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Asia-Pacific Governance Watch

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S. Korea Expands Open Banking Ecosystem, Invites Fintech Firms

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1、 Government Policy and Legislation

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Better Measures of Well-Being Needed for Effective Child Policies

Enhancing child well-being benefits society as a whole and is key to fostering prosperity. However, improving policies to help children thrive will require better data on their needs and lived experiences, according to a new OECD report. Measuring What Matters for Child Well-being and Policies develops a new child well-being measurement framework, identifies key gaps in child data, and outlines how they can be filled. Based on a review of research evidence on child well-being and how it relates to later life outcomes, the framework follows a number of principles; that well-being is multidimensional, is tightly embedded in a child's environment, and that

fundamental aspects change according to age. Well-being measures must also take into account children's views and perspectives. A multidimensional approach is central because difficulties or strengths in different areas interact. The report cites, for example, how emotional regulation in early childhood has a positive impact on learning and on the quality of friendships and social skills, as children grow older.

The framework treats the different dimensions of child well-being – material, social, emotional, cultural and educational well-being, as well as physical health and cognitive development – as interconnected. It also aims to capture the distribution of well-being through measures that reflect lack of opportunities and disparities across different groups of children, for instance by sex, by living arrangement, and by migrant background.

The report identifies a number of key priorities for measuring child well-being, including:

Do children have the things they need?

Are children active and physically healthy?

Do children feel safe and secure, respected, included and happy?

Are children learning and achieving in education?

The report says that although comparable international data has improved, it remains limited in scope. Some children, often the most vulnerable, are frequently missing or not easily identifiable in existing data, while information is limited on the well-being of the very young and on children's own views on important aspects of their lives. Co-ordinated action from governments, international organisations, and the wider community to improve the availability of cross-national child data, is needed. This is a sizable task, it says. It will require both significant investment and a medium- to long-term commitment. The report has been prepared by the new OECD Centre on Well-being, Inclusion, Sustainability and Equal Opportunity (WISE). The Centre is generating new data and solutions to improve people's well-being and reduce inequalities, and to understand better the impact of policies and business actions on people's lives. For more information about the report or about the OECD's work on well-being, journalists are invited to contact Martine Zaïda or the OECD Media Office (tel: +33 14524 9700). Working with over 100 countries, the OECD is a global policy forum that promotes policies to preserve individual liberty and improve the economic and social well-being of people around the world.

From <https://www.oecd.org/> 07/01/2021

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ADB Launches Transport Strategy for Pacific

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has launched a new strategy to help ADB's Pacific developing member countries (DMCs) improve connectivity and tackle other core development challenges across the Pacific over the next 5 years. The Transport

Sector Assessment, Strategy, and Road Map 2021–2025 reviews transport sector performance, summarizes development constraints, and articulates the rationale and strategic direction behind ADB's support. The report explains how ADB will support its Pacific DMCs to achieve domestic and regional transport objectives that enable men and women in both remote areas and urban centers to better access employment, markets, education, and health services. "Whether it's upgrades to roads, ports, or airports, transport is one of the ways ADB can have the biggest impact in the Pacific," said Director of ADB Pacific Department's Transport and Communications Division Dong Kyu Lee. "Through this new road map, ADB will leverage its extensive experience in the transport sector and its strong partnerships in the region to provide transport support that improves connectivity, makes cities more livable, builds resilience to climate change, and spurs inclusive economic growth through regional cooperation.

The report notes ADB's 14 Pacific DMCs are scattered across 30 million square kilometers of ocean, with a total population of 10 million people. The combination of remote geography and dispersed populations present unique challenges to establishing transport networks that lower the costs of trade, address climate risks, and deepen interaction in global markets. The report says that in 2019 ADB had 17 transport projects valued at more than \$1.4 billion underway in the Pacific, comprising 59% of its work in the region. Another 27 transport projects valued at \$2.3 billion are planned for 2020–2023. Ongoing ADB-supported projects include the \$65 million upgrade of Nauru's port in Aiwo to strengthen resilience to climate change and increase efficiency and capacity. Port upgrades are also planned for Apia in Samoa, Honiara in Solomon Islands, and Nuku'alofa in Tonga. In Papua New Guinea, since 2010 ADB has been helping upgrade and rehabilitate national airports under the \$480 million Civil Aviation Development Investment Program to deliver safe, effective, and reliable aviation services. A related program will link airports with all-weather airstrips and develop aviation sector institutional capacity.

The report highlights how ADB works with governments and regional bodies to identify and address shared challenges in the Pacific, including strengthening the resilience of transport systems to climate change and disasters; the development of intermodal transport links to boost tourism; connecting remote populations through roads, wharves, and airstrips, and commercially viable transport services; incorporating the private sector in transport service delivery; and designing socially inclusive and gender-responsive transport infrastructure. The Transport Sector Assessment, Strategy, and Road Map is linked to and informs ADB's strategy document for Pacific small island developing states, the Pacific Approach, and aligned with ADB's Strategy 2030.

From <https://www.adb.org/> 07/13/2021

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CHINA: Issuing Guideline on Ideological, Political Work

As the Communist Party of China (CPC) celebrated its centenary, China has released a guideline to strengthen and improve its ideological and political work. The document, issued by the CPC Central Committee and the State Council, stressed the importance of ideological and political work. It said it has a significant bearing on the Party's future, the country's long-term law and order, and the unity and cohesion of the Chinese nation. Ideological work should be regarded as an important tool to govern both the Party and the country, the guideline said. Efforts should be exerted to deepen ideological and political work, improve it at the grassroots level, and maintain its correct political direction while encouraging innovation, said the guideline. A holistic mechanism should be built to pool all parties in a joint effort to push forward the work, it added. Ideological and political work is the CPC's fine tradition, one of the outstanding strengths that the Party enjoys, and the lifeline for all work, the guideline said.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 07/12/2021

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China to Maintain Stability of Monetary Policy: PBOC

China will stick to a normal monetary policy while keeping it stable and independent, a central bank official said Tuesday. The policy aims to improve support for the real economy and create a suitable monetary and financial environment for the country's high-quality development, Sun Guofeng told a press conference. Sun is head of the monetary policy department of the People's Bank of China (PBOC). The central bank will ensure that the growth of money supply and social financing matches nominal economic growth, supports the green development and technological innovation of small and medium-sized enterprises, and keeps social comprehensive financing costs stable with slight declines, Sun said. China's new yuan-denominated loans totaled 12.76 trillion yuan (about 1.97 trillion U.S. dollars) in the first half of this year, up by 667.7 billion yuan from the same period last year, central bank data showed Friday.

The shift of the U.S. Federal Reserve's monetary policy has little impact on China's monetary policy and financial market, considering its declining interest rate of 10-year treasury bonds, the two-way fluctuations of the yuan exchange rate, the stable operation of the financial market, and the steady and positive trend of China's economy, Sun said. The PBOC said Friday that the country would cut the reserve requirement ratio (RRR) by 50 basis points for eligible financial institutions from July 15 to support the real economy. The RRR cut is a regular operation after the country's monetary policy returned to pre-epidemic status. The direction of the prudent monetary policy has not changed, Sun added.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 07/13/2021

Chinese Premier Stresses Range-based Macroeconomic Regulation, Employment

Chinese Premier Li Keqiang has called for efforts to improve the country's range-based regulation of macroeconomic policies, prioritize employment and stimulate the vitality of market entities to sustain the long-term upward momentum of the economy. Li, also a member of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee, made the remarks on Monday while presiding over a symposium attended by experts and entrepreneurs. Vice Premier Han Zheng, also a member of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee, attended the meeting. Since the beginning of this year, China's economic performance has been within expectations and the driving force of economic growth has been further consolidated, Li said. However, he said, the domestic and external environments remain complex with uncertain factors.

In particular, medium and small firms are facing difficulties due to higher costs caused by the rising prices of bulk commodities. Efforts should be made to keep economic operations within a reasonable range over the second half of this year as well as next year, he added. Li underlined maintaining the continuity and stability of macro policies and sticking to the jobs-first policy. The recent measure of cutting the reserve requirement ratio should be leveraged to beef up support for medium, small and micro firms, as well as labor-intensive sectors, according to the premier. Efforts should also be made to increase job opportunities for college graduates and migrant workers, he said. Li also stressed stimulating the vitality of market entities, expanding higher-level opening-up and boosting the development of the foreign-trade sector.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 07/13/2021

China Issues White Paper on Protecting Rights of Xinjiang's Ethnic Groups

China's State Council Information Office Wednesday issued a white paper detailing the country's progress in protecting the rights of all ethnic groups in Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region. The white paper, titled "Respecting and Protecting the Rights of All Ethnic Groups in Xinjiang," said the Communist Party of China and the Chinese government have upheld a people-centered approach to human rights protection and Xinjiang has made steady progress in this regard over the past 70-plus years. "China has given priority to securing and improving people's wellbeing, advanced various undertakings in Xinjiang, and shared the fruits of reform and development with people of all ethnic groups, so as to guarantee their equal rights to participation and development," said the document. It noted that the Chinese government makes full use of its institutional strengths, pools the efforts of all sectors of society, and

promotes the rapid development of all undertakings in Xinjiang. "The ethnic groups in Xinjiang unite and work together to achieve common development and prosperity. The political, economic, social, cultural, and many other rights of the people of every ethnic group are effectively guaranteed," said the document.

In addition to a preface and a conclusion, the white paper consists of seven sections - "Civil Rights," "Political Rights," "Economic Rights," "Cultural Rights," "Social Rights," "Rights of Women and Children," and "Freedom of Religious Belief." While hailing the progress in human rights protection in Xinjiang, the white paper also slammed some foreign media and politicians for spreading rumors, distortions, and complete fabrications about Xinjiang. "This is a calculated campaign to undermine the Chinese government's enormous efforts to protect ethnic equality, and misrepresent the historic progress that has been made on human rights in the region," said the document. "Their goals are to discredit China, interfere in China's internal affairs, restrict China's development, and destroy stability and prosperity in Xinjiang," it said, adding that such a smear campaign has aroused indignation among the Chinese people and is condemned by the international community. As Xinjiang has achieved moderate prosperity in all respects together with the rest of the country and embarked on a new journey of building China into a modern socialist country, all the people of Xinjiang will enjoy a happier and more prosperous life, said the document.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 07/14/2021

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China to Improve Rural Delivery Logistics to Unleash Consumption Potential of Rural Areas

China will improve the delivery logistics system in the rural areas to further facilitate the flow of agricultural produce to urban households and consumer goods to rural areas, as part of the effort to advance rural vitalization, increase farmers' income and unlock rural consumer demand, the State Council's executive meeting chaired by Premier Li Keqiang decided on Wednesday. "Expanding the logistics services, especially express delivery, to rural areas is an apparent trend. This will both boost rural consumption and sales of agricultural produce," Li said. Integrated development of e-commerce and delivery logistics in rural areas will be advanced. The Internet Plus approach will be employed to better align urban markets and logistics firms with farm households and farmer cooperatives. Specialized agricultural product delivery services and cold-chain storage and processing facilities will be developed.

All this will help boost the sales of agricultural produce and in particular support the development of distinct local business sectors in the rural areas that have just been lifted out of poverty. The efforts to cover all administrative villages with delivery services will be advanced based on local conditions. Faster progress will be made to shore up the infrastructural weak links of rural delivery logistics. In rural areas in east

and central China, the role of market forces will be better leveraged and enterprises will be guided in setting up outlets in villages, to provide better delivery services in rural areas. In rural areas in west China, postal service providers need to fully play their basic role in the last-mile delivery and cooperate more closely with sectors such as express delivery and supply and marketing, to extend delivery services to more villages.

"While adhering to market-oriented methods and competitive development, we should also place greater emphasis on the provision of public services. Support will be provided to improve relevant infrastructure in rural areas." Li said, "The reform of government functions must be steadily advanced to ensure fair competition." The reform of government functions in the delivery sector will be deepened. Unwarranted and unnecessary restrictions will be removed. The development of last-mile delivery services in rural areas will be encouraged. Existing facilities in the villages will be utilized when developing integrated delivery logistics service stations at village level, to effectively lower the costs of last-mile delivery service in rural areas. Oversight on delivery logistics services will be strengthened, to promote fair competition and protect people's lawful rights and interests.

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China Issues Guideline on High-level Reform, Opening-up of Shanghai's Pudong

China on Thursday issued a guideline to support high-level reform and opening-up of the Pudong New Area in Shanghai. The guideline was jointly released by the Communist Party of China Central Committee and the State Council, and listed measures to build Pudong into a pioneer area for socialist modernization. By 2035, Pudong will see its modernized economy comprehensively established, modern urban districts built, and modernized governance fully realized. Its urban development level and international competitiveness will be at the forefront globally, said the guideline. By 2050, Pudong is expected to become an important urban area which is highly attractive, creative, competitive and influential globally, a global model of urban governance and a "shining pearl" of a great modern socialist country, it said.

China will promote high-level reform and opening-up in Pudong to provide an important channel for making better use of domestic and international markets and resources, according to the guideline. Pudong is positioned as a central node of the domestic circulation and a strategic link of China's new development paradigm of "dual circulation," and is expected to play a better role in leading and stimulating the integrated development of the Yangtze River Delta. The area will be a pioneer in promoting higher-level reform and opening-up. It will expand openness from the factor level to the system level and take the lead in establishing a new system for an open economy that is compatible with prevailing international rules. The country will

build economic zones with special functions in Pudong and intensify risk tests on the open economy, said the guideline.

A core area for international technological innovation will also be built in Pudong to increase the capabilities regarding independent innovation, strengthen the leading role of high-end industries, and upgrade national industrial chains. China will build international financial, trade and shipping centers in Shanghai through the active allocation of global capital, information, technology and human resources to shore up support for the real economy, and take the lead in setting up a system of high-standard international economic and trade regulations. The guideline plans to support Pudong in leading the domestic consumption upgrade and the trend of consumption and constructing an international consumption center. It also aims at making the area a model of modern urban governance with a more scientific, refined and intelligent administration.

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Revised Administrative Penalty Law to Heighten Enforcement, Advance Justice

China's revised administrative penalty law is expected to heighten enforcement in key fields and advance justice as it goes into effect on Thursday. The revised law improves the definition of administrative penalty, further specifies the types of penalties and the provision on confiscation of illegal gains, and extends the time limit on accountability for law violations in key fields. The law underscores the principle of combining penalty with education and improves the rules for the application of administrative penalties. The law is expected to increase transparency and credibility of enforcement as it adds new provisions on the release of administrative law enforcement information, a full record of enforcement, and examination of major enforcement decisions.

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China's Top Legislator Urges Full, Effective Enforcement of Rural Vitalization Promotion Law

Top Chinese legislator Li Zhanshu has underlined the importance of fully and effectively implementing the law on the promotion of rural vitalization to drive the comprehensive development of the country's agriculture, rural areas and farmers. Li, a member of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and chairman of the National People's Congress Standing Committee, made the remarks during an inspection tour in southwest China's Guizhou Province from Monday to Friday. Noting that China has realized its

first centenary goal of building a moderately prosperous society in all respects, Li said it will take continuous efforts to consolidate and expand poverty alleviation achievements and promote rural vitalization, to ensure farmers enjoy happier and more prosperous lives. While presiding over a symposium on the implementation of the rural vitalization promotion law, Li put forward a series of measures, including developing industries in accordance with local conditions, ensuring the supply of agricultural products, and improving productivity by promoting mechanization, information technologies and smart technologies. Guizhou's development in recent years epitomizes the progress of the Party and the country, said Li, calling for persistent efforts to bring about a new outlook in Guizhou featuring prosperous lives for its people and a beautiful ecological environment.

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China Issues Guideline to Vitalize Market, Improve Business Environment

China has released a guideline to energize market entities and improve the business environment with streamlined administrative procedures and better services. Focusing on the demand from market entities, related authorities should help fiscal and monetary policies better benefit those in need, and improve public services with infrastructure development, said the guideline released by the General Office of the State Council. To create a market-oriented business environment, efforts should be made to streamline administrative approval procedures, formulate a new negative list for market entry, and tighten regulation over monopoly conduct and unfair market competition, it said. On improvements of a law-based business environment, the guideline urged protection of all types of property rights and a stricter crackdown on infringement of intellectual property rights. Efforts should also go into creating an internationalized business environment, the guideline added, calling for higher standards for trade and investment liberalization and facilitation. It also called for a shortened negative list for foreign investment, and more convenience for high-level international talent dedicated to entrepreneurship and innovation.

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China to Deepen Financial Opening-up, Strengthen Financial Services for Real Economy

Chinese Premier Li Keqiang on Wednesday heard a report on advancing financial opening-up at a State Council executive meeting, where he also chaired discussions on work related to greater financial openness and stronger financial services in boosting the real economy. The meeting noted the steady opening-up of China's financial sector in recent years, during which more than 100 foreign-invested banks

and insurance, securities, payment and clearing institutions have been approved and set up. "We've achieved notable progress in opening up the financial sector in recent years. Yet there are also many challenges," Li said, "We need to continue advancing opening-up in an orderly way, and fully leverage both the domestic and international markets and resources, so that China remains a popular destination for foreign investment." The commitments made on financial openness will be effectively implemented. Proactive efforts will be made toward a higher level of financial openness based on a negative list approach, by aligning with international standards. The market access threshold of foreign-invested financial institutions such as banks and insurance companies will be refined, and rules concerning cross-border transactions between parent and subsidiary firms of financial institutions will be improved.

Channels and methods for foreign capital to participate in the domestic financial market will be optimized. Management requirements of direct investment projects that are closely related to the real economy will be improved. Efforts will be made to keep the RMB exchange rate basically stable and at an adaptive and balanced level. "As a developing country, China's development must rely on the real economy. Greater financial openness should better serve the real economy, which is of great importance to maintaining the country's economic stability," Li said. The macroprudential policy framework will be improved, and mechanisms for the monitoring, evaluation and early warning of systemic financial risks will be put in place, to maintain smooth operation of the financial market. "We must fully deliver on the commitments we have made by advancing the opening-up in the banking and insurance sectors in an orderly way," Li said, "We need to take a holistic approach in handling the relationship between financial openness and financial security, to better safeguard China's economic and financial security." The meeting also decided on measures to further facilitate cross-border trade and foster a more enabling business environment at ports, to sustain steady growth of foreign trade.

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Proactive Fiscal Policy Underpins Economic Recovery

Easing burdens on businesses through extensive tax and fee cuts while enhancing spending on key sectors, China's proactive fiscal policy has underpinned the ongoing economic recovery and will continue to play its role in reinforcing the balancing progress, analysts noted. China's fiscal revenue saw a year-on-year increase of 21.8 percent to exceed 11.7 trillion yuan (about 1.8 trillion U.S. dollars) in the first half (H1) of 2021, showed data released Tuesday. The relatively high growth was mainly driven by a low comparison base last year and rising domestic producer prices, which indicated China's firming economic recovery, according to finance ministry official Liu Jinyun. Compared with the corresponding pre-pandemic level in 2019, the revenue rose 8.6 percent. Given the impact of the pandemic and still uneven

domestic economic recovery, national revenue growth is likely to slow in the latter half of the year, Liu said. Liu, however, noted that this year's budget revenue target can still be achieved due to strong H1 growth.

EXTENSIVE TAX, FEE CUTS

A breakdown of the data showed tax revenue in H1 went up 22.5 percent year on year to 10.05 trillion yuan, while non-tax revenue grew 17.4 percent. In recent years, China has kept mobilizing financial resources to implement large-scale tax and fee reductions, combining institutional arrangements with phased policies and temporary measures to reduce government-imposed transaction costs and cut labor costs for firms. During the 13th Five-Year Plan period, China's cumulative tax cuts and fees exceeded 7.6 trillion yuan, and authorities are determined to push ahead with the campaign to render more targeted and effective support to market entities. The country will continue to implement systematic tax cut policies, extend the duration of several temporary policies such as value-added tax relief for small-scale taxpayers, and adopt new policies on structural tax reductions to offset the impact of some policy adjustments, according to this year's government work report.

DIRECT FUND TRANSFER

As a creative step in fiscal policy to support tax and fee cuts, China has started to implement the direct allocation of fiscal funds on a regular basis to amplify the role of public money in benefiting targeted areas. Last year, the central government directly earmarked 1.7 trillion yuan of much-needed fiscal funds to the prefecture and county-level governments to support their tax and fee cuts, which had helped to keep the economic fundamentals stable. As required by the government work report, the direct allocation mechanism will become a regular practice this year, with a total amount of funds under the mechanism reaching 2.8 trillion yuan. By the end of June, the central government had directly transferred a total of 2.59 trillion yuan to local governments, of which more than 2.5 trillion yuan was allocated to the fund users, according to the finance ministry. In H1, China's fiscal expenditure went up 4.5 percent year on year to 12.17 trillion yuan. "Spending will gain steam in the latter half of the year," said Liu Yuanchun, vice president of the Renmin University of China. Powered by the proactive fiscal policy and prudent monetary policy, China's economy expanded 12.7 percent year on year in the first half of 2021 as recovery continues to consolidate.

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China Issues Guideline on High-quality Development of Central Region

China has issued a guideline on promoting the high-quality development of the country's central region in the new era. The guideline, jointly released on Thursday by the Communist Party of China Central Committee and the State Council, details

measures to promote the region's economic growth, scientific and technological innovation, urbanization, green development, opening-up and people's well-being. China's central region includes the provinces of Shanxi, Anhui, Jiangxi, Henan, Hubei and Hunan. By 2025, the comprehensive strength and competitiveness of the region should be further enhanced, and marked progress should be achieved in innovation capacity, with its proportion of research and development input in the regional GDP reaching the national average, says the guideline. The region's urbanization rate should be increased by more than 1 percentage point annually, and the balanced development between urban and rural areas should be further strengthened, according to the document.

By 2035, the region should put in place a modern economic system, basically accomplish socialist modernization and make substantial headway in common prosperity, according to the document. Regarding promoting advanced manufacturing, the guideline urges the building of industrial bases focused on sectors including intelligent manufacturing, new materials, new-energy vehicles and electronic information. Efforts should also be made to facilitate the major technological transformation and upgrading of the manufacturing sector, attaching importance to fostering the intelligent, green, service-oriented development of traditional sectors such as the coal, construction and steel industries, according to the document. It also underscores accelerating the construction of national logistics hubs in Zhengzhou, Changsha, Taiyuan, Yichang and Ganzhou, and increasing the listed products of the Zhengzhou Commodity Exchange.

To promote integrated development, the central region should become integrated into major regional strategies, the guideline said, stressing support for Anhui Province to take an active part in the integrated development of the Yangtze River Delta region. Amid efforts on urban development, it urges the region to improve infrastructure and public services, build more sponge cities, and enhance the capacity of flood prevention and control. Efforts should also be made to advance agricultural and rural modernization, with major grain producers such as Henan being supported to build core areas for grain production. In terms of environmental protection and pollution control, the guideline says compensation mechanisms for ecological protection and damage should be implemented, while prominent environmental problems in the region should be addressed. With a focus on city clusters and metropolitan areas, the region should coordinate efforts to prevent and control air pollution, and promote air-pollution treatment in key industries, according to the document.

The region should make efforts to conduct the market-oriented trading of permits for pollution discharge, energy use, water use and carbon emissions. To achieve inland high-level opening-up, the country should speed up the development of transportation in the region, including building high-speed railways, promoting the construction of an international logistics center and international air-freight shipping

center, and improving the international air-traffic network, the guideline says. It also urges continued efforts to develop pilot free trade zones in the provinces of Anhui, Henan, Hubei and Hunan to a high standard, and optimize a business environment that is market-oriented, rule-based and internationalized. To enhance the region's ability to provide public services, authorities should carefully review the experience gained from COVID-19 control and strengthen the public health system, the guideline says.

The central region should accelerate the standardization of hospitals for infectious diseases and centers for disease control and prevention, and improve the ability of urban and rural communities to provide medical services. The supply of high-quality public goods, such as world-class universities and large-scale medical institutions, should be increased in the region, the guideline says, specifying that world-renowned universities will be encouraged to run schools in partnership with local institutions, while large-scale comprehensive medical institutions are welcome to set up subsidiaries in the region. The guideline also calls for the early implementation of policies to restore the economic and social order of Hubei Province, which was hit hard by the epidemic last year. In terms of fiscal and financial support, the central government will continue to increase transfer payments to the central region, and local governments can be allocated more bond issuance quotas on condition that risks are under control.

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China Issues Guidelines to Ease Burden of Young Students

Chinese authorities have introduced a set of guidelines to ease the burden of excessive homework and off-campus tutoring for students undergoing compulsory education. China's nine-year free compulsory education system covers primary school and junior middle school. Jointly issued by the General Office of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and the General Office of the State Council, the document specifies guiding principles and targets of the initiative. It details requirements in areas including reducing homework and improving quality of education and after-class services provided by schools. It also pledges to adopt a strict approval and supervision system for off-campus tutoring programs featuring curriculum subjects such as math and physics.

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China's Laws on Military Personnel, Facilities to Take Effect on Aug. 1

China's brand new law on the protection of the status, rights and interests of military personnel and the revised Law on Military Facilities Protection will take effect on Aug. 1, according to a press conference Wednesday. As a ground-breaking legal document, the law on the protection of the status, rights and interests of military personnel prescribes the status of military personnel through legislation for the first time, and ramps up targeted measures to protect military personnel's wellbeing, said Guo Linmao, an official with the Legislative Affairs Commission of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress (NPC). The newly-revised Law on Military Facilities Protection sets forth the principle of coordinating socio-economic development and military facilities protection, and defines the responsibility of local governments and relevant State Council bodies in protecting military facilities during socio-economic and land-use planning, said Tong Weidong, an official with the Legislative Affairs Commission of the NPC Standing Committee. Both laws were adopted on June 10 during the 29th session of the 13th NPC Standing Committee. Aug. 1 marks China's Army Day.

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JAPAN: Ups 2030 Renewables Goal in Draft Energy Policy

Japan aims to hike its 2030 renewable energy target as part of efforts to slash emissions, according to draft documents released Wednesday, but activists described the planned goal as "disappointing". The blueprint of the nation's energy policy sets a higher target of 36-38 percent of power supplies coming from renewable sources such as solar and wind by fiscal 2030 -- up from the current goal of 22-24 percent. Major firms including Sony, Panasonic and Nissan had in January called for the government to make the target twice as ambitious at 40-50 percent. The world's third-largest economy is still heavily reliant on fossil fuels, in part because many nuclear reactors remain offline after the Fukushima meltdown a decade ago. The documents released Wednesday by Japan's ministry of economy, trade and industry said the new target would make renewables the majority of the country's energy mix.

Greenpeace described the draft as "disappointing" and criticized Japan for "failing to commit to ending fossil fuel" despite setting a 2050 deadline for carbon-neutrality last year. "The revision of the Basic Energy Plan is a pivotal point to demonstrate Japan's political will to achieve net-zero by 2050," Hisayo Takada, program director at Greenpeace Japan, said in a statement. "However, the draft plan is disappointing as it is not anywhere near sufficient to meet the 1.5 degrees Celsius target," Takada added, referring to the goal for global warming in the 2015 Paris agreement. The draft policy left the ratio of nuclear energy unchanged at 20-22 percent. Thermal power supplies should account for 56 percent, down from the present target of 41 percent, it said. The government aims to hold further discussions and finalize the policy in October, according to public broadcaster NHK. In fiscal 2019, renewables accounted for 18 percent of Japan's energy mix, with fossil fuels accounting for 76

percent and nuclear power six percent.

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SOUTH KOREA: To Expand Investment in New Deal Initiative, Eyes More Job Creation

South Korea said Wednesday it plans to expand its investment in its signature New Deal policy projects in a bid to create more jobs and better prepare for the post-pandemic era. Under the "New Deal 2.0" initiative, the government will invest 220 trillion won (US\$191 billion) in pushing for digital and green energy projects and promoting inclusive economic growth by 2025, up from its earlier investment plan of 160 trillion won. It is an upgraded version of the New Deal 1.0 drive unveiled last year that centers on laying the groundwork for economic growth over the long haul amid the COVID-19 pandemic. The country said the key policy initiative, if implemented, will help create around 2.5 million jobs by 2025 from its earlier target of 1.9 million jobs. For the New Deal 2.0 drive, the government focused on policy measures to narrow a social divide caused by the pandemic and support young people's efforts to find jobs. The initiative consists of four pillars -- the Digital New Deal, the Green New Deal, the Human New Deal and balanced regional development.

The country plans to invest around 49 trillion won in digital projects by 2025 in a bid to nurture new growth of engines in the digital economy. Of the planned investment, the government will newly spend 2.6 trillion won on fostering new industries promoting hyper connectivity, including metaverse technology, cloud computing and blockchain technology. For the Green New Deal, the government plans to spend some 61 trillion won to bolster green industries and eco-friendly projects. South Korea announced last year that it aims to go carbon neutral by 2050 in an effort to transform the country's fossil-fuel reliant economy into an eco-friendly one. The Human New Deal is aimed at promoting inclusive growth as an economic recovery has remained uneven across sectors, aggravating income gaps between haves and have-nots. The government plans to invest around 50 trillion won to strengthen the job and social safety nets and nurture talented people in key sectors, including non-memory chips and next-generation vehicles.

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S. Korea to Bolster Digital New Deal Initiative

South Korea's ICT ministry said Thursday it will pursue new projects to upgrade the country's digital infrastructure, such as specialized 5G networks, as part of its renewed push for the digital New Deal initiative. The digital New Deal was unveiled last year with the aim of investing around 58 trillion won (US\$50.3 billion) in key digital technologies, such as network infrastructure and artificial intelligence, to

create some 900,000 jobs by 2025. The Ministry of Science and ICT said the country will spend over 49 trillion won over the next four years, with a new focus on establishing specialized 5G networks and expanding the application of artificial intelligence across various industries. Last month, the ministry announced that it will distribute 5G frequency bands to non-telecom operators by the end of the year to spur the wider adoption of technologies using latest generation networks. The specialized 5G networks are expected to be utilized in limited business environments to power new digital infrastructure, such as smart factories and smart farms. The ministry added that it will also support the development of an open metaverse platform in a move to accelerate the adoption of virtual technology across various industries. The metaverse refers to a shared virtual space, where users interact with each other through digital avatars. Earlier this year, the country launched a metaverse alliance composed of major companies, including automaker Hyundai Motor Co. and Naver Labs, the research arm of internet giant Naver Corp.

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S. Korea, ASEAN to Upgrade Their FTA

South Korea's trade ministry said Tuesday it has launched talks with ASEAN to update their free trade agreement (FTA) and further lower trade barriers, as the country seeks to diversify its trade portfolio and expand its presence in Southeast Asia. Officials from the two held a virtual meeting to discuss ways to expand their bilateral economic ties, according to the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy. Asia's No. 4 economy and ASEAN implemented their FTA in 2007. ASEAN currently stands as the second-largest trading partner for South Korea, with their transactions reaching US\$143.8 billion in 2020, more than doubling from \$61.8 billion tallied in 2006. The economic bloc comprises Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Thailand, Singapore and Vietnam. Outbound shipments to the economic bloc came to \$89 billion last year, also rising from \$32.1 billion tallied in 2006. South Korea and ASEAN have agreed to further lower trade barriers in 2016, but related talks have been delayed as they decided to focus on clinching the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP). The RCEP covers ASEAN and its dialogue partners -- South Korea, China, Japan, Australia and New Zealand. The participants currently await the official launch of the deal, which was signed in November 2020. The latest move comes in line with South Korea's efforts to diversify its trade portfolio and cope with the growing protectionism around the globe. The country currently depends on China and the United States for around 40 percent of its exports.

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South-East Asia

INDONESIA: To Require Covid-19 Vaccine Cards for Domestic Travels Under New Restrictions

Domestic travelers on Indonesia's islands of Java and Bali are required to show their vaccination records of at least the first doses of COVID-19 vaccine starting on Saturday. The requirement is stipulated in the new COVID-19 restriction policy announced by Coordinating Maritime Affairs and Investment Minister Luhut Pandjaitan on Thursday. Specifically, those who would travel by planes should take polymerase chain reaction (PCR) tests two days before their flights in addition to the COVID-19 vaccine cards, and those using other long-distance transportation, such as buses and trains, are required to take rapid antigen tests a day prior to their trips. The restriction policy was issued amid the soaring number of COVID-19 cases in the country. Indonesia's Health Ministry reported another record-breaking day with 24,836 new cases and 504 new deaths on Thursday. The Health Ministry has also reported alarming bed occupancy rates (BORs) in Jakarta and its neighboring Banten and West Java provinces, which have surpassed 90 percent. Under the new policy, businesses in the non-essential sectors are required to enforce a work-from-home rule for their employees, and the essential sectors including banking and finance have to cut their office capacity to 50 percent. As for critical sectors such as those dealing with energy, health, security, and disaster mitigation, they are allowed to fully operate as usual under strict health protocols. Schools continue their online classes. Supermarkets and traditional markets should open at a 50 percent capacity until 8 p.m. and shopping malls should temporarily close until July 20. Restaurants are only allowed to accept delivery orders or take-away, the policy says.

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Indonesia Expands Emergency Restrictions to 15 Regions

The Indonesian government has expanded its emergency restrictions (locally known as PPKM) to 15 regions outside Java and Bali from July 12 to 20, according to a senior minister on Friday. Coordinating Minister for Economic Affairs Airlangga Hartarto said the 15 regions were Tanjung Pinang, Singkawang, Padang Panjang, Bandar Lampung, Balikpapan, Pontianak, Manokwari, Sorong City, Batam, Bontang, Bukittinggi, Berau, Padang, Mataram and Medan. "The bed occupancy rates (BORs) in these regions are more than 60 percent, while the number of cases increased significantly and vaccination achievements are less than 50 percent," Hartarto said at a virtual press conference. Hartarto explained that on June 27, the number of active COVID-19 cases outside Java and Bali was recorded at 50,513, but it jumped to 82,711 cases on Tuesday. Similarly, BORs in these regions have increased, particularly in Lampung (82 percent), East Kalimantan (80 percent), West Papua (79 percent), Riau Islands (77 percent), West Kalimantan (68 percent) and West Sumatra (67 percent).

The achievement of vaccination of more than 50 percent outside Java and Bali only occurred in Batam, Tanjung Pinang, Bintan and Natuna all in Riau Islands province. As in Java and Bali, the emergency restrictions in these 15 regions required all employees to work from homes, except for those working in the essential and critical sectors such as in the fields of banking and energy. Schools are conducted online, worship activities are carried out in homes, and shopping centers except pharmacies are only allowed to operate with a maximum of 50 percent of visitor capacity until 8:00 p.m. local time. The country has been implementing emergency restrictions in all provinces in Java and Bali from July 3 to 20, as the number of COVID-19 cases has been soaring after a long Eid al-Fitr holiday and the entry of the more contagious Delta variant. As of Friday, Indonesia recorded 38,124 new daily COVID-19 cases, bringing the total to 2,455,912. The total number of recoveries was recorded at 2,023,548 and deaths at 64,631.

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CAMBODIA: Launching 5-Year Action Plan to Prevent, Respond to Online Child Sexual Exploitation

Cambodia on Wednesday officially launched the first five-year action plan (2021-2025) to prevent and respond to online child sexual exploitation (OCSE), said a press statement released after the event. Held via videoconference, the launch was presided over by Deputy Prime Minister and Interior Minister Sar Kheng, with the participation of more than 500 stakeholders. Speaking at the event, Kheng said amid the global COVID-19 pandemic, technology has become more important for communication and addressing all matters including online education for children, adolescents, and youth in both urban and rural communities. "However, advancements in technology also bring some negative consequences, such as criminals having the opportunity to take advantage of children, through illegal and unethical practices including online sexual exploitation," he said. "This emerging issue is rapidly spreading and placing children at greater risk globally, as well as in Cambodia." There is no official data on the extent of online child sexual exploitation in Cambodia, but through reports from the general public to the authorities and the internet hotline, the average number of reports per year is more than 150, including suspected cases of child sexual abuse materials, also called child pornography and sextortion, the statement said.

It added that in a survey in 2020, some 60 percent of Cambodian children who participated in the survey found that there was a risk of online sexual exploitation when they used the Internet, such as grooming and being forced to create and share pornographic images. Jalaa Abdelwahab, acting representative of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) to Cambodia, said UNICEF strongly believed in the critical role of collaboration to prevent and respond to violence against children including

online exploitation and abuse. "We look forward to continuing to partner with the government, other UN agencies, the private sector, NGOs, and adolescents and youth to ensure no child has to grow up in the shadow of abuse and fear, offline or online," he said. The action plan set six strategic priorities: strengthening the effective implementation of policy and governance, promoting criminal justice system, enforcing measures to prevent exploitation and rehabilitate victims, strengthening community safety to avoid OCSE, enhancing the statute for the provision of internet services, and increasing dissemination and proper understanding of OCSE issues. The estimated cost of the action plan is more than 3.8 million U.S. dollars over five years of implementation, the statement said, adding that 36 percent of the budget is from the government's contribution, while the remaining 64 percent is the contribution from development partners.

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Cambodian PM Reschedules Covid-19 Vaccine Rollout for Adolescents to Aug. 1

Cambodian Prime Minister Samdech Techo Hun Sen on Friday decided to bring forward a COVID-19 vaccination drive for adolescents aged from 12 to 17 to Aug. 1. The prime minister first set Aug. 6 for the campaign, but changed his decision a few hours later in order to enable the adolescent group to get the jabs sooner, according to a Fresh News report. Hun Sen said he will attend the launching event at the Calmette Hospital in Phnom Penh and that China's Sinovac COVID-19 vaccines will be used in the drive, said the report. He will also bring all of his grandchildren aged between 12 and 17 to get the jabs, the Fresh News said, adding that other senior leaders' children and grandchildren will also go for their doses. There are around 2 million adolescents in the kingdom, Hun Sen said last week, adding that the vaccinations for the adolescents will pave the way for the country to reopen schools after being closed down since late February. Cambodia launched a COVID-19 inoculation drive for adults on Feb. 10, with China being the key vaccine supplier. To date, 6.45 million people, or 64.5 percent of the 10 million targeted adult population, have been vaccinated, health ministry's secretary of state and spokeswoman Or Vandine said, adding that the kingdom is targeting to inoculate the 10 million targeted adult population by November. Cambodia confirmed 825 new COVID-19 infections including 335 imported cases on Friday, pushing the national total caseload to 71,244, the health ministry said, adding that 34 new fatalities were recorded, bringing the overall death toll to 1,222.

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MYANMAR: Imposing Stay-At-Home Order in 18 More Towns Over Covid-19

YANGON, July 11 (Xinhua) -- Myanmar's Health and Sports Ministry imposed a stay-at-home order in 18 more towns across the country due to the COVID-19 outbreak, the state-run media reported on Sunday. The stay-at-home order, which will take effect on Monday, will be applied to six towns in Bago region and 12 towns in Yangon region because of the recent increasing COVID-19 infections. So far, the ministry has imposed the stay-at-home order in 63 towns across the country. According to the ministry's figures on Sunday, the number of COVID-19 cases in Myanmar has increased to 192,213 after 3,461 new cases were reported in the past 24 hours. In addition, 82 new deaths were reported, bringing the death toll to 3,838 in the country. A total of 146,358 patients have been discharged from the hospitals and over 2.86 million samples have been tested for COVID-19 so far, the figures showed.

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VIETNAM: Criteria for Evaluating Vietnamese Business Culture Announced

A set of criteria for evaluating Vietnamese business culture was announced on Wednesday in Hà Nội by the Việt Nam Association for the Business Cultural Development. "The set is the first set of standards on business culture approved by the Prime Minister and Government and its contents were contributed and participated in by different ministries and branches," said chairman of the association Hồ Anh Tuấn. He added the set with two parts, 19 criteria and 51 evaluation and measurement indicators, was a basis for determining if a company meets "Vietnamese business culture standards". Per the set, firms cannot be involved in smuggling, tax evasion or the production and trade of counterfeit or harmful products. They must also not owe salary or social insurance payments to their employees, not defraud, take advantage of or harm other organisations and individuals. Other conditions include assessments of business leaders for sustainable development, building and implementing corporate culture, respect for the law, business ethics, and social responsibility.

Vũ Bá Phú, director of the Trade Promotion Department under the Ministry of Industry and Trade (MoIT), said: "A corporate brand is the crystallisation of product quality and corporate culture. "A good brand is not only a business asset but also a national asset as when the country has many prestigious brands, the national brand's prestige is also enhanced," he said. Phú added there was a strong interaction between national brands and corporate brands and corporate culture in recent years. He said many Vietnamese enterprises have made great efforts to build and form a business culture, creating international Vietnamese brands such as Vinamilk, TH True Milk, and Viettel. In that case, Phú said the MoIT appreciated this set of criteria and will consider it as the basis for evaluating the national brand. At the set launching meeting, the association announced the regulations consisting of six chapters and 14 articles for a corporation to be recognised as having Vietnamese

business culture. The recognition aims to contribute to promoting the building of the culture of the Vietnamese business community at home and abroad, and gradually form typical characteristics of Vietnamese business culture to meet the requirements of sustainable development and international integration, said the association. It also has plans for an annual forum called 'Culture with Business' with a separate topic associated with the context and requirements of the year to create a national forum for leaders of the Party and the State to meet with the business community, researchers and managers about business culture. The first forum is scheduled to be held in the second week of November on the occasion of Vietnam Corporate Culture Day on November 10 in Hà Nội.

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PM Approves New Domestic Trade Strategy

Domestic trade is expected to contribute 15-15.5 per cent of the national GDP by 2030 according to a strategy approved by the Prime Minister Phạm Minh Chính this week. Under the strategy, Việt Nam expects to set up sustainable supply chains in the country that will ensure the effective implementation of regulations on food safety and quality, origin tracing, and environmental protection. It aims to ensure the fast and stable development of domestic trade, build the Việt Nam-made brand, protect the interests of both enterprises and customers while also meeting demands for socio-economic development. Total revenue from retail trade and services would average 13-13.5 per cent annually in the 2021-30 period and 12-12.5 per cent annually in the 2031-45 period, the strategy predicted. By 2030, revenue from e-commerce is set to account for 10.5-11 per cent of national retail sales with a growth rate of 20-21 per cent. It also said 40-45 per cent of small and medium enterprises operating in trade will take part in major domestic and foreign e-commerce platforms by then as well. To this end, the strategy emphasised the importance of improving local investment and the business environment. It said transforming domestic trade promotion and improving infrastructure for trade, especially in rural and remote areas, was key.

Priority would be also given to improving infrastructure for trade especially in rural and remote areas and forming sustainable distribution channels for Made-in-Việt Nam products. Training a high-quality workforce to meet the growing demand of global trade integration would be also included. State governance in domestic trade would focus on ensuring market stabilisation, combating trade fraud and mitigating violations of consumer rights while respecting market principles. Meanwhile, the government aims to protect the domestic market via instruments and intervention measures that are in line with its international commitment. The latest report from the General Statistic Office (GSO) showed that revenue from retail trades and services increased 4.9 per cent to over VNĐ2.46 quadrillion (US\$107 billion) in the first half of this year. Retail sales surpassed VNĐ1.98 quadrillion, accounting for 80 per cent of

the total retail sales of consumer goods and services, up 6.2 per cent year-on-year, the GSO said. These encouraging figures were mainly attributed to businesses and firms that quickly adapted to the “new normal” that resulted from COVID pandemic. On the other hand, sales of accommodation and catering services reached VNĐ224 trillion from January to June, down 3 per cent year-on-year. They made up 9.1 per cent of the total revenue. Tourism revenue also experienced a decline of 52 per cent to VNĐ4.5 trillion. Meanwhile, revenue from other services reached VNĐ2.49 trillion, marking a jump of 4.4 per cent.

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Gov't Issues State Administration Reform Master Programme for 2021-30

The Government has issued Resolution No. 76/NQ-CP approving the Master Programme on State Administration Reform for the 2021-30 period. Under the resolution, the Government will focus on the following six areas, namely institutional reform, administrative procedure reform, organisational reform of the State administrative apparatus, civil service reform, public finance reform, and development of e-Government and digital government. For administrative procedure reform, the Government targets to cut or simplify at least 20 per cent of procedures and 20 per cent of the compliance costs regarding business-related procedures by 2025, reported the Việt Nam Government Portal (VGP). At least 80 per cent of administrative procedures of ministries, agencies and localities are provided online at levels 3 and 4 (with level 4 being the highest, where documents and transactions can be processed totally online). By 2030, at least 90 per cent of ministries, agencies and localities will be provided online at levels 3 and 4. The Government seeks to ensure that Việt Nam enter the world's top 30 countries in terms of business environment. The Master Programme on State Administration Reform is renewed every ten years, with the previous one implemented from 2011-20. According to Permanent Deputy Prime Minister Trương Hoà Bình, administrative reform is a prerequisite for the success of the country's socio-economic development in the context of globalisation and international integration. As of November last year, it has reduced and simplified more than 1,000 administrative procedures. As many as 3,893 out of 6,191 business conditions and 6,776 out of 9,926 of goods subject to specialised inspection have been cut. These reductions have saved about 18 million working days per year or over VNĐ6.3 trillion (US\$272 million) a year for society, people and businesses. The Public Administration Reform Index, first introduced in 2012, has become an important tool to measure the progress of public administration reform at ministries, agencies and localities.

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No Immediate Plans to Merge Provinces: Ministry of Internal

Affairs

There are no immediate plans to merge provinces and cities, said the Ministry of Internal Affairs during a press conference yesterday in Hà Nội. "We have only started to revisit Government Decree 1211/2016/UBTVQH13, which set out criteria that define the characteristics of a local government body such as land area and population size," said deputy minister of internal affairs Nguyễn Duy Thăng. "We understand this is a very complex issue, which requires the utmost care and great attention to detail. Factors such as geographical location, history, culture, traditions, national defence and socio-economic development must all be carefully studied and reviewed. We expect this process to take a long time and our most important objective is to maintain stability and development," Thăng said. The ministry has started a process to gather opinions and feedback from officials at both local and central government levels. The deputy minister also said there will be numerous opportunities in the near future for people from all walks of life to join the discussion and voice their opinions. "Once completed, the ministry is to bring the proposals to the central government for review. There is currently no deadline set," said the deputy minister.

The ministry is working on how to best organise district and ward level local government bodies in accordance with the directions given by the National Assembly and the Office of the Prime Minister. There have been reports by newspapers in recent months on a series of proposals made by the Ministry of Internal Affairs to start merging provinces and cities with land areas smaller than 8,000 sq. km or population lower than 900,000 for mountainous regions and 5,000 sq. km or 1.4 million for non-mountainous regions based on data gathered during the last general census in 2019 by the General Statistics Office of Việt Nam. Under such criteria, there are as many as ten provinces with a population size from 314,000 to 733,000 including Bắc Kạn, Lai Châu, Cao Bằng, Kon Tum, Ninh Thuận, Điện Biên, Đắk Nông, Quảng Trị, Lào Cai and Hậu Giang. Ten other provinces and cities were also found to have land area smaller than 5,000 sq. km. In 1976, the country had 38 provinces and cities. By the end of last year, it has 58 provinces and 5 cities under the central government. National Assembly deputies have argued by merging smaller provinces and cities, Việt Nam may be able to save billions of đồng in administrative costs.

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Decree Amends Regulations on Cross-Border Advertising Activities in Việt Nam

Advertising service providers inside and outside the country engaging in cross-border advertising activities in Việt Nam must abide by regulations on advertisement, cybersecurity, as well as management, provision and use of Internet

services and online information, and must pay tax in line with tax-related laws, according to a new Government decree. Decree No. 70/2021/ND-CP gives amendments and supplements to a number of articles of Decree No. 181/2013/ND-CP dated April 14, 2013 providing details on the implementation of a number of articles of Law on Advertising, including adjustments relating to the provision of cross-border advertising service in Việt Nam. According to the document, the provision of cross-border advertising activities in Vietnam means the use of electronic information sites by foreign organisations and individuals to provide advertising services from systems located outside Việt Nam for users in Việt Nam, having revenue generated in Việt Nam. Foreign organisations and individuals engaging in providing cross-border advertising services in Việt Nam must comply with regulations and obligations stated in Article 13 of the Law on Advertising and related regulations. They must not cooperate with websites that have been reported by authorised agencies due to legal violations, whose names are available on the Ministry of Information and Communications (MIC)' online portal. Meanwhile, Decree 70 also gives supplements to regulations on the responsibility in management of activities providing cross-border advertising services. Accordingly, the MIC will receive reports on violations on cross-border advertising activities from other ministries, sectors and localities. It will then send requests on violation settlement to foreign organisations and individuals providing cross-border advertising services. The decree will take effect from September 15, 2021.

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2021 Vietnam Annual Economic Report Launched

The 2021 Vietnam Annual Economic Report entitled “Repositioning Việt Nam in the Global Dynamics” was unveiled on July 29 by the Vietnam National University - University of Economics and Business. The report analyses Việt Nam’s competitive edge based on its advantages and engagement in the global supply chain. It also touches on the adverse impacts of COVID-19 on the global economy at large and Việt Nam in particular. The report has been released annually by the university in association with its affiliate the Vietnam Institute for Economic and Policy Research (VEPR) for 12 years. This year, exports and public investment are projected to become a driving force for the Vietnamese economy. With influxes of foreign investment into Việt Nam, exports in the sector will have an important role to play for economic growth in upcoming years. However, the growth rate of exports may strongly rely on the global economy recovery and shipments of traditional commodities, experts warned. Based on results obtained in the first six months and the complexities of the pandemic, the VEPR believes that the economic growth in the remaining months will depend on efforts in COVID-19 prevention and control, vaccination speed and scale and efficiency of support packages, among others. The institute also put forward growth scenarios for the remaining months. If the pandemic is brought under control in late third quarter and Việt Nam reaches herd immunity in

the second quarter of 2022, and the economic growth is projected at 4.5 – 5.1 per cent. In other scenario, the pandemic is controlled in the next months and herd immunity is reached by Q1 2022, the national economy may expand between 5.4 per cent and 6.1 per cent. If economic activities will not be able to resume by the fourth quarter of this year, Vietnam may see an economic growth rate of 3.5-4 per cent.

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South Asia

INDIA: Rajasthan Govt Soon to Announce EV Policy

Following the footsteps of Maharashtra, Delhi, Gujarat and Telangana, the Government of Rajasthan is all set to roll out its much-awaited Electric Vehicles (EV) Policy. In a recent interaction with the news agency IANS, Transport Commissioner of Rajasthan Mahendra Soni, said, “The EV policy has been drafted and it will be sent to the finance department very soon for approval.” In regard to the EV policy, the Rajasthan government has recently announced a few incentives. These include the subsidy of the upfront cost of electric vehicles for early adopters and also reimbursement of the state GST. However, the numbers will depend upon the battery capacity of the vehicle sold. The government has rolled out these incentives to promote the adoption of EVs (two-wheelers and three-wheelers) in the state. Also, these incentives will be made a part of the policy. According to Soni, the incentives were announced during the Budget Session as a part of the Budget announcements made in the House. Earlier, the announcement of incentives was termed as EV Policy, but, the Transport Commissioner clarified to the agency that the EV Policy is yet to be announced. Considering the incentives announced by the state government, it announced to reimburse Rs 10,000 on a purchase of a three-wheeler (EV) with a battery capacity of 3 KWH, Rs 15,000 for 4 KWH and Rs 20,000 for 5 KWH. Similarly, for two-wheelers, the government has announced to reimburse Rs 10,000 for a battery capacity of more than 5 KWH, Rs 9000 for up to 5KWH, Rs 7000 for 4 KWH and Rs 5000 for 2 KWH. This grant amount shall be payable on all EVs two- and three-wheelers and is payable on vehicles purchased from April 1, 2021 to March 31, 2022 and registered till March 2022.

From <https://egov.eletsonline.com/> 07/24/2021

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Goa Govt Plans to Strengthen State Election Commission, to Amend Municipality & Panchayati Raj Act

The Chief Minister Pramod Sawant-led Government of Goa has prepared a roadmap to bring in amendments in the Goa Panchayati Raj Act and Goa Municipalities Act with an aim to strengthen the State Election Commission (SEC). The move will result in providing the powers of reservation and delimitation to the SEC. As per the present

scenario, the rights of reservation and delimitation for civic elections vests with the directorate of panchayats and the department of urban development. CM Sawant, informing the state legislative assembly said, the government will go ahead with the proposed changes soon. The state cabinet had nodded to the Goa Municipality (Amendment) Bill, 2021, looking forward to the devolution of partial powers to the SEC for carrying out delimitation and reservation. The state government modified the municipal reservations after the Supreme Court disagreed to allow the government's appeal against a high court order which had quashed reservations for the civic elections that were notified by the government. Rejecting the claims of political interference, CM Sawant informed the state assembly that the reservations were done on the basis of the 2011 Census. Earlier, Law Secretary Chokha Ram Garg, who also held the additional charge of the SEC, had to resign from his additional charge following the SC rap. Later, retired IAS officer W V Raman Murthy was appointed by the state government as Stae Election Commissioner.

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UP Govt Presents Its Jal Jeevan Mission Annual Action Plan for 2021-22

The Government of Uttar Pradesh presented the Jal Jeevan Mission Annual Action Plan (AAP) with details of the saturation plan for fiscal 2021-22. The plan was reviewed and approved through a video conference by a national committee chaired by the Secretary, Department of Drinking Water and Sanitation and members from other ministries/ departments and NITI Aayog. Following this, funds are released throughout the year on the basis of physical progress and expenditure incurred while the implementation of the project works. A detailed planning exercise was done to aid the efforts of the state governments in achieving 'Har Ghar Jal' target in a time-bound manner. The Annual Action Plan emphasizes various components of Jal Jeevan Mission, including drinking water source strengthening/ augmentation, water supply works to provide household tap connections, greywater treatment and reuse, operation and maintenance, various support activities including IEC plan, training and capacity building of stakeholders, community mobilisation, water quality surveillance and monitoring, strengthening of water quality testing laboratories and its NABL accreditation/ recognition, etc. As of yet, 31.67 lakh rural households of the total 2.63 crore rural households have been provided tap water connections. In the previous year, as many as 19.15 lakh tap connections were provided in UP. The UP government plans to provide 59 lakh tap water connections in 2021-22, 85.40 lakh connections in 2022-23 and 90.01 lakh connections in 2023-24. However, while the review, the national committee suggested that Uttar Pradesh may plan to provide 78 lakh tap water connections in 2021-22 itself and the state government nodded to the committee's suggestion. In the current fiscal, the UP government looks forward to making five districts 'Har Ghar Jal' and has planned to commence the work in 60,000 villages by the end of 2021.

So far, about 3,500 villages in the state have been declared 'Har Ghar Jal', which means each household in these villages is getting assured tap water supply in their homes. The state government is planning for the saturation of another 10,000 villages by September 2021. The committee urged the UP government to focus on coverage of priority areas, including water quality-affected habitations, drought-prone areas, eight Aspirational and 20 JE/ AES affected districts, Scheduled Castes/ Scheduled Tribes majority areas, Saansad Adarsh Gram Yojana, etc. Also, the efforts made by UP in providing piped water supply in 1.02 lakh schools, 1.04 lakh Anganwadi centres, and all the ashramshalas (tribal residential schools) were lauded by the national committee. Further, the government was asked to ensure safe drinking water for children in all remaining schools and Anganwadi centres as soon as possible. Also, in order to increase community ownership and participation, the UP government has been asked to focus on a robust IEC and behavioural change campaign. Under Jal Jeevan Mission, the community is being encouraged to carry out surveillance of water sources and delivery points from time to time to ascertain the quality of water supplied. PHE Department is training and facilitating the village communities to undertake regular water quality testing in their villages. For this, timely procurement and supply of Field Test Kits (FTKs) to the Panchayats, identification of at least five women in every village for community engagement, training them on using FTKs and reporting the test result findings are given priority. For Uttar Pradesh, with the Central allocation of Rs 10,870 crore in 2021-22 and opening balance of Rs 466 crore available with the State Government, State's matching share of 2021-22 and shortfall of Rs 1,263 crore in 2019-20 & 2020-21; the total assured fund available for the implementation of JJM in the State is about Rs 23,937 crore. Also, as per the 15th Finance Commission tied grant for water and sanitation, a sum of Rs 4,324 crore has been allocated to UP. This grant will be utilized on activities like drinking water source strengthening, greywater management, and more.

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SRI LANKA: Personal Data Protection vs Right to Information – TISL's Recommendations on Data Protection Bill

Sri Lanka is on the verge of introducing a bill on Personal Data Protection which aims to regulate the processing of personal data, while identifying and strengthening the rights of data subjects in relation to the protection of personal data. Transparency International Sri Lanka (TISL) has taken steps to create a legislative brief on the proposed Personal Data Protection bill of 2021 and has highlighted a number of recommendations that law makers should take into consideration when enacting this bill into law. The creation of a legal framework on personal data protection can be viewed as an important juncture in safeguarding human rights, specially at a time when information has become both a tool to be used by the people and against them.

TISL takes this opportunity to thank all the stakeholders who were involved in the drafting of the Personal Data Protection bill of 2021. The legislative brief highlights TISL's five key recommendations for the bill to become an effective law. The recommendations are as follows. 1. Include a specific exception to ensure that the Right to Information Act is not overridden in case of an inconsistency. 2. Establish an independent Data Protection Authority. 3. Harmonize the understanding of 'personal data' between the Personal Data Protection Bill and the Right to Information Act. Such amendment would ensure that when a request is made to obtain information under the Right to Information Act, the possibility that the request clashes with the Personal Data protection bill is minimised. 4. Remove 'Financial Data' and 'Personal Data Relating to Offences, Criminal Proceedings and Convictions' from the list of special categories of personal data. This will ensure that people's right to access information pertaining to corruption and malpractices is not infringed. 5. Recognize 'Journalistic purpose' as a legitimate condition to process data. The main purpose of these recommendations was to prevent the possibility that this particular bill could in effect infringe on the Right to Information of the citizens of this country.

TISL's Executive Director Nadishani Perera commenting on the importance of the proposed recommendations stated that, "If the law relating to Personal Data Protection infringes on the law relating to the Right to Information, there is a possibility that the public could lose faith in both of these laws. This could also lead to confusion between the agencies tasked with upholding these laws. Therefore, it is of paramount importance that steps are taken to amend the proposed legislation in order to ensure that both pieces of legislation are able to accomplish their expected goals". It must also be highlighted that the establishment of an independent Data Protection Authority is vital to ensuring that the new legislation would not be abused by individuals or groups who aim to use the legislation to the detriment of the public. Copies of the legislative brief created by TISL have been sent to Legal Draftsman Mrs. Dilrukshi Samaraweera as well as Mr. Jayantha Fernando who heads the committee that drafted the bill on Personal Data Protection. The drafting of the Personal Data Protection bill commenced in 2018. By December 2019 the bill was submitted for cabinet approval and subsequently cabinet approval was granted in January 2020. The original Draft Bill was also reviewed by the Attorney General and the drafting committee was able to incorporate all recommendations made by the Attorney General by October 2020. The right to information as well as the right to ensure the security of personal data are both vital in a democratic framework. In such a backdrop TISL calls on the lawmakers of Sri Lanka to ensure that enacted legislation do not infringe upon any one of these rights.

From <https://www.lankabusinessonline.com/> 07/19/2021

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The Chamber Academy Holds Discussion and Overview of the Data Protection Bill

The Chamber Academy, the knowledge arm of the Ceylon Chamber of Commerce in partnership with the Information and Communication Agency (ICTA) will be hosting a timely webinar on the Data Protection Bill. The webinar is sponsored by Hutchison Telecommunications Lanka (Pvt) Ltd and London Stock Exchange Group – Sri Lanka. The discussion will be based on the proposed personal data protection bill, defining measures to protect personal data of individuals held by banks, telecom operators, hospitals, and other personal data aggregating and processing entities formulated by the Legal Draftsman's Department. The expert panel will include Jayantha Fernando, General Counsel, ICTA, Shenuka Jayalath, Manager – Regulatory, Group Legal & Regulatory, Dialog Axiata PLC, Sanduni Wickramasinghe, Attorney at Law & Privacy Professional, Member of Drafting Committee, Jehan Perinpanayagal, CEO, Board member, SLASSCOM, Chiranthi Balapatabendi, Director – Industry Development, ICTA. The session will be moderated by Thanusshi Dissanayake, Legal Officer ICTA. The discussion will be followed by an interactive Question and Answer session. The webinar will take place on 2nd August 2021 from 10.30 am to 12.00 pm via Zoom. For registrations email events@chamber.lk.

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Central-West Asia

Kyrgyzstan, Korea Discuss Strengthening Co-op Between Law Enforcement Agencies

The Bishkek city hosted on Monday a meeting between Kyrgyzstan's Minister of Internal Affairs Ulan Niyazbekov and Ambassador of the Republic of Korea to Kyrgyzstan Lee Won-jae, Trend reports with reference to Kabar. In his welcoming speech, Minister Niyazbekov congratulated the ambassador on appointment, and noted the importance of developing partnership relations, the press service of the Internal Ministry reported. "Let me welcome you in the walls of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. I am pleased to meet you. Please accept my sincere congratulations on the occasion of your appointment to the high position of Ambassador of Korea to Kyrgyzstan," Ulan Niyazbekov said. The sides exchanged views on the status and prospects of bilateral cooperation, noted the importance of further strengthening of practical cooperation and partnership between law enforcement agencies of the two countries in the field of ensuring public order, security of citizens. "I want to especially note that the Korean police is one of the best in the fight against transnational crime, religious extremism, cybercrime and drug trafficking. We are very interested in a detailed study of the experience of the police of the Republic of Korea in these areas," the Kyrgyz interior minister added. In turn, Ambassador Lee Won-jae gave a positive assessment of the trend of dynamic development of bilateral relations, expressed gratitude for the warm reception and the hope for further close and fruitful cooperation. Summing up the meeting, Ulan Niyazbekov noted the Interior Ministry of Kyrgyzstan attaches great importance to cooperation with the Korean side and is

ready to develop a comprehensive strategic partnership and further expand cooperation between the competent authorities of the two countries.

From <https://en.trend.az/> 07/26/2021

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UZBEKISTAN: Senate Committee on Science, Education and Health Discuss Draft Laws

Today, on 27 July, a meeting of the Senate Committee on Science, Education and Health was held. It was attended by senators, members of the expert group of the Committee, chairmen of the standing commissions of the Jokargy Kenes of the Republic of Karakalpakstan, regional and Tashkent city Kengashes of people's deputies, representatives of ministries and departments, as well as the media. The meeting preliminarily discussed issues that are planned to be considered at the seventeenth plenary meeting of the upper chamber of the Oliy Majlis. In particular, the discussion centered on the Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan "On Amendments and Additions to Certain Legislative Acts of the Republic of Uzbekistan in Connection with the Further Improvement of Legal Protection of Intellectual Property Objects". This Law was developed in order to fully take into account the requirements of filing applications for intellectual property, to successfully implement international experience in this area, to strengthen positions in international rankings, to improve legislation in accordance with the requirements of international acts in the field of copyright and related rights.

The law stipulates amendments and additions to the Civil Code of the Republic of Uzbekistan, the laws of the Republic of Uzbekistan "On inventions, utility models and industrial designs", "On trademarks, service marks and appellations of origin of goods", "On copyright and related rights." The meeting considered the report of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan on the implementation in the first half of 2021 of the State Program for the implementation of the Action Strategy in five priority areas of development of the Republic of Uzbekistan in 2017-2021 in the "Year of Support for Youth and Strengthening Public Health". During the discussion, information was heard from representatives of the relevant ministries and departments about the points of the State Program, the implementation of which is being delayed. In addition, the results of the study of the state of implementation of the laws "On Communications" and "On Electronic Digital Signatures", law enforcement practice and monitoring of the adoption of by-laws were considered. The relevant decisions of the Committee were adopted on the issues considered at the meeting.

From <http://www.uzdaily.com> 07/27/2021

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AUSTRALIA: New Law Could See Vital Data Sent Offshore

New cyber security laws could result in critical data being sent overseas, the head of a major Australian data firm warns. The Security of Critical Infrastructure bill, currently before federal parliament, would give cyber security agencies power to step in to corporate IT systems when there's a major cyber attack that threatens to bring down vital infrastructure. But the laws won't apply to Australian data stored overseas. "This has the potential to create a dangerous gap in which we lose control of our data," the chief executive of Macquarie Telecom Group David Tudehope said. He told AAP the bill actually creates a perverse incentive for companies to store important data offshore, to avoid extra regulation and the costs that come with it. "It's absolutely critical for the nation to defend against a cyber attack," he said. "We believe it's essential data is stored and secured in Australia."

Australia's existing privacy and telecommunications laws apply to organisations operating overseas, and he said the same is needed to combat the cyber threat. The bill identifies 11 industries that would fall under the new laws, including communications, transport, banking, healthcare, and groceries. As well as a tougher reporting regime, the laws would enable federal cyber detectives to reach into companies' systems to detect hackers and foreign adversaries. "A lot of companies have contracts that would make it difficult for them to accept government help, and this legislation would override that," Mr Tudehope explained. According to the head of the Australian Signals Directorate, the cyber threat is intensifying, with a 60 per cent increase in ransomware attacks over the past 12 months. Rachel Noble fronted a parliamentary committee on cyber security in June and said healthcare systems have been a significant target.

"The vast majority of the attacks over the past year that ASD is aware of are focused on critical infrastructure sectors or systems of national significance," she said. She gave evidence that Australian companies including JBC, Toll Group and Nine had already been hit by "catastrophic" attacks. On some estimates, a significant cyber attack on Australia could cost \$30 billion and 160,000 or more jobs. Macquarie Telecom runs five data centres in Australia, and earlier in July announced it would build its biggest-ever storage centre in Sydney at an initial cost of \$78 million.

From <https://au.news.yahoo.com> 07/18/2021

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NEW ZEALAND: Govt Agrees to Establish a Consumer Data Right

The Government has agreed to establish a consumer data right framework for New Zealand, Commerce and Consumer Affairs Minister David Clark announced today. "Consumers should be in the driver's seat when it comes to how their personal information is used by third parties," David Clark said. A consumer data right (CDR) is a mechanism that requires data holders, such as banks and electricity retailers, to

safely and securely share data with third parties (like fintech companies) following consent from the customer. This means New Zealanders gain access to a wider range of products and services that better meet their needs. “Any data shared through the consumer data right will only take place with a person’s informed consent, and would be strictly used for the reasons agreed upon. For example, if a person was seeking financial advice, they could ask their bank to share data, such as transaction information, with their chosen adviser,” David Clark said.

“The businesses and services wishing to receive this data would also have to meet a number of safeguards to ensure the information could be handled safely and securely. “It’s also my intention that the consumer data right will work hand-in-hand with the Digital Identity Trust Framework announced earlier this year. It’s that piece of work which sets out the rules for the delivery of digital identity services,” David Clark said. Following a recent consultation on options for a consumer data right, the Government is now in the process of building a regulatory regime. “The consumer data right will be rolled out on a sector-by-sector basis to ensure that the detailed requirements work in practice. We will look to align our system with the Australian model introduced in 2019,” David Clark said. Officials are carrying out work to identify which sectors should be considered for designation first. The Government aims to make a second round of detailed policy decisions on the consumer data right framework later in 2021, and will look to introduce legislation in 2022.

From <https://livenews.co.nz> 07/06/2021

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Government Initiatives Contribute to Fall in Benefit Numbers

Minister for Social Development Carmel Sepuloni has welcomed the release of the June quarter Benefit Statistics which show a continuing fall in the number of people receiving a Main Benefit. “This Government’s plan to increase work focused support for Jobseekers is paying off,” Carmel Sepuloni said. “All up Benefit numbers fell 11,193 over the June quarter, there are now 354,744 people receiving a Main Benefit, with 110,790 people receiving a Job Seeker Work Ready Benefit. “Most of this fall comes on the back of another big month for people moving off a benefit and into employment. Around 31,240 people left a benefit last quarter for a job, the second highest number of people finding work since records began. “The statistics released today buck the seasonal trend which usually sees a rise in benefit numbers over the June Quarter. The size of the fall over the June quarter is a significant milestone in our recovery from COVID-19.

“While we have been successful in getting those who have recently lost their jobs back into work, what is pleasing with today’s statistics is that nearly 10,000 people who have been receiving a benefit for over a year found work in the June quarter.” “Our recovery is creating jobs and getting New Zealanders back to work but we are also partnering with industry to ensure businesses are getting the skills they need.

“Some of the most successful programmes include Flexi-Wage which has seen 4,782 people placed into employment since it was expanded in February, and Apprenticeship Boost which now has supported 30,031 people into a trade. “I’ve been particularly impressed by the results from the Mayor’s Taskforce for Jobs with 1,326 sustainable full-time jobs created across regional New Zealand.

“We know that there are jobs available in the market right now, and we remain focused on supporting as many New Zealanders as possible into work. Over previous Budgets we have invested heavily in work focused case management; initiatives include, 263 new frontline staff in Budget 2019 to help people into work. Invested \$150m in Budget 2020 to help people into work Invested a further \$99m in work focused case management and services in Budget 2021. Invested \$86m to sustain the additional frontline work focused staff we employed through COVID-19. “I encourage all businesses who are looking for workers to contact MSD. There are subsidies available to help you with the cost of training employees,” Carmel Sepuloni said.

From <https://livenews.co.nz> 07/15/2021

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Plan to Eliminate Hepatitis C as a Major Health Threat by 2030

A plan to eliminate hepatitis C in New Zealand, reducing liver cancer and the need for liver transplants, has been released today by Associate Minister of Health Dr Ayesha Verrall. “Around 45,000 New Zealanders have hepatitis C, but only around half know they have it,” said Ayesha Verrall. “Symptoms often don’t appear until much of the damage has been done. Without treatment, most people will develop progressive liver damage. Hepatitis C is the leading cause of liver transplants in New Zealand, and the second leading cause of liver cancer – behind hepatitis B. “At the same time, many of those with hepatitis C are from our most marginalised communities, and face significant barriers to getting tested and treated – including stigma around the virus. “But hepatitis C is preventable, and curable,” said Ayesha Verrall.

The National Hepatitis C Action Plan was unveiled at a mobile, pop-up testing clinic in Hamilton, to mark World Hepatitis Day. It’s New Zealand’s response to the World Health Organization’s global hepatitis strategy, and sets out how Aotearoa will eliminate hepatitis C as a major public health threat by 2030. Since February 2019, around 4,500 New Zealanders with hepatitis C have been treated with Maviret, a new direct-acting antiviral treatment funded by PHARMAC. Maviret is simple to administer, has fewer side effects than previous treatments, and can potentially cure 98 percent of people with chronic hepatitis C. “Maviret has been a real game-changer, but funding drugs alone won’t achieve elimination. We need to make sure we find everyone who is at risk or has hepatitis C, offer them a test and to treat them,” said Ayesha Verrall.

Work has already begun under the Action Plan, with a focus on key initiatives including: Developing a national awareness campaign Upscaling the distribution of free injecting equipment to people who inject drugs, to focus on hepatitis C prevention and reducing new infections Increasing access to testing through more nurse-led clinics and point of care testing delivered in the community, and through mobile clinics Increasing uptake of testing and treatment Developing a surveillance system and virtual registry that will connect diagnosed cases with the treatment they need “The Action Plan is the culmination of a major collaborative effort by a group of experts from across the health system. Crucially, this has included NGOs, frontline workers and community representatives with valuable insights into how best to reach those living with hepatitis C,” said Ayesha Verrall.

From <https://livenews.co.nz> 07/28/2021

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2、 Government System and Civil Services

Asia-Pacific

130 Countries and Jurisdictions Join Bold New Framework for International Tax Reform

130 countries and jurisdictions have joined a new two-pillar plan to reform international taxation rules and ensure that multinational enterprises pay a fair share of tax wherever they operate. 130 countries and jurisdictions, representing more than 90% of global GDP, joined the Statement establishing a new framework for international tax reform. A small group of the Inclusive Framework’s 139 members have not yet joined the Statement at this time. The remaining elements of the framework, including the implementation plan, will be finalised in October. The framework updates key elements of the century-old international tax system, which is no longer fit for purpose in a globalised and digitalised 21st century economy. The two-pillar package – the outcome of negotiations coordinated by the OECD for much of the last decade - aims to ensure that large Multinational Enterprises (MNEs) pay tax where they operate and earn profits, while adding much-needed certainty and stability to the international tax system.

Pillar One will ensure a fairer distribution of profits and taxing rights among countries with respect to the largest MNEs, including digital companies. It would re-allocate some taxing rights over MNEs from their home countries to the markets where they have business activities and earn profits, regardless of whether firms have a physical presence there. Pillar Two seeks to put a floor on competition over corporate income tax, through the introduction of a global minimum corporate tax rate that countries can use to protect their tax bases. The two-pillar package will provide much-needed support to governments needing to raise necessary revenues to repair their budgets

and their balance sheets while investing in essential public services, infrastructure and the measures necessary to help optimise the strength and the quality of the post-COVID recovery. Under Pillar One, taxing rights on more than USD 100 billion of profit are expected to be reallocated to market jurisdictions each year. The global minimum corporate income tax under Pillar Two - with a minimum rate of at least 15% - is estimated to generate around USD 150 billion in additional global tax revenues annually. Additional benefits will also arise from the stabilisation of the international tax system and the increased tax certainty for taxpayers and tax administrations.

“After years of intense work and negotiations, this historic package will ensure that large multinational companies pay their fair share of tax everywhere,” OECD Secretary-General Mathias Cormann said. “This package does not eliminate tax competition, as it should not, but it does set multilaterally agreed limitations on it. It also accommodates the various interests across the negotiating table, including those of small economies and developing jurisdictions. It is in everyone’s interest that we reach a final agreement among all Inclusive Framework Members as scheduled later this year,” Mr Cormann said. Participants in the negotiation have set an ambitious timeline for conclusion of the negotiations. This includes an October 2021 deadline for finalising the remaining technical work on the two-pillar approach, as well as a plan for effective implementation in 2023. Further information on the continuing international tax reform negotiations is also available at: <https://oe.cd/bepsaction1>. Media enquiries should be directed to Pascal Saint-Amans (+33 1 4524 9108), Director of the OECD Centre for Tax Policy and Administration, or to Lawrence Speer (+33 1 4524 7970) in the OECD Media Office (+33 1 4524 9700). Working with over 100 countries, the OECD is a global policy forum that promotes policies to preserve individual liberty and improve the economic and social well-being of people around the world.

From <https://www.oecd.org/> 07/01/2021

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OECD Appoints New Director of Development Centre

Ragnheiður Elín Árnadóttir, an Icelandic former industry minister, has been appointed by the OECD Secretary-General as the new Director of the Organisation’s Development Centre, which works directly with developing and emerging countries on social and economic policy. Currently Executive Director at Alor Energy Storage and a Senior Fellow at the Atlantic Council, Ms Árnadóttir has over 20 years of experience in international affairs, national administration and domestic public services. Ms Árnadóttir was Iceland’s Minister of Industry and Commerce from 2013 to 2017, Member of Parliament from 2007-2016, and from 2007 to 2013 she held a senior role at the Icelandic delegation to the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, first as Chair then as Vice-Chair. The OECD Development Centre has 55 members, 27 of which are OECD members and 28 are developing or emerging economies. The Centre works to help developing and emerging economies to develop and implement

policies to drive sustainable growth, reduce poverty and inequalities, and improve people's lives. Countries from Africa, Asia and Latin America participate as full members in the Centre, where they interact on an equal footing with OECD members. As Director, Ms Árnadóttir will oversee the Centre's work and support its Governing Board in promoting policy solutions to improve living conditions in developing and emerging countries. An Icelandic national, Ms Árnadóttir has a Master's Degree in Foreign Service from Georgetown University (US), and a Bachelor's Degree in Political Sciences from the University of Iceland. Ms Árnadóttir will take up her position on 16 August 2021. For further information journalists are invited to contact the OECD Media Office (+33 1 45 24 97 00). Working with over 100 countries, the OECD is a global policy forum that promotes policies to preserve individual liberty and improve the economic and social well-being of people around the world.

From <https://www.oecd.org/> 07/05/2021

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OECD-FAO Agricultural Outlook Presents Production, Consumption, Trade and Price Trends for the Coming Decade - Global Agri-food Systems Need to Transform to Reach SDGs by 2030

With less than 10 years until the 2030 deadline for achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), governments need to step up their efforts to meet global food security and environmental targets, according to a new report released today by the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Although progress towards the SDGs is expected to be made in the coming decade - assuming a fast recovery from the global COVID-19 pandemic, and stable weather conditions and policy environments - the past year of disruptions from COVID-19 has moved the world further away from achieving the SDGs. This calls for urgent attention to the factors and forces driving performance in agri-food systems.

The OECD-FAO Agricultural Outlook 2021-2030 provides policy-makers with a consensus assessment of the ten-year prospects for 40 main farm and fisheries products at regional, national and global levels, analysing the drivers of performance in the agri-food markets and helping to inform forward-looking policy analysis and planning. The Outlook baseline projections describe expected trends based on existing policies, highlighting areas where additional effort is needed to meet the SDGs. Ensuring food security and healthy diets for a growing global population will remain a challenge. Global demand for agricultural commodities – including for use as food, feed, fuel and industrial inputs – is projected to grow at 1.2 percent per year over the coming decade, albeit at a slower annual rate than during the previous decade. Demographic trends, the substitution of poultry for red meat in rich and many middle-income nations, and a boom in per capita dairy consumption in South Asia are expected to shape future demand.

Sustainable productivity growth is key

Productivity improvements will be key to feeding a growing global population - projected to reach 8.5 billion by 2030 - sustainably. Of the increases in global crop production expected in 2030, 87 percent are projected to come from yield growth, while 6 percent to come from expanded land use and 7 percent from increases in cropping intensity. Similarly, a large share of the projected expansion in livestock and fish production is expected to result from productivity gains. However, herd enlargement is also expected to significantly contribute to livestock production growth in emerging economies and low-income countries. Trade will continue to be critical for global food security, nutrition, farm incomes and tackling rural poverty. On average across the world, around 20 percent of what is consumed domestically is imported. Looking ahead to 2030, imports are projected to account for 64 percent of total domestic consumption in the Near East and North Africa region, while Latin America and the Caribbean region is expected to export more than a third of its total agricultural production.

“We have a unique opportunity to set the agri-food sector on a path of sustainability, efficiency and resilience,” OECD Secretary-General Mathias Cormann and FAO Director-General QU Dongyu said in the Foreword to the Outlook. “Without additional efforts, the Zero Hunger goal will be missed and greenhouse gas emissions from agriculture will increase further. An agri-food systems transformation is urgently needed.” Global greenhouse gas emissions from agriculture are projected to increase by 4 percent over the next ten years, mostly due to expanding livestock production. This is despite the fact that emissions per unit of output - carbon intensity of production - are expected to decrease significantly over the period. Globally, aggregate food availability is projected to grow by 4 percent over the next decade to reach just over 3000 calories per person per day. Per capita consumption of fats is projected to grow the fastest among major food groups, due to higher consumption of processed and convenience food and an increasing tendency to eat outside the home, both associated with ongoing urbanisation and rising women’s participation in the work force. Income shortages and food price inflation in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic are reinforcing this trend.

In high-income countries, per capita food availability is not foreseen to expand significantly from its already high levels. However, income growth and changing consumer preferences will support the shift away from staples and sweeteners to higher-value foods, including fruits and vegetables and, to a lesser extent, animal products. In low-income countries, food availability is projected to increase by 3.7 percent, equal to 89 calories per person per day, mainly consisting of staples and sweeteners. Economic constraints will limit increasing consumption of animal products, fruits and vegetables. Due to income constraints, the per-capita consumption of animal protein is projected to decline slightly in Sub-Saharan Africa, a region whose self-sufficiency for major food commodities is, on current trends,

expected to decrease by 2030.

Over the medium term, weather, economic growth and the distribution of income, demographics and shifts in dietary patterns, technological developments and policy trends will shape food and agricultural prices. While the FAO Food Price Index has risen strongly in the past year, these increases are expected to be followed by a period of downward adjustment. The Outlook projects that food prices will resume a gradually declining trajectory in real terms, consistent with slowing demand growth and expected productivity gains. While the Outlook focuses on medium-term trends, a wide range of factors can generate the conditions for short-term price fluctuations in agricultural markets. For instance, developments in energy markets, which affect input prices, and the greater volatility in grain prices associated with the increasing market share of some countries, contribute to the differences between projected and observed prices. More information on the OECD-FAO Agricultural Outlook is available [here](#). For further information or interviews, journalists are invited to contact Lawrence Speer in the OECD Media Office (+33 1 45 24 79 70). Working with over 100 countries, the OECD is a global policy forum that promotes policies to preserve individual liberty and improve the economic and social well-being of people around the world.

From <https://www.oecd.org/> 07/05/2021

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The Limits of “Active” Participation in Smart City Design

Lily, a doctor and single mother of two, lives in a smart home in a new public housing estate (HDB) outside Singapore’s city centre. Hers is an eco-friendly smart home, equipped with a pneumatic waste disposal system and devices that monitor household energy usage. I asked her if the smart home was a motivation for moving, and she laughed: “Not at all. We moved here because there’s more space. Ying and Justin love it because they can have their friends over, which we could never do before.” When I asked about her participation in the smart city, she responded: “Isn’t the point of the smart city that I don’t have to participate?”

In this blog post, I argue that rather than asking residents to become active citizens by adopting a republican citizenship model, scholarship on digital inequality must recognise that residents already actively participate in the political life of the smart city. People’s everyday practices and affective engagements in quotidian spaces like homes, schools, and community centres are themselves political expressions of citizenship (Camp 2014; Berlant 1997). Citizenship is mediated through and by the intimate public sphere: the state uses housing access and data-gathering technologies in domestic space to control who gets to belong in, represent and reproduce the nation’s future. Hence, intimate spaces are key sites where (smart) citizenship can be negotiated. State interventions target “mundane” domestic practices and can therefore be reimagined through those same practices, in those

same spaces. Urban planners and smart city scholars alike tend to look for and encourage smart citizenship in state spaces like urban planning offices or an imagined public agora, but this misses a wide range of material and affective resident engagements which generate smart city futures. Neglecting intimate spaces also often misplaces where actual barriers to overcoming digital inequality exist. I propose that a perceived absence of active citizen participation indicates more than a failure of top-down planning initiatives to give citizens voice or power; it suggests a need to reimagine the very concept of the “active” smart citizen itself.

Many state planners told me they tried to engage citizens but “no one cares.” They held citizen design workshops at their offices, setting up a digital urban analysis tool (“QUA-KIT”) and inviting residents in the afternoon during their workday. Residents sat around a meeting room table while planners explained participatory design processes—showing residents how to select different kinds of residential types (see Figure 1) and position them in an open area to design new housing complexes. Most residents looked uninterested after a few minutes. Planners consider this kind of session a textbook case of hands-on, participatory design, and it might rank relatively highly on Cardullo and Kitchin’s (2018) scaffold of smart citizen participation.

On temporarily set-up laptops, older residents largely created blocks of a uniform size and shape and stacked them in neat rows. I asked one woman what she was building, and she shrugged: “just putting things in a line, not actually making anything.” A group of high school boys giggled as they built the tallest, most absurd towers possible. I caught up with Arnie, a Swiss planner from ETH Zurich, after the event. He sighed: “the public build these crazy structures, that surely they don’t actually want to see in practice, or they place a few blocks and lose interest. And it’s poorly attended, too. It’s hard to do citizen engagement here in Singapore, but it’s hard in Switzerland too.”

Many state planners cited lack of smart citizen participation as evidence that Singapore citizens expected the government to do everything. Alvin says he and other planners try to engage regularly with residents, but with little success. They put the “Master Plan” online for 90 days so that people can comment on it, he explains, but “people only care when it becomes clear that it will directly affect them, which is after that period.” James cites under-construction building sites as one such issue: “we let people use the land before we build on it, and they play soccer on it and get attached.” Planners sometimes have issues getting people to move for sociocultural reasons: no one wants to live near nursing homes, for example, so people protest but only after it’s “too late.” He says that people mostly and very actively complain on social media like Facebook, where they can easily give feedback to state officials since there is only one layer of governance and Singapore has a small population.

From Lily and the planners’ reflections, one might conclude that residents do not want to participate, despite planners’ best efforts. But James’ experience suggests

that residents do participate and express strong preferences, just not in the consultation, feedback, or participatory design spaces that planners make. Over two years, I found lots of evidence of engagement with Singapore's smart city project as residents practiced smart citizenship in myriad ways, but in spaces that did not adhere to traditional democratic participation as "having your say" in an agora or the "participatory design" imagined by planners in workshops held by state agencies: both which demand extra labour from already overworked people (especially marginalized populations). As Larry, a former planner, said: "Stop talking, stop asking people to talk. Watch what they do, do it with them, let them surprise you."

Since states project political power through smart urban infrastructure via smart city planning practices, everyday material engagement with the city, despite seeming practical and mundane, is a form of political engagement (Leszczynski 2020; Billig 1995). Residents practice politics as active smart citizens by affectively and materially engaging with the smart city in their daily lives, for example, through play with and refusal of biometric and other data flows. For example, students in Singapore's National Science Experiment wore smart sensors on a lanyard around their necks to gather data on their motion and environment. Ying, Lily's daughter, told me that she presses a button on the sensor every time she feels happy, and inputs why, to add more data. She also used its camera to take pictures of her "fav hangout spots", like Toa Payoh playground. When Ying presses the button on her sensor to indicate she is happy, she creates another data point for the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) that leads them to conclude playgrounds and community centres spark joy, generating further state investment in these design activities (Benita et al. 2020). She also learns how to visualise her data as part of the Smart Nation project, learning how to replicate or reimagine state visions of Singapore's future through her lessons in smart data visualisation and through school trips to state agencies which place those lessons in a larger state sociotechnical imaginary. In doing so she uses play with data flows to develop and shape her own sense of self, citizenship, and nation, also changing the smart city as she engages with it.

When Lily, Ying and her brother Justin go to see the results of the NSE displayed at the URA's Singapore City gallery, Justin plays with a data-gathering exhibition. It asks him to make his future play space by touching the digital screens, playing with the sensor-enabled blocks in the exhibition, and drawing pictures. By reimagining traditional playground forms, Justin imagines different futures which will then be re-materialised into newly built playgrounds based upon his play.

Playgrounds are a key material-symbolic resource through which the state materialises future imaginaries and fosters affective identifications with the nation. Shaping children's imaginaries from a young age, the state built playgrounds as "imaginative children spaces that conveyed a sense of national and cultural identity" (National Design Museum 2018). Playground design is a way to leave "strong impressions on many young minds" (ibid), salient examples of how the state projects

imaginaries in the intimate public sphere. Engaging with and reimagining these play structures, as a result, is a form of affective political engagement that also reimagines the symbols themselves and the sociotechnical imaginaries they project. In drawing, planning, playing, touching, producing data, and processing data, Ying and Justin practice smart citizenship by interacting with the Smart Nation in myriad ways in their daily lives, both replicating and reimagining it through data flows and material and affective engagement with its infrastructures.

For many residents, especially marginalised groups, such material engagements in intimate spaces are rights claims, because they are building themselves into a future they were built out of. Some residents refuse data flows by, for example, attending private clinics to avoid transmitting their medical data to the state, since an HIV-positive diagnosis can lead to deportations. Queer informants also refused demographic data flows to live in public housing with partners, subverting Singapore's strict housing policy which enforces racial quotas and heteronormative housing arrangements. Some intimate data flows are harder to subvert: racial data recorded at birth determining where a resident can live, and citizenship status conferring the right to marry, work certain jobs, and even have children, for example. "Civic and political publicness" may therefore not be the appropriate concepts to privilege in "local techno-public smart assemblages" (Cowley, Joss and Dayot 2018:70). Moving beyond "traditional fora as spaces of public engagement" may help us develop a more imaginative understanding of smart citizen spatialities (Cowley, Joss, and Dayot 2018:72). Putting poor, female and/or minority bodies in political spaces or increasing the number of democratic spaces in a city, as feminist scholars argue, is only "partially sufficient to address historically and culturally embedded forms of disadvantage" (Cornwall and Goetz 2005: 783).

Instead of suggesting that residents need to increase their visibility in state spaces, I advocate for a shift from a general, standardised concept of the idealised republican smart citizen towards specific analyses of how differently embodied citizens want to—or already do—participate in the everyday production of the smart city. Understanding smart citizenship as involving affective, material practices makes modes of citizen (and non-citizen!) participation visible. It also explains why the idealisation of bottom-up, active, vocal participation in a democratic public sphere outlined in smart citizenship literature might engender unsuccessful attempts to reverse inequality in the smart city.

From <https://dig.oii.ox.ac.uk/> 07/24/2021

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Voting Opens for Next Term of ADB President; Masatsugu Asakawa Nominated

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) today opened the voting process for its President for a 5-year term starting on 24 November 2021. ADB Governors were

invited to nominate candidates for the position from 31 May to 30 June. ADB President Masatsugu Asakawa is the sole nominee. ADB Governors are invited to vote on Mr. Asakawa's candidacy by 30 August 2021. Mr. Asakawa was first elected as President on 30 November 2019 and assumed the Presidency on 17 January 2020 to serve the remaining term of his predecessor, Takehiko Nakao. Read Mr. Asakawa's Vision Statement (Summary and Full Statement). In electing a President, the ADB Charter requires a majority of the total number of Governors, which must represent a majority of the total voting power of ADB members. The result of the election will be announced once the Board of Directors has recorded the votes. Learn more about the election process.

From <https://www.adb.org/> 07/01/2021

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Prime Minister Ardern Steers APEC Leaders Toward Course for Recovery

New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern has chaired a meeting of leaders representing the 21 APEC member economies overnight. "For the first time in APEC's history leaders have come together for an extraordinary meeting focused exclusively on COVID-19, and how our region can navigate out of the worst health and economic crisis in living memory," Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern said. "Front of mind for leaders is achieving widespread access for vaccines globally and working collaboratively to provide them to everyone as soon as possible. "Our discussions moved us beyond vaccine nationalism. Now we are focusing on all aspects of contributing to the global vaccination effort—making vaccines, sharing vaccines and using vaccines.

"Nobody is safe from this virus until everyone is safe. Ensuring both global vaccine access and uptake is as high as possible in the shortest time possible gives our regional and individual economies the greatest chance to accelerate recovery, and will support greater economic stability. "We are also pushing for collaborative and practical solutions on safely reconnecting with the world by continuing to explore options including vaccine passports, travel green lanes and quarantine-free travel bubbles. This is a challenge to which we are working hard to find creative solutions. "We have the opportunity to build back better and emerge from this crisis more inclusive, more sustainable and more adaptable than ever, and in order to achieve this as fast as possible—we need to do it together," Prime Minister Ardern said.

APEC Leaders also discussed a range of other matters relating to the pandemic including:

Individual domestic approaches to the ongoing management of COVID-19;

The evolving strains and health dimensions of COVID-19, with APEC helping speed the flow of vaccines;

Fiscal and monetary tools available to sustain economies through the pandemic, with

the importance of keeping markets open to one another. Leading a regional health, trade and economic response to the pandemic has been one of New Zealand's priorities as APEC 2021 chair. Today's meeting builds on progress made at APEC trade, structural reform and finance ministers' meetings from last month and sets a strong foundation for when APEC Leaders meet again in November. The full joint statement released by leaders at the conclusion of the meeting can be found here.

From <https://www.apec.org/> 07/22/2021

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East Asia

CHINA: Vice Premier Stresses Building Rural Commerce Systems

Chinese Vice Premier Hu Chunhua called for building rural commerce systems to make contributions to the country's new development paradigm. Hu, also a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, made the remarks while attending a recent symposium on building commerce systems in rural areas in Haicheng City, northeast China's Liaoning Province. Efforts should be made to build towns and townships into commercial centers serving surrounding areas and strengthen the nurture of county-level market entities, Hu said. The circulation efficiency of agricultural products should be improved, and the agricultural product processing capabilities should be strengthened, according to Hu. He also stressed support for sustainable and healthy development of e-commerce in rural areas.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 07/06/2021

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China Considers RRR Cuts to Support Real Economy: State Council

China will increase the financial support for the real economy, especially the micro, small and medium-sized enterprises, a State Council executive meeting chaired by Premier Li Keqiang decided Wednesday. To that end, the country will adopt monetary tools such as cuts in the reserve requirement ratio (RRR) for banks at an appropriate time, the meeting said. Such measures are expected to mitigate the impact of commodity price hikes on the operation of companies, the meeting said, adding that the country will refrain from mass stimulus, maintain the stability of monetary policy and enhance its effectiveness. The meeting also decided to roll out monetary tools to support carbon emission reduction, and provide incentives for more private funds to finance the cuts. On the basis of trials, the country will launch the national trading of carbon emission rights among the power generation industry in July this year, and the industries covered will be expanded later on, the meeting said.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 07/07/2021

China to Better Protect Workers' Rights in New Labor Forms to Boost Flexible Employment

China will better protect the rights and interests of workers engaged in new forms of employment, to boost flexible employment, create jobs and increase people's income, the State Council's executive meeting chaired by Premier Li Keqiang decided on Wednesday. "The lawful rights and interests of workers engaged in new forms of employment must be upheld. The flexibly employed now total over 200 million across the country. Last year, we realized fairly sufficient employment, and flexible employment saw an increase of 7.7 percent." Li said. "New forms of employment have become a key source of job opportunities and an important underpinning for keeping overall employment stable," he said. To adapt to the new types of employment, multiple forms of labor relations that help protect workers' rights and interests will be established. Enterprises that engage in labor dispatch and outsourcing should provide appropriate safeguards for workers' rights and interests.

"The lawful rights and interests of workers engaged in new labor forms must be protected. Such protection needs to be compatible with the relevant laws and regulations, and various forms of labor relations should be established, to promote the sound development of flexible employment," Li said. Enterprises should pay work remuneration on time and in full, and refrain from setting any evaluation criteria that endanger workers' safety and health. Platform enterprises were urged to solicit opinions from worker representatives when formulating or adjusting the rules and algorithms on order distribution, commission rate, among others, and make the results public. No unlawful restrictions shall be imposed that prohibit workers from taking jobs on multiple platforms. Occupational injury insurance for the flexibly employed will be piloted, with ride-hailing, food delivery and instant delivery as the priority.

Vocational skills training models tailored to new forms of employment will be developed, and subsidies will be provided to eligible workers participating in such training programs. The household registration restrictions will be lifted for the flexibly employed to enroll in basic pension and medical insurance schemes in places where they work. "Enterprises should assume their obligations and responsibilities for ensuring the rights and interests of the flexibly employed, including reasonable pay, accident insurance and vocational training. There should be proper regulation wherever needed," Li said. "The government has the job to provide for essential needs. Household registration restrictions should be removed regarding basic pension and medical insurance," he said. The meeting also decided to make medical insurance services more efficient and convenient to better protect people's health and enhance their sense of gains.

China Releases Plan on Modernizing Primary-level Governance

China's central authorities have released a plan on modernizing the system and capacity for primary-level governance. The plan, issued by the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee and the State Council, stresses upholding the full leadership of the Party over governance at primary level, and focuses on improving people's well-being. Measures should be adapted to local conditions and implemented step by step, while power should be delegated to primary-level governments and their burden should be reduced, the plan says. It calls for establishing in about five years a primary-level governance system led by the Party organizations, with law-based duty performance by the government, cooperation from various kinds of organizations, and participation from the public. The governance model should combine self-governance, rule of law, and rule of virtue. By another 10 years, modernization of the system and capacity for primary-level governance should be basically achieved, and the benefits of primary-level governance system with Chinese characteristics should be fully demonstrated, the plan says.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 07/11/2021

Xi Inspects Tibet, Stressing Lasting Stability, High-quality Development

Chinese leader Xi Jinping has stressed fully implementing the guidelines of the Communist Party of China (CPC) for governing Tibet in a new era and writing a new chapter of lasting stability and high-quality development for the plateau region. Xi, general secretary of the CPC Central Committee, Chinese president and chairman of the Central Military Commission, visited the Tibet Autonomous Region from Wednesday to Friday for the 70th anniversary of Tibet's peaceful liberation, the first time in the history of the Party and the country. Xi extended congratulations to the 70th anniversary of Tibet's peaceful liberation, visited officials and ordinary people of various ethnic groups and conveyed the CPC Central Committee's care to them. Xi said over the past 70 years Tibet has made historic strides in the social system and realized full economic and social development, with people's living standards significantly improved. "It has been proven that without the CPC, there would have been neither new China nor new Tibet," Xi said. "The CPC Central Committee's guidelines and policies concerning Tibet work are completely correct." Xi stressed efforts to strengthen developing border areas, emphasized the four major issues of stability, development, ecology and border-area consolidation, and called for new achievements in protecting the ecology of Qinghai-Tibet Plateau and advancing its sustainable development.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 07/23/2021

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Senior Chinese Lawmaker Stresses Improving Legal System Against Telecom Fraud

Senior Chinese lawmaker Wang Chen has stressed the importance of further developing the country's legal system to fight telecom and internet fraud. Wang, a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and vice chairman of the National People's Congress Standing Committee, made the remarks while inspecting legislation against telecom fraud in Beijing from Wednesday to Friday. Wang urged supervisory and regulatory bodies to fulfill their duties to help ensure that recurring telecom fraud cases are seriously dealt with and the relevant criminal chain is cracked. He called for quickening legislation to improve laws related to telecom, finance, and the internet, and upgrading the legal tools against telecom and internet fraud.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 07/24/2021

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Senior Official Stresses Party Building in Advancing Rural Vitalization

Chen Xi, a senior official of the Communist Party of China (CPC), on Thursday urged organizational departments at all levels to strengthen Party building with higher standards, greater efforts and more practical measures to promote rural vitalization. Chen, a member of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee and head of the CPC Central Committee's Organization Department, made the remarks while addressing a teleconference on the relevant cause. Chen called for theme training on rural vitalization, efforts to draw all kinds of talent and forging a sound rural governance system under the Party's leadership. He also stressed the need to summarize the experiences in promoting poverty alleviation through Party building and use them in advancing rural vitalization.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 07/29/2021

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S. Korea, U.S. to Form Working Group on Cybersecurity Cheong Wa Dae

South Korea said Friday it will launch a working group on cybersecurity with the United States in order to reinforce cooperation against hacking attacks. It is a measure to follow up on a recent summit agreement between the leaders of the allies -- Presidents Moon Jae-in and Joe Biden -- to bolster the partnership in countering global cyber threats. "The government plans to strengthen the cooperative system with the U.S. by launching the cyber working group to involve relevant authorities,"

Cheong Wa Dae said. The presidential office was briefing on the results of a high-level interagency meeting to check on the nation's cybersecurity posture. The regular session was chaired by Suh Hoon, director of national security at Cheong Wa Dae, with vice ministerial officials of 16 government offices in attendance. They include the National Intelligence Service (NIS), the Ministry of Science and ICT and the Defense Acquisition Program Administration. The NIS said it plans to consolidate and unify the cyber attack alert systems of the military and the civilian and public sectors. Suh cited constant reports of ransomware attacks at home and abroad and called for a thorough response. "Amid deepening dependence on cyberspace due to COVID-19, in particular, all government agencies need to check and preemptively respond to cyber threats by unspecified forces," Suh stressed, according to Cheong Wa Dae.

From <https://en.yna.co.kr> 07/16/2021

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South-East Asia

MALAYSIA: Parliament to Convene in Late July

Malaysia's lower house of parliament is set to reconvene in late July for a five-day sitting after the suspension of parliament and state assemblies due to the pandemic earlier this year, the government said on Monday. The sitting from July 26 to Aug. 2 will explain the national recovery plan and make necessary amendments to allow for hybrid sessions, the Prime Minister's Office said in a statement. Other items on the agenda include the COVID-19 situation in the country and the current state of emergency declared in January, following which parliament and state assemblies have been suspended. Malaysian Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin had sought and received the consent of King Sultan Abdullah Sultan Ahmad Shah to declare a state of emergency on Jan. 12 to curb the COVID-19 outbreak. Sultan Abdullah on June 16 had called for the country's parliament to reconvene as soon as possible.

From <http://www.xinhuanet.com> 07/05/2021

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Malaysian Defense Minister Appointed as Deputy PM

Malaysian Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin has appointed Defense Minister Ismail Sabri Yaakob as the deputy prime minister, the government said on Wednesday. The appointment is to help PM Muhyiddin manage the administration of the country and deal with the current health and economic crisis due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Prime Minister's Office said in a statement. Additionally, Foreign Minister Hishammuddin Hussein has been appointed as a senior minister and will take over the management of the country's security issue from Ismail Sabri, it said. Both appointments have been presented to King Sultan Abdullah Sultan Ahmad Shah and are effective immediately, it added. Muhyiddin became the prime minister in March

last year following the abrupt resignation of former Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad, who had been in office since the general elections in 2018. Muhyiddin had not appointed any deputy at that time, instead of having picked four ministers, including Ismail Sabri, as senior ministers to help him manage the country.

From <http://www.xinhuanet.com> 07/07/2021

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Malaysian PM Muhyiddin Still in Power: Attorney General

Malaysia's Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin and his government remained in power despite an announcement by a key component party to withdraw support, the country's Attorney-General said on Thursday. At this stage, the government is yet to have any clear facts that proved Muhyiddin had lost the majority support in the lower house of parliament, Attorney-General Idrus Harun said in a statement. Citing the country's constitution, he said whether or not an individual held the majority support of the members of the lower house of the parliament must be determined by the parliamentarians themselves, not through statements from political parties or leaders. "Therefore, in terms of the law, the prime minister and the current cabinet still remain to execute federal powers," he said. The announcement comes after the largest component party of Muhyiddin's ruling coalition, United Malays National Organization (UMNO) announced withdrawing its support for Muhyiddin as prime minister earlier on Thursday. Muhyiddin became the prime minister in March last year following the abrupt resignation of former Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad, who had been in office since the general elections in 2018. The support of UMNO's 38 members of parliament (MP) is essential for Muhyiddin to command a majority in the country's 222-seat lower house of parliament.

From <http://www.xinhuanet.com> 07/08/2021

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PHILIPPINES: Ruling Political Party Names New President

Philippine ruling party, Partido Demokratiko Pilipino-Lakas ng Bayan (PDP-Laban), elected Energy Secretary Alfonso Cusi as the new president during a national assembly convened by Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte on Saturday. Duterte, the party chair, led the national assembly held in Clark Freeport Zone in Pampanga province north of Manila. In his speech at the assembly, Duterte thanked his party mates for their continued support of his leadership. "Your presence here sends a clear and resounding message to everyone that our party is as strong as ever and that we are united in further consolidating our ranks until the end of my term and beyond," Duterte said. Duterte, 76, ends his single six-year term in June 2022. The PDP-Laban has been the ruling party since 2016 under the Duterte Administration.

From <http://www.xinhuanet.com/> 07/17/2021

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THAILAND: Army Helps Enforce Night Curfew amid Rising Infections

The Thai army is joining the police and other government personnel in enforcing a 14-day curfew in Bangkok and nine provinces, Supreme Commander Chalermpol Srisawat said on Sunday. The military officers are taking part in enforcing the curfew, effective from the upcoming Monday between 9:00 p.m. to 4:00 a.m., as part of the stepped-up measures to combat the surge in COVID-19 infections, Chalermpol said at a press conference. Nearly 150 road checkpoints in Bangkok and surrounding provinces and four southern provinces are set up to minimize road travel during the night curfew, he said. Thailand has been scrambling to contain a third wave of the pandemic since April. Fuelled by the more infectious Delta variant, the daily cases in the Southeast Asian country have continued to rise recently. On Sunday, Thailand reported 9,539 new COVID-19 cases, the third consecutive day of over 9,000 confirmed cases, and 86 deaths, according to the country's Center for the COVID-19 Situation Administration (CCSA). The new infections took the nation's total number to 336,371 cases and 2,711 deaths.

From <http://www.xinhuanet.com> 07/11/2021

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VIETNAM: Nguyễn Xuân Phúc Re-Elected as State President, Swore to Realise Comprehensive Development

The ongoing National Assembly plenary session on Monday morning elected Nguyễn Xuân Phúc as State President of Việt Nam for 2021-26 tenure. All 483 deputies present (96.79 per cent of all deputies this term) voted in favour of the resolution for the re-election of Phúc, born in 1954 in the central province of Quảng Nam, who has been served as the State Prime Minister of Việt Nam during 2016-21 and as President since April, 2021. President Phúc cited the oath at the swearing-in ceremony that was broadcast live on national television channels. He said: "Under the nation's sacred red flag and yellow star, in front of the National Assembly and people across the country, I, State President of Socialist Republic of Việt Nam, swear to be absolutely faithful to the country, to the people, to the Constitution, and strive to fulfil the mission assigned by the Party, State and people." On behalf of the National Assembly, Chairman Vương Đình Huệ acknowledged the oath and offered his congratulations and presented flowers to the new President. In the speech addressed to the nation, the new President affirmed his commitment to work with parliament and the Government to realise the vision of comprehensive development, in which no one is left behind, especially in remote and economic challenged areas.

Phúc said he would uphold the unity and consensus and promote democracy in order to let the nation firmly move forward. The President said he would listen to the opinions and aspirations of all classes of people, including intellectuals at home and abroad, and pledged to continue to reform the judiciary sector, build a Socialist rule

of law state, strengthen national defence and security capacity, pay attention to the building of a modern and professional People's Army and People's Public Security forces that maintains peaceful life for the people and stand ready to resolutely defend the peace, independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Fatherland. Regarding the ongoing serious fourth wave of COVID-19 infections marked by the highly contagious Delta variant, he believes in the strength of the nation and the people's unity and has confidence in the Government and the commitment of "all of us" to help defeat the outbreak.

On Sunday afternoon, the Standing Committee of the National Assembly submitted the nomination for the new President in the new term, in which Nguyễn Xuân Phúc, member of the 13th-tenure Politburo and State President of Việt Nam during 2016-21 tenure (officially holding office since 2021 April) and deputy of 15th-tenure National Assembly, was the sole entry. According to the 2013 Constitution, the State President is the head of State, representing Việt Nam in domestic and foreign affairs. The State President is elected by the National Assembly among the National Assembly deputies. The term of the President shall follow the term of the National Assembly. When the National Assembly's term comes to an end, the State President continues to perform his duties until the new National Assembly elects a new State President. The State President will submit lists of candidates for the election of the Prime Minister, the Vice State President, the Chief Justice of the Supreme People's Court and the Chief Procurator of the Supreme People's Procuracy. The lists will be discussed in groups. In the afternoon, outcomes of the morning discussion on the list of candidates for the position of Prime Minister will be reported to the NA, followed by a vote on the list, and then the election of the Prime Minister.

From <https://vietnamnews.vn/> 07/26/2021

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City to Set Up Group to Advise on Covid-19 Prevention, Economic Recovery

HCM City People's Committee Chairman Nguyễn Thành Phong has approved the establishment of an advisory group for COVID-19 prevention and economic revival. It will consist of eight leading academics in various fields, and be headed by Dr Vũ Thành TỰ Anh of Fulbright Việt Nam University with Dr Trương Minh Huy Vũ of the Vietnam National University of HCM City as his deputy. The group will attend meetings of the Steering Committee for COVID-19 Prevention and Control and others on pandemic prevention and control, receive all relevant information, and co-ordinate with the Data Analytics Centre to standardise data related to the epidemic. Its mission comprises researching and suggesting specific solutions and measures to the Chairman for fighting COVID-19 while also reviving economic growth. The city Department of Science and Technology has launched a programme called 'HCMC Innovation Solution- COVID-19' (HIS – COVID 2021) to seek out and connect innovative solutions for coping with the pandemic. It has solicited registration

by individuals, teams, organisations, and businesses with innovative solutions, technology applications or digital transformation initiatives that can help the city deal with the outbreak. It encourages innovations, big and small, that can be applied to patient care, disease control and contact tracing, and technology solutions that enable businesses to maintain operations amid the pandemic. Twenty outstanding solutions and technologies will be chosen and their innovators will receive training and consulting to improve their presentation skills. The 10 best will be selected to be honoured at the 2021 HCM City Innovation, Startup and Entrepreneurship Week - WHISE 2021. They will then be introduced to city agencies and the HCM City Union of Business Associations to enable commercial transfer. Businesses and start-ups with innovative solutions that need further support will be created condition to register for the department's SpeedUp Programme under which they could receive investments to foster further development. Registration is open from now until August 15.

From <https://vietnamnews.vn> 07/29/2021

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South Asia

INDIA: IFSC Forms Expert Committee on Longevity Finance

In order to establish a unified regulator, the International Financial Services Centres Authority (IFSCA) has been formed to develop and regulate financial products, financial services, and financial institutions in the International Financial Services Centres (IFSCs) in India. As per global estimates, there are one billion people in the silver generation (a global cohort of individuals aged 60 and older) with a combined spending power of \$15 trillion and the size is ever-expanding. Development in medicinal science and technology will support extending of lifespan and longevity of the silver generation. It is estimated that by 2040, there will be more members of the silver generation than people under 20 years of age. The change in demography will open doors to new challenges and opportunities especially in the areas of wealth management, health, insurance, and other investment products. Hence, in its endeavour to develop Logevity Finance Hub in GIFT, IFSC has constituted an Expert Committee to recommend an approach towards the development of Longevity Finance Hub and provide a road map for the same. The IFSCA is being co-chaired by Kaku Nakhate, president and country head (India), Bank of America, and Gopalan Srinivasan, Ex-CMD, New India Assurance Company Limited. Further, the committee members comprise leaders from the entire longevity finance ecosystem including areas such as banking, insurance, wealth management, FinTech, legal, compliance and management consultancy.

From <https://egov.eletsonline.com/> 07/15/2021

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Bengal Govt Appoints Randhir Kumar, Addl. Secretary, WCD &

Social Welfare; Raju Mishra, Jt. Secretary, Industry, Commerce & Enterprises

The Government of West Bengal, on Thursday, July 15, issued official orders to transfer and post two IAS officers. Randhir Kumar (IAS 2006-Batch) has been assigned the charge of Additional Secretary, Women and Child Development and Social Welfare Department. Alongside, Kumar also gets the additional charge of Commissioner for Persons with Disabilities. Raju Mishra (IAS 2015-Batch) has been appointed as Joint Secretary, Industry, Commerce & Enterprises Department. Mishra will also hold the additional charge of Officer on Special Duty (OSD), West Bengal Mineral Development and Trading Corporation.

From <https://egov.eletsonline.com/> 07/16/2021

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Andhra Pradesh Govt Invites National Agencies to Develop Energy-Efficient Systems

The Government of Andhra Pradesh is actively working on developing cost-effective measures in the power sector and has invited national agencies to collaborate with the state in its energy efficiency movement. Emphasising the need for cost-effective measures, Chief Secretary of the state, Aditya Nath Das, said that through innovative technologies greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions can be reduced. Also, he has asked the energy department to identify sector-wise energy efficiency investment potential in Andhra Pradesh which helps in employment generation and overall economic development. According to the Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE) estimates, Andhra Pradesh has a saving potential of 16,875 MU which is nearly 25 percent of the total annual energy demand of 67,500 MU. Aditya Nath Das who is also the Chairman of the Andhra Pradesh State Energy Conservation Mission (APSECM), in a statement, said that the state is planning to adopt long-term and short-term strategies to mitigate the adverse effects of climate change by cutting down GHG emissions. The statement came ahead of the APSECM's forthcoming executive committee meeting. Citing examples of a few developed nations, Das said that nations like the US, Japan, Germany, Norway and others follow advanced energy management practices and have cut down their energy costs through implementing energy efficiency at global standards. Further, Das has asked the energy department to furnish a report in the executive committee meeting on department-wise initiatives and the establishment and functioning of energy conservation cells.

From <https://egov.eletsonline.com/> 07/20/2021

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Nasir Kamal Becomes DG, Bureau of Civil Aviation Security

Following the orders from the Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT), Senior IPS officer Nasir Kamal has been assigned the post of Director General of Bureau of

Civil Aviation Security (BCAS), on July 24, Saturday. The transfer orders have been given approval by the Appointments Committee of the Cabinet (ACC) for a tenure up to his superannuation on July 31, 2022. The 1986-Batch IPS officer of the Uttar Pradesh cadre has served in various portfolios prior to the present appointment. Ahead of the latest orders, he was posted as Director of the National Institute of Criminology and Forensic Science.

From <https://egov.eletsonline.com/> 07/27/2021

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Gyaneshwar Kumar Singh Gets 3 Months Extension as JS, Ministry of Corporate Affairs

After the official orders from the Centre, Gyaneshwar Kumar Singh, a senior IP&TA&FS officer of 1992-Batch gets a three-month extension on his central deputation as Joint Secretary, Ministry of Corporate Affairs. The three-month extension will be in effect from August 3, 2021. Singh is an officer of Indian Posts & Telecommunication Accounts & Finance Services (IP&TA&FS).

From <https://egov.eletsonline.com/> 07/31/2021

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NEPAL: ADB Appoints New Country Director

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has appointed Arnaud Cauchois as new Country Director for Nepal. As country director, Mr. Cauchois will lead ADB operations in the country and policy dialogue with the government of Nepal and other development partners. He will oversee the implementation of ADB's country partnership strategy for Nepal that focuses on the country's long-term development needs through improved infrastructure for private sector-led growth, improved access to devolved services, and environmental sustainability and resilience. "ADB has been a long-term development partner of Nepal. I look forward to building on the strong partnership and working closely with the government, development partners, and other stakeholders in supporting Nepal's development agenda and poverty reduction efforts," said Mr. Cauchois. "My immediate priority will be to support the Government of Nepal as it addresses both the immediate and longer-term health, economic, and social impacts of the COVID-19 crisis."

In the medium term, Mr. Cauchois indicated the need to support the government with the development of integrated solutions by combining expertise across sectors and mixing public and private sector financing. Expansion of private sector operations, as well as green resilient and inclusive projects, will be pursued in close collaboration with the government and development partners. Mr. Cauchois has almost 3 decades of professional experience, including over 15 years with ADB. Mr. Cauchois, a French national, joined ADB in 2005 as a Rural Development Specialist and has since held numerous leading positions. Prior to this appointment, he served as

Principal Water Resources Specialist for India, Nepal, and Sri Lanka and was outposted in ADB's India Resident Mission. He was also assigned in ADB's Nepal Resident Mission for 6 years and led the improvement of the water management systems in Nepal.

He has extensive experience of leading policy dialogue with governments on various aspects of development and has served the European Commission in Afghanistan as Rural Development Advisor prior to joining ADB. He holds a master of science degree in water resource management from the Superior School of Tropical Agronomy in Montpellier, France. Since its establishment in 1966, ADB has provided over \$7 billion in financial and technical assistance to Nepal. The assistance was provided in energy, transport, water supply and urban infrastructure services, agriculture and irrigation, and education.

From <https://www.adb.org/> 07/06/2021

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Central-West Asia

AZERBAIJAN: Appoints New Ambassador to US

Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev has signed a decree on the appointment of Khazar Ibrahim as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Azerbaijan to the US, Trend reports on July 26.

From <https://en.trend.az/> 07/26/2021

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Azerbaijan Recalls Ambassador to Afghanistan, Appoints New One

President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev has signed a decree on the recall of Hasan Zeynalov from the post of the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Azerbaijan to Afghanistan. President Aliyev also signed an order on the appointment of Ilham Mammadov as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Azerbaijan to Afghanistan.

From <https://www.azernews.az> 07/28/2021

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KYRGYZSTAN: Appoints Ambassador to Pakistan

Kyrgyz President Sadyr Zhaparov signed a Decree, according to which Ulanbek Totuyayev has been appointed Ambassador of Kyrgyzstan to Pakistan, Trend reports citing Kabar. By another presidential Decree, Erik Beishembiyev was relieved of the post of Kyrgyzstan's Ambassador to Pakistan.

From <https://en.trend.az/> 07/03/2021

TURKMENISTAN: New Composition of Commission for Entrepreneurship Support to Be Approved

A new composition of the State Commission for the Support of Small and Medium-Sized Businesses will be approved in Turkmenistan, Trend reports with reference to the State News Agency of Turkmenistan. In addition, it is also planned to make changes to the composition of the Interdepartmental Commission under the Ministry of Finance and Economy. Thus, this measure is aimed at improving the activities for the privatization of state property. Turkmenistan is implementing tasks to increase the share of the private sector, expand market relations, privatize state-owned enterprises, develop small and medium-sized businesses, ensure an abundance of goods in domestic markets, provide access to services, as well as create new jobs. As a result of the support of domestic producers, the number of goods and services that meet the needs of people is constantly increasing. Thus, the program to increase the volume of export products includes 33 projects, including the construction of production enterprises in the light, food, pharmaceutical, transport and communication industries, in mechanical engineering and agriculture. The program for the manufacture of import-substituting products includes 81 projects, including construction materials based on local raw materials, chemicals, household chemicals, processing of agricultural products, fish and fish products, vegetables and horticulture.

From <https://en.trend.az/> 07/05/2021

Turkmenistan Appoints New Ambassador to Kuwait

On July 8, 2021, the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Turkmenistan to the United Arab Emirates Serdarmamet Garadjjev presented his credentials to the Prime Minister of the State of Kuwait Sheikh Sabah Khalid Al-Hamad Al-Sabah as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Turkmenistan to the State of Kuwait (with residence in Abu-Dhabi). The ceremony was held in the Palace of the Emir of the State of Kuwait, Trend reports citing the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkmenistan. During the ceremony, the Ambassador of Turkmenistan conveyed to the Prime Minister of the State of Kuwait warm greetings and best wishes on behalf of the President of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov. In turn, the Prime Minister of the State of Kuwait Sheikh Sabah Khalid Al-Hamad Al-Sabah expressed his best wishes for peace and prosperity to the President and people of Turkmenistan, as well as reiterated the readiness of the Kuwaiti side to develop constructive cooperation for the resolution of issues occupying the regional and international agenda.

From <https://en.trend.az/> 07/09/2021

UZBEKISTAN: The Public Procurement System to Be Improved

A presidential resolution "On additional measures to ensure transparency and increase the efficiency of public procurement" was adopted. According to the resolution, from 5 July 2021, the corresponding corporate customers (24 titles): - place on a special information portal and in the mass media announcements on the conduct of procurement procedures and information on the results of public procurement in the implementation of public procurement; - submit, in accordance with the established procedure, to the State Unitary Enterprise "Center for Comprehensive Expertise of Projects and Import Contracts" under the Ministry of Economic Development and Poverty Reduction, technical specifications and procurement tender documents for conducting a comprehensive examination in cases where the cost of goods (works, services) exceeds twenty-five thousandth the size of the base calculated value. Also, the current procedures for the implementation of public procurement directly or without holding tenders, determined individually, in accordance with the decisions of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan and the Cabinet of Ministers, are canceled. In accordance with the regulation: - departmental normative legal acts are being developed for the prequalification of suppliers; - the electronic system of accounting for the movement of inventory items "E-ombor" is being introduced by automating processes in the warehouse and transport logistics management system. The resolution also approved the Regulation on the Republican Commission for ensuring open and transparent public procurement.

From <http://www.uzdaily.com> 07/03/2021

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Uzbekistan to Improve Public Procurement System

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

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New Ambassador of Uzbekistan to Japan Appointed

In accordance with a relevant resolution of the Senate Council, Mukhsinkhuja Abdurakhmonov has been appointed Uzbekistan's Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary to Japan, Trend reports citing Kun.uz. Abdurakhmonov was born in 1974 in Fergana region, graduated from California State University, Chico (USA) and Otaru University of Commerce (Japan). In 2018-2021, he worked as deputy khokim of Fergana region – head of the investment and foreign trade department. Since 2021, he has been working as the head of a department at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

From <https://en.trend.az/> 07/10/2021

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Uzbekistan to Establish Strategic Development Agency

The Strategic Development Agency will be established by the presidential decree of the Republic of Uzbekistan, the "Nigoh" Telegram channel said, Trend reports citing Kun.uz. Reportedly, the purpose of establishing a new agency is to improve approaches to the implementation of reforms aimed at improving the investment climate in the country, increase their investment attractiveness and competitiveness to ensure the rapid development of regions and industries. The main tasks of the Strategic Development Agency are attracting investments by sectors and regions, studying the strategic issues of project implementation, identification of promising sectors and directions of investment activity, etc. As it turned out, the Agency's priorities, key performance indicators, other decisions related to its activities will be approved by the Council of the Strategic Development Agency under the chairmanship of the President of Uzbekistan.

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Oceania

AUSTRALIA: Morrison Cops Twin Poll Hit on Key Issues

The coalition government has suffered a hit among women while Scott Morrison's

approval rating is at its lowest for a year. Polling for The Sydney Morning Herald and The Age shows the coalition's female primary vote has fallen from 41 to 37 per cent since the last federal election in May 2019. Support for Labor among women rose two percentage points to 35, while female backing for independents lifted from four to seven per cent. The findings come during renewed debate about the treatment of women in the Liberal Party after former MP Julia Banks accused the prime minister of menacing behaviour. Through a spokesman, Mr Morrison has denied the claims. According to the research, the coalition's overall primary vote has fallen from 41 to 39 per cent nationwide since the election. A separate Guardian Essential poll shows the prime minister suffered a six percentage point hit to his approval rating which has fallen to 51 per cent, its lowest in 12 months.

One in three people surveyed rate the federal government's response to coronavirus as poor, rising from 24 per cent a month ago. That is the highest figure since the start of the pandemic while the number giving the COVID response a positive rating is at its lowest, sharply falling nine points to 44 per cent. Labor leader Anthony Albanese's approval rating grew slightly to 41 per cent but he remains well behind in the preferred prime minister stakes in both polls. The Essential survey of almost 1110 voters also gauged how people outside NSW believed Mr Morrison treated their state in comparison to his home turf. Half of all Western Australian respondents believed the prime minister treated their state less favourably than NSW. One in four Victorians felt the same while more than a third of Queenslanders thought NSW was receiving better treatment from Mr Morrison. WA and Queensland were the bedrock of the coalition's narrow election victory at the last federal poll.

From <https://au.news.yahoo.com> 07/06/2021

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Coalition, Morrison Support Ebbs: Newspill

The coalition and Labor are neck-and-neck in popular support but Prime Minister Scott Morrison's approval rating has slipped amid new state lockdowns and criticism of the government's pandemic response. The federal government and Labor opposition both recorded 39 per cent of voter support in the latest Newspill, published in The Australian. Satisfaction with Mr Morrison has fallen by four points to 51 per cent in the fresh poll, while the number of voters claiming they were dissatisfied with the prime minister rose by four points to 45 per cent. The government's primary vote fell by two points while federal Labor's rose by the same amount over the three-week period. This combined four-point shift has Labor now leading the coalition 53-47 on an estimated two-party preferred basis. The Newspill results come amid criticism of the COVID-19 vaccine rollout and new outbreaks of the viral disease that have sparked lockdowns in NSW and Victoria and interstate border restrictions.

The poll was conducted July 14-17 with 1506 voters in metropolitan and regional

areas. Satisfaction with the federal government's management of the vaccine rollout has further waned, with 40 per cent of respondents claiming they were satisfied and 57 per cent claiming otherwise. This compares with 50 per cent saying they were satisfied with the handling of vaccine rollout - and 46 per cent otherwise - in the previous Newspoll last month. The results contrast with earlier in the year when the coalition enjoyed substantially better approval for its handling of the coronavirus. Outbreaks of the Delta COVID-19 variant triggered stringent lockdown restrictions in NSW with millions of residents largely confined to their homes and most retailers forced to shut their doors. Victoria is currently in a five-day lockdown following outbreaks there, with the state's premier warning it is too early to tell if the restrictions will be extended. Early this month, Mr Morrison announced a four-phase plan to move away from lockdowns and restrictions once enough of the population is vaccinated.

From <https://au.news.yahoo.com> 07/19/2021

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Electricity System Needs 'Whole Redesign'

A complete redesign of Australia's energy system is needed to ensure ageing coal-fired power generation can be safely and smoothly replaced by renewables. That's the advice presented to federal and state ministers by the Energy Security Board on Wednesday, as large and small-scale renewable generation accelerates across the country. Board chair Dr Kerry Schott said it was important the entry of new generation was coordinated with the exit of coal-fuelled generation, to ensure the delivery of "affordable, smart and clean energy". "This isn't just a tweak around the edges - it's about a whole redesign of the national electricity market. We expect governments will need time to develop their responses," Dr Schott said. "It's something we have to do to confidently embrace Australia's energy future while reducing the risk of price shocks and blackouts.

"The clearer and more coordinated the path, and the smoother the transition, the more confidence consumers, industry, investors and governments will have." Over the past two years, the ESB has consulted industry, consumer bodies, academics and governments. Dr Schott said there would be four areas of work required. The first of these is preparing for ageing coal-fuelled generation retirement by giving incentives for new types of generation, storage and firming capacity. "We have had a very mild summer, and everyone has got very complacent, but we only need one hot summer in three jurisdictions together or a major unexpected outage at a big coal plant and we've got a real resource adequacy issue right on top of us," she said. The second line of work will be technical reforms, such as getting inertia, voltage and frequency control into the national electricity market - allowing greater use of batteries and emerging technologies.

A third reform will be putting more power in the hands of consumers to source the

energy they need, making better use of home solar, batteries and smart appliances. And a fourth piece of work will involve opening the grid to cheaper large-scale renewables through a series of priority "renewable energy zones", which would ensure generation and transmission is done in a planned way. Dr Schott says the ESB will continue to work with the Australian Energy Market Commission, Australian Energy Market Operator and the Australian Energy Regulator to progress reforms to the National Electricity Rules while the broader advice is considered by governments. Federal Energy Minister Angus Taylor and his state and territory counterparts will consider the recommendations and present a package to the national cabinet later this year.

Mr Taylor said crucial to absorbing renewables into the grid, without threatening reliability and affordability, would be a mechanism to "provide the right market signals to drive investment in dispatchable generation". "This important work must deliver affordable, reliable power, supported by the right mix of technologies and value-for-money transmission, where it is needed," he said. "It must also address the significant changes occurring in our market."

From <https://au.news.yahoo.com> 07/28/2021

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NEW ZEALAND: Government Achieves More Ethnic Diversity, More Women on Public Sector Boards

The Government has achieved its target of 50 percent women on public sector boards and committees, Minister for Women Jan Tinetti, Minister for Pacific Peoples Aupito William Sio, and Minister for Diversity, Inclusion and Ethnic Communities, Priyanca Radhakrishnan announced today. "Our success in hitting our target for 50% women on public sector boards shows that this Government is building the foundations of a better future," Jan Tinetti said. Public sector boards are now made up of 50.9 percent women, up from 45.7 percent in 2017. "More diverse boards make better quality decisions – and better representation of our diverse communities will be critical in securing our recovery from COVID-19 for all New Zealanders," Jan Tinetti said. This is the second year the Stocktake of Gender, Māori, Pacific and Ethnic Diversity on public sector boards and committees measured ethnicity data – now received for 98.6 percent of board members.

The report found: 71.4 percent of board members are New Zealand European (down from 71.6 percent in 2019) 22.3 percent are Māori (up from 21.1 percent last year), 5.4 percent are Pacific peoples (up from 4.6 percent last year) 4 percent are Asian (up from 3.6 percent last year) 0.8 percent are Middle Eastern, Latin American or African (up from 0.6 percent last year).

Wāhine Māori currently hold 12.2 percent of public sector board roles. "We can see there are considerable gaps in representation for our Pacific, Asian, Middle Eastern, Latin American, and African communities, and that there's more work to do,"

Priyanca Radhakrishnan said. "It is vital that the Boards of today reflect the communities they serve. Just as our communities are multi-cultural, and come from many walks of life, we must gain the same varied perspective on our boards to ensure that diversity is achieved," Aupito William Sio said.

"Now that we have met our initial target, Minister Sio, Minister Radhakrishnan and I are working together to build on our progress, and to increase ethnic diversity across all public sector boards and committees," Jan Tinetti said. "We are also working on how data can be collected on representation for the disability community to further increase diversity of our public sector boards. "I invite women who are interested in serving on boards to join the Ministry for Women's nominations database. We are always looking for more women to develop and proactively nominate for board roles," Jan Tinetti said.

From <https://livenews.co.nz> 07/07/2021

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Government to Provide Support for Water Reforms, Jobs and Growth

The Government today announced a \$2.5 billion package to support local government transition through the reforms to New Zealand's drinking water, wastewater and stormwater services. The package will also stimulate local economies while creating jobs and unlocking infrastructure for housing. "New Zealand's water systems are facing a significant crisis and will continue to do so without major transformation. Overhauling our drinking, waste and stormwater services will benefit all New Zealand communities, no matter where they are in the country," Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern said. "The support package announced today will ensure that no council is worse off as a result of the reforms. \$500 million is set aside to provide certainty for local authorities that they will be supported through the transition process, and to ensure the financial impacts of reform will be managed.

"We also want to acknowledge the significant change that the shift in these assets means for Council balance sheets. So the remainder of the package seeks to ensure Councils are better off despite this change to their asset base. "To do this we have set aside \$2 billion for councils to invest in the future for local government, urban development, and the wellbeing of their communities," Jacinda Ardern said. Local Government Minister Nanaia Mahuta said that Central and Local Government had very similar goals and it was important that the two tiers of government approached these challenges together. "New Zealand's water system is one of the country's most significant infrastructure sectors, touching every aspect of our lives. Our communities will need to invest between \$120-185 billion over the next 30 years to maintain, replace and upgrade ageing assets and to provide for growth," Nanaia Mahuta said.

"We acknowledge the significant pressures that all councils are facing with

considerable change on the way. The water reforms have provided an opportunity for Government and local councils to work together to ensure the reforms are fit for purpose. We are pleased to be working closely with Local Government New Zealand not just on these reforms, but on other challenges and opportunities” said Nanaia Mahuta. The Government has signed a commitment to work together with Local Government New Zealand to engage and consult with councils and other stakeholders over the next 6-8 weeks and beyond. “The reforms are about acting for the greater good, with significant benefits to all communities. But they will have the best chance of success if all councils participate. We are working with the sector to ensure everyone understands the reform-related information, and to explain the policy proposals, the benefits of reform, and the details of the support package,” said Nanaia Mahuta.

“All of our water assets will be retained in local ownership; that has been a bottom line for us. We have added a public referendum provision to provide the ultimate protection against privatisation. There will be mechanisms to ensure a strong community say in how the assets and services are run and how planning will be managed,” said Nanaia Mahuta. The \$500 million “no worse off” component of the support package seeks to address the costs and financial impacts that councils would incur such as the transfer of water assets, liabilities, revenue and staff to a new water services entity. The funding also ensures councils will be able to continue to sustainably perform their non-water related roles and functions. But we also know that calculating the long-term impact of the transition of these services for councils is difficult.

The “better off” component of the support package, which comprises \$1 billion Crown funding and \$1 billion from the new water services entities is allocated to councils on the basis of a nationally consistent formula. Councils will be able to use this funding to support the three waters service reform, and focus on other local wellbeing outcomes associated with climate change and resilience, housing and urban design and planning, and community wellbeing. The funding package comes on top of the \$761 million committed to the reform programme in 2020, and \$296 million announced in Budget 2021 for the costs involved with the establishment and transition of the new water entities. The reforms will grow GDP by \$14 billion to \$23 billion over the next 30 years and create an estimated 6000 to 9000 jobs.

From <https://livenews.co.nz> 07/15/2021

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3、 Management, Capacity Building and Innovation

Asia-Pacific

Smart Cities Can Pioneer a New Future for Britain with

Fully-Integrated Tech

When a group of the country's leading telecoms experts met with the DCMS Select Committee in July 2020, they advised that improved digital infrastructure and a move towards "smart cities" will be essential for a sustainable, post-pandemic recovery. For example, Sunderland has installed an IoT (Internet of Things) telecare system in the homes of 350 elderly and vulnerable people. Enabled devices are equipped with software, sensors and complementary tech, specifically to connect and exchange data with other systems and over the internet. These devices are interconnected on the network and can "speak" to each other to enable remote operation of day-to-day tasks. Network-connected sensors mean residents can use their smart devices to close curtains, make sure that doors are shut, send reminders to take medication and make sure that residents are eating and drinking by monitoring smart fridges and kettles. Smart cities can deliver connected CCTV cameras, intelligent road systems and public safety monitoring systems. Savvy property developers and landlords and their residents will directly experience the benefits from early adoption. Seamless, uninterrupted 5G connectivity across the development, will allow homeowners and tenants to move freely around around their complex without experiencing 'lag' or a drop in connection speeds.

Taking this a step further, NPO developer ThamesWey Group has deployed integrated systems to allow users to access their own private network "bubble" using an individually set passcode. This means their internet connection is safe and secure from third-party hijacking, no matter where they are located on a smart enabled complex. Fully integrated smart cities, once the remit of futuristic movies, are becoming a reality to help society reimagine how urban areas operate and, crucially, improving lives. Many of us could not imagine a life without a dishwasher or a Hoover, so integral are these things to our lives. So too will smart cities be in the years to come. In order to realistically achieve this, there must be strong connectivity infrastructure nationwide. It can't be left up to individual cities to forge the path forward, or we will end up with disjointed urban planning. Of course, the much-touted advent of 5G and Wi-Fi 6 will nudge smart technology into the mainstream and accelerate new deployments. Yet progress towards a Smart Britain remains frustratingly slow, exacerbated by a lack of funding and cohesive planning.

We should follow the example of cities such as Singapore and Oslo, who are both ranked within the Top 50 Smart Cities in the world. Oslo for example is now investing heavily in pioneering platforms such as the the 'SmartOslo Accelerator' – a portal that connects start-up communities with the City of Oslo to improve the services available to its citizens. It's helping with areas such as transport and traffic management as well as health monitoring in response to Covid-19. Importantly, it shows the foresight needed to harness future tech. Local authorities, contractors, landlords and developers, suddenly have a fascinating world of data analytics at their fingertips. These can be used to improve how we live, run our homes and make our

towns and cities cleaner, safer and more sustainable. And this only scratches the surface of what can be achieved.

From <https://www.cityam.com/> 07/05/2021

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Post-COVID-19, Building Resilience to Crises and Regaining Citizen's Trust Should Be a Priority for Governments, says OECD

The COVID-19 crisis has demonstrated governments' ability to respond to a major global crisis with extraordinary flexibility, innovation and determination. However, emerging evidence suggests that much more could have been done in advance to bolster resilience and many actions may have undermined trust and transparency between governments and their citizens, according to a new OECD report. Government at a Glance 2021 says that one of the biggest lessons of the pandemic is that governments will need to respond to future crises at speed and scale while safeguarding trust and transparency. "Looking forward, we must focus simultaneously on promoting the economic recovery and avoiding democratic decline" said OECD Director of Public Governance Elsa Pilichowski. "Reinforcing democracy should be one of our highest priorities." Countries have introduced thousands of emergency regulations, often on a fast track. Some alleviation of standards is inevitable in an emergency, but must be limited in scope and time to avoid damaging citizen perceptions of the competence, openness, transparency, and fairness of government.

Governments should step up their efforts in three areas to boost trust and transparency and reinforce democracy: Tackling misinformation is key. Even with a boost in trust in government sparked by the pandemic in 2020, on average only 51% of people in OECD countries for which data is available trusted their government. There is a risk that some people and groups may be dissociating themselves from traditional democratic processes. It is crucial to enhance representation and participation in a fair and transparent manner. Governments must seek to promote inclusion and diversity, support the representation of young people, women and other under-represented groups in public life and policy consultation. Fine-tuning consultation and engagement practices could improve transparency and trust in public institutions, says the report. Governments must also level the playing field in lobbying. Less than half of countries have transparency requirements covering most of the actors that regularly engage in lobbying.

Strengthening governance must be prioritised to tackle global challenges while harnessing the potential of new technologies. In 2018, only half of OECD countries had a specific government institution tasked with identifying novel, unforeseen or complex crises. To be fit for the future, and secure the foundations of democracy, governments must be ready to act at speed and scale while safeguarding trust and transparency. Governments must also learn to spend better, according to

Government at a Glance 2021. OECD countries are providing large amounts of support to citizens and businesses during this crisis: measures ongoing or announced as of March 2021 represented, roughly, 16.4% of GDP in additional spending or foregone revenues, and up to 10.5% of GDP via other means. Governments will need to review public spending to increase efficiency, ensure that spending priorities match people's needs, and improve the quality of public services.

The report, the seventh edition of the OECD's two-yearly overview of public governance, compares OECD and partner countries in areas such as public finance, employment, budgeting, digitalisation and public service delivery. The data can be used to benchmark governments' performance, track national and international developments over time, and monitor governments' progress in public sector reform. Read the full report and country notes. For more information, journalists should contact Spencer Wilson in the OECD Media Office. Working with over 100 countries, the OECD is a global policy forum that promotes policies to preserve individual liberty and improve the economic and social well-being of people around the world.

From <https://www.oecd.org/> 07/09/2021

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IFCN Launches Working Group to Address Harassment Against Fact-Checkers

A core group of 11 representatives from the fact-checking community teams up to support IFCN in addressing the increasing volume of harassment cases. The International Fact-Checking Network, a global coalition of fact-checkers, has been monitoring the increasing number of harassment cases against its more than 120 verified signatory organizations operating in 62 countries. Incidents of harassment, ranging from online attacks to in-person threats, often lead to stress among the staff of these organizations beyond the norms of standard journalistic criticism. This effect is particularly pronounced in countries where the freedom of press and expression is systematically challenged. Over the past 12 months, more than 30 organizations have reported some type of harassment and/or threat from political actors or institutions, from publishers and/or from users on tech platforms whose falsehoods are flagged by fact-checkers as a part of their work with social media companies, especially Facebook. (The IFCN receives funding from Facebook, and members of the platform's Third-Party Fact-Checking program are required to be signatories to the IFCN's Code of Principles to participate).

The IFCN facilitated a gathering of some 50 fact-checking leaders last month to discuss the trends and similarities between the many cases of harassment against fact-checkers and how to respond to abuse or scare tactics. The conversation, initially organized to respond to the threat of violence recently faced by the Bosnian-Herzegovinian fact-checking organization Raskrinkavanje, sparked this initiative to launch a working group to monitor IFCN's efforts in this field. The IFCN

circulated an invitation for nominations to join this working group and formed two subgroups to respond to these challenges. One subgroup will act as the core for consulting and planning by convening on a monthly basis to discuss reported harassment cases and advise IFCN with action items. This group will be provided with immediate updates on every harassment case reported by the fact-checking community and be asked for their guidance and input.

Invited and approved by the representatives of the member fact-checking organizations, the core group member are:

Ana Brakus | Faktograf.hr | Croatia
Angie Drobnic Holan | PolitiFact | United States
Barbara Whitaker | The Associated Press | United States
Ellen Tordesillas | Vera Files | Philippines
Gülin Çavuş | Teyit | Turkey
Jency Jacob | Boom | India
Maarten Schenk | Lead Stories | Belgium / United States
Pablo M. Fernández | Chequeado | Argentina
Rabiu Alhassan | GhanaFact | Ghana
Thanos Sitistas | Elinika Hoaxes | Greece
Tijana Cvjetičanin | Raskrinkavanje | Bosnia-Herzegovina

A larger group formed by the participating representatives from the fact-checking community will convene on a quarterly basis to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the IFCN's actions to help fact-checkers respond to harassment and threats. It will also provide feedback to the IFCN and publish quarterly "Harassment against fact-checkers" reports with the IFCN for verified signatories and the public.

This broader group is composed of the following persons:

Angie Drobnic Holan | PolitiFact | United States
Barbara Whitaker | The Associated Press | United States
Ellen Tordesillas | VERA Files | Philippines
Gülin Çavuş | Teyit | Turkey
Jency Jacob | BOOM | India
Maarten Schenk | Lead Stories | Belgium
Pablo M. Fernández | Chequeado | Argentina
Rabiu Alhassan | FactSpace West Africa (GhanaFact) | Ghana
Thanos Sitistas | Ellinika Hoaxes | Greece
Tijana Cvjetičanin | Zašto ne (Raskrinkavanje, Istinomjer) | Bosnia-Herzegovina
Ana Brakus | Faktograf.hr | Croatia
Coreena Enet Soares | NewsMeter | India
Egle Zicari | 15min | Lithuania
Enock Nyariki | PesaCheck | Kenya
Inga Springe | Re:Baltica/Re:Check | Latvia/Estonia

Jeanfreddy Gutiérrez | Colombiacheck | Colombia
Justin Arenstein | PesaCheck // Code for Africa (CfA) | Kenya
Keti Khutsishvili | Myth Detector | Georgia
Kshipra Narain | NewsMobile | India
Lee Mwitil | Africa Check | South Africa
Malkhaz Rekhviashvili | Factcheck Georgia / GRASS | Republic of Georgia
Martina Stewart | USA Today | United States
Rajneil Rajnath Kamath | Newschecker – NC Media Networks Pvt Ltd | India
Stefan Voss | Deutsche Presse-Agentur (dpa) | Germany

From <https://www.poynter.org/> 07/13/2021

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Teaching Young Children in the Language They Speak at Home is Essential to Eliminate Learning Poverty

Children learn more and are more likely to stay in school if they are first taught in a language that they speak and understand. Yet, an estimated 37 percent of students in low- and middle-income countries are required to learn in a different language, putting them at a significant disadvantage throughout their school life and limiting their learning potential. According to a new World Bank report Loud and Clear: Effective Language of Instruction Policies for Learning, effective language of instruction (LoI) policies are central to reducing Learning Poverty and improving other learning outcomes, equity, and inclusion. Instruction unfolds through language – written and spoken – and children learning to read and write is foundational to learning all other academic subjects. The Loud and Clear report puts it simply: too many children are taught in a language they don't understand, which is one of the most important reasons why many countries have very low learning levels. Children most impacted by such policies and choices are often disadvantaged in other ways – they are in the bottom 40 percent of the socioeconomic scale and live in more remote areas. They also lack the family resources to address the effects of ineffective language policies on their learning. This contributes to higher dropout rates, repetition rates, higher Learning Poverty, and lower learning overall.

“The devastating impacts of COVID-19 on learning is placing an entire generation at risk,” says Mamta Murthi, World Bank Vice President for Human Development. “Even before the pandemic, many education systems put their students at a disadvantage by requiring children to learn in languages they do not know well – and, in far too many cases, in languages they do not know at all. Teaching children in a language they understand is essential to recover and accelerate learning, improve human capital outcomes, and build back more effective and equitable education systems.” The new LoI report notes that when children are first taught in a language that they speak and understand, they learn more, are better placed to learn other languages, are able to learn other subjects such as math and science, are more likely to stay in school, and enjoy a school experience appropriate to their culture and local

circumstances. Moreover, this lays the strongest foundation for learning in a second language later on in school. As effective LoI policies improve learning and school progression, they reduce country costs per student and, thus, enables more efficient use of public funds to enhance more access and quality of education for all children.

“The language diversity in Sub-Saharan Africa is one of its main features – while the region has 5 official languages, there are 940 minority languages spoken in Western and Central Africa and more than 1,500 in Sub-Saharan Africa, which makes education challenges even more pronounced,” says Ousmane Diagana, World Bank Regional Vice President for Western and Central Africa. “By adopting better language-of-instruction policies, countries will enable children to have a much better start in school and get on the right path to build the human capital they need to sustain long-term productivity and growth of their economies.” The report explains that while pre-COVID-19, the world had made tremendous progress in getting children to school, the near-universal enrollment in primary education did not lead to near-universal learning. In fact, before the outbreak of the pandemic, 53 percent of children in low- and middle-income countries were living in Learning Poverty, that is, were unable to read and understand an age-appropriate text by age 10. In Sub-Saharan Africa, the figure was closer to 90 percent. Today, the unprecedented twin shocks of extended school closures and deep economic recession associated with the pandemic are threatening to make the crisis even more dire, with early estimates suggesting that Learning Poverty could rise to a record 63 percent. These poor learning outcomes are, in many cases, a reflection of inadequate language of instruction policies.

“The message is loud and clear. Children learn best when taught in a language they understand, and this offers the best foundation for learning in a second language,” stressed Jaime Saavedra, World Bank Global Director for Education. “This deep and unjust learning crisis requires action. Investments in education systems around the world will not yield significant learning improvements if students do not understand the language in which they are taught. Substantial improvements in Learning Poverty are possible by teaching children in the language they speak at home.”

The new World Bank policy approach to language of instruction is guided by 5 principles:

1. Teach children in their first language starting with Early Childhood Education and Care services through at least the first six years of primary schooling.
2. Use a student’s first language for instruction in academic subjects beyond reading and writing.
3. If students are to learn a second language in primary school, introduce it as a foreign language with an initial focus on oral language skills.
4. Continue first language instruction even after a second language becomes the principal language of instruction.
5. Continuously plan, develop, adapt, and improve the implementation of language of

instruction policies, in line with country contexts and educational goals.

Of course, these language of instruction policies need to be well integrated within a larger package of policies to ensure alignment with the political commitment and the instructional coherence of the system. This approach will guide the World Bank's financing and advisory support for countries to provide high-quality early childhood and basic education to all their students. The World Bank is the largest source of external financing for education in developing countries – in fiscal year 2021, it broke another record and committed \$5.5 billion of IBRD and IDA resources in new operations and, in addition, committed \$0.8 billion of new grants with GPE financing, across a total of 60 new education projects in 45 countries.

From <https://www.worldbank.org/> 07/14/2021

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Air Quality Monitoring Is Now One of the Fastest-Growing Smart City Applications

According to a new research report from the IoT analyst firm Berg Insight, the installed base of urban air quality monitoring devices reached 73,000 units in 2020 and will grow at a CAGR of 34 percent to reach 315,000 units in 2025. This number refers to any type of networked outdoor air quality monitoring device that in some way is used for supplementary air quality monitoring purposes in cities and communities. Traditional regulatory monitoring stations and devices intended for personal use only are thus not included. The last five years has seen a rapidly growing commercial availability of increasingly small and low-cost air quality monitoring devices that enable deployments in large numbers at reasonable costs, thereby addressing the shortcomings of traditional monitoring networks which consist of highly advanced and very expensive monitoring stations that typically can be found at only one or a few locations in major cities and therefore have very low sensitivity for local variations in air quality. "Many cities have now finally started to realize the immense value that IoT-enabled and relatively low-cost and small-sized air quality monitors could bring by facilitating substantial improvements in the spatial and temporal resolution of urban air quality data" said Levi Ostling, smart cities analyst at Berg Insight.

During the past year, the interest in air quality monitoring solutions in the smart city context has reached entirely new levels, boosted by news about potential relationships between air pollution and Covid-19 as well as by record-breaking wildfire seasons in the US and Australia. The market for non-regulatory devices is however in a nascent stage and the number of market participants is growing at a day-by-day basis. Companies that have emerged as leading vendors include for example Environmental Instruments (AQMesh), Airly, Envea, Libelium, Kunak Technologies and Breeze Technologies from Europe; Clarity Movement, Aclima, PurpleAir and Met One from North America; and Aeroqual, Phoenix Robotix

(Aurasure), Oizom and Sailhero from Asia-Pacific. The range of devices available in the market span from near reference-grade solutions to very low-cost devices with little to none supporting software and services.

Although advancements are being made, there is still a lack of standards and certifications related to non-regulatory air quality monitoring devices. The level of performance of air quality monitoring solutions is of great importance as air quality data is often used to inform decisions that have direct consequences for people's health and wellbeing. At this stage, cities thus need to be wary in their implementation strategies for these new types of devices. "If too many cities hastily adopt solutions that turn out to be of poor quality, the industry is at risk of inducing a general mistrust in low-cost air quality sensing technology – a hurdle that could be difficult to overcome once established" concluded Mr. Ostling.

From <https://www.berginsight.com/> 07/25/2021

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What “Smart City” Means for 2021: How Digital Twins, AI and Other Innovations Drive Smart Transformation

As U.S. cities feel the strain of urban growth—rents rising faster than incomes, more than half a million people homeless, persistent racial and social equity issues—some are making much-needed strides. They are becoming what McKinsey Global Institute defines as a “smart city,” a place where technology and data are used to enable better decisions that improve quality of life. A critical condition for any city has been an understanding of the physical location that determines what it is and what it can become. That is why the anchor of urban planning systems is the science and practice of geography. For the past generation, city agencies have adopted geographic information systems (GIS), initially as systems of record for property management, infrastructure, transit, and public safety. Over the past decade, they built on this foundation with embedded sensors, mobile devices, high-speed wireless connectivity, exponential data and advanced analytics. The result is the potential for a truly smart city, not only in terms of affordability and convenience, but also in terms of deepened social bonds. A handful of cities and communities are aspiring to this vision. They are employing sensors for real-time inputs to data hubs, artificial intelligence (AI) for faster applications, multi-layered social demographic data, 3-D models to build and analyze their city's digital twin, and other tech innovations that we'll explore here.

3-D models and the digital twin

In Boston, planners have initiated 103 major projects that include 8,000+ new residential units. They started with a 3-D smart map for buildable lands analysis, including permitting requirements and environmental impact. They used these 3-D maps to create a digital twin—a model of the city encompassing buildings, infrastructure and vegetation. Urban planners iterate projects with the digital twin by

adding designs and data layers to explore and optimize development. The digital twin can also provide insight on the condition of specific neighborhoods and buildings—down to the floor or room levels, and up into the airspaces above existing structures including rooftops. A 3-D map or digital twin makes all this information available to managers, first responders, transit workers, healthcare providers, local businesses, educators and, most importantly, residents. By sharing this data from the digital twin via a dashboard or web app, city leaders can provide important information to the public.

Real-time dashboards

Near Atlanta, leaders in Cobb County use a GIS-driven dashboard to manage the flow of vehicle and pedestrian traffic around major venues by analyzing road closures, accidents and real-time congestion. They also apply AI with machine learning to monitor and adjust traffic signals. In Gresham, Ore., city staff created a smart asset management system, including a location-based registry of public service assets. This effort supports many city departments to optimize everything from street reconstruction projects, traffic counts and the city's hydrant flushing program, to asset repair and replacement, expense management and street repaving.

IoT sensors and AI

Smart cities focus on data-driven performance. Often they leverage data streams from IoT sensors and mobile devices embedded in the city's infrastructure, vehicles and buildings. This data can be analyzed with deep learning and other forms of AI. The result is not only improved mobility (such as the adaptive traffic signals in Cobb County), but a broad shift to real-time decision making. In Coral Gables, Fla., city leaders established a Smart City Hub that brings together key data, high-speed communication networks, and IoT-powered devices such as pedestrian sensors deployed on the city's Giralda Plaza promenade. This modern approach is transforming how city officials and residents communicate while aiding in public safety efforts such as hurricane preparedness and supporting sustainability goals.

Collaboration platforms and civic inclusion

Smart cities engage with constituents from the start, identifying citizen priorities, empowering groups with special concerns and needs and working to improve social equity. Oakland's Department of Race and Equity—the first department of its kind in California—uses location technology to inform a racial equity impact analysis on the city's decisions and policies. Similar to the way cities have used environmental impact analysis for a generation, Oakland's racial impact analysis asks, what will the impact of this decision be on equity?

Into 2021 and beyond

Challenges remain. Population growth keeps pace with advances in urban development. Yet, even with shared, real-time data and the power of visualization,

ambitious civic projects require collaboration among multiple agencies and stakeholders. But, by applying more advanced technology tools, leaders can reinvigorate that collaboration to achieve smarter, more sustainable cities. Richard Budden is Esri's general manager in Europe, supporting customers, distributors and partners across the region. Providing subject matter expertise and thought leadership on topics including smart cities, transportation, infrastructure, and sustainability, Budden helps organizations to understand the value that location technology can bring to their business. Budden is located in The Netherlands but prior to this he was based in Dubai, UAE, where he led Esri's government and smart cities business across the Middle East and Africa.

From <https://www.americancityandcounty.com/> 07/25/2021

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Joint Statement of the Multilateral Leaders Task Force on COVID-19 Vaccines, Therapeutics, and Diagnostics for Developing Countries Following its Second Meeting

The Task Force on COVID-19 Vaccines, Therapeutics and Diagnostics for Developing Countries, established by the heads of the International Monetary Fund, World Bank Group, World Health Organization and the World Trade Organization to identify and resolve finance and trade impediments to vaccine, diagnostics, therapeutic production and deliveries, today launched a new website that includes the first phase of a global database and country dashboards on vaccines, therapeutics, and diagnostics to guide their work and advocacy. It also today issued the following joint statement: "We reiterate the urgency of providing access to COVID-19 vaccines, tests and treatments to people throughout the developing world. In the area of vaccines, a key constraint is the acute and alarming shortage in the supply of doses to low and low-middle income countries, especially for the rest of 2021. We call on countries with advanced COVID-19 vaccination programs to release as soon as possible as much of their contracted vaccine doses and options as possible to COVAX, AVAT, and low and low-middle income countries.

We are concerned that vaccine delivery schedules and contracts for COVAX, AVAT, and low and low-middle income countries are delayed or too slow. Less than 5% of vaccine doses that were pre-purchased by or for low-income countries have been delivered. Our common target is for at least 40% of people in low and low-middle income countries to be vaccinated by the end of 2021. We estimate that less than 20% of the necessary vaccines is currently scheduled for delivery to these countries, whether through COVAX, AVAT, or bilateral deals and dose-sharing agreements. We urge COVID-19 vaccine manufacturers to redouble their efforts to scale up production of vaccines specifically for these countries, and to ensure that the supply of doses to COVAX and low and low-middle income countries takes precedence over the promotion of boosters and other activities. We call on governments to reduce or eliminate barriers to the export of vaccines and all materials involved in their

production and deployment. We underscore the urgent need for all parties to address supply chain and trade bottlenecks for vaccines, testing, and therapeutics as well as all of the materials involved in their production and deployment.

As per the IMF staff's \$50 billion proposal to end the pandemic, and in line with the priorities set out by WHO, WTO, IMF and the World Bank Group, over \$35 billion in grant are needed with only one third of this financed to date. We welcome the recent announcement by COVAX and the World Bank to accelerate vaccine supplies for developing countries through a new financing mechanism. We also welcome the partnership between the World Bank and AVAT, noting that World Bank financing is now available to support the purchase and deployment of doses secured by both AVAT and COVAX. It is critical to improve clarity and transparency around the evolving vaccine market, expected production volumes, delivery schedules, and pre-purchase options. We call on manufacturers to accelerate delivery to developing countries and we call on advanced economies to scale-up near-term deliveries to developing countries." The database and country-by-country dashboards, which also build on the IMF-WHO COVID-19 Vaccine Supply Tracker, seek to focus international attention and mobilize action by illuminating specific gaps, not just globally but also country-by-country.

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East Asia

CHINA: To Improve Protecting New Platform-economy Workers' Rights

China issued a guideline on Thursday to improve protecting the rights of workers engaged in new forms of employment, according to the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security. With the rapid development of the platform economy, the number of workers engaged in new forms of employment, such as online car-hailing drivers and internet marketing specialists, has increased massively, read the guideline. But these workers face new situations and problems in protecting their rights and interests, it added. The guideline has, for the first time, made clear that platform companies should shoulder their due responsibilities in protecting the lawful rights and interests of their employees. China should improve the institutions in labor markets, including ensuring equal job opportunities, improving the guaranteed minimum income system, and safeguarding employees' rights to rest. These measures would protect these employees' rights and interests, according to the guideline. The country will also carry out pilots to offer occupational injury insurance for the flexibly employed in ride-hailing, food delivery, and instant delivery platform enterprises, said the guideline.

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China to Advance Int'l Cooperation in Digital Economy, Technology

Chinese authorities on Friday released a guideline on overseas investment and cooperation in the digital economy, detailing major tasks to actively engage in the global development of digital technology. The guideline, jointly released by several government departments including the Ministry of the Commerce, pledged active integration with the global industrial chain of the digital economy. More efforts will be made to enable digital economy enterprises to accelerate the deployment of overseas research and development centers and product design centers, and strengthen cooperation with overseas technology companies in fields such as big data, 5G, artificial intelligence, and blockchain for joint development of cutting-edge technologies, according to the guideline. Domestic companies will also be encouraged to tap opportunities in the overseas digital market to invest in smart infrastructure.

The guideline called for improving mechanisms concerning the "going out" process of the digital economy and stepping up regulations on new business models of the sector's overseas investment and cooperation. According to a white paper issued by the China Academy of Information and Communication Technology in April, China's digital economy maintained a high growth rate of 9.7 percent in 2020 amid the pandemic and global economic downturn. The scale of China's digital economy reached 39.2 trillion yuan (about 6.1 trillion U.S. dollars) last year, accounting for 38.6 percent of the GDP. With its digital economy ranking second in the world, China has highlighted the digital economy development in its 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-2025) to build a digital China.

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China to Boost Safety Precautions at Urban Metros

Chinese authorities on Monday stressed efforts to properly implement safety precautions at urban metro systems nationwide. The issue was addressed at a video conference held jointly by the Office of the Work Safety Commission under the State Council, the Office of the State Flood Control and Drought Relief Headquarters, the Ministry of Emergency Management (MEM) and the Ministry of Transport (MOT). Local departments and metro-operation units in particular should be fully aware of the extreme importance of metro safety, implement flood-control measures, and respond quickly to early warnings, according to the conference. In case of emergencies, natural disasters and other safety threats, metro-operation units should swiftly suspend the operation of some sections or the entire network in accordance with the regulations, and activate contingency plans in time, it said.

Metro-operating units should enhance their first-response capabilities by establishing and improving professional emergency-rescue teams, and providing sufficient emergency facilities, equipment and materials. Cities with metro networks are required to carry out self-check and overhaul, and the MOT and MEM will send experts to key cities for supervision, the conference noted. For the current flood season, the conference stressed efforts to strengthen urban traffic-safety work and real-time monitoring of key road sections, bridges, culverts and overpasses that are prone to waterlogging. More work should be done to continue flood control and disaster relief in downpour-hit Henan Province and brace for Typhoon In-Fa in the coastal regions, according to the conference.

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Rags to Riches Through China's Poverty Alleviation Efforts

Standing in the parlor he built before his house, Tashi Dundrup showed his prized possession with a sense of pride. "Spanning more than 100 square meters in space, the house has a kitchen, a bathroom, a living room and three bedrooms, and all came at a discounted price thanks to the national policy," he said. Tashi is a resident of Yuan Meng Xin Ju community in Gertse county, southwest China's Tibet Autonomous Region. In standard Chinese, Yuan Meng Xin Ju means "a new home where dreams come true." His living room has a full set of Tibetan-style furniture and all household electronic utilities. However, for Tashi and his family, such living condition was hard to imagine five years ago. He used to be a herder in Rimar village. "Back then, we only had a clay house," Tashi said, adding that he used to make a meager 2,000 yuan (308.8 U.S. dollars) a year from herding, which was just enough to live from hand to mouth. In pursuit of a better life, Tashi, who was then living below the national poverty line, registered for a poverty alleviation relocation program.

After being relocated, fortune smiled on him. Tashi was given the job of water delivery at the community's property management center by the local government. He was also elected as a member of the community management team this April, and took up the task of organizing cultural activities in the neighborhood. Tashi's wife Sonam Tsomo joined the local weaving cooperative, where locals make handicrafts and sell them. Currently, Sonam is aspiring to earn some qualifications in cookery so she can work at the community restaurant. Tashi's family income totaled 36,000 yuan in 2020. Back in Rimar village, he also has around 40 livestock being looked after by his relatives. With all the possessions put together, Tashi can save more than 20,000 yuan every year. Tashi's three children are currently attending school in the county, studying not far from home. "Their meals and tuitions are free. I have nothing to worry about," said Tashi.

"After relocation, my children can enjoy more convenient education, and our living conditions is so much better," Tashi said. Yuan Meng Xin Ju community is Gertse

county's first relocation site for poverty alleviation, and was built with a total investment of 17.18 million yuan. Home to 199 residents from 44 families, the community has all necessary amenities such as a cargo center, a wet market and a home service center. And like Tashi, all dwellers have shaken off poverty. Thanks to the efforts of Tashi and his colleagues, the community residents have access to diverse public cultural services, adding more happiness to their lives. "I am very content with my family's life, and I will continue working with my colleagues for the better lives of my fellow residents," Tashi said.

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China Makes Progress in Original Innovation: Official

China has made great progress in original innovation and science and technology development, said Chinese Minister of Science and Technology Wang Zhigang. China has substantially increased funding for basic research, with an average annual growth rate of 16.9 percent, Wang said at a press conference on Tuesday. The spending on basic researches has reached six percent of the total research and development (R&D) spending, he added. China has become the second-largest contributor of high-quality scientific and technological papers in the world, said Xu Jing, an official with China's Ministry of Science and Technology. The number of citations of China's high-level academic papers in 12 fields including materials science, chemistry, engineering technology, mathematics and physics ranked among the top two in the world, said Xu. According to Wang, China is actively promoting building regional innovation hubs and encouraging regions with proper conditions to take the lead in innovation-driven development. He said that the total economic output created by the high-tech zones across the country accounted for more than 12 percent of the whole country.

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China to Unify Subsistence Allowance for Urban, Rural Residents

China will introduce a unified subsistence allowance for urban and rural residents, the Ministry of Civil Affairs (MCA) said Wednesday. The move comes in a bid to promote the coordinated development of the subsistence allowances system in urban and rural areas, according to a press conference organized by the ministry. Gradual efforts will be made to guide local authorities in closing the subsistence allowance gap between urban and rural areas, said a MCA official.

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China Raises Export Tariffs on Steel Products to Push Industrial

Upgrading

China will adjust export tariffs on some steel products as part of efforts to push upgrading and transformation of the industry. Starting Aug. 1, China will raise export tariffs on ferrochrome and high-purity pig iron to 40 percent and 20 percent, respectively, according to a circular issued by the Customs Tariff Commission of the State Council. Previous rates on the product exports stood at 20 percent and 15 percent, respectively, since May 1. The decision is aimed at pushing industrial upgrading and high-quality development in the steel sector, the circular noted. Also on Thursday, the Ministry of Finance and the State Taxation Administration jointly announced that China will scrap export tax rebates on 23 types of steel products from Aug. 1. The specific execution time will depend on the export dates indicated in the declaration form for export goods, according to the online statement by the finance ministry.

The moves come as China is intensifying efforts to transform the energy-consuming steel industry for greener and high-quality growth. The country plans to cut crude steel output to ensure it falls year on year in 2021. In 2020, crude steel output rose by 5.2 percent year on year to exceed 1.05 billion tonnes, according to the China Iron and Steel Association. Making steel and other energy-consuming industries greener is an important part of China's broader efforts to cut pollution and tackle climate change. China previously announced that it would strive to peak carbon dioxide emissions by 2030 and achieve carbon neutrality by 2060.

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China's Housing Ministry Moves to Stabilize City Real Estate

China's housing authorities on Thursday held a regulatory talk with officials in five cities and urged them to stabilize the property markets in the wake of rapid increases in local home prices. Ni Hong, vice minister of housing and urban-rural development, said the cities of Yinchuan, Xuzhou, Jinhua, Quanzhou, and Huizhou should enhance property market regulation and monitoring and keep its development stable and sound. The prices of residential housing and land have increased too fast in these five cities in the first half of this year, and market expectations have become unstable. Ni asked officials of the five cities to uphold the principle that "houses are for living in, not for speculation" and refrain from using the property sector as a means of short-term economic stimulus. Ni also urged local governments to speed up efforts in establishing a link mechanism between housing and land prices, developing affordable rental housing, and making two-way adjustments in supply and demand to regulate the market order.

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China's Central Region Blazes New Path of High-quality Development

Central China has registered sustained economic growth in the first half of this year, with the total gross domestic product (GDP) of the six central provinces exceeding 11.75 trillion yuan (about 1.82 trillion U.S. dollars). China's central region includes the provinces of Shanxi, Anhui, Jiangxi, Henan, Hubei and Hunan. The region's permanent resident population, at nearly 365 million, accounts for more than a quarter of China's total. Recently, China issued a guideline on promoting the high-quality development of the country's central region in the new era, detailing measures to boost the region's economic growth, scientific and technological innovation, green development and opening-up. Giving full play to the region's advantages in industrial base, market potential, as well as scientific, educational and labor resources is of great significance for promoting the construction of a new development pattern, said Wu Xiaohua, a researcher with the Chinese Academy of Macroeconomic Research.

MORE ADVANCED, GREENER DEVELOPMENT

Regarding promoting advanced manufacturing, the guideline urges the building of industrial bases focused on sectors including intelligent manufacturing, new materials, new-energy vehicles and electronic information. The emergence of a batch of advanced manufacturing enterprises in Hunan is the result of industrial upgrading in the central region. Sany Heavy Industry Co., Ltd., for example, unveiled a new-generation intelligent excavator this year, which is equipped with a 1.9-cubic meter bucket, an electronically controlled hydraulic system and the 5G remote-control technology. The company's overseas sales exceeded 10,000 units in 2020, with year-on-year growth of more than 30 percent. "We hope to achieve the goal of 10 billion U.S. dollars in annual overseas sales by around 2025," said Xiang Wenbo, president of Sany. By 2025, marked progress should be achieved in innovation capacity, with its proportion of research and development input in the regional GDP reaching the national average, says the guideline.

Optics Valley, or the East Lake High-tech Development Zone, in Wuhan of central China's Hubei Province, is well known for its optoelectronic industry chain which attracts global enterprises in the optical fiber, integrated chip and display screen fields. For more than 30 years, the development zone has been taking innovation as the key to success, and a world-class science city will be fully operational in the development zone in 2035, said Wang Xiangwang, a senior official with the development zone. The region will also stick to the path of green and low-carbon development with the aim to realize the quest for green development. Shanxi, a province known for coal production, has made efforts in green and intelligent mining of coal mines and reduction in coal consumption, accelerated the development of new energy, and carried out pilot projects for energy networks construction. In July,

China's national carbon market started online trading, a significant step to help the country reduce its carbon footprints and meet emission targets. Hubei Province will lead the building, operation, and maintenance work of the registration system of the market.

HIGH-LEVEL OPENING-UP

The guideline noted that to achieve inland high-level opening-up, the country should speed up the development of transportation in the region, including building high-speed railways, promoting the construction of an international logistics center and international air-freight shipping center, and improving the international air-traffic network. A key transport hub, Zhengzhou, capital of Henan Province, is located at the intersection of the national railway network. To enhance its connection with European countries, the city has built an inland port to handle China-Europe freight trains. The number of freight train trips via the port jumped from 13 in 2013 to 1,126 in 2020, with the cargo value soaring from 50 million U.S. dollars in 2013 to 4.3 billion U.S. dollars in 2020, data showed.

The guideline also urges continued efforts to develop pilot free trade zones in the provinces of Anhui, Henan, Hubei and Hunan to a high standard, and optimize a business environment that is market-oriented, rule-based and internationalized. From 2006 to 2020, the import and export volume of the six central provinces had increased from 53.6 billion U.S. dollars to 387.3 billion dollars. In real terms, the annual foreign investment in the region increased from 3.42 billion dollars to 7.94 billion dollars. The central region has excellent geographical advantages in imports and exports, abundant labor resources and a broad consumer market, which are conducive to foreign enterprises to meet the needs of the international market, said Wang Shouwen, China's vice minister of commerce.

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JAPAN: Society 5.0 Expo Showcases Advanced Technologies

The Cabinet Office on Thursday launched the Society 5.0 Expo jointly with the Japan Agency for Marine-Earth Science and Technology (JAMSTEC) at Tokyo Skytree Town. This is expected to be Japan's first major expo to focus on Society 5.0. The expo will also be viewable online with multilingual explanations for the global audience. The expo will showcase the Society 5.0 concept proposed by the Japanese government as a highly desirable future society. The concept envisions the creation of a human-centered society in which all industries and other areas of society adopt AI, IoT, robots, big data and other innovative technologies to overcome critical challenges. The Cabinet Office's 6th Science, Technology and Innovation Basic Plan covering fiscal 2021 to 2025 sets forth the direction of science, technology and innovation policies to secure sustainability, resilience and the well-being of diverse individuals.

The expo will present achievements being realized through national projects focused on increasing innovation in society, including the cross-ministerial strategic innovation promotion program (SIP) and the ImPACT program for stimulating high risk, high-impact R&D. Japan's scientific and technological aspirations will be conveyed through numerous displays of advanced technologies. Specifically, some 50 leading Japanese companies, universities and organizations will exhibit approximately 200 products and research achievements that are expected to contribute not only to Society 5.0 but also the U.N.'s Sustainable Development Goals. The exhibits will cover fields such as mobility, healthcare and caregiving, manufacturing, agriculture, food, disaster prevention and energy, including:

- Asteroid-explorer Hayabusa2's returned capsule
- Full-scale model of SHINKAI 6500 submersible piloted to 6,500 meters undersea
- SkyDrive flying car
- Honda Legend Level-3 autonomous vehicle with high-definition 3D mapping
- Model of small synthetic-aperture radar satellite system for on-demand launches and instant observation
- HAL wearable cyborg that transmits brain signals to human muscles for assistance with physical functions
- Disaster-prevention systems for heavy rain and tornado forecasting and ICT-based information sharing
- Smart agriculture technology, such as an automated water supply and drainage system.

International viewers will be welcome to enjoy the many exhibits viewable online via mobile devices and PCs, supported with explanations available in a number of languages. The organizers will be pleased to present the virtual exhibition as an opportunity for the global community to learn more about Japan's forward-looking Society 5.0 concept.

Exhibits will be grouped under the follow themes: Stage 1 Prologue The opening theme will present a full-scale model of the SHINKAI 6500 research submersible and a Dagik Earth three-dimensional digital globe, etc. Satellite-based technologies that are being deployed on a practical working basis in various sectors also will be introduced. Stage 2 Science Frontiers — Space and Ocean. Exhibits of Japan's world-class space-exploration technology will include models of the International Space Station, the Kibo Japanese Experiment Module, a full-scale rocket engine, and the Hayabusa2 return capsule. Exhibits of Japan's ocean exploration and environmental-simulation technology will include autonomous underwater vehicles for exploring hydrothermal vents and ocean-floor resources and advanced solutions for ocean research.

Stage 3 5.0 Society of the Future. Science and technologies developed through Japan's SIP and ImPACT programs and how they will help to enhance life in five areas: 1) 100-year lifespans, 2) Mobility and social interaction, 3) Infrastructure for more resilient and safer life, 4) Human- and earth-friendly lifestyles and 5) Advanced manufacturing. Exhibits will include automated solutions such as robots, vehicles and drones, disaster-prevention systems such as AI for infrastructure inspections,

robotic industrial borescopes, next-generation energy and resources such as ammonia fuel and ocean-floor minerals, and advanced materials such as synthetic spider silk and strong but flexible ultra-thin polymers. Stage 4 Trajectory toward Society 5.0. The evolution of human civilization will be presented through videos and other visuals portraying Society 1.0 (hunting & gathering), 2.0 (agriculture), 3.0 (industry) and 4.0 (information) as well as 5.0 (at Tokyo Skytree Tembo Galleria, the closest point to space in Tokyo). Stage 5 Society 5.0 Theater. Films from the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA) and JAMSTEC will be aired. Also, researchers and experts will give presentations about science, oceans, disaster prevention and ICT for advanced technology and innovation.

From <https://japantoday.com> 07/16/2021

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Japan Sets New 319 Terabits Per Second Internet Speed Record

While it's not as attractive as a land-speed record set in Black Rock Desert, Japan's latest benchmark when it comes to internet speed is much more impressive. Smashing the 178 terabits per second benchmark it set last year when it worked with UK engineers, the new internet speed record now stands at a lightning-fast 319 terabits per second, as originally reported by Vice. To achieve this speed, Japan's National Institute of Information and Communications Technology (NICT) used advanced fiber-optic technology in a lab setting. The NICT system made use of an experimental strand of fiber-optic cable that featured four cores housed in a cable that was roughly the size of a regular fiber optic line. Data was then looped through coiled bits of fiber optic that created a simulated transmission distance of 1,864 miles, with no degradation in speed being reported. With a path established, the researchers then used a 552-channel comb laser firing at multiple wavelengths through multiple amplifiers to speed through into the history books.

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Japan to Allow TV Airwaves to Be Used for 5G Communications

The communications ministry plans to launch as early as this fiscal year a new system to allow the airwaves for live television broadcasts to be also used for 5G ultrahigh-speed mobile communications, informed sources said Monday. Through the new system, the ministry aims to expand frequency bands available to mobile phone carriers, in a bid to prepare for the anticipated spread of 5G communications. The airwaves for live broadcasts of sports matches, disasters and other events are not used on a regular basis, while they can be technically used for 5G communications, as well as currently mainstream 4G services. A revision to the radio law in April last year allowed the airwaves to be also used for purposes other than live television broadcasts. The ministry plans to allow mobile phone carriers to use the airwaves during hours where there are no live broadcasts.

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Japan Successfully Tests Rocket Engine Propelled by New Technology

Japan successfully tested Tuesday a rocket engine that was propelled by new technology using shock waves produced by burning a mixture of methane and oxygen gasses, with the aim of applying the propulsion method to deep space exploration in the future, the country's space agency said. The No. 31 vehicle of the S-520 sounding rocket series, measuring 8 meters in length and 52 centimeters in diameter and carrying the engine, lifted off from the Uchinoura Space Center in Kagoshima Prefecture at around 5:30 a.m., according to the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency. It reached an altitude of 235 kilometers four minutes and four seconds after the launch and landed in the sea southeast of Uchinoura about eight minutes later, with JAXA retrieving a capsule containing test data in nearby waters. JAXA is currently developing technology that will allow it to utilize a rocket engine just one-10th of the current size that can also stay in space for extended periods. Jiro Kasahara, a Nagoya University professor, jointly developing the technology with JAXA, said the test demonstrated that the engine maintained a propelling force in space as expected. "We will aim to put the technology into practical use in about five years," he said. "I'm glad the rocket was launched safely," said Shinsuke Takeuchi, an associate professor at JAXA, who was leading the test launch. He added the test results are expected to be reflected in future academic achievements.

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Japan's 1st Commercial-Use Quantum Computer Starts Operations

The University of Tokyo and International Business Machines Corp. have started operations of Japan's first commercial-use quantum computer, making a foray into a fiercely competitive field led by the United States and China. The next-generation system, developed by the U.S. technology company with the university holding exclusive access rights to use it, was set up at Kawasaki Business Incubation Center in Kanagawa Prefecture, southwest of Tokyo. An industry-academia consortium, launched in 2020, including Toyota Motor Corp., Sony Group Corp. and Mitsubishi Chemical Holdings Corp. as members, has access to the computer for joint research. It will explore the practical applications of quantum computing and nurture human resources. The IBM Quantum System One computer system is the second of its kind that IBM has built outside the United States, following one in Germany. "Fields where quantum computers are put into practical use are expanding widely. I want to convey the achievements to the world," university's President Teruo Fujii said at a ceremony Tuesday to mark the start of the computer's operations. Quantum computers use

quanta, such as particles of light, which have the characteristics of both waves and particles, and can calculate scores of combinations at once, rather than one by one as in conventional computers.

Its ability to solve complex problems at faster speeds than supercomputers is expected to be used for developing new drugs and materials, creating financial models, optimizing logistics and in cryptography, which has become essential for the internet and digital currency. "It is very significant that a base (for a quantum computer) has been set up in Japan as it will help nurture personnel who will be adept at actually operating it," said Hideyuki Mase, senior researcher at the Japan Research Institute. He noted many technical challenges remain for the full-fledged operation of quantum computers and the race to develop them has been intensifying globally, led by the United States and China. "(The base) will help deepen exchanges with experts overseas, including from Asia. It is expected to become a big advantage for Japan as the country promotes research and development" in the field, Mase said. The Quantum Innovation Initiative Consortium that has access to the system also includes Keio University, Hitachi Ltd., Mitsubishi UFJ Financial Group Inc. and Yokogawa Electric Corp. In a time of both misinformation and too much information, quality journalism is more crucial than ever. By subscribing, you can help us get the story right.

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Japan Expands Covid-19 State of Emergency

Japan's coronavirus state of emergency has been extended and expanded to include three of Tokyo's neighboring prefectures and Osaka. Speaking to a news conference on Friday night, Japanese Prime Minister Suga Yoshihide said, "the coronavirus is spreading at an unprecedented speed." He added, "as the more transmissible Delta variant rapidly becomes dominant across the country, there are concerns that the infection could spread further." The new declarations take effect Monday. Existing emergencies in Tokyo and Okinawa will remain in place, while five more prefectures will go under a quasi-state of emergency. The prime minister called on the public, especially young people, to take the latest outbreak seriously. Suga is urging people to heed warnings, and restaurants and bars to continue following the rules. Health authorities say Japan logged more than 10,000 new cases again on Friday. But the recent daily death toll has remained below 20. Suga said that's largely because over 70 percent of seniors have been fully vaccinated. He said inoculation is the best tool to fight the pandemic. And he pledged that 40 percent of the public will have had the required two jabs by the end of next month. The emergencies will run through the end of August. Consequently, the Olympics will end and the Paralympics begin under these stricter anti-virus measures.

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S. Korea, APEC Members Vow to Overcome Pandemic Through Fair Vaccine Distribution

South Korea and other member states of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) on Friday agreed to work toward accelerating the region's economic recovery by facilitating fair distribution of COVID-19 vaccines. Chaired by New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern, heads of the 21 APEC member states held a special online summit focusing on the COVID-19 pandemic and its economic effects. Among the leaders who attended the virtual meeting were U.S. President Joe Biden, Chinese President Xi Jinping and Russian President Vladimir Putin. South Korea was represented by Prime Minister Kim Boo-kyum. The leaders issued a joint statement, following their summit, calling for fair access to coronavirus vaccines in order to overcome the global public health crisis. They also agreed to accelerate the region's economic recovery by facilitating free and fair trade and environments for investment.

"We will only overcome this health emergency by accelerating equitable access to safe, effective, quality-assured, and affordable COVID-19 vaccines. We recognise the role of extensive immunisation against COVID-19 as a global public good," the statement said. "To that end, we will redouble our efforts to expand vaccine manufacture and supply, support global vaccine sharing efforts, and encourage the voluntary transfer of vaccine production technologies on mutually agreed terms," it added. The statement also called for strengthening the advancement of innovations to create more quality jobs and pursuing inclusive economic growth so as to be prepared against potential economic shocks in the future.

"Our Ministers are working to ensure the region's supply chains support the safe and efficient distribution of COVID-19 vaccines and related goods. We are committed to working together to facilitate the flow of goods and services, especially those that most support our health and economic response at this critical time," it noted. Speaking at the summit, Kim stressed the importance of supplying an ample amount of vaccines and allowing fair access, pointing out that merely around 20 percent of the population across APEC economies, which accounts for 38 percent of the global population, were vaccinated. Kim also explained Seoul's efforts to bolster global vaccine supplies through consignment production partnerships with international vaccine developers. The prime minister called for "bold and systematic" fiscal policies in order to achieve an inclusive economic recovery in the post-pandemic era, and shared details of the Korean-version New Deal project.

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S. Korea to Create Think Tank for Space Program

South Korea's science ministry said Tuesday it will create a space policy-oriented think tank in a move to bolster its space development ambitions. The country has recently ramped up its space program, with its first homegrown space rocket set for a launch in October and a lunar orbiter program scheduled for next year. The Ministry of Science and ICT said the new think tank, tentatively named the Korea Space Policy Research Center, will conduct space-related research and analysis to offer guidance for the country's space development policies, as well as private sector efforts. The think tank is expected to be formed with space industry experts from the Korea Aerospace Research Institute, Korea Astronomy & Space Science Institute and the Agency for Defense Development. South Korea, a relative latecomer to the global space development race, has revved up efforts in space-related technologies to propel growth in future industries, with aims to develop over 100 miniature satellites by 2031. The country aims to launch 14 low earth orbit communications satellites by that year to establish a satellite communications network to prepare for future 6G network technology, and test autonomous ship control systems and marine traffic services. South Korea also received a boost in its space program earlier this year after it made an agreement with the United States to completely scrap its missile guidelines, which had limited efforts to develop space launch vehicles.

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Koreas Reopen Severed Cross-Border Hotline Cheong Wa Dae

The two Koreas on Tuesday reopened direct cross-border communication lines that Pyongyang severed last year in protest of propaganda leaflets coming in from the South, Cheong Wa Dae announced, a positive sign for an improvement in the inter-Korean relationship. Park Soo-hyun, senior Cheong Wa Dae secretary for public communication, announced that Seoul and Pyongyang decided to resume communications via their direct hotline starting at 10 a.m. The resumption of inter-Korean communications was a result of an agreement between President Moon Jae-in and North Korean leader Kim Jong-un, Cheong Wa Dae explained. The two leaders have exchanged personal letters on multiple occasions since April for the resumption and shared views on issues of advancing inter-Korean reconciliation, Park said. "The two leaders of the South and the North also shared an understanding to recover mutual trust and again push the countries' relationship forward," he added. The move came 13 months after North Korea cut off all communication lines with South Korea in protest over Seoul's supposed failure to stop activists from sending anti-Pyongyang propaganda leaflets into the communist nation.

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S. Korea to Develop Drones to Monitor Coastal Pollution

South Korea's ICT ministry said Thursday it will expand the use of unmanned aerial

vehicles in the public sector, from monitoring coastal pollution to land surveying, in a move to foster development of the local drone industry. The Ministry of Science and ICT has earmarked 41.3 billion won (US\$35.8 million) to develop drone-related technology from 2019 to 2023, with a forest fire response system and a mail delivery service in the works. The ministry said it has chosen three additional drone projects, setting aside 1.5 billion won for each project until June 2023. Surveillance company Hancor inSpace has been chosen to develop an automatic drone system that targets to observe coastal pollution for over 20 minutes for a distance of up to 4 kilometers. The ministry said it will also pursue a land surveying system, in which up to four drones can take images of a square kilometer of land for 20 minutes. The country will also develop patrol drones to prevent crime and enhance security in remote areas. The project aims to develop a drone system that can automatically patrol a distance of up to 20 kilometers for 40 minutes. South Korea has recently stepped up efforts to develop drone technology, committing 42 billion won by 2025 to develop a response system against illegal drones. The country also aims to commercialize urban air mobility services, using unmanned drone taxis, by 2025.

From <https://en.yna.co.kr> 07/29/2021

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South-East Asia

INDONESIA: To Launch Self-Paid Vaccination Program

The Indonesian government is planning to launch a self-paid vaccination program amid the second COVID-19 wave in the country. At a virtual press conference on Tuesday, the Indonesian COVID-19 task force's spokesperson Siti Nadia Tarmizi said that the Health Ministry, the Ministry of State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs) and the state-owned pharmaceutical company PT Bio Farma are currently formulating the technical guidance to implement the self-paid vaccination program. "We hope to finalize it as soon as possible," said Tarmizi. On Sunday, PT Kimia Farma, a subsidiary to the state-owned pharmaceutical company Bio Farma, announced it would offer a paid vaccination program for individuals at eight clinics in six cities on the country's most populous island Java and the resort island of Bali as part of the Gotong Royong (mutual cooperation) private vaccination scheme. The company said that the service is offered to anyone willing to pay 879,000 Indonesian rupiahs (about 60 U.S. dollars) for two doses of China's Sinopharm COVID-19 vaccine. The Southeast Asian country is currently working to inoculate the targeted 181.5 million people, about 70 percent of its total population, by March 2022.

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Indonesia Approves Emergency Use of Pfizer's Covid-19 Vaccine

Indonesia's Food and Drug Authority (BPOM) has issued an emergency use

authorization (EUA) for Pfizer's COVID-19 vaccine amid a spike in cases as the more contagious Delta variant has entered the country, an official said on Thursday. "BPOM has issued the EUA for the vaccine produced by Pfizer and BioNTech with the mRNA platform," BPOM's head Penny K. Lukito told a virtual press conference. Indonesia has an agreement to procure 50 million doses of Pfizer vaccine throughout 2021. Indonesia has so far given EUA approvals to five COVID-19 vaccine producers, namely Sinovac, Sinopharm, Pfizer, Moderna and AstraZeneca. Indonesia recorded on Thursday 56,757 new COVID-19 cases, the highest since the pandemic hit the country for the first time in March last year, bringing the total tally to 2,726,803.

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PHILIPPINES: Capital to Revert to Strictest Lockdown Next Week as Covid-19 Cases Rise

The Philippine capital of Metro Manila will revert to the strictest lockdown from Aug. 6 to 20 as COVID-19 infections surge, presidential spokesperson Harry Roque said here Friday. Meantime, Roque said Metro Manila will remain under "heightened restrictions" from Friday until the hard lockdown is imposed next week. "The heightened restrictions for Metro Manila are more stringent compared to the general community quarantine with heightened restrictions of other areas," Roque said in a statement. Roque said that public transportation will remain operational. "Only authorized persons outside their residences shall be allowed to travel into and out of Metro Manila and its adjacent provinces, including Cavite, Bulacan, Laguna, and Rizal," he added. The new restrictions ban indoor and al-fresco dine-in restaurants, allowing only take-out and delivery. The COVID-19 cases in Metro Manila spiked in recent weeks, Department of Health (DOH) data showed. At least 11 areas in the capital "all have positive two-week growth rate." Health authorities said the more virulent Delta variant might have driven the spike of cases. The DOH has detected 216 Delta variant cases so far. At least eight Delta variant patients have died. Metro Manila, home to over 13 million people, consistently records the highest COVID-19 cases since the disease emerged in the country in January last year. The Philippines has been in varying quarantine levels after the government imposed a lockdown in mid-March last year.

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THAILAND: To Limit Locally-Manufactured AstraZeneca Vaccine Exports

Thailand plans to set a limit on its exports of locally-manufactured AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccines to meet domestic demand as the country is struggling to contain a months-long surge in infections, a senior official said Wednesday. The Disease Control Department and the National Vaccine Institute (NVI) have agreed to impose

a quota on the exports of AstraZeneca vaccine manufactured in Thailand by Siam Bioscience Co., NVI director Nakorn Prem Sri said at a press conference. The decision will be forwarded to the National Vaccine Committee for approval, Nakorn said, without elaborating on the detail of the export quota. Nakorn said Deputy Prime Minister and Public Health Minister Anutin Charnvirakul, who chairs the National Vaccine Committee, might probably issue a mandate to enforce the export quota. The authority will negotiate with Siam Bioscience Co. and recommend that the manufacturer supply the vaccine to Thailand with respect to the country's current pandemic situation, Nakorn said. On Wednesday, Thailand reported 9,317 new COVID-19 cases, raising the total number of infections in the country to 363,029. The daily tally has stayed above 5,000 so far this month, compared with less than 100 at the beginning of April when the third wave of outbreak began. Cumulative deaths rose by 87 to 2,934. Pharmaceutical company AstraZeneca said last month that its Thai partner Siam Bioscience will produce approximately 180 million doses of vaccines this year, with about one third for Thailand and the remaining two-thirds to the other parts of Southeast Asia.

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VIETNAM: Barriers Removed to Help e-Commerce Platforms Ensure Essential Supplies

The Ministry of Industry and Trade's Department of E-commerce and the Digital Economy has been cooperating with e-commerce platforms to remove barriers to the transportation of essential goods during the COVID-19 outbreak. This will increase the supply of agricultural products and essential goods and also reduce pressure on local authorities, especially in cities and provinces applying social distancing such as HCM City and the southern provinces. The Department of E-commerce and Digital Economy is cooperating closely with six major e-commerce platforms in Việt Nam to implement programmes that promote the sale of essential goods including vegetables and fruits. In HCM City, Tiki, one of the leading e-commerce platforms in Việt Nam, has increased the goods supply focusing on essential products like rice, fresh food, masks, hand sanitizer and dry food such as cakes, candies and instant noodles. Tiki has also joined the programme "Moving food to stabilise prices", an initiative of the HCM City Department of Industry and Trade on coming together to supply essential goods and food.

In 19 southern provinces applying distance, the Viettel Post Corporation (Viettel Post) has opened new mobile selling points in Đồng Nai and Vũng Tàu and prepared essential goods for supply to other localities. The e-commerce platform Voso.vn of Viettel Post has also worked with agricultural product suppliers in Lâm Đồng and Bình Thuận to open new stores supplying fresh products such as vegetables and eggs. Voso.vn has also opened price stabilisation shops supplying more than 2,000 goods items with stable and cheap prices, and delivery in only 1-3 days for people in

isolated and restricted areas. The department said the Sendo e-commerce platform has also implemented a "Shop at home" programme, but it faces difficulty in trading goods because some warehouses are located in blocked areas and the sudden increase in demand for some goods has led to temporary supply shortages. Sendo has solved these problems by working closely with many different suppliers to ensure their supply of goods.

A representative of the Voso.vn e-commerce platform said there is some difficulty delivering goods to the people with transport restricted in some areas. Therefore, there are some orders that are delivered later than usual. In this cooperation with the ministry, the Việt Nam Post Corporation (VN Post) has also been building price stabilisation shops at post offices. The people in isolated areas can order by phone via apps like Zalo and then VN Post postal staff will deliver the goods. By the end of July 22, 2021, VN Post had opened 1,915 selling points. The department has also proposed that the Ministry of Industry and Trade help e-commerce platforms and delivery companies where possible. For provinces and cities that are applying social distancing measures under the Government's Directive 16, the Department of E-commerce and Digital Economy has proposed industrial and trade departments to encourage consumers to order essential goods on reputable e-commerce sites. In the past, the restriction of deliveries has interrupted supply chains. This has led to an increase in people attending supermarkets and wet markets, leading to a higher risk of COVID-19 infection.

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South Asia

INDIA: Innovation as an Impetus to Achieve Increased Public Transport Ridership

Globally, COVID-19 has adversely impacted public transport ridership. In India, where personal vehicles were already the preferred mode of transport, the propensity to choose private transport is greater now owing to the pandemic. As a course correction, we need to adopt newer methods to solve the problems that our cities face while keeping sustainability at the core of those solutions, write Nabamalika Joardar, Programme Manager, National Institute of Urban Affairs (NIUA); Ankit Rai, Senior Associate, NIUA, and Anusha Mishra, Research Associate, NIUA. India is currently one of the fastest urbanising countries in the world. Its cities, as growth engines, are experiencing a huge influx of population, resulting in a surge in private vehicle ownership. City planners, local governments, and policymakers are now faced with declining quality of life in cities, owing to increasing traffic congestion and the consequences of resultant emissions. SDG 11.2 envisions that by 2030, participating countries will provide access to safe, affordable, accessible, and sustainable transport systems for all, improving road safety, notably by expanding

public transport, with special attention to the needs of those in vulnerable situations, women, children, persons with disabilities, and older persons. The primary challenge toward the achievement of this goal is India's struggle with its largely inefficient public transport system, which is one of the contributing factors towards an increase in private vehicle ownership in the country. Most public transport services in India are currently plagued with overcrowding, unreliability, unpredictable travel time, and poor access to transit stations. Public transport infrastructure in tier 2 and tier 3 cities is inadequate and largely overlooked by state governments, despite 'transport' being a state subject. Metropolises, such as the National Capital Region, face the additional challenge of planning boundaries and administrative boundaries not overlapping. This leads to peripheral urban areas suffering from poor public transport connectivity – while functional city boundaries expand quite rapidly, municipal boundaries take much longer to change.

Further, public transport systems are not friendly to the marginalised and vulnerable populations. Whether it is connectivity to marginalised neighbourhoods and urban slums, safety concerns for women and children, or reduced physical access to persons with disabilities and older citizens, our public transport infrastructure has consistently remained outdated. Public transport's patronage is governed by multiple factors including access to a transit stop (motorised and non-motorised), frequency or time headway of the service, fare, travel time between origins and destinations, transfers required, and multi-modal integration facility (physical and institutional), among others. It is when all these elements of a public transport system are accounted for in the design that it provides an adequate level of service, thereby becoming a preferred mode of choice for commuters. For instance, in 2017, the central government earmarked USD 1.5 billion in an attempt to strengthen mass rapid transit in India. Despite such large investments, metro-rail is meeting ridership expectations in very few cities. India currently relies significantly on intermediate public transport (IPT) for its first/last mile connectivity and there is a growing need to integrate IPT within the urban mobility sector of India. A push for faster establishment and operationalisation of Unified Metropolitan Transport Authority (UMTA)-like bodies at regional levels will facilitate faster integration of different public transit modes, including IPTs. The presence of UMTA could also make decisionmaking at the operator and policy level fast and effective, helping improve the overall system performance. However, policymakers have maintained that despite the presence of such a nodal unit, the absence of clear guidelines on how to translate these goals at a city level makes the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) in India a lofty task. Going forward, statutory planning documents need to include separate sections to address transport concerns in cities, ideally integrating cities' Sustainable Urban Mobility Plans. Interventions should focus on universal transport accessibility and affordability, improvement of first/ last-mile connectivity, and promotion of IPTs. Prioritising smart mobility seems like a logical progression for decisionmakers, focusing on the reduction of congestion and pollution, costeffectiveness for consumers, and eventually becoming a source for more varied

choice availability to commuters. In 2015, in its efforts towards striving for a cleaner future, the Government of India adopted the Faster Adoption and Manufacturing of Hybrid and EV (FAME) scheme with an outlay of Rs 8.95 billion (USD 130 million), which provided subsidies for EVs. In the year 2019, FAME-II received further sanctioned subsidies for a total of 5,595 e-Buses to 64 cities for intra-city and intercity operations.

In a post-pandemic world, however, oft-repeated policy recommendations cannot be the sole path to the achievement of the SDGs and when faced with never-before scenarios, innovation can pave the path to improved transport mechanisms in cities. India has an existing scheme in place to promote startups and entrepreneurs in India in the form of Startup India. Surprisingly, out of almost 39,000 startups recognised by the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade on the Startup India portal, only 356 pertain to 'transportation', 'passenger transportation services' and 'transport infrastructure' cumulatively. Further, Startup India presently does not host any challenges in the transport sector and has only 46 incubators and 29 accelerators listed on its portal. This vacuum can be addressed by challenges hosted by Ministries of the government and its affiliated organisations, such as Transport for All, initiated by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA), and SMART move: Innovative Urban Mobility Challenge, initiated by GIZ India and the National Institute of Urban Affairs (NIUA). Innovation challenges offer mentorship, capacity building and engagement facilitation to participants, proving to be the necessary incubation space between city officials and innovators. These challenges provide young academicians and professionals with an opportunity to help the nation in building efficient and resilient urban transport systems and address some of the pressing problems that commuters face on a daily basis. In the face of the ongoing pandemic, when cities face the responsibility of providing sustainable, safe, and seamless mobility systems for their citizens, it is imperative to also consider pandemic-sensitive challenges and climate change as critical foci while developing innovative approaches to existing problems.

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Defence Minister Rajnath Singh Launches AI-based Grievance Management App

Minister of Defence Rajnath Singh launched an Artificial Intelligence (AI)-powered grievance management application in New Delhi on July 15, 2021. The application is developed by the Ministry of Defence with the help of the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Kanpur. Dr Jitendra Singh, Minister of State (IC) for Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions was also present at the occasion. This is the first AI-based system developed to improve grievance redressal in the government. The AI tool developed has the capability to understand the content of the complaint based on the contents therein. As a result, it can identify repeat complaints or spam

automatically. Based on the meaning of the complaint, it can categorise complaints of different categories even when keywords normally used for such search are not present in the complaint. It enables geographical analysis of complaints in a category including analysis of whether the complaint was adequately addressed or not by the concerned office. Easy user-friendly search enables the user to formulate his own queries/categories depending on management requirements and seek performance results based on the query. Given that lakhs of complaints are received on the CPGRAMS portal of DARPG, this application will have great use in understanding the nature of complaints, geographies from where they emanate and policy changes that can be introduced to create systemic improvements to address these grievances. The Minister, while addressing the occasion described the application as a product of good governance, which reflects the growing synergy between the Government and academia. He said this initiative is another citizen-centric reform of the Government that aims to empower the people at large.

The Minister appreciated the role of the Department of Administrative Reforms & Public Grievances (DARPG) in the reform of the Public Grievances Redressal System. He said that resolving the grievances of people is a great service in itself. He added that the active involvement of reputed institutions like IIT Kanpur will further bolster the system and resolve the grievances of people in a transparent and effective manner. The Minister was briefed that this AI-powered application will automatically handle and analyse the complaints of the people and would reduce human intervention, save time and bring more transparency to their disposal. For the project, a tripartite Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed among the Department of Defence, Ministry of Defence, DARPG and IIT, Kanpur on August 04, 2020.

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SDMC Ease License Renewal for Businesses, Extends License Validity Up to 3 yrs

In a bid to enhance 'ease of doing business', the South Delhi Municipal Corporation (SDMC) has decided to relax the norms of license renewal for various businesses. Also, the civic body has pushed the validity of licenses to three years from the current one-year time period. According to an order issued by SDMC's Factory Licensing Department, licensing norms for health trade, storage, restaurants, hotels of all categories, bars, salons, domestic animals, meat shops, dairies, general trade, have been eased and the validity of the licenses have been extended to three years, said SDMC. Now the business owners are provided with options to renew their licenses for one year, two years, and three years at the time of applying for the renewal. As per SDMC, the move aims to help in cutting down the compliance burden of business units and entities while getting their licenses renewed. Also, the move will aid business owners who suffered due to the lockdowns induced by the COVID-19

pandemic. According to a senior official from SDMC, this is an attempt to improve the ease of doing business by the civic authority.

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MCMG Leveraging SAS Systems, Improving Revenue Management

It is not even a year since digital working has set in as the new normal and no more a mere choice. In such a scenario optimising revenue also needs technology-based solutions. Realising the fact, Elets Technomedia Pvt. Ltd. in association with SAS India organised a series of webinars – ‘Revenue Management & Intelligence Summit 2021’ on May 5, 2021. The second webinar witnessed senior policymakers from west India sharing their vantage points on ‘Optimising Revenue Management through Advanced Analytics’. Dr Sangeeta Hasnale, Assistant Commissioner, Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai (MCGM), said, “We introduced the SAS System in our offices to know the issues we face in revenue management from the grassroots level and effectively manage the flow of the work” Expressing the challenges she faced, Dr Hasnale pointed out that due to the onset of the COVID pandemic in February 2020, MCGM had only three months to collect the revenue. “Leveraging SAS systems, MCGM enabled itself to collect the maximum revenue in such a short span of time.” MCGM is the only corporation that has implemented the Capital Value system. While throwing light on how SAS analytics reformed the revenue management system in MCGM upscaling its efficiency, she mentioned, “SAS analytics showed that out of 4,50,000 people, 3,75,000 people didn’t pay the taxes as per the norms laid down by the Supreme Court of India.” In order to surface defaulter information, SAS enabled the categorisation that aided the department to know about those who have not paid taxes for over a year and the people who had an outstanding of Rs 1 crore or above. Besides, SAS generated networks have helped us in analysing whether a single commercial entry is having multiple properties or defaulters, she added. Further, Dr Hasnale said, “With SAS system onboard, every officer was able to analyse their units and their major defaulters. Every inspector was able to set their own target. The system not only improved the efficiency of our revenue management systems it also made the overall process transparent. This transparency aided in gaining back the trust of the people in the corporation.” In her closing remarks, she said, due to technology solutions we were able to pick out the defaulters and enhance our revenue collection. Therefore, SAS is not only helping in increasing the revenue but also making Mumbai a law-abiding city.

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National Housing Awards of Excellence 2020

Elets Technomedia has been a name in the industry for nominating and awarding some of the best practices followed in the industry by various government and private organizations. For this, the organisations interested in participation file details of their projects that are then shortlisted after three rounds of analysis for different award categories. The final shortlisted best practices are then awarded the Elets National Housing Award for Excellence under their respective categories. The first Award of Excellence was presented to the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, Government of India, for Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana under the category of Innovative Scheme by the Government. The Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana or PMAY (urban) is an initiative by the Government of India to provide affordable houses to the urban poor. Durga Shanker Mishra, Secretary, Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA), Government of IndiaThe award was received by Durga Shanker Mishra, Secretary, Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA) and Amrit Abhijat, Joint Secretary, MoHUA and Mission Director, Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana. Both the officers expressed their heartfelt gratitude towards Elets for the award. Pawan Arora, Commissioner, Rajasthan Housing Board (RHB)The Award of Excellence under the category of 'Project by Housing Board' was presented to Pawan Arora, Commissioner, Rajasthan Housing Board (RHB), for his noteworthy work in Indira Gandhi Nagar project, Jaipur.

The Commissioner presented a brief on the establishment of RHB during his award speech. He said, "We are in our Golden Jubilee year and with this auspicious occasion I would like to tell you that our aim at RHB is not only to provide affordable houses and commercial and premium properties to people but a better lifestyle." Speaking on the transformation of RHB, Arora said, "The Chief Minister of Rajasthan and the Urban Development Minister equipped the task of reviving the RHB operations to me, at the time when the Board was in a dire condition. With the collective efforts of the RHB team and the state government, today RHB has regained its trust in people and has made a World Record for selling 1213 houses in just 12 days." Further, he mentioned 'Budhwar Nilami Diwas' wherein people can start bidding on the properties from Monday and every Wednesday at four PM the bids are enlisted and the properties are sold. Arora also pointed out the scheme '10 per cent do, grih pravesh lo' which means 'pay only 10 per cent to own your abode' and the rest 90 per cent are turned into easy EMLs to be paid in 13 years, worked wonders in turning failures to success for RHB projects. Further, he mentioned development works like road development, drinking water connections, model road development, and more done in Indira Gandhi Nagar.

Udit AggarwalThe Award of Excellence for Slum Redevelopment Project for Bhavnagar 7B Slum Area in Rajkot under PMAY PPP ISSR Scheme was presented to Udit Aggarwal, Municipal Commissioner, Rajkot Municipal Corporation for the category of 'Project on PPP Model'. Kshipra Agre, CEO, Surat Urban Development AuthorityThe next Award of Excellence was presented to Kshipra Agre, CEO, Surat Urban Development Authority, for the construction of high rise residential buildings

EWS I 992 for houses and parking space for 10 to 11 floors. EWS II 1024 for houses and parking spaces for 10 to 11 floors under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana, and LIG 504 houses and parking spaces. The project was awarded under the category 'Project by Development Authority'. She congratulated her team for their commendable work on the project. MM Gadhavi, CEO, Unjha Nagarpalika, was presented with the Award of Excellence for planning, designing and construction of 360 DUs EWS II flats buildings including site development with all infrastructure services in Unjha city in Gujarat under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana. Prakash Baviskar Award of Excellence for outstanding innovation in real estate and infrastructure was presented to Prakash Baviskar, Chairman and Managing Director, Baviskar Group. He expressed his gratitude to the Elets team for the award. Further, he enlightened the viewers on the demand and supply gap in the housing sector and spoke on a few solutions. He also mentioned Builders' Society Promoter, an organisation he formed. Baviskar discussed a study he conducted on reducing costs in housing projects and meeting the demand and supply gap in an effective and efficient manner.

Ajay Tyagi, Chief Executive Officer, Rialtes Technologies Ajay Tyagi, CEO, Rialtes Technology, was presented with the Award of Excellence for Rialtes Technologies under the category 'Best Technologies Innovations of the Year in the Housing Sector'. Tyagi commenced his award speech with a thank you note to the Elets team for organising the National Housing Summit. He spoke about Rialtes Technologies saying, "Wherever there is a government agency, private builder or anyone with an innovative approach towards housing, Rialtes is there to support them with its technological solutions." He mentioned GovHouse, a Rialtes product, he described as a digital platform designed to bring digital transformation in the field of affordable housing. The award ceremony of the National Housing Summit 2020 ended on a high note with a vote thanks delivered by Dr Ravi Gupta, CEO and Founder, Elets Technomedia Pvt. Ltd.

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Narendra Singh Tomar Launches NMMS App to Induce Transparency in Rural Development

Union Minister of Rural Development, Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare, Panchayati Raj and Food Processing Industries, Narendra Singh Tomar launched National Mobile Monitoring Software (NMMS) app and Area Officer Monitoring App on May 21. The apps will induce transparency and accountability to the execution of rural development works conducted by the Ministry. The Minister lauded the efforts saying that these two Apps will be big steps towards bringing in transparency and effective monitoring of schemes. Also, he advised the Ministry to make the apps multilingual, provide sufficient training and equipment, and allow time for its rollout. During the launching of the apps through video conferencing, Sadhvi Niranjan Jyoti, Minister of

State, Rural Development, Secretary, Rural Development and officials from the Ministry and all the State Governments were also present. The NMMS App permits taking real-time attendance of workers at MGNREGS worksites along with the geotagged photograph, which will increase citizen oversight of the programme besides potentially enabling processing payments faster. On the other hand, Area Officer Monitoring App facilitates them to record their findings online along with time-stamped and geo-coordinate tagged photograph for all the schemes of the Department of Rural Development- MGNREGS, PMAYG, PMGSY. This would also enable not only better record keeping of inspections by field and supervisory officials but also facilitate analysis of the findings for better programme implementation. On the occasion, the Minister of State highlighted the good works done under MGNREGA by providing employment to rural people during the COVID-19 pandemic period. Secretary, Rural Development, Nagendra Nath Sinha emphasised the strengthening of Social Audit, recruitment of Ombudsman, geotagging of assets and monitoring of works.

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Centre Launches SLDE Platform to Digitise Logistics & GHG Emissions Calculator

In another step towards strengthening the Digital India move, the Government of India has rolled out Secured Logistics Document Exchange (SLDE) and a Green House Gas Emission Calculator. The move is likely to enhance ease of doing business, logistics efficiency, cut down logistics cost and promotes sustainability. Minister for Commerce and Industry Piyush Goyal, in a release, said, "These digital initiatives have been launched to fill the gap in areas where no action has been taken either by private players or any of the line ministries." This is an effort from the Centre to digitise the manual process of generation, exchange and compliance of logistics. The SLDE platform will provide a secure and seamless digital document exchange system. The SLDE platform will enable generation, storage and interchange of logistics-related documents through the digital medium using Aadhaar and blockchain-based security protocols. These security protocols will ensure data security and authentication, provide a complete audit trail of document transfer, faster execution of the transaction, reduced shipping costs and overall lower carbon footprint. This will also enable easy verification of the authenticity of documents. As per the Ministry, "The proof of concept of the platform has been developed and executed with banks (ICICI, Axis Bank, State Bank of India and HDFC Bank) and stakeholders including freight forwarders, exporters, importers and vessel operators." Centre's attempt to introduce a digital system for logistic operations, the SLDE platform, and a GHG Emissions Calculator to monitor GHG emissions and aid in opting for sustainable and right mode of transport for freight movement aim to bridge the gap areas where no action has yet been taken either by private players or any of the line ministries.

Central-West Asia

AZERBAIJAN: Launching Cyberattack Modeling Laboratory

A cyberattack modeling laboratory has been set up under the Data Processing Center of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and High Technologies of Azerbaijan, a source in the ministry told Trend. According to the source, the laboratory will study processes related to cybersecurity and take measures against possible cyber attacks. "The laboratory will also train specialists in this sector. It's planned to identify bottlenecks in the systems, provide audit and security services. Besides, regular imitation attacks will be carried out by the experts," the source said. It also noted that in the training of cybersecurity specialists one of the most important roles is played by the acquisition of skills in organizing the imitation attacks. "This will allow the specialists to precisely study the attack technique, identify gaps in the systems under test and timely eliminate the deficiencies," the source further said. "The laboratory built on a cloud infrastructure will provide a completely isolated environment and allow to faster make changes to the infrastructure." "The laboratory will conduct regular internship programs to train cybersecurity personnel. The candidates will perform various tasks, including participation in the simulation of attacks," stressed the source.

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UZBEKISTAN: A Project to Train and Improve the Skills of Specialists in the Field of Cybersecurity Launched

The OSCE Project Coordinator in Uzbekistan, together with Softline Education, with the support of the Ministry for Development of Information Technologies and Communications of the Republic of Uzbekistan, launched a project aimed at training and advanced training of specialists in the field of cybersecurity. The project is aimed at updating the knowledge and skills of technical specialists in the field of cybersecurity, the formation of a layer of specialists capable of high-quality replication of knowledge in this area, as well as raising the awareness of managers and technical employees of state enterprises, organizations and institutions about the tasks and capabilities of cybersecurity systems. The target audience of this project are: - Heads of enterprises, organizations, ministries and departments - Middle managers responsible for cybersecurity - Technicians providing enterprise cybersecurity - Teachers of specialized educational institutions Information and communication technologies play an increasingly important role in our society. From online shopping and social media to online banking, travel and healthcare, we

increasingly trust digital devices and the Internet. Such integration not only opens up many opportunities, but also creates certain problems for personal and public safety.

Currently, the processes of digitalization of the leading economies of the world are actively and everywhere. ICTs have become an integral part of the life of society, the state, and individuals, and the more important and acute are the tasks of effective and safe implementation of ICT tools in production, education, healthcare, social life, including the need for systematic work to form a culture of cybersecurity. In this regard, the issue of training specialists who can quickly make effective decisions to protect information and eliminate cybersecurity threats is relevant. To solve the problems of advanced training of specialists in the field of cybersecurity, leading domestic trainers and cybersecurity experts, who have confirmed their knowledge with international certificates, will be involved in design work. Participants will also take part in the newly developed online course on OSCE Confidence-Building Measures in Cybersecurity. It should be noted that the project participants who showed the best results during the training will be prepared for international certification in cybersecurity. The initiators of the project expect to complete the implementation of the project in December 2021 and intend to continue working in this direction in the future.

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Uzbek President Gives Instructions to Expand the Provision of Electronic Services

President of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev got acquainted with a presentation on measures to introduce digital technologies on 13 July. In our country, work on the introduction of information technologies is gaining momentum, which increases the convenience of the population. Today, 253 types of services are provided through the Single portal of interactive state services. This year it is planned to introduce 60 more and simplify the provision of over 50 services. Most importantly, these measures help to reduce the amount of paperwork, reduce bureaucracy and corruption, save users time and money, and increase operational efficiency. By the decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan from 5 October 2020, the Strategy "Digital Uzbekistan - 2030" was approved. In accordance with this strategy, programs for digital transformation of regions and industries are being implemented for 2020-2022. In particular, 443 projects have been developed by industry, of which 194 have been implemented to date. Of the 1643 projects envisaged by regional programs, 1172 have been implemented.

For example, the introduction of an information management system for contracts in Uztransgaz JSC reduced costs by 30 billion soums. The introduction of a payment system for 360 types of state duties through the Unified Billing System has saved 24 billion soums. In general, according to the results of the first half of this year, the

volume of services provided in the digital economy amounted to 7 trillion 200 billion soums, the export of computer programming services - 17 million 500 thousand dollars. However, there are industries and regions where this work is proceeding at a slow pace. The corresponding rating shows that in 65 organizations, 116 districts and cities, the digitalization process is not organized at the proper level. At the presentation, the head of state gave the necessary instructions to accelerate projects and expand e-services. - The work done in recent years has really yielded results, services have become more convenient and closer to people. But digital technologies are changing every day, new opportunities are opening up. Therefore, it is necessary to develop a "roadmap" for the introduction of new software products in each ministry, state body and region, - said Shavkat Mirziyoyev.

It was indicated that there are opportunities to bring the volume of services of the digital economy to 16 trillion soums, and the export of computer software - up to 40 million dollars. The need was emphasized to increase the types of public services provided through a mobile application to 100, including through the introduction of services for obtaining information regarding the communal, cadastral, tax, customs spheres, pension provision and labor relations. Responsible persons were instructed to create portals of ministers, khokims of regions, districts and cities, regularly analyze information posted on them. The joint-stock commercial bank "Aloqabank" was tasked with creating a unified platform for client services, providing financial support to start-up projects in the field of information technology. Instructions were given to improve the digital literacy of employees of state and economic management bodies.

From <http://www.uzdaily.com> 07/13/2021

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Oceania

AUSTRALIA: Go Hard to Achieve Zero COVID-19 - Report

Australia is a long way from a post-COVID economy, according to new research that backs longer lockdowns. Modellers, economists and public health experts from the Australian National University and the University of Melbourne have crunched the numbers and found longer lockdowns benefit the economy in the long term. The report comes as the Morrison government urges Australians to live with the virus and get vaccinated to have any hope of opening up to the global economy. "If we think we can do away with periods of movement restrictions when uncontrolled outbreaks occur, we need to think again," University of Melbourne Professor Tom Kompas said on Tuesday. "The key point here is not to think about the economic costs over a period of a couple of weeks, large as they are, but rather to consider the costs over a period of months if community transmission continues."

Imposing a certain number of social distancing days per lockdown was found to

reduce the total in lockdown over a 12-month period, and the costs to the economy of about \$210 million per lockdown day. "Our results support strategies that go hard against COVID-19 infections and get us to zero community transmission," lead author Professor Quentin Grafton said. "This is especially the case now with this Delta variant and Australia's currently low vaccination level," he said. And to ensure compliance and to help those who are doing it tough, Prof Grafton said there needs to be enough financial support for the people who are most affected by lockdowns. Social distancing and lockdown measures have played a key role in controlling both the first and second infection waves in Australia. But contact tracing was found to be resource-intensive, especially as the number of cases increases.

During Victoria's second wave, contact tracing by itself was insufficient to stop growth in infections and a severe lockdown was needed. Hotel quarantine was initially assumed to be 100 per cent effective in preventing the entry and spread of the virus. However, cases of transmission from within hotel quarantine contributed to Victoria's second wave, and there have been multiple other cases of transmission from within hotel quarantine. Separately, modelling commissioned by the federal government from the Doherty Institute is weighing up the full range of tools to suppress - not eliminate - the virus.

From <https://au.news.yahoo.com> 07/06/2021

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Govt Makes COVID-19 Vaccinations Mandatory for More Border Jobs

The Government is further strengthening the border against COVID-19 by making it mandatory for more of the workforce to be vaccinated, COVID-19 Response Minister Chris Hipkins announced today. "To prevent the virus getting into our communities, we must continue to strengthen our border by protecting the people who work there," Chris Hipkins said. The new COVID-19 Public Health Response (Vaccinations) Amendment Order 2021 comes into effect at 11:59pm on 14 July 2021. "As well as workers at Managed Isolation and Quarantine (MIQ) facilities, workers at our ports and airports who are at the greatest risk of exposure to COVID-19 must now be vaccinated," Chris Hipkins said. "The vaccination of MIQ workers has been successful so far. Latest numbers show there were 4,332 MIQ workers on site for the week ending 4 July, all of whom were vaccinated. No unvaccinated worker can enter an MIQ facility.

"Of the active air border workers, 82 percent are fully vaccinated and 2 percent have received a single dose and await their second. "However only 54 percent of active port workers have been fully vaccinated, and we need to see this number increased to avoid the risk of COVID-19 entering the country via our ports. "I am extending the mandatory order to cover a further 1800 currently unvaccinated active border workers. This is necessary to lift the uptake of the vaccine among the wider border

workforce and strengthen our ongoing response to COVID-19. "I'd also encourage border employers to look at opportunities to make it easy for their workers to get vaccine appointments and to urge employees to get their vaccination. It is in their interests to keep COVID-19 out and their businesses open by having a vaccinated workforce."

The legislation allows for a reasonable window for vaccination. All government employees covered by the order must have had their first dose by 26 August, while privately employed border workers must have had their first dose by 30 September. New workers covered by the Order (regardless of employer) will need to have their first dose before starting work. "Border workers who remain unvaccinated after the requirements come into effect will need to discuss options with their employer. They will not be able to continue working in a high-risk border environment until they are vaccinated," Chris Hipkins said.

From <https://livenews.co.nz> 07/12/2021

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Minister Pushes for Disability Job Mandate

The federal minister responsible for disability workers remains committed to making coronavirus vaccines compulsory for the sector. National cabinet has not yet agreed to make vaccines mandatory for disability support workers. Linda Reynolds said as the minister for the National Disability Insurance Scheme she was very supportive of the mandate. Less than 40 per cent of registered disability workers have received at least one dose of the vaccine, despite being included in the highest priority group of the national rollout, which started five months ago. "Given they are working with such vulnerable people I think it is very important and I would encourage every disability worker to go and get vaccinated," Senator Reynolds told ABC radio on Monday. "National cabinet did agree last week to encourage residential disability support workers to have their COVID-19 vaccination as soon as possible.

"They will then look further at whether states and territories then make it mandatory." There is hesitancy among some staff who have threatened to leave the industry if they are forced to get vaccinated. But most disability workers are more than happy to receive their jobs, as long as the vaccines are easily available and paid leave is provided. The proposed mandate follows a similar order imposed on aged care workers, who must receive at least one dose by mid-September in order to keep their jobs.

From <https://au.news.yahoo.com> 07/12/2021

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Workers to Receive Extra Lockdown Support

Workers who lose hours because of lockdowns will receive up to \$750 a week under

a boosted federal support scheme. Coronavirus disaster payments for people who lose more than 20 hours will be increased from \$600, with the new rate mirroring the original JobKeeper wage subsidy. Workers who lose between eight and 20 hours will be eligible for \$450, up from \$375, while welfare recipients will no longer be excluded. People on Centrelink payments will be eligible for \$200 a week if they lose more than eight hours of work. Prime Minister Scott Morrison announced the increased support after a four-week lockdown extension for Sydney and surrounds was confirmed. He argued disaster payments were faster, more effective and better targeted than JobKeeper. "We are not dealing with a pandemic outbreak across the whole country," the prime minister told reporters in Canberra on Wednesday.

"JobKeeper was a great scheme but you don't play last year's grand final this year." While the expansion is designed to immediately help people in NSW, all Australians will be eligible for the new rates under future lockdowns. The scheme has dished out \$411.7 million to people in NSW and about \$80 million to Victorian residents in recent months. NSW recorded 177 new local infections on Wednesday, with Premier Gladys Berejiklian confirming a lockdown extension until at least the end of next month. A raft of federal-state business support was unveiled for NSW and Victoria which are grappling with pandemic-induced financial pain. In NSW, eligible businesses and not-for-profits with revenue declines of more than 30 per cent will receive payments of between \$1500 and \$100,000 a week. The expanded program's turnover cap has been increased from \$50 million to \$250 million.

With a two-week lockdown easing in Victoria, the governments agreed on \$400 million in business support. That includes support for sectors under strain from capacity limits, small businesses, a fund for hospitality and help for commercial landlords with tenants under rent stress. While a record 196,982 coronavirus vaccine doses were administered in the past 24 hours, the national rollout continues to lag behind the developed world. Just 17 per cent of people aged 16 and over have been fully vaccinated five months into the program. But the prime minister is bullish that everyone will be offered a job by the end of the year. "I would expect by Christmas that we would be seeing a very different Australia to what we are seeing now," he said. Mr Morrison has previously warned countries like the UK with high vaccination rates continue to record soaring daily case numbers. But he now says highly immunised nations have more options to fight the disease. "Lockdowns become a thing of the past when you are at that level," the prime minister said. One new local infection was detected in Queensland along with 19 cases on a ship offshore. South Australia's snap shutdown has ended after a Delta outbreak was contained.

From <https://au.news.yahoo.com> 07/28/2021

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Minister Defends Welfare Payment Exclusion

The minister responsible for emergency payments has boldly declared she would

rather be on welfare in Australia than anywhere else in the world. State and federal governments have ramped up support for individuals and businesses affected by Greater Sydney's extended lockdown. People who usually work 20 hours or more will get \$750 per week and those who work less will get \$450. Welfare recipients who have lost eight hours of work a week or more will get a \$200 top-up on their regular payments. But there are 350,000 people on welfare in Greater Sydney lockdown areas who won't get any extra support. They can't look for work because they're in lockdown and will not be offered coronavirus supplements that were given out last year. Emergency Management Minister Bridget McKenzie defended the exclusion of unemployed welfare recipients from disaster payments.

Senator McKenzie said the scheme was designed to supplement the incomes of working people and argued everyone left out could access to a "strong and supportive" welfare system instead. "When you look globally at the economic impacts on individuals we can be very, very glad we actually live in a country like Australia where we have such a strong social network of welfare payments," she told ABC radio. "I would rather be on welfare here in Australia than anywhere else in the world going through this global pandemic." Welfare advocates have been quick to point out Australia has the least generous unemployment payments in the developed world. Australia also has one of the highest rates of poverty among people on age pensions. University union official Damien Cahill described the minister's comments as disgraceful, disrespectful and completely out of touch. "If any coalition minister tried to maintain their privileged lifestyle whilst subsisting on Australia's meagre unemployment assistance programs, they'd blow the lot in a hour and starve for the rest of the week," he said.

From <https://au.news.yahoo.com> 07/29/2021

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NEW ZEALAND: Government Backs Critical Health Research

Research into some of New Zealanders' biggest health concerns including cancer, diabetes, and heart disease is getting crucial support in the latest round of health research funding, Health Minister Andrew Little announced today. The funding, awarded through the Health Research Council of New Zealand, covers 31 General Project grants (\$36.64 million), five Rangahau Hauora Māori grants (\$5.91 million), five Pacific Project grants (\$5.79 million), and four Programme grants (\$19.99 million). "The Government is committed to improving the health and wellbeing of all New Zealanders, and research is a vital part of the plan," Andrew Little said. "This significant investment has the potential to vastly improve the health of New Zealanders. "The research will investigate issues ranging from vaccine hesitancy through to improving genetic diagnoses for tamariki across Aotearoa," Andrew Little said.

Included among the successful applications are projects led by Māori and Pacific

researchers and driven by Kaupapa Māori and Pacific research methodologies that will help to reduce inequities in health for Māori and Pacific peoples. One of the researchers receiving a grant in today's announcement is Dr Jason Gurney (Ngāpuhi) who holds an HRC Māori Health Research Emerging Leader Fellowship. He is being awarded nearly \$800,000 to explore the growing crisis of diabetes and cancer co-occurrence and its impact on what happens to people with cancer. The epidemiologist and senior research fellow at the University of Otago in Wellington wants to improve the quantity and quality of life for Māori and Pacific peoples who develop the diseases. The two-year research project is a collaboration between the C3 Research Group and Professor Ross Lawrenson's research group at the University of Waikato.

It will explore the rapidly increasing rates of diabetes and cancer within Māori and Pasifika populations, and the impact of it becoming increasingly common for one person to have both conditions. "As I said earlier this year when I announced major reform of the health system, Māori and Pacific peoples are twice as likely to die young from conditions that could have been treated, and being Māori or Pacific even determines what sort of treatment you get. "Our plan for dealing with this includes looking at why that is happening and finding effective ways to deal with it. Dr Gurney's research will help, and will also allow us to predict how many people are likely to have both diseases in future so we can plan for that. "The projects funded this year show New Zealand developing innovative approaches that will have an immediate effect on the health system, and that it has an agile and capable research sector that can respond to community needs and emerging health threats," Andrew Little said.

More information and the full list of successful projects can be found on the Health Research Council's website. Background for editors: The Health Research Council of New Zealand (HRC) is responsible for managing the Government's investment in health research. Each year the HRC offers funding for Projects, Pacific Projects and Programmes through an annual contestable funding round, awarding grants of approximately \$1.2 million and up to \$5 million for each successful proposal. Funded projects and programmes have a strategic, long-term vision that will contribute to significantly improving health outcomes for New Zealanders. This year's projects, to highlight a few, will: explore how the health system can better support and achieve health equity; gauge why some New Zealanders are refusing or delaying vaccinations; help boost immunity to the highly contagious disease measles in young adults; focus on more equitable access for lung cancer screening for Māori; and assess methods to help people quit smoking. The Health Research Council of New Zealand invests around \$120 million a year in research that improves the quality, cost-effectiveness and sustainability of New Zealand's health system, and contributes to disease prevention and living well.

From <https://livenews.co.nz> 07/27/2021

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Govt Support for Upgrade of Eden Park Players Facilities

Minister for Sport and Recreation Hon Grant Robertson has announced funding to upgrade the players facilities at Eden Park ahead of upcoming Women's World Cup events. Eden Park is a confirmed venue for the Rugby World Cup 2021, the ICC Women's Cricket World Cup 2022, and a proposed venue for matches of significance for the FIFA Women's World Cup Australia & New Zealand 2023™. The upgrade focuses on the redevelopment of player facilities in Eden Park's West and South Stands, including accessible showers, toilets and baby change tables, to make them gender neutral and of a standard befitting the world's best players. The upgrade will be completed in time for Eden Park to host the Australian, Indian, New Zealand and England female cricket players in March next year.

"This funding is about modernising and improving the facilities for the world's best women's players across all three major events. These facilities will also benefit the domestic and international players who more regularly use Eden Park," Grant Robertson said. "The upgrade at Eden Park and the five ICC Women's Cricket World Cup 2022 match venues will improve the future experience of women and girls and provides an example of what good inclusivity looks like for everyone using the changing facilities regardless of gender, helping reduce barriers to participation." The \$1.71 million investment by the Government in the Eden Park upgrade is part of a \$9.84 million allocation for World Cup accessible venues that was included in the \$265 million Sport Recovery Package. The investment covers upgrades to facilities at the match venues and training grounds for Rugby World Cup 2021, ICC Women's Cricket World Cup 2022, as well as the scoping of upgrades for the FIFA Women's World Cup 2023.

Within the \$9.84 million investment, \$5.3 million has been allocated to support the development of competition and training venues for the Rugby World Cup in the Northland and Auckland regions. This includes supporting the development of the community multi-sport facility and new home for Northland Rugby at William Fraser Park in Whangarei. Through the Major Events Fund, the Government has also provided core tournament investment of \$2 million towards the ICC Women's Cricket World Cup 2022 and \$3 million towards the Rugby World Cup 2021 (played in 2022). The FIFA Women's World Cup Australia & New Zealand 2023™ has received an investment of up to \$25 million from Cabinet.

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4、 Economic and Social Development and ICT

Asia-Pacific

The Growing Role of Cities in Foreign Affairs

The line separating local from global issues is blurring. Inequality, climate change, the integration of migrants and refugees, and the growing influence of China are just some of the critical transnational issues affecting cities today. None of it can be properly addressed or resolved without the world's metropolises and their leaders. On this episode of Out of Order, we're talking about the burgeoning role of cities in international affairs -- how cities conduct diplomacy and how they work with one another to solve global problems. In recent years we've seen the creation of many offices dedicated to international affairs in cities, professionalizing international engagement and building a key vertical connection that gives the local level a voice in a multi-layered global environment. Our guests this week are two people who know this field well: Dr. Gabriele Goldfuss, Director of the Office for International Affairs for the city of Leipzig in Germany; and Ambassador Henri-Paul Normandin, former Director of International Relations for the city of Montreal in Quebec, Canada. Both Gabriele and Henri-Paul are also members of a new network of City Directors of International Affairs, recently launched by GMF Cities. This week's episode is hosted by GMF's Paul Costello.

From <https://outoforder.simplecast.com/> 07/05/2021

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Jobs Must Be at Heart of Recovery to Avoid Deep Scars in Economy and Society, Says OECD

The strong economic recovery underway across OECD countries is yet to fully translate into enough new jobs to get employment levels back to pre-pandemic levels in most member economies according to a new OECD report. The OECD Employment Outlook 2021 says that across OECD countries around 22 million jobs were lost across OECD countries in 2020 compared to 2019 and 114 million around the world. In the OECD area, despite a partial recovery, there are still over 8 million more unemployed than before the crisis, and over 14 million more people not actively looking for a job. The employment rate (the share of working age people in employment) in OECD countries will still be below pre-pandemic levels by the end of 2022, according to the Outlook. Hours worked in low-paying occupations fell by over 28% across the OECD, 18 percentage points more than the fall seen among high-paying occupations. The number of young people not in employment, education or training (NEET) increased by almost 3 million, reversing the trend of the past decade. By the end of 2020 the average NEET rate of 15-29 year-olds, at 12%, remained a full percentage point above that of the previous year.

The OECD unemployment rate decreased marginally in May 2021, to 6.6% (from 6.7% in April 2021), remaining 1.3 percentage points (pp) above its pre-pandemic level observed in February 2020. The corresponding number of unemployed workers in the OECD area was 43.5 million in May 2021, 8.1 million higher than in February

2020. At 13.6% in May 2021, the OECD youth unemployment rate remained 2.2 pp above its pre-pandemic level. There are significant disparities across countries in the size of the economic shock and the speed of the recovery, with differences between May 2021 and February 2020 unemployment rates ranging from more than 4 pp in some countries (e.g. Colombia and Costa Rica) to close to 0 in others (e.g. Australia and France). “It will be very important to get policy settings right to encourage business investment and job creation, as well as to drive the necessary upskilling, re-skilling and skills matching required to ensure everyone has the best possible opportunity to participate and benefit from the recovery”, OECD Secretary-General Mathias Cormann said, launching the report in Paris.

“As governments roll out their recovery plans, it is essential to continue supporting families most in need while better targeting fiscal policy measures designed to boost growth towards firms and jobs that have a viable future in the new post-COVID environment, providing the right incentives for business investment leading to the restoration and creation of more new jobs. “Withdrawing support too soon would risk jeopardising the recovery. The short-term costs of fiscal support measures can be reduced by enhancing the targeting to the most vulnerable sectors, companies and households, while fostering start-ups and job creation,” he said. The labour market also remains vulnerable to a rapid build-up of long-term unemployment. Many who lost their job in the first phases of the pandemic have been jobless since then and may find it increasingly difficult to compete with those whose jobs have been previously sheltered.

At the height of the crisis, job retention schemes supported approximately 60 million jobs, more than ten times as many as during the financial crisis, and saved up to 21 million jobs. These helped to limit rises in unemployment in many countries, while there is no indication that they had a significant adverse impact on job creation so far. Support should now be targeted to sectors still affected by social distancing restrictions. The design of other schemes should be adjusted to promote the recovery and eventually phased out, says the report. Increased investment in active labour market policies will be critical to help workers find employment. Activation policies should be expanded to provide support and governments should better integrate employment and training services and individualise support to enhance its effectiveness. Investment in effective skills policies is essential to help businesses, start-ups as well as workers cope with transitions to occupations and sectors with high growth potential, including those relying on green technologies. More efforts should be made to promote a culture of lifelong learning and linking training to individuals rather than jobs.

The recovery from the crisis also offers an opportunity to address long-standing gaps in social protection, says the Outlook. For example, emergency support for the

self-employed and other workers with weak coverage introduced during the pandemic should be re-assessed and possibly converted into more targeted and systematic responses, capable of ensuring both fairness and incentives to work. This means a more neutral treatment across forms of work, improved portability of entitlements, and eligibility that is more responsive to people's changing needs. Read the report and country notes. For more information or to request an interview, journalists should contact Spencer Wilson in the OECD Media Office (tel. + 33 1 45 24 81 18). Working with over 100 countries, the OECD is a global policy forum that promotes policies to preserve individual liberty and improve the economic and social well-being of people around the world.

From <https://www.oecd.org/> 07/07/2021

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Blog Smart Cities 4.0: Engaging Citizens; Transforming Urban Infrastructure Through Infratech and Open Data

In Bogota, Colombia, authorities are getting citizens involved in the green redesign of a major thoroughfare to improve mobility and reduce traffic bottlenecks, using an open-source online platform. In Zaporizhzhia, Ukraine, city officials are using anonymized, privacy-protected, real-time intelligence on the flows of people through urban neighborhoods, streets, parks, restaurants, and shops to guide their economic recovery strategy. And in India, city governments have partnered with a healthtech company on remote monitoring of COVID-19 patients at home, helping to reduce the burden on overwhelmed healthcare infrastructure. As cities look to realize a future vision of green, resilient, and inclusive urban infrastructure, citizen-centered digital services and solutions are more important than ever. Mobile applications for residents and visitors keep people informed and help with daily activities, from planning trips to choosing schools. Infratech—smart solutions embedded in urban infrastructure from garbage bins to roads to utility meters—generate real-time data on performance and operating conditions that optimizes city services. In turn, the data feeds into analytics to improve infrastructure and services planning. This helps cities reduce costs, mitigate environmental impacts, and advance sustainability goals such as decarbonization and urban mobility. Bottom line: smart technologies make cities run better.

Increasingly, cities are sharing some of the non-personal data generated by these smart technologies with stakeholders, including businesses and the public. This enables a heightened level of engagement that empowers communities by allowing them to weigh in on issues that directly impact them. Such data transparency builds trust and leads to transformative urban development. It can catalyze crowd-sourced innovation on urban challenges like equalizing service provision to ensure that no one is left behind. And it strengthens digital supply chains, opening doors for youth entrepreneurial engagement, new economic activity, and private sector investment. For example, Transport for London's open data initiative attracted many application

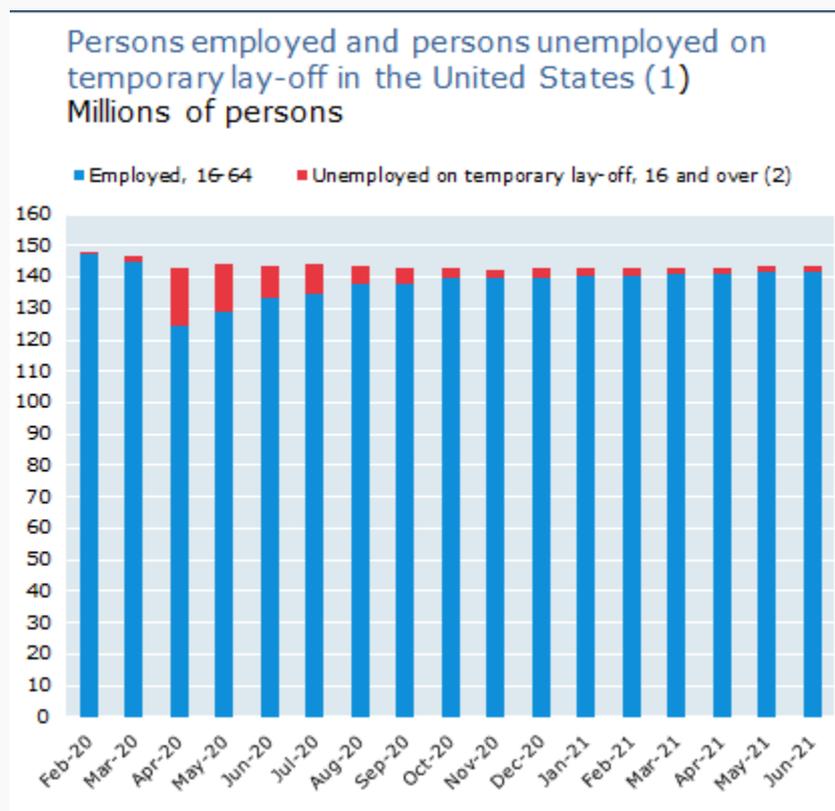
developers, who designed more than 600 mobility apps with real-time transport information based on the open datasets. From an annual spend of about £1million, the initiative generates annual economic benefits and savings of up to £130 million for travelers. IFC is helping client cities design and launch open data programs. It's part of our new suite of services to assist cities in becoming Smart Cities 4.0—an emerging city model that leverages the collective power of engaged and digitally connected citizens to enhance the quality of urban life and ensure sustainable urban development. The Smart Cities 4.0 research shows that cities that are embracing this model—putting people at the center of their transition to a green and digitally connected urban infrastructure—have a stronger return on their technology investments.

IFC has significant experience in the cities space. We've invested and mobilized over \$9 billion in more than 280 projects in municipal infrastructure since 2014. With this new advisory service, we're supporting client cities in building open data programs that can accelerate engagement while delivering returns on investments. The approach combines municipal and private sector investments and advisory services. It also involves forging strategic partnerships with cities around the world to address pressing urban needs with private sector participation. For example, IFC has supported Izmir—Turkey's third largest city and a key IFC city partner—in developing an open data strategy and roadmap. This engagement led to the launch of the city's open data portal. We worked with the Izmir government team, creating a framework to measure progress, and building the skills they needed to implement the strategy. Of course, there are risks associated with deploying an open data approach, from data privacy and security to ensuring uptake by data users and collaboration within the municipality on data release. Careful preparation and groundwork are key—including putting in place data policy frameworks—to ensure that issues are addressed, and risks are mitigated.

From our experience to date, we've learned a few things that are critical for a successful open data initiative, such as ensuring that user needs are considered when datasets are prioritized for release. In addition, leadership buy-in and mayoral endorsement are key to effective municipal collaboration on data release. So, too, is a robust results measurement system to track progress, which will strengthen accountability. A strong communications campaign combined with a user engagement plan will ensure the data is put to good use. Cities are at an inflection point today, as the world re-emerges from the pandemic with a newfound understanding of how fundamental digital connectivity is and everything that it can enable. It's an opportunity to go big. Open data platforms can help, putting people—and trust—at the center of technological advancement that can transform development and citizens' livelihoods. It's also an opportunity for cities to solve for newly arising challenges, such as mounting demand and responsibility for high-quality municipal service delivery at a time of COVID-impacted declines in municipal revenues.

OECD Area Employment Rate Rose to 66.8% in the First Quarter of 2021, but Wide Disparities Across Countries Are Visible

The **OECD area** employment rate – the share of the working-age population with jobs – rose to 66.8% in the first quarter of 2021, from 66.7% in the previous quarter. Some care is needed in interpreting the latest developments in the **OECD** employment rate, as methodological changes to the EU Labour Force Survey blur the comparison between the fourth quarter of 2020 and the first quarter of 2021 for EU countries. In addition, a large part of the increase in the third and, to a lesser extent, fourth quarter of 2020 reflects the return to work of furloughed workers in **Canada** and the **United States**, where they are recorded as unemployed, whereas in most other countries, they are recorded as employed. In the **euro area**, the employment rate stood at 66.9% in the first quarter of 2021, as compared to 68.4% in the **United States** and 77.6% in **Japan**. A large disparity is also observed within the area, with the employment rate ranging from a maximum of 79.3% in the **Netherlands** to a minimum of 53.9% in **Greece**.



(1) The chart provides a more comparable view of movements in US employment statistics with movements in most other OECD countries, where furloughed workers are included in official employment statistics. It should however not be interpreted as alternative official statistics for the United States. In this chart, the number of

employed covers age group from 16 to 64, while the number of unemployed on temporary lay-off covers age group 16 and over.

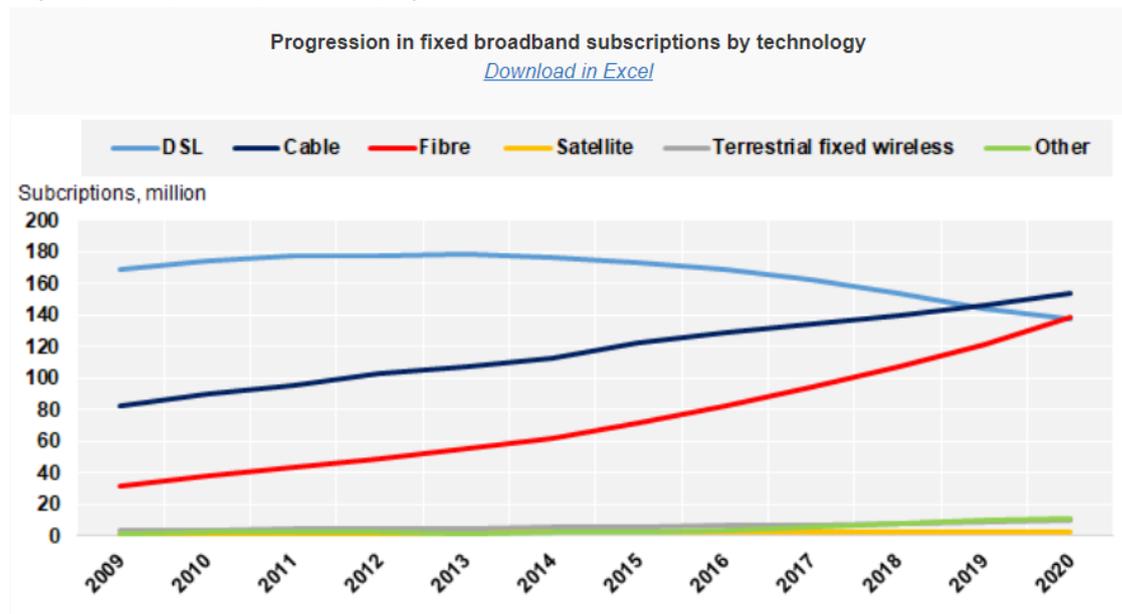
(2) US Current Population Survey data

From <https://www.oecd.org/> 07/26/2021

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High-Speed Fibre Overtakes DSL as OECD Countries Add 21 Million Fixed Broadband Connections in Pandemic Year

High-speed fibre Internet subscriptions surpassed copper-wire DSL connections across OECD countries for the first time in 2020 as the need to move work and home life activities online during the COVID-19 pandemic led to a record 21.15 million new fixed broadband connections (including fibre, DSL, cable and others) in the year to end-December 2020. The latest update to the OECD broadband portal shows that fibre now exceeds 30% of fixed broadband subscriptions across the OECD's 38 member countries, up from 12% a decade ago, and is by far the fastest growing broadband technology, with subscriptions up 14% in 2020 from 2019, outpacing a 5% rise in overall fixed broadband subscriptions. While cable remains the predominant fixed broadband technology, accounting for 34% of subscriptions across OECD countries with a rise of 5.6% in 2020, fibre is steadily replacing DSL subscriptions, which have dropped by 10% over the past two years. Austria, Belgium, Chile, Ireland, Israel and the United Kingdom all increased their fibre connections by more than 50% in 2020. In more and more OECD countries, the majority of broadband connections are now fibre, with the share of fibre in total broadband above 50% in Finland, Iceland, Luxembourg, New Zealand, Norway and Portugal, and exceeding 70% in Japan, Korea, Latvia, Lithuania, Spain and Sweden.



Overall, fixed broadband subscriptions in OECD countries totalled 454 million as of

December 2020, up from 433 million a year earlier, and averaged 33.2 subscriptions per 100 inhabitants. Switzerland led the pack with a penetration rate of 47.5 subscriptions per 100 people, followed by France (45.6%), Norway (44.6%) and Denmark (44.2%). Mobile data usage soared by more than 30% on average in 2020 across the 35 OECD countries for which data were available, with 29 countries showing an increase of over 20%. Finland remains the OECD champion for data consumption at a total of 31 Gigabytes (GB) per subscription per month, followed by Austria (25.8 GB), Latvia (23 GB), Lithuania (20.5 GB), Iceland (16.7 GB), Estonia (16 GB), Chile (12.8 GB) and Sweden (12 GB). Eight countries – Costa Rica, Czech Republic, Greece, Iceland, Italy, Lithuania, Spain and Turkey – saw significant growth of 45% or more in data usage over 2020. On average, users downloaded 7.5 GB of data per month per subscription in 2020, up from 5.8 GB in 2019 in those countries for which data was available.

Mobile broadband subscriptions grew by almost 3% in 2020 across OECD countries. Mobile Internet penetration is highest in Japan, Estonia and Finland, with subscriptions per 100 inhabitants at 185%, 165% and 156%, respectively. Data on machine-to-machine (M2M) communications show that Sweden and Austria remain the leaders in the number of M2M SIM cards per 100 inhabitants. Sweden has 163 M2M SIM cards per 100 inhabitants – a much higher level than most OECD countries that provided data – due in part to the use of these SIM cards in other countries by a Swedish operator. Note that OECD broadband statistics now cover 38 countries with the inclusion of new member Costa Rica, whose data have now been added to historical OECD totals, averages and growth rates where possible. Download broadband data, charts and penetration maps by country at <http://oe.cd/broadband>. For further information, or to discuss these trends further, journalists can contact Verena Weber, Head of the OECD's Communication Infrastructures and Services Policy Unit, by email. Working with over 100 countries, the OECD is a global policy forum that promotes policies to preserve individual liberty and improve the economic and social well-being of people around the world.

From <https://www.oecd.org/> 07/29/2021

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New Skills Development Key to Further Improving Students' Learning Outcomes, Says World Bank Report

Learning outcomes in Russia would benefit significantly from a focus on teaching new skills that are tailored to the modern labor market, says a new World Bank report, *New Skills for a New Century: Informing Regional Policy*. Russia's education system has traditionally been well-performing and efficient, with Russian students appearing among the top performers globally. However, today's labor market requires "21st century skills" - a combination of skills, knowledge, and expertise that students need to succeed in the modern world. "Russia's education system could achieve better teaching and learning outcomes if it focused more on developing 21st-century skills,"

says Tigran Shmis, World Bank Senior Education Specialist. "There is a strong relationship between the quality of the school environment, innovative teaching practices, students' perception of school, and students' learning outcomes." According to the report, 38 percent of Russian schools today are not equipped with workshops and 46 percent do not have scientific laboratories. And, 77 percent of educational institutions do not have dedicated places for integrated lessons that stimulate the development of new skills and team interaction.

The way teaching is delivered, the physical characteristics of the learning environment, and the school's psychological climate all affect students' learning results. The study provides an insight into how these factors impact the development of students' skills, including 21st century and digital skills. Along with data analytics, the study includes a qualitative perspective of modern teaching and learning in Russia, as well as the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on teaching and learning. "Developing the ability of students to master 21st century skills is critical to ensuring their future employment and career success," says Renaud Seligmann, World Bank Country Director for Russia. "Studies in Russia have shown that businesses having access to workers with these skills will also be critical for growth and productivity. In turn, high-quality human capital is a cornerstone of the resilience and sustainability of the national economy."

The report provides recommendations for how schools in Russia can better help students excel. For example, teachers who practice innovative teaching are more likely to drive higher achievement. Modern teaching practices can be supported by expanding the use of technology and enhancing the learning environment in classrooms. Technology should be made available in schools on an equitable basis to improve student learning and enhance teachers' professional development. Education policymakers should prioritize the prevention of bullying and the development of supporting measures to ensure a positive school climate. Despite the physical return of students to schools, the COVID-19 pandemic is causing continued learning losses. Therefore, new equipment, ICT, and innovative teaching methods are needed to enable teachers to improve their practices and compensate such learning losses.

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ADB Lowers 2021 Growth Outlook for Developing Asia to 7.2%

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) is projecting 7.2% economic growth for developing Asia this year, compared with its 7.3% forecast in April, as renewed coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outbreaks slow the recovery in some economies in the region. The growth outlook for 2022 is upgraded to 5.4% from 5.3%. Excluding the newly industrialized economies of Hong Kong, China; the Republic of Korea; Singapore; and Taipei, China, developing Asia's updated growth outlook is 7.5% for

2021 and 5.7% for 2022, compared with earlier projections of 7.7% and 5.6%, respectively. The supplement to ADB's flagship economic publication, Asian Development Outlook (ADO) 2021, provides updated projections for the region's economies and inflation levels amid the COVID-19 pandemic. "Asia and the Pacific's recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic continues, although the path remains precarious amid renewed outbreaks, new virus variants, and an uneven vaccine rollout," said ADB Chief Economist Yasuyuki Sawada. "On top of containment and vaccination measures, phased and strategic rejuvenation of economic activities—for instance, trade, manufacturing, and tourism—will be key to ensure that the recovery is green, inclusive, and resilient."

The COVID-19 pandemic remains the biggest risk to the outlook, as outbreaks continue in many economies. Daily confirmed cases in the region peaked at about 434,000 in mid-May. They narrowed to about 109,000 at the end of June, concentrated mainly in South Asia, Southeast Asia, and the Pacific. Meanwhile, the vaccine rollout in the region is gaining pace, with 41.6 doses administered per 100 people by the end of June—above the global average of 39.2, but below rates of 97.6 in the United States and 81.8 in the European Union. East Asia's growth outlook for 2021 is raised to 7.5%, from 7.4% in April, amid a stronger-than-expected recovery by the newly industrialized economies of Hong Kong, China; the Republic of Korea; and Taipei, China. The subregional growth forecast for 2022 is retained at 5.1%. The growth outlook for the People's Republic of China is likewise maintained at 8.1% this year and 5.5% in 2022, amid steady performances by industry, exports, and services. This year's growth outlook for Central Asia has been raised to 3.6%, from 3.4% in the April forecast. This is mainly due to an improved outlook for Armenia, Georgia, and Kazakhstan—the subregion's largest economy. Central Asia's outlook for 2022 remains at 4.0%.

Projections for South Asia, Southeast Asia, and the Pacific for 2021 are lowered as renewed outbreaks are met with containment measures and restrictions, hampering economic activity. South Asia's growth outlook for fiscal year 2021 is lowered to 8.9% from 9.5%. The forecast for India is downgraded by 1.0 percentage point to 10.0%. Southeast Asia's 2021 outlook is revised to 4.0% from 4.4%, while the projection for Pacific economies is lowered to 0.3% from 1.4%. However, the 2022 growth forecasts for these subregions are upgraded to 7.0%, 5.2%, and 4.0%, respectively. The inflation forecast for Asia and the Pacific this year is raised to 2.4%, from 2.3% in April, reflecting rising oil and commodity prices. The projection for 2022 remains at 2.7%.

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ADB Calls for Just, Equitable Transition Toward Net Zero in Asia and Pacific

Asian Development Bank (ADB) President Masatsugu Asakawa today called for countries in Asia and the Pacific to take bold action to address climate change while ensuring fair and equitable economic growth amid the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. “The task of addressing climate change is not only urgent, but also inextricably linked to an inclusive and lasting recovery from the pandemic,” said Mr. Asakawa at the Indonesian Ministry of Finance–ADB 2021 International Climate Conference. “With shared commitment and international cooperation, we can make the transition to net zero and achieve climate resilience, so that our region emerges stronger than before.” The one-day virtual conference attracted about 800 people from the public and private sectors, development partners, think tanks, and academia to discuss international good practices that can help ADB developing member countries transition to low-carbon, resilient economies and pursue a green, resilient, and inclusive recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

The event highlighted Indonesia’s commitment to meeting its nationally determined contributions (NDCs) under the Paris Agreement, as well as steps it has taken to support the development of a low-carbon, resilient economy. “Indonesia has mainstreamed climate change into our National Medium-Term Development Plan 2020–2024 and established a national Action Plan, both on mitigation and adaptation,” said Indonesian Vice Minister of Finance Suhasil Nazara. “In the near future, we will use this recovery phase post-COVID-19 pandemic to pursue our climate and sustainability agenda.” Indonesia will chair the G20 in 2022. Asia and the Pacific is responsible for more than half of global greenhouse gas emissions. Recent analysis predicts that global energy-related CO₂ emissions will grow by nearly 5% in 2021, as demand for coal, oil, and gas rebounds. About 80% of the growth in coal demand is expected to come from Asia.

The Paris Agreement aims to keep the rise in global temperatures to well below 2°C, preferably to 1.5°C, compared to pre-industrial levels. ADB’s sovereign operations will be fully aligned with the goals of the Paris Agreement by 1 July 2023 and its nonsovereign operations by 1 July 2025. ADB will scale up investments in adaptation and resilience to at least \$9 billion from 2019 to 2024 to support Asia and the Pacific’s recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. The measures will contribute to ADB’s commitment to deliver \$80 billion in climate finance between 2019 and 2030. Mr. Asakawa said ADB will support Indonesia’s transition toward a low-carbon, resilient economy and help the country meet its NDC targets. Strengthening resilience is one of the three focus areas in ADB’s country partnership strategy for Indonesia. That includes climate change mitigation and adaptation and green recovery, as well as disaster risk management and finance.

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East Asia

CHINA: Zhejiang Aims to Boost Digital Economy

East China's Zhejiang Province has set a goal of bringing the added value of digital economy to about 60 percent of its GDP by 2025. According to the province's 14th Five Year Plan on the development of digital economy, industrial chains and clusters of digital security, integrated circuits, and high-end software will be constructed by 2025, with the number of valid patents in digital economy reaching 80,000. The province will also improve its digital trade environment, aiming to increase the total volume of imports and exports in digital trade to 1 trillion yuan (about 154.5 billion U.S. dollars). Zhejiang has been a strong player in the digital economy sector. In 2020, the added value of digital economy of the province reached 3.02 trillion yuan, accounting for 46.8 percent of its GDP.

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New Industries, Business Formats, Models Contribute More to Chinese Economy in 2020

The added value of new industries, new business formats and new business models, dubbed the "three new" economy, contributed more to China's economic growth last year, official data shows. These new growth drivers accounted for 17.08 percent of the country's gross domestic product (GDP) last year, up 0.7 percentage points from the previous year, the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) said on Tuesday. Calculated at current prices, the new drivers climbed 4.5 percent in 2020 from the previous year, outpacing GDP growth by 1.5 percentage points, said the NBS. A new industry involves the application of new scientific and technological achievements and new technologies to form a certain scale of new economic activities. A new business format involves new links, new chains and new activity forms derived from existing industries and fields. A new business model involves the integration and reorganization of various elements of enterprise operation to achieve the goal of customer value and sustainable profit, forming an efficient and competitive business operation mode. The added value of the "three new" economy measures the added value created by all permanent resident units of a country (or region) engaged in "three new" economic production activities within a certain period of time, according to the NBS.

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China Plans to Promote Circular Economy

China unveiled a plan on Wednesday to promote circular economy for the next five years, aiming to basically establish a resources recycling system in the country by 2025 as part of efforts to achieve carbon peak and neutrality goals. The plan,

released by the National Development and Reform Commission, specifies that China's energy and water consumption per unit of gross domestic product will be lowered by about 13.5 percent and 16 percent, respectively, by 2025 from the 2020 levels. Efficiency of resource utilization will be greatly improved by 2025, with circular economy playing a bigger role in ensuring resource security, reads the document. Under the plan, the amount of waste paper and scrap steel utilized will reach 60 million tonnes and 320 million tonnes by 2025, respectively, while the industrial output value of the resource recycling industry will stand at 5 trillion yuan (about 771.6 billion U.S. dollars). The plan also outlines major projects and tasks for developing circular economy in the following five years, including innovations in key technologies and equipment, the treatment of plastic pollution, eco-friendly express packaging and the recycling of traction batteries. China has announced its goal of peaking carbon dioxide emissions by 2030 and achieving carbon neutrality by 2060, with various sectors speeding up low-carbon transition.

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China to Cut Transaction Fees to Invigorate Market Entities

China will reduce a total of 24 billion yuan (about 3.7 billion U.S. dollars) of payment fees every year to invigorate the economy through a slew of fee cuts measures unveiled recently, a central bank official said Thursday. Among the total, over 16 billion yuan will be saved for small and micro-sized enterprises and self-employed individuals thanks to fee cuts, said Fan Yifei, deputy governor of the People's Bank of China, at a news briefing. The measures, which will take effect on Sept. 30 this year, focus on fee cuts in basic payment services, including bank account services, RMB settlement and e-banking, said Fan. These measures will help reduce the cost of capital circulation, boost consumption and promote the high-quality development of the national economy, said Fan. The country will also introduce long-term measures to reduce fees for interbank ATM cash withdrawal, Fan added.

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China to Actively Expand Cross-border E-commerce Pilot Zones: MOC

China's Ministry of Commerce (MOC) on Monday pledged to actively expand the integrated pilot zones for cross-border e-commerce to cultivate new competitive edges in foreign trade. Some cities have submitted applications to the State Council for the establishment of new pilot zones and the MOC will join relevant departments in carrying out related work, Ren Hongbin, assistant minister of commerce, told a press conference. The MOC also promised to formulate guidelines for the protection of cross-border e-commerce intellectual property rights, optimize the list of

cross-border e-commerce retail imports, and facilitate the return and exchange management of cross-border e-commerce import and export.

China's cross-border e-commerce has been expanding much faster than overall foreign trade, and its share in overall foreign trade has gone up significantly. Since 2015, China's State Council has established 105 cross-border e-commerce pilot zones in five batches. The new business model has become a vibrant force driving China's foreign trade growth. China's cross-border e-commerce imports and exports reached 1.69 trillion yuan (about 260.9 billion U.S. dollars) in 2020, up 31.1 percent year on year. Over the past five years, China's cross-border e-commerce has grown by nearly 10 times, according to Ren. To further spur the growth of foreign trade, China's State Council released guidelines earlier this month on accelerating the development of new forms and models of foreign trade to push forward its upgrading and foster new competitive strengths.

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China Reports Expansion in 5G Network Coverage

The number of 5G terminal connections in China has reached 365 million as the country pushes forward 5G network construction, data from the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology (MIIT) showed. The country has completed the construction of the world's largest 5G standalone network, said Tian Yulong, chief engineer at the MIIT, citing figures that so far some 961,000 5G base stations have been built across the country. The numbers have increased from 310 million terminals and 819,000 base stations recorded in May. Shipments of 5G phones in China stood at 128 million units in the first half of this year, accounting for 73.4 percent of the country's total mobile phone shipments during the period, according to Tian. Since its commercialization two years ago, the 5G technology has played an important role in fields such as industrial production, energy and medical services and driven forward the digital transformation in China's economy and society and development of the digital economy, said Tian. China expects to see the number of 5G users exceed 560 million by 2023, according to a recent guideline. By then, 5G network is expected to be used by over 40 percent of personal mobile phone users, and every 10,000 people in China will enjoy more than 18 5G base stations, the guideline said.

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Infrastructure, High-tech Investment to Propel China's Growth in H2: Economist

Investments in high-tech sectors and infrastructure projects may help mitigate potential downward pressure on the Chinese economy in the second half (H2) of this year, an economist said. The economy may encounter challenges in H2 as pent-up demand subsides and property tightening measures bite, but enough fiscal room for investment may help address the potential downward pressure, said Lu Ting, chief China economist with Nomura Securities. The amount of debt issuance by the central and local governments in H1 was notably less than half of the quota for the whole year, indicating fiscal room for more infrastructure investment to counter a potential decline in growth pace, Lu said in a press briefing. He said that the country is also likely to step up investments in high-end manufacturing in H2 as such moves can stimulate short-term growth and are in line with the country's longer-term growth strategy. China's gross domestic product expanded 12.7 percent year on year in H1, the latest official data showed, indicating resilience in recovery. A series of economic indicators including industrial profits and medium-to-long-term loans to the industrial sector saw robust growth in the past few months, Lu noted, adding that such increases indicate further growth prospects for manufacturing investment.

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Chinese Vice Premier Urges Development of Government-subsidized Rental Housing

Vice Premier Han Zheng has called for efforts to accelerate the development of government-subsidized rental housing and resolutely implement the long-term housing mechanism. Han, also a member of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, made the remarks on Thursday at a teleconference on developing rental housing and facilitating regulation of the real-estate market. Han urged taking the development of government-subsidized rental housing as a key task in housing construction during the 14th Five-Year Plan period (2021-2025) and addressing prominent housing issues in large cities. Efforts should be made to guarantee the housing supply for new urban residents and young people, Han said. While pushing forward the development of government-subsidized rental housing, Han underscored the importance of ensuring people's basic living requirements and focusing on striking a balance between the needs of work and life. A scientific rent-pricing mechanism should also be established in accordance with the principle of "affordability and sustainability," he said. Han also stressed sticking to the principle of "housing is for living in, not for speculation", while avoiding the use of housing as a short-term tool to stimulate the economy. The long-term housing mechanism stabilizes the prices of land and houses, as well as expectations, and it should be fully implemented to ensure the stable and healthy development of the real-estate market, he added.

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China's Employment Stable, Back to Pre-pandemic Level

China has seen generally stable employment this year thanks to its economic recovery and supportive policies, and recruitment online and offline has become more heated. In the first half of 2021, a total of 6.98 million new urban jobs, or 63.5 percent of the country's annual target, were created. It is an increase of 1.34 million over the same period last year, said Zhang Ying, an official with the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security, at a press conference Thursday. As business activities become more vigorous, companies are hiring more. "In the first half of this year, the catering industry has managed to achieve growth out of the pandemic," said Xiao Saifeng, marketing director of a catering management company in Changsha, central China's Hunan Province. "We will open seven or eight restaurants in the second half, and our recruitment scale is also expanding." At a refrigeration equipment company in Foshan, Guangdong province, more employees are in demand due to booming export orders this year.

Wu Chengping, chairman of the company's labor union, said the company would go to Qiandongnan Miao and Dong Autonomous Prefecture in the neighboring Guizhou Province for further recruitment at the end of July. Official data also showed the country's surveyed urban unemployment rate fell from 5.5 percent in February to 5 percent in June, down by 0.7 percentage points from June last year and about the same as the pre-pandemic level in June 2019. To enable more job seekers to access job opportunities, the country has also launched specific online recruitment campaigns. They include a Wednesday-concluded one that focuses on micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises, new infrastructure, e-sports, and agriculture, providing 200,000 positions from a total of 17,000 employers. "While we see the general stability of employment, we should also notice the structural problems," said Liu Aihua, spokesperson for the National Bureau of Statistics, adding that the surveyed unemployment rate for urban youth was relatively higher.

According to Liu, the total number of college graduates this year hit a record high of 9.09 million. "The higher unemployment rate is not only related to the intensified competition but also to factors like the lack of change in young people's attitudes towards choosing a job and the mismatch of vocational skills," said Zeng Xiangquan, a researcher with Renmin University of China. Zeng suggested more vocational education and guidance would help college graduates. Looking ahead, China will continue to expand job opportunities by supporting innovation and start-ups, and strengthen employment support for key groups, including college graduates, said Zhang at the press conference. The country will also help improve employment services to ensure the sound operation of online recruitment and the orderly running of offline job fairs, Zhang said.

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New Shanghai Pudong Cluster Unveiled to Draw International Economic Entities

The New Bund Global Economic Organization Cluster was unveiled in Shanghai's Pudong New Area on Wednesday, as part of its efforts to attract more international economic entities to drive high-quality growth. China issued a guideline on July 15 to support high-level reform and opening-up of Pudong. The guideline listed measures to build Pudong into a pioneer area for socialist modernization. The guideline also pointed out that Pudong should play a role in drawing more international economic organizations and multinational companies' regional headquarters to the China (Shanghai) Pilot Free Trade Zone. Currently, a total of 10 international economic organizations have set up offices in the New Bund of Pudong (Qiantan Area). Yang Chao, deputy head of the Pudong New Area, said that the New Bund Global Economic Organization Cluster will gather more corporate headquarters, international organizations and institutions with global influence, helping Pudong become the prime option for many international organizations and improving Shanghai's global competitiveness.

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Chinese Shares Rebound amid Improving Sentiment

Chinese stocks bounced back with across-the-board gains Thursday, ending a losing streak as market sentiment recovered. The benchmark Shanghai Composite Index rose 1.49 percent to close at 3,411.72 points while the Shenzhen Component Index jumped 3.04 percent to 14,515.32 points. The ChiNext Index, tracking China's NASDAQ-style board of growth enterprises, jumped 5.32 percent to close at 3,459.72 points Thursday. The combined turnover of stocks covered by the two main-board indices came in at 1.25 trillion yuan (about 192.4 billion U.S. dollars) on the 7th straight day to exceed the 1-trillion-yuan threshold. The rebound came after sharp declines seen early this week, which sent the benchmark Shanghai Composite Index down over 5 percent from the close last week. The sell-off was largely affected by volatile market sentiment and the A-shares' sound fundamentals remain unchanged, said Yang Delong, chief economist with First Seafront Fund. In fact, the corrections have created opportunities for investors to build up their positions in a capital market undergoing reforms that are poised to improve the quality of listed companies, Yang added.

The world's second largest economy reported solid recovery momentum in the first half of this year, with a GDP growth of 12.7 percent year on year. To further support the real economy, the country's central bank announced that it would cut the reserve requirement ratio by 50 basis points for eligible financial institutions from July 15. With sound economic fundamentals and relatively loose liquidity, the A-share market

could bottom out after bearish sentiment of both domestic and foreign investors fades out, CITIC Securities said in a research note. Data by financial information provider Wind showed that the A-share market Thursday saw net inflow of funds through "northbound trading," or money invested from Hong Kong into the Chinese mainland through the stock connect programs, indicating recovery in confidence of foreign investors. As China further carries out capital market reforms and widens its access to foreign investors, the A-share market will see enhanced long-term investment value, analysts said.

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JAPAN: 5G Tech to Boost Tokyo Games Viewing Experience

The Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics organizing committee has said that it will use fifth-generation, or 5G, large-capacity ultrahigh-speed wireless communications networks to give spectators an exciting experience of viewing the sporting events. The committee will team up with Japan's Nippon Telegraph and Telephone Corp. <9432> and U.S. semiconductor giant Intel Corp. for the project, in which augmented reality and other technologies will be used at sailing, golf and swimming venues. Four 4K high-resolution cameras installed on drones or vessels will be mobilized for sailing events. Visual data from the cameras will be projected on a huge screen, making spectators feel as if they are watching the races from up close, according to the committee. For golf events, the committee will provide a special app designed to distribute videos of matches taking place at different venues and related information to tablet computers and other devices. At swimming venues, some people related to the Tokyo Games will be given eyeglass-type devices enabling them to watch competitions and view data on participating swimmers at the same time.

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BOJ to Back Fight Against Climate Change

The Bank of Japan said Friday it will support the fight against climate change by providing zero interest funds to commercial financial institutions making investments and loans in the area. The BOJ also released its strategy on climate change, announcing plans to purchase "green bonds" using foreign currency-denominated assets through cooperation with other Asian central banks. The fund supply system was discussed at the central bank's two-day Policy Board meeting that ended on Friday, in line with a decision at the previous monetary policy meeting in June. With the system, expected to start this year and continue at least until fiscal 2030, the BOJ hopes to show its resolve to support the fight against climate change, following in the footsteps of European and other major central banks. The new funding system will cover financial institutions that disclose a certain amount of information on measures against climate change. If such institutions use the system, the burden of negative

interest on current account deposits they hold at the BOJ will be relieved.

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Japan Goes on Defense Against Cyberattacks Ahead of Tokyo Olympics

With only a week to go until the start of the Tokyo Olympics, the risk of cyberattacks grows greater by the day. In the wake of the leak of a large number of names of Olympic-related personnel discovered in June, government officials and members of the Tokyo Organizing Committee of the Olympic and Paralympic Games remain on the edge of their seats over fears that another cyberattack could have a major impact on the Games. ■ Sponsors in the crosshairs. “The enemy hackers now know who is in charge of Olympic cyberdefense — they’ve seen where we’ve stationed our ranks,” said one concerned security company executive who has been involved in instituting security protections for the Tokyo Olympics. On June 2, the National Center of Incident Readiness and Strategy for Cybersecurity (NISC), the government’s command center for cybersecurity, announced: “Information on 170 people from 90 organizations who participated in information-sharing training has been leaked due to unauthorized access. The data includes names, job titles and organization names.”

According to security companies and others, a variety of systems used at the Olympics are controlled by computer. A cyberattack on the Games could cause the lights in a competition venue to suddenly turn off, or take tracking systems offline, rendering it impossible to record times. In a worst case scenario, a hacker seeking to sabotage the Games could launch an attack that would make it impossible for competition to continue. To avoid such a contingency, NISC has been holding countermeasure trainings since 2019 with key service providers, including power companies, telecommunications companies and medical institutions, all of which are indispensable for the Olympics to run smoothly. So far, upwards of more than 2,000 people from about 600 companies have participated in these training sessions. According to people familiar with the matter, it was data on these participants that was leaked. An NISC official worried that “an email purporting to come from a person in charge of Olympic cyberdefense could harbor a virus capable of causing major disruptions in operations.” Cyberattacks to probe system weaknesses may already be underway.

Kazuhiro Nakanishi of Akamai Technologies, a security company that defends against distributed denial-of-service (DDoS) attacks in which large amounts of data are sent to bring down a system, said, “Companies sponsoring the Olympics have been repeatedly attacked, although it’s unclear whether the Tokyo Olympics themselves are the ultimate target.” Russia, a sports powerhouse, has been barred from sending a team to the Tokyo Olympics due to organized doping. It faced the

same penalty during the 2018 Pyeongchang Winter Olympics. Instead, Russian athletes must participate individually in the Games, as independent athletes. Against this background, there is widespread wariness that Russia will launch a cyberattack to tarnish the Olympic prestige. The British government announced in October that the Russian military intelligence agency, known as GRU, had conducted cyber-reconnaissance of the organizing committee and related officials before the Tokyo Olympics were postponed. Moscow has denied any involvement in the attack. Also in October, the U.S. Justice Department announced that it had indicted six GRU intelligence officers for attacks on the Pyeongchang Games.

During the 2016 Rio de Janeiro Olympics, a cyberattack targeted the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA), the independent agency that confirmed Russia's doping scheme. Medical data on participating athletes was leaked in the attack, which WADA said was committed by a Russian group. Jun Osawa, a senior researcher at the Nakasone Peace Institute and expert on cybersecurity, said: "Russia has been ostracized from the Olympics, and thus has a motive to sabotage them. It also has the capacity to carry out an attack." ■ Ticketing problems in Pyeongchang. As lightning rods of international attention, the Olympics have attracted several cyberattacks in years past — including some that have disrupted operations. A virus dubbed the "Olympic Destroyer" infected systems at the 2018 Pyeongchang Winter Games, causing problems that prevented venue tickets from being issued. At the 2016 Rio de Janeiro Games, in addition to the attack that siphoned athlete data from WADA, fake Wi-Fi hotspots were also set up to nab information from spectators.

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SOUTH KOREA: Facing Increasing Ransomware Attacks This Year

South Korea's ICT ministry said Tuesday the country reported 78 ransomware attacks in the first half of the year in the latest sign of growing cyberattacks. Ransomware is a type of malware that holds a target's data hostage or locks up its systems until a ransom is paid. It is not immediately clear whether the targeted companies paid ransoms to hackers in return for restoring access to their data. The latest figure represents a rising trend, compared with 22 in 2018, 39 in 2019 and 127 cases last year, according to the Ministry of Science and ICT. Ransomware attacks have grown in scale globally recently, taking aim at various businesses. In May, a local food delivery company, Super Hero, was targeted, which paralyzed its 15,000 delivery workers for hours nationwide. U.S. software company Kaseya was also targeted in an attack recently, impacting some of its customers globally.

To respond to growing cybersecurity threats, the ICT ministry said it has conducted a two-week cybersecurity exercise on 230 companies in May. The number of

participants marks a sharp rise from last year when only 83 companies took part. The exercises found that large companies were able to detect a distributed denial-of-service attack -- when hackers flood a target's system with traffic to become inoperable for legitimate users -- in three minutes on average and make response measures in 19 minutes. Smaller companies were able to detect the attack in nine minutes and respond in 22 minutes. The exercises also found 114 security vulnerabilities on websites of 30 companies. The ministry said it would conduct special ransomware exercises in October to help companies better respond to the increasing type of cyberattack.

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Seoul City's Digital Map Adds Feature Showing Crowd Sizes at Virus Testing Centers

The Seoul city government's official digital map has newly added a feature showing the level of crowds at COVID-19 testing centers across the city, according to officials Monday. The Smart Seoul Map, available at the URL address <https://map.seoul.go.kr/smgis2/short/6NjT7>, was updated to reveal the level of crowds in line waiting to be tested at some 80 testing centers across the city, according to city officials. The crowd sizes are divided into three categories -- normal, busy and crowded -- and are updated every hour. The map also shows information on the test centers, such as whether they are closed for the day or preparing to open. According to officials, the functionality was added at the instruction of Seoul Mayor Oh Se-hoon. Oh initially ordered city officials to develop a smartphone application that can reduce the inconvenience of citizens waiting in lines for long hours. The mayor explained on his social media that the feature was introduced in the city's browser-based digital map in consideration of people who are unable to use smartphone apps.

From <https://en.yna.co.kr> 07/12/2021

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Logistics Investment Continues as E-Commerce War Wages On

More e-commerce platforms are rushing to offer early morning delivery outside of Seoul to win the nation-wide grocery delivery war that has been sparked by Market Kurly and Coupang. Shinsegae Group's online retail channel SSG.com began expanding dawn delivery in several major cities in North and South Chungcheong Province this week, including Cheongju, Cheonan and Sejoing City. The company has said it plans to expand the service to the rest of the country in the future. Entering the region two years after launching its early morning delivery service, the move marks the first time the platform will provide the service outside the Seoul metropolitan area. By building a cold chain distribution center in Cheongju, which works in connection with its online store distribution center in Gimpo known as

“NE.O,” SSG.com will be able to deliver items within hours to the region.

“We are glad to finally provide early morning delivery to customers in the Chungcheong region,” said Kwak Jung-woo, the head of the operations department said. “By expanding the coverage region and increasing supply, we plan to make our early morning delivery service available to more people,” Kwak said. The move comes as Coupang, the country’s second largest e-commerce platform following Naver, has invested over 1 trillion won (\$873.9 million) in distribution centers in regions across in the country so far this year alone, including in North Jeolla, South Gyeongsang, North Chungcheong and Busan. Coupang currently remains the only platform in the country able to provide early morning delivery on a nationwide scale. The combined size of its distribution centers amount to an equivalent of 100 football stadiums, according to the company.

Fresh food delivery service Market Kurly, an online grocery startup which first introduced the concept of dawn delivery known as “Saetbuyi delivery” to the country, also announced plans to expand early morning delivery in the southern region later this year. Having raised investment of 225.4 billion won in a round of Series F funding from investors such as Global asset manager Millennium Management and local logistics giant CJ Logistics, the platform is expected to benefit from a synergy in distribution. In April, Market Kurly signed a memorandum of understanding with CJ Logistics to extend its early morning delivery service in the Chungcheong region. Also on Tuesday, Naver launched a new platform designed to reduce the burden of logistics management on small online sellers.

Named Naver Fulfillment Alliance, the platform brings several domestic fulfillment firms together to provide shipping solutions to the e-commerce’s many small, and fragmented players. Naver itself has around 450,000 online retailers on its Smart Store platform. A fulfillment service refers a third-party warehouse service that prepares and ships a store’s orders. Companies that have joined the platform include CJ Logistics, OurBox, WeKeep, Fassto, Poomgo and Dealibird. Using artificial intelligence algorithms, Naver Fulfillment Alliance enables merchants to manage the entire process of packaging, delivery, inventory management, defective product inspection, management of returned products and other customer services. On the platform, the sellers can find and select a delivery partner that fits their product types and preemptively plan on the logistics processes and costs.

For example, an ice cream seller can choose a fulfillment partner specialized in delivery of frozen food products. Before, each online retailer had to find suitable logistics firms cost-wise and quality-wise on their own. Naver further plans to support fulfillment service providers, including short-distance delivery firms, with its AI technologies that can predict demand and provide better solutions. “Naver has been providing a variety of technologies to support the online store and payment platforms, and NFA is an extension of the efforts,” said Kim Pyung-song, leader of the logistics

platform service at Naver. “The company will continue efforts to develop on-demand logistics services to around 450,000 smart stores and add diversity to the logistics ecosystem.” The tech giant also plans to utilize data from the logistics business to develop new businesses, such as an advisory system for logistics services.

From <http://www.koreaherald.com> 07/13/2021

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S. Korea Launches Test Bed for 5G Devices

South Korea's ICT ministry said Tuesday it has opened a testing facility for products that run on 5G networks in a move to support small and mid-sized companies. The country has earmarked a total of 19.8 billion won (US\$13.8 million) from 2019 to 2023 to develop the testing center in Gumi, about 260 kilometers southeast of Seoul, according to the Ministry of Science and ICT. The facility aims to support local companies in checking whether their connected devices work properly on local and global 5G networks before commercialization. While the test bed has so far established infrastructure for products that run on non-standalone 5G, which requires support from 4G LTE, the ministry said it will introduce standalone 5G infrastructure this year. South Korean telecom operators have yet to commercialize standalone 5G, which promises improved latency, though KT Corp. aims to deploy the technology soon. As of the end of May, the country's 5G users reached 15.8 million, accounting for 22 percent of the total 71 million mobile subscriptions, according to ministry data.

From <https://en.yna.co.kr> 07/13/2021

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S. Korea to Research Digital Treatment for Depression amid Pandemic

South Korea's ICT ministry said Thursday the country plans to invest nearly 30 billion won (US\$26.2 million) over the next three years to research digital treatment for depression in a move to find new ways to help the growing number of people suffering from the mental disorder. The number of depression patients in South Korea reached 790,000 in 2019, up 5.9 percent on-year, and the number is expected to rise as the pandemic restricts social activities and triggers economic uncertainty. Digital treatment methods, such as games and virtual reality software, have recently drawn attention as a possible alternative to treat and prevent mental health disorders without direct physical care. The Ministry of Science and ICT said it has earmarked 14 billion won until 2024 for the research program, while the private sector will invest 14.9 billion won.

The research aims to develop a digital service that offers personalized depression diagnoses based on real-time collection and analysis of user data, as well as a service that provides preventative measures against the disease by using smartphones and other mobile devices. Experts across various fields, from artificial

intelligence to mental health, will take part in the research, including Kim Hyung-sook, a cognitive science professor at Hanyang University. Naver Cloud, the cloud arm of South Korea's internet giant Naver Corp., will also participate in the program to build a cloud infrastructure for the digital platforms.

From <https://en.yna.co.kr> 07/15/2021

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ID Card Mobile Verification Service Due Next Year

Beginning next year, South Koreans will be able to conveniently confirm their identities through smartphones, thanks to the planned introduction of an ID card mobile verification service, the government said Wednesday. The Ministry of the Interior and Safety said it will build the resident registration card mobile verification service during the first half of next year to allow people to confirm their identities through smartphones without presenting their physical ID cards. In the new service, people who do not carry their resident registration cards can have their identities verified simply by showing key information of their ID cards, including name, resident registration number, address and the card issuing agency, through a smartphone. The ministry said people can conveniently use the service after a simple registration with a smartphone app run by the government, without having their mobile ID card issued. There will be no risk of personal information leak because real-time encrypted information is transmitted from the resident registration system, it said, adding the service can be used after going through an identity verification process at Government 24 (www.gov.kr), an administrative service app. The ministry explained that the mobile ID verification service could be particularly useful in cases of submission of civil affairs documents, drinking age check at convenience stores and restaurants, ID verification for aircraft or ship boarding and ID confirmation in private contracts or transactions.

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Korea's Economy Suffers Worst Contraction Since 1997 in 2020 amid Pandemic -BOK

North Korea's economy is estimated to contract 4.5 percent on-year in 2020, marking the worst contraction since 1997, as Pyongyang closed its borders over the COVID-19 pandemic, South Korea's central bank said Friday. The North's economy, which has been hit by tightened UN sanctions over its nuclear and missile programs, expanded 0.4 percent in 2019, but shrank 4.1 percent in 2018 and 3.5 percent in 2017, the Bank of Korea (BOK) said in a report. Last year, North Korea suffered its biggest economic contraction since 1997, when the North's economy shrank 6.5 percent amid a "arduous march," a term used by the North that describes hardships of its people during the famine in the 1990s. The North's economic contraction last year was led by "intense UN sanctions, deteriorating weather conditions and border

lockdowns over the COVID-19 pandemic," a BOK official told reporters. The BOK's annual report is based on data from South Korean institutions specializing in North Korea, which does not publish official economic data. North Korea's foreign trade plunged 73.4 percent on year in 2020 to \$860 million as shipments to China, the North's biggest trading partner, were curbed over the pandemic, the BOK said.

The North's exports totaled \$90 million in 2020, down 67.9 percent from a year ago. Imports stood at \$770 million last year, down 73.9 percent from a year ago, the BOK said. North Korea's nominal gross national income (GNI) stood at 35 trillion won (\$30.1 billion) in 2020. That was equivalent to just 1.8 percent of South Korea's GNI. The North's GNI per capita in 2020 stood at 1.38 million won, equivalent to 3.7 percent of the South's GNI per capita. US Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman, who recently visited South Korea for talks on North Korea, voiced sympathy for North Korean people who face food shortages due to the pandemic. "We all feel for the people of the DPRK, who are indeed, facing all the most difficult circumstances given the pandemic, and what it means as well for their food security," Sherman told reporters in Seoul, referring to the North's official name, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. "We only hope for a better outcome for the people of the DPRK," Sherman said.

From <http://www.koreaherald.com> 07/30/2021

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South-East Asia

INDONESIA: To Allocate 200,000 Tons of Rice for Social Aid amid Covid-19 Restrictions

The Indonesian government is set to allocate 200,000 tons of rice as part of the country's social assistance program amid the latest COVID-19 restrictions as the nation is battling the second COVID-19 wave. The Indonesian State Logistics Agency's President Director Budi Waseso said on Thursday that the logistics will be supplied to 20 million recipients who are eligible for the need. The distribution of the staple will be managed by the country's Social Affairs Ministry. Waseso also said that the agency currently has 1.4 million tons of rice in its warehouse. Indonesia is implementing the emergency public activity restrictions on the most-populated island of Java and the resort island of Bali from July 3 to 20.

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Indonesia's e-Commerce Companies Asked to Create Single-Use Plastic-Free Lifestyle

Hundreds of environmentalists have sent an open letter to leaders of e-commerce and marketplace companies to realize a single-use plastic-free lifestyle amid the

increasing frequency of online shopping during the COVID-19 pandemic, activists said on Friday. In their 2021 Plastic-Free Parade, they asked online shopping companies to provide consumers with choices to minimize single-use plastic and set environmentally friendly shipping alternatives. Tiza Mafira, an activist from the Indonesia Plastic Bag Diet Movement, said that this option is one solution to reduce the negative impact of accumulating plastic waste on the environment and so far there have been several e-commerce entities that provide "no plastic" or "packaging returns" options on their checkout page but they are only a few. "Imagine if all e-commerce companies provided options like this to their consumers, surely the positive impact on the environment would be felt," Mafira told Xinhua.

According to research by the Indonesian Institute of Sciences (LIPI) last year, plastic waste from online shopping increased to 96 percent during the COVID-19 pandemic, in line with the rising transactions on the marketplace to 62 percent and food delivery service to 47 percent. Meanwhile, a Greenpeace Indonesia study in a report titled "Earth without Plastic" concluded that 75 percent of the total 623 respondents agreed to reduce or even stop the use of single-use plastic for packaging, and only 20 percent considered single-use plastic packaging harmless. So far, the obligation to arrange a waste reduction roadmap only applies to producing companies, but not to those selling their products by e-commerce system on marketplaces. As of June 2021, only 23 producers have submitted their waste reduction roadmap plans to the Environment and Forestry Ministry. The activists also asked e-commerce and marketplace entities to provide trainings for their delivery service partners on how to package goods in a way to minimize single-use plastic.

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MALAYSIA: e-Commerce Transactions Income Surges 30 Pct in Q1 amid Covid-19

Malaysia's e-commerce transactions income rose 30 percent year-on-year to 254.6 billion ringgit (61.34 billion U.S. dollars) in the first quarter of 2021, as the new normal of COVID-19 gives huge boost to digital adoption among businesses, official data showed Tuesday. The Department of Statistics Malaysia (DOSM) said in a statement that the growth was driven by manufacturing and services sectors. As for 2020, it said, Malaysia's e-commerce transactions income surged by 32.7 percent to 896.4 billion ringgit (215.84 billion U.S. dollars).

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Malaysia's Population Rises to 32.7 Mln in 2021

Malaysia's population is estimated at 32.7 million in 2021, up 0.2 percent from 32.6 million in 2020, official data showed Thursday. The Department of Statistics Malaysia

(DOSM) said in a statement that the decline in the population growth rate was due to the lower number of non-citizens, which fell to 2.7 million in 2021 from 3 million in 2020. "This was in line with the closure of national borders and the return of foreigners to their respective countries during the Movement Control Order following the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic worldwide," said the DOSM. It said the growth rate of citizens remained stable at 1 percent with the population increasing to 30 million in 2021 from 29.7 million in 2020. Out of 30 million citizens, the composition of ethnics Malay and indigenous groups increased 0.2 percentage points to 69.8 percent in 2021 as compared to 69.6 percent in 2020. The ethnic Chinese population composition declined to 22.4 percent in 2021 from 22.6 percent in 2020. Meanwhile, the proportion of ethnic Indians and other populations remained at 6.8 percent and 1 percent respectively. In 2021, the male population outnumbered the female with 16.8 million and 15.9 million respectively.

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PHILIPPINES: Population Up to Over 109 Million in 2020

The Philippine population climbed above 109 million in 2020, according to the data released by the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) on Wednesday. Based on the 2020 Census of Population and Housing, the PSA said the total population of the Philippines is at 109,035,343, as of May 1, 2020. The agency said the Philippine population increased by 8,053,906 compared with the number in 2015, translating to an annual population growth rate of 1.63 percent. By comparison, the rate at which the country's population grew from 2010 to 2015 was at 1.72 percent. Of the 17 administrative regions nationwide, the PSA said Region IV-A (CALABARZON) had the largest population in 2020 with 16,195,042, followed by the National Capital Region (NCR) with 13,484,462 and Region III (Central Luzon) with 12,422,172. "The combined population of these three regions accounted for about 38.6 percent of the Philippine population in 2020," the PSA said. Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte declared the population count "official for all purposes" on Wednesday.

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VIETNAM: Average Monthly Income Down 1 Pct in 2020

The per capita monthly income of Vietnamese people was averaged at 4.2 million Vietnamese dong (around 183 U.S. dollars) in 2020, down 1 percent year-on-year, according to a survey conducted by the country's General Statistics Office (GSO). Speaking at a press briefing on Tuesday to release the survey result, deputy head of the GSO Nguyen Trung Tien attributed the decrease to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, according to Vietnam News Agency. On the contrary, from 2016 to 2020, the per capita monthly income of Vietnamese people increased by 8.2 percent on average per year, according to the survey. In the first half of 2021, however, over 1.1

million people in the working age were unemployed, up 101,700 from the same period last year, Vietnam News Agency cited Tien as saying. Notably, the ongoing COVID-19 outbreak that started in late April has resulted in a higher unemployment rate in urban areas than that in rural areas, said the official.

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Virtual Reality, Live Streams Essential for Selling Real Estate During Pandemic

The prolonged impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has made digital tools such as live streaming, augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) essential to real estate transactions, according to real estate broker Tran Minh. Minh no longer regularly meets customers face-to-face and now uses online exchange applications such as live stream on Facebook, video calls on Messenger, Zalo or Viber to connect with his customers. Minh told *Đầu tư chứng khoán* (Stock Investment) newspaper that he has used both face-to-face meetings and digital applications. But he says it is better to meet customers directly due to the nature of his work. However, with the current pandemic, he has to rely more and more on apps to stay active. Previously he had worked as a professional online marketer, which he says has given him an edge. In fact, across the industry, livestream sales exploded a few years ago but were mainly used with fashion, cosmetics and food. Now it has also become a trend in the estate industry with not only individuals but also brokerage companies aiming to develop online consulting channels through technology platforms to avoid the impact of the pandemic.

Hải Phát Land - one of the largest real estate distributors in the North, recently added an online talk show forum to consult and update information about projects and the property market in addition to direct sales. Accordingly, they set up a separate studio fully equipped to facilitate online communication with customers on Facebook and Youtube. Vũ Kim Giang, general director of Hải Phát Land said that they considered it as a tool to provide information to customers. The online consultancy would help homebuyers have more time before making a decision. AR and VR applications help them feel the space in a room and get a feel for the interior design without going directly to apartments. They only need to visit the apartments to check the accuracy of the information received through the online channels and to sign contracts.

A vital trend in a touchless economy

The property market is gradually changing with the development of digital technology. With the widespread development of the internet, online marketing has become an effective tool for marketers in general and in the real estate sector in particular. This development forces people working in the sector to constantly change their sales strategies as well as update their digital tools in a responsive and instantaneous way. According to Nguyễn Trung Vũ, Chairman of Cengroup, Việt Nam's real estate

industry is changing very quickly, not every year, every month, but every day, and every hour. In particular, the transformation of "investment taste" and the change in the behaviour to using digital technology utilities requires estate developers to quickly adapt and apply technology in a methodical way to shorten the distance between buyers and sellers. This is also the reason that Cengroup has invested heavily in upgrading technology platforms to support sales. They are also strengthening their cooperation with start-ups on digital solutions to add to their estate trading ecosystem in recent years. In May 2021, on Shark Tank Vietnam, Cengroup successfully closed a deal with a smart call centre start-up - a solution to support their marketing and sales management. The race to put goods in the "online marketplace" is very exciting and businesses have been spending a lot of money on technology to reach customers. However, when they start to implement the actual implementation, the challenge is not small.

From <https://vietnamnews.vn/> 07/24/2021

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Việt Nam Joins Global Peers in Developing Digital Money

Việt Nam is playing catch-up in a global race to develop its own digital currency and experts believe this will not only help the country develop new technology but also present an opportunity for Việt Nam to join the most technologically-advanced countries. The Prime Minister last month endorsed the strategy for developing e-Government towards digital Government in the 2021-25 period. In Decision 942/QĐ-TTg issued on June 15, the State Bank of Việt Nam (SBV) is assigned to research the pilot use of 'virtual money' based on blockchain technology in the next three years. This is a remarkable change in the Government's policymaking given the reality that Việt Nam has not yet recognised cryptocurrencies. So far, the central bank has repeatedly emphasised that owning and trading Bitcoin and other cryptocurrencies is risky for investors as these coins are not protected by law. Virtual currency is a new concept in Việt Nam. There are many different and confusing names in the market such as virtual money, electronic money, digital currency and cryptocurrency. According to Investopedia, digital currencies can be considered a superset of virtual currencies and cryptocurrencies. Digital currencies can be regulated or unregulated currency that is available only in digital or electronic form. If issued by a central bank of a country in a regulated form, it is called the Central Bank Digital Currency (CBDC).

If existing in an unregulated form, it should be called virtual currency and may be under control of the currency developers instead of a centralised regulator. Cryptocurrencies are also an example of this type. Bitcoin and ethereum are the most popular cryptocurrencies. To date, Việt Nam's law has no specific definition of virtual currency and virtual assets. Current regulations only refer to the concept of electronic money (e-money) which is pegged to a fiat currency and exists in the form of pre-paid bank cards, e-wallets or mobile money. SBV has repeatedly affirmed

Bitcoin and other virtual currencies are not electronic money and cannot perform the function of a legal currency as a means of payment. Currently, SBV, the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Finance (MoF) are studying the legal basis for managing virtual currency and virtual assets. MoF has also set up a research group on this issue. While most experts agreed the central bank should clarify the concept of virtual money in the latest Decision 942, finance specialist Nguyễn Trí Hiếu said the “virtual” word can lead to negative thinking as it has been associated with fraudulent projects spreading in the media. “I think the central bank may use the concept of digital currency or cryptocurrency to reflect the intrinsic value of this form of money,” Hiếu told Việt Nam News.

Catching up

More than 60 central banks across the world are exploring and actively developing their own digital currencies to modernise financial systems as well as counter a possible threat from cryptocurrencies, according to PwC. Last year, The Bahamas became the first country to launch a central bank digital currency (CBDC) nationwide. Among major monetary authorities, China is the front-runner in the global race to launch CBDC and is testing a digital yuan, or e-CNY, in several cities. Meanwhile, the European Central Bank is planning to introduce a digital euro within the next five years. The United States lags behind in its own research but the US Federal Reserve has said it is more important to get its approach right rather than leading the pack. In Việt Nam, SBV seemed to be hesitant in building a legal framework for digital currency. Last year, SBV proposed a pilot regulatory sandbox for fintech companies but did not mention digital currency. “Việt Nam is relatively slow in starting to research digital currency but it’s also not too late. Digital currency is an inevitable trend for a digital future,” Hiếu said. While major currencies of the US, EU and Japan have had great influence in the global currency basket and international trade. Hiếu said issuing digital currency of small countries like Việt Nam would lift its position in the new global financial system which will be reshaped in the future with the rapid development of technology.

“The world is entering the digital economy era. Along with the development of Industry 4.0, AI, 5G, this is a challenge for Việt Nam but also an opportunity to rise in the ranks of advanced countries with the most developed technology,” Hiếu said. Huỳnh Phước Nghĩa, Deputy Director of the Institute of Innovation (University of Economics HCM City), also said in many issued policies, Việt Nam has identified technology as key for future development. This policy is backed by the strong development of e-commerce and online payments. “The rate of non-cash payments is on the rise in Việt Nam. The issuance of digital currency could also help accelerate this process,” Nghĩa was quoted as saying on thanhnieu.vn. Vietnamese people are predicted to be ready to accept digital money. Việt Nam ranked second in terms of cryptocurrency use among 74 surveyed economies by Statista in 2020. In Decision 942, the Government also focuses on prioritising research and development of some core technologies in which Việt Nam has advantages such as QR codes, artificial

intelligence (AI), blockchain, virtual/augmented reality (VR/AR) and Big Data, facilitating deployment of digital Government. “However, this is also a big challenge for the SBV as this is an infant and new market and there is no real experience in the world to refer to,” Hiếu said, noting new issues such as concepts, how to store digital money and put it in circulation, building electronic systems, national networks and ensuring information security all need to be developed comprehensively.

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NA Talks Socio-Economic Development for 2021 to 2025

The 15th National Assembly (NA) on Sunday discussed the implementation of the socio-economic development and State budget plans for the first six months of the year. They also discussed solutions for the performance of tasks in the second half of the year and the development plan for 2021 to 2025. Deputy Prime Minister Phạm Bình Minh reported on the socio-economic and State budget situation for the first half of 2021, noting that the economic growth of 5.64 per cent during the period was relatively high compared to other countries. He also noted that many localities hit by the COVID-19 pandemic still posted growth, that the macroeconomy stayed stable, that inflation was kept low, and that's the major balances of the economy, the monetary market, credit, exchange rates, and interest rates were also stable. For the remaining months of 2021, the Government is determined to keep macroeconomic stability, guarantee the major balances, closely coordinate fiscal and monetary policies with other policies, facilitate production and business activities, and support economic recovery. It will also continue working to control inflation, ensure reasonable credit growth, and eliminate unnecessary expenses, he said, stressing that the Government is resolved to realise its targets, but that the current priority is containing COVID-19.

Meanwhile, the proposed socio-economic development plan for 2021 to 2025 features the overall goal of securing fast and sustainable economic growth on the basis of enhancing sustainable macro-economic stability; developing science, technology and innovation; and fully optimising the country's potential and advantages. It targets a five-year growth rate higher than the average figure for the 2016- 2020 period and says that by 2025, Việt Nam will become a developing country with high-tech oriented industry and will escape from lower-middle-income status. It also looks to improve the economy's productivity, quality, efficiency, and competitiveness, uniformly taking solutions to effectively address the COVID-19 pandemic's impact, and swiftly recover and develop the economy.

COVID-19 concerns

Deputy Nguyễn Thị Thuỷ, deputy head of the NA Committee for Judicial Affairs, said that in the past, many localities have had creative and flexible solutions to control the pandemic. However, there are also localities that apply extreme measures and not in

a consistent manner. This has caused congestion in the transportation of goods in many places. In the past, there were localities that did not allow goods transportation vehicles to go through checkpoints even though the owners had pandemic safety certificates. In other cases, many vehicles, after going through many pandemic checkpoints, still had to return because each locality had its own regulations, Thủy said. "Localities can't be totally isolated due to the pandemic, we're applying quarantine and social distancing, not isolation!" she said, citing the Prime Minister's criticism of how localities have been applying extremely strict measures on the transportation of goods. Thủy also said that it is necessary that the Government has a second support package soon. She suggested that the Government soon assign relevant ministries and agencies to build statistical software that can manage the recipients of the support package so that the money and supporting policies go to the right places.

At the same time, she recommended reviewing the current resilience of enterprises to have radical solutions in the future. Delegate Nguyễn Minh Tâm from Quảng Bình Province said that the current measures to prevent and control the COVID-19 pandemic were still short-term and proposed the Government build long-term solutions and strategies for the country. She also emphasised the need to tackle waste in the context of the pandemic, which is not taken seriously by many. Delegate Vũ Thị Lưu Mai, vice head of the Finance and Budget Committee of the National Assembly, emphasised the need to draw lessons from the VNĐ62 trillion support package. She said that during the implementation of the second VNĐ26 trillion package, the Government needed to apply more open, timely and transparent execution policies. Deputy Nguyễn Anh Trí from Hà Nội said the Government's socio-economic reports and verification reports show the overall picture of the country's situation in the past and in the midst of many difficulties, the country had gained a lot of success. Deputy Trí suggested the Government pay attention to updating and developing scenarios on the pandemic and then build targets and scenarios for production and economic development in an effective and sustainable manner. In the immediate future, he said it is necessary to strongly focus on prioritising resources to fight the pandemic, maintain macroeconomic stability and ensure people's lives, he said.

Socio-economic situation

Commenting on the five-year socio-economic development plan for 2021-2025, deputy Nguyễn Thị Kim Bé, from Kiên Giang Province, said that the Government has built its plan based on careful analysis and evaluation of the achievements and limitations of implementing the five-year socio-economic development goals for 2016-21. For the Mekong Delta region, she said that the Government should give priority to investment in the development of transport infrastructure in this area in order to strongly exploit the great potential of the region. She noted that in the future development plan, there is no expressway construction project linking Kiên Giang-Hà Tiên-Rạch Giá. She suggested that such a project be included in the plan.

Referring to the planning and implementation of investment projects, Deputy Vũ Thị Lưu Mai from Hà Nội suggested that the Government, ministries and localities should pay special attention to the development of environmental impact assessment reports. Deputy Nguyễn Cao Sơn from Hoà Bình Province said in the future the Government should boost the speed of budget reimbursement, conduct inter-regional transport projects, and invest in irrigation to facilitate agricultural production.

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South Asia

INDIA: Ranks 10 in Cybersecurity Globally - UN's ITU Global Security Agenda Report

India enters the list of top 10 countries in the United Nations International Telecommunications Union (ITU) Global Cybersecurity Agenda (GCA). Ranking way ahead of China (at 33rd position) and Pakistan at (79th position), India jumped up to secure the 10th position in the list from the previous 47th position. The list is topped by the United States and followed by the United Kingdom. As reported by a national daily, according to India's National Cyber Security Coordinator (NCSC) Rajesh Pant, it is great news for India. It shows acknowledgement of multiple initiatives that have been taken by the government along with CERT (Cyber Emergency Response Team). Highlighting the efforts by the country to enhance the cybersecurity of the nation, Pant said, a national cybersecurity strategy has been tabled in the cabinet and the approval is awaited on the same. Also, a recently operationalised trusted source policy is considered an effective move as it asks all the telecom companies to declare where they source their equipment. Further, he admired Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Independence Day speech through which he acknowledged the significance of cybersecurity in the current and upcoming era. The ITU, a specialised agency under the UN, reported that the ranking is based on four pillars: legal measures, technical measures, capacity building measures and organisational measures. The latest report is the fourth one in the series.

From <https://egov.eletsonline.com/> 07/01/2021

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Achieving Sustainable Urban Transportation System for India

Since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development by United Nations Member States, each of them is making efforts to fulfill the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). India has also been implementing various measures to achieve SDGs. The SDG 11.2, which overall focuses on sustainable, affordable, safe and accessible transport for all, needs some major policy shifts and adoption of innovations to be fulfilled in India. Here's how Dr O P Agarwal, Chief Executive

Officer, World Resources Institute, describes the status of SDG 11.2 in India. In your opinion, is India on the right path to meet the broad objective envisaged under SDG 11.2? What key actions, and at which levels, should be taken to achieve the envisaged objectives? The adoption of the National Urban Transport Policy in 2006 was a turning point in India's approach to urban mobility. This policy prioritised investments in public transport over those in road widening and flyovers. Public transport investments have gone up significantly, thereby putting India on the right track to meet the objectives of SDG 11.2. However, an impression seems to have since emerged that large and stand-alone high-cost projects will be sufficient to provide the needed access to jobs, education, healthcare and other basic needs.

Unfortunately, this is not correct and an aggressive effort is needed to ensure a more holistic approach to urban mobility planning. In order to provide a solid framework of transport-related indicators and apt data to monitor progress, what structures need to be set up to derive final transport statistics estimates at the national level? It is true that transport-related data is extremely weak in India. There is no systematic effort at collecting and managing such data. This has constrained scientific planning and led to the unreliable estimation of demand for several investment projects. This is evident from the consistent shortfalls we have seen in the ridership estimates of several metro rail projects. The problem has been further compounded by the belief that real-time data collected through IT-based systems will meet all our needs. Such real-time data is good for minute-to-minute operations planning but is not enough for future investment planning. Investment planning needs time series data and a clear analysis of trends over a longer period of time. Unfortunately, a clear data collection and management architecture is yet to be developed.

It is important to initiate an exercise for identifying specific use cases, based on which the required data items to be collected have to be determined. Protocols for collecting such data, including collection methodologies, frequency of collection and a harmonised definition of each data item needs to be developed. Institutional architecture for collecting, managing and disseminating this data also needs to be put in place. This will be a fairly involved exercise and shortcut methods of collecting large amounts of data using modern-day IT tools will not be good enough. The data items to be collected need to be identified from concrete use cases, identified by those who understand transport planning, especially transport investment planning. Without good data, we will be making decisions, often involving large investments, on the basis of individual perceptions. We run the risk of high-cost investment decisions being influenced by unreliable analysis undertaken solely to justify projects, that are otherwise not justifiable. To what extent is low-carbon development a priority in relevant sectoral plans? Are there any institutional/decisionmaking/policy processes in place to integrate this priority? We have been discussing the Unified Metropolitan Transport Authority (UMTA) for a long time. Do you think it is the way to establish institutional mechanisms and strengthen capacities for better planning and management of transport systems? It is true that realising the ambition of becoming

a five trillion dollar economy depends, to a very large extent, on how well cities are able to accommodate, and even enable, the required growth. Mobility systems will be fundamental in this. As they say, “if cities are the engines of economic growth, mobility systems are the wheels of that engine’. If the wheels don’t move, the engine does not move. I think urban mobility systems in India are being primarily driven by the co-benefits than by the need for low carbon growth. Investments in public transport are being driven by the need to reduce congestion and air pollution. Electric mobility is being driven by the need to reduce air pollution and dependence on imported fossil fuels. In either case, they also lead to low carbon development, even if the prime motivator is something else. Hence, whether the co-benefits or climate change drive the planning for urban mobility systems should not matter as long as the outcome is low carbon transport.

On Unified Metropolitan Transport Authority (UMTA), I feel that having a lead agency to look at urban mobility systems in a holistic and coordinated manner is very important. Currently, the governance systems are highly fragmented. Metro rail systems are managed by one entity, bus systems by another entity, roads by a third entity, suburban rail systems by yet another entity, and so on. These entities barely talk to each other and there is no platform that brings them together. Many of these entities also report to different higher-level administrative departments, resulting in an unfortunate lack of coordination. This is not an effective way of ensuring a well-coordinated plan for urban mobility. Therefore, a lead agency for urban mobility is needed in each city. In India, we refer to them as the UMTA for the city. These bodies are easy to set up but very difficult to operationalise. Many cities across the world have notified such bodies but very few have been able to ground them and get them to function meaningfully. Even in India, many cities have set up such bodies, most through executive orders and some through legislation, but none have been able to build them up to become powerful voices in the design, planning and management of the systems. There is a need for careful and sensitive handling as, otherwise, existing entities dealing with smaller pieces of the urban transport pie, are likely to become hurdles in the evolution of a lead agency like the UMTA. Please elaborate on how the transport and logistics sector can improve the last mile connectivity and achieve the overarching goal of ‘Atmanirbhar’ India?

Achieving the overarching goal of Atmanirbhar India requires every nook and corner of the country to be connected to every other corner to move goods and people safely, speedily and affordably. Essentially, the country should be well connected. It is well known that large quantities of farm produce are lost in transit before they reach our plates. Fruits, vegetables, milk, sugar cane and a variety of such farm produces have a limited shelf life and need to move to their processing and consumption centres quickly. People should also be able to move around to any place in the country quickly. All of this requires a logistics system that is well organised and well integrated across all modes. Roads are the only mode that can reach every nook and corner, but they cause pollution and are not the most efficient

for high volumes. Rail and marine systems are cleaner and more economical for higher volumes, but are unable to reach every nook and corner, or provide last-mile connectivity. Airline systems are good when goods and people have to move long distances quickly, but they are expensive. Therefore, each mode has its own cost, capacity and speed characteristic which need to be appropriately leveraged to give us an efficient transport network. This will help realise our ambition of an Atmanirbhar India.

With the rise of smart technology, there is an increasing buzz around the term Mobility as a Service (MaaS). Do you think India should actively pursue this idea? If yes, how close are we in terms of materialising this concept? What kind of mindset, technological and governance shifts do you think we need to make this happen? MaaS is the future of mobility, especially in urban areas, and India must not just pursue it but strive for global leadership, given the IT and software skills it has. Basic features of MaaS are already in place with Ola, Uber and a host of other aggregators demonstrating what these technologies can do. Matching supply and demand on a real-time basis is what these aggregators have done. It has made transport so convenient that the younger generation does not find the need for a personal motor vehicle as compelling as their parents did. Many are either getting rid of their cars or at least their second cars, as they find an Ola or Uber to be good enough. Building on this, several bus operators have also come up with aggregator models. These are even better as they will be more efficient in the use of road space and energy consumption than shared taxis. Unfortunately, the current Motor Vehicles Act is a barrier as these bus services do not fit into the classification of being either stage carriages or contract carriages, as required under the Act. It is important that such regulations be reviewed and better aligned with the changing times. They should embrace new technologies instead of becoming barriers by remaining rooted in old principles.

What MaaS does is take this kind of real-time matching of supply and demand to the next level. It brings together all modes of transport and virtually plans, and provides, the entire trip seamlessly, meeting all the requirements of the person desiring to make the trip. Of course, this will need a much higher level of integration across modes. It will be very important for all modes to move towards open data systems. Sadly, we are a far cry for that today and must move towards looking at transport as one system rather than a collection of several independent, and often competing, modes. India is perhaps the only country in the world where even at the national level, the responsibility for transport is split across five ministries – Road Transport and Highways, Shipping, Civil Aviation, Railways and Housing and Urban Affairs. This needs to change. Having a unified policy advocating MaaS will be a futile effort in such a fragmented system. As mentioned earlier, even within a city, mobility systems are awfully fragmented with no city being able to institutionalise an effective UMTA. MaaS has the potential to make personal motor vehicle ownership obsolete, but a unified system is a must for that.

Accessibility to Public Transport for the Urban Poor

Rapid urbanisation in India is presenting the country with immense opportunities for achieving a sustained high national growth rate. The full benefits of urbanisation can be reaped only if cities are able to provide equitable access to urban services, social facilities, public spaces and economic opportunities for all. Presently, a high proportion of the city population lives in informal settlements (estimated at 17.4 per cent, Census 2011) and estimates show that nearly three-fourth of the urban labour force is engaged in informal economic pursuits – indicators of inequitable access to urban services and economic opportunities in cities, writes Dhiraj Ajay Suri, Head, Inclusive Centre for Cities (ICC), National Institute of Urban Affairs (NIUA). The available housing stock in cities and the related urban services fall way short of the demand particularly in the low-income market segment in Indian cities. Lack of formal housing solutions pushes the urban poor to seek informal accommodation. Also with the falling availability of vacant lands and the rising land prices, the low-income layouts – formal, informal and unauthorised, are increasingly located in the city periphery devoid of access to affordable public transport. This, thus, inhibits the access of the inhabitants to economic opportunities and human development facilities located in other distant parts of the cities. It is the dual challenge which needs to be addressed – first, the intersection of public transport routes and areas with high concentration of poor; and, second, availability of affordable intermediate public transport services for the last mile connectivity. India is one of the fastest urbanising countries in the world. Its cities, as growth engines, are experiencing a huge influx of population, resulting in a surge in private vehicle ownership. City planners, local governments, and policymakers are now faced with the challenge of declining quality of life in cities, owing to increasing traffic congestion and the consequences of resultant emissions. The informal sector workers, most of whom live in informal settlements, are generally categorised as homebased workers, domestic workers, street vendors and waste collectors. Each of these groups have specific public transport needs but the generic needs are carrying goods and equipments, and travel at odd hours – both have implications for public and intermediate transport facilities.

The public transport routes need to be specifically designed to cater to the demand of the low-income population segment. This ensures not only meeting the affordable transport needs of this population segment but also ensures ridership for the transport company. Delhi Metro routes have been specifically designed to intersect the dense settlements generating high ridership while Mumbai and Gurgaon monorail as well as Ahmedabad BRTS struggle on this account. The last mile connectivity is generally provided by Intermediate Public Transport (IPTs) besides the dedicated feeder bus facilities in some cities. The critique of the latter is the low

frequency of service which implies high dependence on the former for the urban poor. Cycle rickshaws and e-rickshaws are increasingly the preferred choices due to factors such as affordability, availability and flexibility to carry goods. There is a need to regulate the services of e-rickshaws which are growing exponentially due to high demand. The high demand is leading to a conflict of interest of the operators and users impinging the safety parameters. Social enterprises may be incubated to rationalise the e-rickshaw services from the perspective of availability on-call, cost and safety. The social enterprises will be positioned well to promote employment for youth as service providers. Alongside cost savings, bicycles are also emerging as the preferred mode for last-mile connectivity.

Bicycles are also emerging as the preferred transport mode for commuting within the neighbourhood. This is largely due to the ease and cost savings for the urban poor. Domestic workers and informal workers in the services sector prefer this mode. Bicycle commute may be promoted by positioning bicycle within the neighbourhood mobility plan. Public transport is amongst public goods and services which impact local economic development. It is hypothesized that equitable access to public goods and services promotes equitable economic growth in cities. This is largely due to health-related productivity gains which results in income gains for the urban poor. Easy access to affordable public transport has direct productivity and income consequences as it improves the access to social facilities such as education and health besides income earning opportunities. Long travel time for the urban poor impacts the time available for income-earning opportunities. The low-income population thus prefer to find affordable accommodation close to their workplace and the choice is limited to cheap uninhabitable options. An efficient, fast and affordable public transport system will open up other housing options for the urban poor at locations that are far from the workplace but better serviced. A well designed public transport system thus has the prospect of influencing population densities across the city and improved liveability – tangible benefits for the city population at large rather than just the urban poor.

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MAASive Strides Towards Sustainability

MAAS or 'Mobility as a Service' is the integration of different forms of transport services into a single mobility service that can be made accessible as per demand. A MAAS operator facilitates various transportation options, including taxi or bike-sharing, car rental, etc. or a combination of options to fulfill the customers' demands. Such a system holds the potential to revolutionise mobility in India, write Amit Bhatt, Executive Director, World Resources Institute (WRI) India and Jagriti Arora, Project Associate, WRI India. It's 2021. "Tech is the future" is a hackneyed expression now. Humankind's love for technological innovation sometimes transcends use-cases too. Innovation must be encouraged! We carry the world in our

pockets. The mobile phone has replaced books, televisions, banks, and most recently, schools too. Mobile phones have replaced tickets, bus charts, and even the ride-hailing spaces when it comes to transportation. The rise of Uber and Ola in India is a testament to the success of mobile phones as space rather than just a product. Mobility-as-a-service (MAAS) has been picking up steam in the transportation discourse worldwide. MAAS brings every kind of transport together into a single intuitive mobile app and integrate services, including travel planning and payments, from different providers. It holds the potential to revolutionise mobility in India, nudging mobility choices in a sustainable direction and enabling a mode shift from private vehicles to public transport. To help improve its polluted cities and congested roads, India needs MAAS. However, it is essential to implement MAAS equitably.

Sustainable Development Target 11.2 states that by 2030, vulnerable groups like women, children, persons with disabilities, and the elderly, should have access to safe, affordable, accessible, and sustainable transport systems. Products that offer simple, intuitive solutions should be made available to every part of society. Such solutions fuel economic activity across user groups, protecting their rights as citizens and offering them more choice. Little needs to be said about their contribution to a greener future. So far, MAAS has been perceived as a private player's arena, but the government has a vital role to play in making MAAS viable in Indian cities. From the government's viewpoint, MAAS is characterised by multimodality, digital access to transport services, userfocused trip planning, data sharing, convenience, demand and supply management, integration of transport networks and payment interfaces, better information (to the users), and competitive markets (ensuring efficiency). It is pertinent to ask what role the government can play in making MAAS successful in Indian cities. A typical MAAS ecosystem consists of three actors, transport service providers (including public transport operators, informal public transport operators, car rental agencies, micro-mobility platforms, etc.), MAAS integrator, and, finally, MAAS provider (consumerfacing). In a market-led MAAS ecosystem, private players will be both integrators and MAAS providers; in a public MAAS ecosystem, the government will play the roles of integrators and MAAS providers; in a public-private MAAS ecosystem, the government will play the role of an integrator, while private players will play the role of MAAS providers. The scenario should be chosen keeping public value in mind. The government is best placed to ensure that the beneficial and sustainable modes of transport are incentivised. The government needs to play at least one role in MAAS ecosystem to keep it equitable.

Once the government identifies its roles, it can work towards ensuring social equity. How is social equity different from social equality, one might wonder. Social equality considers the idea that every individual within a governed society receives the same opportunities, support and resources with no discrimination or reserve. Social equity denotes separately that each person should have access to the number of options they specifically need. This entails tailored solution across socio-economic backgrounds of the society. The mobile phone penetration in India has been

increasing but has it grown equally? According to Pew Research, only 24 per cent of people in India have smartphones. Additionally, India trails other emerging economies like South Africa, Brazil, Philippines, Mexico, Indonesia, Tunisia, Kenya, and Nigeria, in smartphone adoption rate. Thinking of MAAS as just a mobile app might restrict its use for nonsmartphone-users; thus, building smart card booths, with interfaces available in regional languages, around bus stops might help bring these solutions to everyone. It is also essential to keep MAAS cheap. Thus, alternative revenue mechanisms should be deliberated. For example, charging more for on-street parking might help pay for certain loss-making services, like public transport. MAAS can become profitable only after it reaches a particular scale. The government should thus play the role of a promoter to ensure that it scales its way to profitability. When making decisions about MAAS, public value should be the key currency. The government can take both MAAS and Indian cities to a better place.

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Making Cities Safe for Women Through SDG 11.2

The SDG 11.2 focuses on building “safe, affordable, accessible and sustainable transport systems for all”. However, for women (and some other excluded groups) the fear of violence in public spaces restricts their movement and access to education, employment, and leisure. It is critical to creating the conditions by which women can move about safely without fear. Research has shown that gender-friendly urban design and transport are key in determining women’s access to the city and achieving the SDG target 11.2, writes Kalpana Vishwanath, Director, Safetipin. Making Cities Safe for Women Patriarchal ideologies play a significant role in hindering women’s right to the city by devaluing their labour, restricting and controlling their movements. In relation to mobility in India, women are less likely to own a vehicle, have access to a vehicle or even access to resources to use public transport. Secondly, women’s trips are often planned differently from men as they tend to carry the burden of managing work of care within households. They may drop a child at school on the way to work or visit the market on their way home. Thirdly in India, women’s workforce participation which is already low (31 per cent as per the last census), has dropped even further in the last couple of years. We must recognise that this not only has an impact on women but on the economy as well. The McKinsey Global Institute estimates that India’s economic output in 2025 can be higher by as much as 60 per cent if women’s participation in the economy were on par with that of men. Public transport is a public good and needs to be planned and delivered with that spirit. In India, the last census data shows that only five per cent of the urban population have a personal vehicle. Most people in the country use public transport, bicycle or walk to work but there are gender differences. The census 2011 data reports that 84 per cent of women’s trips are made by the public, intermediate public and nonmotorised modes of transport. Only four per cent of cyclists in urban India are women.

In addition to public transport, waiting areas such as metro and train stations, bus stops, and IPT stands need to be well lit with well organised last-mile transit. The need for safe and efficient first and last-mile connectivity is critical. Women and girls may reach metro stations and bus stops safely, but unless they can reach their destination safely as well, there will still be restrictions on their mobility. Other studies also support these findings. A 2018 study with 9,000 women across 11 cities revealed that 59 per cent of women used public transport like buses, trains and on-demand taxis, despite over 80 per cent claiming that they felt somewhat safe using it during the day, but not at night. As per Ola Mobility Institute 2019, the key factor driving public transport use among women was affordability, with around 40 per cent claiming this to be the main reason. Other reasons were coverage, frequency, safety, and comfort. Several studies by UN Women and Jagori have shown that an extremely high percentage of women face sexual harassment in public spaces and transport. A study across six Indian states conducted by the United Nations Development Fund (UNDF) with the Breakthrough Trust in 2017 highlighted that over 90 per cent of women and girls experience sexual harassment in public spaces, including bus stops and inside buses. Key features of Safetipin mobile app In the monitoring of SDGs at the country level, it is disappointing to see the sole indicator for target 11.2 that is counted is the number of deaths due to road accidents and not the proportion of persons who have access to public transport. A renewed focus on women's access to public transport as well as their presence in the public sphere is crucial to address the gaps. There is a need for bold and innovative thinking to reduce the gender gap in all aspects of social, economic and political life. One innovation that has been used in the past few years is technology as a tool to generate data as well amplify the voices of citizens in policymaking, especially those that have been traditionally underrepresented.

Safetipin is one such tool that has used a technology platform and apps to collect geospatial data and citizen perceptions on safe and inclusive public spaces to address barriers to the mobility of women and other vulnerable groups. My Safetipin is an app where women's perceptions of safety and danger are crowdsourced and shared with urban stakeholders. The data has been used by city and municipal governments to address make physical and social infrastructure more inclusive. In Delhi, the data helped in identifying over 7000 dark spots which led to a large percentage getting repaired and improved by local authorities. The safety audit data at bus stops and metro stations were used to identify barriers such as poor last-mile options, deserted areas and poor lighting which impacted women's access. The data also helps in prioritising resources. For example, in Gurgaon, lighting data was overlaid with data on areas of high usage especially by women to prioritise which areas to focus on. Walkability and access to public transport and IPT are another set of parameters that Safetipin measures and advocates for. In several cities including Delhi, Hanoi, Bogota, and Durban, the app has been used by citizens and governments to address last-mile connectivity and safety at bus stops, stations and

bicycle tracks. In Durban, the technology platform has supported the Safe Taxi campaign initiated by women's groups through detailed safety audits at waiting spaces. Much more needs to be done by a range of stakeholders. The pandemic has highlighted the vulnerability faced by women. The need of the hour is to make sure that women's rights and access to the city are not further hampered as we slowly recover from the pandemic. A city is not just the brick and mortar, but the interactions and connections as well as the spaces that people carve out for themselves. Women cannot be left behind in this.

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Young Citizens & The City: Cities from Children's Perspective

Children are a universal indicator of the level of well-being in a society. Cities not only have a direct impact on children's health but also act as critical facilitators of fundamental thinking on how children perceive and become an active part of their urban environment, reinforcing the importance of balanced development of all groups of children within their urban context through skilful planning of cities. Divya Jindal, Project Associate, Building Accessible, Safe & Inclusive Indian Cities (BASIIIC) programme, National Institute of Urban Affairs (NIUA), writes about the role of cities in ensuring their needs are addressed through accessible, inclusive and equitable planning principles and mechanisms. "A Good City is one in which children can grow and develop to the extent of their powers; where they can build their confidence and become actively engaged in the world; yet be autonomous and capable of managing their own affairs." Kevin Lynch, *Growing Up in Cities*, 1977. Children "Childhood is a branch of cartography" as once reflected by novelist Michael Chabon¹. Layering the city with micro landmarks and seemingly utilitarian objects that provide physical cues that help shape their understanding of the built environment from their vantage point, giving them a sense of place.

Children's exposure to environmental, social and physical changes in the places where they live, play and grow affects their health and overall development during every stage of their life, particularly in their early years. Although, children form an important part and a large category of people who live in cities – yet they are a demographic group that is often ignored in planning our cities. India, is home to 472 million children (0-18 years) comprising of 39 per cent of the country's total Population². 128.5 million Of these children reside in urban areas, constituting around 34 per cent of the total urban population. India being home to the world's largest population of children³, the overall health and safety of children in the country is a matter of great concern. Of the 27 million children born each year in India, nearly two million of them do not live to the age of Five⁴. 63 million adolescent girls in India live in homes without proper toilet facilities – this means they are forced to defecate on the open risking their lives⁵. One in every eight children in urban India stays in slums where infrastructure is insufficient and living conditions are poor.

Although the statistics are daunting, progress has been made in improving children's health in various areas and addressing their rights. The Constitution of India guarantees Fundamental Rights to all children in the country and empowers the State to make special provisions for children. The National policy of children, 2013,⁶ emphasises the importance of a sustainable, integrated and inclusive approach for development and protection of children, recognising the rights of children to have an appropriate life. Proactive efforts have led to aligning children's needs in urban areas as a part of the national urban development missions such as the Smart Cities Mission⁷ and AMRUT Mission⁸. Bhubaneswar⁹ was one of the first cities under the Smart cities mission to take on the commitment to become India's first child friendly smart city with support from Bernard van Leer Foundation and handholding technical from NIUA under its Child Friendly Smart Cities (CFSC)¹¹ Project. The interventions included transforming green public spaces into child-friendly areas, making healthcare more accessible, supporting parents and using locally-collected data to target resources better.

Following the success and response from citizens in Bhubaneswar, many cities across India have been actively promoting and motivated to implement such interventions. With interventions such as the all-inclusive park in Vishakhapatnam¹² have proven to be successful interventions by including basic needs of all its citizens within their interventions and plans. Works of organisations like aProCh¹³ in Ahmedabad and Rahagiri across India, have supplemented the ways to share public spaces in a more active and engaging way with its citizens. These local community driven practices and interventions have helped understand in detail how children move and navigating the fact that children spend a majority of their time within the home, school and recreational spaces – their needs have to be locally provided and easily accessible. Further establishing that for a city to be inclusive and child-friendly, it must provide a physical environment that ensures children's health, develops their faculties, and fosters their love for community, and for nature.

To encourage more such localised and young children focused interventions, Nurturing Neighbourhood Challenge¹⁵ – an initiative aimed at supporting and developing cities that are responsive to the needs of very young children and their families are some of the forward looking interventions that the national government has promoted. To realise this, innovative methods such as the Popsicle Test¹⁶, the toddler walk-shed¹⁷, urban95¹⁸, are some simple yet innovative methods that cities across the globe are utilising to understand their urban ecosystem from the perspective of their young citizens. These tests are designed to understand the way children traverse within their neighbourhoods and communities and tries to look at the urban realm from their vantage point. As cities in India, find their own customized methods and indicators to better learn and design spaces for children, these tools and methods offer a good head-start for cities more people-centric. "It is important for children to carry out activities on the streets – such as cycling, walking, running,

playing and other common group activities. It is also important for their healthy development that children, from an early age, undertake such activities.

For this reason, it is important for the street to be safe so that these activities can be undertaken without the child's safety being put at risk." WHO and UNICEF, 2008 World Report on Child Injury Prevention. With the understanding that this inter-relationship between urban space and its people is key to ensuring children's everyday freedom, the neighbourhood offers the appropriate scale for a child to be self-sufficient and move about freely, to use daily basic requirements of play, school, and housing. A neighbourhood should be able to cater to all these basic facilities of ensuring a mix of housing typologies, ample play areas, day care facilities and schools within safe, walkable and accessible distances. However, in most Indian cities this has not always been possible, even though planning norms and standards exist. To critically evaluate how neighborhoods and cities can better accommodate the needs of children, it is vital to look at the different scales on which a city functions and how children navigate the spaces between these areas. As these pro-active urban experiments will help open a discourse, that promotes children's everyday freedoms and choices and links it directly to their local geography, mobility, and safety, cultivating a unique identity for the city and fostering a sense of belonging for its children and youth.

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North-Central Railways Aims to Cut 2.5 lakh Tons Carbon Emissions Annually

The North-Central Railways (NCR) which has 97 per cent of its operation in Uttar Pradesh is expected to reduce 2.5 lakh tons of carbon emissions annually by increasing solar power usage. The Railway zone is expected to have 297 MWp (megawatt peak) solar power plants which will play an instrumental role in reducing those huge amounts of carbon emissions. The Indian Railways initiative came following the government of India's ambitious project to significantly reduce carbon emissions and produce 175 GW of solar power by 2022. At present, the zone has 11.03 MWp solar systems in its three divisions and three workshops including 3614 kWp capacity of renewable energy in Prayagraj that helped railways to save Rs 1.09 crore in 2020-21 financial year. The other two division are Agra and Jhansi with 1,588 and 1,204 kWp capacity solar photovoltaic cell systems two workshops of Agra division a total of 4624 kWp capacity of solar energy systems in three workshops of Jhansi division. As per the Indian Railways, the three divisions and three workshops have helped the railway to reduce 9,000 tons of carbon footprints in the previous financial year and saved Rs 3.96 crore. Of the current 11.03 MWp capacity system, only 120 kWp has been installed by the railway and the remaining 10882.34 kWp capacity has been installed by two major private players on the public-private partnership (PPP) at station buildings, workshops, training schools, DRM and GM

offices. As reported by a national daily, the Chief Public Relations Officer (CPRO) of NCR zone, Shivam Sharma, said that NCR has kept an ambitious target of generating of 1.3 crore units of solar energy by the year 2022 that may result in saving about Rs 5 crore under the ambitious “solar mission – NCR”.

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Sustainable Urban Transportation: A Key Enabler for Achieving SDGs

Over 4.4 billion people live in cities today, putting extreme pressure on energy and resource consumption. By 2050, 6.5 billion people¹ will be urban. Sustainable development cannot be achieved without significantly transforming the way we build and manage our urban spaces. Although cities occupy just 3 per cent of the available land, they account for 60-80 per cent of energy consumption and 75 per cent of carbon emissions. The transport sector alone causes over 23 per cent of the global greenhouse gas emissions². Every year 3.5 million people die prematurely due to pollution, one-fifth of which are reported from India³, write Naim Keruwala, Program Coordinator and Team Lead, City Investments To Innovate, Integrate and Sustain (CITIIS), the National Institute of Urban Affairs (NIUA) and Swapnil Saxena, Knowledge Officer, CITIIS, NIUA. There is a growing international consensus towards action on sustainable transport that can lessen the strain on social, economic and environmental well-being of cities, while also promoting development. While there is no universal definition of sustainable transport, the High-Level Advisory Group on Sustainable Transport⁴, appointed by the UN Secretary-General in 2014 defines it as ‘the provision of services and infrastructure for the mobility of people and goods – advancing economic and social development to benefit today’s and future generations—in a manner that is safe, affordable, accessible, efficient, and resilient, while minimising carbon and other emissions and environmental impacts. Managing the transport sector can make a direct and indirect contribution towards the achievements of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) if the three pillars of sustainable development – economic, social, and environmental – are integrated into transport policies, planning and operation. Mobility stands out as a key focus area for SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) which promotes ‘cities and human settlements that are inclusive, resilient, safe and sustainable.’

SDG target 11.2 explicitly calls on the international community to work toward sustainable transport for all people by ‘providing access to safe, affordable, accessible and sustainable transport systems for all, improving road safety, notably by expanding public transport, with special attention to the needs of those in vulnerable situations, women, children, persons with disabilities and older persons.’ Four out of 169 SDGs are directly transport-related, while 15 are indirectly related to the transport sector. This shows that though transport does not have a dedicated SDG, it plays a critical role in enabling other SDGs and achieving growth and

development. As an example, sustainable transport systems are necessary to provide access to education (SDG 4), food security (SDG 2), employment and empowerment for women (SDG 5), healthcare (SDG 3), and to curtail the global greenhouse gas emissions (SDG 13). Accomplishing the SDGs will thus rely on advances in sustainable transport. As a member state, India is committed to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. With only ten years remaining to meet the set targets, now is the time for action to tackle the multiple challenges posed by the urban transport sector, such as congestion, air pollution, and traffic fatalities.

According to the 2019 World Air Quality Report,⁵ 17 Indian cities rank among the world's 25 most polluted cities, a significant percentage of which is caused by vehicles, especially in the big cities. In addition, congestion on roads is a critical issue in India, not only has led to increased traffic incidents but also huge economic losses emerging from time and workforce losses. Bengaluru leads worldwide in traffic congestion, while Mumbai, Pune, and New Delhi are at the fourth, fifth, and eighth positions, respectively. Pollution and congestion, albeit critical, are manifestations of larger systemic issues in India's transportation policy. There is a huge proportion of India's population, especially in Tier II cities that still depend on walking, cycling, or using informal modes of non-motorised transit for commuting. In most Indian cities, non-motorised modes share the same right of way as cars and two-wheelers leading to unsafe conditions for all. The number of fatalities is also increasing in relation to the increasing motorisation and higher slow-moving vehicles in the traffic stream and is estimated to be at 2,30,000 deaths per year – half of which are reported to be vulnerable road users – motorcyclists, pedestrians and cyclists. Growth in polycentric metropolitan regions, commonly called the 'sprawl' continues to present a huge challenge for transportation planning in India. The most common solution to manage this challenge is through informal solutions that increase congestion and pollution and disproportionately affect the poor. This 'last mile' challenge is apparent globally but is acute in the case of India and can be attributed to a fragmented institutional structure and a federal decision-making system.

Urban transport systems require several functions to be performed in a wellcoordinated manner for a seamless and comfortable travel experience for commuters. Unfortunately, these are performed by multiple agencies under the central, state and city governments with different mandates. Various government agencies plan infrastructure as per their geographical mandate but fail to come together to provide end-to-end solutions to complete the transport loop. In addition, fragmentation or overlap of legislations poses challenges that constrain the ability to effectively manage the problems of urban transport. Firstly, it leads to incoherence in the policy framework and secondly, it reflects in the timing, coordination and treatment of how states and cities approach a particular problem. India's urban transport is shifting to sustainable modes of transport like electric vehicles. Three key players in transportation planning include technological innovators, decisionmakers, and end-users. The interaction between the three owing to their conflicting visions

acts as a major barrier for formulating policies and actions. While city planners try to reduce congestion, the manufacturers do the opposite by maximizing sales. Therefore, to achieve the common societal goal of promoting sustainable development necessary to balance the commercial interest of the manufacturing industry, the central government's focus on infrastructure development, and the city governments' need to enable to deal with local issues such as pollution and congestion. The lack of common standards for design, operation, and maintenance of transport infrastructure has caused unorganised and unregulated traffic across many Indian cities and is a major cause of the high occurrence of traffic accidents and fatalities. The Indian Road Congress (IRC) has been the nodal agency that sets design guidelines and technical standards for the construction of roads and bridges, primarily for intercity roads but also for urban roads. These standards are voluntarily followed by all road construction agencies, including the Public Works Departments of cities. Since they are voluntary for municipalities or public works departments, their enforcement of the contractors is sacrificed.

Planning integrated transportation projects is a multi-stakeholder process. Unfortunately, the capability for undertaking a coordinated approach along with a holistic understanding of transport issues and their causes involved is generally lacking at the state government and city level. In addition, there is an imbalance and bias between funding and investments for autocentric road expansion projects and non-motorised and high-capacity public transport infrastructure. It is important that urban transport is treated as an integrated whole through systems financing and pricing. Despite several structural challenges, one cannot negate the incremental progress made in several aspects of transportation planning across levels of governance in India to push for specific solutions. Policies such as the Faster Adoption and Manufacturing of (Hybrid and) Electric Vehicles in India (FAME)⁶ which provide subsidies for EV production and charging infrastructure have made India a frontrunner in taking proactive steps to ensure healthier lifestyles and decrease greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. India expects a 30 per cent share of Electric Vehicles (EVs) on the road by 2030. The Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA) through the Smart Cities Mission has put impetus to solutions like public transport and NMT, increasing the adoption of technological solutions for transport integration, using BRTS, and construction of walking and cycling tracks.

The 'Streets for People' initiative aims to create flagship walking initiatives in cities, which focus on placemaking and liveability. By reimagining streets as public spaces through the lens of economic regeneration, safety, and child-friendly interventions initiatives, cities are working to ensure a green recovery from COVID-19. A similar initiative called 'Cycles4Change' is enabling cities to implement low-cost interventions like pop-up lanes, traffic-calmed streets, community cycle rental schemes, and cycle-training programs, thus fostering a long-term social and behavioural change in the perception of mobility. Also, a noteworthy urban project that deserves mention is the Rejuvenation of Auto Rickshaws in Amritsar through

Holistic Interventions (project RAAHI)⁷ by replacing 7,000 diesel-run autorickshaws with e-autos, the largest formalisation activity of such nature in India. Financed under the CITIIS⁸ program, and currently under implementation, the project adopts an integrated approach and aims to achieve mobility-related, socioeconomic, environmental, and institutional reforms. Achieving sustainable transport will need a broad coalition of stakeholders—from industry, policy, and research institutes, local and national governments, and sector organisations—to engage and address challenges in a holistic manner, at a scale commensurate with the size of the challenges. Integrated policymaking is critical to decision-making on transport systems and infrastructure. It is essential that financial resources be channeled into training and capacity building of the concerned personnel in order to empower them to take on the complex challenges of the urban transportation sector.

Importance should be given to reinforcing efforts towards preventing road traffic fatalities, which include ensuring minimum safety standards for vehicles at the national level, and through commuter awareness at the local level. The SDG target of reducing global road traffic deaths and injuries by 50 per cent by 2020 can be used as a guide for this. Higher quality vehicle design, infrastructure, driver training, information, and many other factors contribute to a more equitable system, and, in this way, accessibility is a key element in ensuring the social sustainability of the transport sector. Technology advancing clean fuels and clean energy is a high priority, and when considering the scale of the health and climate challenges, it is imperative. Implementation of all the above suggestions calls for strong supporting institutional and governance structures, political will, sound leadership, transparency, and adequate resources. The focus on long-term sustainability can be strengthened by creating an effective network of cities for crosslearning and knowledge sharing. It is equally important that any solutions generated are analysed for scalability and transferability potential. Wherever feasible, they should be implemented in other cities.

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Centres Ranks Rajasthan 2nd in Implementing Smart City Projects

Rajasthan has been ranked second in the country in terms of the implementation of the Smart City projects. As per a statement issued by the Government of Rajasthan on July 12, in smart city ranking accorded by the Union Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA), four cities of Rajasthan – Udaipur, Kota, Ajmer and Jaipur have secured the eighth, 11th, 29th and 36th rank among the 100 smart cities in India. For the smart city ranking, the Centre has taken into account various factors, including the smart city plan implementation, the ongoing work and tendering process. Also, fund utilisation and provision of the utility certificates to the Centre from time to time were also considered, the statement added. Commenting on the

rankings, Rajasthan's Urban Development and Housing Minister Shanti Dhariwal mentioned the names of the four cities of Rajasthan that have secured noteworthy positions among the list of 100 smart cities. Considering the costs, the four cities have incurred an expenditure of Rs 1,563 crore from the total amount of Rs 1,845 crore received for various smart city projects. Of the projects worth Rs 3,965 crore in four cities, 138 projects costing Rs 448 crore have been completed while 178 projects worth Rs 2,772 crore are ongoing. Besides, 17 projects worth Rs 145 crore are under process.

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Maharashtra to Constitute Tourism Societies to Boost Tourism at District Level

In an effort to boost tourism in the state, the Government of Maharashtra has taken a decision to set up tourism societies as a pilot in 10 districts across the state. Further, the state government has also decided to appoint district tourism officers in the 10 districts on a contract basis. These will aid in the coordination of various tourism related activities at the district level. The decision was taken in a special review meeting of tourism development projects in the state and the promotion of tourism growth. As the Deputy Chief Minister of the state, Ajith Pawar gave approval for appointing district tourism officers and decided to give priority to experts from the agri-tourism sector. Moreover, following the meeting, Pawar ordered the immediate release of funds worth Rs 250 crore for the development of important tourist destinations like Mahabaleshwar, Ekvira Devasthan, Lonar Sarovar, Ashtavinayak and Konkan beaches. Ajith Pawar chaired the review meeting. Minister for Tourism Aaditya Thackeray, Deputy Minister for Tourism Aditi Tatkare, Principal Secretary Tourism Valsa Nair Singh, Principal Secretary – Finance Rajgopal Deora, and other senior officials attended the meet.

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Producing 'All-time High' 955 MLD Water, DJB Plants Operating at Optimum Levels

As the Delhi Jal Board (DJB), on July 18, raises the production of water to an 'all time high' of 955 million gallons per day (MGD), Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal took to Twitter saying that his government is pushing the most to provide water to all in the national capital. His tweet read, "Govt is doing its best to provide water to all. Our engineers are working 24x7 against all odds." Govt is doing its best to provide water to all. Our engineers are working 24x7 against all odds. <https://t.co/im9ZUAMfNu>. For the past few weeks, several parts of Delhi are facing a water crisis which also led to the opposition slamming the Delhi government and even staging protests at the CM's residence. As a response, the Vice Chairman of DJB Raghav Chadha, through

a tweet, said that the production of water has increased. He tweeted, "I'm pleased to inform that today Delhi's water production by @DelhiJalBoard is at an all-time high of 955 MGD against the usual 910 MGD. Due to sufficient availability of raw water in River Yamuna as well engineering solutions, we have managed to push our optimum levels." I'm pleased to inform that today Delhi's water production by @DelhiJalBoard is at an all time high of 955 MGD against the usual 910 MGD. Due to sufficient availability of raw water in River Yamuna as well engineering solutions, we have managed to push our optimum levels. Earlier on July 17, Chadha said that as much as 16,000 cusecs of water has been released by Haryana three days ago. With this, the water treatment plants in the city are functioning at optimum levels. A few days ahead of Haryana releasing the water in the Yamuna river, Chadha had said that the water levels of the Yamuna at the Wazirabad Barrage had reached the lowest mark in 56 years on Monday, July 12, with Delhi's water share withheld by Haryana. On the previous Sunday, the DJB had moved the Supreme Court seeking directions to Haryana to release Delhi's share of water.

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Rajasthan Housing Board: A Journey to Success

Housing is one of the major sectors adding to the nation's economy, especially, after the launch of programmes like Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY) by the Centre. The Rajasthan Housing Board (RHB) is managing the real estate sector in major cities of Rajasthan and their journey has been no less than a roller coaster ride. The Board achieving record sales today was once in a state of getting dissolved. Here's a brief account of the RHB, from its formation, the downfall to its resurrection and success. The Rajasthan Housing Board (RHB) was established on February 24, 1970. The RHB Act No. 4 was promulgated for the formation of the real estate body and assent from the state's Governor was received on April 18, 1970. The RHB was brought into existence by the Government of Rajasthan as an autonomous body to provide measures to deal with and satisfy the need for housing accommodation in the state. There has been no corpus fund from the state government initially, therefore, RHB sourced its finances through HUDCO Ltd., against which, the state used to extend Guarantee for construction activities. Also, the Board has been mobilising its finances by borrowing from financial institutions, banks and receipts from Self Financing Schemes, sale proceeds from commercial/residential and institutional properties. However, RHB has no debt on it as of date. In the beginning, the Board was operational in only seven cities and now it is working in 65 cities/towns. As the Real Estate sector soared in 2002-03 it also gave a fillip to RHB's activities. However, by 2013, the RHB's activities started dwindling and the downfall began impacting all of its activities with the increase in rejection ratio by the public. The common man's perception was at its lowest ebb. This has led to increased refund applications leading to increased unsold inventory of complete un-possessed dwelling units. RHB had entered in a big way into the multi-storied projects especially

aimed at upper-middle and higher-income groups riding the wave of the boom but couldn't meticulously reap the benefits owing to exorbitant time and cost overruns and boomeranged.

In the year 2015, the Government of Rajasthan had made up its mind to do away with the Board and imposed a ban on all the new housing schemes and constructions. The orders of the government remained in effect for almost three years. Following the formation of a new government in the state, there were talks of revamping the RHB, however, it seemed unachievable especially as a regular full-time Housing Commissioner was not existing. During this, the Housing stock rose to an all-time high of 22,562 unsold units in 2017, hence, no new construction was allowed for two years and the in-progress houses were completed during this course of time that added to the unsold stock. Due to the increased rejection from registered applicants, the stock further piled up. No way was in sight other than disposing surplus units at a discounted rate, because of interest burden, to the extent of 50 per cent of their current reserve price, was available. As high as 13,933 houses were piled up as surplus by August 2019, which affected financial liquidity adversely. In 2019, the Government of Rajasthan appointed Pawan Arora as the Commissioner, Rajasthan Housing Board, and his innovative vision took the Board's drooping fate to the path of unparalleled success. The year 2020-21 was undoubtedly marred by the COVID-19 pandemic. However, undeterred by the recession, RHB adopted various means to attract people. It had embarked upon a few initiatives and innovations to improve efficiency and transparency while following the pandemic protocol. A whopping Rs 2,621 crore worth of close to 10,000 properties have been sold by the end of March 2021 in 18 months from September 30, 2019, which in itself is a historic fete and has been recognised worldwide. Some of the popular schemes that the RHB launched in the last 18 months to do away with its housing stock and turn the table to the profitable sight include – Mahatma Gandhi Dastakar Nagar Yojana; Chief Minister Shikshak Awas Yojna & Chief Minister Prahari Awas Yojna; Allotment of shops in Jhulelal Market of Mansarovar Jaipur on the concessional cost to the Tibetan Refugees; Jaipur Choupatty; Development of Coaching Hub at Pratap Nagar, Jaipur; Establishment of Enforcement Wing; and much more.

During this phase of transformation, the Board took various innovative measures for COVID management and to overcome the crisis. As many as 3540 dwelling units were developed as 'COVID-19 Quarantine Centre'. In all the offices of RHB, a welcome gate of 'No Mask – No Entry' was erected. On October 3, 2020, a free mask distribution chariot van was flagged off by the Urban Development Minister from his residence. A sanitisation station and hand spraying machines have been installed in every office. The last date to deposit demand arising out of lease deed/transfer of name/subdivision/ reconstitution/ change of land use etc. has been extended to March 31, 2021, from March 15, 2020. The facility to pay in 156 monthly instalments was extended to purchasers in the auction. The effective measures undertaken to revamp the RHB and confidence-building measures aimed at people as well as

employees have started paying dividends. People started interacting with the RHB through social media. Also, people began registering and buying residential and commercial properties through eAuction and eBid submission. Moreover, the relaxations and rebates extended during the pandemic boosted the confidence of people resulting in greater participation. A positive mind, perseverance and rightful approach to face problems and resolving them without being deterred by failures can bring about miraculous changes.

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Looking at Public Sector Safety Through the Lens of Mobile Security

“With growing Internet penetration in India and government initiatives such as Digital India, Smart Cities, and Aadhaar, the need to ensure better protection of both critical infrastructure and sensitive data is further amplified,” writes John Hines, Head of Cyber Security, Verizon Asia-Pacific. Mobile devices have become an essential collaboration tool in most commercial enterprises and government agencies. It would not be too far-fetched to say that most employees, including those in India, regularly access corporate data via their smartphones, especially for the many currently working from home. Unfortunately, the convenience of accessing company data has also effectively raised the challenge of ensuring that company-proprietary and confidential data is kept out of the hands of cyber criminals. In the last 18-months, the threat to both private and public sector organizations has become more pronounced, as malicious actors look to exploit human vulnerabilities and our increased dependence on mobile technology. The Mobile Security Index spoke with almost 900 professionals responsible for the procurement and management of the security of mobile devices and 13 security companies and law enforcement agencies. While public sector organizations are reliant on mobile technology they are also concerned about mobile device threats. 84 per cent rated the risk to their organization as moderate to significant while two-fifths said that mobile devices are “extremely critical” to the smooth running of their organisation. In fact, nearly three-quarters (72 per cent) scored the importance as eight or more on the 10-point scale. With the growing internet penetration in India and government initiatives such as Digital India and Smart Cities, the need to ensure better protection of both critical infrastructure and sensitive data is further amplified. Mobile devices are key to improving service delivery, however, they could be putting infrastructure, people, employees, and data at greater risk.

When it comes to cybersecurity, the public sector has a lot on the line. Government agencies have access to a wealth of knowledge about their citizens’ lives including information that most individuals will not share with a private company such as tax information and bank account numbers. According to Verizon’s Data Breach Investigation Report 2021, the most frequently stolen data type in the public sector in

the last year is Credentials, which are then used to further the attacker's presence in the victim's network and systems. These breaches are not limited to desktop systems, they have also reached our mobiles phones. According to Verizon's Mobile Security Index (MSI) 2021, a quarter (25 per cent) of public sector respondents admitted to having suffered a compromise involving a mobile device in the past year. Local, state, and federal organisations were all affected. State government bodies fared best, with less than one in eight (12 per cent) reporting they'd been hit; conversely, nearly one-third (32 per cent) of local government agencies were aware of having been compromised. Despite knowing the stakes, many businesses who put mobile device security on the back burner were more likely to be hacked. Cutting corners is still primarily motivated by expediency, which includes responding to the Covid-19 crisis. The MSI report affirmed that, globally, despite the risk of being hacked and the penalties of being compromised, 35 per cent of public sector respondents acknowledged sacrificing mobile security to "get the job done." This is roughly the same as the previous year (36 per cent) and far lower than what we discovered across all public and private companies (45 per cent). The reasons for cutting corners were numerous including expediency (40 per cent), but responding to the Covid-19 crisis was the most common (48 per cent).

The Biggest Concerns in the Public Sector: Malware – Malware topped the list of threats and vulnerabilities that public sector organizations were most concerned about. In reality, mobile-device users are 26 times more likely to click on a phishing link than they are to encounter malware. Loss/theft -People lose stuff. They leave phones, tablets, and laptops in taxis, on trains, at restaurants—the list goes on and on. Some of these will end up in a lost-and-found box, and others will find a new owner—or rather a new owner will find them. Rogue Wi-Fi – To paraphrase a famous saying, there's no such thing as free public Wi-Fi. At best, users are swapping privacy for convenience. At worst, they could be compromising credentials and exposing other systems—not just the device that they're using, but everything it can connect to—to malicious code. Phishing – Lookout, a mobile security company, saw a 364 per cent increase in the number of mobile phishing attempts in 2020 versus 2019. With many employees working from home, cybercriminals have adapted their techniques. And many have taken advantage of the disruption. Ransomware – There has been extensive media coverage of successful ransomware attacks on public sector organizations in recent years. We all know that cybersecurity is not a new concern, but despite best efforts, the risks landscape continues to rise. The severity of regulatory penalties is increasing, and customers—consumers, enterprises, and public-sector organisations alike—are getting more concerned. According to the MSI report, policymakers are worried about the effect security measures can have on productivity and efficiency, in addition to budget constraints. Poorly implemented protection measures may harm employee satisfaction and organizational efficiency. For instance, something as simple as a poor password policy could put an impact on productivity, increase support costs (due to more resets), and potentially increase risks (by driving employees to circumvent the rules).

In 2021, mobile devices are an essential component of a smooth work experience. As a result of technological convergence, businesses have discovered more effective ways to use devices; you can now do more with a mobile device than you can with your desktop system. With the arrival of 5G, the technology will only improve and many companies will shift towards permanently working from home. Unfortunately, as devices have grown more powerful, they have become more appealing to those with malicious intentions. Solutions have evolved, but, as we've seen, even when tools are in place, people do not always use them. Part of the problem is the gulf between how mobile devices and remote workers have been treated compared to others. Recently, new security models that recognise modern businesses' mobile-first, cloud-first reality have emerged. These promise to improve mobile device security for everyone involved. There is a lot of work to be done to update processes and rules to be cyber-secure.

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UP RERA Goes Digital, Takes Services Online to Reduce Regulatory Compliance Burden

The Uttar Pradesh Real Estate Regulatory Authority (UP RERA) has digitised its various processes, said a statement by UP RERA. The move is likely to reduce the regulatory and compliance burden on the state government. And, this may result in the promotion of investment by the Department of Industry Promotion and Internal Trade, Government of India. Some of the processes that have been taken online include Form A for applying for registration of real estate project, Form E for to get an extension on the registration of real estate project, for obtaining registration certificate by the real estate agent, Form C for obtaining registration of real estate project, Form K to renew registration certificate of a real estate agent, annual accounts audit, etc. On the UP RERA's plan to digitise its services, Rajesh Kumar Tyagi, Secretary, UP RERA, said that an action plan to digitise 10 forms was issued under the Uttar Pradesh Real Estate (Regulation and Development) Rules, 2016. Seven of these forms were already online on the UP RERA portal while the remaining three were digitised by July 16. With an aim to give a boost to the Digital India campaign and to create a convenient system for homebuyers during the COVID-19 pandemic, the UP RERA Headquarters in Lucknow and its regional office in Gautam Budh Nagar have set up e-courts. Around 12,918 complaints have been registered through e-courts and 12,150 complaints have been resolved successfully, as reported by a national daily. Besides this, UP RERA also came up with RERA Samvaad via video conferencing during the COVID-19 pandemic. This initiative is taken to resolve the problems of homebuyers and promoters, in which 1882 grievances were lodged on the portal.

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AZERBAIJAN: Improving Its Position in Global Cybersecurity Index

Azerbaijan climbed 15 positions in the global cybersecurity rating and took 40th place among 194 countries, Trend reports citing the Global Cybersecurity Index (GCI) report of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU). According to the report, among the CIS countries, Azerbaijan took 3rd place in the rating. On the 1st and 2nd are Russia and Kazakhstan, respectively. The collection of relevant data for the ranking and determination of the GCI index has been carried out since 2014. The index is designed to assess the level of cybersecurity of countries in five main areas: - legal measures (legislation, regulation, and control) - 20 points; - technical measures (CERT (Computer Emergency Response Team), standards and certification) - 19.19 points; - organizational measures (policy, strategy, responsible organization, and national assessment) - 13.14 points; - activities to strengthen human resources (development of standards, development of human resources and retraining) - 16.99 points; - cooperation (interdepartmental, intradepartmental, public-private and international) - 20 points. Azerbaijan, with a cybersecurity index of 89.31 points, is ahead of such countries as Switzerland (42), Tunisia (45), Ireland (46), Iran (54), Georgia (55), Iceland (58), Romania (62), Slovenia (67), Czech Republic (68), and Ukraine (78). The first positions in the ranking were taken by the US, the UK, Saudi Arabia, Estonia, South Korea, Singapore and Spain.

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Ongoing Measures to Prevent Cyber Threats Improve Azerbaijan's Position in Global Ranking

Measures being carried out by various structures of Azerbaijan to prevent cyber threats and threats related to information security have strengthened the country's position in the Global Cybersecurity Index, a source in the Central Bank of Azerbaijan (CBA) told Trend on July 3. According to the source, Azerbaijan climbed 15 positions in the global cyber security rating and took 40th place among 194 countries. The CBA pays great attention to preventing external cyber threats associated with both the COVID-19 pandemic and the country's 44-day war last year [for liberating its territories from Armenian occupation], and the spread of Internet fraud in the world. Besides, the CBA is taking preventive measures to increase the level of preparedness for cyber attacks against commercial banks operating in the country. "As part of these measures, work is being carried out to protect information resources and systems from possible attacks, as well as to timely prevent cases of cybercrime," the source said. "Along with this, measures are aimed at ensuring the protection of exploited information resources from possible threats, increasing the

overall level of training in cyber security, as well as ensuring information security when exchanging data."

In this regard, the source noted that cyber attacks aimed at violating the confidentiality and availability of information resources are one of the most serious problems of our time. "The innovative digitalization of the economy, the emergence of new generation technologies, the formation of new solutions, such as information and communication systems based on cloud technologies and block-chain, re-actualize the importance of aspects of information and cyber security," the bank's experts said. "We carry out ongoing activities to ensure business continuity in the financial and banking sector of the country, adequate response to incidents in the field of security, as well as the creation in this direction of a control framework based on international standards." "One of the measures implemented within the 'State program for expansion of digital payments in Azerbaijan for 2018-2020', approved by the order of the country's president, the security requirements for IT systems of banks have been strengthened," the experts added. "A working group has been formed to prepare a regulatory framework in the field of IT security in Azerbaijani banks, international standards and approaches to this issue of leading central banks have been studied."

Besides, according to the director of the Center for the Development of the Electronic Government of Azerbaijan, Fariz Jafarov, in the field of cyber security, it's necessary to take into account both the protection of physical state information systems and the safety of the population using digital government services. "In this regard, we have developed and launched a project of a single authorization on government portals. At the same time, the protection of state systems is provided by the DATA center, created by AzInTelecom LLC under the Ministry of Transport, Communications and High Technologies. The center applies various procedures for the physical security of information, network infrastructure and a number of other areas in accordance with international standards," Jafarov said. He stressed that the Center for the Development of Electronic Government has created special standards for employees, which regulate their activities in a particular information area. Along with this, a national system for the secure exchange of information between organizations, ASAN Bridge, has been developed, which allows the exchange of information between government agencies via a single gateway in an encrypted form, reducing the likelihood of third-party use of this data to zero.

Managing Director of Kaspersky Lab in Russia, the CIS and the Baltic States Mikhail Pribochiy noted that Azerbaijan is very responsible in the implementation of ensuring the cyber security of critical infrastructure. "The digitalization of industry can significantly increase the efficiency of any production, both through automation and through the analysis of data that comes from many devices of the industrial Internet of Things (IoT)," Pribochiy said. "Azerbaijan is a country where such technologies are rapidly developing and on this path it is extremely important to understand and

the risks that accompany this process, because cyber attacks can cause irreparable damage to the country's economy and affect people's health," he added. As the managing director stressed, it's important that in the future, when the concept of Industry 4.0 begins to penetrate urban infrastructure, transport, housing and communal services, healthcare and other areas, cyber security continues to be one of the main elements that are laid in the foundation at the earliest stages. This will not only improve the quality of life for people, but also protect the huge amounts of data which are collected by such systems from cyber attacks. Azerbaijan's use of modern technologies allowed it not only to rise by 15 positions in the global cyber security rating, but also to take the third position among the CIS countries. In this rating, Azerbaijan left behind such countries as Switzerland (42), Tunisia (45), Ireland (46), Iran (54), Georgia (55), Iceland (58), Romania (62), Slovenia (67), Czech Republic (68), and Ukraine (78).

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What Are 'Smart Cities', 'Smart Villages' to Be Created in Azerbaijan's Karabakh?

The implementation of the Smart Village and Smart City projects has already started in Azerbaijan's Karabakh region. The projects envisage the creation of communications in the Azerbaijani lands liberated from the Armenian occupation in accordance with the modern standards. The foundation of one of the first "smart villages" was laid in Zangilan district. "Smart Village" and "Smart City" details Smart City is a general concept for integrating multiple information and communication technologies for urban property management, including local information systems departments, schools, libraries, transport, hospitals, power plants, water and waste management systems, law enforcement bodies and other public services. The conclusions drawn from the analysis of the collected data are directed towards the efficient use of assets and resources. Moreover, the relevant state agencies are able to carry out optimization work based on the information collected in the database. All these digital solutions also refer to medicine and transport. In particular, it is possible to track pollution in the city on an e-map using wireless sensor networks to monitor atmospheric air to protect the environment.

The difference between a 'Smart City' and ordinary cities is in the digitalization of the entire infrastructure and the creation of a big database. Based on this information, the efficiency of expenditure and quality of life of the population are being improved throughout the city. What is the Smart Village concept for? One of the main goals of creating such villages in the world is to prevent urbanization. That is, for people in rural areas, such conditions are created for all the necessary services which are rendered in cities to be provided in villages. Another important point is that the 'Smart Village' concept allows people to earn more than in ordinary city. President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev laid the foundation of the 'Smart Village' project on April 28,

covering Agaly-I, II and III villages of Zangilan district. Specialists from the Turkish, Chinese, Italian and Israeli companies will also take part in implementation of this project. The project will be implemented mainly upon five components. These are the housing, manufacturing, social services, 'smart agriculture' and alternative energy sectors. First of all, 200 fully isolated individual houses by using innovative building materials are planned to be built. Engineering communications, heating systems in houses will also be created on the basis of smart technologies. It is planned to build modern schools, kindergartens, polyclinics and e-government centers in these villages and create a tourism infrastructure.

All residential buildings, social facilities, administrative buildings and public catering facilities, the process of processing and production of agricultural products will be provided with alternative energy sources. The priority in implementation of 'smart' projects in the liberated territories of Azerbaijan is given to 5G technologies, Elman Karimli, coordinator of the Azerbaijan Innovation Agency, said in an interview with Trend. "The 5G technology was originally developed for such big projects as Smart City and Smart Village," Karimli added. "Compared to 4G antennas, 5G antennas are smaller in size and look like a modem," Karimli said. "It is easier to install and the speed is a lot higher. Cable internet connection is necessary in some hard-to-reach places in which disruptions with transmission of wireless signals can occur, where the wired internet can ensure uninterrupted data transmission. Most of the solutions for smart projects will be based on the 5G network." "Moreover, strategic plans are being prepared to automate the activity of state sectors and the sphere of small and medium-sized businesses," he said. Karimli stressed that the main idea of implementation of these projects is to solve problems, economical use of natural resources and public funds. "Besides the automation of agricultural activity, electronicization of the tourism sector is required on these territories," Karimli said.

From <https://en.trend.az/> 07/12/2021

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Azerbaijan's Positions in International Ratings Continue to Grow

Azerbaijan's position in the Doing Business 2020 report rose by 6 points to 28th place among 190 countries, Trend reports citing the Center for Analysis of Economic Reforms and Communication (CAERC). According to the Heritage Foundation's 2021 Index of Economic Freedom, Azerbaijan is ranked 38th among of 172 countries. Azerbaijan also rose 15 positions in the International Telecommunication Union's Global Cybersecurity Index 2020, published in 2021. According to the report of the Children's Rights Index 2021 of the Children's Rights Foundation and Erasmus University Rotterdam, Azerbaijan has advanced 3 points compared to 2020. In addition, according to the results of this year's study of the UNESCAP project "Assessment of readiness for cross-border paperless trade", Azerbaijan retained its regional leadership.

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Azerbaijan, South Korea Broaden Co-Op On Introducing Smart Tech in Agriculture

The South Korean FarmConnect company and the Research Institute of Vegetable Growing under the Ministry of Agriculture of Azerbaijan signed an agreement on cooperation in the implementation of Smart Farming technology, Trend reports citing the message of the Azerbaijani Embassy in Korea. With the help of artificial intelligence (AI), FarmConnect will share with the Azerbaijani institute the technologies for analyzing data and increasing yields, the statement said.

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Azerbaijani Start-Up Developers to Contribute to Economic Dev't – Minister

The activities of startup developers in Azerbaijan will have a positive impact on the development of the economy. Minister of Transport, Communications and High Technologies of Azerbaijan Rashad Nabiyev said, Trend reports. The minister made the remark at a meeting with representatives of the national startups. During the meeting, the sides discussed problems and prospects for the development of the startup ecosystem in Azerbaijan, its current state, and identified new priorities. Nabiyev noted that the creation of an innovative environment in Azerbaijan is one of the important aspects of the development of the ICT sector. “The activities of our talented startup developers, the full implementation of their knowledge and skills will have a positive impact on the development of the economy. We are ready to support them in the process of development and becoming an important part of the digital environment. Such meetings will continue,” the minister noted. “I believe that at present, favorable conditions have been created in Azerbaijan for the development of innovations and their application in various fields. I invite each of you to take an active part in the creation of an innovative environment,” added the minister. In turn, the meeting participants spoke about the development trends of the startup ecosystem and the problems they face in their activities.

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Minister: Startup Developers to Boost Economic Development

The activities of startup developers in Azerbaijan will strengthen the economy and positively impact economic development, Transport, Communications and High Technologies Minister Rashad Nabiyev has said. Addressing the meeting with representatives of the national startups last week, Nabiyev underlined the importance of startups in creating an innovative environment in the country. “The

activities of our talented startup developers, the full implementation of their knowledge and skills will have a positive impact on the development of the economy. We are ready to support them in the process of development and becoming an important part of the digital environment. Such meetings will continue,” the minister said. “I believe that at present, favorable conditions have been created in Azerbaijan for the innovations development and their application in various fields,” he added. During the meeting, the participants discussed the current state, problems and prospects of the startup ecosystem in Azerbaijan, and identified new priorities. Likewise, they discussed the development tendencies of the startup ecosystem and the problems they face in their activities.

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UZBEKISTAN: Development of Rural Infrastructure

In accordance with the Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan No. PP-4898 of November 25, 2020, the project “Development of rural Infrastructure” is being implemented with the participation of the World Bank, the International Development Association and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank. The total cost of the project is US\$183.6 million, of which the International Development Association of the World Bank has allocated US\$100 million. (54.5%), the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank- \$ 82 million. (44.6%) The Republic of Uzbekistan-1.6 million US dollars. (0.9%). The main goal of the project "Development of rural infrastructure" is to apply a new approach to improving the basic infrastructure and social facilities. At the same time, the project provides for the organization of the participation of the rural population with broad involvement and is aimed at ensuring transparency and accountability in implementation on the basis of public participation in decision-making and control over sublicenses using methods of studying in practice.

The project is being implemented in 5 regions, the funds are planned to be disbursed in 306 mahalla gatherings of citizens in the amount of US\$1.3 million. It is planned to reach the population, which will ensure direct participation of the population in the process of choosing sublicenses in these territories. It is planned to select 130 villages in the Andijan, Ferghana and Namangan regions in 2021-2022, agreements were signed with auxiliary non-governmental non-profit organizations providing for the process of selecting sublicense objects, and approved by the World Bank in May this year. In order to mobilize the population and the group in the Andijan and Ferghana regions, the Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development ACTED (France), the International Secretariat for Water (Canada), the national movement “Yuksalish” and the non-governmental non-profit organization “Tarakriet” (Uzbekistan), the Center for Entrepreneurship Development and SEED Execution (Bulgaria), and in the Namangan region-the Limited Liability Company “Rhytm Plus” (Uzbekistan) carry out their activities. This collective mobilization work will be carried

out from July 5 to 28 this year in the above-mentioned areas through training seminars, as well as practical work in certain rural areas.

The International Consulate of the World Bank conducts training seminars for specialists of affiliated non-profit organizations and monitors practical work carried out in rural areas, as well as provides practical assistance. Auxiliary consulting companies of the Ferghana Valley plan to carry out work on 25 sublicense objects during 2021. In addition, in order to organize work on improving the basic infrastructure and social facilities in the villages for 2021-2022, a total of 45 villages were selected in the Jizzakh and Syrdarya regions. Currently, the mobilization of the population and teams has been completed in 20 of them. Also, within the framework of the project, it is planned to build 2 modern schools for 264 places in the MBD "Sohil" of the Pakhtabad district of the Andijan region and 220 places in the MBD "Saray" of the Bakhmal district of the Jizzakh region, design and estimate documentation has been developed and state expertise has been carried out. Today, the process of determining the contractor for construction and repair work is underway. In addition, it was found that 25 sublicenses are of paramount importance and relevance in selected villages, including 11 with clean drinking water, 7 with the improvement of power supply systems, 3 with the repair of internal streets, 2 with the reconstruction of school buildings, 1 with the construction of bridges and 1 with sewage drainage (drainage reconstruction). Currently, engineering companies "Single Customer Service" under the regional khokimiyats-customers hold competitions for design organizations. In 2021, as a result of the implementation of the above measures, US\$20.5 million will be realized within the framework of the project. It is planned to use funds in the amount of US\$100 million.

From <http://www.uzdaily.com> 07/07/2021

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Data-hackathon World AI & Data Challenge

Tashkent, Uzbekistan (UzDaily.com) - On 21-22 August 2021, IT Park, together with the Agency for Strategic Initiatives and UNDP, will hold a data hackathon in the field of information technology as part of the World AI & Data Challenge competition with a prize fund at the international final stage in the amount of 5.5 million rubles. Data hackathon is organized for everyone interested in artificial intelligence and software development. The hackathon will be held online, during which the best developments will have the opportunity to reach the final at the international level. The best projects will be replicated all over the world. CIS countries such as Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Belarus, Moldova and Russia will take part in this hackathon. The main objectives of the competition are to collect innovative projects to reduce poverty, strengthen remote monitoring of patients with cardiovascular diseases, predict the balance of labor resources based on open data, identify pollution of rivers and water bodies, create models for forecasting search and rescue operations in the natural environment, and others. IT Park, as a representative of Uzbekistan, has identified

the following three tasks for the contestants within the framework of the competition:

1. Profiling of poverty in the country, that is, the development of an innovative method for the prevention of poverty in the country;
2. Development of a system for remote monitoring of patients suffering from cardiovascular diseases through arduino and smartphone using machine learning in order to prevent myocardial infarction and cardiac fibrillation.
3. Labor market in the country - understanding trends on the supply and demand side, with the submission of relevant projects.

Participants who have passed to the final stage of the competition will receive full access to online courses on information technology from leading schools and universities in the world, which will help to better prepare for the final presentation, hone their oratory skills and maximize their innovative developments.

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AUSTRALIA: Many Farmers Unprepared for Cyber Attacks

Australia's agricultural sector is underprepared for cyber attacks and must act now to better protect sensitive commercial data. An organisation focused on the long-term prosperity of producers has warned they must learn from the health sector, which became a cyber crime target after digitising patient records. AgriFutures Australia released a report on Monday calling for industries to take urgent action. "In recent years there has been a rapid uptake of technology, and with this, an increased risk of digital attacks," the report said. "Australia's agriculture, fisheries and forestry sectors are in a similar position to where the health system was five years ago, a slow but gradually increasing adoption of new technologies, with a largely unmanaged cyber security risk."

The group found hackers were seeking to profit from agricultural research, intellectual property and other commercial sensitive data, including through online payment portals and computerised machinery. Lucrative personal and financial information was being put at risk, exposing people to identity theft. A survey of about 1000 agriculture, fisheries and forestry producers found they overestimated threats from activists and competitors, while underestimating the risk of supply chain data breaches. "This points to the possibility that the sectors don't really understand their cyber threats as well as they should," the report said. It also found many organisations had not adopted comprehensive cyber security controls. People on average reported their understanding of and confidence in cyber risk as 3.5 out of 5, while just 16 per cent had an incident response plan in place.

Many respondents also lacked the ability or knowledge of how or where to get assistance for a cyber attack. Ransomware, phishing, scam emails, malware and data breaches were among the most common attacks. Last year, wool sales across

the country were halted for more than a week after hackers disabled the sector's major trading system. Australia exports between \$60 million and \$80 million of wool a week. During the ransomware attack, about 70,000 bales scheduled for sale were grounded.

From <https://au.news.yahoo.com> 07/05/2021

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Vehicle Sales Remain Strong in June

Australia's new-vehicle market remains on track to sell more than one million cars and trucks this year despite ongoing supply issues. The Federal Chamber of Automotive Industries says 110,664 vehicles were retailed in June, a rise of just 0.4 per cent compared to the same month last year. But demand for the first six months of 2021 was up a healthy 28.3 per cent to 567,468 units, notwithstanding the slump the market suffered in April and May last year when the first wave of the coronavirus pandemic hit the country. "Expectations for a strong result in June had remained high given the traditional end of financial year demand from business and private buyers driven by government incentives coupled with intensive marketing activity from vehicle brands," FCAI chief executive Tony Weber said. "In spite of some states being forced into COVID-19 lockdowns towards the end of June, the acquisition of a new vehicle remains a popular option for buyers across all market segments.

"The delivery challenges caused by microprocessor shortages and bottlenecks in the supply chain are yet to be fully resolved, however, all parties are continuing to find ways to meet the strong demand for customers across all sectors." Mr Weber said it was expected the supply issues would begin to ease as the global economy continued to recover from the impacts of the pandemic. "Right now, we would expect customer demand across all segments to remain strong in the second half of 2021 which has the market on track to return to a result in excess of one million vehicles," he said. Toyota was the market leader in June with sales of 21,076, followed by Mazda on 12,225, Ford 8456, Kia 7890 and Hyundai 7357. The Ford Ranger was the top-selling vehicle with 6058 retailed last month, ahead of the Toyota HiLux on 5412, the Isuzu Ute D-Max 3167, Mazda CX-5 3018 and the Kia Cerato 2711. Demand for electric cars rose strongly again in June, taking total sales for the first half of 2021 to 2217, a rise of 187 per cent compared to the same period last year.

From <https://au.news.yahoo.com> 07/06/2021

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Focus on Jobs as RBA Seeks Full Employment

After a week of expressing the need to get back to full employment, Reserve Bank governor Philip Lowe will soon see how Australia is progressing on that target. June labour force figures are released on Thursday, and at least one economists is predicting the unemployment rate could be sub-five per cent for the first time in a

decade. Announcing the central bank's latest interest rate decision, Dr Lowe said he believes full employment will be when the jobless rate is close to four per cent, possibly lower. For the June result, economists' forecasts centre on the unemployment rate being unchanged from May at 5.1 per cent. However, predictions range from 4.9 per cent to 5.2 per cent. The number of people employed is expected to have grown by a further 20,000 in the month, but again forecasts range from a 45,000 rise to a 25,000 fall.

Westpac economists say the labour force report would have been conducted before the NSW COVID-19 lockdown set in. The first part of this week will see a spread of confidence figures for both consumers and business, and coming at a time of great uncertainty as a result of the Greater Sydney COVID-19 lockdown, now in its third week. The weekly ANZ-Roy Morgan consumer confidence index - a pointer to future household spending - is due on Tuesday. It fell 3.9 per cent last week in response to virus restrictions in several states. On the same day, National Australia Bank will release its monthly business survey for June, which provides a guide for potential hiring and investment. In May, business confidence index eased from a record high, but conditions struck a new peak for a second month in a row. "Recent virus lockdowns could weigh on sentiment in June," Commonwealth Securities senior economist Ryan Felsman said.

"But with conditions so strong, investors will be closely assessing the June survey for signs of stress, such as shortages of labour and materials as well as pricing pressures." Other recent surveys have shown that employers in manufacturing, construction and services are finding it increasingly difficult to find appropriate staff, while the cost of doing business is increasing. The monthly Westpac-Melbourne Institute sentiment index is due on Wednesday. Meanwhile, Australian shares look set for a sharp rise at Monday's opening despite the shadow of the NSW virus lockdown that recorded one death amid 77 new cases reported on Sunday. Australian share futures surged 76 points, or 1.05 per cent, to 7262 as the three major indices on Wall Street closed at record highs on Friday. The big US banks led the advance ahead of second-quarter results this week, shaking off worries earlier in the week that the US economic recovery may be losing steam as the coronavirus Delta variant spread globally. The Dow Jones Industrial Average rose 448.23 points, or 1.3 per cent, to 34,870.16, the S&P 500 gained 48.73 points, or 1.13 per cent, to 4,369.55 and the Nasdaq Composite added 142.13 points, or 0.98 per cent, to 14,701.92. The Australian market did succumb to Delta strain worries on Friday, but ended above the day's lows. The benchmark S&P/ASX200 index closed down 68.1 points, or 0.93 per cent, to 7273.3.

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Remote Social Services Good for Some

Children and families have been able to access critical social services remotely during the COVID-19 pandemic but some groups still find barriers in the lack of face-to-face support, new research has found. `Southern Cross University research commissioned by child protection advocacy body Fams examined the experiences of workers and managers delivering pandemic-era social services via telepractice. Lead researcher Liz Reimer said the study uncovered a wide spectrum of perspectives on the benefits and drawbacks of these services remotely. "Is telepractice going to replace the in-person experience altogether? No. But it will definitely bridge the gap when workers can't deliver services face-to-face," Dr Reimer said in a statement on Monday. "While telepractice is a powerful tool that helps clients in many different ways, there is still a considerable need for face-to-face interactions."

Fams chief executive Julie Hourigan Ruse said telepractice had allowed people from rural and remote areas to access services that were otherwise out of reach. Clients with social anxiety could also develop a relationship and trust with their case workers from a distance. "Engaging via telepractice is less confronting for some people, compared to being in a visible public space, particularly if there is shame associated with seeking help," Ms Hourigan Ruse said. The research found certain groups, including people with complex disabilities, some culturally and linguistically diverse communities and those experiencing family and domestic violence, struggled without face-to-face support. "Some workers also noted that telepractice limited their capacity to properly assess a home environment and any safety concerns for both children and adults," Ms Hourigan Ruse said.

From <https://au.news.yahoo.com> 07/12/2021

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Social Housing Benefits Dwarf Cost: Report

It took Talie Star about half a dozen attempts to get away from her abusive husband, but what came next was so much worse. Landlords hiked her rent, she became homeless and had to navigate a nightmare of bureaucracy. "The rental market is an absolute nightmare. And if you've been through domestic and family violence, it's even worse," Ms Star told AAP. It took her between five and seven years to secure suitable housing. But so many women and children do not. A report by Equity Economics shows about 9120 victims face homelessness each year after fleeing family violence. Approximately 7690 return to their abusers because there's nowhere to go. COVID has made a bad situation worse, with victims more isolated at home with their abusers. Ahead of a national women's safety summit later this month, the report urges the federal government to spend \$7.6 billion on another 16,810 social housing units. The benefits would dwarf the costs, the report for an Everybody's Home campaign says.

This is because the flow-on costs of women returning to their perpetrators add up to

\$122.5 million a year. Homelessness experienced by women fleeing violence also carries a \$257 million annual price tag. Ms Star's husband was emotionally, psychologically and physically abusive. "He was charming, everyone thought he was just the most wonderful person," she said. Her degenerative spinal condition made leaving even harder. "What happened next was much worse because I was not only experiencing periods of homelessness, I was dealing with housing and Centrelink and other organisations, which all work on this power and control system," she said. "I was experiencing coercive control, both with government systems and then with my ex, and trying to manage and survive." Now an advocate and consultant, Ms Star wants politicians to put their money where their mouth is if they're serious about confronting domestic abuse. "I want to say to politicians, 'are you really listening'," Ms Star said. "Because what I'm hearing is a lot of smokescreen stuff, a lot of hearsay, and it's not working."

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Homelessness, Household Stress on the Rise

Homelessness is projected to surge across Australia by nine per cent this year and housing stress could increase 24 per cent. The two are joint symptoms of a broken national system, says advocacy coalition Everybody's Home. Instead of treating the issues separately, the organisation suggests a holistic approach with five prongs. It wants more first-home buyer support, more low-cost properties, a better deal for renters, immediate relief for stressed households and a plan to end homelessness by 2030. The group, which counts the Salvation Army, St Vincent de Paul and Sydney and Adelaide city councils among more than 300 partner and support organisations, is adamant owners, tenants and the needy are in the same boat. "We cannot have a situation where house prices rise at close to 10 per cent a quarter in some cases, while social housing declines," campaign leader Kate Colvin said.

"That is a recipe for more housing stress, more homelessness and deepening inequality. "On the current trajectory, housing stress is only going to worsen for people on low and middle incomes, which is why we need the federal government to make an urgent investment in social housing." In June, federal minister for homelessness, social and community housing Michael Sukkar rolled out the latest in a series of projects: \$30 million to build more than 100 social housing dwellings in Greater Hobart by 2022. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare data shows the proportion of social housing has declined nationwide between 2014 and 2020 from 4.6 to 4.2 per cent. House prices jumped by up to 9.3 per cent between January and April, according to CoreLogic's June report. The national rental market is also supercharged, with rents for houses increasing 15.1 per cent on average and those for units up 8.1 per cent in the past year.

According to modelling by analytics firm Equity Economics, 7500 more people are

expected to become homeless this year, up from 83,000, and rates of mortgage and rental stress will advance by a quarter. At the top of the Everybody's Home wishlist is 30,000 new public housing units as a first step in addressing what it estimates is a national shortfall of more than half a million affordable dwellings. It says the deficiency across a mixture of apartments, townhouses and free-standing residences is evident in every suburb and town in the country. "Homes that ordinary families can afford is critical infrastructure for every community," Ms Colvin said. "With a home everybody has the ability to live, work and raise their families but surging prices and low vacancy rates mean 'a place to call home' is increasingly out of reach for many Australians."

Equity Economics estimates Australia's lack of long term social housing leads to 7690 women a year returning to violent partners and 9120 becoming homeless. In a report to the national Women's Safety Summit, it found the \$7.6 billion cost of the federal government investing in 16,800 extra social housing units would be dwarfed by economic benefits of \$15.3 billion and creation of 47,000 jobs. The additional accommodation would also generate savings of \$122.5 million a year due to women not returning to violent partners and \$257 million due to them not having to experience homelessness. The federal government says it has committed more than \$72 million since September to the Safe Places Emergency Accommodation Program to support women and children escaping violence.

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Climate Change Could Damage Farm Profits

Australian farm profits could be slashed by up to 50 per cent over the next three decades without more climate change adaptation. A new Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics and Sciences report has modelled the potential impacts of climate change on farmers. The study uses Bureau of Meteorology and CSIRO projections based on two scenarios of pollution reduction by 2050. With limited curbing of global carbon emissions, farm profits could fall by 10 to 50 per cent across Australia. If emissions peak by 2040, farm profits are projected to fall between two and 32 per cent. WA cropping farmers could face more pressure than those in eastern states. More severe impacts could be experienced in lower rainfall and inland areas including central Queensland and parts of western NSW. Livestock producers may face more pressure under severe climate scenarios due to higher temperatures.

Climate projections suggest farmers could experience reductions in average winter season rainfall from three to 30 per cent by 2050 compared with pre-2000 levels. "At present, there's still a lot of variation in projected outcomes, due largely to uncertainty over future rainfall levels," ABARES executive director Jared Greenville said. "This uncertainty over future rainfall is itself an important constraint on farmer

adaptation. "While farmers have made significant progress to date, further adaptation will be required to maintain our competitiveness, particularly if other nations are not impacted to the same extent." Dr Greenville said investing in research, development, climate data and other information would be crucial in preparing the sector for the future. The analysis does offset potential positive effects of farm adaptation or technological improvement, but identifies regions and farm types which will be under more pressure.

ABARES' report also looks at the impact of lower rainfall and higher temperatures over the past 20 years. Profits fell by an average of 23 per cent, or \$29,000 per farm annually, relative to conditions between 1950 and 2000. "Seasonal conditions over the last 20 years have been pretty rough for Australian farmers," Dr Greenville said. "The good news is that farmers have made some remarkable progress in adapting to these hotter and drier conditions." He said after accounting for climate impacts, productivity growth of about 28 per cent in broadacre farming had been achieved since 1989. "The cropping sector has seen a huge gain of 68 per cent," Dr Greenville said. "New technologies and practices mean that farmers are able to grow crops under lower rainfall conditions than they could in the past."

From <https://au.news.yahoo.com> 07/29/2021

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NEW ZEALAND: Govt Laying Tracks to Support Economic Recovery

The Government is fulfilling its commitment to bring New Zealand's rail network back up to scratch and support the economic recovery, Transport Minister Michael Wood announced today. KiwiRail's inaugural Rail Network Investment Programme (RNIP) was released today which details renewals and upgrades on the rail network over the next three years. The Programme includes: Fully replacing 20 bridges around the country and improving around 25 more Replacing more than 200km of rail sleepers Replacing more than 130km of tracks Adding active controls (barrier arms, lights/bells) to 3 level crossings and making improvements to 25 more through renewals Upgrading signals on the Auckland metro network, a new Auckland train control centre and an additional power supply into the network, to support increased train frequency to come with the City Rail Link

Investing in a business case for further network improvements across Wellington, including looking at potentially extending electrification north of Waikanae to Levin and beyond. Michael Wood said rail is key to keeping New Zealand moving and is supporting our economic recovery. "The disruptions to the supply chain due to COVID have shown how important it is to have a reliable rail network to keep freight flowing, which keeps our economy moving. This \$1.3 billion investment is about lifting our national rail network to a resilient and reliable standard. "It is enabling KiwiRail to take on around 150 new track staff, including a pipeline of trainees, and

will also support numerous civil contracting firms and material suppliers. There will be work happening across every region, supporting jobs and the economic recovery across the country. "It's a no brainer to rescue rail from the state of managed decline the previous government left it in. It's worth up to \$2.1 billion to our economy and every year it prevents 2.5 million tonnes of CO2 emissions and 26 million car trips in Auckland and Wellington," Michael Wood said.

From <https://livenews.co.nz> 07/08/2021

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Tourism Support Package Continues Rollout

Mental wellbeing support is being rolled out to five South Island communities most affected by the absence of international tourists. Tourism Minister Stuart Nash today announced details of how tourism operators and communities can access the help announced in May as part of the government's \$200 million Tourism Communities: Support, Recovery and Re-set Plan. "Agreements have now been put in place with District Health Boards in the lower South Island to deliver this crucial support to regional communities," Stuart Nash said. "The \$4.5 million investment allows DHBs to provide support in Kaikōura (Canterbury DHB), Mackenzie District (South Canterbury DHB), Queenstown Lakes and Fiordland (Southern DHB), and Westland (West Coast DHB). "The DHBs will provide a range of mental well-being services and initiatives at a local level. They will work with communities to decide what's needed and how it's delivered.

"Businesses, workers and their families in our tourism destinations are facing challenges from border closures designed to keep New Zealand safe. The support in the Tourism Communities Plan allows decisions about wellbeing resources and services to be made by those at the heart of the communities themselves." Mr Nash also said work on further business support initiatives in the five communities is progressing, and more information about eligibility criteria is available. "Each community now has a lead entity to manage the business support services, and recruitment is underway locally to support them. The initiatives include business advisory support, a grant to implement the advice, and a kick-start fund. They are on track to be available from later next month. "We want access to this support to be easy for businesses to tap into. Businesses will be talking to one person locally about what support is right for them. I encourage businesses in the five communities to check their eligibility criteria on the MBIE website," Stuart Nash said.

More information is available on the Tourism Recovery section of the MBIE website. The business support initiatives are: \$10 million Business Advisory Support fund (up to \$5,000 per business) to enable businesses to receive expert advice and support such as changing target market, or scaling their business. \$10 million in grants for businesses to implement business advice (up to \$5,000 per business). \$49 million Tourism Kick-start Fund, to contribute towards existing tourism businesses scaling

back up for the return of international visitors. The grant will be calculated based on two weeks of pre-COVID revenue set at two weeks of average revenue for 2019.

From <https://livenews.co.nz> 07/15/2021

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Govt Delivers More Classrooms so Children Can Focus on Learning

Extra Government investment in classrooms and school building projects will enable students and teachers to focus on education rather than overcrowding as school rolls grow across the country, Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern and Associate Education Minister Kelvin Davis say. The pair visited Ruakākā School in Whangārei today to announce \$100 million for Short Term Roll Growth classrooms at schools across New Zealand, and announce the first school to benefit from a \$150 million top up for shovel ready school property projects. “We have committed to ensuring all schools have access to quality learning environments and this is us delivering on that promise,” Jacinda Ardern said. “All children deserve a suitable classroom to learn in and it is our responsibility to ensure they have that so they can get the best possible education opportunities.

“School property investment also represents an injection into the economy as our recovery from COVID continues, with projects announced today estimated to create more than 200 employment opportunities,” Jacinda Ardern said. Ruakākā School will get two extra classrooms as part of the Short-Term Roll Growth programme, “Schools across Aotearoa are growing, and Te Tai Tokerau is no exception,” Kelvin Davis said. “It is important that we provide them with the classrooms they need, so they can focus on teaching and learning,” Kelvin Davis said. The \$150 million shovel ready funding will top up existing school property projects that were ready to enter construction but needed a boost so that delivery could start in a challenging market. The additional funding will address cost escalation or other pressures to ensure that project delivery is not delayed.

Kamo High School, also in Whangārei, will receive almost \$7 million top up for a major redevelopment of a main teaching block. The project replaces two end of life teaching blocks with a single two-storey teaching block providing 22 classrooms. At the end of the programme, Kamo High School will have capacity for 1,000 students. A summary of projects announced today: Almost \$7.0 million for a shovel ready project at Kamo High School; More than \$4.0 million for seven Short Term Roll Growth (STRG) classrooms at four schools: Ruakākā School – two short term roll growth classrooms Oruaiti School – one short term roll growth classroom Te Rangi Aniwaniwa – two short term roll growth classrooms Whangārei Intermediate – two short term roll growth classrooms

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5、 Public Finance

Asia-Pacific

World Bank Prices CAD 600 Million Sustainable Development Bond

The World Bank (International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, IBRD, Aaa/AAA) today priced a 5-year CAD 600 million Sustainable Development Bond that matures on July 22, 2026. World Bank bonds support the financing of a combination of green and social projects, programs, and activities for sustainable development in IBRD member countries. Each project is designed intentionally to achieve positive social and environmental impacts in line with the World Bank's goals of eliminating extreme poverty and promoting shared prosperity. The 5-year benchmark transaction pays a semi-annual coupon of 1.200% p.a. and has an issue price of 99.792% and a final spread of +29.90 bps over the 0.250% CAN March 2026 reference bond, offering investors a yield of 1.243% (semi-annual). Joint lead managers for this transaction are BMO Capital Markets, RBC Capital Markets, Scotiabank, and TD Securities. **Jingdong Hua, Vice President and Treasurer, World Bank**, said: *"We are pleased to be back in the Canadian market early in our fiscal year. This funding is critical as we continue to support countries to strengthen health systems, access and deploy vaccines, protect the poor and vulnerable, and restore economic growth. We thank Canadian investors for their ongoing support."*

Investor Distribution

By Geography		By Investor Type
Americas	6 3 %	Banks/Bank Treasuries/Corporates
Europe/Middle East/Africa	2 3 %	Asset Managers/Insurance/Pension Funds
Asia	1 4 %	Central Banks/Official Institutions

Sean Hayes, Head of US Syndicate & Credit Sales, BMO Capital Markets, said: *"World Bank continues to demonstrate unwavering commitment to Canadian dollar primary markets to start its new fiscal year, with this deal representing its tenth consecutive fiscal year issuing a benchmark-sized CAD transaction. The World Bank's presence has cultivated growth across high-grade capital markets for sustainable investment in Canada and continues to draw strong domestic and international support. BMO is a proud partner"*. **Cesare Roselli, Global Head of**

SSA (Sovereign, Supranational, and Agency) Origination, Scotiabank, said: “Scotiabank is proud to have acted as bookrunner in the World Bank’s 5-year CAD 600 million Sustainable Development Bond, its first CAD-denominated transaction of the 2022 fiscal year, issued to support the financing of a combination of green and social projects, programs, and activities in member countries. The transaction resulted in strong involvement of the domestic ESG investment community in Canada and underscored the exceptional support that the World Bank enjoys in that jurisdiction”.

Jigme Shingsar, Managing Director, RBC Capital Markets, said: “The World Bank’s return to the CAD market reflects a consistent strategy of adding liquidity in key markets while fostering the continued development of the global market for sustainable development and ESG bonds. The third World Bank CAD Sustainable Development Bond of 2021 once again captured a very high-quality order book that reflected continued gains in distribution into Canadian investors which bodes well for the long-term development of the market for SSA borrowers in Canada”. **Sameer Rehman, Director, Government Finance, TD Securities,** said: “The World Bank continues to prove it is the pre-eminent Maple issuer by establishing another benchmark reference point in its well-defined curve with today’s new 5-year offering. With over CAD 11 billion now outstanding in the Maple market, the World Bank has strategically positioned itself to capture the full spectrum of currently active CAD investors, leading to a high quality orderbook. We are delighted to have been involved in this transaction, which once again reflects the global recognition of the World Bank name”.

Transaction Summary

Issuer:	World Bank (International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, IBRD)
Issuer rating:	Aaa/AAA (Moody’s/S&P)
Amount:	CAD 600,000,000
Settlement date:	July 22, 2021
Maturity date:	July 22, 2026
Issue price:	99.792%
Issue yield:	1.243% semi-annually
Coupon:	1.200% per annum
Denomination:	CAD 1,000
Listing:	Luxembourg Stock Exchange
ISIN:	CA459058JY02
Clearing system:	CDS, Clearstream, Euroclear
Joint lead managers:	BMO Capital Markets, RBC Capital Markets, Scotiabank, TD Securities

From <https://www.worldbank.org/> 07/13/2021

World Bank Catastrophe Bond Provides Jamaica \$185 Million in Storm Protection

The World Bank (International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, or IBRD) priced a catastrophe bond that will provide the Government of Jamaica with financial protection of up to US\$185 million against losses from named storms for three Atlantic tropical cyclone seasons ending in December 2023. The government of Jamaica is the first government in the Caribbean region, and the first of any small island state, to independently sponsor a catastrophe bond, also known as a cat bond. Jamaica was one of the sixteen countries in the Caribbean Catastrophe Risk Insurance Facility that benefitted from IBRD's first ever cat bond in 2014. The bonds were issued under IBRD's "capital at risk" notes program, which can be used to transfer risks related to natural disasters and other risks from developing countries to the capital markets. Payouts to Jamaica will be triggered when a named storm event meets the parametric criteria for location and severity set forth in the bond terms. The transaction includes an innovative reporting feature resulting in a quick payout calculation, within weeks of a qualifying named storm. It is also the first cat bond to use an innovative cat-in-a grid parametric trigger design for tropical cyclone risk.

Jingdong Hua, Vice President and Treasurer, World Bank, said, "We are pleased to be able to support this transaction and bring together so many different partners all committed to strengthening Jamaica's resilience to tropical cyclones. We especially thank the capital market investors for their support and participating in this important mission." Carlos Felipe Jaramillo, Vice President for Latin America and Caribbean, World Bank, said, "The Caribbean region is vulnerable to climate related events and we know how important it is to protect the welfare of the people in the region. We are proud to support Jamaica in reducing risks associated with these kinds of events." Dr. The Hon. Nigel Clarke, Minister of Finance and the Public Service, Government of Jamaica, said, "The Government of Jamaica has strategically prioritized Disaster Risk Financing to mitigate the adverse fiscal impact of tropical cyclones and natural disasters, thereby strengthening Jamaica's economic resilience. We are pleased with the successful placement of this catastrophe bond, which adds an indispensable layer of disaster risk financing that complements our multi-layered approach. In this transaction, Jamaica benefited from the vast technical resources of the World Bank, and from the strength of its balance sheet. We are also grateful to our bilateral partners, the Governments of the United Kingdom and Germany, through the Global Risk Financing Facility, and to the United States through the United States Agency of International Development who provided financial support for the transaction."

Jamaica is highly exposed to tropical cyclone events which pose a significant threat to Jamaica's macroeconomic outlook. The Government of Jamaica has taken a proactive approach to developing financial, physical and social resilience against

disasters, and is being supported by the World Bank through various financing instruments and technical assistance. The cat bond complements Jamaica's portfolio of disaster risk financing instruments and builds on intensive World Bank engagement, including the preparation of catastrophe risk model and analytics for Jamaica and the adoption of a Disaster Risk Finance Strategy by the Government of Jamaica. The cat bond transaction received financial support from the United States through the United States Agency for International Development, the World Bank's Disaster Protection Program funded by the United Kingdom, as well as the Global Risk Financing Facility (GRiF). The GRiF, implemented by the Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery (GFDRR) and the World Bank's Disaster Risk Financing and Insurance Program and is supported by Germany and the United Kingdom to provide grants to strengthen the financial resilience of vulnerable countries through establishing or scaling-up pre-arranged risk financing instruments.

Dr. Heike Henn, Director Climate and Energy, Sustainable Urban Development, Environment, German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, said, "We are pleased to have contributed to this important milestone in strengthening Jamaica's economic resilience to climate risks. Our support is an integral part of our efforts within the InsuResilience Global Partnership, whose vision is to strengthen the resilience of developing countries and protect the lives and livelihoods of poor and vulnerable people against the impacts of climate and disaster risks. It also shows how important it is that the Partnership brings together governments, civil society, international organizations, the private sector, and academia. Only together we will be able to meet the challenges of climate change."

Asif Ahmad, the British High Commissioner to Jamaica, said, "The United Kingdom stands in solidarity with countries on the frontline of climate change, especially Small Island States like Jamaica which are particularly vulnerable. That is why we have used our Presidencies of the G7 and COP this year to advance the use of innovative financing for resilience. We congratulate Jamaica on this new catastrophe bond, which will ensure that funds are available rapidly for early response and recovery after hurricanes. The UK is delighted to have supported this work through the Global Risk Financing Facility, alongside our G7 partners Germany and the United States, as well as the World Bank." Jason Fraser, Jamaica Country Representative, United States Agency for International Development, said, "This bond solidifies USAID's and the United States Government commitment to support innovative disaster financing mechanisms that provide financial reserves in the wake of natural disasters. In the end, this will enable Jamaica to finance its own recovery from natural disasters and reduce recovery costs. This agreement is an important step in the longstanding partnership between Jamaica and the United States and our growing engagement with the Caribbean region as our neighbor, partner and friend."

Aon Securities and Swiss Re Capital Markets are joint structuring agents and joint bookrunners for the transaction. AIR Worldwide is the risk modeler and calculation

agent. Paul Schultz, CEO, AON Securities, said, "Aon Securities is pleased to partner with the World Bank to help the Government of Jamaica bring this landmark transaction to the capital markets. We recognize the potential for natural disaster events to have a significant impact on the country, and we are excited to help establish this protection to help Jamaica build a stronger social safety net and a more resilient economy for its citizens." Jean-Louis Monnier, Managing Director and Head of Retro & ILS Structuring, Swiss Re Capital Markets, said, "Swiss Re Capital Markets is proud to have partnered with the World Bank and the Government of Jamaica to successfully bring the nation's first catastrophe bond issuance to market. This ground-breaking transaction features innovative payout mechanics which provide Jamaica with faster access to disaster relief funds following a triggering event. As such, it embodies Swiss Re's mission to make the world more resilient."

From <https://www.worldbank.org/> 07/19/2021

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World Bank Group's \$157 Billion Pandemic Surge Is Largest Crisis Response in Its History

In response to COVID-19 severely damaging the lives and livelihoods of millions of people in developing countries, the World Bank Group deployed over \$157 billion to fight the pandemic's health, economic, and social impacts over the last 15 months (April 1, 2020 – June 30, 2021). This is the largest crisis response of any such period in the Bank Group's history and represents an increase of more than 60% over the 15-month period prior to the pandemic. Bank Group commitments and mobilizations in fiscal year 2021 (FY21) alone (July 1, 2020 – June 30, 2021) amounted to almost \$110 billion (or \$84 billion excluding mobilization, short-term financing, and recipient-executed trust funds). Since the start of the pandemic, the Bank Group supported countries to address the health emergency, strengthen health systems, protect the poor and vulnerable, support businesses, create jobs and jump start a green, resilient, and inclusive recovery.

Following last year's COVID-related economic deterioration, the global economy is expected to expand 5.6% in 2021. Thus far, the recovery is uneven and many of the world's poorest countries are being left behind. While about 90% of advanced economies are expected to regain their pre-pandemic per capita income levels by 2022, only about one-third of emerging market and developing economies are projected to do the same. In 2020, global extreme poverty rose for the first time in over 20 years, with nearly 100 million people pushed into extreme poverty. *"Since the start of the pandemic, the World Bank Group has committed or mobilized a record \$157 billion in new financing, an unprecedented level of support for an unprecedented crisis,"* said **World Bank Group President David Malpass**. *"We will continue to provide critical assistance to developing countries through this ongoing pandemic to help achieve a more broad-based economic recovery. The Bank Group has proven to be a rapid, innovative, and effective platform to support developing*

countries as they respond to the pandemic and strengthen resilience for future shocks. But we must do more still. I remain deeply concerned about limited availability of vaccines for developing countries, which are critical to save lives and livelihoods.”

World Bank Group	World Bank Group Commitments (in U.S. billions)		
	Q4-FY20	FY21*	15-mo ending June 21*
IBRD	15.1	30.5	45.6
IDA	17.2	36.1	53.3
IFC	11.2	31.5	42.7
<i>Long-term finance (own account)</i>	4.9	12.5	17.4
<i>Mobilization</i>	4.1	10.8	14.9
<i>Short-term finance</i>	2.2	8.2	10.4
MIGA	2.4	5.2	7.6
Recipient-executed trust funds (RETF)	1.5	6.4	7.9
TOTAL (excluding short-term mobilization, and RETF)	39.6	84.3	123.9
TOTAL (including short-term finance, mobilization and RETF)	47.4	109.7	157.1

*Preliminary and unaudited numbers as of July 14.

In the 15 months ending June 30, 2021, the Bank Group stretched its balance sheets, accelerated leveraging and disbursements, and front-loaded resources. Support to countries from the **International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD)** totaled \$45.6 billion – including drawing down IBRD’s \$10 billion crisis buffer in addition to Board-approved sustainable annual lending limits. Grants and zero or low-interest loans to the world’s poorest countries from the **International Development Association (IDA)** amounted to \$53.3 billion. To meet increased financing needs, the World Bank fully used all remaining IDA18 resources in FY20 and frontloaded about half of all the three-year envelope of IDA19 resources in FY21. In February 2021, IDA donor and borrower country representatives agreed to advance IDA20 by 12 months to enable continued surge financing in the coming years. In addition, over the same 15 months, the **International Finance Corporation (IFC)**, the Bank Group’s private sector development arm, reached a record high of \$42.7 billion in financing, including short-term finance (\$10.4 billion) and mobilization (\$14.9 billion), 37% of which was

in low-income and fragile and conflict-affected states. IFC provided liquidity for businesses to remain in operation, while ramping up investments in companies on the frontlines of the pandemic response. To address the COVID-induced increase in the trade gap, IFC has expanded its trade and supply chain finance activities. IFC's "Upstream" work continues to create the conditions to attract much-needed private investment to some of the world's most difficult places and preparing the ground for a faster private sector recovery.

Despite a challenging year for borrowers and financial markets, IDA doubled the amount it raised last fiscal year from investors, reaching almost \$10 billion. IBRD raised \$68 billion, by mobilizing financing from investors around the globe. IBRD and IDA, both rated AAA/Aaa, raised awareness for a variety of development themes to successfully mobilize finance for sustainable development. The year also included innovations such as a unique \$100 million five-year bond issued by IBRD to support the global response to COVID-19 through UNICEF. IFC, also rated AAA/Aaa, issued close to \$13 billion in bonds for private sector development and job creation in emerging markets. The **Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency (MIGA)**, whose mandate is to drive impactful foreign direct investment to developing countries, issued \$7.6 billion in new guarantees over the same 15-month period since the onset of the pandemic, of which 19% supported projects in IDA countries and fragile settings. In FY21, the World Bank Group's climate finance totaled over \$26 billion, it's largest year of climate finance ever (25% above FY20, which was itself also a record). The new **Climate Change Action Plan** for 2021-2025 aims to integrate climate and development goals, and commits 35% of Bank Group financing to climate, on average, over the next five years, with at least 50% of World Bank climate finance supporting adaptation. In the same time frame, the Bank Group will align financing with the goals of the Paris Agreement, while helping client countries meet their Paris commitments, including supporting and implementation of development of their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and Long-Term Strategies.

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World Bank Accountability Mechanism Secretary Begins Work

World Bank Accountability Mechanism (AM) Secretary Orsolya Székely began work this week with an immediate focus on developing the AM's operating procedures and the details of its dispute resolution process. The AM was established by the World Bank's Board of Executive Directors in 2020 during its review of the Inspection Panel toolkit to reinforce the Bank's accountability framework. It houses both the Panel and a soon-to-be-operational Dispute Resolution Service (DRS). The Panel was created by the Board in 1993 as the World Bank's original independent accountability mechanism and responds to community complaints that the Bank has not complied

with its environmental and social policies and procedures in projects that it funds. The Dispute Resolution Service will begin operations in the near future and facilitate a voluntary, independent and time-bound dispute resolution option for complainants and borrowers in the context of complaints to the Panel. “As I assume my duties, there is much work to do,” said Székely, whose appointment as AM Secretary was announced in early May. “We will focus immediately on creating operating procedures for the Accountability Mechanism that are fully responsive to potential complaints and establishing the operational details of the dispute-resolution process.”

Székely, a Hungarian national, has more than 20 years’ experience working with a broad range of multilateral organizations and the private sector. In her most recent position, holding the rank of Ambassador, Székely served as the Senior Advisor and Coordinator in the Executive Office of the Secretary General, with responsibility for enhancing good governance at the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe. Among the AM Secretary’s duties are establishing and managing the Accountability Mechanism’s work program, budget and staffing, and overseeing the functioning of the DRS. The AM Secretary and Inspection Panel Members report to the Board. “I very much look forward to working with members of the Inspection Panel and the AM staff to provide accountability for project-affected communities in support of the World Bank’s twin goals of ending extreme poverty and boosting shared prosperity,” Székely said. “This strengthened accountability mechanism is a positive development for all of our stakeholders and I also look forward to building a strong relationship with them, including those in civil society.”

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World Bank Approves New Reference Rates for Existing and New Loans in Preparation for End of LIBOR

The World Bank's Board of Executive Directors today approved modifications for new and existing loans that will switch over to new market reference rates in preparation for the global transition away from the London Interbank Offered Rate (LIBOR). The modifications imply changes to the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) and the International Development Association (IDA) new and existing loans. The alternative reference rates will be Secured Overnight Financing Rate (SOFR) for USD-denominated loans, Sterling Overnight Index Average (SONIA) for GBP-denominated loans, and Tokyo Overnight Average Rate (TONA) for JPY-denominated loans. EURIBOR will remain the reference rate for EUR-denominated loans.

NEW LOANS:

Effective from January 1, 2022, New variable-spread loans IBRD Flexible Loans (IFLs) will be offered in

USD based on the Secured Overnight Financing Rate (SOFR);
GBP based on the Sterling Overnight Index Average (SONIA); and
JPY based on the Tokyo Overnight Average Rate (TONA).

The decision comes after the Board of Executive Directors approval on January 26, 2021 to suspend the offering of the fixed-spread loans.

EXISTING LOANS:

Variable-spread

Reference rates for variable-spread loans will be replaced with the same reference rates listed above: SOFR for USD loans; SONIA for GBP loans, TONA for JPY loans. For existing variable-spread loans in EUR LIBOR, the reference rate will be replaced with EURIBOR, effective January 1, 2022.

Fixed-spread

Reference rates for fixed-spread loans in GBP, JPY and EUR will be replaced with the same reference rates listed above effective January 1, 2022. Reference rates for fixed-spread loans in USD will be replaced with SOFR, effective July 1, 2023. The adoption of new reference rates for new and existing loans by the World Bank follows the timetable established by LIBOR's regulator, the United Kingdom Financial Conduct Authority, for LIBOR discontinuation. The approved modifications will allow the World Bank to continue serving its clients with the financial model that is mutually beneficial to the Bank and its borrowers.

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World Bank Prices Tap of Ten-Year SOFR Index Linked Bond

The World Bank (International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, IBRD, Aaa/AAA) has raised an additional USD 900 million for its February 2031 bond referencing the Secured Overnight Financing Rate (SOFR) Index, bringing the new outstanding amount to USD 1.5 billion. The first tranche of this SOFR index transaction was issued in February 2021 and with this tap it becomes the market's largest bond in the ten-year sector that references SOFR. This reopening responds to investor demand for high quality assets and reflects IBRD's commitment to bolster the floating rate market linked to SOFR. SOFR is a rate based on transactions in the U.S. Treasury repurchase market and an alternative reference rate to USD LIBOR. The bond matures on February 11, 2031 and pays a coupon of Compounded SOFR + 37 basis points (resetting daily and paid quarterly). Citi, Credit Agricole and Wells Fargo Securities were the joint lead managers of the transaction. *"We are extremely pleased that the World Bank could add liquidity to the market by tapping an existing bond. This gives investors another opportunity to gain access to the long end of the SOFR curve,"* said **Jingdong Hua, Vice President and Treasurer, World Bank**. *"At now USD 1.5 billion, this SOFR bond is the largest available at the 10-year part of the yield curve and helps advance the development of the SOFR market."*

Investor Distribution

By Geography		By Investor Type	
Americas	7	Banks/Bank Treasuries	
	6		
	%		
EMEA	2	Asset Managers	
	1		
	%		
Asia	3		
	%		

Transaction Summary

Issuer:	World Bank (International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, IBRD)
Issuer rating:	Aaa /AAA
Tenor:	10-year
Notional amount (after tap):	USD 1.5 billion
Reoffer price:	100.285%
Settlement date:	July 29, 2021
Maturity date:	February 11, 2031
Coupon:	Compounded SOFR + 37bps
Compounded SOFR:	Calculated on the basis of the evolution of the value of the SOFR Index from the SOFR Index _{Start} value date to, but excluding, the SOFR Index _{End} value date with regard to the relevant interest period
Coupon payment dates:	Paid quarterly on February 11, May 11, August 11, and November 11 of each year, from and including August 11, 2021, to and including the maturity date
Listing:	Luxembourg Stock Exchange
Clearing systems:	Fedwire, Euroclear, Clearstream
ISIN:	US459058JU87
Joint lead managers:	Citi, Credit Agricole and Wells Fargo Securities

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Amid Ongoing Pandemic, World Bank Support to Middle East and North Africa Exceeds US\$4.75 Billion in Fiscal Year 2021

The World Bank's global response to the COVID-19 pandemic has been designed to help save lives and livelihoods for the poorest and most vulnerable while safeguarding the prospects for sustainable growth in developing countries. In the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, the Bank's support is helping countries respond to immediate needs arising from the pandemic including securing vaccines

while simultaneously strengthening health, education, and social protection systems. In parallel, World Bank financial support and technical assistance are helping bolster the resilience to economic and environmental shocks facing MENA countries. In the fiscal year ending June 30, 2021, new commitments in MENA totaled US\$3.98 billion from the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, which supports middle-income countries; US\$658 million from the International Development Association, the Bank's fund for the world's poorest countries; and US\$114 million for the Palestinian Authority.

"The pandemic has put the region's already strained resilience to the test and has taken a devastating toll on people across MENA. It has also heightened the urgency for decisionmakers to undertake further reforms to address long-standing development challenges in their countries," said Ferid Belhaj, World Bank Vice President for the Middle East and North Africa. "The World Bank's response is helping countries and their people cope with the ongoing health, social, and economic impacts of the crisis, but much more needs to be done. We remain committed to working with countries in the region as they continue to combat the pandemic and address their immediate priorities in climate mitigation and water resources management to forge a green, resilient, and inclusive development path."

This year, the World Bank approved 35 new operations in the MENA region, including those focused on the COVID-19 response – across health, business and social safety net systems – as well as those focused on climate-smart investments for a resilient recovery. Operations included US\$200 million in Egypt for initiatives to reduce air pollution in Greater Cairo; a US\$500 million operation in Jordan to spur climate-smart public and private investment and help accelerate recovery, create more jobs, and strengthen green growth opportunities; and a US\$250 million operation in Morocco to support the economic inclusion of youth in rural areas and improve the marketing efficiency and environmental sustainability of agri-food value chains. In Tunisia, the Bank provided US\$300 million for cash transfers for approximately one million vulnerable households and over 100,000 children. In Yemen, a further US\$203.9 million in grants strengthened emergency social protection, by targeting food-insecure households through a cash transfer program.

In addition to health systems strengthening, the Bank also responded to requests for support for COVID-19 vaccines. Financing for vaccines included a reallocation of US\$34 million for citizens and refugees in Lebanon—the first World Bank-financed operation for the procurement and distribution of the vaccine anywhere. The Bank also approved support for COVID-19 vaccination programs in Tunisia (US\$100 million), and additional financing, including co-financing, for Jordan (US\$63.5 million) and Yemen (US\$20 million). The impact of the pandemic on the region has been exacerbated by other crises, such as volatile oil prices and growing unrest and fragility in some countries. The World Bank worked with the United Nations and the European Union on damage and needs assessments immediately after the Port of

Beirut explosion in August 2020 and the violence in Gaza in May 2021. A multi-donor trust fund was also set up in Lebanon to kickstart the immediate recovery of vulnerable populations and businesses and support the government's efforts to catalyze reforms and prepare for medium-term recovery and reconstruction.

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\$16.4 Billion in Cofinancing in 2020 Expanded ADB's COVID-19 Response

Bilateral, multilateral, and private sector partners joined the Asian Development Bank's (ADB) rapid response to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) in 2020 through record high cofinancing of \$16.4 billion. "Since early 2020, ADB has been working intensely with our partners to help our developing member countries respond to the unprecedented challenges brought by the COVID-19 pandemic," ADB President Masatsugu Asakawa said today at the launch of the ADB Partnership Report 2020: Responsive Partners, Resilient Communities. "Looking ahead, we will need to focus our support on ensuring a green, resilient, and inclusive recovery as the pandemic recedes. This will involve support to countries so that they can pursue low-carbon development trajectories and address job losses and increased inequalities due to the pandemic, including the disproportionate impact of the crisis on women and girls." From the earliest stages of the pandemic, ADB has assisted its developing member countries' response. In April 2020, ADB announced a \$20 billion package of assistance and designed new delivery tools that allowed partners to contribute to budget support critically needed by governments. In addition, some partners redirected previously committed funds to COVID-19-related operations.

Cofinancing for sovereign operations reached \$11.1 billion in 2020, more than double 2019's \$5.4 billion, according to the partnership report. Three quarters, or \$8.2 billion, of sovereign cofinancing was directed at the pandemic response. Nonsovereign, or private sector, cofinancing amounted to \$5.3 billion in 2020, with short-term operations such as supply chain and trade finance support accounting for \$3.1 billion. The pandemic response attracted \$2.6 billion of nonsovereign cofinancing. The Partnership Report 2020 details ADB's work with more than 50 financing partners on more than 200 projects and illustrates how these collaborations aligned with, and contributed to, the seven operational priorities of ADB's Strategy 2030. The report features stories and videos of current and concluded projects that are helping to improve millions of lives in Asia and the Pacific.

From <https://www.adb.org/> 07/08/2021

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ADB, Australia Helping to Strengthen Public Financial Management in Pacific

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the Government of Australia have approved an additional \$2.39 million in technical assistance support to continue public sector management reforms in the Pacific as it recovers from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. ADB is providing \$2 million and Australia \$390,000 (in equivalent A\$500,000) in additional financing to the program which was established in June 2020 to support the Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Niue, Samoa, Tonga, and Tuvalu. "The additional financing from the Government of Australia is highly appreciated and will be used to expand the scope of the assistance to Fiji where reforms will focus on strengthening public financial management practices in Fiji," said Regional Director of ADB's Pacific Subregional Office in Fiji Masayuki Tachiiri. ADB's additional financing will provide targeted assistance on specialized areas including economic modelling, revenue diversification, fiscal adjustment plans, and economic recovery road maps, supporting the countries' efforts for economic recovery from COVID-19. The program will run until 2024 and was originally funded with \$1.5 million from ADB and \$650,000 from the Government of New Zealand.

Among its achievements, the program has helped to prepare an economic and social impact assessment of COVID-19 on the Tongan economy, which supported the country's efforts to develop economic and social protections to manage the impact on the community, while monitoring the impact of the stimulus package. In Kiribati, the program helped to develop guidelines and templates for in-year fiscal update reporting and a tracking and monitoring tool for the management of state-owned enterprises. In the Cook Islands and Kiribati, the assistance was used to develop guidelines on medium-term planning and economic modelling and deliver training to build the capacity of central oversight agencies on macroeconomic and fiscal management.

From <https://www.adb.org/> 07/20/2021

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East Asia

CHINA: To Steadily Advance Digital Yuan Pilots

China's central bank on Friday released a white paper on the progress of the country's digital fiat currency, the e-CNY, saying that it will steadily push forward pilot schemes of its digital yuan. The e-CNY is the digital version of the fiat currency issued by the People's Bank of China (PBOC). It is a value-based, quasi-account-based and account-based hybrid payment instrument with legal tender status and loosely coupled account linkage, the white paper clarified, adding that the e-CNY is "mainly a substitute" for cash in circulation and will coexist with physical yuan.

PURPOSE OF DEVELOPMENT

As the digital economy develops, the share of transactions made using cash is rapidly declining in China. Meanwhile, a variety of so-called cryptocurrencies such as Bitcoin pose potential risks to financial security and social stability, given their lack of intrinsic value, acute price fluctuations, low trading efficiencies and huge energy consumption, the white paper noted. In many countries and regions, central banks or monetary authorities have kept a close eye on fintech development and sought to digitalize fiat currency. The development of the e-CNY system in China aims to create a new form of RMB that meets the public demand for cash in the digital economy era. "Supported by a retail payment infrastructure that is reliable, efficient, adaptive and open, the e-CNY system will bolster China's digital economy, enhance financial inclusion, and make the monetary and payment systems more efficient," read the white paper.

PROGRESS

As the top-level design, functional development, and system testing have been basically completed, the PBOC has so far initiated pilot programs in certain representative regions. It has ensured the programs run in a steady, safe, managed, innovative and practical manner. The PBOC began its e-CNY research and development (R&D) project at the end of 2017. Large commercial banks, telecom operators and internet companies with significant assets, large market shares and strengths in technology development were selected to participate in the project. Since the end of 2019, the PBOC has launched e-CNY pilot programs in Shenzhen, Suzhou, Xiong'an and Chengdu. Since November 2020, Shanghai, Hainan, Changsha, Xi'an, Qingdao and Dalian have joined the pilot programs. As of June 30, 2021, the e-CNY has been applied to over 1.32 million scenarios, covering utility payments, catering services, transportation, shopping and government services. More than 20.87 million personal wallets and over 3.51 million corporate wallets have been opened, with a total of 70.75 million transactions and a transaction value totaling approximately 34.5 billion yuan (about 5.33 billion U.S. dollars).

FUTURE OUTLOOK

In the future, the PBOC will continue to prudently advance the pilot e-CNY R&D project in line with China's 14th Five-Year Plan, with no preset timetable for the final launch. Efforts will focus on areas including expanding test scenarios to cover all possible scenarios in selected pilot regions, optimizing the e-CNY ecosystem, and improving relevant institutional arrangements and rules, the white paper noted. Though technically ready for cross-border use, the e-CNY is currently mainly designed for domestic retail payments. "Looking ahead, the PBOC will actively respond to initiatives of the G20 and other international organizations to improve cross-border payments, and explore the applicability of the central bank digital currency in cross-border scenarios," read the paper. It will also work with relevant central banks and monetary authorities to establish exchange arrangements and regulatory cooperation mechanisms on the digital fiat currency, the paper noted.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 07/16/2021

China to Explore E-CNY Cross-border Payment Programs: Central Bank

China in the future will explore pilot cross-border payment programs of the country's digital fiat currency or e-CNY, the central bank said Friday. Though technically ready for cross-border use, e-CNY is currently designed mainly for domestic retail payments, the People's Bank of China (PBOC) said in its white paper on the progress of e-CNY in the country. "Looking ahead, the PBOC will actively respond to initiatives of G20 and other international organizations on improving cross-border payments, and explore the applicability of central bank digital currency in cross-border scenarios," said the paper. The PBOC will explore pilot cross-border payment programs based on experience of domestic trials and international demand, and preconditioned on mutual respect for monetary sovereignty and compliance, the paper noted. It will also work with relevant central banks and monetary authorities to set up exchange arrangements and regulatory cooperation mechanisms on digital fiat currency, said the paper.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 07/16/2021

JAPAN: To Carry Over Record ¥30 Trillion from FY2020 Budget

A record ¥30 trillion in the government's fiscal 2020 budget is expected to be carried over to the current fiscal year. The government compiled three huge supplementary budgets to mitigate negative effects of the coronavirus pandemic, but one-fifth of the total will be carried over as the funds went unused. Carryover is usually less than ¥5 trillion, and the latest figure is far greater than the previous record of ¥7.6 trillion in fiscal 2012 compiled following the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake. With the three supplementary budgets, total general account expenditures in fiscal 2020 ballooned to ¥175.7 trillion, 70% more than the initial budget of ¥102.7 trillion compiled prior to the coronavirus outbreak. The national budget should in principle be used by the end of the fiscal year, and the Public Finance Law allows carryover to the next fiscal year only for unavoidable reasons, such as natural disasters.

Eyeing the House of Representatives election that must be held by autumn, the ruling coalition is likely to call for a large-scale economic stimulus package that uses the funds. "The coronavirus is a series of unpredictable events," said a senior official at the Finance Ministry. "A sufficient budget was needed to reassure the public." The largest source of the funds comes from about ¥6.4 trillion in economic assistance targeting public and private financial institutions that provide interest-free and unsecured loans. Loans from government-affiliated financial institutions to companies suffering amid the pandemic have not reached expected levels. In addition, about ¥5 trillion in special subsidies to local governments will be carried

forward. The funds were earmarked to assist restaurants that have shortened their business hours as requested by the government, but prefectural governments were too busy to distribute the relief money in time.

Carryover occurred in other subsidies as well. An emergency support fund for medical institutions to secure beds for COVID-19 patients carried over ¥1.5 trillion. The Go To Travel tourism promotion campaign, which was halted because of the pandemic, saw ¥1.3 trillion moved forward. While many government officials consider such a large amount of carryover as temporary, there are concerns that assessment and screening for budget monies will become lax if the move becomes a yearly trend. Repeated supplementary budgets have already worsened the government's fiscal condition. The central and local governments' cumulative long-term debts are expected to reach ¥1.209 quadrillion at the end of fiscal 2021, the worst among major economies. Many in the ruling coalition are anticipating a ¥30 trillion economic stimulus package. However, the Finance Ministry is increasingly wary of issuing additional bonds. "The government should make effective use of carryover funds and curb the supplementary budget as much as possible so as not to increase expenditures," said Keio University Prof. Takeru Doi.

From <https://the-japan-news.com> 07/26/2021

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SOUTH KOREA: To Expand Tax Incentives, Lift More Regulations for Chip Biz

South Korea said Thursday it plans to offer more tax incentives and lift more regulations for chipmakers in line with its vision to become a global powerhouse in both memory and non-memory chips. The country is seeking to have major research and development (R&D) projects and facility investment in the chip sector receive incentives through a law revision, according to the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy. The proposed bill on expanded tax incentives and eased regulations, a follow-up measure of a new blueprint announced in May, will be submitted to the parliament by September, the ministry said. In May, South Korea unveiled the so-called K-semiconductor blueprint, seeking to provide massive tax incentives and state subsidies to chipmakers in order to encourage them to spend a combined 510 trillion won by 2030, in line with its vision to become a global powerhouse in both memory and non-memory chips. Through such efforts, South Korea aims to double its annual outbound shipments of chips to reach a whopping \$200 billion in 2030 from \$99.2 billion tallied in 2020. Chips are a major export product for Asia's No. 4 economy, taking up roughly 20 percent of the total outbound shipments. While South Korea is one of the leading countries in terms of memory chips, it has been lagging behind peers in the non-memory segment. Accordingly, the country has been making efforts to expand R&D projects in such areas.

From <https://en.yna.co.kr> 07/01/2021

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S. Korea to Pump Up Efforts to Curb Growth of National Debt Finance Minister

South Korea's top economic policymaker said Tuesday the country will step up efforts to curb the growth of its national debt in a bid to improve the fiscal soundness. Finance Minister Hong Nam-ki made the remarks during his online meeting Monday with James McCormack, managing director at global rating agency Fitch Ratings. South Korea on Wednesday launched its annual consultation meetings with Fitch over the country's economic situations and its growth outlook. The meetings will be run until Thursday. Hong said South Korea's fiscal health remains relatively sound despite the COVID-19 pandemic, but the country will "preemptively" make efforts to curb the growth of its sovereign debt, according to the finance ministry. The government said last week it will spend 2 trillion won (US\$1.8 billion) repaying part of its national debt with excess tax revenue. Without a debt sale, the ministry proposed an extra budget of 33 trillion won to fund another round of emergency relief funds. With the debt repayment, the national debt is expected to reach 963.9 trillion won this year, down from the 965.9 trillion-won estimate made in March. Hong also said there is a slim possibility for the country to impose additional restrictions on business operations despite the delay in the implementation of a new relaxed social distancing scheme. The country on Wednesday held off the application of four-tier distancing rules in the greater Seoul area for one week amid spiking virus cases and the fast spread of the more contagious delta COVID-19 variant. Fitch is expected to announce its decision on South Korea's sovereign ratings within one or two months after it wraps up the annual meeting with the country. Fitch has maintained its credit rating on Asia's fourth-largest economy at "AA-," the fourth-highest level on the company's table, since 2012, with a stable rating outlook.

From <https://en.yna.co.kr> 07/06/2021

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Korea Pledges W40tr Investment for Battery Leadership

South Korea on Thursday unveiled an ambitious plan to consolidate its leadership in the white-hot battery industry, which included a plan by companies to inject over 40 trillion won (\$34.9 billion) by 2030 as well tax incentives and other support from the government. Dubbed the "K-battery strategy," the public-private plan resembles one announced in March for the chip industry as Asia's fourth-largest economy looks to sharpen its competitive edge in the face of growing challenges, including a global tug-of-war over strategic products. "The K-battery industry is an essential industry that will open the door to the future. It's an industry where we have been taking the global initiative, and it's a field where we have to secure a greater initiative," President Moon Jae-in said at LG Energy Solution's battery plant in Ochang, North Chungcheong Province, Thursday afternoon.

The event was attended by high-ranking government officials and representatives of top-tier battery firms, including LG Energy Solution, SK Innovation and Samsung SDI. The trio ranks among the world's top 10 suppliers of lithium-ion batteries for electric cars. "The global competition is just getting started, as the US, Europe and China are making moves to establish their own manufacturing infrastructure, battery technologies and supply chains," an Industry Ministry official added, explaining the background of the national battery strategy. "The next five years will decide the standing of each country in the global battery market. To engage in an all-out war, we devised a comprehensive strategy." The K-battery strategy revolves around three key objectives -- securing unrivaled battery technologies, establishing a robust ecosystem and creating new markets. While the global electric vehicle battery market is projected to expand tenfold in the next decade, from \$30.4 billion in 2020 to \$304.7 billion in 2030, Korea and China are neck and neck in terms of market share, each controlling around 40 percent.

To gain dominance, Korean companies will invest 40.6 trillion won in the research and development of batteries to secure super-gap technologies, with plans to commercialize lithium-sulfur batteries by 2025, solid-state batteries by 2027 and lithium-metal batteries by 2028, according to the K-battery strategy. Next-generation batteries often require new materials that can only be manufactured in tightly controlled environments. By 2026, Korea will construct a "battery park" equipped with dry rooms where researchers can develop and test next-generation batteries. At the event, LG Energy Solution President and CEO Kim Jong-hyun, Samsung SDI research head Chang Hyuk and SK Innovation battery research institute chief Lee Jang-won gave presentations on strategies to advance lithium-ion batteries and develop next-generation batteries.

The K-battery strategy also laid out detailed plans to bolster the ecosystem of the local battery industry, as its supply chain remains highly volatile at the moment. Lithium-ion batteries consist of four key materials -- cathodes, anodes, separators and electrolytes. Korea imports 47.2 percent of the cathodes it needs, 80.8 percent of the anodes, 69.5 percent of the separators and 66.2 percent of the electrolytes. All four are made predominantly by Chinese and Japanese firms. Korea has a track record of getting into trade disputes with both countries. According to B3 Intelligence, a market research firm, China and Japan together controlled 70.2 percent of the global cathode market last year. The figures were 91.7 percent for anodes, 80.3 percent for separators and 87.9 percent for electrolytes, it said, whereas Korea's market share stood at only 19.5 percent for cathodes, 8.3 percent for anodes, 19.7 percent for separators and 12.1 percent for electrolytes.

The same goes for parts. China and Japan together commanded 99 percent of the global market for pouches, 54 percent for aluminum foil and 49 percent for copper foil. Korea's presence in the pouch market is nonexistent, while it held 16 percent of the aluminum foil market and 20 percent of the copper foil market. To turn things around,

Korea will designate batteries as a national strategic technology and offer tax cuts of up to 50 percent for related research and development and up to 20 percent for infrastructure investment. A fund worth 80 billion won will be launched to support research projects by startups and small and mid-sized companies. In a related but separate announcement, LG Energy Solution unveiled a plan to establish the world's first battery education institution. The LG Institute of Battery Tech will cultivate experts in the field.

To create new markets, Korea will establish a retrieval system that encompasses all stages of the post-treatment of spent batteries -- retrieval, collection, transportation, storage, diagnostics testing, use and commercialization. Dead batteries are expected to be repurposed and used to power street lamps and power banks for camping. Also, Korea will roll out 2.2 gigawatt-hours of public energy storage systems and convert 388 state-owned ships to eco-friendly ones. Subsidies are planned for electric excavators to facilitate the electrification of construction equipment and machines. To incubate battery lease and swap businesses, Korea will work on the standardization of batteries in terms of size, shape, voltage and other characteristics. By next year Korea will launch a pilot project for a "battery subscription service" that will allow customers to purchase empty electric vehicles for less than 20 million won and lease batteries.

From <http://www.koreaherald.com> 07/08/2021

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BOK Set to Begin Normalization to Ease Side Effects of Low Rates Chief

The Bank of Korea (BOK) is preparing to begin normalizing its pandemic-era easing of monetary policy as it seeks to ease side effects of low interest rates, BOK Gov. Lee Ju-yeol said Friday. The remarks came a day after Lee strongly hinted it may conduct its first post-pandemic rate hike by the end of this year, despite a recent spike in COVID-19 infections. The BOK has "notified markets in advance that it could start normalization to ease side effects of low rates for too long if the economic condition improves," Lee told lawmakers. Lee said the BOK will continue policy that supports vulnerable households. While Lee kept his hawkish stance, Lee said the timing of a rate hike depends on the impact of a resurgence of COVID-19 cases. The BOK "delivered a message (of a rate hike) within this year and the timing of its beginning needs to be watched due to the new coronavirus," Lee told lawmakers. On Thursday, the BOK's monetary policy board voted to leave the base rate steady at this year's fifth rate-setting meeting, but Lee adopted a more hawkish tone.

Lee said the BOK will review whether a policy adjustment is needed at next month's rate-setting meeting, prompting some analysts to speculate that the central bank could raise its key rate in August. The BOK "could raise its key rate within this year" if infections with the delta variant ease and prospects of an economic recovery

become clear, Lee told reporters. Thursday's decision came as the nation was battling against its worst-ever COVID-19 outbreaks, with daily new infections rising above 1,000 for more than a week. Lee said the pace of an economic recovery is unlikely to be significantly undermined by the fourth wave of the pandemic because of vaccination efforts and an extra budget. Lee said Thursday's rate freeze decision was not unanimous and a board member cast a dissenting vote insisting that the BOK must raise its key rate by 0.25 percentage point. This year's economic growth is projected to be around 4 percent, consistent with the forecast in May, Lee said.

From <https://en.yna.co.kr> 07/16/2021

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Regulator Steps Up Warnings on Overseas Cryptocurrency Exchanges Targeting Koreans

Foreign cryptocurrency exchanges targeting Korean people will face blocked access to their websites and criminal probes unless they register with South Korea's anti-money laundering body, the nation's top financial regulator said Thursday. By Sept. 24, all cryptocurrency exchanges using Korean currency must register with the Korea Financial Intelligence Unit (KFIU) under the nation's new regulation that aims to prevent money laundering. The KFIU sent a notice to 27 foreign cryptocurrency exchanges that have business operations targeting Korean people about this requirement under the new regulation, the Financial Services Commission (FSC) said. The new regulation also requires cryptocurrency exchanges to have a certificate on information security from South Korea. So far, no foreign exchanges have obtained such a certificate, FSC officials said. Unless foreign exchanges register with the KFIU, they shall cease business operations targeting Koreans starting Sept. 25, the FSC said in a statement. "If they continue to operate without registration, they will be subject to up to five years of imprisonment or a maximum fine of 50 million won (US\$43,455)," it said.

The new regulation will also apply to domestic cryptocurrency exchanges. Under the new regulation, which went into effect in March with a six-month grace period, banks are required to issue real-name accounts under stricter guidelines to prevent money laundering. Under the new rule, banks will assess a cryptocurrency exchange's transparency, business risks and the possibility of criminal activity. Minor cryptocurrency exchanges, which are estimated to number around 100 in South Korea, have been using opaque accounts to lure investors. Such accounts enable cryptocurrency exchanges to manage investors' money with their own bank accounts. Beginning Sept. 25, minor cryptocurrency exchanges will be banned from withdrawing money for cryptocurrency trading if they have no real-name bank accounts. Despite repeated warning from policymakers, Korean investors have been heavily buying virtual currency, seeing it as a lucrative asset amid the pandemic. More young people have been investing in cryptocurrencies, anticipating higher returns, with some saying they cannot buy homes solely with their income amid

skyrocketing home prices.

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IMF Sharply Ups 2021 Growth Outlook for S. Korea to 4.3 Pct

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) on Tuesday sharply raised its 2021 growth outlook for South Korea to 4.3 percent as Asia's fourth-largest economy is on a solid recovery track amid robust exports. This marked a steep rise from the growth estimate of 3.6 percent that the Washington-based organization made in April. The IMF also revised up next year's growth outlook for Korea to 3.4 percent from 2.8 percent. The IMF's projection is the highest among major organizations that have jacked up their own growth estimates for the Korean economy. The Bank of Korea (BOK) and the Asian Development Bank forecast South Korea to grow 4 percent this year. The Korean government expected growth of 4.2 percent. The South Korean economy is on a recovery track on the back of solid exports of chips and autos and improving domestic demand. It contracted 0.9 percent last year.

The country's gross domestic product (GDP) grew 0.7 percent in the second quarter from three months earlier, compared with a 1.7 percent on-quarter gain in the first quarter, central bank data showed. Exports rose 32.8 percent on-year in the first 20 days of July on strong demand for semiconductors, autos and petroleum products, according to customs data. Overseas shipments extended their gains to the eighth straight month in June amid the global economic recovery. Private spending rose 3.5 percent on-quarter in the April-June period, the sharpest expansion in 12 years, as people increased economic activity amid warm weather and relaxed virus curbs. But a recent flare-up in COVID-19 cases and the fast spread of the highly contagious delta variant have emerged as major downside risks for the Korean economy.

South Korea is grappling with the fourth wave of the pandemic, as its daily new cases topped 1,000 for the 21st straight day. The country added 1,365 COVID-19 cases Tuesday, raising the total to 191,531. Meanwhile, the IMF lowered its 2021 forecast for Korea's debt-to-GDP ratio, citing the accelerating economic recovery. The general government debt (D2)-to-GDP ratio is likely to reach 51.8 percent this year, down from its April estimate of 53.1 percent. D2 covers debt holding by central and provincial governments and nonprofit public institutions. The IMF maintained its estimate for Korea's fiscal deficit levels for this year. The size of the country's 2021 fiscal shortfall will likely be equivalent to 2.9 percent of GDP. Last year, the country's national debt grew by the largest-ever amount of 123.7 trillion won (US\$107.3 billion) to a record high of 846.9 trillion won, as the country expanded fiscal spending to tackle the fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic.

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S. Korea Expands Open Banking Ecosystem, Invites Fintech Firms

South Korea's financial authority said Wednesday it plans to expand the ecosystem of the so-called open banking platform by inviting users of fintech services, allowing more people to enjoy simpler financial transactions. South Korea launched the open banking service in 2019, which centers on allowing customers to use any mobile banking application of their choice to access their accounts in different banks. Major South Korean banks already have joined the platform. Starting Friday, users of financial services provided by fintech businesses can also access the open banking platform, in which they can check balances of pre-paid accounts, according to the Financial Services Commission (FSC). Since its launch, the number of accounts registered with the open banking system came to 166.8 million, the FSC data showed. Credit card companies also started to offer the open banking service in May this year, raising the total number of participating firms to 110. The FSC said the first batch of 23 fintech firms, including Kakao and Naver, will join the platform on Friday, with four more set to join the system by the end of August.

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South-East Asia

INDONESIA: Posts State Budget Deficit at 1.72 Pct of GDP in H1

Indonesia experienced a state budget deficit of 1.72 percent of the gross domestic product (GDP) or 283.2 trillion rupiahs (some 19.5 billion U.S. dollars) in the first semester of 2021, Finance Minister Sri Mulyani Indrawati said Monday. The state budget in the first six months this year was driven by an increase in state income by 9.1 percent on an annual basis to 886.9 trillion rupiahs (some 61.2 billion U.S. dollars) or 50.9 percent of the target in the 2021 state budget of 1,743.6 trillion rupiahs, the minister told a press conference. However, the state spending also continues to be intensified to move the economy amid the pressures of the COVID-19 pandemic, she said, adding that the state spending in the first half of this year reached 1,170.1 trillion rupiahs (some 80.8 billion U.S. dollars), or 42.5 percent of the target in the 2021 state budget. "The deficit in the first semester reached 1.72 percent or 283.2 trillion rupiahs (some 19.5 billion U.S. dollars)," she said.

From <http://www.xinhuanet.com/> 07/05/2021

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MALAYSIA: Gross Fixed Capital Formation Falls 14.5 Pct in 2020 amid Covid-19 Pandemic

Malaysia's gross fixed capital formation (GFCF), which measures investment, declined 14.5 percent year on year to 281.1 billion ringgit (about 66.53 billion U.S.

dollars) in 2020 amid the COVID-19 pandemic, the biggest contraction recorded since the 1998 Asian Financial Crisis, official data showed Monday. The Department of Statistics Malaysia (DOSM) said in a statement that the contraction was mainly attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic which has affected the investment of fixed assets for all economic activities. According to DOSM, GFCF was the second largest component of GDP with 20.9 percent share of the total economy last year. "The continuous reduction in investment of fixed assets may lead to a lower production capacity in the future and subsequently distort the growth of potential output," said DOSM. By kind of economic activity, GFCF in the services sector contracted to 12.5 percent as compared to 1.6 percent in the preceding year, while in the manufacturing sector, it dropped by 17.1 percent as against a decline of 10 percent in the previous year. Meanwhile, GFCF for mining and quarrying fell 25.4 percent as compared to a decrease of 9.3 percent in the preceding year; construction sector went down 2.2 percent, steeper than the decline of 1.3 percent recorded in the previous year; agriculture sector contracted 8.8 percent as against to 0.1 percent in 2019. "The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted economic activities and the economic downturn was the lowest after 1998. Series of movement control orders imposed by the government has indirectly attributed to the reduction in expenditure of fixed assets," said DOSM. However, it said, the recovery trend for GFCF is expected to start in 2021. Malaysia's GFCF declined up to 43 percent year on year in 1998.

From <http://www.xinhuanet.com/> 07/26/2021

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THAILAND: Grants Aid to Businesses Affected by Covid-19 Restrictions

The Thai government approved on Tuesday a one-month relief aid for people affected by travel restrictions and curfew under the sustained COVID-19 situation. A total of 30 billion baht (about 920.24 million U.S. dollars) will be granted to employees and business owners in Bangkok, its five neighboring provinces, and four southern provinces, according to government spokesman Anucha Burapachaisri. The government will provide each Social Security-covered employee with financial aid equal to half their monthly pay, up to 7,500 baht (about 230 U.S. dollars), and an additional 2,500 baht (about 76 U.S. dollars) on top, Anucha said. Employees without Social Security coverage will receive 5,000 baht (about 153 U.S. dollars) from the government, he said. The affected business operators will receive 3,000 baht (about 92 U.S. dollars) for each of their employees for a maximum of 200 headcount, he added. Thailand on Monday imposed a semi-lockdown in Bangkok and nine provinces to curb the further spread of coronavirus, especially the variants. With 8,685 new COVID-19 cases and 56 deaths recorded on Tuesday, the country's total number now stands at 353,712 infections and 2,847 deaths. As of Monday, nearly 13 million doses of vaccine have been administered in Thailand.

From http://www.xinhuanet.com 07/13/2021

VIETNAM: IFC Lends \$100 Million to OCB to Boost Climate Finance

International Finance Corporation (IFC) is providing a US\$100 million long-term loan to Orient Commercial Joint Stock Bank (OCB) to help expand lending to small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and boost financing, especially for climate-friendly projects in Việt Nam. IFC's investment will help OCB improve its outreach to SMEs in Việt Nam, which are facing a financing gap of \$21 billion, equivalent to 11.2 per cent of the country's GDP. With IFC's support, OCB expects to double its SME lending portfolio by 2024 by leveraging its digital banking platform and developing products that cater to the sector's needs. Some areas that SMEs are seeking financing for include renewable energy, energy efficiency, and climate-smart solutions, which can help them grow sustainably while contributing to reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. The current share of climate financing – as a percentage of total bank financing – in Việt Nam is just about 5 per cent or \$10.3 billion and is expected to increase significantly in the coming years. As the country aims to reduce GHG emissions by 9 per cent by 2030 to mitigate climate change impact, this presents a \$753 billion climate-smart investment opportunity for Việt Nam between 2016 and 2030, according to an IFC study.

To help OCB tap into this huge lending potential, \$50 million of the funding will be earmarked for climate-friendly projects, creating new options for businesses to obtain green financing. While the State Bank of Việt Nam has been promoting green banking over the past few years, the climate-finance market is still young and banks are now considering a systematic approach toward climate finance. "IFC sees banks as a major force in fighting climate change in emerging markets such as Vietnam since they can strategically expand financing for climate-smart initiatives," said Kyle Kelhofer, IFC Country Manager for Việt Nam, Cambodia, and Laos. "By supporting commercial banks in Việt Nam to establish a viable climate-finance portfolio, IFC is facilitating the development of a climate-finance market, attracting international lenders and further supporting Việt Nam's shift to a low-carbon and resilient growth model."

From <https://vietnamnews.vn> 07/12/2021

US\$10.4 Billion over Ten Years Needed to Expand Railway Network

The Ministry of Transport (MoT) has proposed investing VNĐ240 trillion (US\$10.4 billion) to expand the railway network from now until 2030. The ministry has submitted a draft master plan on railway development up to 2030, with a vision toward 2050, to the Prime Minister for approval. It aims to raise the sector's market

share to 0.27 per cent in cargo transportation and 4.4 per cent in passenger transportation by 2030, Tuổi trẻ (Youth) has reported. The volume of cargo will reach 11.8 million tonnes by 2030, up 2.3 times over 2019's figure and passenger transportation will reach 460 million people. To achieve this goal, the national railway network will be extended to 16 routes with a total length of 4,871km. The number includes seven existing routes and nine new lines. The seven existing routes namely Hà Nội-HCM City, Hà Nội – Hải Phòng, Yên Viên - Lào Cai, Hà Nội – Đồng Đăng, Hà Nội – Thái Nguyên, Kép – Hạ Long – Cái Lân, Kép – Lưu Xá will all be upgraded to meet domestic transport demand. Among the nine new routes, top priority will be the North-South high-speed railway project with a plan to build a double-track railway of 1,435mm size, stretching over 1,545km. By 2050, the national railway network will consist of 25 routes with a total length of 6,409km. This will be an increase of nine with an additional length of 1,538km. According to Nguyễn Ngọc Đông, Deputy Minister of Transport, the railway network planning for 2050 will basically not change much compared to the plan approved in Decision 1468/QĐ-TTg in 2015 of the Prime Minister.

From <https://vietnamnews.vn/> 07/21/2021

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Finance Ministry Working on US\$1.04 Billion Support Package

The Ministry of Finance (MoF) is mulling a VNĐ24 trillion (US\$1.04 billion) support package for businesses hit by the coronavirus pandemic by exempting and reducing tax and fees. Minister of Finance Hồ Đức Phúc said that the 15th National Assembly (NA) on Sunday discussed the implementation of the socio-economic development and State budget plans for the first six months of the year. The proposal will be sent to the NA and the Government for approval once completed. In addition, the ministry also submitted a proposal to postpone the implementation of Circular 40/TT-BTC on tax for business households until January 1, 2022 to create more convenience for taxpayers. Earlier, the Government approved a VNĐ26 trillion support plan for businesses and individuals affected by the pandemic. The money is currently being disbursed. He added that the ministry had requested the Government to cut regular spending by 10 per cent and conference and business fees by 50 per cent to gain more resources to fight the pandemic. At the same time, the Government needs to improve the efficiency of public investment, including official development assistance projects. They should consider cutting inefficient projects, while managing securities, insurance and currency markets. Fiscal and monetary policies should also be well coordinated.

The finance ministry has provided nearly VNĐ8.2 trillion to the Ministry of Health (MoH) to cover vaccine costs, and another VNĐ12.3 trillion is on the way, he added. Regarding procurement of medical supplies and equipment for pandemic prevention and control, the minister said the issue had been resolved in Government resolutions which allowed the appointment of contractors for procurement in emergency

conditions. The MoH is responsible for pricing and trading in accordance with Government guidance. "Currently, the MoF has issued a circular guiding localities and the MoH to make timely procurement for pandemic prevention and control," he said. In the first half of the year, the socio-economic picture was positive with GDP growth of 5.64 per cent, and State budget collection reaching 58.2 per cent of the estimate, up 16.3 per cent on the same period last year. State budget expenditures ensured efficiency, reaching 41.2 per cent of the estimate, with a surplus in the first 6 months of the year. Public debt is also sustainable for restructuring. Government bonds are issued with a term of up to 12 years, with an interest rate of only 2.6 - 2.7 per cent a year. The stock, insurance and money market have developed well, including securities, stocks, bonds and the derivatives market. The insurance market increased by 16.2 per cent. The current stressful issue is the complicated pandemic, he said, adding that the Government and the Prime Minister had been taking proactive and drastic measures in the pandemic fight to ensure socio-economic development.

From <https://vietnamnews.vn> 07/27/2021

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Việt Nam's FDI Inflows Plunge 11.1% in Seven Months

Việt Nam raked in US\$16.7 billion in foreign direct investment (FDI) in the first seven months of 2021, down 11.1 per cent from the same period last year, data from the Ministry of Planning and Investment (MPI) shows. This is the biggest fall in FDI inflows since the COVID-19 pandemic broke out again in the country in late April, wreaking havoc on multiple industrial parks in the northern provinces of Bac Giang and Bắc Ninh. Earlier, FDI inflows declined 2.6 per cent year-on-year in the first half of the year, after it edged up 0.8 per cent in the January-May period. According to the MPI's Foreign Investment Agency, of the 7-month figure, \$10.13 billion came from 1,006 newly-registered projects, up 7 per cent year-on-year. Some \$4.54 billion was added to 561 existing projects, representing a year-on-year decrease of 3.7 per cent. Capital contribution and share purchases by foreign investors dropped by 55.8 per cent to \$2.05 billion. Economists believed that the COVID-19 pandemic is taking a toll on Việt Nam's FDI attraction. The fourth coronavirus wave has knocked the confidence of European businesses, with the EuroCham Business Climate Index (BCI) falling almost 30 points to 45.8 in the second quarter of this year. Despite the contraction, the FDI disbursement slightly rose by 3.8 per cent from a year earlier to \$10.5 billion. The largest proportion of the seven-month FDI, \$7.9 billion or 47.2 per cent, landed in processing and manufacturing, followed by electricity production and distribution, with \$5.49 billion or 32.8 per cent. Singapore topped foreign investors, pouring \$5.92 billion into Việt Nam, followed by Japan (\$2.54 billion), and South Korea (\$2.2 billion). The Mekong Delta province of Long An was the largest recipient of FDI with \$3.58 billion, followed by HCM City (\$1.78 billion) and Binh Dương (\$1.33 billion).

From <https://vietnamnews.vn> 07/28/2021

South Asia

INDIA: Union Cabinet Approves Alterations to Central Sector Scheme of Financing Under Agriculture Infrastructure Fund

The Prime Minister Narendra Modi-led Union Cabinet, on July 7, nodded to several modifications in the Central Sector Scheme of Financing Facility under 'Agriculture Infrastructure Fund'. The cabinet has extended eligibility to State Agencies/APMCs, National and State Federations of Cooperatives, Federations of Farmers Producers Organisations (FPOs) and Federations of Self Help Groups (SHGs). Currently, interest subvention for a loan of upto Rs 2 crore in one location is eligible under the scheme. In case, one eligible entity puts up projects in different locations then all such projects will now be eligible for interest subvention for a loan of upto Rs 2 crore. However, for a private sector entity, there will be a limit of a maximum of 25 such projects. Such a limitation will not be applicable to state agencies, national and state federations of cooperatives, FPOs and SHGs. Location means a physical boundary of a village or town having a distinct Local Government Directory (LGD) code. Each of such projects should be in a location having a separate LGD code. For APMCs, interest subvention for a loan of upto Rs 2 crore will be provided for each project of different infrastructure types including cold storage, sorting, grading and assaying units, silos, etc. within the same market yard. The power has been delegated to the Minister of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare to make necessary changes with regard to the addition or deletion of beneficiaries in such a manner so that the basic spirit of the scheme is not altered. The period of the financial facility has been extended from four to six years up to 2025-26 and the overall period of the scheme has been extended from 10 to 13 up to 2032-33. The modifications in the scheme will help to achieve a multiplier effect in generating investments while ensuring that the benefits reach small and marginal farmers. The APMC markets are set up to provide market linkages and create an ecosystem of post-harvest public infrastructure open to all farmers.

From <https://egov.eletsonline.com/> 07/10/2021

MK Stalin Unveils AG&P Pratham's Rs 1700 cr Investment Commitment for City Gas Distribution Infra

With a shared vision of a Clean Energy Future, Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, MK Stalin, on July 20, unveiled the Rs 1,700 crore City Gas Distribution (CGD) infrastructure investment commitment for Chennai, Kancheepuram and Chengalpattu districts by AG&P Pratham, the CGD arm of Atlantic Gulf & Pacific (AG&P), Singapore, a leading global downstream gas and LNG logistics company. On the occasion, the CM laid the foundation stone for AG&P Pratham's second City

Gate and Mother Station in the State at Vallam-Sriperumbudur, Kancheepuram and inaugurated the commissioning of its first Compressed Natural Gas (CNG) station at Meenambakkam, Chennai. AG&P Pratham's City Gate Station will receive natural gas directly from IOCL's natural gas pipeline and the Mother Station will take the uninterrupted supply of the clean fuel to distribute to industrial, commercial and domestic consumers through a Piped Natural Gas (PNG) and CNG distribution network, opening up a new era of clean, efficient fuel for the State. CNG is a non-toxic and safer fuel that offers significantly improved mileage and a reduction in maintenance costs with a reported increase in savings of up to 40-50 percent for CNG-fueled auto-rickshaw drivers, taxi drivers and car rental owners.

Similarly, the PNG equivalent of a 14.2 kg domestic LPG gas cylinder, offers savings of up to 30-40 percent in the non-subsidised and 20-30 percent in the subsidised category. Speaking at the occasion, Abhilesh Gupta, Managing Director, AG&P Pratham, said, "We are honoured to collaborate with the Government of Tamil Nadu to establish the city gas infrastructure in the industrial hub of Tamil Nadu, and bring this safe and environmentally-friendly alternative to our customers. Our second City Gate and Mother Station in the State will provide power plants, industrial, commercial and domestic consumers uninterrupted access to this competitive fuel. In addition, over the next eight years, as part of our investment commitment, we will be commissioning a network of 113 CNG stations and installing 11,50,000 domestic PNG connections in a part of Chennai, Kancheepuram and Chengalpattu districts. We are focused on achieving the State's mission to transform into a gas-based economy and hope that the wide availability of natural gas will spur even more manufacturing while simultaneously generating employment for over 3,400 people and trigger overall economic and social progress with healthier air."

In February 2021, AG&P Pratham signed an MoU with the Government of Tamil Nadu to invest Rs 2,700 crore over the next eight years to build CGD networks in the districts of Chennai, Kancheepuram, Chengalpattu, Vellore, Ranipet, Thirupathur and Ramanathapuram. Of this, AG&P committed to investing Rs 1,700 crore for establishing the CGD infrastructure in a part of Chennai, Kancheepuram and Chengalpattu districts, the industrial hub of Tamil Nadu. Since 2018, AG&P Pratham was awarded three concessional areas comprising of six districts and a part of Chennai in Tamil Nadu by the Petroleum and Natural Gas Regulatory Board (PNGRB) for the development of CGD infrastructure and natural gas market. AG&P will be supplying PNG to 20 lakh households, 10,000 commercial establishments, 150 industrial enterprises and operate over 200 CNG stations in the State in coming years.

From <https://egov.eletsonline.com/> 07/21/2021

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SRI LANKA: Fitch Affirms Bank of Ceylon at CCC and AA (Ika)/Stable

Fitch Ratings has affirmed Bank of Ceylon's (BOC) Long-Term Foreign- and Local-Currency Issuer Default Ratings (IDR) at 'CCC'. The ratings do not carry an Outlook because of the potentially high volatility at this rating level, in line with Fitch's rating definitions. BOC's National Long-Term Rating has also been affirmed at 'AA-(lka)'. The Outlook is Stable. At the same time, Fitch has affirmed BOC's Viability Rating at 'ccc', Support Rating at '5' and Support Rating Floor at 'NF' (No Floor). BOC's Long-Term IDRs are driven by the bank's intrinsic credit profile, as reflected in its VR. There are no changes to our assessment of the bank's intrinsic credit profile since our last review in December 2020. The ratings are constrained by the sovereign IDR (CCC). BOC's VR remains highly influenced by the operating environment and asset quality. Our assessment of the operating environment for Sri Lankan banks reflects the risk of doing banking business due to the sovereign's credit profile and the impact of the coronavirus pandemic. Sri Lanka's economy contracted by 3.6% in 2020 as a result of the pandemic, and our expectation is for an expansion of 3.8% in 2021. Our forecasts are subject to a high degree of uncertainty depending on the evolution of the pandemic. The outlook on the operating environment assessment remains negative due to the potential for further risk from the deterioration of the sovereign credit profile or pressure on domestic operating conditions beyond our expectation independent of changes in the sovereign rating. The operating environment for Sri Lankan banks has a high influence on banks' ratings, as it is likely to constrain their intrinsic credit profiles through its effect on financial and non-financial key rating factors. The negative outlook on risk appetite and most of the financial profile factors reflect the pressure from the operating environment.

BOC's risk appetite score of 'ccc'/negative reflects heightened risk from its significant exposure to the sovereign and also from non-state exposures that could be susceptible to deteriorating operating conditions. The bank's increased lending to the state and state-owned enterprises (SOEs) resulted in loan expansion of 27.7% in 2020 and 8.6% 1Q21, which far exceeded that for the sector, and increased its loan book concentration to the state and SOEs. BOC's risk appetite is more susceptible to pressure, as its status as a large state bank has led to an increased policy role in intermediating relief to businesses and individuals affected by the pandemic. BOC's asset quality score of 'ccc'/negative is aligned with its risk appetite score and reflects our expectation of persisting risks to asset quality. Its impaired loans/ gross loans ratio fell to 9.7% by end-1Q21 from 10.3% at end-2020 due to the rapid increase in loans. Pressure on impaired loans could manifest across an extended period of time due to relief measures that halted the recognition of credit impairments and ongoing discretionary restructuring. Despite an increase in loan loss allowances/ impaired loans to 59% by end-2020 from 56.6% at end-2019, net impaired loans/common equity Tier 1 capital deteriorated to 65%, underscoring the pressure on BOC's capitalisation. BOC's capitalisation and leverage score of 'b-'/negative factors in the heightened constraints on accessing capital from the state due to its credit profile,

although capital deficiencies are not envisaged. In the absence of a capital infusion from the state, the bank has continued to retain more profit since 2019, and has raised additional Tier 1 capital through perpetual unlisted bonds. BOC's exposure to the state bolsters its reported capitalisation ratios, as the exposure is mostly risk-weighted at 0%. Still, the bank's capital buffers remain thin, relative to its exposure to risks from the operating environment and sovereign credit profile.

BOC's earnings and profitability score remains at 'b-/negative to reflect our expectation of sustained pressure in this area through high credit costs, despite the potential for improved pre-provision profit buffers. Its operating profit/risk-weighted assets ratio recovered in 1Q21 to 5.3% after dropping to 2.0% in 2020, alongside a sharp increase in impairment charges that consumed 54% of pre-impairment profits in 2020. BOC's funding and liquidity score of 'b-/negative reflects the challenges in accessing foreign-currency funding due to the sovereign credit profile, despite the benefit from its state linkages, which support its entrenched domestic deposit franchise and perception of safety. BOC has the largest foreign-currency deposit base in Sri Lanka, supported by its leading position in channelling inward worker remittances. In addition, the bank also relies on foreign-currency non-deposit funding, although its share in non-deposit funding has declined since end-2019. BOC's loan/deposit ratio rose sharply to 91% in 1Q21 from 84% across 2017-2020 driven by rapid loan growth in 2020 and 1Q21. BOC's National Rating is also driven by its standalone strength and reflects its entrenched domestic franchise, but higher risk appetite and smaller capital buffers relative to private-bank peers that have the same national rating. The ratings are constrained by our assessment of Sri Lanka's sovereign rating and the operating environment.

The Support Rating Floor of 'NF' and Support Rating of '5' reflect our opinion that extraordinary sovereign support for the bank cannot be relied upon in our ratings. We believe the sovereign's ability to provide extraordinary support is severely constrained by its weakened financial flexibility, the size of the banking sector relative to the economy and the banking system's high vulnerability to large losses in a downturn, despite a high propensity for the sovereign to extend support to the bank. The Basel II Sri Lanka rupee-denominated subordinated debt of BOC is rated two notches below its National Long-Term Rating, in line with Fitch's baseline notching for loss severity for this type of debt and our expectations of poor recovery. Factors that could, individually or collectively, lead to positive rating action/upgrade: Upside to BOC's IDR, VR and National Rating is constrained by our assessment of the sovereign's credit profile and the operating environment. We do not anticipate developments that might lead to positive rating action in the near-term given the pressure on the sovereign rating and the challenging operating environment. BOC's Support Rating and Support Rating Floor are constrained by the sovereign rating. An upward revision of the ratings is possible provided the sovereign's ability to provide support improves materially. However, we do not expect this in the near to medium term. Factors that could, individually or collectively, lead to negative rating

action/downgrade: Pressure on BOC's IDR, VR and National Rating is most likely to stem from a deterioration in Sri Lanka's sovereign rating, constraining BOC's standalone credit profile, including the operating environment.

Operating conditions are likely to deteriorate significantly in such a scenario, resulting in heightened risk for BOC's financial profile, such as through a lack of access to foreign-currency funding that restricts operations or a significant deterioration in loan quality that erodes its capital. Weaker assessment of the operating environment independent of changes in the sovereign rating, or a deterioration in credit metrics past our base-case expectations relative to peers, would also lead to increased pressure BOC 's National Rating. International scale credit ratings of Financial Institutions and Covered Bond issuers have a best-case rating upgrade scenario (defined as the 99th percentile of rating transitions, measured in a positive direction) of three notches over a three-year rating horizon; and a worst-case rating downgrade scenario (defined as the 99th percentile of rating transitions, measured in a negative direction) of four notches over three years. The complete span of best- and worst-case scenario credit ratings for all rating categories ranges from 'AAA' to 'D'. Best- and worst-case scenario credit ratings are based on historical performance.

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Central-West Asia

AZERBAIJAN: Digital Banks to Become Key Components of Any Developing Financial System

Digital banks, providing remote access to all services without physical contact, will be a key component of any evolving financial system, Tamerlan Rustamov, Head of the expert group 'On Payment Systems and Digital Banking' of the Azerbaijan Banks Association (ABA), told Trend. According to Rustamov, in Azerbaijan, as in countries with developed financial systems, the use of mobile platforms in the banking system is inevitable. Besides, deepening of the process of building digital platforms in mobile banking will ensure that products and services that meet customer needs are delivered through a single platform. "It's necessary to ensure the creation of a horizontally integrated chain of products and services through mobile banking. The richness of digital services must be ensured by redefining the service chain provided by banks through mobile banking. This will have a direct impact on the process of expanding the use of value-added services compared to mobile banking," he added. Rustamov noted that at the same time, banks should focus on the wishes and needs of the client.

"Namely this factor ensures the improvement of users' digital payment habits by attracting a new segment of customers. The focus should be on the use of advanced

information technologies, including artificial intelligence, open banking technologies that will deepen the platform, enrich the service chain, and provide products that meet customer needs in advance," the ABA's representative said. He stressed that the achievements in the application of innovative technologies and solutions must be supported. "The process of integrating mobile banking services into the instant payment system operated by the Central Bank of Azerbaijan should be accelerated, and the introduction of tokenization services should be expanded. These innovations should be aimed at strengthening direct access to financial services by increasing the efficiency and security of digital payments," he further noted. The above factors, according to Rustamov, will ensure focus on the desires and needs of customers, the use of a horizontal service chain, advanced information technologies and innovative solutions, the introduction of new services along with traditional banking products and services on a single platform, as well as the expansion of the client segment. "In order to increase the level of security, it's needed to establish a set of mandatory requirements for financial institutions by adopting a regulatory legal document in the field of electronic and mobile banking," Rustamov said.

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

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Azerbaijani Finance Ministry Puts Up Mid-Term State Bonds for New Auction

The Baku Stock Exchange (BSE) held an auction on the placement of medium-term state bonds of the Azerbaijani Ministry of Finance, Trend reports on July 14 referring to a source in the BSE. The amount of the bonds was 40 million manat (\$23.5 million) and the term of maturity – 1,092 days. During the auction, 14 investors filed 26 bids in the price range from 98.14 manat (\$57.73) with a yield to maturity (YTM) of 7.2 percent to 100.4 manat (\$59.06) with a YTM of 6.35 percent. In accordance with the decision of the finance ministry, the cut-off price of bonds reached 100.296 manat (\$59) with the YTM of 6.39 percent, and the weighted average price – 100.34 manat or \$59.02 (6.37 percent). The total amount of applications at nominal prices amounted to nearly 149.84 million manat (\$88.14 million) while the volume of placement - 40 million manat (\$23.5 million). The maturity date is July 9, 2024. The auction participants must fulfill their obligations to purchase bonds till July 14, 2021.

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Oceania

AUSTRALIA: RBA Takes Centre Stage amid Cash Rate Talk

The Reserve Bank of Australia's upcoming monthly board meeting may give some fresh clues as to when the cash rate might increase, but it is safe to say it will remain

at a record low 0.1 per cent for a while yet. RBA governor Philip Lowe will hold a rare media conference after Tuesday's meeting to ensure the right messaging gets out on the outlook. And if there are any doubts on what the board is trying to achieve, Dr Lowe will have another chance to put the record straight when he gives a speech to the Economic Society of Australia on Thursday. The central bank has repeatedly been saying that interest rates will not rise until inflation is sustainably within the two to three per cent inflation target, an event it did not expect to occur until 2024 at the earliest. However, there is growing speculation among economists that this could be brought forward to 2023 or even earlier, given the strength of the economy, and particularly in a jobs market.

The RBA has flagged Tuesday's meeting has a couple of decisions to make, which may further influence such talk. As one of its policy tools along side the cash rate, the RBA targets the three-year government bond to ensure its yield, or interest rate, remains at or close to 0.1 per cent. Most fixed-rate mortgages are set against three-year bonds. It maintains the target by purchasing the three-year benchmark bond - which matures April 2024 - but it now has to decide whether it switches its focus to the November 2025 as the new three-year benchmark. There is a growing feeling that it won't and will stick with the April 2024 version, because to shift to the later maturing bond would suggest the RBA does not expect to lift rate until closer to 2025. The bank will also announce the next stage of its quantitative easing, or five and 10-year bond-buying program, which aims to keep market interest rates and borrowing costs low.

Its second \$100 billion tranche under the program is due to be exhausted in September. Analysts are speculating the next stage could be a smaller amount. Economists will also focus on the RBA's latest view on the housing market following last week's data showing further price gains, coupled with another surge in home lending, particularly to investors. Before the board meeting, there is a flurry of economic indicators for retail trade, building approvals, job advertising, consumer sentiment and payroll jobs over Monday and Tuesday. Meanwhile, Australian shares look set for a flat start on Monday with the futures market trading unchanged from the previous close. The benchmark S&P/ASX200 index closed 43 points, or 0.59 per cent, higher at 7308.6 on Friday. Wall Street scaled new highs on Friday after new jobs figures showed further strong gains, but not enough to trigger interest rate rises by the US Federal Reserve. The Labor Department's employment report showed non-farm payrolls increased by 850,000 jobs last month, but the total is 6.8 million below its peak in February 2020. The Dow Jones Industrial Average rose 152.82 points, or 0.44 per cent, to 34,786.35, the S&P 500 gained 32.4 points, or 0.75 per cent, to 4,352.34 and the Nasdaq Composite added 116.95 points, or 0.81 per cent, to 14,639.33. The US markets will be closed on Monday on account of the Independence Day holiday.

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Extra \$300m for NSW Flood Recovery Effort

Another \$300 million has been set aside to help communities clean up from record flooding that sent large tracts of NSW underwater in March. Tens of thousands of people were evacuated across the state as rivers fuelled by torrential rain broke their banks, with Sydney's Hawkesbury-Nepean Valley and the mid-north coast the hardest hit. Of the newly announced funding, \$200 million will be spent on eight key flood recovery initiatives, which include industry recovery, job retention, rebuilding infrastructure and safeguarding mental health and community wellbeing. The federal government has also announced it will top up the Infrastructure Betterment Fund, matching the NSW government's contribution of \$100 million. That money will go towards rebuilding and improving the resilience of public infrastructure damaged during the recent floods as well as the Black Summer bushfires.

The package - jointly funded by the state and federal governments and now worth \$400m all up - will ensure longer term recovery of the impacted areas, Minister for Emergency Management Bridget McKenzie said. "Months on from the devastating storms and floods which impacted over 70 Local Government Areas across NSW, we are continuing to stand by communities as they recover," she said. "We have listened to farmers and producers, too, and included more than \$25 million to provide grants for rural landholders who do not qualify for the existing supports, as well as funding for environmental recovery initiatives, including riverbank restoration." NSW Deputy Premier John Barilaro said a big part of the long term recovery was improving the wellbeing of communities inundated, many of which were still reeling from drought, bushfires and the pandemic. "We cannot underestimate the mental health and wellbeing of those impacted by these disasters and I'm pleased that we've been able to provide extensive support to assist communities hardest hit," he said.

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Potential Savings for Property Sellers

In a supercharged real estate market where selling prices top reserves in a blink, there's an increasingly-common search for reasonable agent commissions among sellers. Depending on location and the work involved, commissions can hand a 3.5 per cent stake to an agent. "In Australia we are unfortunately charging more than any other country to transact property," Sydney realty executive James Kirkland said. "The idea of anywhere between two and three-and-a-half per cent to sell a property is outrageous in any other country." His solution, as sales director at Upside Realty, is a flat-rate sales fee. For the majority of Australian residential properties, that sell for between \$450,000 and \$1.5 million, that amounts to \$9990. While some people argue discount brokerages do little more than list properties and stick for-sale signs in lawns, Mr Kirkland explains the deal includes the full treatment: online marketing,

brochures, sideboards, professional photography and copywriting.

The company employs a network of agents who market, manage inspections and conduct negotiations just like traditional realtors. However it also centralises a lot of the administration work so they can focus on sales and get a quicker stream of listings. The arrangement also involves an online vendor platform to monitor buyer inquiries and inspection numbers. Queensland mum Sarah Parker was up for \$35,000 in fees when she recently put her home on the market. Instead, a flat-rate deal left her with an extra \$25,000 to reduce the debt on her next home. Upside has seen listings per agent rise 62 per cent, while sales per agent have shot up 74 per cent in the past quarter. Some of it has to do with a hot market but Mr Kirkland said it also showed customers are keen to shave years off their next mortgage by selling through fixed-fee agents. Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute research shows mortgage debt especially among older Australians has blown out 600 per cent since the 1980s, accounting for inflation. Nearly half of home owners aged 55 to 64 are said to still be paying off loans, up from 14 per cent 30 years ago. In regional Australia mortgages can be repaid in 20 years. In cities it's more like 80 years, or never.

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Funding for Projects to Reduce Waste from Construction and Demolition

The Government has announced funding for projects in Auckland and the lower North Island to help reduce construction and demolition waste. "Construction is the main source of waste sent to landfill, and much of this could be reduced, reused and recovered," Environment Minister David Parker said. "The Government is funding initiatives that will enable New Zealanders to reuse material and reduce the amount of waste going to landfill. Reducing construction and demolition waste will also help reduce greenhouse gas emissions. That's a win, win for the climate and the environment." "Diverting construction waste from landfill is another step towards helping New Zealand become a low waste, low emissions economy." The Auckland Council Waste Management and Minimisation Plan 2018 found that 86 per cent of the 1.6 million tonnes of waste sent to landfill in 2016 came from commercial, construction, demolition, infrastructure, and other activities.

Auckland-based Waste Revolution will receive \$1.1 million funding to create a commercial resource and recovery centre for the storage and redistribution of material. The new centre will sort and store waste materials from the construction, demolition and commercial industries which will then be sold to the construction industry and wider public "This initiative is a great example of a circular solution that encourages reusing materials which would otherwise end up in landfill. We expect this project to redirect 3,500 tonnes of waste material each year and create new jobs,"

David Parker said. Waste Revolution is a collaborative initiative between Junk Run and Kiwi Recycling. Further south, Central Environmental will receive \$750,000 to set up a construction and demolition waste processing facility in Feilding. Materials, including concrete, native timber and building materials, will be recycled and reused.

The new facility will be able to process 80,000 tonnes a year and will service the Manawatu/South Taranaki and Northern Wellington region. “There is limited capacity to process and recover construction and demolition waste in the lower North Island currently, so this new facility will quickly reduce the amount of waste going into landfill around the region.” David Parker said. In Porirua, for instance, over 50 per cent of waste disposed to landfill comes from construction and demolition (approximately 32,000 tonnes a year). “Reflecting this, we will provide \$164,250 to Porirua City Council to determine if a construction and demolition recycling facility is feasible in Porirua,” David Parker said. These initiatives will be funded through the Waste Minimisation Fund’s 2020 round, administered by the Environment Ministry. Today’s announcement follows last week’s announcement of funding for projects to reduce food waste in Christchurch, Nelson, Napier, Northland, Dunedin, Queenstown and Auckland. Applications for the 2021 Waste Minimisation funding round are being considered. The 2021 round continues a focus on construction and demolition waste as well as organic waste.

From <https://livenews.co.nz> 07/28/2021

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NEW ZEALAND: Economy – Reserve Bank Confirms Consultations “Key to the Future of How New Zealanders Pay and Save”

“The Reserve Bank of New Zealand – Te Pūtea Matua will be consulting extensively over the remainder of 2021 on issues key to the future of how New Zealanders pay and save, driven by its new stewardship mandate for cash and a broader currency system that supports the prosperity and wellbeing of New Zealanders,” confirmed Assistant Governor Christian Hawkesby today (Weds, 7 Jul ’21). The Reserve Bank will be releasing a series of money and cash issues papers for feedback from August to November which are taking forward issues identified during Future of Cash consultations in 2019. “We’ll be considering not only what we should be doing as steward, but what a resilient and stable cash and currency system in New Zealand might look like, and how we might best respond to digital innovations in money and payments,” says Mr Hawkesby who is also the Reserve Bank’s General Manager of Economics, Financial Markets and Banking.

“The first consultation will introduce and seek feedback on the broad concepts of money and cash stewardship, and outline specific topics to be covered in the rest of the series. Subsequent papers will look at the potential for a Central Bank Digital Currency (CBDC) to work alongside cash as government-backed money, issues

arising from new electronic money forms including crypto assets (such as BitCoin) and stable coins (such as proposed by a Facebook-led consortium), and how the cash system might need to change to continue to meet the needs of users. “While most of us are keen to pay electronically, we know from research we’ve published today, feedback, and news reports that some communities, personal and retail customers are struggling with the loss of cash and in-person banking services despite banks’ efforts to help them adapt.

“Despite less New Zealanders using physical cash, the ability to use it remains widely valued because it ensures inclusion, and gives everyone autonomy and choice in the way they pay and save. “Knowing that the money held in our bank accounts can be withdrawn in central bank money backed by the New Zealand government – currently only available through physical cash – is an unspoken promise which helps promote trust in banks and the financial system. We are concerned that this promise is being weakened through reducing access to physical cash services due to falling branch and ATM numbers. “However, we also know that digital forms of payment are the preferred way of paying for the majority of us, and that the future will undoubtedly involve less cash. Our job is to ensure that these transitions work for all New Zealanders.

“The potential for a Central Bank Digital Currency to help address some of the downsides of reducing physical cash use and services is something we want to explore for New Zealand. A CBDC, similar to digital cash, might well be part of the solution, but we need to test our assessment of the issues and proposed approach before developing any firm proposals. “We encourage those affected or interested in these issues to register on our website to be included in these consultations, during which we’ll be talking and travelling widely to hear from all the interests involved including diverse communities and customer types, along with cash, banking and fintech industries,” says Mr Hawkesby. Research reports highlight cash use and service changes, and how we value cash

The Reserve Bank has published today a series of research reports prepared over the past six months looking at trends in cash and payments preferences and services, including the apparent impact of COVID-19, and why and how New Zealanders still value cash despite preferring electronic payments. Cash and payments data update: COVID-19 special The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the decline in transactional cash use, compounded by accelerating reductions in banks’ branch and cash services, and despite New Zealanders’ rush to cash in March 2020. Comparison report: Cash use surveys 2017, 2019, 2020 Cash use survey 2020 The decline in cash users is reflected across a number of indicators, including the proportion of people who don’t hold cash in their wallet, and the number of people who are using cash less than they were 12 months ago. Increasing numbers of New Zealanders are using electronic payment options. In 2020, the trajectory of change in responses to some questions has increased dramatically.

Government Commits \$600,000 to Flood Recovery

The Government is contributing \$600,000 to help residents affected by the weekend's violent weather with recovery efforts. Acting Minister for Emergency Management Kris Faafoi and Agriculture Minister Damien O'Connor have been in the Buller district this afternoon to assess flood damage and support the local response effort. They have announced an initial contribution of \$300,000 towards a Buller Mayoral Relief Fund and another \$100,000 towards a similar fund for Marlborough. Alongside that the event has been classified a medium-scale adverse event, unlocking another \$200,000 for flood-affected farmers and growers across the West Coast and Marlborough regions. "While it is too early to know the full cost of the damage, we expect it to be significant and this contribution will help communities to start to get back on their feet," Kris Faafoi said.

"I know it's been a really rough weekend for the people of Buller, Marlborough and Tasman and I'd like to acknowledge how disruptive and distressing this flooding has been for all affected communities. "This has been a massive effort with multiple agencies working across a range of areas. I've had the privilege of speaking to some of those working on the front line and they're doing a great job," Kris Faafoi said. Damien O'Connor said the extra funding will be used to help farmers recover, and includes wellbeing support, specialist technical advice and other flood assistance. "This weather event has put further pressure on farmers who're entering one of their busiest times of the year – calving and lambing – and we're committed to helping them get through," Damien O'Connor said. "Based on the advice I have received from Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI) staff, the scale of impact is beyond the communities' ability to cope.

"MPI will be working with industry groups, such as DairyNZ, Beef + Lamb New Zealand, Federated Farmers and NZ Winegrowers, to determine how this financial support can have the greatest impact. "Support is available for farmers who are short of livestock feed, or who have had baleage and fodder crops damaged by floodwaters," Damien O'Connor said. "A big cleanup and recovery effort lies ahead for communities impacted by this flooding, and I can assure you the Government will be doing all it can to help," Kris Faafoi said. Mayoral Relief Funds provide an additional way to help communities bounce back after an emergency. Local communities and councils are well-placed to know exactly what they need so this funding can be used, for example, to meet the needs of affected families and individuals, community organisations or marae. The funds are in addition to other support that people may be eligible for through the Ministry of Social Development and Ministry for Primary Industries.

The national Feed Coordination Service can help connect farmers with surplus supplementary feed listed for sale. Farmers needing feed support are encouraged to call 0800 FARMING (0800 32 76 46). Farmers who need wellbeing support should call their Rural Support Trust on 0800 RURAL HELP or 0800 787 254. What's an adverse event? The Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI) makes the classification, usually following an approach by the community. There are three adverse events – localised, medium and large-scale. These cover things like droughts, floods, fire, earthquakes and other natural disasters and take into account the magnitude of the event, the ability to prepare for it and the capacity of the community to cope.

From <https://livenews.co.nz> 07/18/2021

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Funding for Five Projects to Reduce Food Waste

The Government is funding five projects to help address the growing problem of food waste, Environment Minister David Parker announced today. “New Zealand households throw away nearly 300,000 tonnes of food every year, half of which could still be eaten. By supporting these initiatives, we’re taking steps to reduce this problem,” David Parker said. The Government will fund two food waste and three compost projects this year through the Waste Minimisation Fund. KiwiHarvest will receive \$153,000 for its three new sites. 0800 Hungry Ministries in Christchurch will receive \$67,012 to replace 15-year-old delivery vans used in their food rescue operations. Community Compost Ltd will receive \$92,250 to expand current composting operations in Nelson.

CBEC (Community Business and Environment Centre) EcoSolutions that operates in Northland will receive \$400,000 to install 12 community composting hubs and 1,200 home composting systems. BioRich Limited in Napier will receive \$850,000 to expand existing composting operations in Hawke’s Bay. “We continue to support organic waste projects to meet emissions reductions targets. It is one of our investment signals for the current 2021 funding round and further applications are still under consideration,” David Parker said. “To address food waste, we need to look into ways of redistributing or reusing edible surplus food, as well as ways to divert inedible food from landfill. These projects support both. “By funding such projects we’re making strides towards a low waste, low emissions circular economy.”

Project details: KiwiHarvest is a national food rescue organisation that works with food businesses, including supermarkets, wholesalers, producers, cafes, restaurants, and hotels, to rescue the food that they are not able to sell. This is redistributed to people in need. “We are supporting KiwiHarvest’s Project Whakaraki, which has allowed KiwiHarvest to expand its food collection sites in Dunedin, Queenstown and the North Shore of Auckland,” David Parker said. 0800 Hungry Ministries have provided food rescue and support for Christchurch’s people in need for 20 years. It has a large group of volunteers, but 0800’s vans were holding back operations. They

were nearing the end of their life and are manual drive vehicles. So, many of the volunteers who were used to driving automatic vans were not able to drive them ,

“0800’s services have been well received and in greater demand during crisis times like Covid-19, Christchurch’s recent flooding and the earthquakes,” David Parker said. Community Compost Ltd, Nelson has built and operated in-vessel commercial composting machine – bEartha to address the high demand in Nelson for commercial organic waste processing. “This new funding will help them build another bEartha and expand their capacity by 156 tonnes to 350 tonnes a year,” David Parker said. Community Business & Environment Centre (CBEC), Northland is a community enterprise operating a range of environmental programmes across Northland. “With this grant, CBEC three-year project will set up 12 community compost collection hubs across Northland capable of processing up to 100 tonnes of waste from local businesses and organisations.

“The project also tackles food waste from a household perspective, by providing eight-week community compost recycling programmes and composting systems to an expected 1,200 households by the end of the project,” David Parker said Biorich, Hawke’s Bay will expand their existing composting facility to increase their annual capacity from 50,000 tonnes to 62,000 tonnes a year. The project will produce organic compost for use in Hawke’s Bay, Gisborne and Bay of Plenty. “The BioRich project will address the issues of stockpiled lambs’ skins due to a collapse in the world pelt market, and the large volume of wood waste generated around Napier and Hastings that cannot be burnt because of air quality controls,” David Parker said.

From <https://livenews.co.nz> 07/22/2021

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6、 Private Sector

Asia-Pacific

Using Entrepreneurial Spirit to Advance Democracy

In episode 10 of the third season of How to Fix Democracy, a series developed by the Bertelsmann Foundation and other partners, former GMF YTIIL fellow Wietse van Ransbeeck discusses the role modern technology can play in making democracy more inclusive and diverse. Through his Brussels-based venture CitizenLab, Wietse works with local governments around the globe to help them become more participatory with input-gathering and decision-making. The exploration of new ways for governments to connect with their citizens is also something GMF Cities will explore as part of the Cities Fortifying Democracy project, and we continue to cheer on Wietse and his colleagues as they help cities in their all-important endeavor to keep democracy strong.

East Asia

CHINA: Central Bank Emphasizes Support for Small Businesses

China's central bank has called upon banking financial institutions to enhance their capabilities of providing financial services to micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises to better support the country's real economy. Efforts should be made to increase the credit supply to micro, small and medium-sized enterprises, optimize credit products and services to individual businesses, and expand service coverage in inclusive financing, according to a circular released by the People's Bank of China (PBOC). Banking financial institutions should also develop and continue fine-tuning loan products so as to facilitate the use of funds and reduce the overall financing costs for those enterprises, read the circular. The PBOC also stressed that all banking financial institutions should enhance their loan pricing capabilities by providing differentiated and precise loans.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 07/05/2021

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China Reports Growth in Loans to Small Firms

China had issued more inclusive loans to small and micro firms by the end of May, official data showed on Wednesday. Outstanding inclusive loans to small and micro businesses had totaled 17.07 trillion yuan (about 2.63 trillion U.S. dollars) by the end of May, up by 30.53 percent year on year, Zhang Zhongning, a spokesperson for the China Banking and Insurance Regulatory Commission, told a press conference. These loans had supported about 28.63 million enterprises, 5.71 million more than a year earlier. In the first five months of this year, the interest rate of newly issued inclusive loans to small and micro enterprises averaged at 5.68 percent, down by 0.2 percentage points from 2020, Zhang said.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 07/14/2021

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China's Logistics Sector Booming as Foreign Trade Expands

China's logistics sector reported rapid growth in the first half of the year, boosted by thriving foreign trade as the recovery of the world's second-largest economy has continued to consolidate. The country's foreign trade rose 27.1 percent year on year to 18.07 trillion yuan (about 2.79 trillion U.S. dollars) in the first six months, its best performance for the same period in history, data from the General Administration of Customs (GAC) shows. The record-breaking trade volume entailed rising shipping

demand among foreign trade enterprises. "My firm needs to ship goods overseas every day, with over 10,000 containers sent every year," said Yang Nan, president of a foreign trade firm in east China's Jiangsu Province, an export powerhouse in China. As a major means of transport, rail freight saw strong growth momentum. According to data from the China State Railway Group Co., Ltd., the China-Europe freight train service handled 7,377 trips in the first half of this year, up 43 percent from the same period last year, while goods transported totaled 707,000 twenty-foot equivalent unit containers, surging 52 percent year on year. Air cargo orders also climbed as Chinese goods gained popularity among customers around the world. In the January-June period, China's air cargo volume rose 24.6 percent year on year to 3.74 million tonnes, according to data from the Civil Aviation Administration of China.

China's sustained economic recovery is shoring up production and demand, which has laid a solid foundation for the growth of the country's foreign trade, said GAC spokesperson Li Kuiwen, adding that global economic revival also has played a positive role. Despite the trade growth registered in the first six months, the future is not entirely rosy for foreign trade firms as they are faced with challenges including fluctuating exchange rates, rising transport costs and high raw material prices, analysts have said. To further spur the growth of foreign trade, China's State Council earlier this month released guidelines on accelerating the development of new forms and models of foreign trade to push forward its upgrade and foster new competitive strengths. To plan for the future, enterprises should avail of the opportunities presented by the new forms and models of foreign trade, sharpen their product and brand competitiveness and further expand their markets, said Zhuang Rui, a professor at the University of International Business and Economics.

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China's Electronic Information Manufacturing Sector Maintains Steady Expansion

China's electronic information manufacturing sector posted steady expansion in the first half of 2021, data from the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology (MIIT) shows. The added value of electronic information manufacturers with annual operating revenues of at least 20 million yuan (about 3.09 million U.S. dollars) rose 19.8 percent year on year, with the compound annual growth rate reaching 12.5 percent over the past two years, according to the MIIT. In June alone, the added value of those manufacturers grew 13.4 percent year on year, quickening by 0.8 percentage points from the growth during the same period in 2020, the data showed. The export delivery value of major enterprises in the sector rose 17.6 percent year on year in the January-June period, while fixed-asset investment into the sector jumped 28.3 percent from a year ago. MIIT data also shows that the operating revenue of major electronic information manufacturers went up 25.8 percent year on year to 5.11 trillion yuan in the first five months, while their combined profits in the period

totaled 254.5 billion yuan, surging 49.3 percent year on year. In June, China's smartphone output climbed 2.9 percent year on year to 140 million units, while the production of integrated circuits jumped 43.9 percent to 30.82 billion pieces.

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China Launches Special Campaign to Regulate Its Internet Sector

China has launched a special six-month campaign to regulate its internet industry, the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology said on Monday. The campaign targets problems that may disrupt market order, damage consumer rights, or threaten data security. The ministry will crack down on malicious internet company practices that could disrupt market order, such as link-blocking activities and interference in products and services operated by other entities. In the interest of data security, the ministry will target companies that have not taken management and technical measures as required in the collection, transmission and storage of data, and in offering the data to other entities.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 07/26/2021

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JAPAN: Companies Join Global Rivalry to Launch Satellite-Based Internet Services

Efforts to put satellites into orbit, thereby giving more people around the world access to internet services, have been spreading widely. More than 3 billion people are estimated to live in places with insufficient internet systems. This has led to growing international rivalry among technology firms and other companies as they seek to mine the untapped market for such services in newly emerging economies and developing countries. Speaking at an international trade fair for telecom businesses held in Spain in June, SpaceX CEO Elon Musk said his company would be able to provide high-speed, broadband internet service almost anywhere in the world by August. A U.S. space enterprise and the frontrunner in the satellite communications business, SpaceX has been competing fiercely with Amazon. com, Inc. and Facebook Inc., both of which aim to launch their own satellites to provide internet service.

SpaceX has launched over 1,500 satellites to date and started its internet service last year in such countries as the United States and Canada. Users have to buy special terminals for about \$500, while paying a monthly service charge of about \$100. The Internal Affairs and Communications Ministry plans to review the Radio Law this summer so that people in Japan can also use the SpaceX service. Japanese companies have likewise entered this field. SoftBank Corp. in May agreed on a business tie-up with OneWeb LLC, a U.K. satellite communications company in

which its parent firm SoftBank Group has invested. OneWeb has successfully put over 180 satellites into orbit, and SoftBank plans to start providing its service in some parts of the world this year. Rakuten Group, Inc. plans to launch its satellite communications service for domestic customers as early as fiscal 2022, by making use of the technologies owned by a U.S. startup it has invested in.

As Rakuten is a late starter in the mobile phone service business, and it will cost both time and a huge sum of money to develop radio communication base stations on the ground, Rakuten aims to swiftly narrow the gap with its front-running rivals via new technologies. A mainstream method in internet communications is to have data-mounted digital signals converted into optical signals, then have the data exchanged via networks of optical fibers. The nation's three leading mobile phone service operators — NTT Docomo, Inc., KDDI Corp. and SoftBank — have set up base stations at several hundred thousand locations across the country, giving them extensive communication networks. In contrast, satellite communications can send radio waves to wider areas and will therefore have less difficulty covering even areas where optical fiber and other communications networks have not been established. Efforts to utilize satellites started several decades ago, with transmission speed and the related cost being major challenges.

The cost of the rockets necessary for launching satellites into orbit has dropped in recent years, while the functions of semiconductor chips have been enhanced, thus having the momentum for adopting satellite communication systems growing. More time is thought to be needed for companies to realize their objective of making satellite communication services common in newly emerging economies and developing countries. U.S. consulting firm AT Kearney Inc. estimates that the market size of the global space industry, which centers on the satellite communication service business and stood at about ¥40 trillion in 2020, will expand to roughly ¥160 trillion in 2040. However, some have said that with the growing number of satellites in orbit, radio waves from space might collide with terrestrial radio waves, resulting in glitches. Also, satellites that have reached the end of their life spans could eventually become space debris. "Providing stable service is our most important mission," said Nobuyuki Uchida, an executive officer of Rakuten Mobile, Inc.

From <https://the-japan-news.com> 07/18/2021

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SOUTH KOREA: Government Action Needed to Help Local Firms Catch Up with Global Transition to Clean Energy

Carbon neutrality is likely to act as a virtual trade barrier for South Korean companies to approach global markets and the government should act more proactively to help local firms not to fall behind the global trend toward cleaner energy, a POSCO executive said Wednesday. Speaking at a forum held by the Federation of Korean Industries in Seoul, Kim Hak-dong, the head of POSCO's steel business unit called

for governmental support to help Korean companies to catch up with global competitors. “Carbon neutrality is becoming a new trade barrier,” he said, before adding, “We need more support that matches that in other rival countries and global companies in fields such as hydrogen reduction steel.” The European Union has pledged one trillion euros (\$1.1 trillion) in funding until 2030 while the United States will spend \$2 trillion by 2025, with Japan spending 30 trillion yen (\$271 billion), the FKI said.

“Until we reach carbon neutrality, tougher regulations compared to rival countries and companies will not ideal,” Kim said. POSCO is eyeing to attain net zero emissions by 2050 with plans to reduce CO2 emissions by 20% in the short-term by 2030 and 50% in the mid-term by 2040. Consisting of three phases, the process will aim to increase energy efficiency and replace the current fuel and raw materials with economical low-carbon ones, as well as maximizing the use of scraps along with applying CCUS technology. In the last phase, it aims to come up with a carbon neutral steelmaking process based on green hydrogen and renewable energy. Kim Yoon, the chairman of Samyang Holdings and the leader of the K-ESG Alliance, said the forum was “meaningful” in that leaders of different sectors put heads together to discuss the topic of ESG.

“By discussing the challenges that South Korean companies face with the government and the National Assembly, we want to reach the common goal, which is South Korea’s sustainable growth,” Kim said. Some of the policy ideas suggested the FKI to encourage ESG values include providing tax credits for carbon reduction technology and support for environmental friendly technologies in the fields of biodiversity and circular economy and approval more environmental friendly plastics including biodegradable plastics Wednesday’s event on ESG was attended by some 60 guests including lawmakers Lee Won-wook and Kim Hoi-jae as well as Lee Gyung-su, who heads the Science and Technology Innovation Division at the Korean Ministry of Science and ICT.

From <http://www.koreaherald.com> 07/07/2021

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KT Starts ‘Real’ End-to-End 5G Service in Industry First

KT on Thursday announced the launch of pure end-to-end 5G service, becoming the first mobile carrier in South Korea to commercialize a 5G standalone network. Starting from Thursday, users of Samsung Galaxy S20, S20+ and S20 Ultra phones who subscribe to KT’s 5G mobile plans will be able to access the 5G SA connection simply by updating their device software. Standalone refers to it being pure 5G from end to end, without occasional transitioning to 4G Long Term Evolution networks. So far, all three mobile carriers selling 5G plans in South Korea have relied on the backup of LTE networks wherever 5G connections fail. This is known as 5G nonstandalone. For data usage, for example, when users watch a video clip on

YouTube, they are on 5G. But for wireless telecom services, smartphones are still connected to LTE networks. With “real” 5G, mobile devices will have better battery efficiency and response speed, KT said.

According to the Telecommunications Technology Association, the battery life of the Galaxy S20+ increased by 8.8 percent to 13 hours and 38 minutes on the standalone network, in comparison to 12 hours and 32 minutes nonstandalone. KT added the 5G SA rollout would make a difference in the government’s disaster alert system as well. Currently, text messages that alarm the public of accidents or disasters are sent via the LTE network that covers a wider range of areas than the 5G SA network, making it impossible to narrow down the recipients. Starting with mobile plans, KT plans to further expand the deployment of 5G SA across industries. “KT is preparing to provide 5G services that would create new value for customers,” said Kim Young-in, vice president at KT’s network business. “As a digital platform company, KT is making various efforts to help overcome the COVID-19 crisis and push the digital new deal drive.”

Meanwhile, SKT and LG U+ remain cautious on expanding standalone access, citing network stability issues. The standalone mode could turn out to have slower data transfer speeds, without the support of the far-reaching 4G infrastructure, thus undermining overall 5G quality. Some also have raised concerns that KT 5G subscribers could be left out of service upon leaving the firm’s 5G coverage area. “KT has been preparing for the 5G SA service for a long time and has proven the company’s technology has no quality issue,” said a KT official. “When users get out of 5G regions, they are automatically connected to LTE.”

From <http://www.koreaherald.com> 07/15/2021

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Government Eyes More Relief Funds for Small Merchants Under Proposed Extra Budget Minister

South Korea’s top economic policymaker said Monday the government will consider the dispersal of more relief funds to small merchants hit by the pandemic under its proposed extra budget. The fourth wave of the pandemic has spurred calls to revise a proposed extra budget of 33 trillion won (US\$28.8 billion) as the toughest-ever virus curbs will likely cause more damage to the self-employed. On July 12, South Korea began imposing Level 4 social distancing rules, the highest-level in its four-tier scheme, in the greater capital area, for two weeks to stem spiking virus cases. From Monday, non-metropolitan areas were also put under toughened virus restrictions. Finance Minister Hong Nam-ki ordered finance ministry officials to draw up measures to increase support to the pandemic-hit merchants under the proposed supplementary budget scheme.

Of the extra budget, the government earmarked 3.9 trillion won to provide relief funds

to struggling small business owners and to compensate them for losses caused by business restrictions. Parliamentary committees are seeking to increase support to such people, but the finance minister has been cautious about jacking up the size of the extra budget, presenting negative views about a potential debt sale to finance a larger supplementary budget. He is also opposed to the provision of universal support to all households, citing the country's growing national debt. The ruling Democratic Party wants another cash handout to all households, instead of the government's proposal to give relief aid to people in the bottom 80 percent income bracket. But the minister said he is open to revising details about cash-back reward schemes for credit card spending. The government set aside 1.1 trillion won for the program in a bid to boost spending in the second half.

From <https://en.yna.co.kr> 07/19/2021

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Korean Companies Jump onto NFT Bandwagon

A growing number of South Korean companies are rushing to join the fledgling digital blockchain market based on nonfungible tokens, as artists, museums and diverse digital asset holders are exploring the potential of the new segment. An NFT, a unit of data stored on a digital ledger, is gaining popularity as a way for people and companies to use the blockchain technology to buy and sell the ownership of digital assets, ranging from works of art to games and videos. Korean companies with a rich archive of digital assets and blockchain technology providers are keen to get a piece of the action as steadily increasing NFT deals are expected to drive up demand for solutions. CJ OliveNetworks said Monday it has agreed to work with Lambda256, a unit of Dunamu, to enter the NFT market together and cooperate in related business and technology. Dunamu is running Upbit, a Korean crypto exchange.

Under the partnership, CJ OliveNetworks said it would put together its digital transformation technology in the broadcast media field with Lambda256's blockchain NFT service platform. "We are pleased to cooperate with Lambda256, which has strength in blockchain technology and know-how in NFT business," said Cha In-hyuk, CEO of CJ OliveNetworks. The two companies said they would work together to apply a range of NFT solutions including the generation of large-scale media data, issuance, distribution and tracking to accelerate NFT transactions. In addition, CJ OliveNetworks said it would offer services including verification for NFT intellectual property with artificial intelligence solutions developed by its digital transformation research center. CJ OliveNetworks said it would issue NFTs of intellectual property for media artworks it holds and also push for a distribution business in a bid to step into the NFT ecosystem where first movers are yet to set the standards for copyright, ownership and intellectual property applications.

To that end, Park Jae-hyun, CEO of Lambda256, said the company will help introduce CJ OliveNetwork's technology both at home and abroad. Also on Monday,

a Korean blockchain firm Coinplug said it has inked a business partnership with Belivvr, which offers an extended reality platform. Under the contract, Belivvr's NFT-based content will be distributed and sold on Coinplug's NFT market. As a showcase, the two firms unveiled a virtual exhibition titled "V.SPACE," featuring a gallery of artworks by webtoon and illustration artists who belong to Belivvr and direct links to an online auction site for bidding. Belivvr, which launched its webtoon platform in 2017, has been making inroads into the metaverse ecosystem in order to take advantage of the latest digital technologies that allow users to interact with each other through digital avatars and navigate a virtual reality world.

Coinplug launched a beta version of NFT platform Metapie on July 20 and is now offering NFTs for digital art, sports and other categories. Uhn Joon-sun, CEO of Coinplug, said, "The deal with Belivvr is expected to generate collaboration effects between NFT business and the metaverse industry." Belivvr said the NFT art market focused on the ownership of artworks will offer fresh opportunities for webtoon artists. Currently, the rights of popular webtoon stories are actively sold for movie and TV adaptations, while the commercial transactions of original webtoon artworks are limited to a small number of enthusiasts. Although the NFT market is still in its infancy, players in the blockchain sector are taking steps to enter the segment by establishing marketplaces and demonstrating transactions to help the sector take off faster.

Korbit, a major Korean blockchain exchange, set up the country's first NFT market in March. Starting from July 21, Korbit is selling a limited number of NFTs based on tvN's hit drama series "Vincenzo." "We are looking at the sector to see how NFTs get converged with metaverse," a Korbit official said. "As more people get to know NFTs, a new market is likely to take shape in the near future." It seems inevitable that the growth of the NFT business will hinge on the expansion of the metaverse ecosystem, as it is possible to attach ownership on all the digital assets that users create in the virtual world. Mobile giant Kakao is also interested in the NFT business. In May, Kakao's blockchain technology affiliate Ground X launched a solution that allows people to easily issue NFTs. It also introduced a digital asset wallet designed to display and distribute digital content in NFT format.

In the entertainment sector, singer Se7en released an English edition of a new song "Mona Lisa" as an NFT. The track will be sold through the New Economy Movement, or NEM, ecosystem with a dual-layer blockchain. More local NFT marketplaces are expected to pop up to meet the demand from artists and agencies home to a library of music and multimedia content. In the art sector, Kansong Art and Culture Foundation made headlines last Thursday after it announced plans to tokenize Hunminjeongeum Haerye, National Treasure No. 70, in a bid to raise operation funds. Hunminjeongeum Haerye, if turned into an NFT, would become the first national treasure to be traded on a blockchain platform. The book from the Joseon era (1392-1910) is a guide to Hangeul, the Korean writing system, created by King Sejong.

From <http://www.koreaherald.com> 07/26/2021

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South-East Asia

SINGAPORE: Must Reinforce Position as Resilient Offshore Trading Hub for Ferrous, Steel Sector

Singapore's Minister for Manpower and Second Minister for Trade and Industry Tan See Leng said Tuesday that Singapore must reinforce its position as a resilient offshore trading hub for the ferrous and steel sector. He said at the opening ceremony of the Singapore International Ferrous Week 2021 that the city-state aims to distinguish itself from the competitors based on the intangible factors, such as the strong rule of law, favorable business environment, liquid financial sector, and highly skilled workforce. "Nonetheless, we must work hard to preserve our status. One way to do so is to improve the transparency of Singapore's trade financing," he added. The minister offered three suggestions on how Singapore's ferrous community can pivot and thrive in the new business environment, where the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic continues to be keenly felt, the post-pandemic recovery is expected to be protracted and highly uneven across various geographies and sectors, and structural shifts accelerated by the pandemic present a myriad of challenges for the commodities sector. Besides reinforcing Singapore's position as a trading hub, Tan suggested that Singapore's ferrous and steel sector embraces the opportunities afforded by digitalization, and the companies continue to innovate to transform their operations and build new competitive advantages. The Singapore International Ferrous Week 2021, held from July 13 to 15, is co-organized by Enterprise Singapore, the Singapore Exchange (SGX), Esteel together with partners. It is a platform for pan-Asian industry experts and decision makers across the steel-making and trading value chain to explore partnerships and growth opportunities.

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VIETNAM: Govt Rolls Out Interest-Free Loans for Companies to Pay Salaries

The Việt Nam Bank for Social Policies has begun accepting applications from businesses for interest-free loans to fund furlough and salary payments, its deputy director, Bùi Văn Sỗn, said. The loans are part of the Government's latest relief package worth VNĐ26 trillion (US\$1.13 billion) for supporting workers and employers struggling to cope with the pandemic. Around VNĐ7.5 trillion will be used for interest-free loans for businesses to pay salaries. Businesses can obtain a loan to pay workers who have contracts with compulsory social security but are furloughed for 15 consecutive days between May 1, 2021 and March 31 next year. They must not have any bad debts to qualify for the loans, but do not need guarantees. They are

also permitted to borrow to pay workers to resume business. This includes businesses instructed to close down temporarily as a COVID-19 preventive measure in that period, those in transportation, aviation, tourism, and hospitality, and others that send guest workers abroad. The loans are for up to 12 months. Minister of Labour, War Invalids and Social Affairs Đào Ngọc Dung promised that procedures for the relief package would be simplified and abbreviated as much as possible.

While last year the VNĐ62 trillion relief package took up to 40 days for businesses to get loans for work stoppage payment, now it should only take seven to 10 days, he assured. Dr Võ Trí Thành, a member of the National Financial and Monetary Policy Advisory Council, said the VNĐ26 trillion package would help businesses that retain their staff or want them to return to work after the pandemic. But Trần Minh Phi, director of An Phi Construction and Design Co., Ltd., said many businesses are struggling to repay their bank loans due to the nearly two-year-long pandemic, and so many might not be able to meet the requirement of having no bad debts. Dr Nguyễn Trí Hiếu, an economist and financial expert, agreed with Phi, saying the requirement should be scrapped to better support people working for businesses with bad debts. There could be policies to force businesses to prioritise repayment of this loan before others, and businesses with debts overdue for 90-180 days could be given the loan, he added. A continuing drawback facing the programme is that like last time some businesses are not fully aware of the new relief package. According to the General Department of Statistics, in the first six months of the year 70,200 businesses had to temporarily or permanently close down, a 22.1 per cent increase year-on-year. There were nearly 1.2 million people of working age unemployed during the second quarter, up 7.8 per cent from the first quarter, according to the Ministry of Labourers, War Invalids and Social Affairs. HCM City has become the COVID-19 epicentre of the country with more than 28,300 cases. It has been under social distancing since May 31, affecting the livelihoods of many locals.

From <https://vietnamnews.vn/> 07/20/2021

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Information-Communications Technology Sector Earns Nearly US\$65 Billion in H1

Total revenue of the information and communications technology (ICT) sector reached nearly US\$65 billion in the first half of 2021, up 22 per cent year-on-year, according to the Ministry of Information and Communication. Of that figure, \$57.6 billion came from hardware and electronics. The export turnover of hardware and electronic products is estimated at \$50.5 billion, accounting for 31.6 per cent of the country's total export value. The earnings mainly came from the export of computers, spare parts, mobile phones, and components. The telecoms industry posted total revenue of nearly VNĐ66 trillion (\$2.86 billion) during January-June, up 5.29 per cent against the same period last year. This year, the ministry set a target of around \$140 billion for the ICT sector, a year-on-year rise of 14 per cent. By the end of June, the

sector had around 47,000 enterprises, which employed 1.055 million workers.

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Pandemic Highlights the Need for Developing Part-Supply Industries to Cope with Disruptions

The COVID-19 pandemic is highlighting the urgent need for promoting the development of part-supply industries to enable enterprises to be more resilient to shocks or disruptions to global supply chains. Việt Nam's part-supply industries remained weak in terms of technology, management capacity and linkages with foreign-direct-investment (FDI) companies, which became evident when the COVID-19 pandemic caused disruptions to global supply chains. The recent virus outbreaks at industrial parks pushed many enterprises into difficulty with a severe shortage of components and materials for production. Automobile manufacturer Hyundai Thành Công said that the company was facing a chip shortage and planned to reduce 20 per cent of their production capacity. They said that risks of further cuts in production existed if the chip crunch did not ease. Nguyễn Văn Kết, director of mechanics company SKD Việt Nam, said that his company was also affected by the shortage of chips which depends on imported sources. The shortage of components and materials for production has become more severe during the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in a number of countries which makes transportation of goods more difficult.

According to Trương Thị Chí Bình, Deputy President of the Việt Nam Association for Supporting Industries, although production was maintained during the pandemic, nearly 50 per cent of the association's member enterprises saw drops in revenue. Việt Nam's supporting enterprises remained of weak capacity compared with other countries in the region such as Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia and India, which made Vietnamese enterprises more vulnerable to global shocks and disruptions to value chains. A report from the Ministry of Industry and Trade showed that for the garment and textile industry, as an example, the local procurement rate was just 40-45 per cent and the industry has to depend on imported fabric. The industry mainly did outsourcing contracts with a low added value. For the automobile production industry, the local procurement rate was far below what was expected. The local procurement rate for the electronics and telecommunications industry was only around 15 per cent and just five per cent for hi-tech industries. Đào Phan Long, President of the Việt Nam Association of Mechanical Industry, said Việt Nam lacked spearhead products which could compete with imported ones. In addition, Việt Nam remained largely dependent on imports of raw materials for production, which would also undermine its productivity and competitiveness.

More than ever, enterprises need further support from the Government to recover production and promote the development of the part-supply industry, Bình said. She

said that policies should be developed to encourage the consumption of domestically-produced products and expand exports. A law supporting industries is important to attract investment and promote the development of these industries. According to the Industry Agency under the Ministry of Industry and Trade, the ministry will study and develop policies to attract investment and enhance linkages to promote technology transfers between FDI and domestic enterprises. This would contribute to support the development of the part-supply industries. The ministry's database of the manufacturing and processing industry included more than 3,600 potential enterprises operating in mechanical, automotive, electronics, footwear, and garment and textile industries. Việt Nam set the target of having at least 1,000 enterprises that were capable of being direct suppliers to multinational companies.

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Banks to Tighten Credit in Risky Sectors in Remaining Months of This Year

Banks will continue to tighten lending in risky sectors including securities, real estate, financial, and tourism business, seeing higher credit risks in the remaining months of this year, a survey carried out by The Monetary Forecasting and Statistics Department, has said. The survey included 95 per cent of credit institutions and branches of foreign banks operating in Việt Nam. The survey found that credit institutions saw an increase in overall credit demand in the first half of this year and forecast the trend would continue in the second half. Only credit demand from tourism businesses dropped in the first half but it was expected to see a slight recovery in the second half. Credit risk was seen to increase in the first half of 2021 but at a lower rate than the second half of 2020 in almost all sectors. However, securities, real estate, financial and tourism businesses were considered sectors with higher credit risk in the pandemic.

Banks said that they intended to tighten lending for securities, real estate, financial and tourism business in the remaining months of this year but loosen credit criteria for enterprises, especially those of small and medium-sized enterprises, on positive economic prospects, improved financial capacity of credit institutions, and the Government's drastic measures to fight the virus. Retail and wholesale, import and export and lending for living expenses were the major drivers of credit growth in the first half of this year and would continue in the remaining months of this year and next. State Bank of Việt Nam statistics showed that total outstanding loans were estimated to be more than VNĐ9.6 quadrillion (US\$414 billion) as of the end of May and banks pumped a net value of more than VNĐ455 trillion into the economy through lending channels in the first five months of this year. Trade and industry were the two sectors with the highest outstanding loans, worth more than VNĐ2.22 quadrillion and VNĐ1.84 quadrillion respectively. Credit for trade saw a growth rate of 5.73 per cent while industry had a 6.73 per cent growth rate, higher than overall

credit growth of 4.95 per cent in the first five months of this year.

From <https://vietnamnews.vn> 07/31/2021

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South Asia

INDIA: MHA Denies Access to CCTNS Databases for Private Firms

In Lok Sabha during the current monsoon session of the Parliament, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has informed that no private company is allowed access to the Crime and Criminals Tracking Network System (CCTNS) and other government databases to run background checks on employees. As reported by a national daily, the Minister of State for Home Affairs Ajay Kumar Mishra added, "The access will not be granted even to the companies who wish to pay and get any information through its data." The Minister shared this in a written reply to a senior Congress leader Dr Shashi Tharoor who had asked, "Whether the Centre has decided to provide have access to the CCTNS and other government databases to private companies for running background checks on employees." Under the Centre's National e-Governance Plan (NeGP), CCTNS is a scheme that aims at developing a comprehensive and integrated system to scale up the efficiency and effectiveness of policing. For this, the scheme advocates the adoption of the principle of e-governance and create a nationwide networking infrastructure for an IT-powered tracking system to aid in crime investigation and detection of criminals. The scheme was given a go-ahead on June 19, 2009, and an allocation of Rs 2,000 crore has been made for the CCTNS project.

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Andhra Govt to Create 55,000 Jobs Through Digital Employment Exchanges & Job Fairs

With an aim to generate employment for 55,000 people in the coming three years, the Government of Andhra Pradesh is planning to launch digital employment exchanges in each district and organise job fairs bimonthly. As reported by a national daily, the IT Minister of Andhra Pradesh Mekapati Gowtham Reddy, while addressing a review meeting, asked the officials to look for sources to generate more employment opportunities in the state. He added, from August 15, job fairs at digital employment exchanges will be held twice a month. The first job fair will be organised in Kadapa district in association with Andhra Pradesh Skill Development Corporation. The target for generating 55,000 jobs in three years was kept under the new Andhra Pradesh Information Technology (IT) Policy 2021-24. To achieve this, a robust and holistic business ecosystem would be developed and the IT, Electronics and Communications Department would be transformed into a revenue centre to achieve self-sustenance. Further, Reddy also directed the officials to ensure the completion

of iconic towers in Visakhapatnam soon. In order to set up an electronics manufacturing cluster at Kopparthi Industrial Estate in Kadapa district, the state government has earmarked a sum of Rs 200 crore. The cluster is also expected to generate substantial employment, the Minister added.

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Tamil Nadu Govt Issues Order to Attract Startups, Offers Various Exemptions & Benefits

Tamil Nadu's MSME Secretary, V Arun Roy has issued new SOPs to promote entrepreneurship in the state. His order dated, July 22, allows the startups registered in Tamil Nadu to be eligible for relaxed rules, including exemption from payment of Earnest Money Deposit (EMD), exemption from the condition of prior turnover; exemption from the condition of prior experience and waiver of tender cost for procurements that are below Rs 20 lakh in value. The concessions, now, being extended to the startups are due to the recommendations from the Mission Director, Tamil Nadu Startup and Innovation Mission (TANSIM). The mission was brought into existence to give a boost to MSMEs. The procurement entities include government departments, public sector undertakings, statutory boards, local bodies; co-operative institutions and universities in the state. According to the Tamil Nadu government, numerous startups struggle to keep up in their initial days due to the lack of access to market for their products. As the state government is a major purchaser, it can aid the startups and solve their marketing problems to a major extent. Meanwhile, the state will also be providing recognition to these startups. As per the order, "It is observed that many startups face entry barriers as departments and Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs) impose restrictions like EMD, prior turnover condition and prior experience condition." It cited the examples of Kerala, Karnataka and Telangana saying that many states have recognised this issue and have released orders dispensing with such entry barriers for startups. Convenor for the Consortium of Indian Association KR Raghunathan called the initiative a step in the right direction. He said, it will help create unicorns from Tamil Nadu while also bolstering employment opportunities. As reported by a national daily, Raghunathan said, "Currently, EMD is exempt for locally registered MSMEs including startups. However, a startup with Udyam registration in another state like Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra can also benefit if they register as a startup in Tamil Nadu."

From <https://egov.eletsonline.com/> 07/27/2021

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SRI LANKA: Sampath Bank Introduces Helpline for Business Startup Advisory Services

Sampath Bank announced the launch of a helpline for Business Start-up Advisory Services under its flagship entrepreneurship development programme, 'Sampath

Saviya,' recently. This new endeavour builds on the Bank's longstanding efforts to support the nation's entrepreneurs and nurture a culture of entrepreneurship around the island. Focusing on the critical incubation period during which early-stage businesses tend to face heightened levels of challenges, the initiative seeks to facilitate the business incubation process. Playing an advisory role, Sampath Bank will be offering much needed guidance and support to help start-ups establish their businesses and commence operations. Sampath Bank is geared to offer guidance on early-stage business planning and registration. Further they provide information to connect with the institutions which assist business start-ups, build relationships with the Bank and the learning programmes on business development. All Sri Lankans looking to set up their own business or in the process of building their start-up venture can access Sampath Saviya Business Advisory Services by calling the dedicated helpline on +94 777 60 10 60 or by submitting their queries online through the link available on www.sampath.lk.

From <https://www.lankabusinessonline.com/> 07/29/2021

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Central-West Asia

AZERBAIJAN: Working on Transferring Some of Functions of State Bodies to Private Sector

Azerbaijan is developing proposals for the development of the non-oil sector, the transfer of regulatory and commercial functions of state structures to the private sector, Trend reports citing the report of the Azerbaijan Cabinet of Ministers for 2020, Trend reports. The adoption of a bill on cooperation between the public and private sectors, as well as the creation of a State Investment Holding, will also contribute to this process, the document reads. "Also, a new bill on privatization and transfer of state property to management is being developed. This bill is aimed at the privatization of large companies and joint-stock companies, increasing the efficiency of their activities through partnerships between the private and public sectors," said the report.

From <https://en.trend.az/> 03/10/2021

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Several State Property Facilities Privatized in Azerbaijan Through New Auction

The State Committee on Property Issues under the Azerbaijani Ministry of Economy held a new auction, during which 9 state property facilities were privatized, Trend reports referring to a source in the committee. According to the source, the privatized facilities include 8 vehicles and 1 state-owned package of shares in Barda Karpic OJSC, which is located in the Barda district. The source said that interested participants can visit the website for the provision of property services of the State

Property Service of Azerbaijan 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 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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TURKMENISTAN: Actively Promoting Growth in Private Sector - US Embassy

Small and medium sized enterprises are essential for the continued expansion and success of the private sector in any economy and Turkmenistan is actively promoting growth in the private sector, Stephen Guice, Public Affairs Officer of the US Embassy in Ashgabat told Trend. Turkmen companies are expected to join and benefit from USAID supported webinars, he noted. Guice added that on April 6, 2021, USAID supported a webinar designed to assist Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Central Asia to become active participants in e-commerce. The goal of the webinar was to share best practices in e-commerce for the sellers from Central Asia. "It is expected that the SMEs will use this knowledge to transform their businesses and to use these e-commerce platforms to sell their products locally, regionally, and globally," he noted. According to him, next steps include: webinars with independent experts and specialists from large international companies (VTEX, PayPal, UPS, DHL, eBay).

Representatives of these companies will share their experience in Internet marketing, e-commerce, electronic payments, accounting, cash flow management etc. As earlier Guice told Trend, to increase the competitiveness of Turkmenistan's economy, USAID supported a start-up ecosystem program. "The program worked with six local mentor companies that offer startup incubation and acceleration services. These mentor companies hosted a total of 122 entrepreneurs and helped develop their innovative business ideas and products. In addition, USAID created a platform that assists aspiring entrepreneurs in understanding startup entrepreneurship and to master skills through learning, practicing, and collaboration," said Guice. Also, to raise awareness about the importance of international standards and to train a pool of local experts, since 2017 USAID supported over 20 ISO training sessions and export promotion webinars for hundreds of representatives from local consulting companies and food producers in Turkmenistan. In addition, Guice said that USAID Enables Turkmen Exporters to Access New Markets. Thus, since 2019, USAID has partnered with Ter Onum, a Turkmen company specializing in wholesale import and export. USAID provided Ter Onum with training and support to arrange for and send a trial shipment of melons to Austria.

USAID's assistance to develop the private sector and increase its competitiveness is bearing fruit, boosting exports, and expanding access to new markets for Turkmen products, thus diversifying Turkmenistan's economy. Furthermore, USAID supports Turkmenistan's economy to meet local market needs and increase commercial ties with western countries. "USAID co-invested in the automation of Shaylan's (a company, operating large warehouses and a fleet of refrigerated trucks) logistics management by utilizing cutting-edge Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) systems. The ERP systems will help not only increase the company's annual revenues by 30 percent but also be available as a service for logistics companies across the country. Through this intervention, USAID is introducing new and modern technologies to strengthen supply chains that will enable Turkmenistan to increase its exports and diversify its economy," concluded Guice.

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

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Turkmen Private Sector Plans to Establish Production of Geomembranes, Geotextiles

Member businesses of the Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs of Turkmenistan (UIET) plan to establish the production of waterproofing synthetic materials, namely geomembranes and geotextiles, for use in water management projects, the UIET reported on Wednesday, Trend reports citing Business Turkmenistan. Domestically produced waterproofing synthetic materials are expected reduce the loss of water in artificial and natural reservoirs, and canals in the open ground, which are mainly used for the needs of agricultural producers, according to the report. For the production of the materials, the businesses plan to use polypropylene and polyethylene from the Kiyarly polymer complex, located in Balkan velayat. Established in 2008, the UIET unites more than 25 thousand businesses operating in different sectors of the national economy.

From <https://en.trend.az/> 07/22/2021

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UZBEKISTAN: The Effectiveness of Work in the Field of Privatization Considered

Under the chairmanship of President Shavkat Mirziyoyev, a video conference was held on 1 July to discuss the effectiveness of the work being done and further priority tasks in the field of privatization of state assets. Privatization is one of the important economic measures that not only provides budget revenues, but also serves as the basis for new investment projects, job creation and value-added products. The availability of land, buildings and infrastructure is a prerequisite for the development of entrepreneurship. Therefore, the issue of privatization has been identified as one of the key areas of economic reforms. Work is underway to reduce the number of

enterprises with a state share at least 3 times in the current and next year. These transformations are widely recognized by the world's authoritative experts and media. On 27 October 2020, the Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan "On measures for accelerated reform of enterprises with the participation of the state and the privatization of state assets" was adopted. In the first half of this year, 478 objects of state property were sold for 1 trillion 100 billion soums.

However, much remains to be done. In particular, 288 out of 556 objects designated for sale have not yet been put up for auction. In addition, 511 objects at the disposal of enterprises and banks with state participation, which are not related to their main activities, have not yet been sold. The meeting discussed the tasks of effectively organizing the privatization process, simplifying the procedures for participating in auctions and expanding access to them. It was noted that this year more than 900 state-owned objects will be put up for sale. The practice of selling state property at a starting price of "1 soum", the sale of land plots with an investment obligation will be canceled, objects will be put up for electronic auction at the market price. In addition, the fee for participation in the online auction will be abolished, and the costs of entrepreneurs for electronic registration will be covered by the State Asset Management Agency. When buying real estate at auction, the payment period will be extended from the current 5 days to 15 days. A procedure will be introduced according to which the sale and lease of buildings and vehicles of organizations with a state share of more than 50 percent will be carried out only through an electronic auction.

Responsible persons were instructed to develop a draft resolution providing for this new procedure. The necessity of putting up for sale with the involvement of foreign consultants of state shares in 13 large real estate objects in Tashkent and 11 industry enterprises was emphasized. Khokims of regions, districts and cities were instructed to put up for sale 154 empty objects under their jurisdiction within a month. The share of funds remaining at the disposal of the regions after the sale of property put up for auction by khokimiyats will be increased from 73 to 87 percent. These funds will be evenly distributed between the regional and district (city) budgets. The State Assets Management Agency was instructed to re-conduct a full inventory of non-core and empty facilities of enterprises and banks with the participation of the state and prepare them for privatization. Proposals for financial rehabilitation and modernization of idle or unprofitable enterprises were discussed.

From <http://www.uzdaily.com> 07/01/2021

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Artel Becomes First Private Uzbek Manufacturing Company to Obtain Credit Rating

Artel Electronics LLC ("Artel"), Central Asia's leading home appliance and electronics manufacturer and one of Uzbekistan's largest companies, has received a first-time

Fitch rating of 'B' with a stable outlook, Trend reports citing the company. Artel therefore becomes the first private manufacturing company in Uzbekistan to be assigned a rating from one of the "big three" international rating agencies. In its publication, Fitch praised Artel's "leading domestic market position", "expected strong funds from operation" and "successful and long-term cooperation" with internationally renowned original equipment manufacturers. The rating follows a rigorous assessment of the company's financial and commercial position, and provides an independent benchmark of the its reliability as a borrower. Recent business reforms in Uzbekistan have enabled the country's leading companies to restructure, access international financing opportunities and explore foreign markets. Capitalising on this, Artel Electronics has been successfully revising its existing processes to follow international best practice in financial reporting and ESG. This includes the introduction of a professional supervisory board and the audit of the company's consolidated IFRS accounts for the last three years by Deloitte. Bektemir Murodov, CFO, Artel Electronics LLC, stated: "We are delighted to have received our first rating from Fitch today. This moment follows months of hard work by the team at Artel as we work to align ourselves with the best global standards of corporate governance. The rating will help us deepen our cooperation with our partners, access new forms of financing, and is the natural next step towards entering international capital markets." Artel was founded in 2011 with limited product lines. Since then, the company has grown to produce a wide range of household appliances and electronics, with over 10,000 employees operating in all regions of Uzbekistan. Artel currently exports its products to over 20 countries throughout the CIS and the Middle East, and the company is also the regional partner of Samsung and Viessmann.

From <https://en.trend.az/> 07/12/2021

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Enterprises of Uzbekistan Produced Industrial Products Worth 200.1 Trillion Soums

Tashkent, Uzbekistan (UzDaily.com) -- According to preliminary data, in January-June 2021, enterprises of Uzbekistan produced industrial products worth 200.1 trillion soums, the index of physical volume of industrial production by the same period in 2020 amounted to 108.5%. In the structure of production, the largest share falls on manufacturing enterprises (82.5%), the volume of production of which amounted to 165.1 trillion soums. The main factors of growth in the physical volume of industrial production were its increase in the mining industry - by 7.5, manufacturing - by 8.6%, electricity, gas, steam and air conditioning - by 12.1%, in water supply, sewerage, collection and disposal of waste - by 3.5%. The volume of products produced by mining and quarrying enterprises in January-June 2021 amounted to 19.0 trillion soums, or 9.5% of the total industry. Manufacturing enterprises in January-June 2021 produced goods for 165.1 trillion soums, or 82.5% of the total industry. In the structure of the manufacturing industry, the share of

high-tech industries amounted to 2.5% (1.6% in January-June 2020), medium-high-tech - 20.3% (24.3%), medium-low-tech - 40.3% (38.5%) and low-tech - 36.9% (35.6%).

In the volume of the manufacturing industry, the share of enterprises for the production, repair, assembly of machinery and equipment, the production of cars, trailers, semi-trailers and other finished products amounted to 17.6% (the physical volume index amounted to 100.7% against January-June 2020), metallurgical industry – 27.2% (113.0%), enterprises for the production of textile, clothing and leather products – 18.0% (120.9%), for the production of food, drinks and tobacco products – 16.3% (105.9%), enterprises for the production of chemical products, rubber and plastic products – 9.4% (106.4%). In January-June 2021, the republic produced 546.5 thousand tons of motor gasoline (an increase of 4.6% compared to the corresponding period of 2020), 315.3 thousand tons of cotton yarn (an increase of 36.3%), 126.3 million liters of beer (6.9%) and 914.4 thousand tons of flour from soft wheat and spelled (decrease by 4.5%). In January-June 2021, 1 855 trucks were produced in the republic (by the corresponding period of 2020, the volume of production increased by 1.3%). In January-June 2021, 495 buses were produced in the republic (by the corresponding period of 2020, an increase in production was noted by 6.7%).

In January-June 2021, 75.6 thousand units of automobile engines were produced in the republic (a decrease by 33.1% compared to the corresponding period of 2020). In January-June 2021, 173 tractors were produced in the republic (by January-June 2020, the production volume decreased by 72.5%). In January-June 2021, 383 pieces of rippers and cultivators were produced in the republic (by the corresponding period of 2020, a decrease in production was recorded by 43.1%). In the automotive industry in January-June 2021, 31,788 Cobalt vehicles were produced (-15.6%), 13943 - Nexia (-60.2%), 21962 - Gentra (-15.7%), 28772 - Damas (+7.8%), 6085 - Spark (-58.1%) and 6230 - Labo (+79.1%). The overhaul of technological equipment made it possible to increase the capacity utilization of chemical enterprises and to exceed the production indicators of the previous year for the production of methyl alcohol (by 7.4 times by January-June 2020), paints and varnishes based on acrylic or vinyl polymers (121.2 %) and caustic soda (136.2%). At the same time, there is a decrease in the production of ammonium sulfate (91.3% compared to January-June 2020).

If in January-June 2020 the share of the metallurgical industry in the structure of the manufacturing industry was 24.3%, and the physical volume index increased by 3.2%, then in January-June 2021 the share of the industry in the manufacturing industry was 27.2%. the index of physical volume increased by 13.0%, while the volume of production amounted to 44 960.3 billion soums. In January-June 2020, the share of production of other non-metallic mineral products in the structure of the manufacturing industry amounted to 5.1%, while the physical volume index, in

relation to the same period in 2019, decreased by 0.3%. In January-June 2021, the share of other non-metallic mineral products amounted to 5.1%, the index of the physical volume of production increased by 9.5%, and the volume of production amounted to 8357.0 billion soums. If in January-June 2020 the share of food production in the manufacturing industry amounted to 14.0%, and the physical volume index, in relation to 2019, reached 108.4%, then in January-June 2021 the share of food products decreased to 13.3%, the index of physical volume increased by 5.0%, the total production volume amounted to 21 885.8 billion soums.

At the end of January-June 2020, the share of beverage production in the structure of the manufacturing industry amounted to 2.3%, while the physical volume index, in relation to the same period in 2019, increased by 6.0%. In January-June 2021, the share of beverage production amounted to 2.5%, the physical volume index - 118.5%, and the production volume reached 4 199.8 billion soums. At the end of January-June 2020, the share of the production of textiles in the structure of the manufacturing industry amounted to 11.9%, while the physical volume index, in relation to the same period in 2019, amounted to 105.5%. In January-June 2021, the share of textile production amounted to 14.1%, the index of the physical volume of their production increased by 23.4%, and the production volume amounted to 23 277.2 billion soums. If in January-June 2020 the share of clothing production in the structure of the manufacturing industry was 3.3%, and the physical volume index was 101.7%, then in January-June 2021 the share of the industry in the manufacturing industry was 3.4%, the index physical volume - 117.3%, production volume reached 5 543.2 billion soums.

In January-June 2020, the share of chemical production in the structure of the manufacturing industry was 7.6%, while the physical volume index, in relation to the same period in 2019, amounted to 99.5%. In January-June 2021, the share of chemical products amounted to 7.7%, the index of physical volume of production increased by 7.2%, and the volume of production amounted to 12673.8 billion soums. At the end of January-June 2020, the share of coke and product production in the structure of the manufacturing industry amounted to 4.2%, while the physical volume index, in relation to the same period in 2019, amounted to 100.1%. In January-June 2021, the share of coke and refined products production amounted to 3.2%, the physical volume index also decreased by 33.1%, and the production volume amounted to 5 255.7 billion soums. At the end of January-June 2020, the share of production of vehicles, trailers and semi-trailers in the structure of the manufacturing industry amounted to 12.1%, while the physical volume index, in relation to the same period of 2019, reached 107.7%. In January-June 2021, the share of this industry amounted to 8.5%, the physical volume index decreased by 17.3%, and the production volume amounted to 14 053.8 billion soums.

At the end of January-June 2020, the share of the production of rubber and plastic products in the structure of the manufacturing industry amounted to 2.0%, while the

physical volume index, in relation to the same period of 2019, decreased by 8.1%. In January-June 2021, the share of this industry amounted to 1.7%, the physical volume index - 103.0%, the production volume - 2887.9 billion soums. The volume of products produced by enterprises of electricity supply, gas, steam and air conditioning amounted to 14.6 trillion soums (7.3% of the total industry). The index of the physical volume of the industry, compared to the corresponding period of 2020, increased by 12.1%. The volume of products produced by enterprises of water supply, sewerage, waste collection and disposal amounted to 1.4 trillion soums (0.7% of the total industry). Compared to the corresponding period of 2020, there was an increase in services for the emptying, cleaning and treatment of cesspools, sedimentation tanks and septic tanks by 9.8%, as well as services for the removal, transportation of wastewater and their treatment - by 34.7%. recorded an increase in the production of textile waste by 1.0%.

As a result of measures taken to expand the range and stimulate the production of finished products, the production of consumer goods amounted to 64.3 trillion soums and, in comparison with the corresponding period of 2020, the growth rate reached 107.7%, the share in the total volume of industry was 32.1%. In the structure of food production, the production of wine and vodka and beer amounted to 5.8% (7.2% in January-June 2020). In the structure of consumer goods production in the republic, the largest share falls on the city of Tashkent (22.2% of the total volume of consumer goods), Andijan (17.0%), Tashkent (11.4%) and Samarkand (9.3%) regions. The largest growth in the production of consumer goods was recorded in Jizzakh (138.1% against the corresponding period of 2020), Samarkand (124.3%), Bukhara (119.3%), Syrdarya (117.7%), Namangan (115.3%), Surkhandarya (115.1%) regions and Tashkent city (114.8%), exceeding the national average (107.7%). In the structure of production of non-food products of the republic, the largest share falls on the city of Tashkent (22.3% of the total volume of non-food products), Andijan (24.0%), Samarkand (9.0%), and Tashkent (8.4%) regions.

In the structure of food production in the republic, the largest share falls on the city of Tashkent (22.0% of the total volume of food products), Tashkent (16.5%) and Samarkand (9.6%) regions. During the reporting period, enterprises with foreign investments produced goods for 47.7 trillion soums, the share of which in the total production volume amounted to 23.8%. The change in industrial production was significantly influenced by the growth in the index of the physical volume of industrial production in Kashkadarya (125.6% compared to January-June 2020), Syrdarya (123.4%), Jizzakh (114.7%), Namangan (111.8 %), Tashkent (109.6%) regions and Tashkent city (113.8%). In the structure of industrial output of the republic, the largest share falls on the enterprises of Tashkent (18.3% of the republican volume of industry), Tashkent (18.3%), Navoi (17.5%), Andijan (7.7%) and Fergana (5.5%) regions. The smallest share of industrial production was recorded at the enterprises of Surkhandarya (1.3%) and Jizzakh (1.7%) regions. Analysis of the differentiation of industrial output per capita showed an excess of the national average (5 763.9

thousand soums) in Navoi (34 493.0 thousand soums), Tashkent (12 278.1 thousand soums) regions and Tashkent city (13 487.9 thousand soums).

The production of consumer goods per capita in the reporting period in the republic amounted to 1 852.0 thousand soums, including in the city of Tashkent – 5 254.5 thousand soums, Andijan region – 3 418.8 thousand soums, Tashkent region – 2 449.6 thousand soums, Syrdarya region – 2 027.7 thousand soums. During the reporting period, small businesses produced goods worth 47.9 trillion soums, the share of which in the total production volume amounted to 24.0%. In the context of regions, the largest share of small business was observed in Jizzakh (53.4% of the total industry in the region), Namangan (46.5%), Surkhandarya (42.4%), Syrdarya (40.9%), Samarkand (40.3%) regions. At the same time, the smallest share of small business was noted in Navoi (6.1%), Tashkent (16.2%), Khorezm (21.9%), Kashkadarya (22.7%), regions, as well as in the Republic of Karakalpakstan (18.8 %). Analysis of the structure of industrial production in the context of the regions of the republic showed that the low share of production of small businesses in the total volume of industry is explained by the significant volume of production of large industrial enterprises located in these regions.

Today, 89.8 thousand industrial enterprises operate in the republic, of which 16.4 thousand (18.3% of the total number of operating enterprises) are in the city of Tashkent, 9.8 thousand (10.9%) - in Fergana, 9.2 thousand (10.3%) - Tashkent, 9.1 thousand (10.1%) - Andijan, 7.8 thousand (8.6%) - Samarkand and 7.1 thousand (7.9%) - Namangan region. In January-June 2021, 11 117 industrial enterprises were newly created in the republic, of which 1 233 (11.1% of the total number of newly created) accounted for Fergana, 1 109 (10.0%) - Samarkand, 967 (8.7%) - Namangan, 959 (8.6%) - Kashkadarya region and 1 186 (10.7%) - Tashkent city. To date, the largest number of operating industrial enterprises is located in the cities of Andijan (3 270 units), Namangan (2 692 units), Samarkand (1 696 units), Kokand (1 484 units), as well as in the following districts of Tashkent city: Almazar (2 190 units), Chilanzar (2 027 units), Uchtepa (1 920 units), Yunusabad (1 795 units), Shaikhantakhur (1 471 units) and Mirzo-Ulugbeksky (1 366 units). As of July 1, 2021, the minimum number of operating industrial enterprises is located in Shirin (58 units), Syrdarya region; Tamdy district (72 units) and Gazgan city (39 units) of Navoi region; Arnasai (90 units) and Yangiabad (72 units) districts of Jizzakh region; Kegeili (82 units), Kanlykul (71 units), Takhtakupyr (85 units) and Bozatau (40 units) regions of the Republic of Karakalpakstan; Bandikhan district (73 units), Surkhandarya region.

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Oceania

AUSTRALIA: Tech Giants Push back on Cyber Powers

Tech giants have warned proposed powers to allow the federal government to bust into networks and block cyber attacks are flawed and will create more problems for the tech sector. The government wants to impose obligations on companies requiring them to report critical cybersecurity incidents within 12 hours. Under the proposed laws, the government could also intervene in companies' networks if there was a major cyber attack. Amazon Web Services' Roger Somerville said the government wrongly assumed it could intervene without making things worse. "There's a deeper underlying assumption that if something bad happens to a critical piece of Australia's infrastructure, then the government is capable of stepping in and fixing that bad thing," he said on Thursday. "There's just a really big risk of the government stepping in and misunderstanding how the regulated entity operates and maybe making things worse."

At the moment, companies share information with security agencies informally and without triggering notification thresholds and want to keep it this way. They also want the government to better define what it considers a critical cybersecurity incident, and to give companies more time to assess and report problems. Shane Huntley from Google's threat analysis branch said the proposed 12-hour time frame meant security agencies would be flooded with a constant stream of small reports about potentially insignificant things. Parliament's intelligence and security committee was also told court approval should be required before the Commonwealth could intervene in company networks. Google is concerned the prospect of the Australian Signals Directorate being able to install software on its networks would also alarm foreign customers. Mr Huntley said this wasn't necessary anyway. "I'm not aware of any unique capabilities and software that cannot be matched by the most robust system that we've built for ourselves," he said. Already covering specific electricity, gas, water and ports assets, the proposed laws would provide for intervention powers across all areas of the economy.

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NSW Businesses Await Support Package

NSW business owners are waiting on the details of a support package aimed at keeping them afloat with no end in sight for Sydney's lockdown. The federal and state governments will on Tuesday unveil details of the aid to include JobKeeper-style payments to cover costs and wages as long as no worker is sacked. Disaster payments are also expected to rise from the current cap of \$500 a week for people in nationally-recognised hotspot areas and who cannot work. NSW reported 112 new COVID-19 cases on Monday. Premier Gladys Berejiklian said the lockdown of Sydney and surrounds was unlikely to end on Friday. There were 63 patients in hospital. Of those, 14 were under the age of 35 and 18 were in intensive care. Social services and union groups demanded more support for residents locked down

across greater Sydney, the Central Coast, Blue Mountains, Wollongong and Shellharbour areas.

The Australian Council of Social Service wanted a top-up and an expansion of the federal disaster payment scheme. Currently, people can claim up to \$500 a week if they are in a nationally-recognised hotspot for more than seven days and cannot work. For people who would usually work fewer than 20 hours a week, the disaster payment drops to \$325. Those already receiving income support are excluded. "We need to urgently deliver an income floor to ensure everyone affected by the pandemic has an income above the poverty line," ACOSS chief executive Cassandra Goldie said. The Australian Council of Trade Unions wanted casuals included in any wage subsidy program. Secretary Sally McManus said the majority of permanent employees stood down last year had exhausted their paid leave, while the casually employed remained in limbo with no security or end in sight.

Sydneysiders under the age of 40 were urged to talk to a doctor about getting the AstraZeneca vaccine, despite Pfizer being preferred for that age group. Federal and NSW authorities said people need to weigh up the risk of contracting the Delta strain with the vaccine advice. NSW was opening up its mass vaccination hubs and pharmacies to give those over 40 AstraZeneca shots. The Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation met on Monday to review its vaccine advice, but it did not change. The expert panel previously changed its advice recommending AstraZeneca for people aged over 60. Two million medical-grade masks from the national stockpile were being sent to primary health networks across Sydney, alongside gloves, gowns and goggles.

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Retail Sales to Show Impact of Lockdowns

The price of having Australia's two major cities in lockdown is estimated to be costing the nation around \$10 billion, but this is a growing figure that could result in the economy going into contraction in the September quarter. The full impact on households from last month's Victorian lockdown alone will be plain to see when new retail spending figures are released on Wednesday. The Australian Bureau of Statistics will issue its preliminary retail trade figures for June, with forecasts among economists centring on a 0.4 per cent decline, wiping out the 0.4 per cent gain seen in May. Forecasts range from a 0.3 per cent rise to a one per cent fall. However, Westpac economists point out that lockdowns have previously generated gains for retail sectors like basic food, which accounts for 40 per cent of total retail sales.

But in a note to clients, they also point out that the July figures will be clobbered by the snap lockdowns in Brisbane, Darwin and Perth, as well as the the now lengthy restrictions in Greater Sydney. Greater Sydney is in lockdown until at least July 30,

with additional restrictions announced on Saturday, while Victoria is in a further five-day shutdown, which could yet be extended. Still, history shows that once restrictions are eased, the economy bounces back fairly rapidly. The Reserve Bank will release the minutes of its July 6 board meeting on Tuesday, where it left the cash rate at a record low 0.1 per cent and made adjustments to its future bond buying program. RBA governor Philip Lowe subsequently gave a rare media conference, followed by an in-depth speech, suggesting the minutes may not offer anything new for the interest rate outlook. However, one key message that emerged is the need to get the unemployment rate lower.

Last week's labour force figures showing the jobless rate falling to a 10-year low of 4.9 per cent will provide some comfort to the RBA, even if virus outbreaks have now muddied the outlook. Among other data due from the ABS are weekly payroll job figures and preliminary international trade numbers for June both on Thursday. Meanwhile, Australian shares look set for a weak opening on Monday as concerns over the highly contagious Delta variant grow both here, the US and other parts of the world. On Wall Street on Friday, the Dow Jones Industrial Average fell 0.86 per cent to end at 34,686.08 points while the S&P 500 lost 0.75 per cent to 4,327.19 and the Nasdaq Composite dropped 0.78 per cent to 14,429.43. Australian share futures were 37 points, or 0.5 per cent lower, at 7232. On Friday, the Australian S&P/ASX200 benchmark index closed up 12.2 points, or 0.17 per cent, to 7348.1.

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NEW ZEALAND: Trade Sector – New Evidence Shows Invisible Poison Still in Drinking Water – Master Plumbers

Master Plumbers, Gasfitters & Drainlayers is renewing calls to ban lead in drinking water, with further evidence that New Zealanders are still at risk from this invisible poison. CE Greg Wallace says lead has been removed from paint and fuel, but the Government continues to ignore the potential health risk being caused by lead in household drinking water. “The Australians are taking a much harder line on this, and are looking at introducing zero-lead tapware and brass plumbing products. Yet the New Zealand Government doesn't seem to be interested in taking stronger steps to protect New Zealanders.” Greg Wallace says Master Plumbers has yet again produced proof that it is possible to buy tapware in this country that contains lead at levels that far exceed New Zealand's drinking-water standard limits of 10 micrograms per litre.

In a random sample conducted this month, Master Plumbers tested five taps purchased online. It found three of the taps contained lead above the allowable limit-with one a massive 11 times over. “The Government has to stop ignoring this evidence. Lead is a cumulative toxin, which makes ongoing exposure through drinking water of particular concern. The World Health Organisation has ruled there

is no known safe blood lead concentration for humans, yet here we are in New Zealand ignoring this health issue. “Babies and children are most vulnerable, and exposure can lead to serious, irreversible neurological and behavioural effects.” He says the Ministry of Health’s answer to the problem is to run a kitchen tap for 30 seconds every morning to get rid of lead dissolved in the water. “Taking this approach does nothing to address the risk. It might reduce lead contamination risks, it does not remove lead from drinking water.

“Surely, the real answer is for New Zealand to say we don’t want any lead in our drinking water. Like the Australians we should be looking to move to zero-lead tapware and brass plumbing products.” Greg Wallace says the Government must also introduce a mandatory third-party testing and verification regime for plumbing products to ensure they actually comply. “Without this, there is no way for the public to know the taps they drink from are safe.” A review of New Zealand’s plumbing product standards is among the recommendations made in the report on the health system response to the recent lead contamination of Waikoutaiti’s drinking water. “Master Plumbers wants to see this happen as a matter of urgency,” says Wallace. “Plumbing products installed in our homes and public water supply should be fit for use-end of story.”

Note: TVNZ’s Sunday programme profiled the risks associated with lead in our drinking water last night (11 July). There was also coverage of lead being present in paint, soil and leadlight windows further highlighting the health risks to New Zealanders. Master Plumbers, Gasfitters and Drainlayers NZ Inc (Master Plumbers) is the national membership organisation for plumbing, gasfitting and drainlaying businesses, with 18 regional Associations and Branches across New Zealand. Companies go through a Quality Assurance programme in order to become a member. We provide members with a wide range of resources and training opportunities to support them in staying up with the latest technologies, products and compliance requirements. We advocate on behalf of our members and our industry.

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Boost for Pacific Regional Business

Pacific businesses will get a much-needed financial boost as they recover from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic thanks to the new Pacific Aotearoa Regional Enterprise Fund, said Minister for Pacific Peoples Aupito William Sio. The new \$2 million fund will co-invest in Pacific business projects and initiatives to create jobs, increase productivity and stimulate growth in the regions. “These direct investments aim to quickly provide existing Pacific regional businesses with capital to increase productivity and participation in regional economic development initiatives. “It will also help scale up businesses to transition, diversify and participate in sectors crucial for the recovery and rebuild of the economy,” Minister Sio says. The Ministry for

Business, Innovation and Employment's Kānoa – Regional Economic Development & Investment Unit will transfer \$2 million to the Ministry for Pacific Peoples (MPP) for the fund.

Minister Sio says thanks to MPP's existing relationships within the Pacific business community, it is in strong position to engage and help increase uptake in Government support. "Kānoa – REDIU and MPP will work together to invest in Pacific business projects and activities in the regions through the new Fund. "Pacific peoples continue to experience inequitable socio-economic outcomes compared to other population groups in New Zealand. "The economic inequities highlight the exposure of Pacific peoples to the impacts of events such as the pandemic, leading to high unemployment, poverty and poor health outcomes that continue to reinforce cycles of intergenerational inequality. "Pacific peoples have very low rates in terms of business ownership, or self-employment compared to other population groups. "The delivery of the funding grants will help to address some of the economic inequities experienced by Pacific peoples and support regional Pacific businesses to access investments to accelerate development and activities at the core to recovery from the impacts of COVID-19," said Aupito William Sio.

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Govt Welcomes Draft Report on the Retail Grocery Sector

The Commerce Commission's draft report into the retail grocery sector is being welcomed by Government as a major milestone. "I asked the Commerce Commission to look at whether this sector is as competitive as it could be and today it has released its draft report for consultation," Commerce and Consumer Affairs Minister, David Clark said. "The draft findings indicate that there are problems in the market and that New Zealanders would get better prices, ranges and quality if there was increased competition in the grocery sector. "The study delivers on a Labour Manifesto commitment and was launched in November 2020. It looks into both the consumer and supplier side of the grocery market. "Consumers deserve to know if they are getting a fair deal at the supermarket checkout, and the draft findings indicate they may not.

"The average Kiwi household spends a large amount of its weekly expenses on food, and this has been increasing year on year. "I encourage everyone to read the draft and make a submission as this will help the Commission form the final report. I look forward to a public discussion of the issues in the draft report and seeing the Commission's final recommendations," David Clark said. The supermarket study follows on from a report into the retail fuel sector in 2019 which led to swift action to improve competition and pricing. The draft report and information on how to make a submission is available on the Commerce Commission's website. Consultation is open for four weeks, closing 26 August. The Commission will publish its final report

on the study by 23 November 2021 and the Government will then consider what changes may be necessary to bring about better outcomes for consumers.

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