sector businesses, 11,655 formal microenterprises, and 994 small enterprises will receive grants to cover their short-term cash flow needs. Atou Seck, World Bank Country Manager for Benin, notes that “micro and small enterprises, which already had limited access to formal financing, are finding it difficult to obtain the cash necessary to continue their activities during the COVID-19 crisis. Rapid financial assistance is needed to keep them afloat. This financing is also good news for enterprises in the tourism and related sectors, which have seen a steep decline in investment and growth owing to COVID-19.”

The Cross-Border Tourism and Competitiveness Project, approved in March 2016 for an initial \$50 million, is financing major projects in the city of Ouidah such as rehabilitation of the Portuguese Fort, construction of the International Museum for the Remembrance of Slavery, upgrading of heritage sites and monuments along the slave route, and urban revitalization of the historical village of Zoungbodji and tourist routes. The World Bank, one of the largest sources of funding and knowledge for developing countries, is taking broad, fast action to help developing countries respond to the health, social and economic impacts of COVID-19. This includes US\$12 billion to help low- and middle-income countries purchase and distribute COVID-19 vaccines, tests, and treatments, and strengthen vaccination systems. The financing builds on the broader World Bank Group COVID-19 response, which is helping more than 100 countries strengthen health systems, support the poorest households, and create supportive conditions to maintain livelihoods and jobs for those hit hardest.

*The World Bank’s International Development Association (IDA), established in 1960, helps the world’s poorest countries by providing grants and low to zero-interest loans for projects and programs that boost economic growth, reduce poverty, and improve poor people’s lives. IDA is one of the largest sources of assistance for the world’s 76 poorest countries, 39 of which are in Africa. Resources from IDA bring positive change to the 1.6 billion people who live in IDA countries. Since 1960, IDA has supported development work in 113 countries. Annual commitments have increased steadily and averaged about \$21 billion over the last three years, with about 61% going to Africa.

From <https://www.worldbank.org/> 04/29/2021

Businesses Need to Broaden Trade with Asia

Australian exporters are being urged to look for new Asian markets to combat the economic fallout of coronavirus and strained relations with China. Trade Minister Dan Tehan has released the final report of the Asia Taskforce - a joint project between the Asia Society and Business Council of Australia. It provides a blueprint for Australia to compete more successfully in the region. Mr Tehan said business and government needed to work together in order to keep trade with Asia moving. "The Asia Taskforce does more than make the argument that businesses should expand into diverse markets across Asia," he said on Wednesday. "It advocates a 'Team Australia' approach and identifies practical, specific actions that business and governments can take to strengthen the presence of Australia, and our businesses, in Asia."

The report proposes focusing on markets and sectors where Australia has competitive advantages, such as healthcare in Indonesia and financial services in Japan, as well as India, Vietnam and Korea. However, it finds diversification cannot replace the need to adjust to Australia's complex relationship with China. Business Council chief Jennifer Westacott said the rise of Asian economies and their growing middle classes presented strong opportunities for Australian companies. "But only if we grasp the opportunity," Ms Westacott said. "If we succeed, Australians will have the best standards of living in the world but if we fail, we run the risk of becoming a second order economy in a thriving region."

From <https://au.news.yahoo.com> 04/07/2021

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ADB, AFD Reaffirm Strong Cooperation in Key Sectors, Including Climate Action

Asian Development Bank (ADB) President Masatsugu Asakawa in a call today with Agence Française de Développement Group (AFD) Chief Executive Officer Rémy Rioux reaffirmed the importance of collaboration between the two institutions, particularly on key issues such as climate change and aspirations for COP26. "ADB's partnership with France, through AFD, is strong and continues to build on our long history of collaboration on important development issues and projects across many countries and sectors in Asia," Mr. Asakawa said. "This solid foundation and our dynamic collaboration allows us to support an inclusive and resilient green recovery across the region as it emerges from the COVID-19 pandemic." The two leaders met ahead of the agencies' annual high-level consultation on 14 and 15 April. ADB and AFD signed their first partnership framework agreement in October 2016. They have since jointly funded 22 projects in 10 countries, in sectors such as energy, transport, public sector management, finance, agriculture, water, urban infrastructure, and health. AFD has provided \$1.9 billion in cofinancing alongside \$4.7 billion from ADB

to fund these development programs across the region.

Mr. Asakawa updated Mr. Rioux on ADB's response to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, which includes a \$20 billion support package for Asia and the Pacific announced in April last year. ADB has committed \$17.1 billion through grants, technical assistance, and loans to governments and the private sector and has mobilized an additional \$12.2 billion in cofinancing. Mr. Asakawa acknowledged with appreciation AFD cofinancing for ADB's \$500 million COVID-19 response program in Pakistan. Mr. Asakawa stressed the importance of vaccine access to enable the post-COVID-19 recovery, and updated Mr. Rioux on the roll-out of ADB's \$9 billion Asia Pacific Vaccine Access Facility (APVAX). The two leaders discussed cooperation on mitigating the severe impact of climate change in Asia and the Pacific which threatens to further undermine development gains over the last several decades. As part of that endeavor, ADB and ADF have a shared objective to contribute to the success of the COP26 summit to be hosted by the UK government later in the year. In 2020, while responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, ADB committed \$4.3 billion in climate finance and mobilized \$729 million from external resources.

From <https://www.adb.org/> 04/14/2021

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ADB, CD Finance Sign Loan to Support Rural Microcredit for Farmers, Entrepreneurs, and Women Borrowers

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) and CD Finance Management Co., Ltd. (CD Finance) held a virtual signing ceremony for a \$40 million (in yuan equivalent) loan to finance microloans to improve the livelihoods of farmers, microentrepreneurs, and women borrowers in rural areas of the People's Republic of China (PRC). "Accelerating access to rural finance, particularly for women, and bridging gaps in financial services are key to achieving sustainable rural development," said Ashok Lavasa, ADB's Vice President, Private Sector Operations and Public-Private Partnerships. "ADB is pleased to support financial institutions like CD Finance, which provide access to urgently needed finance for productive rural activities that can improve the livelihoods of rural communities and help small businesses to expand." At least 60% of the loan is targeted for women borrowers and is expected to benefit over 30,000 women. A gender action plan will support measures to increase focus on providing financing and other services to women, including financial education and life skills training to women borrowers and enhancing CD Finance staff capacity to better respond to the needs of female clients. CD Finance will also conduct outreach campaigns for women microentrepreneurs.

"We are pleased to receive further support from ADB," said CD Financial Management CEO Liu Dongwen. "With the mission of eradicating extreme poverty

largely completed, the focus of rural work has shifted to promoting full rural revitalization and accelerating the modernization of agriculture and rural industries. As an organization dedicated to serve rural areas and farmers, CD Finance is delighted to work with ADB to support rural revitalization, facilitate productive activities of rural households, and improve their livelihoods.” Established in 2008, CD Finance is the largest microfinance institution in the PRC. It serves approximately 400,000 active borrowers, 72.25% of whom are women (including co-borrowers). CD Finance operates mainly in rural counties to serve the financial needs of rural low- and middle-income groups. Founded from the microfinance activities of China Foundation for Poverty Alleviation, a donor-funded organization established in 1996, CD Finance has successfully transformed into a sustainable commercial institution.

From <https://www.adb.org/> 04/23/2021

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East Asia

CHINA: Better Business Environment Boosts Foreign-related Legal Services

Despite the pandemic, China's eye-catching achievements in attracting foreign investment over the past year has borne witness to the confidence of foreign investors in the country's law-based business environment, and therefore provides opportunities to its foreign-related legal services. "A law-based environment is the best environment for doing business," said Li Zhiqiang, president of the Inter-Pacific Bar Association, at the ongoing annual conference of the association held in Shanghai. The implementation of China's Foreign Investment Law, which entered into force on Jan. 1, 2020, made concrete efforts to protect foreign investment, Li added. A total of 220 lawyers were dispatched overseas by the All China Lawyers Association (ACLA) in four batches for training, and about 3,000 lawyers were also trained for foreign-related legal services domestically, Jiang Min, deputy head of the ACLA, said at the annual conference. Over 150 overseas branches were established in 35 countries and regions by Chinese law firms, Jiang said, adding that a group of talented personnel with compound skills are evolving to provide high-quality legal services for domestic and foreign enterprises.

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China EximBank Ups Loan Support for Small, Micro-businesses

The Export-Import Bank of China (China EximBank) has increased loan support for small and micro-businesses, with outstanding funds topping 100 billion yuan (about 15.4 billion U.S. dollars) under a targeted program by the end of March. Under the

loan model, the policy bank provided low-cost funds to medium and small banks, which then grant the loans to small and micro-businesses to reduce their financing cost. China Eximbank is a state-funded and state-owned policy bank dedicated to supporting China's foreign trade, investment, and international economic cooperation. China has rolled out a slew of measures to reduce financing costs of small and micro-companies. Outstanding inclusive finance loans to small businesses climbed by 30.3 percent by the end of 2020 from the previous year to 15.1 trillion yuan, central bank data showed.

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China Strengthens Regulation on Asset-light Housing Rental Enterprises

China has issued a guideline to strengthen regulation on asset-light housing rental enterprises and clarify regulatory measures for those engaged in sublease operations. Housing leasing companies and individuals subleasing more than 10 houses (rooms) are required to register as market entities in accordance with law and obtain business license, said the guideline jointly issued by the Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development and other five government bodies. To defuse financial risks, the guideline required housing rental companies to set up a regulatory account for rental funds at local commercial banks. If the companies collect rents for more than three months at a time or deposits for more than one month at a time, they should include the funds in the account. The guideline also prohibited these enterprises from carrying out financial businesses in a disguised way, such as embedding housing rental consumption loans in the lease contract, use tenant's credit to obtain consumption loans or tempt tenants to use the loans. In recent years, China's housing rental market has developed rapidly and is generally stable. However, some asset-light housing rental companies engaged in sublease operations infringed the legitimate rights and interests of tenants by controlling housing supply, bidding up rents and even fraudulently obtaining credit funds.

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Xi Encourages Private Enterprises to Develop Boldly

Xi Jinping, general secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, on Monday expressed his hope that private enterprises can develop boldly and with confidence. Xi made the remarks when visiting a food-processing zone for local specialty Luosifen rice noodles during his inspection of the city of Liuzhou in south China's Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region. It is not an easy task to develop the

small rice noodle business into such a large industry, said Xi. "We encourage the development of private businesses. When they encounter difficulties, the Party and the state give them support, and when confusion arises, guidance is offered, with the hope that they can develop boldly and with confidence," Xi said.

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96 Pct of Foreign Enterprises Upbeat on Prospects in China

A recent survey by the Ministry of Commerce (MOC) shows that 96.4 percent of foreign-invested enterprises are optimistic about their business prospects in China. The figure represents a 2.1 percentage-point increase on the beginning of the year, according to the survey of over 3,200 foreign-funded firms. In the first quarter of the year, 10,263 new foreign-funded enterprises were established in China, a surge of 47.8 percent year on year and up 6.7 percent from the same period of 2019, said MOC spokesperson Gao Feng. Foreign direct investment into the Chinese mainland surged 39.9 percent year on year in actual use to 302.47 billion yuan (about 46.74 billion U.S. dollars) in the first quarter, he said, adding that the figure rose 24.8 percent from the same period of 2019. Aside from the low base of the same period last year, the rapid growth was mainly driven by factors such as the stable recovery of the Chinese economy, continuous improvement of the business environment and enhanced confidence of foreign investors, Gao said. He also noted challenges facing the attracting of foreign investment, including complex and grave pandemic situation and international circumstances, lukewarm cross-border investment and restrictions on cross-border flow of people. The ministry will continue to expand opening up and optimize the business environment to stabilize foreign investment, he said.

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JAPAN: Business Confidence Rebounds to Pre-Pandemic Levels

Japanese big manufacturers' sentiment improved to pre-pandemic levels in the first quarter while companies stepped up capital spending plans, suggesting the export-reliant economy was benefiting from a solid recovery in global demand. Confidence among big non-manufacturers also recovered from three months ago, underscoring the fading strains from the coronavirus pandemic, a central bank survey showed on Thursday. The data offers some relief for policymakers striving to revitalize the pandemic-hit economy as a fourth wave of infections raises uncertainty about the outlook. "The results underline the Bank of Japan's view the economy continues to recover moderately," said Yoshiki Shinke, chief economist at Dai-ichi Life Research Institute. "It turns out that renewed state of emergency curbs have had

limited impact on business sentiment thanks to solid exports and goods demand,” he said.

The headline index measuring big manufacturers’ sentiment rose to plus 5 in March from minus 10 in December, the BOJ’s closely watched “tankan” survey showed, beating market forecasts of a flat reading. The third straight quarter of improvement lifted the index to the highest level since September 2019, as the benefits of the global recovery spread to a wide range of manufacturers including machinery and car makers. While hotels and restaurants continued to suffer from the pandemic, the rebound in manufacturing activity spilt through to a broader improvement in conditions that helped other service-sector firms. That led to an improvement in big non-manufacturers’ sentiment index to minus 1 in March from minus 5 in December. “The further strong rebound in the Q1 Tankan supports our view that the economy’s recovery from the pandemic will gather pace again soon,” said Tom Learmouth, Japan economist at Capital Economics.

Backed by prospects of recovery, big firms expect to boost capital expenditure by 3.0% in the year that began in April, more than market forecasts for a 1.4% gain. That would follow a 3.8% cut in spending plans for the year that ended in March. Capital spending plans among firms of all size and sectors rose 0.5% in fiscal 2021, the first positive projection made at the start of a business year since relevant data became available in 1984. There were concerns, however, the rebound from the pandemic’s initial hit may have peaked. Big manufacturers and non-manufacturers both expect business conditions to stay largely flat three months ahead, the tankan showed. Some retailers were seeing signs of weakening demand for stay-home goods like grocery and household electronics, a BOJ official told a briefing. “There were some automakers fretting about the impact chip shortages could have on their output,” the official said.

A fire at Japanese chipmaker Renesas Electronics is seen aggravating chip shortages, said Taro Saito, executive research fellow at NLI Research Institute. “It’s unavoidable that output will drop. It’s a risk factor that is not reflected in today’s tankan,” he said. A tankan index gauging price moves showed companies saw input costs rising, which could also hurt their bottom lines. Like many countries, Japan deployed massive monetary and fiscal stimulus over the past year to lift the economy back from a record postwar slump. Many analysts expect the economy to have contracted in the first quarter but see it gradually emerging from the doldrums as solid exports offset some of the weakness in consumption. The BOJ tankan indexes are derived by subtracting the percentage of pessimistic respondents from optimistic ones. A negative figure means pessimists outnumber optimists.

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SOUTH KOREA: ICT Companies Spent over 40 TIn Won on R&D in 2019

South Korea's information and communication technology (ICT) companies spent more than 40 trillion won (US\$35.3 billion) on research and development in 2019, data showed Thursday, as the country focuses on developing new 5G and artificial intelligence technology. ICT companies' total R&D spending reached 41.4 trillion won in 2019, up 3 percent from the previous year, according to the Ministry of Science and ICT. By sector, 38.1 trillion won, or 91.9 percent of the total, was spent on information technology and broadcast devices, which include semiconductors and smartphones, highlighting the country's focus on its two major export products. Spending on software accounted for just 6.4 percent of the total at 2.6 trillion won, while that on information communication and broadcast services reached 1.7 percent at 700 billion won. Large-size companies accounted for most of the R&D investment, spending 33.5 trillion won or 80.9 percent of the total, while startups spent 3.6 trillion won or 8.8 percent. The ICT ministry noted that overall R&D increased despite a plunge in global trade in 2019. The country's ICT exports sunk 20 percent that year largely due to a trade dispute between the United States and China. The ministry added that it expects R&D investment by local ICT companies to have increased last year, despite the economic slump triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic.

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South-East Asia

VIETNAM: Domestic Electronic Firms Urged to Enhance Capacity, Improve Linkage with FDI

Enhancing the linkage between domestic and foreign-direct-investment (FDI) electronic enterprises can be an important solution to promote the development of this industry which is now dominated by the FDI sector. Việt Nam was now home to factories of a number of global technology giants such as Samsung, LG, Canon and Intel with investment sums worth billions of dollars. The country recently emerged as a top destination for FDI in the global production shift. Oppo was planning to build a plant in the northern province of Bắc Ninh while Lenovo was also studying the opportunity for a plant in Bắc Ninh or Bắc Giang. Although Apple has not announced plans to assemble iPhones in Việt Nam, many of their partners were increasing the production of components in the country. Foxconn invested in a project producing iPads and MacBooks worth US\$270 million in Bắc Giang three months ago and planned to expand production in the country with a goal of reaching revenue of \$40 billion in the next three to five years. According to Trần Thanh Hải, Deputy Director of the Import-Export Department under the Ministry of Industry and Trade, there was a

significant change in the electronics industry in recent years that Việt Nam had original design manufacturers (ODMs).

Still, the electronics industry of Việt Nam was still dominated by the FDI sector. Although Việt Nam was one among 12 of the largest electronics exporters in the world and top three in ASEAN, 95 per cent of the country's electronics export came from FDI enterprises. Đỗ Thúy Hương from the Việt Nam Electronic Industries Association said it was necessary for Vietnamese firms to cooperate with FDI enterprise to establish value chains in the electronics industry. Three factors must be in place to be able to become suppliers of global technology giants – quality, on-time delivery and reasonable price, she said. According to Việt Nam Industry Agency, the capacity of domestic electronics enterprises remained limited, while the product quality and design had not met market demand. There were emerging names recently, such as Bphone, Vsmart and Viettel, but foreign names were still dominant.

The local procurement rate was also low, only at around five to 10 per cent. Electronic products in the Vietnamese market were mainly imported or assembled from imported components. Some companies managed to participate in the industry's supply chains but most could only supply products of low value and technology content. The Việt Nam Industry Agency said that domestic electronic enterprises must improve their capacity to be able to participate in the supply chains of the FDI enterprises as well as being able to take advantage of opportunities arising from new-generation free trade agreements. Support should be provided to selected enterprises that take the role in promoting the development of the electronics industry, the agency said. Besides solutions to expand markets, enterprises should focus on identifying their core products and strengths to create breakthroughs.

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Recruitment Demand Soars in Textile & Garment, IT Sectors

The effectiveness of free trade agreements, especially the EU– Việt Nam Free Trade Agreement, has helped to increase export orders for textile and garment enterprises in Việt Nam, leading to high recruitment demand in the first and second quarter, according to Navigos Group, a recruitment service provider in Việt Nam. Compared to the same period in 2020, the recruitment demand in this industry has risen by 50 per cent to 60 per cent, especially for middle and senior management positions. Textile and garment enterprises are in need of many positions in both production and commercial office departments in Southeast Asia and Việt Nam. Candidates are required to have working experience in countries in the Southeast Asia region, including Việt Nam. However, many Vietnamese candidates meet the professional criteria but lack working experience in the region. The Federation of Labour and

companies in the textile, garment and footwear industries in the southern province of Bình Dương said that many workers are needed. Representatives in human resources at companies have set up a small booth on an industrial park campus for recruitment, according to Sài Gòn Giải Phóng (Liberated Sài Gòn) newspaper. A company in the province's Đồng An Industry Park said that it needs more than 2,000 workers. Its managers have a policy to give bonuses of VNĐ1 million (US\$) for staff who can find others to work there. The company also provides allowances for transport and accommodation, and other benefits, to workers. According to the Federation of Labour, the province needs more than 4,000 workers as many companies have seen an increase in the number of orders in the first months because of increased e-commerce activity. Many workers did not return to their jobs after the Tết (Lunar New Year) holidays, it added.

IT industry

Navigos Group said that besides high demand in the textile and garment industry, some companies in the IT industry this year will have 20 per cent to 25 per cent more demand compared to 2020. The first quarter of 2021 saw growth in labour demand at IT companies, especially in outsourcing and product segments, with plans to expand the scope of operations and business. As financial services enterprises are in the process of digital transformation, there is a very high demand for IT positions. Recruitment requests from these IT companies often focus on Vietnamese candidates.

Finance and banking

The sharp increase in the number of new investors in Việt Nam's stock market in the first quarter has affected recruitment demand at securities firms, according to the Navigos Group. Positions related to customer relations are being recruited and are expected to increase. In the first quarter, Navigos Search said that banks had great recruitment demands in the fields of priority customers, technology, legal, compliance, and bancassurance. Technology-related positions are being offered at attractive salaries. Positions that need candidates from Japan and South Korea in the insurance industry and in risk management and internal control in the securities industry are difficult to fill because most candidates do not meet the requirements. Continuing the trend from 2020, overseas Vietnamese candidates in the fields of digital transformation, technology, data and marketing in the financial and banking industry are needed. According to the HCM City Centre for Forecasting Manpower Needs and Labour Market Information, enterprises in the city need nearly 68,600-73,500 workers for IT, finance-banking and others. Because of digital transformation and the impact caused by COVID-19 leading to e-commerce development, many enterprises in the city need analysts as well as cybersecurity and software engineers.

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South Asia

INDIA: Quantela Makes Strategic Investment in Cognitive Multimedia Analytics Company Graymatics

Quantela, a smart city enabler and outcomes-as-a-service provider with over a 100 smart city deployments across the globe, today announced a strategic investment in Silicon Valley founded and Singapore based Graymatics, a cognitive multimedia analytics company with an industry-leading AI platform to transform installed CCTV video feeds into compelling customer-centric solutions in different industry verticals. The all-equity deal would give Quantela a minority shareholding in Graymatics with significant strategic and Go-To-Market (GTM) alignment, and help build comprehensive capabilities in video analytics into its AI-driven smart solutions for its target markets spanning smart cities, buildings, education campuses, public spaces and commercial establishments. For Graymatics, which caters to industries such as surveillance, telecom, media and advertising, retail and e-commerce; the deal opens doors for it to be a part of global smart city projects through Quantela. Graymatics provides video analytics solutions to different smart cities especially in the East Zone of India, and various smart spaces (including buildings, highways, ports, airports, telecom carriers) in Singapore, Indonesia, China, the Philippines, Japan, Korea to enhance safety, security, operational efficiency and customer experience. “Looking from the lens of technology maturity, adaptability and affordability; this is the right time for us to scale globally by enhancing Quantela’s smart city platforms, which have strong real-time data analytics capabilities, with the power of video analytics to deliver more meaningful and measurable outcomes for city administrators and citizens”, stated Sridhar Gadhi, Founder and Chairman, Quantela Inc. speaking about this strategic investment. He added, “This will help accelerate Quantela’s journey to improve the liveability of cities and the quality of life of citizens.”

Explaining the investment rationale, Amr Salem, CEO, Quantela Inc., said, “A live video stream has data that is dynamic, usually requiring manual surveillance. Most video analytics companies are unable to analyse the actual video content in real-time. Graymatics, with its real-time indexing, analysis and classification of videos and images is innovative in this respect.” He further said, “Our investment in Graymatics will give Quantela the competitive edge to tap into opportunities to enhance public safety by tracking suspicious behaviour and abandoned objects; improve traffic flow and crowd management; help detect traffic violations through number plate recognition and also identify littering patterns for better waste management.” The scope of application of Graymatics’ video analytics can also be extended to digital kiosks and signages at public spaces which can help city administrators and commercial establishments in better monetization. In the post-pandemic world, the use of facial recognition and video tools could be extended to tracking adherence to social distancing, use of masks etc. Abhijit Shanbhag, President and CEO,

Graymatics said, “Today, video analytics is one of the fastest-growing industries and Graymatics is a frontrunner of innovation in this space. The utility for video analytics goes beyond security and can easily transcend into a powerful tool that can help us run our lives and cities more efficiently.” Speaking about the opportunities that lie ahead, Abhijit said, “Graymatics is excited to journey with Quantela as we create synergies between our offerings, creating definitive industry-leading solutions for the smart cities space and beyond.”

In India, Quantela partnered with the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA) to set up the first-of-its-kind India Urban observatory in March 2019 to leverage data analytics for optimizing city operations, improving governance and enhancing the economic performance of cities across the country. Since the pandemic outbreak, it has repurposed its smart city platform to launch CoVER (COVID Emergency Response platform) which is continuing to help governments, public health officials and city administrators to devise mitigation policies and predict hospital infrastructure requirements. Backed by Digital Alpha, an investment firm focused on digital infrastructure and services required by the digital economy with an equity investment of US\$ 10 million in 2018, Quantela was recently accorded ‘Minicorn’ status by data intelligence firm Tracxn and considered among the top emerging global companies in the smart cities space for 2020.

From <http://egov.eletsonline.com> 04/01/2021

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Linksys & Fortinet Announce Strategic Alliance to Deliver Enterprise-Grade Performance & Security for Work from Home Networks

Linksys, a global leader in wireless networking products, a subsidiary of Foxconn Interconnect Technology (6088.HK) (“FIT”) and Fortinet (NASDAQ: FTNT), a global leader in broad, integrated and automated cybersecurity solutions, today announced a strategic alliance with the intent to further secure and optimize the performance and management of home networks in today’s work from home environment. Together, Fortinet, Linksys, and FIT will offer enterprise-grade connectivity and security and unparalleled quality of service to organizations that need to provide seamless and secure connectivity for their employees to efficiently work from home. As part of the alliance, Fortinet has made a strategic investment of \$75M in Linksys, which provides leading and next-generation router connectivity solutions to consumers and businesses worldwide. In addition, Fortinet will appoint a representative to the Linksys Board of Directors. Ken Xie, Founder, Chairman of the Board, and CEO at Fortinet, said, “When organizations implement telework at scale, cybercriminals leap at the opportunity to exploit the numerous security gaps that arise. Security-driven networking—a strategy that converges networking and security across the connected environment, from the core, into the cloud, and to the branch

and remote workers —enables organizations to see and defend today’s highly dynamic environments while preserving an excellent user experience. We are excited to partner with Linksys to deliver enterprise-grade secure, reliable network connectivity for home-based workers.” Sidney Lu, Chairman and CEO of FIT Hon Teng said, “We are pleased to welcome Fortinet as a strategic partner in providing secured connectivity for consumers and remote professionals. The collaboration is a testament to the ongoing strength and reach of the Linksys business. We look forward to leveraging Fortinet’s proven cybersecurity expertise to capitalize on new opportunities.”

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Punjab State Power Corporation’s Digital Collection Touches New Record of Rs 19,630 Crores

Punjab State Power Corporation Ltd (PSPCL) has collected around Rs19,630 crores digitally from 143 lakh digital transactions. Due to a number of easy-to-use digital platforms offered by PSPCL, more than 75% of the collection is now being received digitally, A Venu Prasad, CMD, PSPCL has said. “Citizen’s confidence in effective digital payments has evolved in such a way that from just around Rs 2000 crores from 43 lakh digital transactions during FY 2016-17, we have now received around Rs 19,630 crores from 143 lakh digital transactions in FY 2020-21, a whopping jump in digital collections. Such attainment is a matter of pride for the state when Punjab is usually considered a farming economy,” Venu Prasad informed. He added that PSPCL is on the toppers’ list in digital collection segment, which he asserted “speaks” volumes about the PSPCL’s commitment towards offering the “state-of-the-art” easy-to-use digital touchpoints to consumers of the state. Providing the details of E-payment history, Venu Prasad said that the digital payment facility was started in the year 2008 in Punjab for electricity bills. “During 2017, Punjab envisioned the digital evolution and started the facilities of electricity bill payments through enhanced, innovative, and citizen-friendly digital modes in a big way. PSPCL initiated cost-effective, convenient-to-use, and smooth digital bill payment platforms through Bharat Bill Pay (BBPS) like BHIM, SBI Pay, PNB, HDFC Payzapp, Paytm, PhonePe, Just Dial, Google Pay, Amazon, Umang, etc.” He also added, “PSPCL has offered all available digital modes of present-day like Net Banking, credit cards, debit cards, Rupay Card, UPI, mobile wallets, RTGS/NEFT, POS machines for the facilitation of power consumers of Punjab by providing round the clock seamless services.” To encourage more consumers to move to digital modes “happily” with the least financial costs, Venu Prasad informed that PSPCL has undertaken awareness campaigns about digital modes and offers. “Every stratum of citizens have shown remarkable enthusiasm and consumers are now free from long queues at cash counters. Citizens are saving huge direct and indirect costs, which were earlier being incurred in offline modes.”

SRI LANKA: Optimism Among Swedish Companies Doing Business with Sri Lanka

Growth over the past five years, negative development in 2020 and optimism for 2021. These are some of the key takeaways from the Sweden-Sri Lanka Business Council's membership survey for 2021. Among the members' most prioritized issues are simplified visa rules to Sri Lanka and to Sweden, increased attention for Sri Lanka from the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and continued stable cost development. – The survey confirms our assumption that Swedish companies operating in Sri Lanka or trade with the country have done well for several years. To realize the existing potential for continued development, the obstacles need to be cleared. It is our top priority for 2021 to support our members and to develop the relations even further between our two countries, says Jan Campbell, Chairman of SSLBC. The membership survey was conducted in February 2021. In total, it was answered by 50 percent of the members. Among the respondents are companies active in IT, manufacturing, trade, food sector and tourism. Seven out of ten have been operating in or with Sri Lanka for at least three years. Seven out of ten (71 percent) answer that their business in or with Sri Lanka has grown over the past five years. The pandemic has affected the members but in different ways. Seven out of ten (69 per cent) answer that 2020 has meant a negative development, while two out of ten (19 per cent) answer that it has been positive. At the same time, optimism is felt among the members ahead of 2021. Seven out of ten (69 percent) estimate that operations in or with Sri Lanka will develop positively or remain unchanged. Members were also asked to describe what their top priority issues for operations in or with Sri Lanka are in 2021. The answers have been grouped by main areas: Simplified visa and quarantine rules – Several describe a need for simplified visa rules, both to Sri Lanka and to Sweden for their Sri Lankan business partners. When the survey was carried out, the quarantine rules still constituted a major obstacle to business visits.

Continued attractive cost level – Several members emphasize the importance of Sri Lanka's competitive cost level. In addition, the importance of economic stability is mentioned. Good flight connections and logistics – The importance of good flight connections and functioning logistics as the country opens up is also highlighted. Access to qualified staff – Another area emphasized by the members as a priority for 2021 is access to Sri Lanka's qualified staff. The long-awaited return of tourists – Even though most members are not active in the hospitality industry, the return of tourists is still mentioned as important by many. Strengthened Swedish representation in Colombo is requested – An important ingredient in taking advantage of the existing potentials, the members also believe is that the Swedish

embassy in Colombo should be reopened. The embassy was closed in 2009 and Sri Lanka is since monitored by the Swedish embassy in New Dehli with the support of the Honorary Consul General, Otara Gunawardane in Colombo. Sweden-Sri Lanka Business Council (www.sslbc.se) was founded in 2006 and has about 60 members. The members are active in IT, manufacturing, consumer goods and food as well as tourism. In total, members create 3,100 jobs in Sri Lanka, directly and indirectly. SSLBC's purpose is to promote trade, friendship, goodwill and understanding between Sweden and Sri Lanka through personal networks and contacts SSLBC strives to facilitate relations between relevant trade organizations, business intermediaries and companies in both countries to stimulate business and trade between Sweden and Sri Lanka.

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Central-West Asia

AZERBAIJAN: State Committee on Property Issues Holds New Auction on Privatization

The State Committee on Property Issues under the Azerbaijani Ministry of Economy held a new auction on April 13, 2021, Trend reports referring to a source in the committee. According to the source, 8 public property facilities, including 1 small enterprise (located in Shamkir district) and 7 vehicles have been privatized. The source said that interested participants can visit the website for the provision of property services of the State Committee on Property Issues on the day of the auction, as well as observe it without registration online. All those wishing to partake in the auction on the official website of the committee (emlak.gov.az) or on the privatization.az portal must, after registering, pay a deposit of 10 percent of the initial auction price of the object, thereby obtaining the status of the customer. On the day of the auction, bidding can be joined by selecting the section 'Electronic auction' on the e-services portal (e-emdk.gov.az).

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Azerbaijan Improving Access of Entrepreneurs to Insurance Services

The management of the Azerbaijan Insurers Association (AIA) and the Entrepreneurship Development Fund held a meeting, Trend reports referring to a source in AIA. According to the source, the sides discussed current situation and real prospects in the sphere of providing entrepreneurs with access to insurance services. The source also noted that the AIA Executive Director Elmar Mirsalayev spoke about

the types of insurance services provided to entrepreneurs. According to Mirsalayev, ensuring access of business entities to insurance services and raising awareness of entrepreneurs about insurance is the main priority of the association and the local insurance market. In turn, Board Chairman of the Entrepreneurship Development Fund Kanan Najafov stressed that the insurance system is the most successful mechanism for protecting the business environment. Regarding the insurance services most relevant to business, Najafov pointed out that the entrepreneurs working in the agricultural sector and carrying out export operations are interested in profitable insurance products. Another topic of discussion was business loan insurance for entrepreneurs. Following the meeting, the parties agreed to stimulate entrepreneurs' access to insurance services, identify new and more suitable products for them, as well as prepare and sign a memorandum of cooperation.

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Economy Minister Reveals Total Investments in Industrialization in Azerbaijan

Over 73 million manat has been invested in operating industrial quarters in Azerbaijan up till now, the country's Ministry of Economy Mikayil Jabbarov said, Trend reports citing the Ministry of Economy. At the same time, 286 jobs have been created in industrial enterprises. According to Jabbarov, residents of these enterprises have sold products worth over 96 million manat (\$56.4 million). The minister noted that industrialization in Azerbaijan already covers not only large cities but also districts. Earlier, Jabbarov stated that Azerbaijan's task is to double GDP by 2030 in accordance with the new 10-year development plan, which requires an average annual economic growth rate of 7 percent.

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UZBEKISTAN: Largest and Oldest Bank to Go Private by 2023

Uzbekistan's largest and one of the oldest state-owned banks, Uzpromstroybank (UzPSB) is set to go private by 2023. According to a government resolution adopted on March 29, the International Finance Corporation (IFC) is to open a \$75mn credit line for this purpose. All or part of the loan is to be converted into additional ordinary shares. The Finance Ministry and UzPSB are to draw up a roadmap for the privatization within the next two months. As part of the privatisation process, the bank's supervisory board is to be updated, comprising five new independent members with international banking practice. From now on, UzPSB is banned from channelling its funds into authorized capital of commercial organizations in areas that are not related to banking activities. The resolution recommended the bank to

accelerate the implementation of the tasks assigned to the motivation mechanism for employees of the head office and the branch network, including the implementation of key performance indicators (KPI); to sell non-bank assets acquired as a result of the bank's investment activities; to take effective measures to reduce the share of foreign currency loans.

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Uzbekistan Picks Consultants for 18 Privatisation Deals

The Uzbek government has picked Deloitte, Grant Thornton and KPMG to advise it on the sale of 18 state-owned enterprises, UzAssets, an investment company established under the State Assets Management Agency, said on April 6. The three consultancies "will support UzAssets by providing financial, tax and legal due diligence, valuation services and identifying and negotiating with potential buyers", it said in a statement. Among the assets to be sold off are majority stakes in Kafolat, one of the Central Asian nation's largest insurance companies, Quartz, the country's largest glass producer, and Trest-12, a leading construction company. Also on the privatisation list are oil and gas equipment maker Kokand Mechanical Plant, Uzbek Chemical Plant, Ferghana Oil Refinery, Jizzakh Plastics, an electric construction company, as well as 10 wine and spirits producers.

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Oceania

AUSTRALIA: Beer Tax Cut Push to Cure COVID Hangover

Australian brewers want the federal government to slash the beer tax for pubs and clubs to help lift the hospitality sector out of its COVID-19 hangover. In a submission for next month's federal budget, the Brewers Association of Australia pleads its case for a 50 per cent reduction in the excise rate on draught beer. The peak industry body says small to medium pubs that buy about 15 kegs a week would save \$465 a week in beer tax under the proposal, allowing businesses to pour more money into promotions or pay down debt. John Preston, chief executive of the group that represents major Australian brewers Carlton & United Breweries, and Lion and Coopers, argues a significant cut would help venues cope with future lockdowns and ongoing capacity limits. "A 50 per cent reduction in the excise rate on draught beer would deliver a massive boost to hospitality business owners at a relatively small cost to the government," he said on Wednesday.

"Beer anchors pubs and clubs, and these businesses need a break." Under its

modelling, the Brewers Association says a 50 per cent reduction would cost the federal treasury \$150 million from its annual beer tax revenue of \$2.5 billion. "Beer tax in Australia is the fourth-highest in the developed world," Mr Preston said. "Given more than 85 per cent of beer consumed in Australia is made in Australia reducing beer tax should also be a priority to support the 100,000 jobs that rely on brewing and the hundreds of millions of dollars of produce we source from Australian farmers." If a cut to the excise won't be granted, the lobby group wants the government to consider freezing the rate or stopping current automatic, six-monthly increases. New industry sales data shows there was a 30 per cent fall in draught beer sales in 2020 compared to the previous year, representing more than \$1 billion in lost revenue for pubs and clubs.

"These figures clearly demonstrate the impact of lockdowns across Australia on pubs, clubs and the brewing industry with staggering falls in sales volumes through pubs and clubs of 94 per cent and 96 per cent for April 2020 and May 2020," the group said. It also noted the brewing industry and hospitality sector carried the cost of tipping out 373,500 kegs - equivalent to about 44 million schooners - as venues were forced to close. AAP has approached Treasurer Josh Frydenberg for comment on the pre-budget submission.

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Disability Sector Wants Jab Rollout Plan

Disability advocates are urging the government to fix Australia's vaccination rollout, with the majority of the sector still waiting for their first coronavirus jab. Disability accommodation providers and residents were supposed to be included in the first phase of the national rollout, which targets the country's most vulnerable residents. National Disability Services chief David Moody says the sector is keenly awaiting the result of Monday's national cabinet meeting in the hopes a tangible plan is developed to get the rollout back on track. He understands that it is a huge logistical exercise. "That said, we are frustrated, very frustrated, and concerned about the lack of vaccine going into people's arms which should have been under phase 1a," Mr Moody told AAP. "The reason why the disability sector was identified for priority access for the vaccine is because we know, based upon research, that people with disability often suffer much harsher impacts as a result of getting COVID-19."

Mr Moody wants to know how and when people in disability accommodation will receive vaccinations. Prime Minister Scott Morrison will meet his state and territory counterparts on Monday as they grapple with updated health advice that has put them back to the drawing board for the vaccine rollout. The leaders will meet twice weekly until it is on track. Most Australians were supposed to receive the AstraZeneca vaccine but that has been linked to rare blood clots so people under the

age of 50 have been told to get the Pfizer option instead. The Commonwealth has primary responsibility for vaccinating disability care residents and has contracted private companies to deliver the jabs.

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Aust Roadmap for Edible Insect Industry

Australia could play a significant part in an emerging and lucrative global culinary trend - the billion-dollar edible insect industry. The CSIRO has produced a roadmap for Australia to produce nutritious, sustainable and ethical edible insects. Launched on Thursday, "Edible insects: A roadmap for the strategic growth of an emerging Australian industry", lays out a plan for the edible insect industry. Co-funded by CSIRO and the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, it provides a framework for First Nations initiatives, start-ups, insect businesses, researchers, policymakers and community members interested in the industry. CSIRO researcher and report co-author Rocio Ponce Reyes says edible insects are high in protein, vitamins and other macronutrients, and the global industry is growing fast. The worldwide edible insect market was expected to reach \$1.4 billion in value by 2023.

Europe and the US lead the Western market with more than 400 edible-insect-related businesses. "Insects have high-value nutritional profiles, and are rich in protein, omega-3 fatty acids, iron, zinc, folic acid and vitamins B12, C and E," Dr Reyes said. "They are a healthy, environmentally friendly, and a rich source of alternative proteins." More than 2100 insect species are eaten by two billion people in 130 countries, including 60 native insect species traditionally consumed by Indigenous Australians. Australian species include witjuti (also known as witchetty) grubs, bogong moths, honeypot ants and green tree ants. CSIRO entomologist and report co-author Bryan Lessard said the report drew on the expertise of Australian and international scientists, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, insect farmers, food processing industry leaders and chefs.

Commercial insect farming had a low environmental footprint, requiring minimal feed, water, energy and land resources, he said. CSIRO's future protein lead professor Michelle Colgrave said the aim was focused on helping Australia capture high-growth global protein markets to grow Australia's protein industry by \$10 billion over five years, in line with the Australian government's goal to lift farmgate output to \$100 billion by 2030. "With the global population set to reach 9.7 billion by 2050, we will need to meet this demand for sustainable protein production by exploring diversified sources," Professor Colgrave said. "Alternative protein industries can play an important role in Australia, contributing to regional and national prosperity."

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NEW ZEALAND: Awards Celebrate the Food and Fibre Sector Employer Excellence

Exceptional employment practices in the primary industries have been celebrated at the Good Employer Awards, held this evening at Parliament. “Tonight’s awards provided the opportunity to celebrate and thank those employers in the food and fibres sector who have gone beyond business-as-usual in creating productive, safe, supportive, and healthy work environments for their people,” Agriculture Minister Damien O’Connor said. The awards, which are sponsored by the Ministry for Primary Industries and the Agricultural and Marketing Research and Development Trust (AGMARDT), featured finalists from a diverse range of enterprises including Māori agribusiness, forestry, and veterinary services. Damien O’Connor said about 350,000 people were working in the food and fibres sectors and this was expected to grow over the coming years.

“Our Fit for a Better World – Accelerating our Economic Potential Roadmap sets goals of employing 10 per cent more Kiwis from all walks of life in the food and fibres sector by 2030, and 10,000 more New Zealanders in the workforce over the next four years. Having the right environment to nurture and develop people in our primary sectors is critical to New Zealand’s future. “The past 12 or so months have been tough. I have been particularly impressed with how many of finalists have said they used Covid-19 to look at how they were working and make changes that benefited them and their employees.” “Our farming, forestry, and horticulture sectors supported New Zealand through Covid-19 and are now leading the way in our economic recovery.” Damien O’Connor said initiatives like the Opportunity Grows Here campaign show there are no shortages of work in these important sectors.

“There are plenty of opportunities to build life-long and very rewarding careers in the engine room of our economy. “It’s clear that everyone who has entered the Good Employer Awards is leading the way in best practice. When we do this collectively, we show our urban cousins that rural communities are vibrant and inclusive places to work, live, and grow in. “Finally, I want to thank everyone who entered the Good Employer Awards, for their commitment to safe work practices and their people. They should all be proud of their achievements,” Damien O’Connor said.

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