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Asia-Pacific Governance Watch

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1、 Government Policy and Legislation

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APEC Agriculture Ministers Issue Joint Statement

Ministers responsible for food security from the 21 APEC member economies issued a joint statement following their virtual meeting on 19 August 2021. The statement reflects the outcomes of the 2021 APEC Food Security Ministerial Meeting chaired by New Zealand Minister of Agriculture Damien O'Connor. The statement acknowledges efforts in responding to the immediate global health crisis and economic shock. It recognizes the important roles of advancing digitalization and innovation, productivity, inclusivity and sustainability to achieve food security.

Read the 6th APEC Ministerial Meeting on Food Security Joint Statement

Ministers responsible for food security also issued an annex to the statement, a 10-year food security roadmap, that details goals and key action areas where APEC is well placed to help ensure people always have access to sufficient, safe, affordable and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.

Read the Annex: The APEC Food Security Roadmap Towards 2030

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APEC Ministers Commit to Protecting Food Systems, Launch Food Security Roadmap

Agriculture and food ministers from 21 member economies of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) on Thursday reaffirmed their commitment to an open, transparent, productive, sustainable and resilient APEC food system by launching a new 10-year food security roadmap. Nearly 2.37 billion people lacked access to adequate food in 2020, a rise of 320 million in just one year, according to a World Bank policy brief. A report by the Global Network Against Food Crises found that the number of people facing acute food insecurity who need urgent life and livelihood-saving assistance hit a five-year high in 2020. Against this backdrop, APEC ministers adopted the APEC Food Security Roadmap Towards 2030 at their annual APEC Ministerial Meeting on Food Security chaired by New Zealand Minister of Agriculture Damien O'Connor on Thursday. The roadmap details goals and key action areas where APEC is well placed to help ensure people access to sufficient,

safe, affordable and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.

"While food security was already a challenge, COVID-19 showed us that there are vulnerabilities in our food systems and in our economies, and that our food systems need improvement - especially to deliver on the APEC 2040 vision of an open, dynamic, peaceful and resilient region," O'Connor said in his opening remarks. The roadmap, aligned with New Zealand's APEC 2021 priorities as well as the APEC Putrajaya Vision 2040, focuses on digitalization and innovation, productivity, inclusivity and sustainability. "Besides our effort to address the challenges of food security, the roadmap also emphasizes efforts in increasing productivity and efficiency, minimizing food waste, mitigating and adapting to climate change as well as reducing costs and facilitating food trade," said Philip Houlding, chair of the APEC Policy Partnership on Food Security. The group spearheaded the development of the roadmap and drives public-private sector engagement on all aspects of food security in the region.

At the virtual meeting, APEC ministers acknowledged the benefits of digitalization and discussed measures to promote innovation and improve the use of digital technology to ensure food security as the region recovers from COVID-19. "The pandemic accelerated digital transformation and highlighted the abilities of an innovative digitally enabled economy to better recover and thrive," said O'Connor. "But effective recovery also requires all elements of government to work together to deliver this transformation and enhance food security in the APEC region." Ministers also highlighted the central role of the private sector throughout the food value chain with respect to production and processing, distribution, trade and investment. They encouraged deeper collaboration between policymakers and the private sector to ensure an innovative and refreshed food system to meet the food security challenges of the future. "Without food security for all our people, we cannot achieve the other goals we have for our economies," O'Connor said.

From <http://www.xinhuanet.com> 08/19/2021

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APEC's Vaccine Action Plan: Strengthening Immunization Programs in the Region

APEC member economies developed a comprehensive 10-year strategy in a bid to support the region's routine vaccination effort and enhance the resilience and sustainability of immunization programs in the region through 2030. The health and economic crises has disrupted global routine immunization programs. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), around 23 million children missed out on basic childhood vaccines. Another study found that 95 percent of economies in the Asia-Pacific region reported disruption to routine vaccination, with infancy and school-entry age vaccinations most impacted. A vaccine task force was established

last year, comprised of policymakers and private sector representatives, to work on vaccine-related issues, and to identify the best approach to immunization so member economies can better prevent infection and disease for all individuals. “Vaccination is one of the world’s most important and cost-effective public health measures,” said Dr Michelle McConnell, Planning Group Chair of the APEC Life Sciences Innovation Forum – one of the groups that spearheaded the strategy. “While the priority now is to vaccinate as many people as possible against COVID, we still need to be able to provide robust immunization programs against other vaccine-preventable diseases so that COVID’s impact is not compounded by additional outbreaks.”

The APEC Action Plan on Vaccination across the Life-Course details key pillars for a successful immunization program and policy targets. With a collective goal that by 2030, all 21 APEC member economies will have implemented resilient and sustainable life-course immunization programs to protect the health and well-being of all populations. This will enable economies to achieve the WHO Immunization Agenda 2030. “A life-course approach to vaccination requires that immunization schedules and access to vaccinations respond to an individual’s stage in life, their lifestyle and specific vulnerabilities or risks to infectious disease that they may face,” added Dr McConnell. She further highlighted that taking a life-course approach will improve equity in health outcomes, reduce health burdens on social systems, lower treatment costs, and ease economic burdens such as illness-induced wage and productivity loss.

The document puts forth a series of recommendations that will help move the region forward toward resilient and sustainable immunization programs by:

- promoting recognition of the value of vaccination and vaccine innovation
- prioritizing access to and uptake of vaccination across the life-course
- building whole-of-government capacity in health security and pandemic preparedness
- strengthening confidence in vaccination and build resilient immunization program
- enabling investment and innovation in vaccine research and development, manufacturing and delivery
- accelerating regulatory harmonization for vaccines across APEC economies, and
- establishing proven and innovative mechanisms for sustainable immunization financing.

“It has never been more apparent that vaccination is critical to the strength of our economies,” said Dr Rebecca Sta Maria, Executive Director of the APEC Secretariat. “APEC has a unique role to play in supporting the region’s effective trade, regulation and investment in vaccines to protect our population, both in the midst of COVID-19 and far beyond.”

The APEC Life Science Innovation Forum in collaboration with the APEC Health Working Group will also host the virtual 11th High Level Meeting on Health and the Economy on 24 August. The Health Working Group also contributed to the

development of this action plan. To learn more about APEC's work stream on vaccination, visit this website. To access the ongoing webinar series "The Role of Vaccination in Maintaining Health and the Economy during Pandemics" please visit this link.

From <https://www.apec.org/> 08/23/2021

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ADB, ADBC Sign MOU to Promote Rural Vitalization in PRC

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) and Agricultural Development Bank of China (ADBC) today signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) to cooperate in support of rural vitalization in the People's Republic of China (PRC). The MOU opens avenues of cooperation between ADB and ADBC, including cofinancing, to promote the PRC's rural vitalization program. Under the agreement, ADB and ADBC will promote innovation, demonstration, and replicability of green agriculture and rural development projects in the PRC by leveraging financial resources and combining knowledge and technical expertise in project design and implementation. "ADB and ADBC each have unique resources and advantages that can be used to support rural development, protect urban and rural environment, improve the safety and quality of agricultural production, and increase farmers' income," said ADB Country Director in the PRC Yolanda Fernandez Lommen. "The knowledge generated is expected to benefit the PRC and other developing member countries of ADB." The partnership will collaborate to support rural infrastructure, environment improvement, and agribusiness value chains development. The cooperation will focus on eight areas: preventing and controlling rural pollution; reducing rural vulnerability to climate change; strengthening the conservation, restoration, and sustainable use of biodiversity in agriculture; supporting the urban-rural integrated development; expanding social services for the rural communities; promoting green and sustainable financing for rural development; applying new and advanced technologies, including digital technologies; and supporting agriculture-related regional cooperation and development. ADBC is an agricultural policy bank in the PRC, with a mission to raise funds through the market based on national credit, and act as a strategic pillar of the country in supporting the development of agriculture, rural areas, and farmers. ADB is committed to achieving a prosperous, inclusive, resilient, and sustainable Asia and the Pacific, while sustaining its efforts to eradicate extreme poverty. Established in 1966, it is owned by 68 members—49 from the region.

From <https://www.adb.org/> 08/26/2021

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East Asia

CHINA: CPC Unveils Guideline on Enhancing Legal Supervision

The Communist Party of China Central Committee has issued a guideline to strengthen legal supervision work of the people's procuratorates. Procuratorial organs should give full play to their duty of conducting legal supervision, said the document, calling on them to safeguard national security and social stability and ensure high-quality socio-economic development. Both quality and results of legal supervision should be improved comprehensively to safeguard judicial justice, it noted, urging improvements in mechanisms of information sharing, case notification, and case transfer between people's procuratorates and law enforcement, public security, judicial, and judicial administrative organs. The guideline demanded fine-tuned supervision on filing, investigations, and trials of criminal cases, as well as civil proceedings. Procuratorial organs were also asked to push forward works on public interest litigations, among others. Efforts are needed to strengthen the competence of procuratorial personnel, it added.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 08/02/2021

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China Maps Out New Blueprint on Building of Rule of Law Government

China has set out an outline on promoting the building of a rule of law government from 2021 to 2025, on the basis of the successful implementation of a previous 5-year plan. The document, jointly issued by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the State Council, was made public Wednesday. Identifying promoting the rule of law for government as the main task in advancing law-based governance in all areas, the document highlighted the guiding philosophies, principles, and overall goals of this cause for the next five years. It urges improving government functions in various fields, including economic adjustment, market supervision, social management, public service, and environmental protection. The government's function in formulating development strategies, plans, policies and standards should strengthen. More legal and institutional efforts should curb unjust interventions in micro-economic activities, says the document.

It also specifies that the lists of power and duties of departments of the State Council should be formulated by the first half of 2022. The negative list for market access should also be strictly implemented. On improving the law-based business environment, the plan calls for concrete efforts to prevent the administrative power from eliminating or stifling competition. It pledges improvements in the system of pre-establishment national treatment plus a negative list for foreign investment. It also promises strengthened enforcement of anti-monopoly and anti-unfair competition laws. It stresses pushing forward legislative activities and studies in key areas such as national security, bio-security, infectious diseases prevention and control, and digital economy. The document calls for improved emergency response

systems, including monitoring and early warning, information reporting, rapid response, restoration and investigation and assessment of relevant events.

Primary-level organizations and the public should be guided and regulated in participating in emergency response to enhance the capability of handling emergencies in accordance with the law, the outline says. It added that drills in this regard should be conducted regularly. Systems of exercising oversight over administrative powers should improve, it says. It calls for greater transparency in government. Also, it urges governments at all levels to promote law-based administration with the help of digital technologies, including the internet, big data, and artificial intelligence. The document stresses strengthening the Party's leadership for the building of a government based on the rule of law.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 08/11/2021

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China Issues Regulation on IT Infrastructure Security

Chinese Premier Li Keqiang has signed a State Council decree to publish an administrative regulation on major IT infrastructure security. The regulation was issued as the country's major IT infrastructure faces severe security challenges, including frequent cyberattacks, according to a State Council statement on Tuesday. The regulation, which will take effect on Sept. 1, defines what can be identified as major IT infrastructure projects, and clarifies the liabilities of operators concerning the security of these projects and the penalties for offenders. Major IT infrastructure projects are IT network facilities and information systems of major industries and in key areas, according to the regulation. The state cyberspace administration will take charge of coordination, the public security department will provide supervision, and the state telecom regulator and other relevant departments will be responsible for the security control of major IT infrastructure projects under their watch.

Operators of major IT infrastructure projects bear the primary responsibility of maintaining the integrity, confidentiality and availability of relevant data, according to the regulation. It stipulates requirements for these operators to ensure cybersecurity, including conducting security checks and risk assessments every year and prioritizing safe and creditable internet products and services in procurement. Personal information and important data collected and produced by the operators during their operations within the Chinese mainland should be stored in the mainland, said the regulation, adding that security assessments will be necessary for business needs of providing such data overseas. Operators of major IT infrastructure projects and the relevant regulatory agencies will face administrative and criminal punishment if they fail in their duties, according to the regulation. Organizations and individuals that compromise the security of such infrastructure will also receive legal penalties, per the regulation.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 08/17/2021

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China Adopts Legal Aid Law

A law on legal aid was adopted by China's top legislature on Friday amid the country's efforts to regulate and promote legal assistance to better safeguard social fairness and justice. The law was adopted after the third reading at the 30th standing committee session of the 13th National People's Congress, which opened on Tuesday. The law specifies that law firms, grassroots legal service agencies, lawyers and primary-level legal service workers are all obligated to provide legal aid services in accordance with laws. Under the circumstances when close relatives of heroic martyrs safeguard the personal rights and interests of heroic martyrs, or when people claim civil rights and interests relevant to their righteous and courageous acts, the applications for legal aid will not be restricted by their financial difficulties, according to the law. Law firms, lawyers and legal aid volunteers are encouraged to offer legal aid services in areas with insufficient legal resources, according to the law. The law will take effect on Jan. 1, 2022.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 08/20/2021

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China Adopts New Law on Graft Busters

China on Friday passed a new law on graft busters as part of efforts to deepen the reform of the country's anti-corruption system. The law on "supervisors" -- anti-corruption personnel that staff the four levels of supervisory commissions -- was passed by the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, the country's top legislature. The new law, which will take effect on Jan. 1, 2022, will standardize the appointment and removal of anti-graft personnel and stipulate their functions, duties, management and oversight. China in 2018 enacted the Supervision Law and established supervisory commissions at national, provincial, prefectural and county levels to integrate anti-corruption functions and personnel that had previously scattered in related judicial and administrative organs, as well as in the disciplinary watchdogs of the Communist Party of China. The commissions have the power to investigate conduct involving the abuse of public office and hand out administrative sanctions. They can hand over public sector employees to the prosecutors in the case of suspected job-related crimes.

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China Adopts New Law to Protect Personal Information

China's top legislature on Friday voted to adopt a new law on personal information protection, which will take effect on Nov. 1. Lawmakers approved the law at the

closing meeting of a regular legislative session of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress (NPC), which started Tuesday. The development of big data brings convenience to life but also breeds chaos: some platforms over-collect personal information; some businesses install image acquisition equipment without authorization and secretly record customers' faces and other biological characteristics. China has always attached great importance to personal information security. The law on personal information protection clarifies rules on the processing and cross-border providing of personal information.

"Currently, the whole society pays close attention to new technologies such as user profiling and recommendation algorithms, and problems including big data-enabled price discrimination have arisen," said Zang Tiewei, spokesperson for the Legislative Affairs Commission of the NPC Standing Committee. The law makes provisions prohibiting the excessive collection of personal information and big data-enabled price discrimination against existing customers. When pushing information and business marketing to individuals through automated decision-making, personal information processors should provide options that don't target personal characteristics at the same time, or offer ways of rejection, says the law. It asks internet giants, which possess the personal information of a large number of users, to set up an independent body mainly composed of outsiders to supervise how the information is handled.

These big internet platforms are also required to formulate their own rules on personal information protection following the principles of openness, fairness and justice, and publish social responsibility reports on personal information protection on a regular basis, according to the law. It also requires prominent signs to be set up at public places where image acquisition and personal identification equipment is installed, stipulating that the collected images and identification information can only be used for safeguarding public security. Strengthening protection for minors, the law deems personal information of minors under 14 as sensitive, asking personal information processors to formulate special processing protocols for the group. China had 989 million internet users by the end of 2020, of whom 183 million were minors.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 08/20/2021

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New Legislation Improves China's Public Legal Services

Chinese lawmakers on Friday voted to adopt a legal aid law amid efforts to improve public legal services, better safeguard people's legitimate rights and interests, and maintain social fairness and justice. The law was adopted after a third reading at the just-concluded session of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, the national legislature. It will take effect on Jan. 1, 2022. Observers said the legal aid system is the natural result of the development of China's legal culture, and that

the legislation marks a critical step forward in advancing the rule of law in China. As a component of the public legal system, legal aid services range from legal counseling to criminal defense. The law authorizes legal aid institutions, established by the judicial administration departments of governments above the county level, to assign their own staff members who hold law or law-related qualifications to provide legal aid services.

Under the new legislative framework, such institutions can directly handle relevant cases, rather than the existing process of accepting and dealing with procedural items concerning legal aid. "This is helpful for legal aid institutions to retain talent and improve their services," said Yang Hanqing, director of a Beijing-based law firm. The law also specifies that law firms, grassroots legal services agencies, lawyers and primary-level legal service workers are all obligated to provide legal aid services in accordance with the law. China has made notable progress in its public legal services. By the end of 2019, a total of 2,828 legal aid institutions had been established across the country. In 2020, these institutions resolved nearly 1.4 million cases and accepted more than 480,000 cases involving migrant workers.

The plan to build the rule of law in China (2020-2025), issued by the Communist Party of China Central Committee in January, set the goal that by 2022, a modern public legal services system would have largely taken shape to cover both urban and rural areas, providing convenient and efficient services to the equal and inclusive benefit of the people. Yet problems persist in the accessibility of legal services in rural areas and the distribution of legal service resources in different regions. The newly adopted law stipulates that a mechanism for the trans-regional flow of legal services resources will be established and improved, and lawyers and legal aid volunteers are encouraged to offer legal aid services in regions with insufficient legal resources. It also pledges support for eligible individuals, such as those working in legal education and research as well as law students, to serve as legal aid volunteers.

Between 2016 and 2020, volunteers for an annual legal aid program consisting of lawyers, college students and primary-level legal professionals helped handle more than 28,000 legal aid cases, benefiting 7 million people in central and western China who lacked legal resources. Legal aid calls for wide participation from social sectors. The law also lists labor unions, women's federations and disabled persons' federations as entities providing legal aid. Observers said this is an effective step to mobilize people from all walks of life to participate in the undertaking and better meet the increasing demand for legal services. Wang Junfeng, head of the All-China Lawyers Association, said the legal aid law will further improve the system safeguarding citizens' rights and interests, and suggested more efforts be made to standardize and regulate legal aid services in areas such as work duties and performance evaluations to promote the high-quality development of legal aid.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 08/20/2021

China Unveils Plan to Boost Employment

China's State Council has released a plan to boost employment during the 14th Five-Year Plan period (2021-2025). To achieve more employment and better quality jobs, efforts should implement the employment-first policy, improve the policy system, strengthen training services, and promote prosperity for all, says the plan. By 2025, the country's employment situation will be generally stable, and the quality of employment would have steadily improved. Structural problems would also be effectively addressed by then, business startups would create more jobs, and the ability to cope with risks would be significantly enhanced, the plan noted. It puts forward key tasks, including continuously expanding employment capacity and promoting the development of the human resources market system. By 2025, China aims to add over 55 million new urban jobs and conduct skills training for employees engaging in new forms and models of businesses. The country will subsidize vocational skills training sessions, the plan said. It also aims to improve the public employment service system, increase people's income, and improve their rights and interests protection. Companies should shoulder their social responsibilities of being maternity-friendly, the plan noted. It added that employers are encouraged to offer flexible parental leave or flexible working methods.

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China Unveils Plan to Boost Employment

China's State Council has released a plan to boost employment during the 14th Five-Year Plan period (2021-2025). With the major goal of achieving fuller employment and creating better quality jobs, efforts should be made to implement the employment-first policy, improve the policy system, strengthen training services, and take solid steps to promote common prosperity for all, says the plan. By 2025, the country's employment situation will be generally stable, the quality of employment would have steadily improved, the structural problems effectively addressed, more jobs created by encouraging business startups, and the ability to cope with risks significantly enhanced, according to the plan. The plan puts forward key tasks including continuously expanding employment capacity, promoting the development of human resources market system, improving public employment service system, increasing people's income and better protecting their rights and interests.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 08/27/2021

JAPAN: MIC Publishing ICT Cyber Security Measures 2021

The Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communication ('MIC') released, on 29 July 2021, its ICT Cyber Security Measures 2021 and the results of its public comments on the same. In particular, the measures outline security measures for individuals in the information communication service and networks field including telecommunication carriers, teleworking, trust services, and Internet of Things, among others. In addition, the measures recommend the promotion of cybersecurity through industry, academia, and government collaboration, as well as international cooperation with ASEAN countries and Indo-Pacific regions, among others.

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Japanese Government Gives Teeth to Revised Whistleblower Protection Law

The government has drawn up a guideline to protect whistleblowers who report corporate malfeasance, The Yomiuri Shimbun has learned. The guideline's main pillar requires companies to punish executives or others who have demoted or cut the salaries of whistleblowers. Following the passage of the revised Whistleblower Protection Law in June last year, which includes measures to strengthen protections for whistleblowers, the Consumer Affairs Agency has outlined practical applications of the law. Under the law, companies with more than 300 employees are required to set up a reporting channel and investigation system. Companies will be required to establish a contact point and identify the official in charge in documentation. The guideline also calls for the creation of a system to ensure independence from executives because such officials may deal with accusations involving other executives.

To prevent retaliation against whistleblowers and ensure they are protected, the guideline specifies that companies take disciplinary or other appropriate measures against executives or others who engage in conduct disadvantageous to whistleblowers. The government is expected to provide guidance or recommendations to companies that violate the guideline and disclose their names if firms fail to make improvements. People in charge of the reporting channel will be required to ensure confidentiality and face a fine of up to ¥300,000 for noncompliance. Companies with less than 300 employees will be obligated to make efforts to adhere to the guideline, but will not be subject to penalties. The government plans to release the guideline soon and implement it by June next year.

From <https://the-japan-news.com> 08/19/2021

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Unified Standard for Connected Technology Eyed

The transport ministry has decided to formulate a unified, international standard for

data communication modules (DCMs) for connected cars, as DCMs currently differ in performance among automakers. The Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism will launch a study on the issue as early as fiscal 2022, hoping to make a proposal to a United Nations body to establish an international standard. The aim is to create an environment where domestic automakers can be at an advantage against foreign rivals in developing next-generation vehicles. DCMs are key components of connected vehicles that are always connected to the internet. The devices collect data such as location, speed and information on vehicles' surroundings captured by cameras, and transmits them via the internet. Such a system would allow drivers to avoid traffic jams by analyzing traffic information in real time. It would also notify manufacturers of abnormalities in the vehicles for maintenance purposes. The ministry will begin a survey on the DCMs installed in vehicles by each automaker as early as in late August, mainly focusing on the information and communication methods used by the devices, with a view to developing a unified standard. It will also survey current situations of DCMs in use by foreign automakers.

The development of connected cars is essential to the establishment of self-driving technology, which all companies are aiming to put to practical use, given that vehicles need such information as the distance between vehicles and road conditions for safe self-driving. At present, however, the information collected by DCMs varies among carmakers and the communication methods are not unified. The exchange of information between vehicles manufactured by different automakers has become complicated, making it difficult to apply the information and technology to self-driving. The ministry plans to propose the unified standards to the United Nations' World Forum for Harmonization of Vehicle Regulations (WP29), which discusses the standardization of automobile technologies. If successful, the standards will become international and automakers in member countries will be obliged to produce vehicles in accordance with the standards if they are adopted by WP29. Connected cars have been spreading rapidly in recent years. According to the research firm Fuji Keizai Co., global sales in 2019 were 31.2 million units, and are expected to grow to nearly 100 million units in 2035.

From <https://the-japan-news.com> 08/23/2021

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SOUTH KOREA: Gov't Unveils Dozens of Special Measures to Help Young Koreans

The government has announced 87 special measures for the younger population, including attractive mortgage loans and a year of monthly rent support for those at a certain income level who do not own a home. Minister Koo Yun-cheol of the Office for Government Policy Coordination on Thursday said the latest measures were drafted to assist young Koreans in keeping their dreams and hopes as they are the country's future. Among the measures are home mortgage loans with a fixed interest rate and

a maturity of up to 40 years, which will be introduced for newlyweds and young adults trying to buy a home. Rent assistance for youths of up to 200-thousand won a month is expected to benefit some 152-thousand people. New incentives will also aim to encourage job creation. Under the plan, small and medium-sized firms hiring younger people will receive subsidies of several million won per year. Also present are financial products that offer tax deductions to help young people save money and grow their assets.

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South-East Asia

CAMBODIA: Launching National Campaign Against Covid-19

Cambodia on Monday launched a national campaign against the coronavirus under the theme "Responsible Together to Prevent COVID-19 Transmission." The campaign aimed at reminding and encouraging all people to strictly abide by necessary measures to contain the spread of COVID-19 and its variants, said a health ministry's press statement. "Although there is a decline in new infections and deaths in some provinces, the risk of a surge in COVID-19 due to the Delta variant is very high," the statement said. The statement said it is imperative that the guideline on the three do's and three don'ts, which was introduced in mid-December, be reinforced to suppress the virus transmission. The three do's include wearing a face mask, washing hands frequently and maintaining the physical distancing of 1.5 meters, while the three don'ts are avoiding confined and enclosed spaces, avoiding crowded spaces, and avoiding touching each other, it said. Health Minister Mam Bunheng called on people to share their knowledge of COVID-19 preventive measures with their friends, family members, relatives and neighbors in order to curb the virus transmission more effectively. He advised the governors of all cities and provinces to conduct a campaign in their respective territories to enhance awareness among the public about preventive measures of COVID-19.

The minister also asked local authorities to use all means including TVs, radios, social media, mobile loudspeakers, banners and leaflets to spread the awareness to the people. Also, he urged people to report to local authorities immediately if someone returned home from high risk areas or from overseas without going into a mandatory quarantine. The Southeast Asian nation has been enduring the third wave of COVID-19 community transmission since Feb. 20. The kingdom confirmed a daily record of 593 cases on Monday, pushing the national total caseload to 86,041, the health ministry said, adding that 21 more fatalities had been recorded, taking the overall death toll to 1,704. Another 806 patients had recovered, bringing the total number of recoveries to 81,202, it said. The country began a COVID-19 vaccination drive on Feb. 10, targeting to vaccinate 12 million people, or 75 percent of its 16-million population, by November. To date, some 8.94 million people, or 55.9

percent of the total population, have received at least one vaccine dose, while 7.25 million of them, or 45.3 percent, have completed the two-dose inoculation.

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MYANMAR: Extending Covid-19 Preventive Measures Until End of September

Myanmar's Central Committee on Prevention, Control and Treatment for COVID-19 decided on Sunday to extend the period for preventive measures against COVID-19 to Sept. 30. The extension will be applied to all orders, announcements, directives previously issued by the respective union level government organizations and ministries in order to contain the spread of the viral disease, the announcement said. According to the Ministry of Health, Myanmar reported 3,166 new COVID-19 cases in the past 24 hours, bringing the tally in the country to 392,300 on Sunday. A total of 106 more deaths were reported, bringing the death toll to 15,183 as of Sunday, the ministry said. According to the ministry, a total of 346,408 patients have been discharged from hospitals after full recovery and over 3.53 million samples have been tested for COVID-19 so far. Over 1.84 million people have completed two-dose COVID-19 vaccination as of Saturday. Myanmar detected its first two positive cases of COVID-19 on March 23 last year.

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VIETNAM: Ministry of Health Issues New Criteria for Pandemic Control

The Ministry of Health has issued new criteria in controlling the COVID-19 pandemic in HCM City and other cities and provinces that are implementing social distancing rules according to Directive 16 of the Prime Minister, including Hà Nội. Localities will be considered to have pandemic under control when the number of new cases in the community decreases continuously compared to the previous two weeks and decrease by at least 50 per cent compared to the week that recorded highest infections during the pandemic. The rate of positive samples tested by reverse transcription-polymerase chain reaction (RT-PCR) method during the day in the community also needs to decrease within 14 days. Additionally, the locality will be deemed to have COVID-19 under control when no new clusters of infections are recorded over seven days. Under the new criteria, provinces also need to achieve a 50 per cent reduction in the risk of infection and an increase of at least 30 per cent of districts and communes that return to the "new normal" state. In HCM City, the risk of infection needs to be reduced by 30 per cent. In the fourth wave, four southern provinces and cities which record highest infections are HCM City, Bình Dương, Long An and Đồng Nai.

From <https://vietnamnews.vn> 08/20/2021

Law on Bad Debt Settlement Proposed

The Government needs to issue a law on bad debt settlement for credit institutions as a pilot resolution on the issue will expire next year, experts said. Such debts could increase again due to the adverse impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. The National Assembly approved Resolution 42/2017/QH14 on piloting the bad debt settlement of credit institutions in 2017, however, the policy will expire next year. According to statistics from the State Bank of Vietnam (SBV), the total bad debt of the whole banking system as of May 31, 2021 was VNĐ425.4 trillion, down 3.4 per cent compared to the end of 2020. Accumulated from August 15, 2017 to May 31, 2021, VNĐ353.81 trillion of bad debt was recovered according to Resolution 42. The results are positive, but many warnings showed bad debt will continue to rise again due to the COVID-19 pandemic, especially after the latest outbreak. According to banks' financial statements in the second quarter of 2021, more than half of banks recorded an increase in overdue debt balance compared to the end of 2020, especially doubtful and potentially irrecoverable debts. In Việt Nam, debts are classified into five groups based on their risk status: standard debt, debt needing special attention, subprime debt, doubtful debt, and potentially irrecoverable debt.

Specifically, at VietinBank, potentially irrecoverable debt increased sharply by 103 per cent and accounted for more than 80 per cent of the bank's total bad debt. The rises at Military Bank and NamABank were 145 and 100 per cent, respectively. Nguyễn Thu Lan, senior director of Techcombank's Risk Management Division, said bad debts caused by the COVID-19 pandemic are now just a risk, not an existing bad debt as banks have been allowed to restructure and keep debt groups unchanged for COVID-19 affected firms as per the Government's direction. However, she was concerned as the pandemic is not over while its heavy impacts are still ahead. Firms will still have to face many difficulties in the future and banks will certainly not be able to stay out of the firing line. According to Cấn Văn Lực, chief economist of BIDV, one of the major problems when dealing with bad debts currently is the handling of collateral. The right to seize security assets of a credit institution is one of the key contents in Resolution 42, but it does not specify regulations when the borrowers do not cooperate.

Therefore, as Resolution 42 will expire next year, Lực said it is necessary to have a law on bad debt settlement with a stronger legal framework. Sharing the same view, Lawyer Trương Thanh Đức, director of ANVI Law Firm, said Resolution 42 has a good effect in dealing with bad debts, however, the policy still needs to be further streamlined to improve the handling of bad debts of the economy those of the banking industry. Anticipating the possible risk of bad debt in the future, the central bank has recently also proposed to issue a law on bad debt handling based on provisions of Resolution 42. According to the SBV, the issuance of a new law on bad

debt handling will help maintain the settlement of bad debts after the expiry of Resolution 42, helping credit institutions accelerate the handling of bad debts to avoid potential risks for the economy.

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South Asia

INDIA: Delhi Govt Rolls Out Property Registration Guidelines for Sub-registrars

In an effort to improve service delivery to the citizens, the Revenue Department of the Government of Delhi has rolled out guidelines for sub-registrars on the documentation of properties. Divisional Commissioner Sanjiv Khirwar issued the guidelines. As per these, all sub-registrars have to comply with all provisions of the Registration Act, 1908 and the Indian Stamp Act, 1899, and other relevant statutes and orders from the Revenue Department. Further, documents for which the registration is compulsory to include sale deed, gift deed, partition deed, mortgage deed, lease deed for a term exceeding one year, and other non-testamentary instruments. As per the guidelines, all other documents apart from these have to be presented for registration within four months of execution. In case the document is not presented within the stipulated time, then the registrar may impose a payment of a 10-fold fine to allow it. Also, any person other than those parties to the document and witness will not be permitted to enter the sub-registrar office, the guidelines added. The people involved in the registration process will be recognised through their Aadhaar number or enrolment slip. In case they do not own any of that, they'll be asked to apply for the Aadhaar card immediately. An enrolment slip should be provided to such a party to take forth their registration process. Also, the guidelines suggest that an endorsement by the sub-registrar must be made that the person executing the documents agrees to the execution of the instrument and he or she is completely aware of the salient features of the contents of the instrument. As and when the parties submit their documents duly executed, the sub-registrar will sign the endorsement immediately under sections 52 and 58 of the Registration Act.

In case of any discrepancies, the guidelines says, the sub-registrar will issue a system-generated deficiency memo through the Delhi Online Registration Information System (DORIS) on the same day. Also, the documents will not be kept awaited for any reason once the deficiencies are done away with or after the expiry of the time period mentioned in the memo. Apart from this, the newly issued guidelines also address property dispute issues. It says, the sub-registrar will update on the same day on the DORIS portal as and when he receives any information of any kind of property dispute. Only a system-generated notice through DORIS portal shall be given by the sub-registrar to the concerned party. Three days' time will be given to them to produce any stay order from a competent court of law. It also clearly

states that the sub-registrar shall not keep any document pending because of a complaint made by any party unless he gets a copy of a stay order granted by a court to maintain the status quo or restrain the transfer of the property. If any document is presented free of any dispute and discrepancy, it must be registered in a day's time. Latest by the day after the documents were presented. Also, it has to be ensured that the registered document is delivered on the same day. Following compliance with the provisions under sections 34, 35, 58, and 59 of the Registration Act, the certificate of registration is to be endorsed. This certificate will pose evidence for the registration of the property. Hence, after the documents are completely scrutinised as per all legal respects, the sub-registrar will finally issue the registration certificate under section 60 of the Registration Act and will put his signatures on the same. The guidelines also provide for regular monitoring of sub-registrar offices. On a monthly basis, the concerned registrar would prepare a consolidated assessment report and forward the same to the Inspector General of Registration (IGR).

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Power Ministry Puts Draft Green Energy Rules on Its Website for Comments

The Union Ministry of Power has “Draft Electricity (promoting renewable energy through Green Energy Open Access) Rules, 2021” for the purchase of green energy and power from waste-to-energy plants. The draft rules have been circulated and uploaded on the Ministry’s website <https://powermin.gov.in/> to seek comments within 30 days. The draft rules have been drafted with various the following subheads under which the details for the same have been provided. These subheads include Renewable Purchase Obligation (RPO); Green energy open access; Nodal Agencies; Procedure for grant of green energy open access; banking; and cross-subsidy surcharge. On tariff, the rules propose that the Appropriate Commission will determine the tariff for green energy. The tariff will include the cost of average pooled power of the renewable energy, cross-subsidy charges (in case any), and service charges that cover all prudent costs of the distribution licensee for providing the green energy. Addressing the green hydrogen, the draft rules state that it is the hydrogen produced using electricity from renewable sources. “The obligated entity including the Industries can also meet their Renewable Purchase Obligation by purchasing green hydrogen. The quantum of green hydrogen would be computed by considering the equivalence to the Green hydrogen produced from one MWh of electricity from the renewable sources or its multiple. The norms shall be notified by the Central Commission.” Also, the rules propose guidelines for green energy open access. It states that the Appropriate Commission shall formulate regulations according to this Rule for providing Green Energy Open Access to consumers. Within a maximum time period of 15 days, all the applications shall be granted permission for open access to Green Energy. This is “provided that only consumers who have contracted demand/sanctioned load of 100 kW and above shall be eligible

to take power through green energy open access. No supply limit shall be affixed for the captive consumers taking power under green energy open access. Provided further that reasonable conditions such as the minimum number of time blocks for which the consumer shall not change the quantum of power consumed through open access may be imposed so as to avoid high variation in demand to be met by the distribution licensee.”

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Achieving SDG 11.3 Through Participatory Planning Initiatives

Citizen participation and engagement is the cornerstone of democratic city governance. One of the key indicators of SDG Target 11.3 is the ‘proportion of cities with a direct participation structure of civil society in urban planning and management that operate regularly and democratically’, writes Chetan Vaidya, former Director, School of Planning and Architecture (SPA) and the National Institute of Urban Affairs (NIUA). In India, public participation in urban planning has been a practice since the promulgation of town planning and development acts. Such participation however was confined to feedback and objections and citizens could not successfully influence decision making and proposals. Participation has been a buzzword in various local urban plans and projects. Development projects are more focused on implementation whereas planning preparation influences decisions. In the last few decades, several initiatives were taken to improve public participation in urban development in India. These include legislative, programmatic, and scheme-based efforts to institutionalise participatory processes in planning, implementation, and monitoring. Starting with the 74th Constitutional Amendment Act that formalised city/town administration as a third tier of government and institutionalised mechanisms for participatory and decentralised governance, reforms like the Community Participation Law at the national level, state-level initiatives like the People’s Planning Campaign for Decentralised Governance in Kerala, Resident Welfare Associations Scheme in Delhi; Citizen engagement in centrally sponsored schemes like the Smart City Mission and the Swachh Survekshan all constitute notable participatory initiatives and are described in the following section.

The 74th Constitutional Amendment Act: In India, the Constitution was amended in 1992 through the enactment of the Constitution (74th Amendment) Act (CAA) that gave constitutional recognition to the local governments. Looking back at the CAA, however, the provisions on creation and composition of ward committees, putting in place a planning process driven by the local government under District Planning Committees (DPCs) and Metropolitan Planning Committees (MPCs) and devolving of optional functions yet to materialise. **Community Participation Law (CPL):** The CPL was a mandatory reform under the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM) and it refers to making appropriate provisions in the state-level municipal statutes for the establishment of a three/four-tiered structure. It

contemplated the creation of another tier of decision-making in the municipality which is below the wardlevel, called the Area Sabha. CPL aimed at: (a) Strengthening municipal governments by institutionalising citizen participation (b) Involving citizens in municipal functions like setting priorities, budgeting provisions, exerting pressure for compliance of existing regulations, etc. States were to either enact a separate CPL or make appropriate amendments to their existing municipal laws. The Area Sabha concept as the fourth tier of municipal governance did not work in practice.

Decentralised Governance in Kerala: Following the 74th CAA to the Constitution of India, the People's Plan Campaign for decentralised governance was adopted by the Kerala Government in 1996. It also transferred the control of sub-centres and primary healthcare centres to local-self-governments. City Mayors have executive powers and Municipal Corporations are not managed by Municipal Commissioners. Moreover, the federation of women self-help groups (SHGs) under the state-wide Kudumbasree Mission plays an active role in the delivery of various services. Empowered local governments have led to the active participation of citizens in urban planning in the State.

Resident Welfare Associations (RWAs) of Delhi: RWAs have been playing a very active role in planning and improving the delivery of services in the city. In 2003, Delhi Government introduced a Bhagidari system to create a partnership between civic officials and RWAs. It allowed local citizens, traders and other stakeholders to have regular interactions with urban officials. It did bring the public agencies close to people and helped in the delivery of services. However, urban poor were often kept outside this system and the system mostly benefited the middle and higher-income groups. RWAs are giving given important inputs to the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) in preparing and finalisation of Delhi Master Plan 2041 through online meetings and using the public engagement portal set up for this purpose.

Smart City Mission: Guidelines for this mission had a mandatory condition of citizen participation in preparing the Smart City Development Plan. Cities created proposals through extensive citizen engagement. Pune developed its vision through active participation for its citizen. The city had a participation of more than 13.5 lakh citizens in the development of Pan city projects and the corresponding figure for the area development plan was 23.3 lakh. Pune city used several methods for citizens participation such as door-to-door form distribution, Ganesh Mandal community group events, city portal, online discussion groups, citizen group engagement, press and social media, distribution of app for self-help groups, competition for crowdsourcing of ideas, etc. The large-scale participation of citizens and use of ICT led to good planning and projects in this mission.

Swachh Survekshan (SS): It is an annual survey of cleanliness, hygiene and sanitation in cities and towns across India. The survey was launched as part of the 'Swachh Bharat' (Clean India) Mission in 2016 and presently it covers about 4,242 urban centres. The objective of the survey is large-scale citizen participation and an ensured continuity in the Clean India campaign. Indore in Madhya Pradesh has been

ranked as the cleanest city for the last four years. Citizens of Indore take great pride as the cleanest city for the last four years. Citizens of Indore take great pride as the cleanest city in the country. Local community groups, traders, industry associations, public agencies fully support the Indore Municipal Corporation in maintaining cleanliness in the city. The SS survey has led to the active participation of citizens in the delivery of the urban service. Demand for Enhanced Participation: It could be generated through civil society initiatives. The tools at the sub-national level are social audits, community scorecards, citizen report cards and public expenditure tracking and budgeting. The Public Affairs Centre has successfully used some of these initiatives in Bangalore and other cities. At the national level, the appropriate tools include public interest litigation and citizen movement. It is clear that these initiatives have applicability at all levels of government. Though, the impact of these measures is unpredictable and may vary with time. Active participation of citizens can be further enabled and enhanced with the use of Information Communication Technology. The process of information dissemination and practice in public participation needs to be improved. The learnings from these experiences may be documented, disseminated and mainstreamed in India's urban planning and development process.

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Delhi to Implement Action Plan Against Climate Change by Year End

In an attempt to combat climate change, the Government of Delhi is planning to implement a new 10-year action plan, said the officials. In this regard, the Government of India had come up with the National Action Plan for Climate Change (NAPCC) in 2009 and asked the states to prepare their own plans. Delhi, however, submitted its action plan in the year 2019 making it the last state to do so. According to a senior official of the environment department, "The plan majorly remained on paper and could not be implemented in a proper manner. It expired in 2020. Now, we are due for a new plan." The existing plan laid emphasis on six areas including energy, transport, green cover and urban development. Also, it projected a significant decrease in cold days and nights and a rise in heavy rainfall events in the national capital. The Government of Delhi is likely to rope in a German agency as a knowledge partner. Considering the planning exercise, the environment department has asked the Ministry of Forest, Environment & Climate Change (MoEF&CC) to release a sum of Rs 20 lakh. Reportedly, all the extreme weather events that occurred in the last 10 years are being analysed to prepare a comprehensive plan. The plan will be aimed at battling air pollution, greenhouse gas emissions, transport issues, air conditioning, heat islands, promotion of renewable energy, assessing agriculture patterns, etc. Through this, the government will be able to figure out activities causing surge in greenhouse gas emissions and allocate responsibilities accordingly to the concerned departments. The plan will be implemented in a phased

manner for a period of 10 years. Reportedly, consultations with the stakeholders will be within two months and the plan will be implemented in a phased manner by this year. Delhi has been witnessing major climatic changes in the past few years. The national capital had recorded its coldest-ever day on December 30, 2019, since 1901. As per trends, since August 2020, Delhi has been witnessing varying weather conditions and is breaking weather records almost every month. (With inputs from PTI)

From <https://egov.eletsonline.com/> 08/31/2021

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Central-West Asia

AZERBAIJAN: Launching Project to Develop ICT Skills of Population

An online learning portal to improve the digital skills of the population and develop their knowledge on the use of information and communication technologies has been created in Azerbaijan, the Ministry of Transport, Communications and High Technologies of Azerbaijan told Trend. According to the ministry, the 'iktlab.edu.az' online learning portal offers free online trainings (video lessons) on acquiring knowledge in the field of ICT and digital technologies, in which users can participate in an interactive form. "The portal will post lessons in various areas of ICT and digital technologies, prepared in the Azerbaijani language. The portal currently provides video information on the basics of digital skills, the use of Internet technologies and other similar topics," said the ministry. Content related to digital marketing and programming courses will also be available soon. "The purpose of this project is to help the population, especially women, in obtaining knowledge and skills in all parts of the country on a free basis. Those who successfully complete the training course will be able to obtain certificates through this portal," the ministry noted. The online project is being implemented by the ICT Application and Training Center (İKT LAB) with the support of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and High Technologies and the International Telecommunications Union. The platform was developed within the 'Development of multimedia online courses and a web portal for women' project. This project is being implemented on the basis of the decision of the World Conference on the Development of Telecommunications on the implementation of regional projects as part of regional initiatives.

From <https://en.trend.az/> 01/06/2021

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Azerbaijan Always Considers Food Security as Strategic Priority – FAO

The government of Azerbaijan always considers food security as a strategic priority for the country, the FAO Azerbaijan told Trend. The FAO noted that on April 29, 2019,

the government has Approved the "State Program to ensure food security in the Republic of Azerbaijan for 2019-2025." "The main objectives of the State Program are to bring norms and standards in the field of food safety in line with international requirements, improve the provision of safe and quality food, increase the export potential to foreign markets, strengthen control over agrochemicals and veterinary materials used in agriculture, as well as awareness raising," the FAO said. The FAO official noted that in regards to the recent global trend of increase in food prices, the government takes into account the current realities of the global market being an integral part of it. "However, we also observe the certain measures of the government to secure the local markets from the global shocks. It is mainly observed with the increasing programs on a different type of state support to the agricultural producers in the country," the FAO added. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) is a specialized agency of the United Nations that leads international efforts to defeat hunger.

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Azerbaijan Working on Legal Assessment of Environmental Damage on Liberated Lands

Materials on the damage caused by the Armenians to the environment of the territories of Azerbaijan, previously liberated from Armenian occupation, have been sent to Azerbaijan's General Prosecutor's Office, Trend reports. On August 30, the Working Group on Environmental Issues of the Interdepartmental Center operating under the Coordination Headquarters with the aim of centralized solution of issues in the liberated territories of Azerbaijan, held a regular meeting. During the meeting, it became known that the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources of Azerbaijan carried out an assessment work in accordance with the legislation. Investigation materials on Zangilan, Gubadly, Aghdam, Fuzuli, Khojavand, Jabrayil, Tartar districts and the city of Shusha were sent to the General Prosecutor's Office of Azerbaijan for a legal assessment.

From <https://en.trend.az/> 08/30/2021

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AUSTRALIA: New Rules Help Life Support Energy Users

Carolyn Campbell-McLean has muscular dystrophy and depends on electricity for the simplest everyday tasks. There's the ventilator so she can breathe at night, a rechargeable wheelchair and an electronic bed - even an electric system to open her front door. "When the power goes out, for me it's pretty drastic," she told AAP. There are about 150,000 Australians who depend on uninterrupted power to run life support equipment and each has to register with their power company. It means they'll be

contacted quickly if there's a blackout, and their power can't simply be cut off but they need a fresh medical certificate every time they move house or change retailer. And life support appliances such as dialysis machines, ventilators or insulin pumps can be expensive to run. Like many, Ms Campbell-McLean has been told she has to switch energy retailers if she wants to save money.

Yet the disability advocate says the paperwork is a "pain in the neck" - she can't write, use a printer or get to the doctor for yet another medical certificate. "People who really need a discount and to get a better deal are actually the ones stuck on big power plans," she said. "It is frustrating always having to prove you have a disability and do the paperwork ... there's a lot on our plates just dealing with the everyday". NSW Energy and Water Ombudsman Janine Young agrees. "It's really a barrier, it's a lack of equality, it's really unfair," she told AAP. After hearing from Ms Campbell-McLean, the Ombudsman pushed for a change to the national energy market rules, which will be introduced on Sunday. It means consumers who depend on life support can use their medical documents for up to four years, making it easier for them to switch power companies or move house.

"It is critical that these customers can easily switch retailers to get an energy contract that meets their financial needs," Ms Young said. After being with the same supplier for eight years, Ms Campbell-McLean says she'll now be able to look out for cheaper energy deals without the mental health impacts of tackling piles of disability paperwork. "You can actually look for a better deal without having to go through all the red tape," she said. Australian Energy Market Commission Chair Anna Collyer says she's pleased to be able to make the change. "It means you don't have to go to the doctor every time you want to switch energy retailers," she told AAP. Ms Campbell-McLean believes energy retailers are trying to do better by customers but said it's "not before time."

From <https://au.news.yahoo.com> 08/01/2021

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Coalition Nixes Labor's Cash-for-Job Plan

All fully vaccinated Australians would receive a \$300 payment under a \$6 billion Labor plan to give the coronavirus job rollout a shot in the arm. The Morrison government has rejected the opposition's proposal designed to fuel sluggish immunisation rates. Finance Minister Simon Birmingham described the announcement as insulting to millions of Australians who had already received a shot. "The evidence says that it's unnecessary and unlikely to work," he told the ABC on Tuesday. Australia remains behind the world with just over 19 per cent of people over 16 fully vaccinated against coronavirus. Labor is calling on the government to provide a one-off \$300 payment to all people fully vaccinated by December 1 including those already immunised. The coalition favours incentives like giving vaccinated people greater freedoms and partnering with the private sector to offer

bonuses.

Senator Birmingham said schemes in Canada and the United Kingdom, where vaccination rates are high, were a better option. "They used some targeted incentives in careful, targeted ways to help get people over the line, but not this type of broad-brush scatter gun approach," he said. Opposition Leader Anthony Albanese said his plan would give the rollout a much-needed shot in the arm for businesses and workers struggling under lockdowns. "The government has failed on its two jobs this year, the rollout of the vaccine and fixing quarantine," he said. "It needs to use every measure at its disposal to protect Australians and our economy." Leading epidemiologist Mary-Louise McLaws said cash incentives were unnecessary at this stage with Australians generally good at taking up vaccines. "I actually don't think Australians are that hesitant. There is just not enough vaccine available," she told the Nine Network.

"I would prefer that money to go to people who are really hurting financially with the lockdown." Senator Birmingham said research by the government's behavioural economics team found financial incentives aren't the solution. Federal and state governments have set a 70 per cent vaccine coverage target for lockdowns to be minimised and 80 per cent for them to be a thing of the past. "The faster this is achieved, the faster the recovery as we emerge from the lockdowns that are bleeding hundreds of millions of dollars a day from the nation's finances," Mr Albanese said.

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Australia Tightens Overseas Travel Rules

Australia has made it even harder to leave the country during the coronavirus pandemic for citizens and permanent residents who usually live overseas. The federal government has quietly tightened pandemic border rules with people who live in other countries now needing approval to return home. Finance Minister Simon Birmingham said the move was designed to reduce the number of Australians joining the backlog of people stranded abroad. "It's been very difficult in terms of repatriating people into Australia. We have limited availability," he told Sky News on Friday. "One of the tools quite rightly applied to make sure that we manage that is to keep a lid where possible on the number of people exiting the country in the first place. "So many of those exiting do seek to come back in a relatively short order." There are concerns people who come to Australia for quick visits to see dying loved ones may face hurdles in returning to the countries they live in. Senator Birmingham argued the exemption for overseas residents from needing permission was not designed to enable frequent travel in and out of Australia. He said there were too many people leaving the country for short periods before adding themselves to the cohort keen to return. More than 38,000 Australians stranded overseas have registered to come home with 4569 considered vulnerable. Federal and state governments agreed to

halve inbound passenger caps out of concern about the Delta variant of coronavirus.

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JobKeeper Transparency Plan Set for Defeat

Big companies will not be forced to reveal how much they received in wage subsidies with the coalition poised to shoot down greater transparency. Independent senator Rex Patrick last week put forward an amendment to a federal government bill for new coronavirus financial support to include requirements for companies earning more than \$10 million. Under the change, the tax commissioner would publish how much businesses were handed from the JobKeeper scheme and new assistance packages. But the Morrison government is adamant the information should be kept secret and plans to defeat the amendment in the Senate on Monday. Finance Minister Simon Birmingham said all JobKeeper recipients were eligible under the rules which were designed to save workers during nationwide lockdowns. "We don't think it's appropriate to create a circumstance where now they are vilified with some sort of pretence that they weren't eligible when they were eligible," he told the ABC. Labor is not expected to back the senator's amendment when it comes up for reconsideration, having made its point last week when supporting it but not wanting to stand in the way of financial assistance flowing through. Senator Patrick is urging the opposition to again support his amendment. "If they don't, that means they are pretending that they stand for something," he told ABC radio. Shadow assistant treasurer Andrew Leigh has led a campaign to name and shame businesses who didn't hand back JobKeeper payments despite turning big profits. The Labor frontbencher last week called for a public register for firms with turnovers above \$100 million.

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Projects to Ease Environmental Pressures

The federal government has announced 22 new recycling projects in collaboration with the NSW government to ease pressure on the environment. The joint funding component between the Commonwealth and NSW for these projects is \$24 million, which federal Environment Minister Sussan Ley estimates will generate industry investment of \$59 million. It is part of a \$600 million national rollout of recycling infrastructure. "This is about easing pressure on our environment by recycling more materials including plastics, tyres, glass, cardboard and even coffee cups, and importantly it is about creating jobs and economic investment," Ms Ley said. "We need to capture the economic value of waste, we need to create markets for recycled materials and this level of investment will drive jobs in key areas at a critical time." NSW Environment Minister Matt Kean said the Remanufacture NSW projects in Western Sydney, the Central Coast, Newcastle, and regional NSW would create jobs.

It would also increase the state's recycling capacity by an estimated 120,000 tonnes every year. "We can't keep sending our scraps to languish in landfill when there are huge opportunities to turn our trash into treasure," Mr Kean said. "This funding and these new projects will help to boost our existing recycling capabilities, supportive innovative re-use of recycled materials and boost NSW's recycling capacity." Key projects: * Establishment of a new \$40 million regional Materials Recovery Facility to recycle waste glass, plastic, tyres and paper and cardboard in Newcastle * Five mobile plastic processing facilities across Sydney to process almost 5000 tonnes of plastic each year * New state-of-the-art infrastructure in Erskine Park to reprocess 3,200 tonnes of used tyres for use in road construction and manufactured rubber-based products * Wetherill Park plant expansion that turns paperboard beverage containers into sustainable building products as a substitute for plaster and particle boards.

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Regulators Complete Review of ASX Outage

A review into the outage at the Australian Stock Exchange in November 2020 has found that a new trading system was not ready to go live when it was activated, causing a day's trading to be lost. The review overseen by the Reserve Bank of Australia and the Australian Securities and Investment Commission said the outage occurred after a major upgrade to the ASX's equity trading platform, ASX Trade. "The regulators view operational incidents of this nature with significant concern," the RBA and the ASIC said in a joint statement on Monday. The review conducted by IBM Australia found that overall the ASX met or exceeded leading industry practices in a majority of the capabilities assessed. "However, the independent expert identified several key shortcomings in the project," the statement said. These included factors suggesting that the ASX Trade system was not ready to go live considering ASX's near-zero risk appetite for service disruption, gaps in the rigour applied to the project delivery risk and issue management process. "It was not reasonable to conclude that ASX's test plan was consistent with its risk appetite," it said. The review made recommendations in seven key categories - risk, governance, delivery, requirements, vendor management, testing and incident management. "The regulators note that ASX has agreed to address the recommendations from the review, and apologised for the disruption to the market," it said. "The regulators expect ASX to apply the insights from IBM's findings across the ASX Group to ensure existing and proposed projects, including the CHES replacement program, are managed and implemented appropriately."

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Morrison Talks Up Overseas Travel Plans

Scott Morrison believes international travel could be on the near horizon for fully vaccinated Australians, as airlines prepare for the "inevitable" rollout of vaccine passports. The prime minister and Qantas are pinning a reopening of borders on having 80 per cent of Australians aged 16 and older fully vaccinated. "It enables Australians who are vaccinated ... to be able to travel and return at significantly reduced risks to themselves and others," Mr Morrison told reporters on Friday. Qantas earlier revealed plans to resume flights to some low-risk destinations with high vaccination rates from the end of the year. These include Singapore, Japan, the US, UK, Canada and New Zealand. The airline will require travellers to be vaccinated and is working with the International Air Transport Association to roll out a travel pass when international Qantas and Jetstar flights resume.

With Europe and the UK having already introduced their own vaccine passports, Virgin Australia head of strategy Alistair Hartley said it was "inevitable" other nations across the globe would follow suit for international travel. "They'll be some form of this," he said on Friday during an online conference hosted by the UNSW School of Aviation. "Most airlines that I speak with ... we want to see a consistent approach." Dhruv Gupta, chief aviation officer at Sydney Airport, said he was told checking in flights was taking six hours during a recent call with several European airport counterparts. The silver lining, he said, was the hard lessons are currently being learnt abroad, paving the way for technology to be bedded down before Australia reopens internationally. Mr Gupta believes the pathway to recovery for the COVID-smashed aviation industry is clearer than any time in the 18 months, courtesy of the vaccine markers for reopening set by the Doherty Institute.

"All of the data that we have seen in the first half of this year supports the fact that the underlying demand is there," he said. "The demand is there and it's going to come back once those thresholds are hit." Some 33 per cent of Australians aged 16 and older are fully vaccinated. There is contention among state, territory and federal leaders about whether to include younger children in Australia's vaccination thresholds. Mr Morrison is adamant this is not necessary under modelling provided to the national cabinet. An expansion of home quarantine, currently being trialled in South Australia, could also be on the cards under higher vaccination rates. Finance Minister Simon Birmingham expects the type of quarantine people will be expected to do depends on where they're coming from. "There may well be some significant changes in terms of what we've known quarantine to be to what it will be," he told Sky News.

From <https://au.news.yahoo.com> 08/27/2021

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New Laws to Protect Commission Witnesses

People who have been afraid to come forward to tell their story to the disability royal

commission can have more confidence under new protection of information laws, the commissioner says. Federal parliament passed laws on Monday that will protect sensitive information provided to a royal commission. Disability royal commissioner Ronald Sackville said the new laws would remove a "significant barrier" to people with disability, or people on their behalf, engaging with the royal commission. "The royal commission will now be able to guarantee the confidentiality of submissions and other sensitive information both during and beyond the term of our inquiry," the former judge said. He encouraged anyone who has had concerns about telling their story to now contact the royal commission. "This includes accounts of a person's, or another person's, experiences of systemic violence, abuse, neglect or exploitation," he said.

Emails, letters and conversations will get the same protection as evidence given in person and in session. It will be an offence incurring a prison term of up to 12 months to expose information that should be kept private. Assistant Minister Nola Marino told parliament the disability royal commission was guided by witnesses, and its outcomes must be based on a true reflection of those experiences. "It is critical that people sharing their lived experiences with the royal commission feel respected and that survivors of violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation have their experiences appropriately acknowledged, recognised and validated," she said. There are also stronger safeguards for whistleblowers who expose the failings of government departments, corporations or institutions. In a progress report issued on Monday, the royal commission says it has held 282 private sessions and received 851 submissions in the first six months of 2021, despite COVID-19 disruptions. More than 2600 submissions have been made in total, before a final report due in September 2023. "Now you know you can come forward and you can name names," Greens leader Adam Bandt said. "You can talk about specific incidents that have happened to you. You can also talk about the systems that have worked to discriminate against you."

From <https://au.news.yahoo.com> 08/30/2021

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NEW ZEALAND: New Fuel Regulations Come into Force

Motorists and smaller fuel companies are set to benefit from a more competitive market as new regulations, including terminal gate pricing, take effect from today," says Energy and Resources Minister Megan Woods. "A terminal gate pricing regime will improve competition in the wholesale market by making it easier for fuel companies to access fuel more cheaply and in more locations," Megan Woods said. "Also among the suite of new measures, a dispute resolution scheme and rules to ensure contracts between wholesale fuel suppliers and their wholesale customers are fair. "While prices have recently increased due to the rising price of crude oil I am certain that over time the impact of the provisions in the Fuel Industry Act will promote competition in fuel markets to make things fairer for kiwi motorists and

smaller players in the market. The regulations, beginning today, support legislation that was passed last year (The Fuel Industry Act 2020) after a Government-ordered fuel market study conducted by the Commerce Commission found that fuel companies had been making higher profits than expected in a workable competitive market. "Margins on regular and premium petrol have reduced since the Government announced the market study and these regulations will make things more competitive with more measures still to come. "A requirement for retail fuel sites to display premium fuel prices on forecourt price boards will come into effect by 11 February next year and regulations requiring fuel companies to collect and disclose certain information are currently being developed to assist with monitoring of the fuel market," Megan Woods said.

From <https://livenews.co.nz> 08/11/2021

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Government Sets Out Plan to Reconnect New Zealanders to the World

Vaccination rollout will speed up, with all eligible ages able to book in their vaccine by 1 September Move to 6 weeks between doses to ensure more NZers at least partially vaccinated as soon as possible in face of Delta risk Phased approach to reopening border with self-isolation pilot this year and set up of new testing and vaccine checking systems at border

From the first quarter of 2022 move to new individual risk based border settings that will establish low, medium and high risk pathways into the country Elimination retained as best strategy to keep COVID out and economy open The Government will use the second half of 2021 to vaccinate as many New Zealanders as possible and safely conduct a self-isolation trial for vaccinated New Zealanders in order to prepare for a phased resumption of quarantine-free travel, Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern announced today.

The Government's framework for re-opening borders and moving to an individualised risk-based model for quarantine-free travel was unveiled at a forum on Reconnecting New Zealanders to the World in Wellington today. The release of the plan followed the publication of Sir David Skegg's Strategic COVID-19 Public Health Advisory Group's advice to Government on Wednesday. "Getting vaccinated is the number one thing everyone can do to be protected against COVID-19, help accelerate our economic recovery, reduce the risk of lockdowns, and safely allow New Zealand's borders to begin re-opening next year," Jacinda Ardern said. "The plan announced today is informed by the best available scientific evidence and public health advice. It will allow us to capture the opportunities vaccination brings, while protecting the gains New Zealanders have worked so hard for.

"Key to this is maintaining our Elimination Strategy. The advice is clear: If we open our borders now we will lose the freedoms and advantages we have achieved so far.

“If we give up our elimination approach too soon there is no going back, and we could see significant breakouts here like some countries overseas are experiencing who have opened up early in their vaccination rollout. “Therefore the first step in our plan is speeding up the vaccination process to ensure everyone is at least partially vaccinated as soon as possible to reduce the risk and impact of Delta entering the country. “From today we are moving to a six week period between doses, meaning more people can get their first dose quicker and ensuring everyone is at least partially vaccinated in the coming months. Those who work at our border, have underlying health conditions or wish to be fully vaccinated sooner can still get their second dose after three weeks.

“We are also bringing forward the eligibility dates for the remaining groups. As already announced 50 plus will be open from Friday 13th August, 40 plus will be open on Wednesday 18th August, 30 plus will be open on Wednesday 25th August and from 1 September we will be open for all eligible ages. “Once enough people are vaccinated, we will be able to start the next step in the plan: a phased introduction of an individual risk-based approach to border settings in 2022. “Low-Risk, Medium-Risk and High-Risk travel pathways will be created, and which pathway a traveller takes will be based on the risk associated with where they are coming from and their vaccination status. “Each pathway will have testing and isolation requirements proportionate to that risk. “The Low-Risk pathway will permit quarantine free entry for vaccinated travellers who have been in low risk countries.

“The Medium-Risk pathway would include a combination of self-isolation and/or reduced MIQ for vaccinated travellers who have been in medium risk countries. “To prepare for the Medium-Risk pathway the Government will run a self-isolation pilot in the second half of this year to test processes and systems for the safe use of this tool. “Businesses and organisations that need to send staff overseas will be invited to express interest in participating in the pilot which will run between October and December 2021. “The High-Risk pathway will see the continuation of a full 14 days in MIQ and testing for unvaccinated travellers and any traveller, including vaccinated travellers, who have been in very high risk or high risk countries. “This individual risk based approach requires new systems to be set up. We will use the remainder of 2021 to continue to prepare for the operation of borders under this system.

“This work includes ongoing work on the development of a traveller health declaration system, investigating new testing technology for rapid testing on arrival at airports and reliable pre-departure testing as well as piloting self-isolation arrangements for some New Zealanders and strengthening other public health measures such as contact tracing. “New Zealand remains in a strong position. We don’t have COVID in the community and our economy is more open than most. “Our plan to reopen our borders both protects the gains we have won, while setting us up to safely reconnect New Zealanders and business with the world and seize the opportunities created by our COVID success,” Jacinda Ardern said.

2、 Government System and Civil Services

Asia-Pacific

Shared Problems Need Shared Solutions – Starting Now: Asia-Pacific Business Leaders

Working together – as APEC Economic Leaders demonstrated recently – to find coherent, timely solutions to complex global challenges is the only way the region will continue to thrive, the APEC Business Advisory Council (ABAC) declared Tuesday during their third virtual meeting for the year. Rachel Taulelei, the 2021 ABAC Chair, said that the council had finalized its annual letter and report to the APEC Economic Leaders at the meeting. “Our key message to leaders is that a prosperous, peaceful and resilient future will only be achieved through our collective efforts. The challenges we face are profound, but they are also shared,” Taulelei said. “The pandemic is the most urgent problem, but we also need to navigate climate change, faltering economic growth and digital disruption. Standing alone and turning inwards is not the right strategy in a deeply interconnected world,” she added. The New Zealand Prime Minister, Jacinda Ardern, opened the council’s third meeting. “We were honored to have the opportunity to share some of our thinking directly with the Prime Minister and we were able to congratulate her on hosting the first ever mid-year, informal retreat of APEC Leaders,” Taulelei highlighted. “It is clear that there is considerable common ground with ABAC and we look forward to our annual dialogue with leaders in November.” Taulelei explained that the council had made a broad set of recommendations in its report, reflecting the range of complex issues facing the region.

“A collective response to the pandemic is the most critical priority. If we want to put COVID behind us, we need faster, more equitable and universal vaccination, complemented by freeing up trade in vaccines, essential medical supplies and services,” she said. “Vaccination is also key to the safe and seamless reopening of borders, when the time is right, which will in turn enable economic recovery. APEC should develop a coherent regional framework for this,” Taulelei added. She recalled that ABAC’s theme for 2021 is ‘People, Place and Prosperity’, or ‘Tāngata, Taiao me te Taurikura’. Taking a holistic view on how those priorities could be integrated and amplified had informed ABAC’s recommendations. “The well-being of our people must be at the heart of all that we do,” Taulelei explained. “So we have recommended capacity building and structural reform to help empower small businesses, women and Indigenous communities,” “We also call for a digitally-enhanced and trade-friendly food system; ensuring people are adequately

nourished is fundamental to achieving all other objectives,” she continued. “When it comes to place, we are committed to ensuring that sustainability underpins and drives all of APEC’s economic activity going forward. To that end, we have agreed a set of Climate Change Leadership Principles and a framework for trade in renewable energy, which we want to see, adopted more broadly.

“As for prosperity, APEC can demonstrate real leadership here as it has done so effectively in the past by championing a credible and relevant World Trade Organization, putting in place some of the building blocks towards the eventual Free Trade Area of the Asia-Pacific, and ensuring that we leverage the potential of the digital economy through greater capacity-building, more accessible infrastructure and making sure that digital trade can flow seamlessly across the region,” Taulelei said. She commented that there was a need for urgency. “The time for action is now. History shows that a crisis often generates new creativity and new momentum. Our key takeaway for leaders is that we need to start seeing results in all of these areas.” “This will help us kick start the implementation of the Putrajaya Vision 2040 that leaders agreed last November, which is obviously important. But even more importantly, it will enable us to look to 2022 with a greater sense of optimism about the future,” Taulelei concluded.

From <https://www.apec.org/> 08/03/2021

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Masatsugu Asakawa Reelected for Second Term as ADB President

Asian Development Bank (ADB) President Masatsugu Asakawa received unanimous support for a second term as ADB President from the members of ADB’s Board of Governors voting in the recently concluded election. His new term runs for 5 years beginning on 24 November 2021. Mr. Asakawa was first elected as ADB’s 10th President on 30 November 2019 and assumed the position on 17 January 2020, serving the remaining term of his predecessor, Takehiko Nakao. “My vision for the upcoming term is for ADB to serve as the premier development institution for Asia and the Pacific as it supports its developing member countries (DMCs) in recovering from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic on a renewed path toward the prosperous, inclusive, resilient, and sustainable future we envisioned in our Strategy 2030,” said Mr. Asakawa.

Since taking office in January 2020, ADB has made significant contributions to the region’s COVID-19 pandemic response and recovery planning with a \$20 billion comprehensive response package and \$9 billion Asia Pacific Vaccine Access Facility. ADB also concluded in September 2020 a successful replenishment of more than \$4 billion for its Asian Development Fund and Technical Assistance Special Fund, which provide critical grant resources for vulnerable DMCs. Prior to joining ADB in 2019, Mr. Asakawa was the Special Advisor to Japan’s Prime Minister and Minister of Finance,

and has a close-to-four decades' career at the Ministry of Finance, where he gained extensive and diverse experience in international finance and development. Mr. Asakawa also successfully led international taxation discussions including Base Erosion Profit Shifting project as Chair for Committee on Fiscal Affairs in the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development from 2011 to 2016. Born in 1958, Mr. Asakawa holds a Bachelor of Arts from the University of Tokyo and a Master in Public Affairs from Princeton University.

From <https://www.adb.org/> 08/31/2021

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East Asia

CHINA: To Establish Multi-tiered Medical Insurance System

China will establish a sustainable multi-tiered medical insurance system, according to a recent circular on developing lists for medical benefits. The system will clearly define rights and responsibilities, and provide moderate support, says the circular released by the National Healthcare Security Administration and the Ministry of Finance. The lists consist of the basic system and policy, as well as items covered by medical insurance fund and its criteria on payment. No local policies will be made unless authorized in the lists, and existing ones that are not consistent will be removed or adjusted in three years, the circular reads.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 08/11/2021

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JAPAN: Digital Agency to Be Launched; Info Leak Concerns Linger

The Japanese government will launch on Sept. 1 an agency that will lead the digitalization of administrative services, but there are lingering concerns about possible information leaks by private-sector staff. Digital reforms are a key policy of the government of Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga. With the novel coronavirus crisis shedding light on the government's lagging digitalization efforts, the Suga administration hopes to make up for the delay by promoting reform measures under the new agency, aiming to enhance the convenience of administrative services. The government will have the agency serve as a "control tower" in promoting digitalization efforts in the public and private sectors. The agency will aim to create a system that will allow people to complete all types of administrative procedures via smartphones in 60 seconds each. The new body will have the authority to issue recommendations to government ministries and agencies and book information systems-related costs on behalf of them in the government's budget in a lump sum.

From <https://www.nippon.com> 08/16/2021

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South-East Asia

MALAYSIA: PM Resigns After Losing Majority Support in Parliament

Malaysian Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin announced his resignation on Monday after losing majority support in the lower house of parliament. In a televised speech, Muhyiddin said he and his cabinet had resigned as demanded by the federal constitution as he no longer enjoyed the support of the majority of members of parliament (MPs). He explained that although he had initially sought to test his support in the parliament, the withdrawal of support by a dozen of MPs from his own coalition and the rejection of cross-party cooperation by the opposition had left him with no alternative. "With that, I have lost the support of the majority. So, there is no need for my legitimacy as prime minister to be determined in the parliament," he said following a meeting with Malaysia's King Sultan Abdullah Sultan Ahmad Shah. In a separate announcement, the National Palace confirmed that Sultan Abdullah has accepted Muhyiddin's resignation.

"His majesty accepted the letter of resignation from the most honorable Muhyiddin Yassin as prime minister and the posts of the entire cabinet with immediate effect today (Monday)," it said the statement, adding that Muhyiddin would continue as a caretaker prime minister until a suitable replacement is determined. Muhyiddin became the prime minister in March last year following the abrupt resignation of former Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad, but he has been holding on to power with a slim majority in the parliament. Muhyiddin's resignation came after Ahmad Zahid Hamidi, president of the United Malays National Organization (UMNO), a component of the ruling Muhyiddin coalition, withdrew UMNO's support for the prime minister together with a number of UMNO MPs.

NO IMMEDIATE SUCCESSOR

According to Malaysia's constitution, the king, as the country's supreme head of state, appoints a parliament member as the prime minister, whom in his view commands the majority of the MPs. With a split political landscape, leaders of political parties are now huddling together to get enough MPs for the parliamentary majority. The opposition is pushing for former deputy prime minister Anwar Ibrahim to become prime minister. Some analysts also predicted that UMNO could still work out a solution with Muhyiddin's party and his allies under the current coalition but with UMNO holding the premiership. Former Prime Minister Mahathir has proposed a national recovery council consisted of technocrats and experts to overcome the political impasse.

SIMILAR CHALLENGES AHEAD

No matter who will succeed Muhyiddin, analysts said that any incoming government will have to deal with the triple threat of political instability, a raging COVID-19

pandemic, and the resulting economic difficulties. Political observer Azmi Hassan said the immediate problem that any incoming government and PM would need to resolve is the political instability facing the country which will allow it to effectively respond to the pandemic and shore up the economy. "The first thing that the new PM will have to do is to secure this broad support to form a government that is stable enough to appoint ministers that will be there for their competency, not for their political loyalty. "We need a government that will formulate policies not out of political considerations but really to solve the problems caused by the pandemic. This is critical," he said. Failing to contain the pandemic has cost Muhyiddin's government much of its public support despite its national vaccination program. Malaysia reported another 19,740 new COVID-19 infections, the Health Ministry said on Monday, bringing the national total to 1,424,639. Oh Ei Sun, principal advisor for Malaysia's Pacific Research Center, said any incoming PM and government will face the same challenges as the outgoing one to get a grip on the pandemic and then to revive the economy. "Expectations are very high due to the desperation of the situation. The new government will be expected to deliver, if not in six months, then by the end of the year. Otherwise they will start to see the same demands to step aside," said Oh.

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Malaysian King to Appoint New PM, Asks Political Leaders to Work Together

Malaysia's King Sultan Abdullah Sultan Ahmad Shah has urged political parties to work together against a dire situation the country is facing as he weighed on the candidates of the new prime minister. The National Palace said in a statement on Wednesday that Sultan Abdullah met with the heads of major political parties on Tuesday after the resignation of former Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin on Monday after losing majority support in the lower house of the parliament. The King has also asked each member of parliament (MP) to submit one candidate as prime minister by Wednesday afternoon, according to the statement. During the meeting with political party leaders, Sultan Abdullah has asked any new prime minister being appointed shall seek a confidence vote in the lower house of parliament as soon as possible to prove the support of the majority. The new prime minister shall also seek cross-party cooperation to ensure a stable government, the statement said. "Before concluding the audience, His Majesty reminded the heads and representatives of major parties that to ensure harmony, the MPs who win must reach out to those who did not."

"Everyone should be working as a team. In other words, the winner does not win everything while the loser does not lose everything," it said. According to Malaysia's constitution, the king, as the country's supreme head of state, appoints a parliament member as the prime minister, whom in his view commands the majority of the MPs. Among the potential replacement candidates for Muhyiddin is his former deputy,

Ismail Sabri Yaakob. Ismail Sabri is a vice president of the United Malays National Organization (UMNO), which is part of Muhyiddin's previous ruling coalition. But UMNO President Ahmad Zahid Hamidi has been at odds with Muhyiddin, being responsible for the withdrawal of support together with a number of UMNO parliamentarians that saw Muhyiddin lose his slim majority. Local media reported that Ismail Sabri had secured unanimous support from MPs of UMNO as well as from other component parties in Muhyiddin's previous coalition, which might give him the simple majority to be the new prime minister. Another prominent candidate is former deputy prime minister Anwar Ibrahim, who heads the country's opposition bloc.

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Malaysian PM Ismail Sabri Unveils Cabinet

Malaysian Prime Minister Ismail Sabri Yaakob unveiled his cabinet on Friday, forming a lineup similar to his predecessor with no deputy prime minister being named. In a televised speech, Ismail Sabri said the ministers will have to prove themselves in a short space of time as the country is still grappling with the COVID-19 situation and its economic fallout. "I will ensure this cabinet focuses on having a high-performance work culture. Therefore, each ministry must draft its short-term and long-term plans and achieve set goals." "Therefore, each ministry must prove their initial performance within the first 100 days," he said. Many of those named had previously served under former Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin, who resigned on Aug. 16 following the withdrawal of support by several of his political allies. Four senior ministers including International Trade and Industry Mohamed Azmin Ali, Defense Minister Hishammuddin Hussein, Works Minister Fadlillah Yusof and Education Minister Mohd Radzi Md Jidin, all of whom served in Muhyiddin's cabinet, are mostly in the same capacity.

Former Science, Technology and Innovation Minister Khairy Jamaluddin has taken over the health portfolio while former Communications and Multimedia Minister Saifuddin Abdullah has taken the Foreign Ministry, a position he held under the government of Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad from 2018 to 2020. Among the portfolios that remain unchanged include the Finance Minister, Transport Minister and Home Minister. Before Ismail Sabri's appointment, Malaysian King Sultan Abdullah Sultan Ahmad Shah instructed any new prime minister being appointed shall seek a confidence vote in the lower house of the parliament as soon as possible to prove the support of the majority. The next parliamentary session is scheduled for Sept. 6-30. Prior to announcing the cabinet lineup, Ismail Sabri met with opposition leaders to secure cross-party cooperation. A joint statement was issued proclaiming to cooperate in the fight against COVID-19.

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PHILIPPINES: Duterte Accepts Endorsement as Vice Presidential Candidate in 2022

Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte, whose single six-year term ends next year, has accepted the ruling political party's endorsement to run for vice president in the 2022 elections, Cabinet Secretary Karlo Nograles said on Tuesday. Duterte "agreed to make the sacrifice and heed to the clamor of the PDP-Laban party for him to run as vice president in the 2022 national elections," Nograles, the executive vice president of the governing PDP-Laban party, said in a statement. Nograles said Duterte accepted the endorsement "after (being) presented with popular calls" from PDP-Laban's members "aspiring for a transition of leadership that will guarantee continuity of the administration's program during the past five years" of Duterte's administration. Nograles said the party will discuss Duterte's nomination during their national convention next month. Duterte, 76, was elected president in the May 2016 elections. The constitution limits Philippine presidents to a single six-year term. The vice president is elected separately from the president under the Philippine law. The vice president can be propelled to the presidency if the president dies or is incapacitated. Neither Duterte nor his spokesperson has yet to issue an official statement on the endorsement.

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THAILAND: Cabinet Keeps VAT Rate at 7 Pct for Another Two Years

The Thai Cabinet on Tuesday decided to keep the current 7 percent rate of Value Added Tax (VAT) for at least another two years, hoping to reduce the financial burden of consumers and businesses wrought by COVID-19 pandemic. According to Rachada Dhanadirek, a deputy government spokeswoman, this extension will not impact the state revenue collection during fiscal year of 2022 and 2023, as it has already been incorporated in the revenue projection. The VAT has been at 7 percent since the Asian financial crisis in 1997. The Ministry of Finance revealed that the Revenue Department has also extended the deadline for online tax filing and payments, in order to give the general public and business operators more financial liquidity. Moreover, penalties for late filing or failure to file taxes by both general public and businesses will also be waived or charged at a reduced rate. Finance Minister Arkhom Termpittayapaisith noted that this move is part of several measures that the government has been taking to enhance business confidence and boost economic recovery. The University of the Thai Chamber of Commerce's consumer index fell to a record low in July amid concerns over the COVID-19 outbreak and the ongoing political uncertainty.

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VIETNAM: HCM City Appoints New People's Committee Chairman

Deputy Secretary of HCM City Party Committee Phan Văn Mãi on Tuesday was named the new chairman of the municipal People's Committee, replacing Nguyễn Thành Phong, who has been assigned to be the deputy head of the Party Central Committee's Economic Commission in Hà Nội. At the second meeting of the city People's Council (2021-2026 tenure), Phan Văn Mãi, 48, was elected with the agreement of 87 out of 89 delegates, Nguyễn Thị Lệ, chairwoman of the People's Council, said. The meeting discussed policies related to pandemic prevention, support for frontline forces, and other issues, according to Lệ. Mãi said the city would continue to focus on treatment for critically ill COVID patients to reduce the mortality rate and control the outbreak by September 15 under the Government's Resolution 86. He pledged to take care of people affected by the pandemic, especially the poor and disadvantaged, and to formulate socio-economic plans that adapt to pandemic conditions. He said the city would implement the Resolution of the 11th Congress of the Party Committee (2020-2025) and the Resolution of the People's Council (2021-2026 term). "I promise to do my best to fulfil the assigned tasks," he said.

Mãi is from Bến Tre Province's Giồng Trôm District. He holds a bachelor's degree in English, a bachelor's degree in economics, and a master's degree in economic management. He previously held the positions of secretary of Bến Tre Provincial Youth Union, secretary of the Central Committee of the Youth Union, secretary of the Central Committee of the Youth Union, chairman of the Việt Nam Youth Union, and deputy secretary of the Bến Tre Provincial Party Committee. He is also a former secretary of Bến Tre Province's Party Committee and former chairman of Bến Tre Provincial People's Council. In June, Mãi was assigned by the Politburo to be the Permanent Deputy Secretary of the HCM City Party Committee for the 2020-2025 term, replacing Trần Lưu Quang, who was named secretary of the Hải Phòng City Party Committee. Since the end of June, Mãi has been involved in pandemic prevention as the deputy head of the city's COVID-19 Prevention and Control Committee. The city has appointed Phạm Đức Hải, former vice chairman of the HCM City People's Council, as deputy of the city's COVID-19 Prevention and Control Committee, who is also the spokesperson for pandemic prevention issues.

Nguyễn Thành Phong, a member of the Party Central Committee, no longer belongs to the executive board and standing board of the HCM City Party Committee. He also no longer holds the posts of deputy secretary of the committee for the 2020-2025 tenure or chairman of the city government for the 2021-2026 term. A native of Bến Tre Province in the Mekong Delta, Phong served as deputy secretary of the city Party Committee in 2015. He was voted People's Committee chairman for the 2016-21 term in October 2015, while holding the Party position. Phong was head of the Steering Committee for COVID-19 Prevention and Control in HCM City but it is not clear who will replace him. The city, the country's COVID epicentre, has applied the highest-level pandemic prevention measures ever as it has recorded more than

180,000 cases since late April. On Monday, the city began a strict policy that requires “everyone to stay at home” and not go out to buy food, except for some groups of people who must have permits and documentation to travel on city streets.

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Việt Nam Elected to UPU Postal Operations Council

Việt Nam was elected member of the Postal Operations Council (POC) of the Universal Postal Union (UPU) for the 2022-2025 term at the 27th UPU Congress which was held in both in-person and online formats in Abidjan, the Ivory Coast, from August 9-27. This is the first time Việt Nam has run for the position. At the Congress, countries elected a total of 40 members of the POC. Việt Nam's candidacy for the POC affirmed its willingness to participate and contribute to promoting multilateral cooperation in issues of common concern of the international community. The country's election to the POC demonstrated its increasing role and position in the international arena. It also reflected the great efforts of the Vietnamese postal sector which has actively contributed to the UPU's activities for many years, creating high prestige and trust in member countries. This will also create a chance for Việt Nam to expand bilateral cooperation with UPU member countries, as well as cooperation activities to improve the quality of infrastructure, services, and postal network in the future. The UPU was founded in 1874 and is headquartered in Bern, the capital of Switzerland. It currently has 192 member countries. Its goal is to help secure a global network of state-of-the-art postal products and services. The UPU Congress is the highest body of the union, convened every four years with the main content being to shape the future of the postal sector, review and approve the world postal strategy and plan for next years. The POC is one of the four organs of the UPU, along with the Congress, the Council of Administration, and the International Bureau. The POC's task is considering commercial, economic and operational aspects of the world postal service and making recommendations on the standard of technological and operational processes.

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South Asia

INDIA: Gujarat Govt Aims to Maximise Faceless Tech to Remove Corruption

Chief Minister of Gujarat Vijay Rupani, on Aug 2, said the Government of Gujarat is working towards maximising the use of technology and create a faceless system to enhance transparency and do away with corrupt practices. He was addressing a gathering on the second of the nine-day celebrations to mark the completion of his five years as the CM. During his address, the CM said, Gujarat is leading in terms of

extending benefits of internet services to villages in the state under the BharatNet project. Adding to the government's approach of the adoption of technology, he said, from the 'Seva Setu' programme, the government is now heading towards 'e-Seva Setu' to use technology to extend services to people on a daily basis. Under the Seva Setu programme, camps were held four to five times a year at taluka and municipality levels to aid citizens in availing the various government schemes' benefits. He mentioned that the Gujarat government had recently made non-agriculture land approval and related services online. This has helped in enhancing transparency in the system and cut down on corruption. Also, services like e-tendering for mines and minerals have also reduced corruption, the CM claimed.

On August 7, 2016, Rupani became the CM of Gujarat following the resignation of the then CM Anandiben Patel and continued in the office after the BJP's victory in the 2017 Assembly elections. Amid the celebrations, CM Rupani also launched the government's scheme for providing Rs 2,000 monthly to each of the 3,963 children who lost one of their parents due to the COVID-19 pandemic. While addressing the gathering on digital or technology-based initiatives in Gujarat, the CM said, "Gujarat has become the first state to connect villages directly through the internet. The BharatNet's e-connectivity with high frequency has helped people in villages and gram panchayats to avail 55 services through a computer without them requiring to visit taluka or collector office." The state government will soon come up with a facility where people can submit an e-application and immediately receive the required certificates, added the CM. On the occasion, he launched the government's 433 Seva Setu camps across the state, a new scheme encouraging remarriage of widows through financial support from the government and he re-launched several projects for citizens of Rajkot including the online booking of city bus services and a GIS-enabled portal for various services.

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SDG 11.3: Significance of Participatory Governance in India

India, home to the world's second-largest population, is observing a noticeable rise in people's migration to cities. This results in increasing the pressure on urban resources, civic services, and facilities. The city governments are taking steps to build capacity to cater to the rising demands and develop sustainable, liveable, safe, and resilient cities. However, to devise out apt solutions for a city, citizen's engagement plays a crucial role. Through the 74th Amendment Act and programmes like JNNURM, Smart Cities Mission, Jal Jeevan Mission, etc. the Government of India is taking measures to boost citizen participation in urban governance and planning. In September 2015, the United Nations General Assembly gave out a set of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to be fulfilled by 2030. These goals aim to enhance sustainability in urban development, livability in cities, the safety of citizens and data, and resilience for cities to stay afloat in times of pandemics like

COVID or natural calamities, or other crises. The target 11.3 of the SDG 11 is to enhance inclusive and sustainable urbanisation and capacity for participatory, integrated, and sustainable human settlement planning and management in all countries, by 2030. This forms the core of the egov Magazine's Special July Issue. The magazine features viewpoints and enriching insights from urban experts and intelligentsia on SDG 11.3 and India's efforts towards achieving the target. It brings to light the implementation of the 74th Amendment Act, participatory governance in India, and programmes like JNNURM and Smart Cities Mission that promote citizen engagement in urban planning. The Magazine also holds a special interview with Durga Shankar Mishra, Secretary, Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, This is the third edition in a special series of egov Magazine on SDGs, a collaborative effort of the Elets Technomedia Pvt Ltd and the National Institute of Urban Affairs(NIUA).

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Digital Transformation of Governance in India

The Government of India has been proactive in exercising the digital transformation of governance in the country. And, major initiatives have been taken under an umbrella programme 'Digital India' launched by the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY). Shedding light on this Dr Rajendra Kumar, Additional Secretary, MeitY, Government of India, addressed the Governance Leadership Summit 2021. Dr Kumar delivered his special address emphasising the importance of technology and how digitalisation has transformed the governance in India. Addressing the existing technology framework of the government, he said, "As we all are aware that the current digital framework of the government in India is under the umbrella programme 'Digital India'. It was launched in 2015 and it has been by far the most important programme for ensuring that technology can be deployed effectively by all stakeholders including the private sector to transform their overall interface for citizens and businesses." Digital India broadly talks about leveraging technology for transforming governance but it is also a vision to ensure India can leapfrog its development initiatives using technology, he added. Speaking on the Ministry of Electronics and IT (MeitY) initiatives to transform governance, Dr Kumar said, "Before Digital India, there was a bouquet of e-governance projects in various domains of governance for transforming their service delivery paradigm. The Digital India programme brought all these different e-governance projects together. Under Digital India, we have worked on the JAM trinity – Jan Dhan Yojana (an initiative to ensure bank accounts for all), Aadhar (biometric-based identification system) and Mobile (using mobile as a platform to extend citizen services)." MeitY had also taken up large initiatives in the past five to six years to help transform the paradigm of governance to benefit citizens. An example could be Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) which utilised the government's e-governance framework based on Jan Dhan, Aadhaar and Mobile to directly transfer the government benefits and subsidies to the concerned beneficiaries, he added. Dr Kumar named a few more

such initiatives by MeitY like Government e-Marketplace (GeM), MyGov, e-Hospital, Open Government Data Platform, GIS-based initiatives, DigiLocker and more.

Elaborating on DigiLocker, he said, “This is a secure digital platform where citizens can store all their documents and ID cards. Also, respective government departments are using this to add documents in the digital locker of the citizens rather than delivering a hard copy of the same. This has helped in transforming the governance into a completely paperless, faceless and presenceless form.” This has been one of the core ideas that the Ministry has been propagating to all the government departments to ensure that citizens need not have to visit offices to avail any services, said Dr Kumar. “In 2019, MeitY has unveiled its vision to achieve a \$1 trillion digital economy by 2025. Under this vision, all the departments have been brought on board, have been encouraged and being extended complete support from the Ministry to introduce digital interventions and transform their own domains of governance, their interphases with businesses and citizens, so that we can leverage technology to achieve our goal,” told Dr Kumar. Addressing emerging technologies, he mentioned that “we have a large initiative on emerging technologies. This is a major area where we’re promoting all the government departments and other stakeholders to use emerging technologies like Artificial Intelligence, Blockchain, Internet of Things (IoT), etc. to ensure that not only citizens but also the private sector can benefit from the emerging opportunities.” He added, “I called this opportunity because the Indian IT sector which is already known for its competitiveness can work in this domain and be a world leader.”

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Pankaj Kumar Assumes the Post of Chief Secretary, Gujarat

Senior IAS officer of 1986-Batch Pankaj Kumar took over the charge of Chief Secretary (CS) of Gujarat on August 31. He replaced the outgoing CS Anil Mukim who retired from the post on the day. Prior to the posting, Kumar was holding the charge of Additional Chief Secretary (ACS), Home Department, Gujarat. Shortly after taking over the post of CS, Kumar said, “Gujarat is an extremely progressive state and my role as the new chief secretary will be to further boost the development led by good governance, and ensure holistic development of the state.” Kumar, while serving as ACS Revenue, brought in a series of reforms and since then has been known for his proactive approach towards governance. He has also served as the Secretary to Prime Minister Narendra Modi when he was the Chief Minister of Gujarat. Throughout his career in Indian Administrative Service (IAS), Kumar has served in various capacities in the departments including revenue, home, health and family welfare. Also, he played a key role in the adoption of technology to digitise the state’s administration post the launch of the Digital India Mission. Also, he played a major role in upgrading the healthcare infrastructure in the state after the COVID-19 pandemic occurred. Back then, Kumar was heading the Health and Family Welfare

Department.

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Digital India – Towards Transformation & Empowerment

Digital Technologies is helping the governments world over serve astonishingly diverse sets of citizens. The 'Digital India' programme was envisioned and promised by the Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi in 2015 as a mission to deliver a transparent, participative and responsive government to the Indian people. Under this programme several initiatives and platforms such as GeM, GSTN, UMANG, DigiLocker were launched to digitally empower citizens and bring last mile delivery of government services. 99% Indians have Aadhar identity which is being used for authentication to avail of several services. During Covid-19, various initiatives of Digital India that were built over for last 6-7 years gained massive popularity. They enabled contactless payment, work from home, seamless execution of businesses and assisted people in a myriad way. Digital India ecosystem which is built on 3 vision areas and 9 pillars expanded digital infrastructure in term of connectivity up to rural areas of country, cloud infrastructure, expended the horizon of digital services, and took a big step forward to empower citizens of India.

1.0 Introduction –

One of the main objectives of Digital India was to connect rural areas by improving digital infrastructure. Present government undertook the giant BharatNet programme to provide highspeed broadband connections to all 2.5 lakh gram panchayats across India and to connect all households and individuals. It is the world's largest rural connectivity programme, having connected over 1,60,000-gram panchayats so far. To harness the benefits of Cloud Computing & to provide a nationwide secure cyber space, Digital India has adopted a 'Cloud first policy' and has embarked upon an ambitious initiative- MeghRaj. Since its inception it has accelerated delivery of e-services, seeing 10x growth in terms of applications hosted. It has transformed the way in which government manages its ICT services. Digital India has also helped develop a socially, digitally, and financially inclusive society with its programs like setting up of more than 3.88 lakh functional Common Service Centres (CSCs) run by Village Level Entrepreneurs (VLEs). Self-sustaining network of CSCs has enabled the delivery of digital services through the internet and created 12 Lakh direct and indirect jobs, out of that around 1 lakh are women entrepreneurs. The program has successfully bridged villages and technology, empowering all stakeholders in variable degrees. Digital India has helped set up an online GeM platform currently having 18.51 Lakh sellers and service providers, offering 34.38 lakh registered products. It helps remotely located entrepreneurs of the country in selling their commodities to the Government. Another service called DigiLocker is a robust digital platform gateway towards paperless governance issuing digital documents from 1200+ source/issuers databases helping citizens across spectrums.

2.0 Digital Services–

The major catalyst in India's growth towards digitization has been the increased access to and affordability of internet services. This has resulted in a galloping growth of internet user base. The government's Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) Scheme has disbursed more than 13.4 Lakh crores, catering to around 35 crores Indians, liberating hapless citizens from officers and leakages. DBT has brought efficiency, transparency and accountability in the government systems. It has made massive contribution to PM Modi's motto of Minimum Government, Maximum Governance. BHIM app is a simple, secure and seamless digital payment instrument, built on the Unified Payments Interface (UPI) 2.0 platform. Equipped with features such as donations, IPO investments, linking overdraft facility, etc. along with existing features, BHIM has seen total transaction volume increase from Rs 2,000+ crore in FY 2017-18 to Rs 5,554 crore in FY 2020- 21. It ensures convenience and ease of transactions and facilitates businesses to grow customer base beyond geographical limitations. e-NAM provides a pan-India electronic trading portal which connects all existing APMC Mandis to create a unified national market for agricultural commodities. One thousand mandis across 18 States and 3 UTs are integrated wherein 175 types of agriculture commodities are traded. The platform has onboarded 1.69 crore farmers, 1.5 lakh traders and 87,000 commission agents. E-NAM is available in 585 locations in 16 states and can increase prices realised by farmers up to 15%. On one hand is the Goods and Services Tax Network (GSTN) which brings transactions involving about 10.3 million indirect taxpaying businesses onto one digital platform, creating a powerful incentive for businesses to digitise their operations, bringing people closer to the government. On the other hand, is the Unified Mobile Application for New-age Governance (UMANG) app which offers a galaxy of government services. It has reached to a level of more than 1150 government services and more than 19,500 bill payment services. It has around 3.83 crore downloads (Android and iOS) in about 3 years and it is facilitating around 20-30 Lakh transactions on a daily basis. During COVID-19 pandemic period, more than 10.50 lakh Advance Claims for COVID -19 (~60% of overall) in EPFO were raised via UMANG Platform and also more than 3 Lakh Jeevan Pramaan pensioner certificates generated successfully through UMANG in the month of Nov, 2020 and Dec, 2020.

3.0 Digital Empowerment–

The Digital India initiative carries potential to become a great leveller. The process of digitalisation it has kicked off in the Indian society has single-handedly assured greater participation of the people in a greater democracy, resulting in an empowered society which focuses on digital resources, collaborative digital platforms and digital literacy. The services offered by MyGov are premised in Modi government's promise of ensuring good governance. It has proved its mettle in India's fight against Coronavirus in the role of a major disseminator of genuine information and engagement with citizens of the country. It has around 94.3 lakhs registered Users, offering 39.8 lakh comments. MyGov has hosted multiple innovative challenges on

its innovate platform, namely COVID Innovation challenge, Shri Shakti Challenge, Drug Discovery Challenge, AI challenge and Aatma Nirbhar app challenge etc. The e-Courts Integrated Mission Mode Project is one of the national e-Governance projects being implemented in High Courts and district/subordinate Courts of the Country. The objective of the e-Courts project is to provide designated services to litigants, lawyers and the judiciary through ICT enablement of district and subordinate courts in the country. It has created awareness about computerisation among courts and about the application software, namely, Case Information System, among the important stakeholders including judicial officers and court officials. The project has achieved more than 90% in ICT deployment in terms of asset creation. Aadhaar authentication at PoS is input required for a customer to do an AePS based transaction. Banking services offered by AePS include cash deposit, cash withdrawal, balance enquiry, mini statement, Aadhaar to Aadhaar fund transfer, authentication, BHIM Aadhaar Pay etc. Millions of unbanked citizens use AePS to facilitate disbursement of Government entitlements like NREGA, Social Security pension, Handicapped Old Age Pension etc. of any Central or State Government bodies to their beneficiaries. Digital India aims at increasing digital inclusivity by bridging the digital divide between rural and urban India. This is done through increasing digital knowledge, access and affordability by bringing high speed internet across India and improving digital literacy. India is currently working on the world's largest digital literacy programme, Pradhan Mantri Grameen Digital Saksharta Abhiyan (PGMDISHA), with objective to train 6 crore rural adults digitally. The Digital India Mission is being given strong policy push through Open API policy, Open Source, IndiaEA Ecosystem, Policy on Collaborative Application Development, technical and domain standards, Security. India is also getting ready for using emerging technologies such as 5G, artificial intelligence, blockchain, augmented reality, virtual reality, machine learning & deep learning, natural language processing and robotics. These are going to play a crucial role in the government and industry alike, whether it is planning or decision-making; accelerating development or analyzing deployment, problem solving or product development; discovering new trends or drawing out correlations.

4.0 Conclusion

Digital India with its multiple impactful programs has significantly increased India's efficiency, connected every nook and corner of the country with digital wires of trust, brought transparency in the system and has amplified voice of every Indian and as Hon'ble Prime Minister says- "Digital India has connected the ordinary citizen to the government," he said. "We have also democratised data. Online delivery of services has helped the lower and middle classes find relief from corruption." Digital India is leveraging technology and driving systemic social changes with its visionary policies & impactful initiatives and helping realize the prosperous India we have envisioned for long – a mighty country leading from the front in

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Transforming Governance Through Technology

In an effort to emphasising the need for rapid adoption of technology in government operations and shifting to digital platforms, Elets Technomedia Pvt Ltd organised a two-day virtual Governance Leadership Summit 2021. The first panel discussion of the Summit was themed – Empowering Citizens through Transformational Governance: The Way forward. Manu Shukla, Head Strategy, Amazon Web Services (AWS) moderated the panel discussion. He welcomed the panellists Rohit Kumar Singh, Additional Secretary, Ministry of Culture, Government of India, and Ashish Upadhyay, Additional Secretary and Financial Adviser, Ministry of Power, Government of India. Shukla opened the discussions by calling Rohit Kumar Singh to present his vantage point on the significance of technology transformation for the country and the government. Singh began by saying, “It is not the technology transformation, we need to transform the governance.” Citing his experience in working with the government, he said, “Almost 32 years back, when we started our careers, the government was a very formidable entity. It was a closed thing. There was hardly any focus on engaging with the citizens. As technology played the role of an enabler, it became easier for the people to come forward to engage with the government.” Elaborating on ‘transformation’, Singh pointed out that “Transformation cannot be achieved in one go. It follows a three-step path... First is Information. The government needs to put out information (relevant to people) on public platforms so that people are aware. The second is Interaction. The government should let the people interact with it by taking people’s feedback, suggestions, etc. through online platforms or public meetings. The third is Transaction. Then the government should have a path for citizens to transact like filling up forms and applying for schemes, paying bills online, etc. These three steps if implemented in a successful manner will lead to transformation.” As an example of transformation, Singh cited the example of CoWIN portal and said that this is a good example where citizens get the needed service at a click of a button and can engage with the government on the same.

When asked to share examples of technology implementation, Singh said, “During the first wave of the COVID-19, I was the Additional Chief Secretary, Health, Government of Rajasthan. This was a novel virus and nothing much was known about it, back then. A sudden widespread was seen in the walled city of Jaipur and we made decided to prioritise the saving of lives. Also, back then, only the National Institute of Virology in Pune had the facility to test. So, we had to figure out a way to identify people who are vulnerable to this infection. We found that Rajasthan has a really good database of health insurance so we quickly zeroed down to the database of that area. S on the basis of that we identified a list of people who have comorbidities and can be potential victims of the infection. Then we sent our healthcare staff to test those and isolated many as per the requirement.” Technology is not used in isolation but also the existing databases or methods are to be considered for improved functioning. Governance Leadership Summit

2021Addressing how the technology-led transformation of governance is the way forward for India, Ashish Upadhyay said, “The theme of the panel discussion itself clearly states that ‘empowering citizens through transformational governance’ and technology is only the enabler.” Governance is doing good for the people as is decided by them through their elected representative, he added. Adding on Upadhyay said, “Technology does disruption and also provides solutions. While governance is how to handle those disruptions and use them to provide a solution to the problems of the people. This is the correlation between the two. An example of where there is governance but no technology could be Tukaram Omble controlling Kasab with just a “danda”, tremendous courage but no technology. Whereas an example of technology without governance or active governance could be Jamtara. It could be highly dangerous.” Therefore that challenge lies with us to judiciously use technology to do good and some examples highlighting that could be Aarogya Setu, CoWIN portal and more, he added. On the adoption of cloud technology to improve operational efficiency, Upadhyay said, “If we talk about power sector as such. It has three parts – generation, transmission and distribution. As far as generation is concerned, we’re in a comfortable position today. So even if the economy grows at 10 per cent per annum then also we will be in a position to supply power. Initially, we had issues in transmission, especially while supplying power to the Eastern and Southern parts of India. Later with high-tension transmission lines and then the One Nation One Grid projects, almost all the transmission issues have been done away with. However, the distribution sect is still not reformed the way we wanted it to be and has a lot of issues.” Hence, to deal with this, an amalgamation of governance and technology, he added.

“We’re planning to introduce pre-paid meters on large scale. Ultimately, the power sector after the introduction of newer technologies should become like telecom. For this, we need a lot of data to back up and we will require cloud computing there. Maybe in the next three to four years, we will be having these emerging technologies in the power sector. In this year’s budget, the Union Finance Minister has announced the scheme for the power sector and have allocated a budget accordingly. In the scheme there are many technology interventions that have been mentioned,” said Updhyay. Briefing about his organisation AWS, Manu Shukla said, “We at AWS are highly supportive of innovation, disruption and supporting India in moving to the way forward. We look forward t collaborate with the government and help you in taking the vision of technology-powered governance forward.” Shukla delivered a short vote of thanks to the panellists and ended the session.

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Central-West Asia

AZERBAIJAN: Developing Infosystems Based Int'l Standards – Ministry

Information systems are being developed in Azerbaijan through the principle of security by design and given the best practices to minimize risks, the country's Ministry of Transport, Communications and High Technologies told Trend. According to the ministry, such concepts as 'good' or 'bad' are absent in the field of information security. "Information security works like this - potential threats, risks and impacts on the workflow are assessed, and measures are proposed to reduce risks to the appropriate level. At the same time, efforts are made to ensure that security measures do not interfere with business processes and don't cause great potential damage," the ministry said. "Taking into account all the above, we apply the best risk mitigation practices, develop information systems in accordance with the security by design principle (envisioning provision of security at all stages of the production process) and use the products of world leaders in the field of information security, as well as to conduct annual ISO 27001 certification," added the ministry.

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Azerbaijan Appoints Military Prosecutors for Kalbajar, Gubadly Districts

Mahir Bayramov was appointed military prosecutor of Kalbajar district, and Elshan Mursalov - military prosecutor of Gubadly district in Azerbaijan, the press service of the General Prosecutor's Office told Trend. According to the press service, after the creation of the military prosecutor's offices of the Gubadly and Kalbajar districts [liberated from Armenian occupation in the 2020 Karabakh war] in compliance with the decree of Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev 'On creation of new military prosecutor's offices in liberated territories of Azerbaijan' dated April 1, 2021, the structure and staffing of the offices were determined by the corresponding orders of the Prosecutor General Kamran Aliyev.

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Simplification of Declaration Forms for Taxpayers Continues in Azerbaijan

The State Tax Service under the Ministry of Economy of Azerbaijan continues the process of improving and simplifying declaration (reporting) forms to ensure the satisfaction of taxpayers, Trend reports with reference to the service. Following the analysis carried out by the relevant working group, it was found that due to the expansion of the database, adjustment of the forms of declarations and their applications became necessary, said the service. As reported, in this regard, changes have been made to the forms, including the rules for drawing up the 'Declaration on the tax withheld at the source of payment from persons providing real estate', 'Declaration on the tax on the extraction of mineral resources' and their

appendices. The new forms of declarations and the rules for their preparation can be found on the website of the State Tax Service, the message says. To study the opinions and proposals of taxpayers who work with declaration (reporting) forms, the site has a section 'Proposals for declaration forms', the message said. "Taxpayers can send their proposals on the forms and content of all types of tax returns to the State Tax Service through this section. All proposals are carefully studied and analyzed by the relevant working group," the message says.

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Oceania

AUSTRALIA: Government Defends Parliament Virus Safety

Government senate leader Simon Birmingham has defended parliament's health safeguards as politicians converge in Canberra during coronavirus outbreaks. There are fears a parliamentary session which starts on Tuesday could bring the disease to the virus-free ACT. Parliament is sitting under tight health restrictions, with the public banned from Parliament House and some MPs and senators video-linking to debates from their home states. It is expected around 85 MPs will be present in the House of Representatives and 45 to 50 senators in the upper house. Senator Birmingham said there were extensive precautions and safeguards in place for the sitting fortnight. "It will be a slimmed down parliament in terms of the number of parliamentarians attending, dramatically slimmed down in terms of the number of staff working in parliament house," he told ABC radio.

Senator Birmingham said extensive social distancing practices mirrored successful parliamentary sittings last year. Manager of Opposition Business Tony Burke said restrictions at parliament were tougher than anywhere in the ACT. He said it was essential for parliament to sit to pass legislation and apply scrutiny to Prime Minister Scott Morrison. "When parliament's on, he has to front up every single day at question time. And question time, for all its imperfections, he has to be there, he has to front up," Mr Burke told the ABC. "There's plenty to be asking about." Defence Minister and Leader of the House Peter Dutton will not attend the sitting fortnight after being forced into home isolation with his family. His sons attend a school linked to southeast Queensland's growing coronavirus outbreak, which has sent millions of people into lockdown. While Nationals frontbencher David Gillespie is the deputy house leader, former attorney-general Christian Porter will manage government business. Senator Birmingham said it was customary for the Liberals to fill the job when the leader of the house is absent. Mr Dutton took over from Mr Porter after he changed jobs following decades-old rape allegations he strenuously denies.

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Labor to Challenge Green Bank Regulations

Labor will again seek to remove the ability of Australia's green bank to invest in fossil fuel technology. The federal government has redrafted rules to expand the remit of the Australian Renewable Energy Agency after its first attempt was quashed by Labor and the Greens. The regulations allow ARENA to invest in low emissions technologies including carbon capture and storage and hydrogen made with the use of fossil-fuel generated energy. ARENA can still make its own investment decision based on merit. Ahead of parliament sitting on Tuesday, the Labor caucus on Monday decided it would move another disallowance motion. However, the motion would be more tightly worded than the previous one, only dealing with a section on carbon capture and storage and hydrogen made using fossil fuels. Pro-coal Labor MP Joel Fitzgibbon argues his colleagues should support the government's position.

Labor will need cross bench support to be successful in the Senate. Opposition climate spokesman Chris Bowen said the government's regulations ran contrary to the object of ARENA which was to "improve the competitiveness of renewable energy technologies and increase the supply of renewable energy in Australia". "Experts say that funding other technologies would be inconsistent with the object of the Act, and would likely be subject to legal challenge," Mr Bowen said. The Greens also plan their own version of the disallowance motion, which goes further than Labor's. "Angus Taylor's crusade to spend more public dollars on coal and gas is as shambolic as it is reckless," Greens leader Adam Bandt said. Mr Taylor told AAP the change would allow ARENA to support technologies that can reduce emissions across all sectors of the economy. "Getting new, low emissions technologies to economic parity as soon as possible is the only way to reduce emissions without imposing new costs on households, businesses or the economy," he said. The minister said the changes had the support of the agency itself, as well as groups such as the Business Council, National Farmers Federation, ClimateWorks Australia and the Investor Group for Climate Change. It is unclear when the motions will be moved.

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Gender Pay Gap Threat to Diversity, Profit

Female executives are still paid 30-35 per cent less than male counterparts by the majority of Australian employers. Despite being of equal calibre, education and achievement, it's the case in eight-out-of-10 workplaces, according to a world-first study of 539 ASX-listed companies across a decade. With almost 3000 scenarios analysed, the University of South Australia project also reveals the impact goes beyond the individual, with the disparities directly associated with lower-performing companies. Professor Carol Kulik says Australian businesses which fail to offer gender pay parity are effectively self-sabotaging diversity efforts and overall profit. "It

might surprise people that gender pay gaps exist at very senior levels but with senior performance criteria often vague and subjective and gender stereotypes still rife, the resulting imbalance is commonplace," she said.

"We hear a lot about the benefits of women in executive levels. They provide different views and perspectives, reduce risks, improve decision-making and promote performance. "But if a firm has a large gender pay gap, promoting women to the top team will neither deliver benefits for the individual nor the organisation." Pay disparities in top management teams negatively moderate the relationship between the representation of women and subsequent organisation performance, Prof Kulik says. "In dollar figures, if a male executive is paid 2.6 times that of their female counterpart, every woman added to the team will lower the firm's annual return on assets by 2.2 per cent. "The cause, we suspect, is that underpaying women sends a powerful signal that the organisation has low expectations about women's contributions - that women executives have a lower status and less influence than their male counterparts."

As a result, women executives become less forthright and men more likely to discount their opinions. Ultimately, a gender pay gap reduces the extent to which women's voices can influence the executive's actions and decisions, so the firm gets no value from diversity within the team. The study considered men and women executives of comparable education, tenure and board memberships. "Organisations pay a price for gender inequality," co-researcher Yoshio Yanadori said. "Just because an organisation has a good representation of women at the top doesn't mean that they are a gender equal firm. Women's representation is only one indicator. "Gender diversity must be matched with equal pay. If organisations have women in senior leadership roles but pay them less than their male counterparts, they're simply shooting themselves in the foot."

The top-three industries with large gender executive pay gaps are energy (oil and gas drilling but excluding mining), information technology (hardware, software, semiconductor) and industrials (machinery, transportation). Those with small gender pay gaps are healthcare (both products and services, pharmaceuticals), financials and consumer staples (food, beverages and personal products). Publication of the UniSA findings coincide with the release of Average Weekly Earnings data by the ABS used to calculate the overall national gender pay gap at 14.2 per cent. Accordingly, the Workplace Gender Equality Agency has declared August 31 as this year's Equal Pay Day, recognising the average 61 extra days from the end of the previous financial year that women must work to earn the same annual pay as men.

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3、 Management, Capacity Building and Innovation

Asia-Pacific

Fighting Poverty by Protecting Landscapes

The Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry and the World Bank have launched a \$57 million Lao Landscapes and Livelihoods Project that will generate jobs and income in rural areas by promoting investment in environmentally sustainable and socially-responsible forest and landscape management, and in the preservation of Lao PDR's natural capital. The project is funded by the Bank's International Development Association, with contributions from the Global Environment Facility and the Canada-World Bank Clean Energy and Forest Climate Facility. The project starts at a time when Laos is facing the added economic burden of the COVID-19 pandemic, with GDP growth slowing and poverty increasing by an estimated 1.4-3.1 percent in 2020. "Forest landscapes account for 70 percent of our country's landmass and host almost 70 percent of our people," said H.E. Mr. Thongphat Vongmany, Vice-Minister for Agriculture and Forestry for Lao PDR, speaking at an event to launch the project. "Forests are critical to recovery from the economic slowdown associated with COVID-19, and to reducing vulnerability to climate risks. This land is our natural wealth, and by improving its management we can kickstart greener, more resilient growth." Poverty in Laos is concentrated in rural areas, most of which are forestlands. The World Bank's 2020 Poverty Assessment shows that the country's poverty hotspots are now in the central provinces, which are home to areas with rich potential for productive forestry and nature-based tourism.

Designed as part of the 2030 National Green Growth Strategy, the project prioritizes conservation, tourism development, timber and non-timber production to provide economic growth, jobs, and livelihoods in around 600 villages across 8 provinces. "Lao forests possess globally significant biodiversity and habitat integrity, and these can be promoted to attract tourism that generates jobs and livelihoods," said World Bank Lao PDR Country Manager Alex Kremer. In addition, production forests could create up to 300,000 jobs through private investment in environmentally and socially sustainable plantations to meet growing international demand for 'good wood'." The project will help government institutions strengthen public policy and strategy to meet international standards and commitments, and will set up a coordination platform involving authorities, development partners, villagers, and the private sector to inform decision-making. The aim is to increase or at least maintain the amount of forest cover in five large priority landscapes, while engaging households in improved livelihood activities, with at least half of the new jobs going to women.

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Lack of Water Linked to 10 Percent of the Rise in Global Migration

As climate change accelerates a global water crisis, rainfall variability is expected to

be one of the contributing forces in migration, according to a new World Bank report released today. The report anticipates that the world's cities, which receive migrants and are now home to 55% of the global population, will face a rising number of "day-zero" events – when taps run dry. The report, *Ebb and Flow*, provides the first-ever global assessment of the impact of water on migration. It is based on analysis of the largest data set on internal migration ever assembled, covering nearly half a billion people from 189 population censuses in 64 countries, and several national and global data sets that have been combined for the first time. In the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), where 60 percent of the population lives in water-stressed areas, the report notes that water is already one of the main vulnerabilities faced by people living in the region, particularly those displaced by conflicts and their host communities. The report finds that water deficits are linked to 10 percent of the increase in total migration within countries between 1970 and 2000. By the end of this century, worsening droughts are projected to affect about 700 million people. These climate shocks will have a disproportionate impact on the developing world, with more than 85 percent of people affected living in low- or middle-income countries. Yet it is often the poor who cannot afford to leave. The report finds that residents of poor countries are four times less likely to move than residents of wealthier countries.

Globally, water shocks affect not only the number of people who move, but also the skills they bring with them. Migrants who leave regions with lower rainfall and frequent drought usually possess lower educational levels and skills than other migrant workers, implying significantly lower wages and less access to basic services at their destination. This raises important policy implications for receiving cities. "As the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic continues, climate change is fueling water challenges around the world, which will hit developing countries hardest", said Mari Pangestu, the World Bank Managing Director for Development Policy and Partnerships. "In cities receiving migrants from rural areas due to rainfall variability, it pays to prevent such crises in an integrated way, to support green, resilient and inclusive development." Cities are also facing an increasing number of day-zero events, where they risk running out of water. Alongside recent acute water shortages in Cape Town, South Africa; Chennai, India; São Paulo, Brazil; and Basra, Iraq, dozens of smaller cities contend with similar events, but do not make international headlines. This underlines the need to preserve and sustainably manage water resources. Policies and infrastructure needed to build water resilience are expensive, but a drought is far more costly, potentially reducing a city's economic growth by up to 12 percent. The report highlights ways cities can tackle these challenges, such as reducing water demand, recycling wastewater, harvesting storm water, and redesigning urban areas to resemble sponges that soak up water and store it below ground.

Water security is key to post-conflict reconstruction in MENA

In the MENA region, war, conflict, and unemployment are more influential drivers of

migration than events related to water, such as drought. As the effects of climate change intensify, however, these historical patterns may no longer hold. In areas that lack good governance, climate change could exacerbate vulnerabilities and create tensions over water resources, leading to a vicious cycle of water insecurity and fragility. Water insecurity is felt most acutely by the millions of forcibly displaced and their host communities. The MENA region has the world's highest levels of forced displacement, with an estimated 7.6 million refugees, of whom 2.7 million are hosted in the region, and 12.4 million internally displaced people fleeing protracted conflicts. Water is more often a victim – rather than a primary source – of conflict. Using data from Duke University's Targeting of Infrastructure in the Middle East (TIME) database, the report finds that, since 2011, there have been at least 180 instances in which water infrastructure was targeted in conflicts in Gaza, Yemen, Syria, and Libya, leaving hundreds of thousands without access to water.

According to the report findings, steps to build water security are urgently needed within the MENA region. The protracted displacement crisis and water scarcity underline the need to continue to build off of humanitarian interventions and improve policies that promote long-term water security and resilience to shocks. "As the world's most water-scarce region, access to water is a daily struggle for millions of people in the MENA region, particularly the most vulnerable. The region also faces the greatest expected economic losses from climate-related water scarcity – estimated at between 6 percent and 14 percent by 2050," said Ferid Belhaj, World Bank Vice President for the Middle East and North Africa. "Ensuring that water is part of the broader humanitarian-development policy discussion and plans is vital for stabilizing economies, rebuilding livelihoods, and forging a green, resilient, and inclusive future for all." The report notes that policy makers will need to make trade-offs between short-term, uncoordinated measures to respond to immediate water needs, and long-term measures needed to address structural water issues. Recognizing and managing these trade-offs will help ensure that water risks do not undermine progress toward a sustainable recovery in the MENA region. Note: The report was funded in part by the Global Water Security & Sanitation Partnership, a Multi-Donor Trust Fund based at the World Bank's Water Global Practice.

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Officials Begin Technical Meeting Cluster, Propel APEC's Recovery Progress

The third and final APEC technical meeting cluster is now underway involving close to 2,400 officials, policymakers and private-sector representatives from 21 economies and more than 80 virtual working groups and fora meetings and activities. The meeting cluster will culminate in a two-day plenary session of senior officials on 2-3 September, chaired by Vangelis Vitalis, Deputy Secretary of Trade and Economic Affairs of New Zealand's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade. This will be the last

meeting this year before APEC Senior Officials prepare for Leaders' Week this November. "Officials and experts have been working on a number of trade and investment, economic and technical cooperation and structural reform initiatives guided by New Zealand's priorities for this year," said Dr Rebecca Sta Maria, Executive Director of the APEC Secretariat. "All the initiatives covered by these working groups support the forum's overarching goal this year to advance the region's recovery while at the same time increase inclusion and sustainability and promote innovation and a digitally enabled recovery," Dr Sta Maria added. "With APEC Economic Leaders' Week inching closer, officials will use this opportunity to complete outstanding issues and finalize their deliverables for senior officials who will report APEC's progress and recommendations to ministers in November," she said.

Meeting highlights

The APEC Digital Economy Steering Group kick-starts the meeting cluster by pursuing its implementation of the APEC Internet and Digital Economy Roadmap. The roadmap lays out 11 key areas and actions to facilitate technological and policy exchanges among member economies, promote innovative, inclusive and sustainable growth, as well as to bridge the digital divide in the APEC region. Under the Business Mobility Group, officials are continuing their pursuit of the safe resumption of travel and aim to strengthen the integrity of the APEC Business Travel Card scheme. This includes efforts to prevent exploitation and fraudulent activity. Earlier this year, the group continued their work toward modernizing and improving the security and efficiency of business travel and launched the virtual ABTC. As of now, eight economies have transitioned to the virtual platform.

The APEC Policy Partnership on Women and the Economy will seek to advance the APEC 2021 inclusive agenda by addressing the pandemic's disproportionate impact on women in the region. The group will hear from the APEC Policy Support Unit and discuss updates of the bi-annual APEC Women and the Economy Dashboard and is expected to provide analysis and recommendations to senior officials regarding the APEC La Serena Roadmap for Women and Inclusive Growth implementation plan. APEC's Policy Partnership on Food Security will also meet to address key food security challenges facing the region, including production and supply chain disruptions brought by COVID-19 as well as existing challenges such as population growth, urbanization, climate change, the depletion of natural resources and new technological developments that are expected to transform the sector. The APEC Food Security Ministerial Meeting is scheduled to be held virtually on 19 August. It will be chaired by New Zealand's Minister of Agriculture, Damien O'Connor, who also chaired the APEC Ministers Responsible for Trade Meeting earlier in May.

From <https://www.apec.org/> 08/10/2021

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Bridging Financing Gaps for Women Starts with Better Data and Technology

The pandemic has damaged economies and derailed livelihoods. Poor communities have suffered, with lockdowns and lost income exposing them to even deeper poverty. Women have experienced some of the most extreme impacts. Even before the pandemic they lacked access to basic financial services and knowledge that can help people to survive in difficult times. ADB recently launched the Women's Finance Exchange to promote awareness about how women can improve their finances and livelihoods. Christine Engstrom, who heads the financial institutions division of ADB's private sector operations department, says the pandemic has been particularly trying for the region's women. She explains how the Women's Finance Exchange can help to ensure nobody is left behind as countries recover.

Why do women face extra barriers to obtaining basic financial services?

Just as in other industries, biases and conventional ways of banking may be blind to gender gaps. Despite progress, there is still a consistently large financing gap for women and women-owned small- and medium enterprises, estimated at \$1.7 trillion globally. Women also face barriers such as a lack of documentation of their business operations, as well as collateral, formal identification, or a network for female entrepreneurs to provide support. In addition, women often live long distances from financial institutions, and women's ownership of mobile phones is more limited than that of men, restricting a key channel for the distribution of financial services. Lending to women is also constrained by the risk aversion of banks (toward those people without traditional collateral) and a lack of gender-disaggregated data. Without data, financial institutions do not have a clear understanding of the potential market opportunity to provide financial products and services to women. As a consequence, they are not aware of the business case for serving low-income women. There are also cultural and religious factors. In some parts of Asia, women need the consent of a male family member to access formal financing.

What is the impact on their lives and on the region's economies?

These barriers lead to missed opportunities to improve livelihoods. Women who are unable to obtain basic financial support experience greater difficulty in pulling themselves and their families out of poverty. Women who do seek financing often rely on informal sources, such as loans from friends and family, or loan sharks. As a result, women are limited by the amount of financing available and often subjected to high interest rates that could lead to debilitating indebtedness. This means they miss out on opportunities to scale up their businesses through stable financial support, and to receive training from formal institutions. Due to institutional gender bias in our systems and cultures, many women lack information and awareness of financing options. They also may not understand the role of financial institutions and the way they evaluate borrowers and businesses. Because of this, many women entrepreneurs are reluctant to seek financing at all.

Has the pandemic made matters worse? If so, how?

The pandemic has made matters worse. Retail and service sectors, which are often dominated by women, were hit hard by the pandemic, putting millions of women at risk of losing their jobs. Recent estimates by the International Labour Organization indicate that of the 55 million domestic workers globally at risk of losing their jobs and incomes due to lockdowns and lack of social protection, 37 million are women. This can be devastating for women, particularly those who are single mothers or who are critical contributors to family income needed to obtain food and shelter. For women-owned businesses, the pandemic has meant no work, and this is often further compounded by the lack of any type of national level safety net. In addition, for countless women in economies of every size in Asia and the Pacific, the burden of caring for the family has become an even more onerous challenge. High rates of mental and emotional distress were also reported during the pandemic, with women reporting higher rates than men. COVID-19 will continue to raise new barriers to women borrowers. Emerging evidence suggests that in lower and low-income countries, lost income will worsen poverty for informal workers and their families. According to a report by the United Nations and other contributing organizations, 155 million full-time jobs were lost in the first three months of 2020. This increased to 400 million in the second quarter, with lower and middle-income countries hardest hit.

What are the most efficient and feasible solutions, especially in the region's poorer countries?

Gender lens investing, which uses gender analysis and tools such as gender equality scorecards, can be used by financial institutions to mitigate the bias towards women and their businesses by improving decision-making around investing in products and services that support women. Such support can include blended finance or funding from the public and private sectors at slightly lower interest rates. Digital finance technologies can also be tapped to deliver more financial options for women. They can meaningfully alter supply-side economics by addressing "last mile" distribution and servicing issues through low cost, widespread points of physical access which are digitally enabled such as mobile phones and point of sale devices). Additionally, digital finance technologies can significantly enhance access to credit through alternate sources of data (e.g., payment transactions, telco data) and analytics driving better customer profiling, credit risk assessment, and fraud detection. Business processes and service delivery models, for example, are primed for digital transformation since many financial institutions and women's businesses have not yet digitized their models. Also, financial products can be tailored for women borrowers, and financial and digital literacy training can be provided.

ADB is launching the Women's Finance Exchange. How will it help?

There is still a long way to go to increase women's access to finance. That's why ADB has set up the Women's Finance Exchange. It will work with financial partners to expand gender-responsive financing in developing economies of Asia. Through the Women's Finance Exchange, ADB will partner with organizations such as the Center for Excellence in Financial Inclusion (CEFI). We will work with CEFI to help

women become better entrepreneurs through online training programs on topics such as debt management, business planning, and e-commerce. An online platform will feature our clients and their achievements, and introduce new technologies that can help solve gender-responsive financing challenges. Women's Finance Exchange will conduct market scoping and needs assessments for financial technologies to help financial institutions expand their gender-responsive finance portfolios. It will provide IT assessments for gender lens financing topics, such as alternative credit scoring models which incorporate gender specific data. In Papua New Guinea, for example, we will work with MiBank to boost lending to women's businesses and develop a digital product. By 2023, about \$300,000 in new financing will be provided to at least 40 women's businesses in Papua New Guinea.

What more needs to be done?

First, we need more gender-disaggregated data. Data can inform banks and financial institutions on best practices in designing products, programs, and strategies to meet the specific needs of women's businesses. Data can identify, for instance, how the pandemic has affected women in different ways than men, and provide crucial guidance on actions which meet the real needs of women. Second, if we want genuine change, we need to invest more in women. There are some inspiring and effective partnerships, such as Women Entrepreneurs Finance Initiative (We-Fi) and FinEquity, which are working to narrow the gender financing gap. But we can do much more. ADB supports women entrepreneurs in many ways. We provide guarantees through our Microfinance Risk Participation and Guarantee Program to partner with financial institutions so they can lend to microfinance institutions that on-lend to micro-borrowers, mostly rural women. ADB also provides targeted long-term funding to women's businesses through many financial institutions across Asia and the Pacific. Capacity building through grants from ADB boosts the capabilities of financial institutions and women borrowers through financial literacy and legal training and new product development.

From <https://www.adb.org/> 08/12/2021

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Ministers Commit to Protect Food Systems, Launch Food Security Roadmap

Agriculture and food ministers from the 21 APEC member economies reaffirmed their commitment to an open, transparent, productive, sustainable and resilient APEC food system by launching a new 10-year food security roadmap. Nearly 2.37 billion people lacked access to adequate food in 2020, a rise of 320 million in just one year, according to a World Bank policy brief. A report by the Global Network Against Food Crises (GNAFC) found that the number of people facing acute food insecurity who need urgent life and livelihood-saving assistance hit a five-year high in 2020. Against this backdrop, APEC ministers convened at their annual APEC Ministerial Meeting on Food Security on Thursday, chaired by New Zealand Minister of Agriculture

Damien O'Connor, and adopted the APEC Food Security Roadmap Towards 2030. The roadmap details goals and key action areas where APEC is well placed to help ensure people always have access to sufficient, safe, affordable and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life. "While food security was already a challenge, COVID-19 showed us that there are vulnerabilities in our food systems and in our economies, and that our food systems need improvement—especially to deliver on the APEC 2040 vision of an open, dynamic, peaceful and resilient region," Minister O'Connor highlighted in his opening remarks.

The roadmap, aligned with New Zealand's APEC 2021 priorities as well as the APEC Putrajaya Vision 2040, incorporates four key areas of focus:

Digitalization and innovation: using digital levers to drive food sustainability

Productivity: prioritizing systems that are fit for purpose

Inclusivity: ensuring that underrepresented groups are set up to thrive

Sustainability: tackling climate change and environmental challenges

"Besides our effort to address the challenges of food security, the roadmap also emphasizes efforts in increasing productivity and efficiency, minimizing food waste, mitigating and adapting to climate change as well as reducing costs and facilitating food trade," added Philip Houlding, Chair of the APEC Policy Partnership on Food Security. The group spearheaded the development of the roadmap and drives public-private sector engagement on all aspects of food security in the region.

At the virtual meeting, APEC Ministers heard from Qu Dongyu, Director-General of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), on closing the digital divide, especially in rural areas, and how this can help address some challenges faced by small-scale food producers. Ministers acknowledged the benefits of digitalization and discussed measures to promote innovation and improve the use of digital technology to ensure food security as the region recovers from COVID-19. "The pandemic accelerated digital transformation and highlighted the abilities of an innovative digitally enabled economy to better recover and thrive," said Minister O'Connor. "But effective recovery also requires all elements of government to work together to deliver this transformation and enhance food security in the APEC region." Ministers also highlighted the central role of the private sector throughout the food value chain with respect to production and processing, distribution, trade and investment. Ministers encouraged deeper collaboration between policymakers and the private sector to ensure an innovative, refreshed food system to meet the food security challenges of the future.

"Without food security for all our people, we cannot achieve the other goals we have for our economies," Minister O'Connor concluded.

Read the 6th APEC Ministerial Meeting on Food Security Joint Statement

Read the Annex: APEC Food Security Roadmap 2030

From <https://www.apec.org/> 08/19/2021

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‘Convergence, Cohesion, Collaboration’ Key to Addressing Education Challenges — ADB VP

Teachers and students must be equipped with the skills to use new technology and apply developments in different disciplines such as pedagogy and psychology to continue learning amid the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, participants at the Asian Development Bank’s (ADB) 9th International Skills Forum heard today. “We see widening digital gaps across age groups and regions within countries,” said ADB Vice-President for Knowledge Management and Sustainable Development Bambang Susantono. “This shows the urgent need to equip students, teachers, and trainers with digital skills to adapt and learn in a rapidly digitalizing world.” Mr. Susantono stressed the importance of “convergence, cohesion, and collaboration” to address challenges in education—combining discoveries in different disciplines such as behavioral science with new generation technologies to improve learning experiences and outcomes. “Artificial Intelligence and adaptive learning software can help students learn at their own pace and learn from their mistakes,” added Mr. Susantono. “Teachers can use data generated by adaptive learning software to cater to the individual learning needs of each student.” The International Skills Forum is ADB’s flagship event in education. Under the theme “Reimagining Education and Skills Development for a New Normal,” this year’s event explores how to ensure ongoing learning for all in a new normal characterized by COVID-19, and how developing countries can improve employability and equip their citizens with 21st century skills.

ADB has a long track record of helping to improve access to and the quality of education in Asia and the Pacific, having provided more than \$15 billion in loans and grants since inception. Last month, ADB President Masatsugu Asakawa stated that the organization is aiming to double its financing for education up to 10% of its total annual commitments by 2024. Indonesia’s Minister of Education and Culture Nadiem Makarim gave the opening keynote address. University of Washington Institute for Learning & Brain Sciences Co-Director Patricia Kuhl and Stanford University Lewis and Virginia Eaton Professor of Psychology Carol Dweck joined BRAC University’s BRAC Institute of Educational Development Executive Director Erum Mariam, and edX Founder and CEO Anant Agarwal on a panel discussion on “The Future of Education – Power of Convergence.” More than 3,000 participants are expected at the forum including policy makers, representatives from academia, education experts, and partners from ADB’s developing member countries. This year’s event runs 23–27 August and is held virtually due to the pandemic.

From <https://www.adb.org/> 08/23/2021

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ADB and Nauru Sign Grant to Expand and Improve Water, Waste Management Services

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the Government of Nauru today signed a \$5 million grant to help fund the preparation of an ADB-supported project for boosting urban services in Nauru. Nauru's Minister of Finance and ADB Governor Martin Hunt and ADB Pacific Department Director General Leah Gutierrez signed the grant agreement, which will partly fund the assessment, planning, and capacity building needed to implement the proposed Nauru Sustainable Urban Development Project. "Growth in Nauru's urban areas puts stress on essential services, including water supply and sanitation," said Mr. Hunt. "There is a critical need for this urban project, preparation is key, and we appreciate ADB's support in planning and developing it." The proposed \$20 million project will increase access to and improve the quality and safety of essential urban services for about 2,150 households on the island. "The public health and well-being of people in Nauru depends on having better access to safe water, sanitation, and effective solid waste management," Ms. Gutierrez said. "ADB is supporting the Government of Nauru in the planning of this urban project, which will also focus on improved resilience and sustainability, particularly in the face of climate change and exposure to natural disasters." ADB will use its project readiness facility to fast-track project-developing engineering designs and procurement plans. The ADB project team will also develop policies and capacities to manage the new urban facilities and deliver improved services. The \$5 million grant is sourced from ADB's Asian Development Fund. The Government of Nauru is contributing \$210,000.

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Plastic Threatens Migratory Species in Asia-Pacific: UN

From endangered freshwater dolphins drowned by discarded fishing nets to elephants scavenging through rubbish, migratory species are among the most vulnerable to plastic pollution, a UN report on the Asia-Pacific region said Tuesday (Aug 31), calling for greater action to cut waste. Plastic particles have infiltrated even the most remote and seemingly-pristine regions of the planet, with tiny fragments discovered inside fish in the deepest recesses of the ocean and peppering Arctic sea ice. The paper by the UN's Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS) focused on the impacts of plastic on freshwater species in rivers and on land animals and birds, which researchers said were often overlooked victims of humanity's expanding trash crisis. It said that because these creatures encounter different environments – including industrialised and polluted areas – they are likely at risk of higher exposure to plastics and associated contaminants. Researchers cited estimates that 80 per cent of the plastic that ends up in the oceans originates on land – with rivers thought to play a key role in carrying debris out to sea. The report comes just days ahead of a major summit of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), which will include a motion calling for an end to marine plastic pollution by 2030.

“Actions to address this global issue have fallen far short of what is needed,” said CMS Executive Secretary Amy Fraenkel. “The focus has thus far been on clean up in our oceans, but that is already too late in the process. We need to focus on solutions and prevention of plastic pollution upstream.” The UN report highlights two regions – the Ganges and Mekong river basins – which together contribute an estimated 200,000 tons of plastic pollution to the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean every year. Discarded fishing gear were found to be major threats. Dolphins can become entangled and trapped under water by old nets, with endangered Irrawaddy Dolphins and Ganges River Dolphins at particular risk. The report also said migratory seabirds, such as Black-footed Albatrosses and Laysan Albatrosses, may not be able to tell plastic from prey when flying over the ocean and can accidentally eat floating debris. This means the plastic could build up in their guts or be passed on to their chicks when they regurgitate food for them, it said. On land, Asian Elephants had also been observed scavenging on rubbish dumps in Sri Lanka and eating plastic in Thailand, the report noted. The report stressed that species in Asia-Pacific face a multitude of threats, including habitat loss, overfishing, industrial pollution and climate change. “Even if plastic pollution is not the most significant of these stressors, it can add an additional stress to already vulnerable populations,” it said. It called for strategies to prevent plastic being dumped in the environment, reducing waste through better design and recycling, as well as greater efforts to understand the effects of this pollution on migratory species.

From <https://worldnews-today.com/> 08/31/2021

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East Asia

CHINA: Bringing China Prosperity with Sci-tech Innovation

On April 24, 1970, a young man in Liangjiahe, a village in northwest China's Shaanxi Province, was excited to get the news that China successfully sent its first satellite Dongfanghong-1 into space. The young man, Xi Jinping, later became Chinese President. On May 15, 2021, Xi, also general secretary of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee and chairman of the Central Military Commission, extended congratulations on the successful landing of China's first probe on Mars. He called for making new and greater contributions to exploring the mysteries of the universe and promoting the noble cause of peace and the development of humanity. Stressing the importance of sci-tech innovation in building a moderately prosperous society in all respects, Xi once noted that "We must blaze a new trail and rely on innovation to drive growth."

FOR THE PEOPLE

Xi noted that satisfying people's longing for a better life should be the foothold of sci-tech innovation, the goal of which should be to benefit, enrich and improve

people's lives. Since the outbreak of COVID-19, Xi has put forward new requirements for sci-tech innovation. China clearly stated that people's lives and health should be the top priority in the fight against the virus. Last March, Xi visited the Academy of Military Medical Sciences and Tsinghua University in Beijing. He said that COVID-19 research must be taken as a major and pressing task, calling for accelerating its progress and overcoming major difficulties in epidemic prevention and control at an early date. "Science and technology are the most powerful weapons in humanity's battle against diseases," Xi said. "Mankind cannot defeat a major disaster or epidemic without scientific development and technological innovation." At the call of Xi, experts and professionals from various fields and disciplines in the country worked around the clock to build a tight "safety net" for more than 1.4 billion Chinese people and injected confidence into the global fight against the pandemic.

One year later, China promoted the largest scale of vaccination against COVID-19. China's COVID-19 vaccines have been approved for use in more than 100 countries and regions worldwide. Chinese people have been benefiting from the sci-tech achievements and innovation initiatives since the country further increased the support of sci-tech in improving people's livelihood. When visiting a tea farm during his inspection trip to east China's Fujian Province in March, Xi stressed more efforts in implementing the arrangements to dispatch technical professionals to rural areas to help with local development. Hundreds of thousands of technical professionals had participated in China's poverty alleviation efforts. The country in February declared a "complete victory" in eradicating absolute poverty. Sci-tech innovations have helped China achieve major progress in fields like improving air quality, protecting land resources, and reclaiming saline land.

FROM THE PEOPLE

Xi wrote back to the elder scientists who participated in the Dongfanghong-1 mission, as the 50th anniversary of the successful launch of the country's first man-made satellite approached last year. In the letter, Xi said he is deeply moved that the participants of the Dongfanghong-1 mission have devoted their youth to the space cause and still care about the future of China's aerospace industry in their old age. From older generation scientists to outstanding scientists after the founding of New China, Xi has mentioned many names on many occasions. Sci-tech innovation is inseparable from talents. China cannot ask for, buy or beg for core technologies in key fields, noted Xi in 2018 while addressing China's academicians. He called on researchers and engineers to establish a strong sense of responsibility and self-confidence to innovate. Xi's speech gave Lu Chaoyang greater confidence in exploring deep into quantum science research.

Lu, who became a professor at the University of Science and Technology of China at 28, wishes that China would stand on top of quantum science one day. While presiding over a group study session of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central

Committee last October, Xi stressed the importance and urgency of advancing quantum science and technology. He called for strengthening strategic planning and the systematic layout for the development of quantum science and technology, as well as grasping the general trend and playing good first moves. Last December, Lu and his team built a quantum computing prototype "Jiuzhang," via which up to 76 photons were detected. The achievement marks China's first milestone on the path to full-scale quantum computing. China has been building its sci-tech team and optimizing its talent structure. A group of leading talents and innovation teams have emerged, and young sci-tech talents have gradually become the main force of scientific research. When the young generation harbours aspirations, skills and a sense of responsibility, science and technology will have a future and innovation will have hope, noted Xi.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 08/11/2021

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China Eases Restrictions on Non-financial Corporate Debt Instruments

The People's Bank of China has decided to test removing the credit rating requirements for the issuance of non-financial corporate debt instruments. The move was made to further motivate market entities to use external ratings and drive the market-oriented reform of the credit rating sector. During the test period, the issuance of non-financial corporate debt instruments will no longer be subject to Article 9 of the Administrative Measures for Debt Financing Instruments of Non-Financial Enterprises in the Interbank Bond Market, the bank said. However, the issuance of other corporate debt instruments will continue to be subject to administrative measures, it said.

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China to Roll Out Measures to Stabilize Manufacturing Investment

China will adopt multiple measures to stabilize manufacturing investment, the country's top economic planner said Tuesday. The country will boost green investment by encouraging investment in technological upgrading and stepping up policy support for the traditional manufacturing industry to reduce carbon emissions, said Meng Wei, spokesperson for the National Development and Reform Commission. The country will also support investment in advanced manufacturing and improving weak links in the industrial and supply chain, Meng added. Comprehensive measures will be taken to ease the upward pressure on commodity prices and strengthen investment incentives for middle and downstream manufacturing enterprises while implementing various cost reduction policies, the

spokesperson said. China's fixed-asset investment amounted to 30.25 trillion yuan (about 4.67 trillion U.S. dollars), up 10.3 percent year on year in the first seven months of this year, data from the National Bureau of Statistics showed. Specifically, investment in manufacturing gained 17.3 percent year on year during the period, the data showed.

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Chinese Regulator Pledges Measures for Commodity Price Stability

China's top economic planner Tuesday pledged to closely monitor price changes of bulk commodities and take multiple measures to ensure price stability as part of efforts to alleviate burdens on businesses over raw material costs. These include boosting production and supply, timely release of reserves, strengthening coordination of imports and exports, and stepping up market supervision, said Meng Wei, spokesperson for the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC). Through two batches, China has released 270,000 tonnes of copper, aluminum, and zinc from its national reserves to maintain market order. The move has helped to guide market expectations and ease business pressures over raw material cost, Meng noted. Earlier official data showed China's producer price index (PPI), which measures costs for goods at the factory gate, expanded by 9 percent year on year in July, slightly higher than the 8.8-percent growth in June. Sharp price hikes in crude oil and coal lifted year-on-year PPI growth in July. Month-on-month data, however, showed that government policies to stabilize commodity prices took effect, with mild price declines seen in industries like steel and non-ferrous metals, the National Bureau of Statistics said.

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China Shores Up Support for SOEs in Northeast Region

China on Wednesday launched a program on promoting coordination between local state-owned enterprises (SOEs) in the country's northeast region and central SOEs to ramp up the revitalization of northeast China. A total of 111 local SOEs in Heilongjiang, Jilin and Liaoning provinces, and the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region will work closely with 100 subsidiaries of 53 central SOEs, according to the State-owned Assets Supervision and Administration Commission of the State Council (SASAC). The country will enhance resource sharing and industrial integration between these enterprises to deepen reforms of state-owned assets and firms in the region, and promote high-quality development of local SOEs. These enterprises will cooperate for optimizing and coordinating industrial and supply chains, transforming and upgrading traditional industries, making breakthroughs in

core technologies, improving corporate governance and enhancing the building of talent teams. Reforms of state-owned assets and firms in the region achieved positive results in the first half-year, with combined operating revenue of local SOEs and locally-based central SOEs and their subsidiaries surging 28 percent year on year, SASAC data showed. More efforts should be made to improve the market-oriented operation mechanism, weak links in industrial structure and the level of management for the local SOEs, the SASAC noted.

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CPC Maintains Purity, Advanced Nature Through Vigorous Measures

The Communist Party of China (CPC) takes vigorous measures to maintain its members' purity and advanced nature, said a senior CPC official Thursday. With more than 95 million members, the CPC considers this matter a fundamental issue and an important task in its Party building work, said Qi Jiabin, an official with the CPC Central Committee's Organization Department, at a press conference. The CPC has been tirelessly improving Party members' ideological and theoretical understanding, and has always armed the whole Party with the latest achievements of adapting Marxism to the Chinese context, said Qi. The CPC ensures the requirement of full and strict governance over the Party reaches every member and Party branch, said Qi. Taking a zero-tolerance stance at its members' misconducts, the Party enforces its discipline with resolute measures, effectively tackling graft, bribe-taking, abuse of power and other actions that violate Party discipline, said Wang Jianxin, an official with the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection of the CPC and the National Supervisory Commission, at the press conference. The CPC's efforts are widely recognized by the public, and the people's confidence and trust in the Party has been significantly enhanced, noted Wang. He added that according to a survey of the National Bureau of Statistics, 95.8 percent of the Chinese people consider the CPC's Party governance efforts very effective in 2020, up 16.5 percentage points from 2012.

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China's Service Trade Fair to Highlight Digital Technologies

The China International Fair for Trade in Services (CIFTIS), which will open in Beijing next week, will highlight digital technologies and services, organizers said Friday. Themed "toward digital future and service-driven development," the trade fair will feature a special section for digital services for the first time, according to Yan Ligang, head of the Beijing Municipal Commerce Bureau. Up to 33 well known enterprises and institutions will participate in the special section, and 15 conferences and forums

will be held to discuss the digital economy and digital trade, Yan told a press conference. "The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the digitalization of trade in services, thus providing opportunities for structural adjustment and the development of new service trade businesses," said Wang Bingnan, China's vice minister of commerce. In 2020, China's digitally deliverable trade in services stood at 294.76 billion U.S. dollars, up 8.4 percent year on year and accounting for 44.5 percent of the total service trade, official data showed.

More than 10,000 enterprises from 153 countries and regions have signed up for this year's CIFTIS. Among them, 2,400 firms will showcase their products and services offline. Up to 18 percent of offline exhibitors are Fortune 500 companies and leading enterprises, up 9 percentage points from last year, according to the organizers. The 2021 CIFTIS will also have exhibitions on new topics such as healthcare services, business services, engineering consultancy and construction services, according to Yan. A global summit on service trade, five summit forums as well as 119 thematic forums and conferences will be held on the sidelines. Apart from a comprehensive exhibition at the China National Convention Center, this year's CIFTIS will also have a thematic exhibition to take place in Shougang Park in Shijingshan District. CIFTIS is a major platform for trade in services in China. This year, it is to be held from Sept. 2 to Sept. 7 and will have an exhibition area of 130,000 square meters.

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JAPAN: Government Eyeing Greater Legal Protections for Freelancers

The government plans to expand the range of companies required to provide written contracts when hiring freelancers, in a bid to increase legal protections for such workers. The move addresses difficulties freelancers face, such as cases in which oral agreements are reached but then unilaterally canceled, and comes as their incomes have been declining during the coronavirus pandemic. The government is planning to submit a revised bill in next year's Diet session. The law governing subcontracting requires companies with over ¥10 million in capital to provide written contracts when commissioning freelance workers. Under the law, which stipulates fair practices in subcontracting work, companies must clearly indicate details such as fee amounts and payment dates. However, companies with ¥10 million or less in capital are exempt from the requirement.

A government survey conducted in February and March last year found that about 40% of freelancers experienced trouble such as unsettled payments or unilateral changes of delivery dates after they received commissions from companies. Of those who experienced difficulties, about 60% said agreements were only made orally. Written contracts were not exchanged or emailed. In cases in which documents were exchanged, the details were often insufficient. It is believed that in many cases

freelancers finally gave up without voicing complaints when in these situations. In a bid to prevent such troubles, the government concluded it was also necessary to require companies with ¥10 million or less in capital to prepare and archive written contracts that stipulate the detailed conditions of business transactions made with freelance workers.

The government will conduct investigations to determine the scale of the issue regarding companies that commission freelancers. Based on the results, officials will consider the criteria for companies that will have to meet the requirement to issue written contracts. Some officials floated the idea of establishing a new law rather than revising the subcontract law. Freelancers work in a wide range of occupations, including computer programming, interpreting and writing. It is estimated that there are about 4.62 million freelancers nationwide, and their numbers are likely to grow as work styles become increasingly diverse. The expected increase prompted the government to strengthen support for freelancers. In April, the government included actors, actresses and other entertainers, as well as animators, to be covered by workers' compensation insurance for workplace accidents. Starting in September, bicycle delivery workers and information technology engineers will also be covered by the insurance program.

From <https://the-japan-news.com> 08/13/2021

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AI-Aided Surveillance System Eyed to Monitor Suspicious Ships

The government has decided to launch a new surveillance system that identifies suspicious ships by combining artificial intelligence and satellite technology, The Yomiuri Shimbun has learned. The plan is for the system to go into operation as early as fiscal 2024. The aim is to create a monitoring system that covers a vast area and facilitates a prompt response to incidents such as Chinese ships entering Japanese territorial waters near the Senkaku Islands in Okinawa Prefecture and illegal fishing by Chinese and North Korean vessels in the Yamato Bank area off the Noto Peninsula, according to sources. A demonstration will be conducted next fiscal year. Under the envisaged system, AI analyzes satellite-collected data, such as the location and speed of ships, so that suspicious ships can be detected at an early stage and Japan Coast Guard patrol vessels can be dispatched promptly to track their movements.

Images of ships and other data obtained from satellites are currently used to manually identify vessel types. The use of AI will enable an automatic, immediate identification of a larger number of ships, the sources said. "By combining satellites and AI, we can expect to drastically reduce the number of man hours," a source close to the government said. The government earmarked ¥450 million to create the new system in the third supplementary budget for fiscal 2020, and a developer will be selected. The JCG is likely to be the main user of the system, while coordination is

being made so the Defense Ministry will have access to relevant information. Japan's effort to expand its marine surveillance from outer space comes as it needs to monitor a wider area. Chinese government-owned ships have entered Japanese territorial waters repeatedly after Japan nationalized the Senkaku Islands in 2012, and provocations by China Coast Guard ships have become more intense this year.

In the Yamato Bank area in the Sea of Japan, which is within Japan's exclusive economic zone, there has been a sharp increase in illegal operations by Chinese fishing boats since spring. A Chinese marine research vessel in July last year conducted an unauthorized operation in the EEZ off Okinotorishima island, the southernmost island that belongs to Tokyo. In the East China Sea, North Korean ships have conducted illegal trading of refined oil products. The government is also eyeing the use of satellite data from European countries and the United States. It is also considering the establishment of a surveillance system that can cover an even broader area, including Taiwan and the South China Sea.

From <https://the-japan-news.com> 08/15/2021

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Government Measures Take Aim at Plastic Waste

The Japanese government has drawn up draft measures aimed at requiring businesses and municipalities to promote recycling plastic and reducing waste. The draft was submitted to a joint meeting of the environment and economy ministries on Monday. If the measures are approved, businesses will be asked to review their practice of offering single-use plastic items free of charge. The measures specify 12 plastic items that businesses should replace with products made of other materials. These include plastic spoons and straws at convenience stores, tooth brushes and razors provided at hotels, and clothes hangers used by dry cleaners.

Businesses will be asked to either charge for those items, or offer incentive points to customers who do not want them. The measures will be mandatory for businesses that give customers five tons or more of the items annually. The government plans to issue warnings, or disclose the names of businesses that fail to take sufficient steps to recycle plastic and reduce waste. The measures also include specific criteria for plastic waste collected for recycling, such as plastic bottles and food trays. The government plans to issue ordinances based on the measures, which could take effect in April next year.

From <https://www3.nhk.or.jp> 08/23/2021

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Japan Eyes Digital Vaccination Certificates by End of Year

The government wants COVID-19 vaccination certificates to be digitized by the end of the year and actively used at commercial facilities among other places. Currently, paper certificates are issued as proof of vaccination for people traveling overseas.

Chief Cabinet Secretary Katsunobu Kato said at a press conference on Thursday that the certificates would be digitized by the end of this year before they are made available for domestic use as part of efforts to revive economic activities while preventing infections. “We are studying the possibility of digitization by the end of this year. If the certificates are digitized, they could be used domestically,” Kato said. At a press conference on Wednesday, Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga also mentioned the possibility of using vaccination certificates for dining out, travel and events, among other things. “We will carefully consider the restoration of daily life and socioeconomic activities,” Suga said.

The digital vaccination certificate will include the recipient’s name, date of birth, passport number, date of inoculation, and the type of vaccine that was administered. If the certificates are used in Japan, holders will likely be able to receive services and discounts at hotels and restaurants, among other places. The government has been cautious about using such a system in Japan. Kato said in the past, “It is not appropriate to unfairly discriminate against people based on whether they have been vaccinated or not.” However, the business community has been strongly requesting the use of digital certificates. In June, the Japan Business Federation submitted a proposal to the government calling for the swift introduction of the certificates. Dining discounts and the easing of restrictions for events and nursing home visits were among examples cited for how the certificates could be utilized. The government plans to create operational guidelines so that people without the certificates will not be unduly disadvantaged.

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SOUTH KOREA: Upping Cyber Threat Warning as Attacks Increase

South Korea's ICT ministry said Wednesday it raised the country's cyber threat warning level by one notch higher from the lowest level to respond to growing cyberattacks and threats related to the country's COVID-19 relief funds. The government has a five-tier cybersecurity alert system, which is set at the second-lowest level as of 11:30 a.m. Wednesday, according to the Ministry of Science and ICT. Under the higher alert level, the Korea Internet & Security Agency will expand monitoring of malware and other cyberthreats as well as strengthen response measures with related institutes. The ICT ministry said that it decided to elevate the warning level in a move to preemptively respond to growing cyber threats, such as ransomware. Ransomware is a type of malware that holds a target's data hostage or locks up its systems until a ransom is paid. There have been 78 ransomware attacks reported to the country's internet security agency in the first half of the year, compared with 22 in 2018, 39 in 2019 and 127 cases in total last year. The government also expects phishing attacks to increase with the scheduled provision of pandemic relief funds, The National Assembly endorsed a 34.9 trillion

won (US\$30.3 billion) extra budget last month in a bid to finance another round of relief packages to small merchants and people in the bottom 88 percent income bracket hit hard by the pandemic.

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

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S. Korea to Step Up Support to Fight Ransomware Attacks

South Korea's ICT ministry said Thursday it will expand support to small businesses to help them ward off ransomware threats after it raised the country's cyberthreat warning level a day earlier. Cyberattacks using ransomware, a type of malware that holds a target's data hostage by locking up systems until a ransom is paid, have been on the rise in South Korea, with 78 such attacks reported to the country's internet security agency in the first half of the year, compared with 39 in 2019 and 127 cases in total last year. The Ministry of Science and ICT said it would strengthen support to small businesses that have weaker cybersecurity systems by offering them data back-up, encryption and restoration systems to protect their internal data in order to help restore their systems in ransomware attacks.

It will also provide anti-ransomware software for free to medical clinics ahead of the country's plan to vaccinate around 18 million people aged 18 to 49 later this month to ensure a smooth vaccination rollout. The ministry added that it is reviewing adding oil refining companies and self-driving vehicle control systems to its list of core facilities that require cybersecurity protection, considering the ransomware attack earlier this year on the U.S.-based Colonial Pipeline, which forced the company to temporarily halt its fuel supplying operations. The move comes as South Korea braces for even more cyberattacks. The country's spy agency elevated its cyber threat warning level for public institutions to the second-lowest level in a five-tier system Tuesday, saying it has identified ransomware attacks targeting major local hospitals.

The ICT ministry has also raised its cyber threat warning status to the same level Wednesday, with expectations that phishing attacks will increase with the scheduled provision of pandemic relief funds. Experts say ransomware attacks can usually be blocked if companies strengthen their security. Hackers invest a lot of time, at times even over a year, to conduct such attacks as they have to go through internal systems to find a point to widely distribute the ransomware, according to Lee Jae-kwang, head of the profound analysis team at the Korea Internet & Security Agency. "Hacking into a company's internal system and spreading ransomware takes a lot of work," Lee said in a recent online briefing. "As they take a long time to prepare, security personnel have many opportunities to defend their systems."

From <https://en.yna.co.kr> 08/05/2021

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Bar Association to Create Online Legal Counseling Service as

Alternative to Lawtalk

The Korean Bar Association (KBA) is planning to launch an online legal counseling platform as an alternative to private mobile applications that offer paid legal services, sources said Friday. They said the association has recently formed a task force, jointly with the Seoul Bar Association, to open such a service as early as this year. While exact details have yet to be determined, the service will be "designed to give clients easy access to information about lawyers and other legal services," an official from the KBA said. The KBA began an investigation into its lawyer members Thursday over the use of the popular legal counseling application LawTalk as a new rule banning its members from offering legal aid on the online service took effect on the day. The association said the app disrupted the legal services market and served as a paid broker, an act prohibited under South Korea's Attorney-at-Law Act, while Law & Company Co., the operator of the app, countered that its service was a legal advertising platform.

"We feel utterly discouraged to see the KBA, which banned its members from using legal counseling platforms, was planning to create a similar service," the company said. The KBA said that its yet-to-be-released service would not be for-profit, unlike those run by private companies. Since the service was launched in 2014, the two sides have been engaged in a yearslong standoff. Amid a tit-for-tat battle, the KBA changed its rule in May to prohibit lawyers from joining online advertising platforms. The revision took effect Thursday. For their part, 60 lawyers who were featured on the app filed an injunction with the Constitutional Court in June to stop the new rule from taking effect. The court decision has yet to come out. As of Aug. 3, around 2,900 lawyers, or more than 10 percent of the country's 24,000 lawyers, were providing legal services on the platform. The figure reached nearly 4,000 early this year.

From <https://en.yna.co.kr> 08/06/2021

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S. Korea 8th Among OECD in S&T Innovation Capacity

New analysis finds that South Korea ranked eighth among members of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development(OECD) in terms of innovation capacity in science and technology last year. The Korea Institute of S&T Evaluation and Planning revealed the figure in a report released on Monday based on the Composite Science and Technology Innovation Index which the institute has compiled every year since 2006. The ranking slipped down by a notch from 2019. The institute releases the index in a bid to compare science and technology innovation capacity among the 35 OECD countries. The data often forms the basis on which the government sets future action plans for relevant policies. The U.S. topped the list followed by Switzerland, the Netherlands, Japan, Germany, Israel and Luxembourg.

From <http://world.kbs.co.kr/> 08/23/2021

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Personal Info. Watchdog Fines Facebook, Netflix for Privacy Violations

South Korea's personal information protection watchdog has fined Facebook and Netflix nearly six-point-seven billion won for violating the country's privacy law. The Personal Information Protection Commission on Wednesday slapped the six-point-66-billion-won penalty against the overseas platform services and ordered the two and Google to make necessary improvements. Facebook was given the heaviest penalty of six-point-44 billion won after it was accused of creating and storing facial recognition templates of 200-thousand South Korean users without consent between April 2018 and September 2019. The U.S.-based company was also fined for illegally collecting resident registration numbers and consigning personal information to another entity. Netflix was ordered to pay 220 million won in penalties for collecting five million users' personal information without consent before their registration was completed. Although Google was not fined as it had not violated laws, the platform service provider was advised to improve its legal notification on personal information collection.

From http://world.kbs.co.kr 08/26/2021

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Moon Presents S. Korea's 'Venture Powerhouse' Vision, Vows Full Gov't Support

President Moon Jae-in said Thursday the government will provide complete support for South Korea's high-tech startups and entrepreneurial ventures as the country aims to emerge as one of the world's four major venture powerhouses. He pledged to expand support for investments in venture firms via the creation of a special fund worth 1 trillion won (US\$850 million), speaking during a Cheong Wa Dae event, titled "K+Venture (K Add Venture)." The government will make sure South Korea joins the top four of the world's venture powers through full support -- from business launch, growth, recovery to re-challenge, Moon said. "Support for venture investment will further increase," he added. "The government will also create a new fund worth 1 trillion won in order to expand the high-risk early stage of investment in startups." He stressed the need to foster technology startups and the inflow of talented manpower and capital, as well as invigorate the M&A market. "The government will raise the number of technology startups (in South Korea), currently totaling around 230,000 a year, to 300,000 by 2024," he said. The president expressed optimism, saying South Korea is already riding on the second "venture boom" in the wake of the first one in the early 2000s.

From <https://en.yna.co.kr> 08/28/2021

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South Korean Patents in Core Future Technologies Lag in Quality Report

South Korea is churning out patents in core areas of the “fourth industrial revolution,” but their impact is falling far short of matching up to this, a recent report shows. According to the state-run Korea Institute of Science & Technology Evaluation and Planning’s latest analysis of the country’s technological innovation capability, the country ranked third out of 44 countries surveyed in terms of the number of patents registered in the US in nine selected fields in 2019 and 2020. South Korea owns a total of 188,160 patents in the categories, which include artificial intelligence, big data, the internet of things, autonomous driving, 3D printing and digital health care, trailing only the US and Japan. But when it comes to the quality of the patents, which could be measured by the number of citations, the country’s ranking falls to 20, with citations per patent standing at just 2.8. The country with the most citations per patent was Iceland at 11.2, followed by the US at 6.2. “This means that South Korea’s ownership of high-quality patents didn’t measure up to its overall patent quantity,” the institute said. By category, the largest number of US patents owned by South Korea were in the field of the cloud, at 16,161, followed by big data at 15,642 and the internet of things at 12,874.

From <http://www.koreaherald.com> 08/29/2021

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South-East Asia

INDONESIA: Sharply Cuts RT-PCR Test Prices amid Call from Public

Indonesian President Joko Widodo has ordered to cut the test prices of the Reverse Transcription Polymerase Chain Reaction (RT-PCR) to a range between 450,000 rupiahs (some 31.24 U.S. dollars) and 550,000 rupiahs from the previous maximum of 900,000 rupiahs set by the Health Ministry. The move means that the prices of the RT-PCR tests in Indonesia will be cut between 38.9 percent and 50 percent over the previous ones. "One way to increase testing is to reduce the RT-PCR test prices. I have told the health minister about this and I asked for the cost of the PCR tests to be in the range between 450,000 rupiahs and 550,000 rupiahs," said the president in a video uploaded to the account of the Indonesian Secretariat Cabinet on Aug. 15. Widodo also ordered that the results of the RT-PCR tests in Indonesia should be available within 24 hours as the country needs speedy outcomes.

The Indonesian government has set the highest price for the RT-PCR tests at 495,000 rupiahs for the islands of Java and Bali, and 525,000 rupiahs for the areas outside the two islands. The government decided to cut the RT-PCR test prices following debates about the prices of the COVID-19 tests in the country, which were

considered too expensive. The Directorate General of Health Services has issued a regulation concerning the prices for RT-PCR tests which have been effective from Aug. 17. Director General of Health Services Abdul Kadir said the new prices of the RT-PCR tests were set together with the Financial and Development Supervisory Agency. "From the evaluation results, we agree that the highest price for RT-PCR examinations is lowered to 495,000 rupiahs for Java and Bali islands, and 525,000 rupiahs for outside Java and Bali islands," he said at a virtual press conference in Jakarta on Aug. 16. State-owned pharmaceutical company PT Kimia Farma has decided to reduce the prices of RT-PCR and Antigen tests to meet the regulation.

Currently, the company's most expensive COVID-19 testing price is 495,000 rupiahs for RT-PCR and 125,000 rupiahs for antigen. "This will make it easier for the public to have COVID-19 tests, which will lead to an overall improvement in Indonesia's health climate," the company's President Director Verdi Budidarmo said. Agus Chandra, acting president director of PT Kimia Farma Diagnostika (PT Kimia Farma's business unit) said his company would follow the president's instruction to lower the prices of the RT-PCR tests as much as possible. "In addition to lowering the price of the RT-PCR test to 495,000 rupiahs, we also reduced the price of antigen swab to 85,000 rupiahs for the regular type of device and for the Abbot Panbio brand it falls to 125,000 rupiahs," he said. However, several health facilities including hospitals in the country have yet to follow the president's instruction to lower the prices of the RT-PCR tests to detect COVID-19. House Speaker Puan Maharani on Friday asked all health facilities including hospitals to follow the rules set by the government as this decision is part of the government efforts to strengthen test for COVID-19. "All health facilities, including hospitals, clinics, and laboratories, must comply with these rules," Maharani said, calling on the government to give warnings or sanctions to those health facilities defying the rules.

From <http://www.xinhuanet.com> 08/22/2021

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PHILIPPINES: Approving Sputnik Light Covid-19 Vaccine for Emergency Use

The Philippines' Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has granted the emergency use authorization for Russian vaccine maker Gamaleya Institute's Sputnik Light vaccine against COVID-19, FDA Director General Enrique Domingo said on Monday. The official in charge of vaccine procurement, Carlito Galvez, said the approval of the single-dose vaccine Sputnik Light would boost the government's vaccination drive. In March, the Philippines' FDA granted the emergency use authorization to use Russia's two-dose Sputnik V coronavirus vaccine. The Philippines also has approved several COVID-19 vaccines including Sinovac, Sinopharm, AstraZeneca and Pfizer, among others. The Philippines has administered over 30 million doses of COVID-19 vaccines. Over 13 million people have been fully vaccinated against COVID-19 so far. The government aims to vaccinate up to 70 million people this year. On Monday, the

Philippines' Department of Health reported 18,332 new COVID-19 infections, the biggest single-day spike since the outbreak of the pandemic last year. The Philippines now has a total of over 1.85 million confirmed COVID-19 cases, including 31,961 deaths.

From <http://www.xinhuanet.com> 08/23/2021

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THAILAND: Easing Some Covid-19 Restrictions as Infections Drop

Thailand announced Friday that it will ease COVID-19 restrictions in Bangkok and some other provinces next month, as infections and death rates have fallen while vaccinations pick up speed. From Sept. 1 onwards, air-conditioned restaurants will be allowed to resume dine-in services until 8:00 p.m. at up to 50 percent of their capacity, whereas open-air restaurants can receive customers up to 75 percent of their capacity, according to the Center for COVID-19 Situation Administration. Hair salons, massage places and beauty clinics can reopen with some restrictions applied, while outdoor sports facilities and public parks can be open with strict social distancing measures in place. The existing 9:00 p.m. to 4:00 a.m. curfew in the 29 provinces will remain in place. Thailand on Friday reported 273 new COVID-19 deaths and another 18,702 cases, taking the total numbers to 10,587 fatalities and 1,139,571 infections, official data showed. The majority of the new cases over the past 24 hours were still in Bangkok at 4,699, followed by neighboring Samut Prakan and Chonburi at 1,220 and 1,064, respectively. New cases in other provinces were lower than 1,000. As of Thursday, Thailand has administered over 29.5 million doses of COVID-19 vaccines, with more than 10 percent of its 69 million population fully vaccinated.

From <http://www.xinhuanet.com> 08/27/2021

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Aviation Authority Gives the Green Light for Air Travel Between Dark Red Provinces

The Civil Aviation Authority of Thailand (CAAT) announced on Sunday that from September 1 airlines can operate passenger flights between 29 "dark red" provinces while ensuring disease control measures are strictly followed. Aviation authority gives the green light for air travel between dark red province. The announcement came after the Centre for Covid-19 Situation Administration on Friday announced the lifting of restrictions on domestic air travel. Passengers must present a vaccine certificate or a negative test result as required by the destination provinces. The 29 "dark red" provinces are: Bangkok, Kanchanaburi, Chonburi, Chachoengsao, Nakhon Pathom, Nakhon Nayok, Nakhon Ratchasima, Narathiwat, Nonthaburi, Pathum Thani, Prachuap Khiri Khan, Prachinburi, Ayutthaya, Phetchaburi, Pattani,

Phetchabun, Yala, Rayong, Ratchaburi, Lop Buri, Songkhla, Singburi, Samut Prakan, Samut Songkhram, Samut Sakhon, Saraburi, Suphanburi, Tak and Ang Thong.

According to the CAAT, passengers travelling to the following provinces must comply with these regulations:

1. Phitsanulok and Chumphon: Must download tracing application and spend 14 days in state quarantine facility.
2. Phuket and Krabi: Must download tracing application, present a negative result by RT-PCR or by antigen test kit (ATK) method performed by a doctor, and a certificate of either receiving two doses of vaccine or having been infected and recovered from Covid-19 in the past 90 days.
3. Hua Hin (Prachuap Khiri Khan) and Trang: Must download tracing application, present either a certificate of receiving two doses of vaccine, or of having been infected and recovered in the past 90 days.
4. Phrae, Nan, Sakon Nakhon, Udon Thani, Chiang Mai, and Buri Ram: Must download tracing application, present a certificate of receiving two doses of vaccine. Test may be required upon arrival.
5. Khon Kaen, Ubon Ratchathani, and Lampang: Must download tracing application, present a negative result by RT-PCR method and a certificate of receiving two doses of vaccine.
6. Chiang Rai, Hat Yai (Songkhla), Nakhon Phanom, Ranong and Nakhon Si Thammarat: Must download tracing application, present a negative result by RT-PCR or ATK method performed by a doctor and a certificate of receiving two doses of vaccine.
7. Surat Thani: Must download tracing application.
8. Bangkok, Loei, Narathiwat and Rayong: No extra regulations announced.

The CAAT also has permitted all airlines to carry passengers at up to 75 per cent capacity (from the previous 50 per cent), but on-board food and drinks are still prohibited.

From <https://www.nationthailand.com> 08/30/2021

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VIETNAM: Telehealth System, National Technology Centre for

COVID-19 Prevention and Control Launched

Prime Minister Phạm Minh Chính said the telemedicine system, which is connected to all hospitals at the district level, would help save more patients' lives, reduce the overload on upper-level hospitals, and limit the transmission of virus. Addressing a ceremony on August 8 to launch the Telehealth Platform and the National Technology Centre for COVID-19 Prevention and Control, the Prime Minister said that the platform was one of the effective solutions in providing timely diagnosis and treatment support. As the COVID-19 pandemic was spreading regardless of countries, religions, ages and genders, using the same technology platform across the country would enhance the effectiveness of the fight against the pandemic, Chinh stressed. He asked the health and information and communication sectors to continue researching and improving technologies for telemedicine, contributing to reducing fatalities and driving back the pandemic to again achieve sustainable development and prosperity. The Government leader also took the occasion to hail efforts by medical workers in the front line of the combat against the COVID-19 pandemic. At the event, doctors of HCM City's Chợ Rẫy Hospital provided consultation for doctors of several other medical facilities in the city and Long An and Bình Dương provinces via the Telehealth Platform on treatment for COVID-19 patients in critical conditions. The Prime Minister also listened to opinions of doctors in localities throughout the country such as Đồng Tháp, Tiền Giang, Đồng Nai, Bình Phước, Lâm Đồng, Gia Lai, Đắk Lắk, Bà Rịa - Vũng Tàu, Khánh Hòa, Phú Yên, Nghệ An, and Lạng Sơn on patient treatment.

From <https://vietnamnews.vn/> 08/09/2021

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Government Aims for HCM City to Control COVID-19 Outbreak by September 15

The Government has set a target for HCM City, the epicentre of the current wave of infections, to contain its COVID-19 outbreak by September 15. Prime Minister Phạm Minh Chính has just signed Resolution 86 of the Government on the implementation of urgent measures to prevent and control the COVID-19 pandemic to implement Resolution 30 of the National Assembly. According to the resolution, the Government aims for HCM City to control its outbreak before September 15; Bình Dương, Long An, Đồng Nai provinces before September 1; and other localities before August 25. The resolution said that many agencies, units and localities have not taken serious, decisive or substantive measures in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic, while inspection and supervision is still lax in many places. These include slow responses to the changing situation, slow vaccination rates, lax management of social distancing, as well as congestion in the transport of goods. The pandemic is still unpredictable, while the supply of vaccines is limited and there is not yet any specific treatment for the virus, so the Government emphasised that pandemic prevention is an urgent task.

The Resolution stipulates urgent and specific solutions to prevent, repel and move towards good control of the pandemic in order to prevent a crisis both in public health and the socio-economic sector. Regarding the application of urgent measures, the Government assigned local leaders to proactively decide and direct their subordinates to strictly apply solutions corresponding to the level of risk in the spirit of Directive 15, Directive 16 and Directive 19 of the Prime Minister. Based on the actual situation, they may apply these solutions earlier and at higher levels but not later and lower than the provisions in the above documents. The Government pays special attention to social distancing and other measures in anti-pandemic work that must be strictly implemented from the very beginning, at all levels. Leaders of localities are asked not to procrastinate, hesitate, lack determination or lack responsibility. Instead, they should take the lead, be creative when implementing the task, draw lessons from the work and made quick adjustments when the situation changes. All localities must strictly implement the motto "go to every alley, knock from door to door, check every person", detect and handle people who come from pandemic-affected areas without declaring and people leaving localities which are applying social distancing without permission. One of the other urgent solutions proposed by the Government is to allow localities to proactively and flexibly apply necessary measures such as restricting some vehicles or asking people not to leave their homes for a certain period of time.

Speed up testing

Localities need to speed up testing among high-risk groups of people in order to detect new cases as soon as possible, the resolution said. Localities must not miss new F0s and not let them continue to travel and spread the virus further. For areas with widespread infections such as HCM City and neighbouring provinces, it is necessary to enhance testing, care and treatment, ensuring the maximum reduction in the rate of severe cases, mortality and spread to other areas. The Ministry of Health is tasked with promptly distributing vaccines to provinces and cities, in which priority is given to densely populated localities, those with many infections and fatalities, as well as any large and crowded urban areas. The resolution also asked the Ministry of Health to build pandemic response scenarios for all levels, based on which the procurement of equipment and materials can be calculated. The Ministry of Health, ministries, branches and localities can mobilise public and private health systems and social resources to promptly coordinate in the implementation of COVID-19 prevention, treatment and vaccination. The Government also requested the Ministry of Finance, ministries, branches and localities to prioritise the arrangement and allocation of the state budget and other lawful resources to ensure funding for the COVID-19 pandemic prevention and control work. The Government requested the cutting of at least 50 per cent of spending on conferences, travelling expenses of ministries, central agencies and localities (except for the expenses of important and urgent activities and to serve the pandemic prevention and control work).

Population Database to Help Manage Covid-19 Vaccinations

The Ministry of Public Security (MPS) will share data from the National Population Database to help manage COVID-19 vaccinations. The database will be shared with the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Information and Communications. From Wednesday, the MPS officially deployed the nationwide citizen management software in pandemic-affected areas on the basis of the National Population Database. The software is updated with medical declarations when people pass pandemic control stations. Specifically, when citizens register medical declarations at <https://suckhoe.dancuquocgia.gov.vn> before going through pandemic control stations, the system will provide them with a QR code. At the checkpoints, police officers will check information on the system and let them go through. Data is processed on the National Population Database, then communicated to ward and commune authorities in order to manage their information, thereby tracing the movements of citizens easily, quickly and accurately, saving costs in the current pandemic situation.

At the meeting on Thursday with the MPS, Minister of Health Nguyễn Thanh Long emphasised that the People's Public Security force performs resident management. The force played a key role in tracing COVID-19 cases, while controlling the movement of people and vehicles, he said. Therefore, information management on the basis of the National Population Database and QR codes was suitable for the actual situation, ensuring accuracy, contributing to the prevention and control of COVID-19. Long proposed the MPS to unify the medical declaration form and use a unique QR code for each individual, avoiding confusion, simplifying procedures, saving time, and facilitating people in the medical declarations. Speaking at the meeting, Deputy Minister of Public Security Nguyễn Duy Ngọc asked the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Information and Communications to support and share experience in health management and vaccination databases. Ngọc said the two ministries should provide professional and technical support so that the MPS can quickly use national data on population in the work of tracing COVID-19 cases, verifying citizen information for vaccination management, contributing to the pandemic control.

Việt Nam Promotes Safe Use of Digital Platforms

The Ministry of Information and Communications has issued a directive on promoting the development and use of safe and healthy digital platforms. The directive is also expected to contribute to creating digital trust and ensuring the safety of Việt Nam's

cyberspace. Digital platforms have made important contributions to the national digital transformation, and the development of the digital economy and digital society. However, information and data leakage on digital platforms still occurs on an increasingly large scale. The spread of fake news, information that violates the law, especially on cross-border digital platforms, has caused a lot of negative impacts. Therefore, the ministry requires businesses that manage digital platforms to develop the platforms that are able to protect themselves and have tools to process and remove information that violates the law. In particular, owners of digital platforms must implement solutions to ensure information security and publicise measures to handle and protect personal information, and collect personal information only with the consent of the users. These units are not allowed to provide, share or distribute personal information of users, except with their consent or at the request of competent state agencies.

From <https://vietnamnews.vn> 08/20/2021

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More Than 130,000 Tonnes of Rice from National Reserve Proposed to Help Pandemic-Hit People

More than 8.6 million people in 24 provinces and cities in Việt Nam need emergency food relief due to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, according to the Ministry of Labour, Invalid and Social Affairs. The ministry has proposed the Prime Minister take more than 130,000 tonnes of rice from the national reserve to allocate to the affected people. If the proposal is approved, each beneficiary will get 15 kilos for a month. Further support will be considered if difficulties caused by the pandemic continue. According to the ministry, the fourth wave of COVID-19 in Việt Nam seriously affected people's lives, especially laid-off workers or those who lost their jobs and had their incomes reduced, making them face the increasing threat of hunger. The ministry received reports from 24 provinces and cities that are implementing social distancing orders under the Prime Minister's Directive 16. The 24 localities have asked for a total of more than 216,600 tonnes of rice to support over 8.6 million people. Of that, Đắk Lắk asked for 534.3 tonnes for 35,626 people; Đắk Nông 577.1 tonnes for 38,474 people; Đồng Tháp over 5,883 tonnes for 392,231 people; and Tây Ninh 336.2 tonnes for 22,417 people. The southernmost province of Cà Mau asked for over 2,862 tonnes for 190,822 people; Vĩnh Long 2,103 tonnes for 140,213 people; Long An 807 tonnes for 53,800 people; Kiên Giang 2,278 tonnes for 151,878 people; and Trà Vinh 1,739 tonnes for 115,930 people. On August 16, Prime Minister Phạm Minh Chính agreed to distribute more than 4,117 tonnes of rice from national reserves to support pandemic-hit people in three provinces of Bình Phước, Bạc Liêu and Sóc Trăng.

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ICT Plays Crucial Role in Fight Against COVID-19

Information and communication technology (ICT) has played an important role in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic, Nguyễn Huy Dũng, deputy minister of Information and Communications, said during the video talk “Kết Nối Trong Đại Dịch” (Connections during the Pandemic) on Tuesday. “Technology is helping to connect hospitals and doctors with patients, and needy people with donors, so we can together repel the pandemic,” he said. Telehealth services were launched at the beginning of the pandemic for remote consultations in Việt Nam. About 2,000 central hospitals are now connected to all district-level hospitals across the country. Since the fourth wave of the pandemic, the telehealth system has opened new connections with COVID-19 treatment hospitals in HCM City, and with Bình Dương and Long An provinces for transfer of emergency cases among hospitals. As for other IT uses, HCM City has piloted a search engine at website <http://tracuuf0.medinet.org.vn/> to help families of COVID-19 patients look up information about their health status.

COVID-19 patients can also connect with medical staff on apps such as VOV Bacsi24, Giúp tôi! and Zalo Connect. Vòng Thanh Cường, a representative of Giúp tôi!'s development staff, said it took only 30 seconds to connect doctors with people through the app. “That’s what people expect. When they need help, they need support from experts immediately to feel at ease.” Nguyễn Trường Nam, deputy head of the Information and Technology Department at the Ministry of Health, said the application of ICT in COVID-19 prevention and control has earned achievements in telemedicine, tracing, testing and vaccination. It has also helped connect charity organisations with the needy and people affected by COVID-19. The Vietnamese messaging application Zalo recently introduced a new feature Zalo Connect, which received more than 320,000 messages in 15 days. Nam said that although the application of technology solutions had brought results, local authorities should send accurate instructions to people so that technology solutions are used more effectively.

From <https://vietnamnews.vn> 08/27/2021

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HCM City to Offer Support Package to Poor Households as Well as Workers in Need

HCM City will provide VNĐ1.5 million (US\$65.5) each to 3-4 million workers' families facing difficulties because of the pandemic as part of a new support package worth nearly VNĐ2.6 trillion (\$112.3 million). This amount is in addition to a previous package of VNĐ900 billion (\$39.2 million) that was targeted for poor and near-poor households, poor workers, and self-employed workers' families. The two support packages will be disbursed by August 30. According to Phạm Đức Hải, deputy head of the city's Steering Committee for COVID-19 Prevention and Control, the city has about 53,000 poor and near-poor households with 170,000 people. The number of people with reduced or no income in the city, however, has risen significantly. People

with stable incomes have had to suspend work, take unpaid leave, or have lost jobs. The beneficiaries of the support packages will be extended to include these people. If people in need of support have already received a social welfare package of food and essential items worth VNĐ300,000 (\$13) each from local authorities, they will get VNĐ1.2 million (\$52.5) in cash from the support package. Both permanent and temporary residents will benefit, regardless of occupation. Local officials have been told to ensure that money is delivered in time and to the right people, and that no one misses out.

Travel permits

In another matter, Phan Công Bằng, deputy director of the city's Department of Transport, said the department had issued more detailed guidelines on granting QR Code identification certificates to vehicles. After receiving dossiers, the department will ensure that the results are returned to individuals and organisations within 24 hours via software or the social network Zalo. The public has suggested granting travel permits to charity groups to help them easily provide food and essential necessities for people in difficult circumstances. Senior Lieutenant Colonel Lê Mạnh Hà of the city's Police Department said the city highly appreciated the charity work of individuals and organisations who were offering a helping hand to city authorities. However, the city could not issue travel permits to charity groups as travelling across the city could pose a risk of spreading the coronavirus to the community or even to themselves. To strictly implement the current "stay-at-home" order, he said that charity groups should transfer their gifts to local authorities instead of handing them over directly. Hà said that vehicles transporting oxygen cylinders, medicines, medical supplies and equipment would be allowed to pass checkpoints without a travel permit if the drivers show business registration licences or a document on pandemic prevention and control work. People going for vaccination and follow-up examination appointments, and for medicine, need to bring their and appointment papers and medical information to go through checkpoints. They do not need a travel permit. The city has seen a 90 per cent reduction in traffic volume since the two-week stay-at-home order period started on August 23.

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PM Asks Local Authorities to Have Clear Goals to Fight COVID-19

Prime Minister Phạm Minh Chính on Sunday asked authorities at the grassroots levels to set clear goals in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic and develop thorough agendas to achieve them. He made the statement at an online meeting between the National Steering Committee for COVID-19 prevention and control with 20 provinces and cities under social distancing across the country. The meeting aimed to emphasise the importance of bottom-level authorities in controlling COVID-19 in accordance with the PM's order in official dispatches No 1099 and 1102, which is treating each commune, ward, town, factory and enterprise as 'a fortress',

each resident 'a soldier' to fight the pandemic. In attendance were Deputy Prime Ministers Lê Minh Khái, Lê Văn Thành and Vũ Đức Đam, National Assembly vice chair Nguyễn Khắc Định, ministers, and leaders of concerned central organisations. Apart from top local leaders in the 20 cities and provinces, grassroots level officials in 1,060 communes, wards and towns under their jurisdiction also took part in the meeting. They discussed their experience controlling the pandemic and the lessons learned through the process, identify limitations, and propose improvements for the future.

Speaking at the meeting, PM Chính said he highly valued the efforts made by different sectors to fight COVID-19, including State-owned agencies, businesses, and especially those on the front line. However, as the pandemic was still going strong and unpredictably, not only in Việt Nam but around the world, everyone needed to be prepared and adjust to the ever-changing conditions, he said. He asked local authorities, especially those in communes, wards and towns, to identify COVID-19 prevention goals and action plans suitable for their localities so that the expected outcomes outlined by the Government's Decree No 86 would be achieved, and social distancing lifted. Measures that were not effective must be reviewed and adjusted, and new solutions developed if needed, he added. "We have made sacrifices implementing social distancing, so we at least need to make sure that our goals to contain the pandemic are met," he said. He asked localities to strictly comply with directives and decrees on COVID-19 prevention and control issued by the Party and the Government since the beginning of the pandemic.

Applying social distancing is to prevent the disease from spreading further, so it must be strictly applied under tight control. Meanwhile, quick testing and vaccination must also be carried out in accordance with safety regulations from the Ministry of Health, he said. Each ward, commune and town must have a hotline number available 24 hours a day that people can reach whenever they need, he added. Local authorities should know their residents and provide them with material and mental support if needed. Residents should have access to medical treatment at the earliest time possible and from the grassroots levels, which would help reduce pressure for major hospitals and health facilities. Modern and traditional medical practices should work together to reduce severe patients and deaths. The Government leader also asked local authorities to ensure social security for the people, and encourage them to comply with pandemic control regulations. Localities with high population density should think of ways to temporarily move people to places with less population to ensure their safety, he said. PM Chính stressed that the country was going in the right direction with the right measures to fight the pandemic, but should limitations arise during the implementation process, they should be thoroughly reviewed and improved.

From <https://vietnamnews.vn/> 08/29/2021

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South Asia

INDIA: Centre Exempts 2 States & 8 Organisations from Drone Rules for R&D

On a conditional basis, the Union Ministry of Civil Aviation (MoCA) and Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) have agreed to exempt two state governments including Karnataka and Gangtok Smart City from Unmanned Aircraft System (UAS) Rules 2021 to carry out technology-based government projects. The Centre has granted permission for one year to the Government of Karnataka for drone-based aerial surveys for creating urban property ownership records in Bengaluru. Meanwhile, to efficiently carry out smart city projects, the Centre has nodded to permit drone-based survey by the Gangtok Smart City. In a notification issued by MoCA, the permit will be in effect from the date of approval or until further orders. Also, it will be subject to the terms and conditions of the SOP from the DGCA. Eight more organisations including National Health, Mission, have been granted exemption from the UAS Rules 2021. The National Health Mission, Mumbai sought exemption to conduct experimental BVLOS drone flights to deliver medicines and healthcare items in tribal areas of Jawhar in the Palghar, Maharashtra. Other organisations that have been exempted from the UAS Rules include Steel Authority of India, IISCO Steel Plant in West Bengal for conducting perimeter surveillance of the plant; Hyderabad's Asia Pacific Flight Training Academy and Gujarat's Blue Ray Aviation for holding remote pilot training using drones; Chennai-based Tractors and Farm Equipment Ltd. for holding drone-based aerial spraying to assess the health of crops and prevent crop diseases. Also, exemptions have been granted for research and development purposes to Mahindra & Mahindra for drone-based agricultural trials and precision spraying on paddy in Telangana and hot pepper crop in Andhra Pradesh respectively; Bayer Crop Science for agriculture research activities through drones and for drone-based agricultural spraying; and for holding atmospheric research by Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology, Pune. The research will be carried out at Osmanabad airport, Karad airport, IITM Bhopal, NDA Pune, and Mohammed Airfield.

From <https://egov.eletsonline.com/> 08/16/2021

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MoHUA Approves Construction of over 16k Houses Under PMAY-U

The Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA), on August 16, gave a green signal to the construction of 16,488 houses in cities under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana – Urban (PMAY-U). As per a statement, after this approval, the total number of houses sanctioned by the Centre surpasses the 1.13 crore count. According to MoHUA, the decision to sanction 16,488 new houses was taken at a meeting of the Central Sanctioning and Monitoring Committee (CSMC). Officials from four states

and union territories attended the meet. These approved houses are said to be constructed under the Beneficiary-led Construction (BLC) and Affordable Housing in Partnership verticals of the Centre's PMAY-U. While addressing the meet, MoHUA Secretary Durga Shanker Mishra said, "The demand for sanction has saturated all States/UTs, and work should be done expeditiously towards completing all the projects within the stipulated time." After the latest approval, the count of total houses sanctioned by the Centre under PMAY-U is now 113.06 lakh. Of the total, 85.65 lakh houses have been grounded for construction and over 51 lakh have been completed and delivered to the beneficiaries, read the statement. Mishra, during the meet, urged the states and union territories to actively participate in the 'PMAY(U) Awards – 100 Days Challenge'.

From <https://egov.eletsonline.com/> 08/18/2021

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Selecting Right Digital Partner for Transforming Records Management

Government organisations have to manage a high influx of administrative records on a daily basis. Maintaining the sheer volume of incoming physical and digital records can pose a big challenge. The need of the hour for government organisations is to implement records management software that can successfully digitise and streamline records in a secure manner, writes Arpan Bansal, Global Head COE (Government), Newgen Software. With regard to records management, mapping out a course of action requires a government organisation to evaluate its existing organisational structure, technological capabilities, process ownership, and overall governance. Here are seven factors every organisation to look for before identifying the right technology for your records management needs.

1. A platform-based approach. To keep up with dynamic business requirements, you must invest in a platform-based solution that is agile, future-ready, and has key capabilities, including artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning (ML)-based content classification, metadata generation, mobile-based access, social content management, straight-through integration, and more. Furthermore, the records management solution must ensure: Complete tracking of records, from generation to disposition and archival, for all record types, such as born-digital, email, electronics, and physical. Scalability of the digitised system through a private cloud or government cloud. Policy digitisation with a modelling-driven environment and improved efficiency through configurable systems

2. Adherence to security and compliance measures. Government organisations face a variety of challenges, ranging from maintaining information security and preventing privacy breaches to ensuring compliance with regulatory requirements. Hence, your records management system should: Ensure the authenticity, confidentiality, and integrity of records with comprehensive security capabilities. Comply with global

standards and system certifications, including DoD 5015.02, ISO 15489, ISO 16175, VERS, and NRAA Oman.

3. Advanced technologies for intelligent automation: In order to automate the end-to-end records lifecycle, from creation to disposition, your chosen software must feature new-age technologies, such as AI, ML, and robotic process automation (RPA). You must ensure that your records management solution can: Enable the rapid digitisation of physical content through scanning and intelligent information extraction. Support process automation with RPA-based, automatic document classification capabilities to perform repetitive tasks with minimal human intervention.

4 Seamless collaboration using productivity applications: While evaluating a solution, you must factor in its ability to enhance employee efficiency and flexibly meet organisational expectations. This empowers your users with the right tools to engage across geographies, access and share documents rapidly, and maximise output. Your choice of a records management system should: Optimise document and data flow across your organisation. Manage records with a range of systems and facilitate real-time collaboration using business productivity apps, such as Microsoft Outlook, Microsoft Office 365, MS Teams, SharePoint, Google Docs, and more.

5 Federation across multiple systems: The ideal records management software should offer a unified view of information, while allowing users to access, edit, and manage documents through productivity-focused applications, such as Microsoft SharePoint. Furthermore, it should feature: Federated search capabilities, to search connected repositories and content management systems, from a single interface. A distributed, federated content repository, with secure, role-based access to enterprise-wide content

6. Integration with enterprise apps: Your selected records management software must be able to eliminate informational silos by connecting and communicating with disparate systems. The software should enable: Integration with other business applications, tools, repositories, and cloud storage systems through APIs and web services, ready-made adaptors, integration standards, and custom APIs. Secure access to self-service sites, content, and confidential documents. Support for microservices and containerization-based deployments.

7. Smooth Migration from Legacy Systems: You must ensure that your chosen records management solution can adapt to your organization's growth, evolving business needs, and future requirements. The solution should: Enable seamless migration and modernisation of legacy systems. Provide interoperability for efficiently delivering civic services. Offer a flexible and agile architecture, catering to future requirements. The Way Forward By keeping these seven factors in mind, you can identify the right records management system for your organisational needs. It is imperative that you select software that is sustainable, scalable, and secure, while also maintaining compliance with regulatory requirements and standards. As the

governmental landscape continues to shift, organisations must be prepared for the unexpected. By implementing a solution based on a digital transformation platform, one can leverage new-age technologies to stay future-ready and provide uninterrupted citizen services.

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CM Ashok Gehlot to Launch I-Start Virtual Incubation Programme for Aiding Startups

Chief Minister of Rajasthan Ashok Gehlot is scheduled to launch the I-Start Virtual Incubation Program themed “IT for Good Governance” today, August 20, as per officials. As per an official statement, CM Gehlot will provide funds to 21 selected startups at different places across the state during the event. Rajasthan Innovation Vision (Rajiv-2021), a virtual programme, will be organised on the birth anniversary of the former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, read the statement. The event will witness discussions in terms of the innovations made in the field of Information Technology (IT) in Rajasthan. Also, how the IT innovations are benefiting the people will also be on the agenda for discussions, the statement added. Announcing the event, CM Gehlot took to Twitter (in Hindia) saying, “On the birth anniversary of former Prime Minister Shri Rajiv Gandhi, a virtual program of Rajasthan Innovation Vision (Rajiv-2021) program on the theme of Good Governance through Information Technology (IT for Good Governance) will be organised tomorrow at 11 am. Various IT services will be launched during the program.” The public information infrastructure and innovations advisor to former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, Sam Pitroda, is a key speaker at the event. Other than addressing the importance of IT for good governance, Pitroda will also shed light on Rajiv Gandhi’s contributions to the country. The event is organised 10 days after CM Gehlot, on August 10, said that leveraging IT for providing good governance and access to all government services was crucial for the Government of Rajasthan. The CM has also directed officials to ensure online delivery for all kinds of citizen services. Furthermore, he said that the Rajasthan government is giving priority to start-ups, however, these are limited to only big cities of the state. The government has also asked the officials to begin Rural I-Start, a programme similar to the government’s I-Start initiative. The move is aimed to connect students of the government’s English medium schools, rural entrepreneurs, women self-help groups (SHGs) in villages and innovators.

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MyGov Launches Innovation Challenge for Developing Indian Language Learning App

MyGov, the citizen engagement platform of the Government of India, and the Department of Higher Education has launched an Innovation Challenge for creating

an Indian Language Learning App. The challenge aims to get an app developed that will promote regional language literacy that may result in creating greater cultural understanding within the country. Further, the move is to take forward Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of celebrating India's cultural diversity through greater interaction among its constituent parts. The Innovation Challenge of MyGov focuses on creating an app that will enable individuals to learn simple sentences of any Indian language and acquire a working knowledge of a particular Indian language. The key parameters that will be looked into will include ease of use, simplicity, Graphical User Interface, gamification features, UI, UX and superior content, which makes it easy and fun to use and learn any Indian language. The challenge is open to Indian individuals, startups and companies. MyGov envisions the app to be multi-modular, with the capacity to teach through the written word, voice and video/visuals. App developers can propose multiple interfaces for the engagement of learners. The innovation challenge can be accessed at <https://innovateindia.mygov.in/indian-language-app-challenge/> The final date for rolling in for the challenge is May 27, 2021. Following the evaluation of prototypes submitted, the top 10 teams will be invited to make presentations and the top 3 will be selected by a jury. Funding of Rs 20 lakh, Rs 10 lakh, and Rs 5 lakh will be provided to the top 3 respectively to make the apps better. For evaluation of the solutions, a few broad parameters will be considered such as Innovation, Scalability, Usability, Interoperability, Ease of deployment/roll-out and Campaign.

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Punjab CM Launches Helpline for Citizen Services, Extends Admission Portal for Contactless Admissions

Chief Minister of Punjab Captain Amarinder Singh, on August 19, launched "Unified State Helpline Number 1100" to provide citizen-centric services and easy grievance redressal. The CM launched the service through video conferencing. Singh also extended the "State Admission Portal" (<https://admission.punjab.gov.in>) till the end of this month to make students, looking for admission to government colleges, apply in a hassle-free manner. Elaborating on the Unified Helpline Number 1100, Singh said, the number would come in handy for people to avail themselves of citizen-centric services. The move will make their lives easier. The helpline number would soon be equipped with features like chat, email, WhatsApp and SMS, the CM added. Singh asked the administrative secretaries to regularly hold a weekly review of their department's operations. Also, he asked the Chief Secretary to ensure prompt delivery of the citizen services. According to the CM, around 42,000 students have already enrolled on the admission portal. Through the portal, all the admissions would be done in a contactless manner as it allows the entire process to be completed remotely and applicants would not have to be physically present. Punjab's Higher Education Minister Tript Rajinder Singh Bajwa, while addressing the occasion, said that with the launch of the admission portal, a long-pending demand of students

had been fulfilled. The portal will make the admission process a whole lot easier and safe for the students as it enables them to apply through a single application for multiple colleges.

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Urban Affairs Ministry Awards 'Water Plus' Certification to 3 Cities in Andhra Pradesh

The Union Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA) awarded 'Water Plus' certification to three cities in Andhra Pradesh of the total nine cities shortlisted across the country. The Water Plus certification is awarded to cities under the Swachh Bharat Mission and Swachh Survekshan assessment. With this, Andhra Pradesh becomes the only state in India to have more than one Water Plus city, as per the statement from the Chief Minister's Office (CMO). "The certified municipal corporations are Tirupati Municipal Corporation, Vijayawada Municipal Corporation and Greater Visakhapatnam Municipal Corporation (GVMC)," the statement read. The statement from the CMO said that according to the MoHUA's prescribed protocols, the Water Plus certification is given to cities that have already achieved Open Defecation Free (ODF) or ODF+/ODF++ statuses. "A Municipal Corporation can be certified as water plus provided the treatment and management of liquid waste from households, commercial establishment drains, sewer, etc. is done at a satisfactory level, considering the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) norms, ahead of releasing the treated wastewater to the environment. Also, wastewater/sewage treatment facilities should be adequate and regularly maintained along with cost recovery through reuse and recycling of treated wastewater," added the statement. Follow and connect with us on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Elets vid.

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Labour Ministry Launches e-Shram Portal – National Database of Unorganised Workers

In a move to aid the unorganised workers, the Minister for Labour and Employment Bhupender Yadav, on August 26, launched e-Shram portal. The Minister handed it over to the States/UTs in the presence of the Minister of State for Labour and Employment and Petroleum and Natural Gas Rameswar Teli. Naming the e-Shram portal a step towards achieving the vision of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Yadav said, "For the first time in the History of India, a system is being made to register 38 crore unorganised workers. The portal will not only register them but would also be helpful in delivering of various social security schemes being implemented by the Central and State Governments." The Minister also extended his gratitude to PM Modi for sanctioning Rs 2 lakh Accidental Insurance cover to each unorganised worker registered on the e-Shram portal. The e-Shram portal will cover all

unorganised workers of the nation and help link them to social security schemes of the Government of India. The portal will prove to be a huge boost for the last-mile delivery of services. #ShramevJayate pic.twitter.com/wnEb0U85Uo — Bhupender Yadav (@byadavbjp) August 26, 2021

As per the accident insurance cover, if a worker registered on the e-Shram portal meets with an accident, he will be eligible for Rs 2 lakh on death or permanent disability and Rs 1 lakh on partial disability. While elaborating on the e-Shram portal that also pose as a National Database of all unorganised workers, Rameswar Teli called out to the people of the country to join hands in making this campaign a success and get all unorganised workers registered on the e-Shram portal. Be a partner in fulfilling the much-needed goal of the Government of India: “Chutega nahi koi bhi kamgaar, yojanayein pahunchengi sabke dwaar” that in English is “None of the workers will be left behind, all the government schemes will be made to reach their doorsteps.” On this occasion, both Ministers also interacted with the workers from Ajmer, Dibrugarh, Chennai and Varanasi who virtually connected from the Common Service Centres who shared their experiences and expectations. Shri Yadav and Shri Teli also briefed them about accidental Insurance Schemes and explained benefits for registering on the portal. After registering on the e-SHRAM portal, unorganized workers will need not to register separately for Govt’s Social Security Schemes. e-SHRAM card containing a 12-digit UAN will be valid throughout the country: MoS @LabourMinistry @Rameswar_Teli #ShramevJayate pic.twitter.com/1Z3LF9c87M— PIB India (@PIB_India) August 26, 2021

Secretary to the Labour Ministry Apurva Chandra called e-Shram portal a major turning point and game changer in the history of the country. He said, over 38 crore unorganised workers in India will be registered on the e-SHRAM portal which is totally free of cost. Workers can get themselves registered at their nearest Common Service Centre (CSC) or by themselves through a smartphone. The Secretary further said that after a worker has registered he/she is issued an e-Shram card with unique Universal Account Number (UAN). Through this UAN, the worker will be able to access the benefits of the various social security schemes anywhere anytime. Along with the Union Labour Minister and Minister of State for Labour department, Labour Ministers of States/UTs, Chief Secretaries, Additional Chief Secretaries, Principal Secretaries (Labour), Labour Commissioners of all States/UTs joined the launching virtually. The event was also joined by all the field offices of the Labour Ministry and Labour Departments of State Governments along with Regional Offices of EPFO and ESIC and by over fourlakh Common Service Centres (CSCs). The Ministry has already provided the demonstration of the portal during its first and second pre-launch. Moreover, guidelines for operationalisation of portal and mobilisation of workers have been issued as well.

From <https://egov.eletsonline.com/> 08/31/2021

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SRI LANKA: Airport and Aviation Services Ramps Up Digital Transformation with IFS

IFS, the global enterprise applications company, announces that Airport and Aviation Services (Sri Lanka) has successfully implemented IFS Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) solutions to boost efficiency and transparency across its operations. The business is currently on a journey towards a digital-first infrastructure that embraces modern technology and maximizes productivity. Becoming globally connected and environmentally sustainable is also a key part of the company's vision. The new IFS implementation at AASL connects the company's two main airports—Bandaranayake International Airport (BIA) and Mattala Rajapaksa International Airport (MRIA), along with other domestic airports. The completion of the first phase ensures seamless operations between airports across the country. Multiple locations now work in synchronization, with back-end operational teams working in collaboration. This in turn enables management personnel to monitor the system centrally. Major General (Rtd) G. A. Chandrasiri, Chairman, Airport and Aviation Services Sri Lanka, said, "We are one step closer to achieving a fully digitalized infrastructure for our operational divisions. Being in one of the primary revenue-generating organizations for our country's economy, I'm excited to embark on this journey with IFS. With modernized business applications, we have a bird's eye view of the operations of all locations with a click of a button. With its transparency and real-time data, we are now equipped to take up our next journey to reinforce economic growth" Shiraz Lye, IFS South Asia Managing Director & VP Sales, added, "It's a great moment of Service for IFS, in our journey to digitally transform government entities. This is a collective effort of individuals coming together to support and contribute to the national economy given the uncertain COVID 19 pandemic situation. With the completion of the first phase, we aimed to deliver an outcomes-based solution to support AASL to ensure business continuity while adapting to the current changes in the economy." Learn more about how our ERP solution supports businesses across the globe.

From <https://www.lankabusinessonline.com/> 08/04/2021

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STEMUP Educational Foundation Unveils Fully-automated Volunteer Management System

STEMUP Educational Foundation, the non-profit organization with a focus on furthering Scientific, Technological, Engineering, and Mathematical (STEM) knowledge among Sri Lankan students, has launched a fully-automated Volunteer Management System (VMS). The foundation has over 1,600 volunteers from professional organisations and universities who help to spread the message of STEM education among the target audience of schoolchildren aged 11-13 years, 14-18 years as well as university students. The VMS, accessed via volunteers.stemup.lk, allows volunteers to register online by entering their basic

background information after which they are allowed to choose their Technical Skills that include ICT based skills such as Programming, Web Development, IoT, Artificial Intelligence, Machine Learning, Cloud Computing and UI/UX as well as non-ICT skills such as HR Management, Entrepreneurship, Security, Finance & Accounting, Management, Teaching and Mentoring. Volunteers can choose to communicate in any of the 3 languages and select any STEMUP program from the Foundation's expanding list that includes Micro:bit SLUG, CoderDojo Sri Lanka, Machine Learning for Kids, Electronics for Kids, Hour of Code, GameDev Kids, STEM Ambassadors and CareerLink Mentor. Each VMS-registered volunteer is provided a public profile that can be shared via a URL as well as a private profile for internal purposes. Based on the volunteer's number of contributions, over time they will be assigned a series of Badges that range from Bronze, Silver and Gold which can be added to their public profile. The VMS Admin verifies and approves all volunteer registrations and assigns projects to volunteers based on a number of criteria. The VMS' user-friendly layout and enhanced visibility on all available volunteer opportunities makes the volunteer's life easier.

The VMS also has a Careers Link where volunteers can easily find job opportunities and internships at some of Sri Lanka's leading organisations and thereby take their careers to the next level. The Careers Link allows any organisation to register to gain access to the STEMUP volunteer team in order to publicize their job vacancies and internship opportunities. As a result of their volunteering experience, STEMUP volunteers are known to be well-rounded individuals with characteristics that include a positive attitude, professionalism, dependability, innovative ideas, problem-solving abilities, teamworking and willingness to learn. Through the VMS, volunteers will also have the chance to join a Mentorship Programme where they can mentor others in areas such as building a start-up or finding a suitable job. Prabhath Mannapperuma – Director of STEMUP Educational Foundation stated, "We are proud to launch the STEMUP Volunteer Management System. It was co-developed in partnership with Impact IT Solutions. This system will allow volunteers to easily register, pick projects to volunteer for based on their area of expertise and availability, track their progress and be rewarded with Badges that will portray their position in the STEMUP volunteer team. Additionally, with the Career Link they will be able to further their careers by applying for vacancies at Sri Lanka's leading organisations. Meanwhile, organisations can access some of the most employable individuals in the country by registering and posting their employment opportunities on the VMS." The STEMUP Educational Foundation is a non-profit organization whose mission is to inspire and engage students to become interested in pursuing Scientific, Technological, Engineering, and Mathematical (STEM) degrees and careers. The organization's mission is fulfilled through the programs and resources they offer to the South Asian community. The Foundation has educational opportunities and resources for all. Most of its resources are also offered free-of-charge as a part of the vision of becoming a national model for passionate support for STEM education.

From <https://www.lankabusinessonline.com/> 08/19/2021

Central-West Asia

AFGHANISTAN: UN Humanitarians Continue to Deliver Relief

UN humanitarian workers and their partners continue to deliver relief to more than 17,500 displaced people in Kabul despite challenges from the Afghanistan crisis, a UN spokesman said on Monday. "In the past month, 17,500 people have been identified as newly internally displaced," said Stephane Dujarric, the chief spokesman for UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres. "Most of the displaced people arriving in recent days are reported to have arrived from Ghazni and Logar provinces." Some 13,500 of the internally displaced persons (IDPs) received food, cash, health care, household items, and water and sanitation support, Dujarric said. Inter-agency teams were deployed around Kabul to assess humanitarian needs. "Despite immense challenges, humanitarian organizations -- both the UN and nongovernmental organizations -- in Afghanistan are committed to delivering aid and services to millions of people in need while adhering to the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence," he said. The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs said in its latest Flash Update on Afghanistan that assessment teams had to shut down their operations Sunday afternoon "due to uncertainty of the situation in Kabul." People's immediate needs continue to be shelter, household items, food, sanitation, hygiene kits, provision of health services and drinking water, said the office. The spokesman noted the secretary-general's report on Children and Armed Conflict in Afghanistan released last week, saying an additional 5,770 boys and girls were killed and maimed in the country between January 2019 and December 2020. Child casualties for the first half of 2021 constituted the highest numbers of children killed and maimed for this period ever recorded by the United Nations in Afghanistan, a situation compounded in the last few weeks and days, Dujarric said. He said the \$1.3-billion humanitarian response plan for Afghanistan remains just 38 percent funded, leaving a shortfall of almost \$800 million.

From <https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/> 08/17/2021

AZERBAIJAN: "Procedure for Managing Information Security in Banks" Included in State Register of Legal Acts

Azerbaijan has developed the "Procedure for managing information security in banks" as a result of the measures being taken in the field of ensuring information security, Trend reports on Aug. 3 with reference to the reporting data of the Central Bank of Azerbaijan (CBA). The document establishing the minimum requirements for information security in the country's banks, taking into account the requirements of ISO / IEC 2700X standards of the International Organization for Standardization,

was approved upon the decision of the Board of the CBA and included into the Azerbaijan State Register of Legal Acts. The creation of the information technology infrastructure that meets the modern requirements in Azerbaijan in accordance with the international trends and the expansion of the offered digital services in the financial and banking sector make it important to ensure the information security during its exchange, protect the information resources from the possible threats, increase the level of general training in cybersecurity.

Taking into account that the application of the new rules in the field of information security will take time to create an appropriate information technology infrastructure in the banks and develop the policy and procedures for organizing the business processes in the field of information security, this document will enter into force on April 1, 2022. From this date, a decision was made to cancel the current resolution of the Board of the CBA "Rules on the security of information systems in banks" dated December 10, 2014. The new rules contain mechanisms for security of human resources, asset management, access control, cryptography, security of information exchange, ensuring security in the acquisition, use and maintenance of information systems, protection of information security in service relations with external suppliers, as well as the requirements for managing the information security incidents. The CBA constantly focuses on the activity of ensuring the information security in the banking sector of the country, in particular, timely revealing, reducing and preventing the possible cyber attacks.

From <https://en.trend.az/> 08/03/2021

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Another Insurance Company in Azerbaijan Entitled to Work Within 'Green Card' System

Azerbaijani A-Group insurance company has been included in the register of insurers entitled to carry out activity within the 'Green Card' system, Trend reports on Aug. 4 with reference to the Compulsory Insurance Bureau of Azerbaijan. Thus, 14 insurance companies in Azerbaijan have the right to operate within the Green Card system. Such insurance companies as Ata Sigorta, Ateshgah Sigorta, Azerbaijan Industrial Insurance Company, AzSigorta, State Insurance Commerce Company of Azerbaijan, Baku Sigorta, Gunay Sigorta Silk Way Insurance, Meqa Sigorta, Nakhchivan Sigorta, Pasha Sigorta, Qala Sigorta and Xalq Sigorta have been the insurers-members of the Compulsory Insurance Bureau within the Green Card system until now. The Green Card international vehicle liability insurance system has been operating since 1951. Its main goal is to settle claims of victims of road accidents committed with the participation of foreign motorists, in accordance with the national legislation of the country where the accident occurred. According to the agreement "On the green card", an insurance policy for motor third party liability issued in any country participating in the agreement is valid in the territory of another country that is a member of this agreement. The national bureaus of the Green Card

are part of a single organization - the Council of Insurance Bureau headquartered in Brussels, which operates under the auspices of the Working Group on Road Transport of the Inland Transport Committee of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe.

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

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Azerbaijan Switches to New-Generation Communication Technology

Azerbaijan's Aztelecom LLC under the Ministry of Transport, Communications and High Technologies has updated stations of the Alcatel 1000 S-12 type and switched to the IP multimedia subsystem (new-generation communication) technology meeting modern standards to ensure high-quality international and long-distance phone communications, Trend reports referring to the ministry. According to the ministry, work on the transition to the new stations began back in 2019. "Over the years, new stations have been successfully installed and tested in Baku and the Yevlakh district, after which they were commissioned," the ministry further said. "The transition to IMS technology will allow LLC subscribers to use better quality telephone services." Besides, the ministry noted that the ICT sector is one of the fastest-growing in Azerbaijan. "To ensure stable, safe, and high-quality access of citizens to the information and telecommunication network in districts, townships, and villages of Azerbaijan, work continues on creating new infrastructure, introducing modern technologies, and providing new equipment," added the ministry.

From <https://en.trend.az/> 08/23/2021

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Azerbaijan to Hold New Auction for State Property Facilities

The State Committee on Property Issues under the Azerbaijani Ministry of Economy will hold a new auction for state property facilities on September 21, 2021, Trend reports referring to the committee. According to the committee, 49 state property facilities, including 17 small state enterprises and non-residential premises, as well as 32 vehicles will be put up for the auction. The committee said that interested participants can observe the auction 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).

From <https://en.trend.az/> 08/24/2021

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Azerbaijan Reveals Total Volume of Investments in Local

Agricultural Parks

Current private investments in agricultural parks of Azerbaijan make up 1.2 billion manat, Trend reports citing the Ministry of Economy. The Entrepreneurship Development Fund of Azerbaijan issued concessional loans worth 173 million manat (\$86.4 million) for the creation of 23 agricultural parks, and investment incentive documents worth up to 1 billion manat (\$588 million) were issued to 27 agricultural parks, the ministry said. "Along with this, 25 agricultural parks that received an investment promotion document were issued many confirming documents for the import of machinery, technological equipment and installations, and according to these documents, agricultural parks received benefits in the amount of 32.8 million manat (\$19.3 million)," said the report of the ministry. The report also reads that modern irrigation systems are widely used to increase yields in agricultural parks. In 43 operating agricultural parks, out of 80,000 hectares of irrigated land, about 40,000 hectares are irrigated using a rotary irrigation system, 7,000 hectares - a drip system, 2,000 hectares - a sprinkler irrigation system, and 31,000 - using traditional methods, the report said. "Agricultural parks also play an important role in increasing employment.

Currently, a total of about 4,750 people work in agricultural parks, and more than 4,800 are provided with seasonal work. In the future, it is planned to create an additional 4,500 jobs," the ministry said. "Work continues on the creation of agricultural parks in Azerbaijan and 51 agricultural parks and large farms are being created in 32 districts of the country on 240,000 hectares. Of these, 35 specialize in crop production, 14 in crop and livestock production, one in livestock, and one more in sorting, packaging, processing, and logistics. The activities of 43 agricultural parks have already started, while design work is underway in others," the ministry emphasized. Over the past year, the country's agricultural parks produced 124,300 tons of wheat, 64,600 tons of barley, 121,600 tons of corn, 90,400 tons of sugar beet, 45,500 tons of corn for silage. 18,500 tons of raw cotton, 5,900 tons of soybeans, 32,300 tons of clover, 27,400 tons of milk, and 3,300 tons of meat. During 2017-2020, orchards with a total area of more than 7.5 thousand hectares were laid in agricultural parks, from which 12,000 tons of apples, 393.5 tons of olives, 183 tons of almonds, 200.7 tons of pomegranate, and 165.7 tons of grapes were harvested last year.

From <https://en.trend.az/> 08/25/2021

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UZBEKISTAN: Sharing Data on Number of Vaccinated Citizens

More than 1.5 million Uzbeks completed the full course of vaccination against COVID-19, Trend reports citing Telegram channel of Uzbekistan's Ministry of Health. On August 25, 206,696 people were vaccinated against the coronavirus. Of these, 76,549 people received the first dose of the vaccine, 93,171 - the second, and

36,976 - the third. To date, the total number of doses of coronavirus vaccine used is 13,166,524. Among the regions, citizens from the Samarkand region received the most vaccine - 24,478 doses. Andijan (24,207) and Fergana (20,987 doses) regions follow next. Of the total number of vaccinated people, most of them are in Fergana (1,556,376 doses), Namangan (1,550,067), and Andijan (1,401,962) regions. The vaccination process continues.

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Oceania

AUSTRALIA: Government Extends Support as COVID Bites

The federal government will focus on measures to limit damage to the economy as the Delta variant of COVID-19 continues to wreak havoc in NSW and Queensland. Treasurer Josh Frydenberg will on Tuesday introduce to federal parliament a draft law to make changes to worker and business support. Labor will support the bill if it is consistent with what the government has previously said it would do. It is understood the bill will allow the roll out of national business support payments for those impacted by significant lockdowns and make the payments tax-free. As well, the draft laws will allow the tax-free treatment of COVID-19 disaster payments for workers over the 2020/21 tax year. Parliament is sitting under tight health restrictions, with the public banned from Parliament House and many MPs and senators video-linking to debates from their home states.

It is expected around 85 MPs will be present in the House of Representatives and 45 to 50 senators in the upper house. While the focus of the debate will be on the government's pandemic response, health authorities' concerns are growing about the impact on children - especially those with underlying medical conditions. Approval has now been given for children as young as 12 who have impaired immune systems or come from other vulnerable groups to get priority access to Pfizer vaccines. Health Minister Greg Hunt said this meant about 220,000 children would be able to get a Pfizer vaccine. A broader step to approve the vaccination of all children aged 12 to 15 for COVID-19 could be given within weeks. Labor health spokesman Mark Butler said the Delta variant was posing new challenges in terms of children and young adults. Vaccine task force commander Lieutenant General John Frewen has indicated the government could change its approach to focus on vaccinating "key transmissibility younger groups", including people aged under 40.

It comes following evidence that young adults are more likely to contract COVID-19 and transmit it. "They are often more mobile and likely to engage in activities such as visiting multiple venues at night and more likely to work in casualised and frontline jobs," Royal Australian College of General Practitioners president Dr Karen Price said. "So even though their chances of suffering severe effects or dying from

COVID-19 may be less than older people, it makes sense to get them vaccinated." Prime Minister Scott Morrison will emerge from The Lodge after two weeks of restrictions to attend parliament and deliver a simple message. "Get vaccinated, full stop," he told 5AA radio. So far 12.4 million people have received at least one dose of a vaccine, with 19.2 per cent of the over-16 population fully vaccinated. Locked-down Sydney detected another 207 new local cases on Monday. Queensland extended its lockdown until at least Sunday after recording 13 new local infections, taking a Delta variant cluster to 31.

From <https://au.news.yahoo.com> 08/03/2021

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Demand for Workers Impacted by Lockdowns

Demand for workers is coming off the boil as businesses give up looking for staff at a time of virus lockdowns. The National Skills Commission said job advertisements posted on the internet fell by a further three per cent in July, a second consecutive monthly decline after striking a 12-year high in May. The commission's preliminary figures for July released on Monday showed job ads were still 38.3 per cent higher than their pre-COVID-19 levels. The impact of virus lockdowns was particularly felt in NSW, which saw the largest decline among states and territories, slumping by 10.3 per cent in the month. This was twice the rate of decline in the Northern Territory, which was down 5.2 per cent. All other states and territories recorded steady or declining recruitment activity over the month, apart from Victoria which saw a 3.9 per cent increase. However, Victoria is currently back in lockdown, which is due to be lifted on Thursday. Reserve Bank of Australia governor Philip Lowe expects the impact of a series of lockdowns, which at times have affected more than half of the population, will result in the economy contracting in September. This is expected to see an increase in the unemployment rate. The central bank's latest economic forecasts released on Friday showed the jobless rate rising to five per cent by the end of the year, compared to its current level of 4.9 per cent, a decade low. However, it expects the unemployment rate's downtrend to resume next year as the economy recovers, falling to 4.25 per cent by December and four per cent the year after.

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Call for Crackdown Before New Solar Rules

The Clean Energy Council has called for a regulatory crackdown on Australia's poles and wires companies before the introduction of new rules for solar households. Wide-ranging restrictions mean network companies can no longer prevent solar households feeding energy to the grid. The Australian Energy Markets Commission has promised its "tough new obligations" will mean network companies are held accountable for making the grid solar and battery friendly. Australia has the fastest rate of solar take-up in the world and almost one in four Australian homes have

rooftop solar installed. But the Clean Energy Council's Darren Gladman has told AAP poles and wires firms should be held to account before the rules come into play. Mr Gladman says the policing of crucial network settings such as voltage varies between states and territories, with some states "asleep at the wheel".

"It's a dog's breakfast, it's a patchwork quilt of different regulations across the country," he said. Voltage settings on the local electrical network are important for households with rooftop solar because if the voltage is too high, their solar systems can't feed extra energy into the grid. Mr Gladman fears the new rules could see customers paying for voltage problems that are decades old to be fixed up. "It's hard to see how the regulator will decide on how much to blame solar for voltage issues and how much blame the networks." But Tamatha Smith from poles and wires peak body Energy Networks Australia said networks are already well regulated via the east coast's National Electricity Market. "Voltage standards are typically overseen by state-based regulators, reflecting the unique networks in each state, and state government priorities," she told AAP in a statement.

She said the recent rule changes will help networks accommodate new technologies in a way that minimises impact on other customers. "Networks give the highest priority to operating their systems to deliver safe, reliable and secure outcomes for all Australians," she said. The new regime for rooftop solar will come with different pricing plans to encourage solar households to export at times when demand is high - a scheme some advocates have labelled a "sun tax". The changes are part of a rule set issued by the AEMC that seeks to deal with the large amounts of solar energy flowing into the system and pave the way for household batteries and electric vehicles.

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Call for Climate Fund to Pay Big Emitters

If Australia acts now to help big industries cut emissions, the goal of net zero emissions by 2050 has a better chance of being achieved, a report has found. The independent think tank Grattan Institute in a report released on Monday has called for a taxpayer-funded Industrial Transformation Future Fund to support practical ways to reduce emissions. The industrial sector is responsible for 30 per cent of Australia's emissions, with 80 per cent from just 194 large facilities. Instant asset write-offs to replace older industrial equipment with newer, lower-emissions plant and machinery are also recommended to help achieve large-scale industrial transformation. State governments are urged to expand energy savings schemes at thousands of smaller industrial sites, building on the success of residential and commercial schemes. Net zero by 2050 is Prime Minister Scott Morrison's preferred policy and the Grattan report says curbing emissions from the biggest emitters will increase the likelihood of success.

"The climate clock is ticking," Grattan director Tony Wood said. "Just about every capital investment decision the industrial sector makes from now on will have repercussions for emissions in coming decades." He said governments need to send the right signals now, so these decisions don't lock in emissions. Policies to ensure access to finance for investments in low- and zero-emissions industry could include a public-private investment fund, the report suggests. State governments - some already developing renewable energy zones to support industrial parks and homes - could support "catalyst organisations" to help identify and solve infrastructure and energy supply bottlenecks. The existing federal safeguard mechanism sets baselines for big industrial emitters, which the institute says should be beefed up. "Do not exempt any facilities," the report said. Existing facilities should be encouraged to reduce their emissions using technologies that are available now.

New and replacement facilities should meet emissions benchmarks substantially better than existing ones. "Net zero by 2050 is a tough target," Mr Wood said. "It requires an unprecedented pace of asset replacement and renewal, starting now." November's international climate conference in Glasgow will bring together many countries seeking to agree to more ambitious emissions reduction targets. Australia is banking on a technology program to reach its global commitments. Making progress by using the options Australian industries already have buys valuable time, and is an insurance policy against delays in commercialisation of new technologies, the report said.

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NEW ZEALAND: Government Commits Further Assistance for Drought and Flood-Affected Rural Communities

Farmers and growers affected by this year's drought or floods in Marlborough, Tasman, West Coast, Canterbury, Otago and the Chatham Islands will have access to Rural Assistance Payments (RAPs) from today, Social Development and Employment Minister Carmel Sepuloni has announced. "The Government is committed to easing the financial pressures on farmers and growers and help secure their recovery given the recent droughts and floods that have affected their incomes," Carmel Sepuloni said. "The Rural Support Trusts in all these areas have been doing great work in the region, and the Ministry of Social Development will be working closely with them to get support to those who need it. "Government has also activated Enhanced Taskforce Green, Temporary Accommodation Service and invested over \$6 million to help rural communities recover from recent adverse events." Carmel Sepuloni said.

"We know droughts and floods take a long time to recover from. We encourage farmers and growers to make contact with their Rural Support Trust to see what

support may be available for them to access. The work of the Trusts is considerable and hugely appreciated,” Agriculture Minister Damien O’Connor said. The drought in Marlborough, Canterbury, Otago and the Chatham Islands was classified as a large-scale adverse event by the Minister of Agriculture on March 12 2021. The flooding in Canterbury was classified as a medium-scale adverse event on 1 June 2021; while the flooding in the West Coast, Marlborough and Nelson was classified as a medium-scale adverse event on 18 July 2021. The Ministry of Social Development works with the Ministry for Primary Industries, the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA), regional councils, the Rural Support Trust and other agencies to monitor conditions and review the support needed.

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Protecting Unique Land for Generation Next

The Government is boosting legal protection for critically important natural habitats on private land, Minister of Conservation Kiri Allan says. “An \$8 million investment over four years will see Queen Elizabeth II National Trust Ngā Kairauhi Papa (QEII) work with government agencies, councils and others to provide legal protection of Jobs for Nature-funded projects through Open Space Covenants. “That will ensure the biodiversity gains from the Crown’s investment in Jobs for Nature are protected and sustained on private land and allows QEII to legally protect hundreds of hectares of private land with high biodiversity value,” Kiri Allan said. “Jobs for Nature is about protecting and enhancing our biodiversity as we recover from the impact of Covid-19 – this funding gives greater certainty that the effort being put into these projects is not wasted and the special biodiversity will remain for future generations to enjoy and appreciate.

“An example of this is the Hawkes Bay Regional Council’s Harare Takatū Jobs for Nature project where four kilometres of fencing has been erected to keep feral deer and other animals from feeding on native plants in a 90-hectare wetland, which will now be protected in perpetuity by a QEII Open Space Covenant.” An Open Space Covenant is an agreement between QEII and a landowner to protect an area forever. The landowner continues to own and manage the protected land, and the covenant and protection stays on the land, even when the property is sold to a new owner. QEII drafts the legal documents, pays for survey costs and shares the cost of fencing with the landowner, often alongside a contribution from another agency like the regional council. “A new form of legal protection, at this stage called a restoration agreement, will also be developed for Jobs for Nature projects that do not have strong enough existing biodiversity values to meet the Open Space Covenant criteria. Such an agreement may be more suitable for native revegetation or wetland restoration projects. “QEII will work in partnership with local councils, government agencies and other groups to identify areas suitable for protection under either an Open Space Covenant or a restoration agreement,” Kiri Allan said.

Health Indicators Will Track Better Care for All NZers

The Government's reform of the health system took a big step forward today with the unveiling of the system that will be used to hold it accountable and ensure it delivers more equitable healthcare for all New Zealanders. Health Minister Andrew Little has already announced the 20 district health boards will be disestablished and replaced with a new national system with a greater focus on primary healthcare, bring an end to the postcode lottery system of health services, and cutting bureaucracy so healthcare workers can focus on patients. Today, Andrew Little launched the Health System Indicators framework that complement the reforms. "The indicators are a new way of thinking. They are not about incentivising with funding or pointing the finger if targets are not met – they are neither a carrot nor a stick," Andrew Little said. "They are a measure of how well our health system is functioning across the country, and an opportunity to then create local solutions to address local health needs. "This framework will help the sector focus on the areas that most need to improve – especially for Māori and Pacific peoples.

"The indicators are based on the Government's six priorities for health – improving child wellbeing, improving mental wellbeing, improving wellbeing through preventative measures, creating a strong and equitable public health system, better primary healthcare and a financially sustainable health system. "Twelve indicators have been developed and progress in meeting them will be publicly reported on every three months. "When the indicators show there is a problem, health services will work with local communities to come up with effective ways to fix it." The indicators replace the outdated and ineffective National Health Targets regime. "The targets have been in place since 2007 and there's plenty of evidence – from New Zealand and other countries – that they don't work," Andrew Little said. "They are arbitrary and don't reflect the real priorities of the health system. "Even worse, they led to what can only be described as perverse outcomes, with district health boards seeking to meet, such as doing lots of small procedures instead fewer major ones so they could claim more people were being treated."

Govt Will Be Equal to Latest Climate Science

A collective effort involving every sector of the economy, every community, and almost every government agency and their Minister will be needed to avert a climate crisis, the Minister for Climate Change, James Shaw said today in response to the release of the latest scientific evidence on global climate change, its impacts and future risks. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) is the world's

leading authority on climate science. Its latest report released today has been authored by thousands of scientists and reviewers from more than 100 countries, including Aotearoa New Zealand. The findings provide the starkest warning yet of the risk facing our children, our planet, and future generations, unless urgent action is taken. "Right now, Ministers and agencies are discussing what action they will take to bring down emissions in their sector, which will form the basis of our forthcoming Emission Reduction Plan. We must use this chance to review progress and make sure the actions we are committing to will cut emissions in line with what the latest science requires. Anything less will not be enough. "The findings of the IPCC reaffirm those of the Climate Change Commission and confirm why this Government is right to prioritise climate action," James Shaw said. Since its establishment in 1988, the IPCC has released five Assessment Reports, each of which updates the established science on climate change. Today's report is the IPCC's Sixth Assessment report.

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Government Releases Expert Advice on Reconnecting New Zealanders

Group recommends phased re-opening of border More infectious Delta variant requires high vaccine uptake before border can be safely opened Suggests risk based factors be taken into account at border such as vaccination status and Covid-19 prevalence in countries visited Group confirms the viability of maintaining elimination strategy The Government has released the expert advice of the Strategic Covid-19 Public Health Advisory Group led by Professor Sir David Skegg on how to approach the reopening of New Zealand's borders. The advice, commissioned by Associate Minister of Health Dr Ayesha Verrall, suggests a phased re-opening of New Zealand's border once the vaccination programme is fully rolled out, and sets out the preparatory work needed now.

"The emergence of the Delta variant has altered both the advice provided and our approach to reconnecting with the world," Ayesha Verrall said. "We need to do more to further strengthen our borders and bolster our health defences, including through the vaccine rollout, before we can safely open the border further, and that will take a little more time to properly prepare. "Achieving high rates of vaccination is critical to provide protection for individuals from being infected and becoming seriously ill. It will support a safe re-opening of New Zealand's borders by protecting whānau and the wider community, by making it less likely that the virus will spread," Ayesha Verrall said. "The Group recommends a phased approach to slowly admitting more travellers to New Zealand, without needing to go into MIQ, based on risk based factors such as their vaccination status and the state of the pandemic in their country of origin," Covid-19 Response Minister Chris Hipkins said.

"The Group proposes these travellers would still be subject to a number of

requirements, such as proof of vaccination, pre-departure testing and rapid testing on arrival in New Zealand. “The Group recommends preparatory work begins now, including seeking advice on rapid testing at airports, along with a strengthening of public health and social measures, such as expanding health system capability and contact tracing capacity, and mandating QR scanning at some types of venues – of which work is already underway by the Government,” Chris Hipkins said. The advice also confirms the viability of maintaining our Elimination Strategy as international travel resumes. “The Elimination Strategy, defined as a zero tolerance to new cases, has served us incredibly well in keeping cases of Covid-19 out of the community and stamping out cases when they do arise,” Ayesha Verrall said. “The advice confirms that maintaining the Elimination Strategy does not mean our border settings must remain as they are.

“Provided that a high level of vaccination coverage is achieved, reliance on population-wide measures such as lockdowns can be reduced and the Elimination Strategy maintained through more targeted public health measures, such as testing and contact tracing. “According to the advice, continuing with our Elimination Strategy is not only viable, but optimal, as we re-open borders, and will be key to protecting New Zealanders and maintaining our future options,” Ayesha Verrall said. The Group, chaired by Sir David Skegg, is made up of experts in epidemiology, infectious diseases and public health, and has provided independent advice on our ongoing COVID-19 response.

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Childcare Available Again for Workers in Alert Level 4 Businesses and Services

The Government is restarting childcare for workers in Alert Level 4 businesses and services, which was available during last year’s national lockdown, Education Minister Chris Hipkins said today. Workers who have children aged up to 13-years-old can access free care, so they are able to continue to provide the essential services we need during the current lockdown. “Providing a free and flexible service to our essential workers is really important and one way to reduce their stress as they go about their vital work on behalf of us all,” Chris Hipkins said. “We still don’t know for how long we’ll be in Level 4. We’ll know more tomorrow, but essential workers need to be able to plan and putting this service in place from tomorrow will give them some valuable peace of mind.” The scheme is for the workers in Alert Level 4 businesses and services, and other exempted services such as fire and emergency and border workers. It is also only for those Level 4 workers who do not have childcare in place – parents are expected to use their own private arrangements where possible. A list of 32 providers, with national coverage, will from today, be available for parents to contact. “These providers may offer options for childcare under the scheme either in the child’s home, or in the carer’s home.

We're aiming to provide as much flexibility as possible for those workers who need it. "Just like last lockdown, these are all licensed services that usually provide home-based early childhood education – so all the safety checks have been done. And, just like last time, each carer will be limited to caring for children from a total of one family only."

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Government Agrees to Boost Support for Buller Flood Recovery

The Government has agreed an \$8 million financial assistance package to help the Buller district to recover from last month's severe flooding. Acting Minister for Emergency Management, Kris Faafoi, said the package would provide financial security for the Buller District Council and enable it to continue with recovery operations while maintaining its "business as usual" services. "This flooding event has profoundly affected many people and their families. People have lost their possessions, their homes are damaged, their livelihoods have been impacted, and their lives have been turned upside down," Kris Faafoi said. "This assistance will help support the recovery for those impacted communities throughout the Buller District," he said. Multiple government agencies have been working with Buller District Council to deliver services such as temporary accommodation, financial assistance, and mental health support.

July's severe flooding event has seen nearly half the residents of Westport seeking council assistance. 463 houses in the district were flooded, and more than 200 houses remain uninhabitable and people still require alternative accommodation. Minister for Local Government, Nanaia Mahuta, said Buller District Council faced a number of challenges that warranted additional Government support. "Having a small rating base, the Council cannot absorb the costs of the floods easily. "The Council has worked incredibly hard to support its community through the flood response and clean-up, and we are committed to ensuring they can continue to support their community through what will be a long and challenging recovery," Minister Mahuta said. "I know this additional support will be greatly appreciated in the Buller district, where people are still very much bearing the brunt of this massive event," West Coast Tasman MP Damien O'Connor said. The \$8 million financial assistance package will fund: immediate costs associated with recovery support for a community hub and navigation services so those affected can be supported to access services assistance to support the Buller District Council and funding to purchase skilled advisory services to advise Ministers on the financial situation of the Buller District Council and other assurance that may be required.

From <https://livenews.co.nz> 08/24/2021

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Proposed Intensive Winter Grazing Regulations Updates Are

More Practical for Farmers

Proposed changes to intensive winter grazing regulations are being consulted on that will make them practical for farmers to comply with while ensuring improved environmental outcomes, Environment Minister David Parker and Agriculture Minister Damien O'Connor announced today. Intensive winter grazing is a farming practice where livestock, such as cattle and sheep, are grazed on paddocks planted with fodder crops. When done poorly it can have serious negative effects on water quality and animal welfare. "The Government has been working with industry representatives and regional councils this winter to roll out on-the-ground support to drive better practices to benefit freshwater quality and animal welfare," Damien O'Connor said. "It's important that what we develop is workable. That's why we're proposing amendments to manage the effects of pugging, get paddocks re-sown as soon as possible, and protect critical source areas."

Under the proposed changes, farmers would be required to re-sow grazed paddocks as soon as conditions allow, instead of by a set date. Specific requirements around the depth of pugging will also be removed. "We've been listening to farmers and earlier this year changed our proposed approach to low slope maps and I encourage farmers to have their say on practical ways to improve intensive winter grazing," Damien O'Connor said. "Under the proposal, farmers wanting to undertake intensive winter grazing on slopes over 10 degrees can do so with a certified freshwater farm plan that includes controls to prevent soil loss and mitigate the risks associated with a higher slope," David Parker said. "Scientific evidence shows that with intensive winter grazing at 15 degrees, twice as much soil will be lost than if planted at 10 degrees. If mitigation can prevent soil loss that can be reflected in farm plans," David Parker said.

The Government has today released the intensive winter grazing consultation documents and is seeking feedback from farmers and regional councils. "We recognise it's a busy time of the year on-farm and that the country is dealing with the Delta outbreak. But, overlapping with existing consultation being undertaken for certified freshwater farm plans and stock exclusion, low slope maps will make it easier for farmers to have input," Damien O'Connor said. "To help provide farmers with certainty, the introduction of intensive winter grazing practice regulations is proposed to be deferred for a further six months until 1 November 2022," Damien O'Connor said. The Government is working alongside sector groups including farmers and eNGOs, to develop the integrated farm planning approach, with the aim of providing farmers and growers with a practical tool to meet requirements. "This set of proposed regulations has come about from working steadily with industry leaders and councils on how we achieve the right result in a practical way," Damien O'Connor said. Improving freshwater health and management is part of the Government's Essential Freshwater package.

From <https://livenews.co.nz> 08/26/2021

Govt Delivers Early Funding for Youth Mental Health

Due to the current Delta outbreak the Government has brought forward a \$1 million fund aimed at community-led projects to support youth mental health in Auckland and Northland, Health Minister Andrew Little announced today. “We have learned from previous lockdowns that they are particularly challenging for young people and that the greatest need for support for young people in Aoteroa kicks in around two weeks in,” Andrew Little said. “They can experience higher levels of distress when taken out of normal learning environments and may be in a situations that include transient housing and employment. “This is why we have moved quickly to make funding available for community-led initiatives that focus on supporting mental resilience and wellbeing when youth need it most. Mental health is an important part of the Government’s response to Covid and vital in laying the foundations for a better future for New Zealand.

“The Youth Mental Wellbeing Fund is for grassroots initiatives and we’ll be prioritising initiatives that include a focus on young people in Auckland and Northland. “Investing in these community-led initiatives means support is tailored to the people that need it, that services are easily accessed and they are available as soon as possible. “Applications for the Fund open tomorrow and we expect to release the funding within the coming weeks,” Andrew Little said.

Editors’ Note: The Youth Mental Wellbeing Fund is a \$1 million fund for grassroots initiatives, similar to the existing Māori and Pacific Community Suicide Prevention Funds. Grants will be made of \$50,000 or \$100,000, depending on the initiative. Applications are open from Monday 30 August and will close on Monday 6 September. Application information is available on the Ministry of Health website. This grant will seek proposals from small community-based mental wellbeing providers who can also demonstrate how the proposed services will engage with and address the needs of groups of young people who experience inequities in mental health and well-being, including but not limited to: Rangatahi Māori Pacific Young People; Rainbow Young People; Young People who are Refugees or Migrants; and Other groups within the geographic area known to experience inequities.

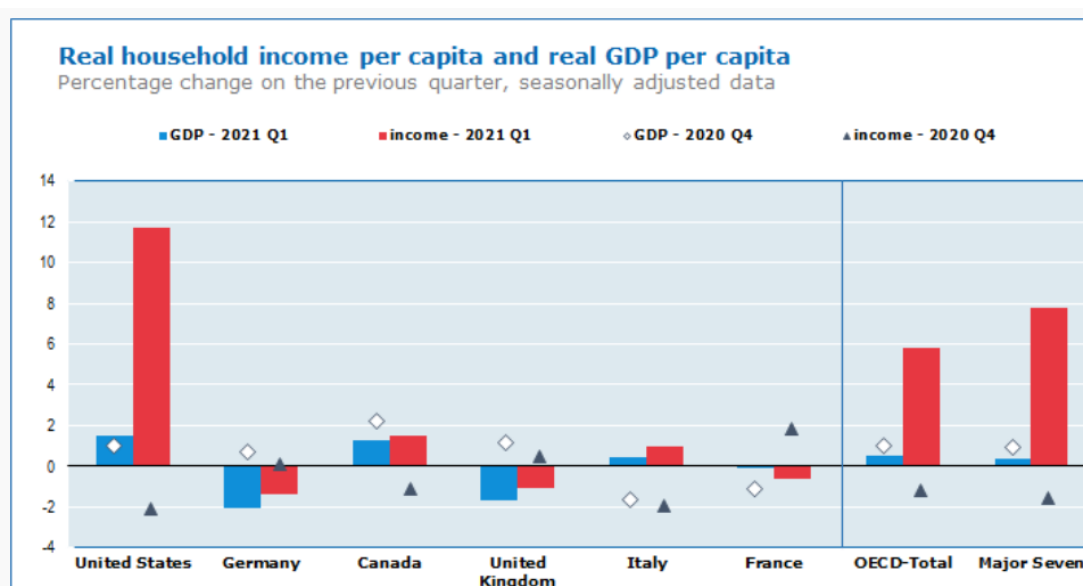
From <https://livenews.co.nz> 08/29/2021

4、 Economic and Social Development and ICT

Asia-Pacific

OECD Household Income Grows Strongly in the First Quarter of 2021, Driven by Significant Fiscal Expansion in the United States

Real household income per capita, which provides a better picture of people's economic well-being than GDP, grew by 5.8% in the OECD area as a whole over the first quarter of 2021. The rise, the largest since 2008, is largely due to the United States' significant increase in real household income, which is a direct result of the government's recent fiscal support, including transfer payments made to households. This exceptional rise in incomes was much higher than the 0.5% increase in GDP per capita recorded in the OECD area during the first quarter of 2021. The result this quarter continues the divergence between GDP per capita and household income per capita since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. From Q4 2019 real household income per capita has increased by 8.2% in the OECD area as a whole, while real GDP per capita has declined by 2.7%.



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Sierra Leone's Economy Is Recovering from COVID-19 Contraction Although Uncertainties Persist

Sierra Leone's economy is projected to recover from the COVID-19 contraction with real GDP expected to rebound by 3.0 percent in 2021, an upward revision of 0.8 percentage point relative to the 2020 forecast, according to the new World Bank Sierra Leone Economic Update launched today in Freetown. The growth rebound reflects the expected recovery of agriculture, mining and services following the easing of COVID-related restrictions and Government's Quick Action Economic Response Program (QAERP). Fiscal deficit almost doubled in 2020 due to a combination of revenue shortfalls and spending increases to support the Government's pandemic response. The deficit is expected to decline gradually to 2.4 percent of GDP by 2023 as COVID-19 related spending is reduced while revenue mobilization improves on the back of the expected economic recovery. To strengthen

fiscal sustainability, the report recommends that the authorities should quickly draw up a roadmap for fiscal consolidation, anchored by robust revenue mobilization and expenditure rationalization reforms, to return to the pre-pandemic (2018/19) fiscal path. The authors also highlight the need for government to prioritize structural reforms for diversifying the economy, and these reforms should focus on creating an enabling environment for the private sector to support long-term economic growth and promote decent and quality jobs, which will in turn support determined domestic revenue mobilization.

“It is a welcoming development that Sierra Leone’s economy is slowly recovering from the devastating impact of the COVID-19 crisis, and we are encouraged by the government’s efforts to deal with the crisis and lessen its impact on people’s livelihoods,” said Abdu Muwonge, World Bank Country Manager for Sierra Leone. “However, improving and sustaining the country’s growth prospects will require further attention to policies that strengthen the quality of service delivery in the social sectors, and we remain committed, together with development partners to supporting efforts that aim at an effective turnaround of the economy.” The 2021 Economic Update devoted a special section to examine the “Welfare and Poverty Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic” in Sierra Leone. The report found that restrictions put in place to contain the spread of the COVID-19, as well as the downturn in the global economy have led to a small increase in poverty, reversing the previous trend of poverty reduction. Urban areas, particularly the capital city, Freetown, have seen the largest increase in poverty.

During the height of the outbreak, the government provided tax relief to businesses by suspending taxes on essential goods and services. The report recommends that policy priorities over the short to medium-term should focus on strengthening the response to the COVID-19 pandemic by rolling out a strong vaccination program and implementing broad-based macroeconomic reforms to support a quick economic recovery. “To improve on the current economic outlook, it is important to focus on implementing a robust vaccination program that targets full vaccination of population ‘at risk’ as well as measures to protect people’s livelihoods in the immediate and medium term,” said Kemoh Mansaray, World Bank Senior Country Economist and a lead author of the report. “Sustaining the economic recovery will involve structural reforms to accelerate inclusive economic growth, as well as resuming fiscal consolidation through robust revenue reforms and expenditure rationalization and a prudent monetary policy to support the recovery and stabilize the exchange rate.”

From <https://www.worldbank.org/> 08/05/2021

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Digitalization Policies and Solutions to Build Back a Transparent, Modern, and Efficient Port of Beirut

Digitalization is one of key foundational stones for the reconstruction and

modernization of the Port of Beirut (PoB) operations, according to a new World Bank note that aims to provide guidance to policymakers on the crucial requirements for building back better this vital facility. The implementation of an efficient and effective PoB digital action plan is contingent on high level political commitment. The note titled “Reforming and Rebuilding Lebanon’s Port Sector: Policies and Solutions for Digitalizing the Port of Beirut” outlines key principles for the design and implementation of digital trade solutions at the PoB. It explains the need for digitalization, outlines the building blocks of the required enabling environment, and presents the chronic obstacles to change and possible solutions to address them. Developed in collaboration with the Agence Française de Développement (AFD), this note deepens the digitalization agenda outlined in the first note on Lebanon’s port sector institutional reform published by the World Bank in January 2021.

The resilience of the Lebanese port sector has proven to be low. The impact of the ongoing economic crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the PoB explosion has traumatized the sector and exposed its weaknesses and inabilities to predict, identify, and respond to external risks. The anticipated slow recovery of the sector is likely to exacerbate the burden on the economy while opportunity costs are high, and competition with other ports in the Eastern Mediterranean region is expected to intensify. The note argues that digitalization of the Port of Beirut will generate positive spillover effects on the Lebanese economy. Its implementation will reinforce anti-corruption practices and increase people’s trust in government organizations. It will also help reduce trade costs and bureaucracy, enabling more small and medium enterprises to participate in international trade. Port digitalization makes movements of hazardous substances more transparent and permits identification of dangerous levels or cases of combined storage. It also improves the efficiency, effectiveness and predictability of logistics services. Finally, digitalization will improve regulatory oversight and decision making via the analysis of big data and the generation of new key performance indicators and business intelligence.

“Rapidly evolving technology is creating the digital ports of the future and Lebanon should not be left out”, said Saroj Kumar Jha, World Bank Mashreq Regional Director. “Through an all stakeholder approach, Lebanon should immediately enact special port institutional framework to reform the port sector and to launch transformation process towards a structured and systematic technological upgrade of the port of Beirut to support Lebanon’s economic recovery.” Arthur Germond, AFD’s head of office in Beirut, supported this opinion: “Lebanese authorities urgently need to modernize port operations. This upgrading is imperative to rekindle the country’s economy; it will only bear fruits after a comprehensive overhaul of the institutional and legal framework of Lebanon’s port system. France, notably through AFD, stand ready to work with Lebanese authorities in this endeavor.”

The Note proposes a digitization action plan comprised of three pillars which ensure that policy considerations go beyond the technological architecture and include

economic framework and human capacity dimensions. The first is the institutional pillar which aims to strengthen the Lebanese digital enabling environment and entails reforms in the legislative and operational framework towards trade facilitation, improved border compliance, and adequate national digital infrastructure. These include the adoption of the new Customs law and the restructuring of the Customs administration into a “one head one body” organization. The second is the digital pillar, which recommends the implementation of three port digital solutions, namely the “maritime single window”, “port community system” and “national single window” digital solutions, which enable intelligent and secure information exchange between public and private stakeholders. Finally, the human capital pillar ensures that the required capacity is in place both from the public and the private sector.

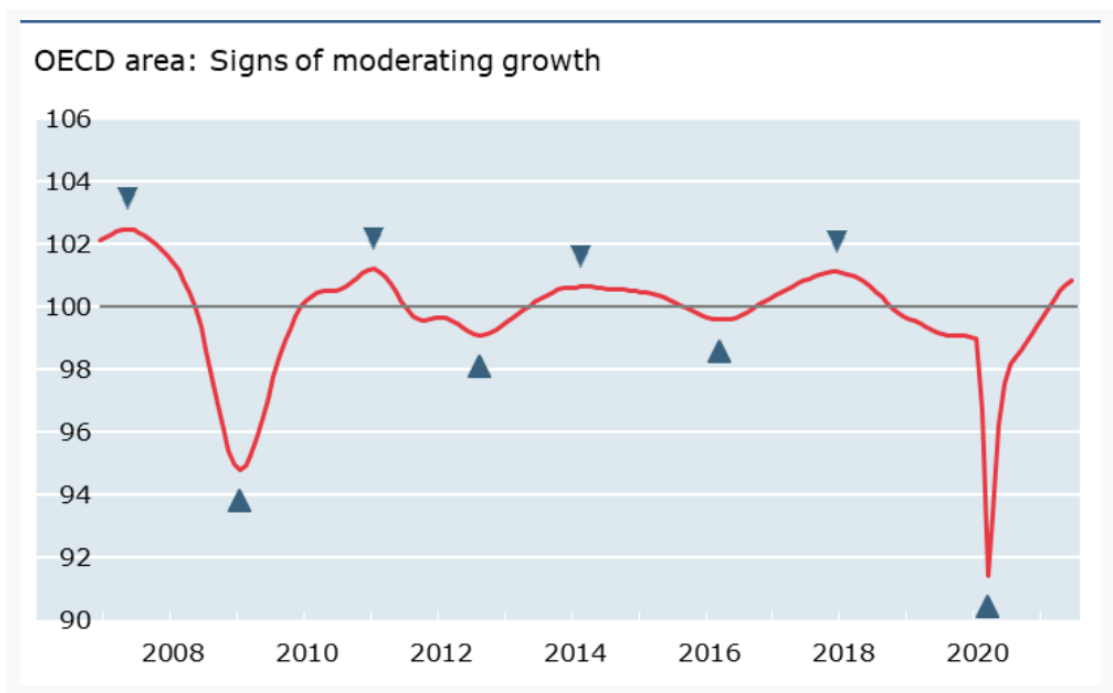
Successful digital transformation is contingent on the implementation of structural reforms, especially those related to governance and institutional framework of port sector. Digital port solutions should not be narrowly perceived as a pure IT port infrastructure project. Beyond hard and soft digital infrastructure, there is a critical need to develop the appropriate institutional and legislative framework in support of their seamless functioning. The full and effective adoption of a digital action plan requires a set of fundamental reforms. Some of them have been identified a long time ago and characterized as urgent, but they have been on halt for years in the design phase pending implementation. Their enactment would send positive signals of change to private port operators and the logistics industry players and could help unlock much needed investments in the Lebanese port sector.

From <https://www.worldbank.org/> 08/10/2021

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Signs of Moderating Growth in Most Major Economies

The OECD Composite leading indicators (CLIs), designed to anticipate turning points in economic activity relative to trend, show signs of moderating pace of growth at above-trend levels in the OECD area as a whole and in most major economies. The latest CLIs point to signs of moderating pace of growth at above-trend level in the United States, Japan and Canada. Similar indications have emerged in the United Kingdom and in the euro area as a whole, including Germany and Italy. In France, there are also signs of moderating pace of growth, with the CLI still below trend. The CLIs for the major emerging-market economies point to diverging developments. Steady growth continues in China (industrial sector), and stable growth continues in India, whereas in Brazil the CLI continues to indicate slowing growth. Signs of moderating pace of growth have emerged in Russia. Despite the gradual lifting of COVID-19 containment measures in some countries and the progress of vaccination campaigns, persisting uncertainties might result in higher than usual fluctuations in the CLI and its components. As such, the CLIs should be interpreted with care and their magnitude should be regarded as an indication of the strength of the signal rather than as a measure of the degree of growth in economic activity.



From <https://www.oecd.org/> 08/10/2021

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Value of G20 Merchandise Trade at New High in Q2 2021, Trade in Services Growth Gaining Pace

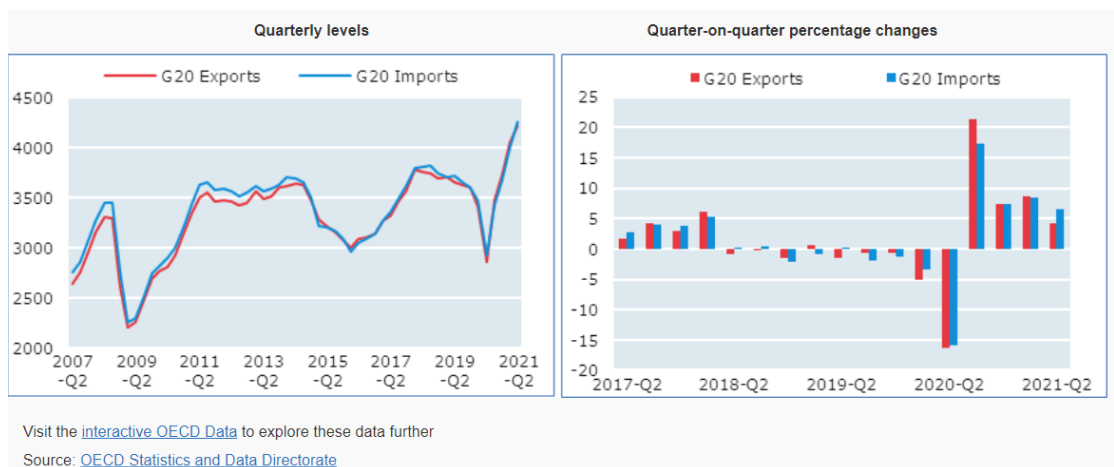
The second quarter of 2021 saw international merchandise trade for the G20, as measured in seasonally adjusted current US dollars, reach a new high following the record levels already posted in Q1 2021. G20 merchandise exports and imports increased by 4.1% and 6.4% in Q2 2021 compared to the previous quarter, showing a slowdown compared with the rates posted in Q1 2021 (8.6% and 8.5% for exports and imports, respectively). Like in the previous quarter, rising commodity prices explain a large part of the increase, as congestion in international shipping and supply issues around semiconductors placed further pressure on the price of traded goods. The G20 economies more reliant on exports of primary commodities saw strong export growth in Q2 2021, a combination of increasing prices, limited global supply (e.g. copper) and strong demand (particularly from China, Japan and Korea). Australia's exports increased 10.0% in Q2 2021, on the back of rising sales of cereals, metals and coal. Brazilian exports rose by 29.4%, driven by iron ores and soybeans. Russian exports grew 30.7% in Q2 2021, mostly benefiting from increasing energy prices.

Merchandise trade values in North America reached an all-time high in Q2 2021. Canada's exports were up 4.7%, driven by energy and forestry products. Imports rose by 3.6%, with metals and pharmaceutical products playing a large part. Mexico also recorded solid growth in the quarter, exports up 3.3% and imports up 5.1%. The

United States recorded growth of 6.8% for exports in Q2 2021, led by aircraft, pharmaceuticals and semiconductors and with strong demand from Canada and Mexico. Imports in the quarter rose 4.2%, with robust imports of mobile phones and despite sluggish purchases of vehicles. European G20 economies saw international trade increase notably in aircraft, agriculture products and pharmaceuticals, fuelled in particular by demand from China and the United States. In Q2 2021 the European Union recorded export growth of 2.8% and import growth of 5.7% (France 1.3% and 2.9%, Germany 1.3% and 6.3%, and Italy 4.0% and 6.4%). In the United Kingdom, exports rose 12.3% and imports 11.3% in Q2 2021, a strong rebound following the Q1 slowdown. The rise in commodity prices was a factor in imports increasing faster than exports in the East Asian G20 economies in Q2 2021. Exports from Japan and Korea grew by 2.7% and 2.2%, while imports rose by 7.4% and 11.8%, respectively, with trade in vehicles and parts driving the increase in particular for Korea. Following the staggering (18.6%) growth in the previous quarter, Chinese exports declined by 2.5% in Q2. Imports, instead, continued to expand (up 10.9%), with purchases of agricultural products, metals and semiconductors remaining strong.

G20 merchandise trade

Based on figures in current prices (billion US dollars), seasonally adjusted



G20 trade in services growth gaining pace in Q2 2021

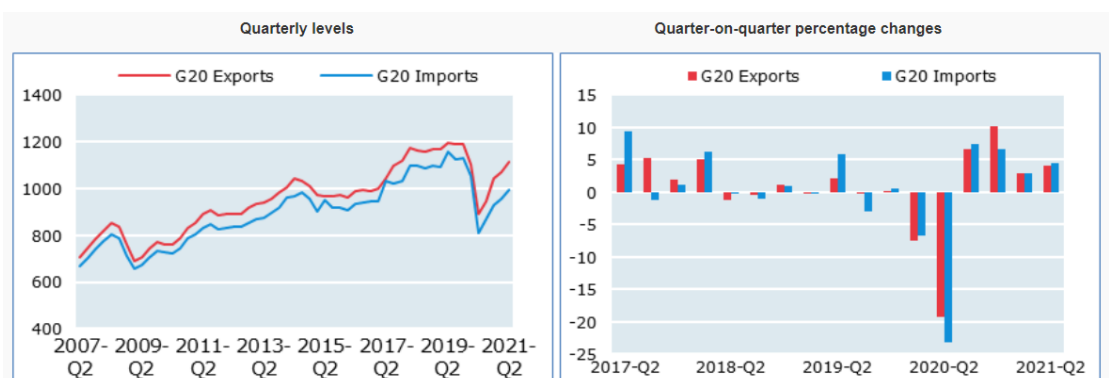
Q2 2021 growth in services exports and imports for the G20 aggregate is estimated (based on preliminary information available for a subset of the G20 economies) at around 4.5% and 4.0%, respectively, compared to the previous quarter and measured in seasonally adjusted US dollars. This compares to the slower rate recorded in Q1 (2.9% for exports and imports). The further surge in shipping costs in Q2 2021 continued to boost trade in transport services across most G20 economies, while trade in digitally deliverable services, such as telecommunications, computer and business services, remained strong. Travel, although still severely affected by the COVID-19 containment measures and threatened by the emergence of variants, showed an uptick in Q2. Exports of services from the United States and Canada

grew by 3.6% and 1.7%, respectively, in Q2 2021. Imports recorded faster growth (7.2% and 8.0%), driven by travel in the United States and by financial services in Canada. Services trade in Brazil also experienced strong growth, with exports and imports expanding by 6.8% and 5.5%, respectively.

In Europe, both exports and imports of services picked up in Germany in Q2, up by respectively 4.2% and 5.4%, with imports fuelled by a nearly 30% increase in travel expenditure. Travel and financial services also boosted French exports of services (up 5.6%), while imports remained almost flat (up 0.4%) on lower purchases of transport services. Conversely, trade in services contracted in the United Kingdom (minus 0.4% and minus 2.2% for exports and imports). Russian exports rose 5.7% while imports contracted by 7.3% (due to a slowdown in purchases of business services). Turkey's exports and imports increased by 5.8% and 2.3%. With the exception of Australian exports (down 0.5%), trade in services continued to expand markedly in Asia-Pacific. Exports and imports increased by 8.1% and 15.9%, respectively, in Korea, with a jump in travel imports (up 20.1%) adding to the continuing growth in business, telecommunication and computer services. Similarly, Japanese exports and imports rose by 4.7% and 8.4%, with travel and business services expanding at a faster rate on the import side. Chinese exports increased by 7.4%, largely driven by soaring transport receipts, while imports rose 2.3% on higher purchases of business and transport services. A partial and temporary border opening boosted Australia's travel imports (4.5 times higher than in the previous quarter, but still at very low levels), which contributed to the 8.9% increase in imports of total services.

G20 trade in services

Based on figures in current prices (billion US dollars), seasonally adjusted



Visit the [interactive OECD Data](#) to explore these data further

Source: [OECD Statistics and Data Directorate](#) and national sources.

Note: The Q2 2021 trade in services values are preliminary estimates based on available data, covering about 60% of exports and imports for the G20 aggregate.

From <https://www.oecd.org/> 08/24/2021

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New Lobbying Group to Advocate for Cities Amid Potential

Windfall of Federal Infrastructure Dollars

To advance federal policies that make cities more sustainable, equitable and innovative, several smart city organizations, companies and leaders formed a new lobbying coalition late last month. The Coalition for Urban Innovation's founding members include Sidewalk Labs, the Smart Cities Council, Replica, and Via Transportation, among others. The coalition's advisory board also touts urbanist and University of Toronto professor Richard Florida, in addition to six other urban technology experts. The group, on its website, says it plans to help maximize the potential windfall of federal infrastructure dollars that support efforts advocating for leaders to "reimagine urban infrastructure" and prioritize smart investments in cities. Addressing climate change and racial equity are also among the coalition's top priorities. Cities and metro areas are becoming increasingly important to U.S. economic performance, especially as the country moves through the pandemic, said Florida in an emailed interview.

"Urban tech is already among the largest, if not the largest area of venture-capital startup activity of any sector," Florida said. "These innovations are critical to leveraging and enhancing the performance of our cities, and more broadly the economic performance and competitiveness of the United States. It's important the federal government make the most effective investments it can in this critical area." Cities are responsible for about 90% of the U.S. gross domestic product and 75% of carbon dioxide emissions. "Yet the major systems cities and urban counties rely on to operate and deliver services have not changed since the Second World War," the coalition writes. The group can advocate for those systems to become more innovative, helping to support some of the sustainability and equity outcomes that the Biden administration hopes to achieve, according to Via Transportation public policy head Andrei Greenawalt.

If the federal infrastructure bill were to become law, for example, the Department of Transportation would have historic levels of funding to hand out on a competitive basis, he said. One of the group's goals will be to advance incentives or funding that entice cities and transit agencies to work with the private sector, according to Greenawalt. That can be done through competitive grant programs or ensuring that existing streams of funding allow for public-private partnerships. Federal investments in urban policy and innovation are also fragmented across a host of cabinet agencies and departments, said Florida. Better coordination surrounding those efforts could make those investments more efficient and impactful, Florida said. The federal infrastructure dollars also represent an opportunity for local leaders to invest in smart city concepts and infrastructure. The \$1 trillion infrastructure bill would create the Strengthening Mobility and Revolutionizing Transportation grant program for projects involving advanced smart city or community technologies. The funds would be distributed over five years and used for projects that involve technology like connected vehicles, smart grids and smart traffic signals, according to the Eno

Center for Transportation. The House passed a \$3.5 trillion budget resolution on Tuesday and committed to voting on the \$1 trillion bipartisan infrastructure bill by Sept. 27.

From <https://ampo.org/> 08/30/2021

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Urban Transformation Post-Pandemic: Not Business as Usual

COVID-19 has hit cities hard, with 90% of infections reported in urban areas.[1] That impact will have a range of repercussions as cities aim to achieve the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goal 11, which calls for urban areas that are inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable. Now more than ever, cities will need to turn to advanced technologies that can help them not only face down a crisis like COVID-19 but also improve overall efficiency and quality of life. Most important, cities need to avoid returning to "business as usual" when it comes to their smart city agendas.[2] While it is still unclear what life will look like post-pandemic, city leaders need to view the crisis as an opportunity to re-evaluate and adapt their policies.

Cities and crisis

It's not unusual for a disruptive event to prompt a "reset" of sorts when it comes to cities. The 1755 Lisbon earthquake led to the birth of earthquake engineering;[3] the cholera outbreak in London triggered the first public health policy on urban sanitation in 1848; and a fire in Chicago in 1887 led to vertical construction and the first skyscrapers.[4] The damage wrought by World War II also prompted massive government-sponsored housing and rebuilding programs.[5] The COVID-19 pandemic will likely be no different. But how cities operate post-pandemic will not only be informed by the gaps the crisis revealed: The new patterns of behavior and activity that emerged during the pandemic will also necessitate a rethink of how cities operate going forward. Consider some of the pandemic's impacts:

An upsurge of digital payments and 77% year-on-year growth in e-commerce during 2020[6]

An inability to access public infrastructure, services, and education emphasized the need for digitalization of city operations[7]

Declines in economic activity led to cities losing on average 15% to 40% of their annual municipal finances [8]

A 6% contraction in global energy demand and a 7% reduction in carbon emissions in 2020 as compared to 2019[9]

During the early months of the lockdowns—and the subsequent fall in economic activity—there was a 20% to 40% reduction in air pollution levels in major global cities[10]

While the crisis is expected to trigger a renewed commitment to building resilience, these types of patterns should prompt a stronger consideration of inclusivity and sustainability in cities. The trends in e-commerce will affect neighborhood businesses. Digitizing of services, while important to access and city budgets, can

leave behind people without internet access. Concomitant drops in air pollution and energy demand underline the importance of cleaner economic activity.

While pre-pandemic smart city policies may have been motivated by efficiency and cost-savings, local governments need to recognize that the pandemic has shifted those goals. Policies now have to be more people-centered and responsive with a greater focus on sustainability. They also need to fix gaps that can cause cascading effects from one urban system to another.

Taking action

Despite the challenges presented by high density living, cities have had among some of the strongest responses to the pandemic. A recent study of 167 cities globally already shows how COVID-19 is impacting urban planning: 68% of cities are reconsidering urban planning and the use of space, with 54% re-thinking mobility and transportation.[11] For example, as an immediate response to the pandemic, Bogota, Columbia added 52 miles of temporary bike lanes to their existing network at the beginning of 2020.[12] Milan, Italy, responding to the disruption of food aid caused by COVID, established a permanent joint public-private food aid system—that also provides consistent and comparable data about food distribution.[13] And in Singapore, the government is increasing its ICT investment by 30% to accelerate digitalization that can enable citizens and workers to resume normal activities and businesses to reopen safely.[14]

These examples highlight how actions taken both during and post-COVID will be vital to achieving smart city goals. They can inform some of the short-term and longer-term approaches urban planners should consider, including:

Communicating and promoting public transportation. City officials should provide as much information as possible about the availability of public transport—and its safety—to not only increase ridership but also to bring back nervous customers.

Using data to optimize mobility services: Data gathered by major tech players via mobile devices can provide critical insights into the transport needs of citizens. Data coming from other mobility-related sources—including micromobility players (scooter and bike rentals) and navigation apps—can also help urban planners design more effective mobility policies and systems. Investing in making alternative, sustainable choices more attractive. This can be achieved with IT support from the private sector as well as by incentivizing sustainable choices—for example, giving out rewards for choosing environmentally friendly modes of transportation via an app. And according to the Deloitte City Mobility Index, more and more cities are considering measures that make micromobility more attractive such as reclaiming street space from cars for cycling and walking.

Drawing on the power of innovation and digitalization. With disruption as an accelerator, cities can and should continue developing innovative approaches using new technologies to become smarter and more sustainable. For example, IoT can provide important data via sensing. This data, in turn, can then be used via open

digital platforms by private sector players to create innovative new services. Taking a strategic approach. Rather than returning to pre-pandemic approaches, city planners should reassess urban plans and make strategic choices that can help make cities, cleaner, safer, more affordable, and more inclusive. Underpinning any and all of these actions must be a strict adherence to strong governance. With the increased use of technology during the pandemic—and as a key enabler of urban transformation overall—cities must maintain public trust by addressing such critical issues as privacy, data protection, cybersecurity, and connectivity. Cities must never lose sight of effective governance as they invest in advanced technologies—understanding that their approach can play an important role in how society resets post-crisis.

Keeping the momentum

With more than half of urban planners acknowledging that the pandemic has permanently changed how people live, work, socialize, and travel in their city,[15] there is no doubt that the pandemic has both altered and accelerated the smart city agenda. The question now is how to use the urgency generated during the crisis to continue making innovative choices that not only boost resiliency but also promote inclusivity and sustainability.

From <https://www.forbes.com/> 08/30/2021

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Why Cyber Attacks Will Define 21st Century Warfare

For decades, cyber attacks were widely thought to be the preserve of tech-savvy individuals or gangs seeking to steal or extort money. In recent years, it's become clear that nations are using cybercrime as a standard part of their armoury. Ransomware, phishing and distributed denial-of-service attacks are just a few of the many weapons that states are using in geopolitical conflicts that are increasingly playing out in cyberspace rather than on the battlefield. Mikko Hyppönen, chief research officer at IT security company F-Secure, has been helping authorities in North America, Europe and Asia to fight cybercrime for more than 30 years. "In the 1990s, I wouldn't have believed that national governments, intelligence agencies and the armed forces were developing and deploying malware against other countries. The notion would have sounded like science fiction to me," he admits. "But it's obvious in hindsight. It makes perfect sense. Cyber tools are excellent weapons. They're efficient, affordable and deniable." Hyppönen notes that all technically advanced nations are developing both defensive and offensive applications for these weapons as the battle for cyber supremacy escalates around the world.

A technological and social tipping point

Although state-backed cyber warfare is no longer novel, a tipping point has been reached as the offensive capabilities of the weaponry have become more sophisticated and the use of digital tech has become more ingrained in society. So

says Dr Tim Stevens, senior lecturer in global security at King's College London and head of its Cyber Security Research Group. "A lot of what we're seeing isn't entirely new, but the scope and scale of it are increasing all the time," he says "What's readily apparent is that this is now an issue of public and global policy. It affects you and me every day." His point is backed by the most recent figures from the UK National Cyber Security Centre, which is a part of GCHQ. Last November it reported that it had protected the country from 723 cyber "incidents" in the 12 months to 31 August 2020. That was a 20% increase on the annual average total over the preceding three years. There are two main reasons for this intensification, according to Stevens. First, there has been a significant increase in the size of the "attack surface" provided by the world's most developed economies. Their digital transformation has advanced to the point where they're offering a much bigger choice of potential entry points to target.

"This is unequivocally the risk management problem of the 21st century," he says, adding that the second, related reason has been the rise of low-cost digital tech lacking in effective security features. "We're producing increasing amounts of data and we're linking up devices that are demonstrably insecure," Stevens says. "When you turn things over to the market, it's a case of 'pile 'em high and sell 'em cheap'. Billions of low-cost devices being sold don't have good security." Alex Rice is the founder and CTO of HackerOne, a company that uses hackers to help organisations detect vulnerabilities in their own systems. He cites another factor behind the upsurge in state-sponsored cyber warfare. "The amount of tech being developed that's unique to particular governments is declining rapidly. Today, it is shared more or less across the board. This means that there are very few pieces of state technology that can't be attacked," he says. "How do we improve their defences? By focusing on private-sector and open-source technology. For example, there are two major mobile platforms – Apple and Android – in use. We secure government infrastructure by securing all private infrastructure and networks."

A multi-pronged response to the cyber threat

Given the complexities of cyber warfare, Stevens believes that no single solution can ever be an effective defence. "A multi-pronged set of processes and initiatives is needed," he says. "These will range from security standards to education and diplomacy." Although diplomacy has a key role in developing standards of behaviour, Stevens acknowledges that it would be hard to develop a framework that's acceptable to all – and, even then, some states could sign up to it and then renege on the treaty. "Russia, for instance, allows cybercriminals in the country to act as long as they don't interfere with the state's activities," he notes. "But this is something that Biden and Putin could agree to prevent." Dr Vasileios Vasilakis, a lecturer in network security at the University of York, agrees with Stevens that "advanced persistent threats" – hacking groups affiliated with national governments – could be prevented through diplomacy. "It would be much more difficult for them to operate if Russia were to crack down on them," he says. Hyppönen suggests that another response to

the cyber threat at the political level would be the establishment of a dedicated ministerial portfolio. "This issue needs to be taken seriously and have the proper levels of leadership behind it," he says. "Eventually, all countries will have minister- or cabinet-level representation for cyberspace. It's going to become the norm."

Rice believes that a more effective political response that could help to protect critical infrastructure would be the creation of a cyber warfare equivalent of the Geneva convention. "It's in our mutual interest to not attack each other's power grids," he says. "So we need to establish what's allowed and what's not, so that governments can be held accountable." Many analysts believe governments should also regulate any technology being sold in a country to ensure that it meets necessary security standards. For Hyppönen, an international certification scheme for security akin to the CE certification system for manufacturers selling products in the European Economic Area should be created. "We need to verify that the devices we are using are as safe as possible," he says. Others point to the support that governments could be offering SMEs in a capacity such as that of the UK Centre for the Protection of National Infrastructure. While "large corporations can hire their own teams to defend their networks, it is harder for small businesses to do" Vasilakis notes.

Role of individuals and private sector

The problem is not up to governments alone to tackle, says Jake Moore, a cybersecurity specialist at firewall provider ESET. The onus, he argues, is also on individuals and enterprises to support the effort by protecting themselves with encryption, firewalls and other defence mechanisms. "There are serious players involved in this: Russia, China, North Korea," Moore says. "They are throwing huge amounts of money behind it. That's why a collaborative approach is desperately needed. We need the public to get involved and play their role, because governments aren't always the quickest at seeing this issue." Nonetheless, experts are keen to stress that most cyber attacks are still committed by criminals rather than governments, which tend to use hacking as a tool for espionage and sabotage rather than theft. This means that any defensive measures should account for these varying contexts. "Who is your enemy – what threat will you have to defend against?" Hyppönen says. "The answer could be so different depending on your enterprise. Pizza restaurant owners, unlike state agencies, don't need to worry about foreign governments – but they do need to worry about ransomware attacks designed to gain access to payment systems."

The 5G-enabled, highly connected smart city has been heralded by some as a utopia, offering seamless functionality between infrastructure systems ranging from power distribution grids to public transport networks and providing the ultimate in digital convenience for its citizens. Yet security experts are concerned that, while such developments could drastically improve people's quality of life, the smart city is vulnerable to being disrupted like never before. "There's a lot of talk about smart cities, but not so much talk about secure cities," says Tim Stevens of King's College

London. “Critical infrastructure must be made absolutely secure. But we’re not quite there, especially in sectors such as energy –criminals are still working their way in.” He cites the ransomware attack in May that successfully took control of the computer systems of Colonial Pipeline, a major US oil distribution network, forcing the company to spend \$4.4m (£3.2m) to pay off the hackers. “That was a wake-up call for a lot of people,” Stevens says. “Energy is one sector that really concerns the public because without it everything grinds to a halt. I find it remarkable that we haven’t yet seen many infrastructure disasters on this scale.” The University of York’s Vasileios Vasilakis agrees, citing the first known successful cyber attack on an electrical grid in December 2015. Hackers believed to be linked to Russia delivered malware via a phishing email, which cut power to more than 230,000 people in Ukraine, fortunately for no more than six hours.

“Events such as this one could become more and more common,” he predicts. Security professionals warn that, as a consequence, there may need to be a trade-off between a modern urban environment, made smarter by data, and a city where everyone’s privacy is protected. “The explosion of the internet of things has made people’s lives easier, but few IoT devices have been designed with security in mind,” says Jake Moore of ESET. “We have far more IP addresses in our homes than ever. These can be exploited by all sorts of criminals. We need to think carefully about the implications.” This threat is likely to become even more complex as systems become ever more reliant on the internet. Experts fear that, if the appropriate measures aren’t taken to agree stricter security protocols, hackers could take control of critical urban infrastructure. “It’s like what we see in the movies, but some of it could actually be done for real,” says Mikko Hyppönen of F-Secure. “We’re becoming more and more efficient, but more and more vulnerable. Just imagine how much more reliant we will be in 10 or 20 years.”

From <https://nationalcybersecuritynews.today/> 08/31/2021

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APEC Posts Strong First Quarter Growth, on Track to Hit 6.4% in 2021

The APEC region posted a 6.1 percent increase in economic growth in the first quarter of 2021, bouncing back strongly from a 2 percent decline in the first quarter of 2020, according to an updated report by the APEC Policy Support Unit. This number comfortably puts the region on track to achieve growth expectations for the year, which is now estimated at 6.4 percent, or slightly higher than the earlier prediction. High growth in the first quarter of 2021 is due to a combination of factors, including the low comparison point following substantial economic contraction a year ago as well as higher government spending given the sustained impact of the pandemic on economic activities, while domestic consumption grew considerably during this period. In the near term, the APEC Policy Support Unit still sees sustained stimulus measures from governments driving the region’s economic growth. Private

consumption will also get a boost of confidence as consumers are expected to draw on their accumulated savings, bolstered in part due to cash transfers and wide-ranging subsidies to households.

“Vaccination programs and rollout still drive economic growth and the recovery progress in the region,” said Dr Denis Hew, Director of the APEC Policy Support Unit. “We are still seeing a disparity in access to vaccination coverage across APEC; economies with faster rollouts and sustained fiscal support will recover faster and stronger, while economies that struggle with vaccine access and have limited fiscal space will take more time to recover due to these uncertainties,” explained Dr Hew. Vaccination coverage across APEC is noticeably diverse, ranging from 148 doses per 100 residents to a low of only one dose per 100 residents. As a result, the rate of fully vaccinated people across economies varies greatly, from as low as 0.2 percent to as high as 72 percent of the population as of mid-August. “The race to vaccinate as many people as possible in the shortest amount of time is extremely crucial,” said Rhea C. Hernando, an APEC Policy Support Unit researcher who updated the report. “Economies cannot afford to keep imposing restrictions, close borders and indefinitely provide wide-ranging fiscal and monetary support.” Hernando explained that multilateral cooperation is key in facilitating the free flow of vaccine components and related supplies as this will significantly contribute to the accessibility and affordability of vaccines, especially for low- and middle-income economies.

“It is now clear that for economic recovery to be on firmer footing, health must be safeguarded, which in turn necessitates access to vaccines to protect as many people as possible, as soon as possible,” she added. In terms of trade, the region performed positively in the first quarter of 2021, with the value of merchandise exports and imports growing at a higher rate of 16.8 percent and 16.2 percent, respectively, from a contraction of 6.1 for exports and 4.1 percent for imports during the same period last year. This improved performance is brought mainly by pharmaceuticals and office and communications equipment, while the agrifood, apparel, metals and minerals sectors also added to the trade boost. The unfaltering impact of COVID-19 on the transport and travel sectors continues to drag APEC’s commercial services performance. For the period January to March 2021, commercial services declined further to 12 percent for exports and 15.2 percent for imports, compared to a decline of 9.5 percent for exports and 9.2 percent for imports for the same period in 2020.

The updated report also notes an increase in inflation during the first half of 2021 to 2.3 percent, compared to 1.6 percent in the first half of 2020, due to the gradual normalization of prices. Inflation is expected to revert to its pre-pandemic levels globally once prices factor in pandemic-related supply-side disruptions. The whole-year forecast of inflation for the APEC region is 2 percent while it could increase to 2.2 percent in 2022. There is a risk that the upward trend in inflation could persist as consumption activity strengthens following successive quarters of pent-up

demand. The report notes that price pressures require continued monitoring and clear communication from monetary policy authorities to guide inflation expectations. "Addressing the ongoing health crisis, primarily through rapid vaccination rollouts even as appropriate health measures continue to be observed, remains paramount to strengthen economic recovery," Hernando concluded. "When people feel safe, they are more confident to go out, work and spend accumulated savings while business could resume investment activity, supporting a gradual but uninterrupted economic reopening toward a stronger recovery."

From <https://www.apec.org/> 08/17/2021

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Reeling Recovery Predicted for ASEAN

Prospects for Southeast Asia's economic recovery remain uncertain as the COVID-19 pandemic is expected to weigh on regional growth. After a yearlong slump, three biggest economies of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, or ASEAN – Indonesia, Thailand and Malaysia – have posted positive growth rates in the second quarter. The Philippines, Vietnam and Singapore have likewise expanded during the same period. Throughout ASEAN, authorities are now battling the more infectious Delta variant and are depending on foreign vaccines to support their mass inoculation programs. These will allow them to gradually lift lockdown measures, ease the strain on their public health systems and boost domestic consumption. Thailand's GDP rose by 7.5 percent in the second quarter of this year, according to an Aug 16 report from its state economic planning agency National Economic and Social Development Council. The figure beat market estimates of 6.5 percent. Indonesia's GDP rose by 7.07 percent – its strongest performance since 2004, and Malaysian GDP grew by 16.1 percent. Despite the rosy figures, analysts still have a less sanguine outlook on regional recovery.

"ASEAN broadly remains in a battle with the more contagious Delta variant," said economist Chua Han Teng of Singapore's DBS Bank. "Movement restrictions imposed to curb the virus are likely to weigh on economic activity for the time being," Krystal Tan, an economist at ANZ Bank in Melbourne, said growth outlook for the region is "very challenging given the virus resurgence, tightened restrictions and low vaccine coverage". Tan expects Thailand's economy in particular to struggle more in the third quarter given the worsening pandemic and delayed recovery prospects for the tourism sector. The travel and tourism industry accounts for 20 percent of the country's GDP. Thailand's NESDC has slashed its 2021 growth projection to a range of 0.7 to 1.2 percent from the previous 1.5 to 2.5 percent forecast. This is largely due to a new COVID-19 wave that has seen total infections spike to over 900,000 as of Aug 16, more than triple the number of cases from the end of June. The government has also decided to extend lockdown measures until the end of August. Indonesia has extended movement restrictions until next Monday as daily COVID-19 cases remain high. As of Friday, the virus has infected more than 3.93 million and killed

more than 122,600 people in Indonesia, according to data from the World Health Organization. Bank Negara Malaysia has downgraded this year's GDP forecast to between 3 and 4 percent from the previous forecast of between 6 and 7.5 percent. The country's central bank said the downgrade is due to the reimposition of nationwide containment measures.

Low base effect

Analysts said that ASEAN's second-quarter growth is also mostly due to the low base effect and it is not indicative of a long-term trend. "The year-on-year figures may look great, but they are a horrible distortion (of the current situation)," said Rob Carnell, head of research and chief economist for Asia-Pacific at Dutch investment bank ING. Carnell said second-quarter GDP figures in 2021 are compared against the second quarter of 2020, which is a period of maximum contraction during the initial phase of the pandemic. "It would be miraculous if the year-on-year figures were not strongly positive," he said. It is a view that ANZ's Tan agrees as well. "The positive growth rates in the second quarter were largely driven by low base effects from the first wave of the pandemic in 2020 and will not be sustainable as these effects fade," she said. Tan cited Malaysia's GDP as an example. Though the country posted double-digit growth on a year-on-year basis, its GDP contracted when measured on a per quarter basis. Malaysia's second quarter GDP contracted by 1.9 percent compared with the first quarter of 2021. Malaysia is reeling from one of the worst COVID-19 outbreaks in Asia, with 22,948 new cases detected on Thursday, according to figures from its health ministry. Yang Han in Hong Kong contributed to this story.

From <https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/> 08/21/2021

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COVID-19 Threatens Asia and Pacific's Progress on SDGs, ADB Data Show

The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic is threatening Asia and the Pacific's progress toward critical targets under the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), according to a new report by the Asian Development Bank (ADB). The pandemic pushed an estimated 75 million to 80 million more people in developing Asia¹ into extreme poverty as of last year, compared with what would have happened without COVID-19, according to Key Indicators for Asia and the Pacific 2021, released today. Assuming that the pandemic has increased inequality, the relative rise in extreme poverty—defined as living on less than \$1.90 a day—may be even greater. Progress has also stalled in areas such as hunger, health, and education, where earlier achievements across the region had been significant, albeit uneven. Key Indicators presents comprehensive economic, financial, social, and environmental statistics for ADB's 49 regional members. According to the report, about 203 million people or 5.2% of developing Asia's population lived in extreme poverty as of 2017. Without COVID-19, that number would have declined to an estimated 2.6% in 2020.

“Asia and the Pacific has made impressive strides, but COVID-19 has revealed social and economic fault lines that may weaken the region’s sustainable and inclusive development,” said ADB Chief Economist Yasuyuki Sawada. “To achieve the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, decision makers need to harness high-quality and timely data as a guide for actions to ensure that the recovery leaves no one behind—especially the poor and vulnerable.” Asia and the Pacific’s economy has grown at a robust pace in recent years and contributed as much as 35% to global gross domestic product (GDP)—in current US dollars—in 2019. But COVID-19 took a toll just when weaker domestic investment and slowing global trade and economic activity were starting to challenge this momentum. Among reporting economies in Asia and the Pacific, only about 1 in 4 posted GDP growth last year. The region lost about 8% of work hours due to mobility restrictions, deeply affecting poorer households and workers in the informal economy. The Key Indicators report includes a special supplement introducing a practical framework for measuring the digital economy and its growing role in modern life, which has been particularly evident during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Key Indicators 2021 also presents:

The status of SDG indicators in Asia and the Pacific;

Regional trends and tables, including indicators across eight themes—people; economy and output; money, finance, and prices; globalization; transport and communications; energy and electricity; environment; and government and governance;

An analysis of the pandemic’s impact on global value chains and their role as both a dampener and amplifier of shocks; and

Updated individual country tables for the 49 regional members of ADB. Along with the report launch, ADB has updated its Key Indicators Database, which offers access to statistical indicators going back to the year 2000, via a user-friendly and accessible interface.

From <https://www.adb.org/> 08/24/2021

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APEC Ministers: Invest in Health Equity to Revive Prosperity

APEC member economies are united in their call to close health gaps and ensure everyone in the region has access to safe and affordable healthcare. Members believe that strengthening health systems and capacity is essential to achieving sustainable recovery from COVID-19 and bringing back prosperity to the people. Health ministers, academics, industry leaders and representatives from governmental and international organizations convened for the 11th APEC High-Level Meeting on Health and the Economy on Tuesday against the backdrop of a resurgence in COVID-19 infections globally due to the more transmissible Delta variant, which only highlighted the disparity in health systems’ capacity and

vaccination coverage. Opening the high-level meeting, New Zealand's Minister of Health, Andrew Little, underlined the importance of close cooperation and coordinated response when confronted with an unprecedented and enduring health and economic crisis caused by the global COVID pandemic, urging members to step up collaboration in ensuring health equity. "The pandemic has been with us for 20 months, and the world is still adjusting to the uncertainty it brings and the constant way the virus changes," said Minister Little. "One thing that is certain, however, is that good health and economic prosperity are interdependent."

"When we look across the world we can see the toll of COVID-19 has not been borne equally—either between countries or within countries. The poorest have been hardest hit," he added. "We must work together, both within APEC and more widely, to put equity at the heart of all efforts to combat COVID-19." Vaccination coverage across APEC is noticeably diverse, ranging from 148 doses per 100 residents to a low of only one dose per 100 residents. As a result, the rate of fully vaccinated people across economies varies greatly, from as low as 0.2 percent to as high as 72 percent of the population as of mid-August. Minister Little said international trade forums are critical to safeguard the equitable supply of vaccines and related COVID-19 therapeutic products and reflected on the advancements made during APEC 2021 in this area. "This year, we are taking action to strengthen international supply chains for COVID-19 vaccines and related goods, to ensure their swift and efficient distribution," he added. "It is vital we strengthen our collective efforts on trade barriers and that we help facilitate increased manufacturing and distribution of COVID-19 vaccines and related products."

The high-level meeting also focused on the impact of COVID-19 on women and vulnerable groups. Members and experts discussed policy measures that support equitable access to healthcare services for these communities as well as enabling a safe return to work. Members and experts advised to incorporate health equity into trade and supply chains for vaccines and other medical products, looking at the role of regulatory convergence to improve the resiliency of supply chain. Sustainable investments in pandemic prevention and preparedness are also key to accelerate economic recovery, mitigate the negative impacts on livelihoods and reduce the possibility of future health shocks. Members agreed that investment in health systems is a strategic asset for economic resiliency. "We all have a role to play in ensuring the global community emerges stronger from this pandemic," Minister Little explained. "Our approach must be global, our commitment collective and our assistance must encompass all levels of society to ensure equitable outcomes. Through this dialogue, we can jointly reinforce our commitment to health equity and building resilient health systems, alongside sustainable economic growth." To read the 11th APEC High-Level Meeting on Health and the Economy Joint Statement, please visit [here](#).

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East Asia

CHINA: Spurring Digital Economy as New Driver of Growth

Putting on a helmet and sitting in front of several big screens, you are able to experience the exciting moment of a spacecraft launch. This is one of the highlights of the 2021 Global Digital Economy Conference that concluded in Beijing Tuesday. During the two-day event that opened on Monday, cutting-edge technologies featuring data-driven innovation were displayed while participants focused on discussions concerning the digital economy as a new driver of China's economic growth despite the COVID-19 pandemic. China's digital economy kept a high growth rate of 9.7 percent in 2020 amid the pandemic and global economic downturn, according to a white paper released by the China Academy of Information and Communications Technology (CAICT). The country's digital economy scale hit 39.2 trillion yuan (about 6.1 trillion U.S. dollars) last year, accounting for 38.6 percent of the GDP.

"As people are more connected than ever due to the increasingly diversified communication means, we have all benefited from the progress of digitalization, especially during the hardest time of the pandemic," said Guido Giacconi, vice-president of the European Union Chamber of Commerce in China. The digital economy has become a key to achieving economic recovery and promoting sustainable development with the global economy, which is still in a fragile state of recovery, said Zhuang Rongwen, director of the Cyberspace Administration of China, at the opening. The digital economy has displayed strong resilience in the face of the pandemic, as it gives a strong boost to a number of new business models such as online shopping and education, telemedicine and artificial intelligence, said Cai Fang, an expert with the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.

China has built the world's largest optical fiber and 4G and 5G mobile broadband networks, with the number of 5G terminal connections exceeding 365 million and 5G application scenarios becoming increasingly rich, said Xiao Yaqing, minister of industry and information technology. 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. Chinese companies will also be encouraged to tap opportunities in the overseas digital market in the following decade, said Lei Jun, chairman of Xiaomi Corporation, a Chinese smartphone manufacturer. According to a guideline jointly released by Chinese government departments on July 23, more efforts will be made to enable domestic digital economy enterprises to accelerate their 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 and artificial intelligence.

The capital city Beijing has also introduced an action plan Monday on accelerating the process of building itself into a worldwide pioneer in digital economic development. As noted in the plan, the added value of Beijing's digital economy is expected to account for about 50 percent of its GDP by 2025. Last year, the added value of the city's digital economy has exceeded 1.44 trillion yuan, accounting for about 40 percent of its total economic volume. The World Trade Organization predicts that digital technologies will promote an annual growth of the global trade volume by around 2 percentage points by 2030, and the proportion of global service trade will be increased from 21 percent in 2016 to 25 percent by then. "In face of the challenges such as sluggish economic growth and aging society, the digital economy will enable an inclusive high-quality development that enables more elderly people to overcome the digital divide," said Cai.

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China's Foreign Trade Sustains Sound Growth

China's foreign trade maintained upward momentum in the first seven months of the year. Both exports and imports registered double-digit growth, customs data showed Saturday. The country's total imports and exports expanded 24.5 percent year on year to 21.34 trillion yuan (about 3.3 trillion U.S. dollars) from January to July, data from the General Administration of Customs (GAC) showed. The volume marked a 22.3 percent increase when compared with the pre-pandemic level during the same period in 2019, the GAC said. Exports rose 24.5 percent from a year ago while imports jumped 24.4 percent in the Jan.-July period. In July alone, the country's imports and exports rose 11.5 percent year on year to 3.27 trillion yuan, representing a yearly increase in China's foreign trade for 14 consecutive months, customs data showed. Specifically, exports went up 8.1 percent while imports climbed 16.1 percent. "The yearly growth of exports in July is slightly below expectations but remains resilient," said Li Qilin, an analyst from Hongta Securities. The demand for epidemic prevention materials rebounded due to the resurgence of the COVID-19 pandemic overseas. Meanwhile, the recovery of offline consumption in some developed countries helped shore up China's exports, as foreign importers were restocking inventories for the new semester and year-end holidays, said Li.

The recovery of overseas production also pushed up the demand for Chinese products, including machinery equipment, according to Li. Looking forward, Li cautioned about uncertainties of China's exports ahead in the face of certain factors. These factors include possible tapering off of policy stimulus overseas, virus variations, and financial burdens of Chinese exporters caused by increasing freight costs. Saturday's data also showed China's trade with three major trading partners all increased in the first seven months. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations remained China's largest trading partner, followed by the European Union and the

United States, the GAC data showed. The growth rates of China's trade value with the three trading partners between January and July stood at 24.6 percent, 23.4 percent, and 28.9 percent, respectively. During the same period, China's trade with countries along the Belt and Road totaled 6.3 trillion yuan, up 25.5 percent, year on year.

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Chinese Economy on Stable Track Despite Challenges

China's economy maintained its recovery streak in July, despite challenges posed by the resurgence of COVID-19, extreme weather and external uncertainties. China's industrial production continued its expansion, with the value-added industrial output, which measures factory activities, rising 6.4 percent year on year in July, according to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS). The figure was up 11.5 percent from July 2019, bringing the average growth for the past two years to 5.6 percent, NBS data shows. During the January-July period, China's fixed-asset investment increased 10.3 percent year on year, with the average growth rate over the last two years at 4.3 percent. The country's retail sales of consumer goods climbed 8.5 percent year on year in July, resulting in an average growth of 3.6 percent over the past two years. Floods and the resurgence of COVID-19 restrained industrial production to a certain extent, while the resumption of quarantine measures in some regions affected the recovery of consumption related to tourism, catering and other services, said Wen Bin, chief analyst at China Minsheng Bank.

In general, the cumulative growth rate of major macroeconomic indicators remained at a reasonable level, although growth in some areas of the consumption and services sectors slowed last month due to high temperatures, heavy rainfalls and sporadic COVID-19 outbreaks, said NBS spokesperson Fu Linghui. China's job market also remained generally stable last month thanks to increasing demand for labor and flexible job opportunities, as well as favorable policies that stabilize employment and assist college graduates and migrant workers, said Fu. In July, the surveyed unemployment rate in urban areas was 5.1 percent, up 0.1 percentage points from June, but lower than the rates registered in the same period in 2020 and 2019. In the first seven months of 2021, China created a total of 8.22 million new urban jobs, achieving 74.7 percent of its annual target, NBS data shows. Fu expects China's economy to continue its steady recovery in the second half of the year, with major macro indicators remaining within a reasonable range and the quality of development further improved.

Fu is optimistic about the country's future consumption. The expansion of vaccination campaigns and targeted COVID-19 prevention and control measures will stabilize the market, while the increased job opportunities and household incomes will drive up consumption, he said. In terms of industrial production, Fu highlighted the fast

expansion of China's high-tech manufacturing sector against the backdrop of the country's increasing resilience in innovation-driven development. In July, the sector's output expanded 15.6 percent from the same period last year, resulting in an average growth of 12.7 percent over the last two years. Cautioning that there are increased uncertainties in global economic resumption and challenges to domestic economic recovery, Fu said that measures will be taken to implement the cross-cycle adjustment of macro policies, tap into the potential of the domestic market, and keep the economy operating within an appropriate range. More efforts should be made to boost domestic demand further, improve the role of infrastructure investment in stabilizing investment and growth, and ramp up support for manufacturing, micro-, small- and middle-sized enterprises, as well as inclusive and green finance, Wen said.

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China's Half-year Economic Performance Lays Solid Foundation for Achieving Full-year Targets

Despite the pandemic and domestic economic development challenges, China's economy has sustained a steady recovery since the start of 2021, laying a solid foundation for achieving its full-year economic and social development targets, reported the country's top economic planner Wednesday. In the first half of the year, the country's major economic indicators, including economic growth, unemployment rate and consumer price index (CPI), have met expectations, said He Lifeng, head of the National Development and Reform Commission, while delivering a report on implementation of the national economic and social development plan at the ongoing session of the National People's Congress Standing Committee. China's gross domestic product expanded 12.7 percent year on year in the first half of 2021, and a total of 6.98 million new urban jobs were created, according to He.

The country's CPI rose 0.5 percent year on year during the January-June period, and foreign exchange reserves stood at 3.214 trillion U.S. dollars by the end of June, He added. China's proactive fiscal policy so far this year has provided support for major strategic national tasks and contributed to the recovery of the economy as well as the improvement of people's wellbeing, said Xu Hongcai, vice minister of finance. Yet with external shocks persisting and new challenges arising for enterprises, He stressed that greater efforts are needed to consolidate the foundation for economic recovery at home. To keep major economic indicators within proper range, Xu said that efforts should be made to undertake cross-cyclical adjustments. Macro-policies should focus on supporting the real economy, promoting employment, stimulating the vitalities of market entities and coping with potential cyclical risks, Xu added.

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Foreign Investors Generally Confident in Chinese Market: MOC

Foreign investors' confidence and expectations of the Chinese market are generally stable, according to the Ministry of Commerce (MOC). Reports published by the chambers of commerce of the United States, European Union (EU) and Japan, among others, have shown foreign enterprises' confidence in the market, MOC spokesperson Gao Feng told a news briefing Thursday. Nearly two-thirds of the American enterprises and 59 percent of EU firms decided to expand their businesses in China, while 36.6 percent of Japanese firms also decided to increase their investment, Gao said, citing figures from the reports. Foreign direct investment (FDI) into the Chinese mainland has continued sound momentum since the second half of last year, Gao added. The FDI, in actual use, surged 25.5 percent year on year to 672.19 billion yuan in the first seven months, MOC data showed. Gao said the country will continue to expand opening-up, optimize the business environment and help foreign investors and enterprises to develop in China.

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Chinese Vice Premier Stresses Digital Economy Development

Vice Premier Liu He Monday called for vigorous efforts to advance the digital economy in China while paying close attention to the issues that its development may bring. Liu, also a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, made the remarks in a video address to the China-Shanghai Cooperation Organization Forum on the Digital Economy Industry and the Smart China Expo 2021. The events both opened Monday in southwest China's Chongqing Municipality. The digital economy is a significant growth engine for the Chinese economy, Liu said. Liu urged efforts to conform to the development trend and promote technological innovation. "We should simultaneously pay close attention to the new problems brought by the digital economy, strengthen international cooperation and exchanges, conduct in-depth research and discussions, and put forward effective solutions," Liu said. He called for a market-oriented, law-based, and internationalized environment to develop the digital economy. He also urged giving priority to the building of sound mechanisms to foster its development.

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Chinese Market Set to Prosper with Broader Global Reach

The Chinese market has been well positioned to soar, with new trends shaping its landscape, and the government delivering greater openness and extending efforts to

promote free trade. The vision set out by commerce officials at a press conference Monday testifies to the country's confidence in growing its consumer market, which is second only to the United States in terms of size, and enhancing its strength as the world's top trading nation. "A historic transformation has been accomplished," said Commerce Minister Wang Wentao as he reviewed the country's achievements in terms of business and trade along the journey of building a well-off society. Describing China's market as "unique" and "boasting the advantage of a super-large market," with a middle class of more than 400 million people, making up about 29 percent of its total population, Wang said China has been continuously expanding domestic demand as a strategic basis to foster a strong domestic market.

EVOLVING LANDSCAPE

Compared to 2012, when the country first announced its goal of completing the building of a moderately prosperous society in all respects, China's sales of consumer goods jumped from 20.6 trillion yuan (about 3.18 trillion U.S. dollars) to 39.2 trillion yuan last year, posting an annual average growth of 8.4 percent. But the country's evolving business landscape cannot be explained simply in terms of increased market size. Prominent structural changes have also taken place, reflecting the stronger consumer preference for better services and trading up. Traditionally, a quarter of the country's annual retail sales came from household appliances, furniture, automobiles and catering consumption. Last year, services consumption, though worst hit by COVID-19, contributed 50.1 percent to the country's consumption, as new business scenarios such as contactless sales and smart shops continued to emerge.

Other new consumption trends include the growing appetite of young consumers for time-honored local brands keen on innovation, the rising potential from rural areas, and the increased consumer passion for digital, cultural, tourism and health products and services. Geographically, Shanghai, Beijing, Guangzhou, Tianjin and Chongqing are striving to stand out as international consumption centers, exploring ways of elevating people's livelihoods by better meeting people's increasingly diverse consumer demands. The potential in the central and western regions is to be unleashed as the country makes efforts to promote coordinated development across the whole country.

GREATER OPENNESS

Foreign companies are also expected to expand their presence in the marketplace, as the country has slashed the number of sectors that are off-limits to foreign investors from 93 to 33, while foreign ownership limits on the financial and automobile sectors have been loosened. Hailing foreign firms as "the significant participant in, witness of and contributor to China's building of a well-off society," Wang acknowledged their role as "special and important." So far, they have generated one-tenth of urban employment, one-sixth of tax revenue and two-fifths of imports and exports. Despite the challenges from COVID-19, 56 percent of American

firms, 73 percent of European firms and 89 percent of Japanese companies made a profit in China last year. The inflow of foreign investment into China rose 4.5 percent, compared to a 40-percent decline worldwide.

Looking forward, Wang said that opening-up is about reform, and that the emphasis of opening-up will be more on making institutional arrangements. Regarding the development of the country's free trade zones, he said, "We have reached a consensus and identified goals, and we will promote opening-up in line with higher-level international economic and trade rules." Stress tests with some high-level economic and trade rules will be conducted if the situations are mature, he said, adding that the negative list for foreign investment in pilot free trade zones will be further reduced.

FREE TRADE

Wang said that, as a key part of the Ministry of Commerce's work is to facilitate mutually beneficial cooperation with other countries, the ministry will support foreign investment and foreign trade as its primary tasks, actively advance the joint building of the Belt and Road projects, promote the integration of domestic and foreign trade, and enhance bilateral and multilateral trade cooperation. Vice Minister Wang Shouwen said the country is seeking to sign more free-trade agreements and upgrade existing free-trade deals with Singapore and the Republic of Korea (ROK), respectively. Talks over new agreements with the Gulf Cooperation Council, Israel and Norway will be accelerated, as will those concerning the China-Japan-ROK free-trade agreement, he said. So far, China has inked 19 free-trade agreements involving 26 countries and regions. Worldwide, more than 350 international free-trade agreements have been reached, according to the World Trade Organization.

The vice minister said free-trade agreements have brought closer ties between China and its trade partners. For instance, China's trade with ASEAN skyrocketed from 78 billion U.S. dollars in 2003 to 685.1 billion U.S. dollars last year. Amid the disruptions of COVID-19, China's trade with free-trade-agreement partners rose by 3.2 percent in 2020, in comparison with 0.8 percent increase with non-free-trade-agreement partners. As for the Belt and Road cooperation, vice minister Qian Keming said that China has extended its global reach, signing more than 200 cooperation documents with 172 countries and international organizations. Over 90 bilateral cooperation mechanisms have been established to facilitate trade, investment and e-commerce. From 2013 to 2020, China's cargo trade with countries involved in the Belt and Road Initiative totaled 9.2 trillion U.S. dollars. "These efforts have brought new development opportunities and broader markets to all countries, and at the same time enabled them to share the dividends of our reform and development," Wang Wentao said.

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Xi Highlights Developing Green Economy, Furthering Ecological Progress

Xi Jinping, general secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, on Monday stressed the importance of developing the green economy and furthering ecological progress. Xi made the remarks while visiting a memorial forest in the Saihanba forest farm located in north China's Hebei Province. Named after Wang Shanghai, a late official of the Saihanba forest farm, the Shanghai memorial forest is the birthplace of the "Saihanba spirit," a term attributed to generations of workers on the farm who have kept their mission in mind, worked hard and pursued green development. The workers have dedicated themselves to decades of hard work and created a miracle by transforming a wasteland into vast forests. When talking with staff representatives of the farm, Xi said their efforts have set a good model and are of great significance for ecological advancement nationwide. Xi urged the workers at the Saihanba forest farm to gain a deeper understanding of ecological conservation and continue their hard work for new achievements.

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China to Push Forward High-quality Development of Women and Children's Affairs

The State Council's executive meeting chaired by Premier Li Keqiang on Wednesday adopted the Outline for Women's Development in China (2021-2030) and the Outline for Children's Development in China (2021-2030), and required improving support measures for the three-child policy. Gender equality and women's all-round development are important hallmarks of social progress, and children represent a country's future and a nation's hope. Recent years have seen notable achievements the country made in women and children's affairs. "We must put high premium on work related to women and children as it is an important part of our modernization drive and a symbol for social progress. The principle of gender equality and putting children first should be better manifested in social life," Li said.

The two outlines set out objectives and measures in health, education, social security and welfare, family, environment, legislation and other areas, and made the following requirements. The basic state policy of gender equality must be delivered. Women's equal rights to education, employment, starting businesses, and participation in decision making and management must be protected. Equal remuneration for men and women for work of equal value will be fully implemented. Public services that support the comprehensive development of families and women will be expanded, and social security system improved to meet women's special needs. Basic support and services for women facing difficulties will be strengthened and the legal system protecting women's lawful rights and interests refined. "There

must be institutional arrangements to protect women's rights and interests. Competent departments must provide support," Li said.

The two outlines highlight the need to uphold the principle of putting children first. Greater emphasis must be given to the all-round protection of children at the family, school, society and the internet levels. Compulsory education will remain the top priority of education investment. Children's well-rounded development in terms of moral grounding, intellectual and physical ability, aesthetic sensibility, and work skills will be promoted. The health services system for children must be enhanced to ensure the safety of food and products for children. The rights to survival, development and safety, and the interests of orphans, unattended children, children with disabilities and homeless children must be protected. Greater care and protection will be extended to left-behind children of migrant workers, and school bullying must be prevented and effectively dealt with.

"There are 250 million children in China. Their healthy development is of vital importance to families and the whole society," Li said. "We should focus our efforts on tackling the prominent issues that constrain the development of women and children's affairs." The two outlines urged updating the support measures in executing the three-child policy. Maternity leave and childbirth allowance will be implemented, and parental leave explored. Public-benefit childcare services will be developed with the support of communities. Expenses for infant and child care services for children under 3 years old will be eligible for itemized extra tax deductions for individual income tax. Housing and other support policies will be strengthened. Multi-pronged steps will be taken to lighten the burden of family in child bearing, child care and children's education. "Support measures for the three-child policy should be carefully studied, to steadily optimize the demographic mix and raise people's educational level," Li said.

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China Develops Community-based Home Care Services for Elderly

Zhao Hong, a resident of the city of Chengde in north China's Hebei Province, is unable to independently care for himself due to a cerebral infarction. In addition to the help of his daughter, he can now count on workers from a community-based services center that provides elderly home care. Zhao's daughter used to prepare three meals for him at once and put them in the refrigerator. Knowing that she was very busy, workers with the Center for Home-based Elderly Care Services in the Binhe Community now often come to cook for Zhao. "They are very reliable and considerate. They came to my home to make fresh dumplings for me. I am extremely grateful to them for their help," Zhao said. President Xi Jinping, also general secretary of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee and chairman

of the Central Military Commission, visited the center during his inspection tour of Chengde from Monday to Tuesday.

He said that ensuring happy lives for the elderly is a vital responsibility of Party committees and governments at all levels, and called for efforts to develop all-inclusive elderly care services and improve the networks for community-based services centers providing home care for the elderly. Established in 2018, the center is run by a home-based care services company and provides services including cultural entertainment, health care, spiritual support and daytime care for the elderly aged 60 and above in the area. The government pays the company an annual fee of 718 yuan (about 111 U.S. dollars) for each elderly person it serves. The center currently has one nurse and 12 full-time staff members. It also has 230 volunteers, including 48 individuals over the age of 60, who provide services for nearly 1,200 elderly people living in the Binhe Community. Doctors are regularly appointed by contracted hospitals to offer on-site consultations.

"We have input information about the elderly, including their medical history, health status, medication and living needs, into our system. And they can call for help using their mobile terminals, and our workers will reach them to provide timely services," said Xu Jiajie, Party chief of the Binhe Community. Liu Baochuan, 65, lives in the Haitangyuan neighborhood of Binhe and has several medical conditions, including diabetes and hypertension. Liu is often cared for by center workers, who visit him regularly, taking his blood pressure and providing professional health guidance. When he was ill and hospitalized, center workers and volunteers took turns to accompany him and take care of him in the hospital. "The newly retired locals help the older or disabled elderly, and the length of our volunteer services can be deposited in a 'Time Bank.' When we need help in the future, we will get the services of other volunteers," said Hu Xiyang, a 67-year-old volunteer living in Binhe.

Xi, who pays great attention to the development of elderly care services, has often visited elderly care services facilities during his domestic inspection tours. When he visited the Center for Home-based Elderly Care Services in the Binhe Community, he also urged efforts to build a system that integrates home, community and healthcare facilities. In 2020, there were 264 million people in China aged 60 or above, accounting for 18.7 percent of the total population. By 2025, the country's elderly population over the age of 60 is expected to exceed 300 million. As of 2020, there are 38,000 care institutions and 280,000 community care facilities for the elderly across the country, with a total of 8.2 million beds.

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China Sees Progress in Building E-commerce Demonstration Bases: Ministry

China has made solid progress in building e-commerce demonstration bases in recent years, data from the Ministry of Commerce showed. By the end of 2020, the country had formulated 127 such bases, which housed a total of 73,500 e-commerce companies. The number of companies increased by 12.9 percent from a year earlier, said the ministry. The total e-commerce transaction volume at these bases reached 6.37 trillion yuan (about 982 billion U.S. dollars) last year, up 13.3 percent year on year, according to the ministry. Emphasizing the demonstration bases' role in creating jobs and reducing poverty, the ministry said that these bases had over 1.51 million employees by the end of 2020, with 97,600 of them being migrant workers. More than 90 percent of these bases have dedicated themselves to poverty alleviation through e-commerce, it added.

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JAPAN: Virtual City Becoming a Tech Utopia

Toyota engineers are using a virtual-reality 'digital twin' to design a technology-driven future concept city more than five times faster than normal, testing and tweaking new technologies before they are built for real as part of the company's Woven City project. The automotive and robotics giant announced its Woven City smart-city project in Japan at the CES 2020 consumer tech conference, and in February broke ground on what it calls "the world's first programmable city". Named to reflect the idea that a city involves many different layers of daily activity, every element has been designed with efficiency in mind. Pedestrians and self-driving electric vehicles will move over separate dedicated paths, for example, with virtual modelling allowing designers to test different road layouts for optimal efficiency. "This technology, along with modern AI, is helping us learn and create synthetic data sets that we can use to accelerate and optimise the deployment and design utility of Woven City," Woven Planet Holdings representative director and CEO Dr James Kuffner said during the recent AWS Innovation Day.

"We've accelerated by at least a factor of 5 or 10, the number of iterations that we've been able to think about, evaluate and improve upon by utilising and leveraging virtual representations of the city." Having emerged from the economic chaos of the 2011 earthquake and Fukushima nuclear disaster, Woven City will be built on a 70-hectare former Toyota factory at the base of Japan's Mount Fuji. Intended to showcase the benefits of ubiquitous connectivity, the city will be populated by full-time residents and researchers surrounded by AI-powered technology including IoT sensors, robotic assistants, and connected self-driving vehicles. The city will be almost completely reliant on renewable energy including rooftop solar panels and hydrogen-powered fuel, which Toyota has been pushing hard in its automotive business. As cloud platforms enable architects and city planners to store and share the virtually unlimited data volumes needed for detailed 3D models, digital twinning has become a powerful tool in speeding the design of built environments.

The same data is accessible from anywhere in the world, allowing collaborators from different disciplines to explore and discuss evolving models. The City of Melbourne, for example, has been using 3D visualisation to evaluate city planning applications while the NSW government last year launched a digital twin of the state, which overlays a broad range of geospatial data onto an interactive map of the state. Australian virtual-tour company PHORIA recently tapped digital twins to help real-estate agents like Jellis Craig Stonnington work around COVID lockdown restrictions by showcasing homes in photorealistic detail. Yet annotating photographs or city maps is a far cry from designing one virtually, from the ground up. In the past, Kuffner said, “cities often evolved organically, where there may not have been a master plan.” Digital twinning, he explained, is helping Toyota and its partners design the city in a realistic, interactive virtual space.

“In the same way that Toyota engineers have used computer-aided design tools to dramatically accelerate the number of iterations they could do on an engine or a transmission or a chassis design, we can use the digital twin to do many iterations of different possible layouts and architectural design choices.” Digital twins are a key driver of advanced manufacturing and Industry 4.0, with a recent report predicting the market for industrial digital twins – which build interactive models of industrial machines for use in training, testing, and operations – will surge by 29 per cent annually through 2030. “The real transformation is happening now in software,” Kuffner said, “as AI allows robots to leave the structured environments of factories and enter more semi-structured or unstructured environments like logistics hubs, or our homes and offices.” “We’re trying to accelerate the rate of development and optimisation by exploring how we can optimise the layout of the city to have smooth safe mobility of people and goods throughout the city before it's even built”.

From <https://ia.acs.org.au> 07/27/2021

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SOUTH KOREA: Ransomware Attacks on Korean Companies on the Rise KISA

The number of ransomware attacks on Korean companies, organizations and schools is on the rise and hackers are using more sophisticated techniques to exploit vulnerabilities in security systems, the country’s state-run cybersecurity body warned. Ransomware refers to malware that infects computer and mobile devices by exploiting system vulnerabilities, and threatens to destroy data unless a ransom is paid. According to the Korea Internet & Security Agency, 78 ransomware attacks on Korean targets were reported in the first half of this year. The number of ransomware attacks was just 22 in 2018, before going up to 39 in 2019 and 127 in 2020, in line with the explosive growth of similar attacks worldwide. Cybersecurity firm Check Point Research said the number of organizations affected by ransomware surged by 102 percent around the world in the first half of this year, compared from a year

earlier. The damage caused by ransomware will reach \$20 billion this year, a 57-fold increase from 2015, according to data from Cybersecurity Ventures.

“Hackers are expanding the scope of targets from individual PCs to small companies with weak security systems and social infrastructure,” said Lee Jae-kwang, chief of KISA’s Profound Analysis Team. Lee said hackers used to focus on encrypting a victim’s database but have now switched to extracting large amounts of sensitive data and threaten to publish them, forcing organizations to pay ransom demands -- a technique known as “double extortion.” But the full picture on the growing ransomware threats remains murky as companies are reluctant to disclose the attacks for fear of hurting their brand and losing revenue as a result. Cybercriminals across the globe are developing more lethal methods, with the attacks evolving from simple email phishing to highly targeted and more damaging network-wide infections. KISA’s Lee said that a growing number of disparate Ransomware-as-a-Service (RaaS) brands, which eliminates the time-consuming phase of development on the part of hackers, is contributing to the wider spread of attacks. Hackers pay in cryptocurrency to purchase such tools on the dark web, or encrypted sites that are not indexed by conventional search engines.

“With the use of RaaS, even cybercriminals who do not have expertise in security solutions can orchestrate ransomware attacks,” Lee said. “It is also very difficult to track and trace such RaaS-based attacks.” Lee said that recent ransomware attacks have turned to target computers of system managers who do not check their security regularly. This is because system managers have access to the central network and key solutions, serving as a gateway for large-scale targeted intrusions known as APT, or advanced persistent threat. “To carry out APT attacks on companies, a hub is needed, and PCs connected to the key systems are becoming the main targets,” Lee said. Cutting off the system manager’s PC from the central management solutions is one way to minimize damage when a ransomware attack is attempted, while the overall system needs regular security updates to fix vulnerabilities in advance. In addition, two-factor authentication for the system manager’s PC is highly recommended, according to KISA.

To resolve security-related issues, the Ministry of Science and ICT recently announced it would implement a nationwide information security consulting and solutions support project, offering 15 million won (\$13,000) of financial support each to 600 small- and medium-sized companies. Some companies tend to mismanage their data backup systems, resulting in greater damage. Setting up data backup systems and updating antivirus vaccines are important, but are not enough to fight off all attacks. “When computer virus vaccine programs detect malware programs, some people believe their systems are safe, but it is often a warning signal that their systems are under attack,” said Lee. “Companies must fix the vulnerable points indicated by vaccine programs as fast as possible.” IT managers should also refrain from formatting their systems immediately after they come under attack, KISA said.

Conducting a post-attack analysis first would help identify infiltration routes and other potential weak points.

When ransomware attacks happen, it takes around one month to fully restore the database even when companies have prepared a backup. KISA said many Korean companies do not know it takes such a long period of time to recover their systems, and they need to take careful measures to safeguard their businesses and minimize service disruptions. Citing its own analysis of actual cases, KISA said many ransomware attacks on Korean companies were prepared over an average period of one year. Over that period, hackers attempt to infiltrate the system, secure a strategic point, explore vulnerabilities to which IT managers do not pay much attention and finally mount a lethal attack that paralyzes the entire system. KISA said the yearlong period in which ransomware attacks are planned and attempted means two things for Korean firms. First, companies tend to ignore their security warnings even after warning signs surface. Second, they have enough time to minimize or prevent damage if they do regular and thorough checkups on the vulnerable points of their networks and computers.

From <http://www.koreaherald.com> 08/02/2021

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S. Korea's 5G Users Top 16 Mln Data

The number of smartphone users on 5G mobile networks topped 16 million as of June, data showed Thursday, as subscriptions to the latest generation networks continued to grow despite a lack of new flagship 5G phones. The total number of 5G users reached 16.47 million in June, accounting for around 23 percent of the total 71.63 million mobile subscriptions in the country, according to the data from the Ministry of Science and ICT. The latest data marks an increase from 15.84 million in May. South Korea first commercialized 5G networks in April 2019. SK Telecom Co., the country's largest mobile carrier by subscriptions, had the most 5G users at 7.7 million, followed by KT Corp. at 5 million and LG Uplus Corp. at 3.7 million. Subscriptions to 5G phones are expected to grow at a faster rate later this year after the launches of Samsung Electronics Co.'s new foldable 5G phones, as well as Apple Inc.'s new iPhones. "With the launches of flagship phones from Samsung and Apple in the second half of the year, net monthly growth in 5G subscribers are expected to rise to around 900,000," eBEST Investment & Securities analyst Lee Seung-woong said in a report. Monthly net additions in 5G users stood at around 624,000 in June, compared with over 1 million in January after the launches of Samsung's flagship Galaxy S21 the same month and Apple's iPhone 12 in October last year.

From <https://en.yna.co.kr> 08/05/2021

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Online Food Market Soars 45 Pct in H1 amid Pandemic

South Korea's online food market jumped more than 45 percent in the first half of the year from a year earlier due to the fallout from the coronavirus pandemic, data showed Thursday. The value of online food transactions in Asia's fourth-largest economy stood at 27.8 trillion won (US\$24 billion) in the January-June period, up 45.4 percent from a year earlier, according to the data from Statistics Korea and industry sources. It was the largest half-year tally that breached the previous record of 24.1 trillion won registered in the second half of last year. In light of the current pace, the country's online food market is expected to top the 50 trillion-won mark this year after reaching 43.4 trillion won last year. The first-half jump was attributed to a marked increase in contact-free consumption in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic. The figure covers online transactions of food, groceries, farm produce, meat and fishery goods, as well as food delivery services. Transactions of food and beverages surged nearly 34 percent in the first half from a year earlier, with the value of food delivery services spiking some 63 percent. The first-half gain in the online food market is much higher than the value of overall online shopping, which expanded 23.6 percent on-year to 91.8 trillion won. Local food companies have been ramping up efforts to catch up with soaring online shopping amid the fallout from the coronavirus pandemic.

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S. Korea Aims to Set Global Tech Standards for Metaverse

South Korea's standard agency said Thursday it will spare no efforts to lead the global standardization of technologies related to the metaverse as the industry is expected to further expand down the road amid the COVID-19 pandemic. "Online meetings and lectures, along with remote working, have emerged as a new norm amid the pandemic," Lee Sang-hoon, who heads the Korean Agency for Technology and Standards, said during the International Display Standardization Forum held virtually on the day. "South Korea will provide any necessary support for businesses seeking to set technology standards in the field," he added. The metaverse refers to a 3-D virtual shared world, in which all activities can take place with the help of augmented- and virtual-reality services. Such platforms have grown in popularity over the past year as people shift their activities online amid the pandemic. The standard agency said it is important for South Korea to acquire core technologies, such as flexible and transparent displays as displays play a key role in promoting the metaverse ecosystem.

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South-East Asia

INDONESIA: Introducing Solar Power Program into Universities

to Cultivate Future Talents

The Indonesian government has launched the Solar Power Initiative Movement Program to universities across the country, aiming to encourage college students to choose their future careers in the clean energy industry. The program is designed for students who want to earn college credits from it as a elective class. It is tailored as a combination of three-month courses and three-month group assignments, Minister of Education, Culture, Research and Technology Nadiem Makarim said on a virtual event Friday. During the first three months, students will receive course materials delving on engineering, commercial, and marketing knowledge. Then, the students will be trained directly by rooftop photovoltaic power station entrepreneurs about market survey, business strategies, and promotional techniques. According to the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources, the current total capacity of photovoltaic power stations in Indonesia is only 31 megawatts. However, the ministry also predicts that the potential capacity of the power stations can reach up to 32,000 megawatts if more Indonesian households, offices, industries, government buildings, or state-owned enterprises use the solar power stations. The program is one of the government's initiatives to attract the interest of the public and businesses to consume more clean energy. The government has set a target for renewable energy to comprise at least 23 percent of all energy consumption in the country by 2025.

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CAMBODIA: Aiming to Achieve Herd Immunity Against Covid-19 by Year End

Cambodia's vaccination drive is expected to cover 12 million people, or 75 percent of the kingdom's 16-million population by the end of this year, Prime Minister Samdech Techo Hun Sen said on Friday. Hun Sen said as the target of vaccinating 10 million adult population is close to be achieved as planned by November, the government is committed to achieving the goal of vaccinating 2 million adolescents aged 12-17 by the end of this year in order to build herd immunity. "On behalf of the Cambodian government, I'd like to express my sincere appreciation to our friendly countries for providing vaccines to Cambodia timely, especially to the People's Republic of China, which is the leading country in providing vaccines in terms of both humanitarian donations and direct orders," he said at a national forum via videoconference. Health ministry's secretary of state and spokeswoman Or Vandine said that as of Aug. 19, the country has administered at least one dose of COVID-19 vaccines to 9.38 million people, or 58.7 percent of the total population. "About 86.12 percent of the 10 million targeted adults and 39.48 percent of the 2 million targeted adolescents have been vaccinated," she said. The Southeast Asian nation confirmed 519 new COVID-19 cases on Friday, pushing the national total caseload to 88,242, the health ministry said, adding that 836 of the total cases were the Delta variant. Fifteen more fatalities were reported, bringing the overall death toll to 1,762, the ministry said, adding that

another 553 patients recovered, taking the total number of recoveries to 83,851.

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Cambodia's COVID-19 Vaccination Coverage Reaches 10 Mln People

Cambodia has administered at least one dose of COVID-19 vaccines to 10.07 million people, or 63 percent of the Southeast Asian nation's 16-million population, officials said on Thursday. Of them, 8.13 million have completed the two-dose inoculation, Ministry of Health's secretary of state and spokeswoman Or Vandine said in a report. "As of Aug. 25, some 88.35 percent of the 10 million targeted adults and 62.87 percent of the 2 million targeted adolescents aged 12-17 have been vaccinated," she said. Cambodia began a COVID-19 vaccination drive in February, targeting to inoculate 12 million people, or 75 percent of the total population, by the end of this year in order to build herd immunity. Most of the vaccines used in the country's immunization program are China's Sinovac and Sinopharm. According to the Chinese Embassy in Cambodia, to date China has provided 22.3 million vaccine doses to Cambodia, of which 3.8 million were humanitarian donations. Cambodian government chief spokesman Phay Siphon called the kingdom's inoculation drive a "great success," expressing his profound gratitude to China for providing vaccines to Cambodia regularly and timely.

"If there was no China's strong support, we would not have enough vaccines to inoculate our people. We highly value this generous help," he told Xinhua. "I'd like to say that our joint COVID-19 fight should be a role model for international cooperation and there is no doubt that it will contribute to building a community of shared future between Cambodia and China." Phea Sokheng, a 20-year-old student at the Phnom Penh International University, showed her thanks to the Cambodian government for providing free vaccines and gratitude to China for donating and selling vaccines to the kingdom. "A friend in need is a friend indeed.' China, your kind support will be engraved in our hearts forever," she told Xinhua. Sokheng, who has been fully vaccinated with Sinovac vaccine, said she was quite confident in the quality and efficacy of the vaccine, saying that it would protect her from COVID-19 and its variants. Cambodia confirmed 423 new COVID-19 cases, including 111 imported ones on Thursday, raising the national total caseload to 90,958, the Ministry of Health said, adding that six more fatalities had been reported, bringing the overall death toll to 1,841. Another 291 patients had recovered, taking the total number of recoveries to 86,993, the ministry added.

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MALAYSIA: Near-Term Economy Continues to Face Challenges

Malaysia's near-term economy continues to face challenges as the leading index which acts as an indicator of the future movement of the overall economy eased to 0.5 percent in June, from 6.9 percent in May, official data showed Wednesday. The Department of Statistics Malaysia (DOSM) said in a statement, the growth of the leading index in June was mainly contributed by real imports of other basic precious and other non-ferrous metals driven by the import of copper-based metals. However, the leading index declined 2.8 percent month-on-month, reflected by the reduction in all of the leading index components, mainly the number of housing units approved. "The leading index indicates that Malaysia's near-term economic prospect continues to face challenges. This is in line with the forecasts by international and national agencies that expect a slower economic outlook for Malaysia in 2021," said DOSM. However, it opined that positive impacts from various government initiatives to support business continuity, along with the progress of COVID-19 vaccination rates may stimulate the business confidence and hence support the economic recovery. Meanwhile, the coincident index, which reflects the current economic activity, posted a negative 3 percent in June following the implementation of another round of Movement Control Order in May to contain the pandemic. It further decreased to negative 6.3 percent month-on-month as against a decline of 1.3 percent recorded in the preceding month, due to the noticeable decline in capacity utilization in the manufacturing sector.

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SINGAPORE: To Generate New Growth, Jobs, Prosperity for Future

Singapore must change gears from drawing down reserves to support people's livelihood to generating new growth, jobs and prosperity for the future, said Singaporean Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong on Sunday. While delivering the National Day Rally 2021 speech Lee said Singapore must now refocus on the future. The city-state needs to preserve its status as a business hub, attract more foreign investments, and grow Singapore companies and entrepreneurs, so as to sustain longer term growth, he said. According to Lee, it is important for Singapore to open up soon and allow more people to travel in and out of Singapore in a safe way. That is because the staff of many multinational corporations (MNCs), which use Singapore as their regional base and Singapore's businessmen need to fly in and out of the country to visit operations in other countries. "If our borders stay closed for too long, MNCs will find us less useful, Singaporean businesses also will suffer, and our economy will be permanently damaged," the prime minister said. Singapore's Ministry of Trade and Industry announced earlier this month that it upgraded Singapore's GDP growth forecast for 2021 to 6-7 percent from 4-6 percent. Lee said in his speech that the ministry is more confident because the global economy is picking up. "The U.S. and China are growing strongly, and Europe is also recovering," he said. "These are our major markets."

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THAILAND: Over 23% of Thai Population Have Got Their First Jab

Phuket is the only province where most of the residents have been vaccinated against Covid-19, the Higher Education, Science, Research and Innovation Ministry reported on Monday. The ministry said that so far, more than 20 million doses of the vaccine have been administered in Thailand – with the first 10 million taking 124 days and the last 10 million just 36 days to administer. The ministry's statistics show 23.9 per cent of the population has received the first dose, 6.7 per cent both doses and 0.3 per cent, mostly medics, have received their third jab. So far, Thailand has only administered four brands of vaccines, namely Sinovac (48.77 per cent), AstraZeneca (43.95 per cent), Sinopharm (7 per cent) and Pfizer (0.28 per cent). The highest number of jabs – 670,000 – were delivered on August 5. In terms of provinces, Phuket leads with 75.9 per cent of the population inoculated, followed by Bangkok (70.2 per cent), Rayong (41.6 per cent) and Phang Nga (41.1 per cent). Moreover, the ministry said Thailand is the fourth-most inoculated nation in the region. Some organisations in the country, namely Baiya Phytopharm, Chulalongkorn and Mahidol Universities, BioNet-Asia and the Government Pharmaceutical Organisation, are conducting research for their own Covid-19 vaccine.

From <https://www.nationthailand.com> 08/09/2021

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Education Ministry Cuts Homework to Reduce Stress of Children Studying Online

The Education Ministry says will reduce homework and screen time for students studying online, in a bid to lower their stress. Education Minister Treenuch Thienthong announced the move on Monday, the same day as new research showed an increase in anxious behaviours among online learners. Treenuch said indicators of academic performance have been adjusted to allow students to learn what they need to know and reduce screen time and homework. Teachers have been instructed to focus on evidence-based learning rather than exams. Basic National Education Test (ONET) scores would not be used for graduation and admissions decisions at both basic and tertiary levels, she confirmed. The minister acknowledged that some schools had adopted the same schedule for online teaching as classroom teaching, and not reduced study time. The Office of the Basic Education Commission (OBEC) and Vocational Education Commission (VEC) will instruct education area offices to ensure that each school complies with the policy to reduce the burden on students, she added. Monday also saw the Thailand Physical Activity Knowledge Development Centre (TPAK) release a study on the impact of online learning. It states that the increased amount of homework has stressed

children and caused anxious behaviours. Stress levels are particularly high among those in Grade 6 preparing for middle school and Grade 12 preparing for university, as they were worried there would be no good schools left for them, the study said.

From <https://www.nationthailand.com> 08/24/2021

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Thailand Welcomes more International Tourists After Expansion of Travel Program

Over 3,000 international tourists have visited other designated tourist areas beyond Phuket in Thailand since a new program took effect on Aug. 16, Thailand's Center for Economic Situation Administration said Tuesday. The "Phuket Sandbox 7+7 Extension" program reduces the mandatory stay in Phuket for fully vaccinated international travelers from 14 to 7 days, after which another seven days can be spent in alternative tourism hotspots in Krabi, Phang-Nga or Surat Thani. "The program signifies the progress of Thailand's plan to gradually reopen to fully vaccinated international travelers." said Yuthasak Supasorn, Governor of the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT). More destinations will be added to the list, once the preparation of appropriate measures on health and safety are fully in place, he added. So far, there have been a total of 24,190 tourists visiting the country under the Phuket Sandbox scheme, which was launched on July 1, allowing vaccinated foreign tourists from low-and-medium-risk countries to visit the island without undergoing a two-week quarantine. The primary countries of origin of these travelers are the United States, Britain, Israel, France and Germany. Tourism is regarded as a key driver for the Thai economy. The country attempts to restore the sector and prepare for a nationwide reopening for vaccinated foreign visitors by mid-October.

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VIETNAM: Connecting Farming Households to e-Commerce Platforms Will Help Digital Economy Development

Việt Nam looks to connect five million farming households to e-commerce platforms this year, which would create breakthroughs in the development of the digital economy in the agriculture sector, Deputy Minister of Information and Communications Phạm Anh Tuấn said. This was the highlight of the ministry's plan approved in late July to provide support to farmers to take their products online and promote the development of the digital economy in the agriculture and rural sector. At an online conference this week to implement the plan, Tuấn said that the plan aimed to connect farming households with e-commerce platforms to promote their products, expand markets and encourage consumption of farm produce. Tuấn asked local departments of agriculture and rural development and industry and trade to cooperate with two selected post companies Vietnam Post and Viettel Post to develop detailed plans for connecting local farmers with e-commerce platforms this

month. Tuấn said that five million farming households would be connected to e-commerce platforms by the end of this year, which would create the first breakthrough in developing the digital economy for the agriculture sector, adding that support would continue to be provided in following years.

Nguyễn Trọng Đường, Deputy Director of the ministry's Department of Enterprise Management, said that it was important to make farmers see the benefits of bringing their products online. For a bigger goal, the ministry aimed to connect a total of 13 million farming and individual business households to e-commerce platforms, Đường said. Statistics of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development's Agricultural Products Processing and Development Department showed that to date, only around 8,000 farming households with more than 14,500 agricultural products were connected to e-commerce platforms. E-commerce platforms provided a good channel for distributing agricultural products, especially in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. A clear example could be seen from the consumption of lychee of COVID-hit Bắc Giang Province in May. More than 8,000 tonnes of lychee was sold in 63 provinces and cities nationwide via two platforms Postmart and Voso. According to Tuấn, the volume of agricultural products sold via e-commerce platforms remained modest. However, e-commerce platforms would not only play a role in selling the products but also in promoting the products and expanding markets, especially in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

From <https://vietnamnews.vn/> 08/16/2021

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HCM City Wants to Use One Smart Card for All Public Transport

The HCM City People's Committee plans to establish technical standards to develop a single smart card that could be used for all types of public transport. The city aims to create inter-linkages between automatic fare collection (AFC) systems as well as convenience for card users. If metro lines, rapid buses and water buses have many kinds of AFC systems, the cost to interlink these systems would be too high, according to city officials. The committee has sought clearance from the Ministry of Transport to give the city the authority to decide on the technical standards for all AFC systems in public passenger transport on waterways and roads. An AFC system is in line with the city's smart-city project which promotes the use of cashless payments. In a related issue, the city's Transport Department is considering investment in an automatic payment system that could be used for all types of public transport. The city launched a one-year pilot project on the use of cashless payment for public buses in March 2019, and later extended it to the end of this year. The pilot is expected to encourage more residents to use the bus system. Passengers need to register to get a bus card, which is similar to a bank card. The cashless payment was first used on bus route No 86 from Bến Thành Market in District 1 to Tôn Đức Thắng University in District 7. The project is being piloted on a total of eight bus routes instead of 18 bus routes as previously planned. More than 10,300 smart bus cards

were issued to passengers by the end of last year. After preliminary review and evaluation, the city will decide on how to proceed with the project. The pilot scheme will also be applied to metro lines, rapid buses and boats in the future. The Việt Nam Thương Tín Commercial Joint Stock Bank (VietBank) and Zion Company received approval to carry out the pilot project, which uses capital from enterprises instead of funds from the city or state budget.

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City Provides Social Welfare Packages for Homeless and Poor Residents

HCM City has prepared 1.8 million social welfare packages so far for the homeless and poor. Each free package, valued at VNĐ300,000, includes rice, vegetables, cooking oil and spices for one week. Out of 1.8 million packages, the city has sent 492,076 packages to localities to support people in need. The city will continue to mobilize resources to prepare an additional 2 million social welfare packages as planned. On August 25, the city gathered around 300 homeless people to send them to shelters. District 4 gathered 116 homeless people living along Võ Văn Kiệt Street and beneath Móng and Calmette bridges and sent them to shelters. Eleven of them tested positive on their first COVID test, the rest were vaccinated. Đỗ Thị Trúc Mai, deputy chairwoman of District 4 People Committee said that the district would make sure all homeless people in District 4 get vaccinated. Deputy Prime Minister Vũ Đức Đam, head of the National Steering Committee for COVID-19 Prevention and Control, instructed the city on Monday to gather and test homeless people.

At shelters, they will be tested for COVID-19, and if positive, they will be sent to quarantine facilities, and if not, will be assigned to shelters for care and get vaccinated. During the two-week stay-at-home period, district authorities will speed up COVID-19 testing for people in the red (extremely high-risk) and orange (high-risk) zones. The city's Department of Health is working with districts to set up mobile vaccination teams in the red and orange zones. People living in these areas will go to their nearest mobile unit for vaccinations. The plan aims to separate positive cases from the community, and control the outbreak as soon as possible. The city is also speeding up its vaccination schedule. The city has classified all 312 communes and wards into three groups: green zone (free of COVID cases), orange zone (high-risk) and red zone (extremely high-risk). The goal is to maintain and expand the green zones while isolating and reducing risks in red and orange zones.

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Mobile Oxygen-Production Stations Provide Oxygen Cylinders to Hospitals in Need in HCM City

Ministry of National Defence's Air Defence - Air Force is using two container trucks as mobile oxygen-production stations to meet oxygen demand of hospitals treating COVID-19 patients in HCM City. The trucks are equipped with machines for oxygen production and a back-up generator. Each station can produce 40-60 oxygen cylinders with pressure swing adsorption (PSA) technology. The stations have two drivers and four others in charge of producing oxygen. They travel to hospitals treating COVID-19 patients to provide oxygen in time. The Air Defence - Air Force also has a A41 plant with three liquid oxygen production lines with a capacity of nearly 4,300 oxygen cylinders of 40 litres each. On August 18, the plant's 1,000 oxygen cylinders were sent to 12 field hospitals in the city. The city Department of Information and Communications on August 26 launched the phone app Oxygen 247 to help COVID-19 patients and their relatives as well as health officials contact hospitals that have empty beds with oxygen cylinders and ventilators. The app helps the Department of Health and the city Steering Committee for COVID-19 Prevention and Control to dispatch oxygen cylinders to hospitals facing a shortage. The app is available on IOS and Android platforms. Its database is connected with the Department of Health's management system which is updated frequently.

Priority for oxygen, medicine

Speaking at a press meeting on August 26, Phan Công Bằng, deputy head of the city Department of Transport, said that vehicles transporting oxygen cylinders and medical equipment were being given priority for travel on the roads. Lê Mạnh Hà of the city police said that vehicle drivers must have transportation contracts for equipment and medicine, and a business registration licence. People in the city who have an appointment for re-examinations or vaccinations are allowed to travel without a travel permission document. The city police are not providing travel permission documents to charity organisations and individuals who want to provide meals and food to people in need because there is a risk of virus transmission. They can contact the city's special task teams who will help transport meals and food.

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South Asia

INDIA: Free Education & Monthly Pension to Children Orphaned Due to COVID

As the COVID cases are surging in the state, the Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh Shivraj Singh Chouhan today, on May 13, announced that children whose parents or guardians succumbed to COVID-19 infection will be provided free education and a monthly pension of Rs 5000. According to an international news agency, CM Chouhan said, "We cannot leave such families, we are the government of the state and we will support these children." Such children need not worry, as they are the children of the state, and the state will take care of them, he added. Addressing

women who want to start a business or want to work, the CM announced that for such women the state government will grant loans on the government guarantee.

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India's Path Towards Localising SDGs and Atmanirbhar India

India has adopted the Sustainable Development Goals framework and aligned its development policies and missions with the global goals. The country has made significant progress on the SDG targets driven by the principles of inclusive growth and sustainability. However, the process of implementing strategies at the city level for achieving global/national sustainability goals—localisation of SDGs—is an arduous task. While the urban local bodies are still struggling with low technical and managerial capacities, the COVID-19 pandemic has thrown up a series of socio-economic challenges making the situation even more challenging. This has not only slowed the momentum towards implementing SDGs but also has brought the focus on urban local bodies' functions which now need to be strengthened to build a resilient urban society. In response to the pandemic and economic slowdown, the call for making an Atmanirbhar India— supported by the five pillars economy, infrastructure, system, demography, and demand—will only be realised if our cities are sustainable and productive. There is no doubt that a self-reliant India will emerge from self-reliant cities. This endeavour will require a strong synchronisation between the national planning policies and the global frameworks. It is crucial that both are implemented locally.

One of the most important implementation steps is to strengthen local economic development, i.e. building up economic capacity by delivering on the basic socio-economic needs. We must also shift from regulatory-based planning to strategic planning. Such planning will allow for stronger regional networks that enhance investments and develop spatial strategies that incentivise growth, and design enabling policies for people, production, and productivity. This is the decade of action for SDGs and it is imperative to adopt an action-oriented approach to meet the goals of economic self-reliance, inclusivity, and sustainability. We must strengthen the institutional capacities, promote innovative financing mechanisms and harmonise the policy environment for action at the local level. NIUA is committed to helping Indian cities perform better. To achieve this objective, along with our own resources, we partner with media, industry, academia, and other government and non-government organisations for effective research, capacity-building, and advocacy outcomes. The collaboration of the National Institute of Urban Affairs and eGov magazine is a demonstration of the same. Teams at NIUA and eGov magazine have enthusiastically worked to collate a diverse range of knowledge-base on the cross-cutting issues on sustainable urban development in India for this special issue. My sincere thanks to all the authors who have contributed to this special issue and shared their knowledge to make this issue possible.

Fostering Sustainability in India's Urban Development

In 2015, all the UN member states adopted the Sustainable Development Goals. The SDG 11 is the most important among all the goals as it directly relates to the inclusive and sustainable development of cities. In this regard, Durga Shanker Mishra, Secretary, MoHUA elaborates on various missions and programmes of the ministry contributing towards achieving SDG 11 in India in an exclusive interview with the National Institute of Urban Affairs for eGov Magazine. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity. They are a universal set of goals, targets and indicators that UN member states are expected to use to frame their agendas and policies until 2030. In this regard, the member states are implementing the SDGs by translating global goals into their national legal framework consisting of local policies, norms, standards and recommendations. What key actions have been taken by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs to achieve sustainable and inclusive urbanisation for India? Providing Sustainability, inclusivity, and improved quality of life in Indian cities are the most important priorities for my ministry. The people migrating from rural to urban areas have dreams and aspirations to improve their quality of life with better facilities for living, and livelihood opportunities that include physical, social, institutional and economic infrastructure. It is a big challenge in view of the rapid urban growth. However, the government sees it as a huge opportunity to drive the economy forward. Investments in urbanisation initiatives will create jobs, improve ease of living and employ citizens to the best of their abilities in service of the nation. Traditional interventions have mostly focused on physical improvements such as slum upgradation. We at MoHUA have a holistic approach that integrates all dimensions of sustainability and urban inclusion – social, economic, environmental and governance. Therefore, a three-level strategy, as highlighted below was adopted:

At the first level, poverty alleviation, affordable housing and cleanliness are the three biggest challenges. Deen Dayal Antyodaya Yojana-National Urban Livelihood Mission (DAY-NULM), Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana – Urban (PMAY-U) and Swachh Bharat Mission Urban (SBM-U) are implemented in all i.e. nearly 4,400 urban local bodies (ULBs). At the second level, basic infrastructure like water supply and sewerage/septage projects and green parks are in the focus. These sectors require economies of scale and are being implemented in 500 cities, with 1,00,000 and above population (2011 Census) through Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT). This covers over 65 percent of the total urban population in the country. Finally, at the third level, 100 cities are being developed under Smart Cities Mission (SCM) to address the issue of ease of living with improved quality of life, sustainability and economic-ability by evolving a new paradigm of urban

governance with communities at the core and increased use of digital technology to improve the urban infrastructure, services and optimum utilisation of resources. One of the primary objectives of this ministry is to promote inclusive cities by ensuring comprehensive development that will improve quality of life, create employment and enhance incomes for all, especially the poor and the disadvantaged. Urban development in India is a state subject. The states are given the task of developing their respective urban planning frameworks to achieve sustainable and inclusive urbanisation. However, this task puts an enhanced responsibility for cities, which may affect the already institutionally weak smaller and medium cities. From this perspective, could you please elaborate on how are you trying to build the capacities of the smaller municipal corporations and municipalities in contributing towards sustainable urban development?

Capacity of local governments to conceive and deliver sustainable infrastructure projects and services of international quality is a challenge we are working on. Implementation of urban development is a complex activity and spans across the pillars of social, economic, infrastructural and institutional development, which typically takes place at a local (governance) level. We are bringing together the diverse skill-sets that reside in multiple ministries of the Government of India, State Governments, multi-lateral, bi-lateral funding institutions, expert organisations, and other ecosystem partners who specialise in sectorspecific initiatives to build capacity among in the local governance. All missions in the ministry have their own capacity development components/programmes which aim at the promotion of knowledge sharing platforms/forums and eliminating the bottlenecks in mainstreaming the emerging and low-cost technologies. NIUA is our research and capacity development arm that helps develop the capacity of city officials in critical sectors. We have created a panel of 35 premier academic and research institutions around the country. They help in building a strong institutional structure at the National, State and city level, enabling the ministry and State agencies to provide high-quality technical assistance and capacity building. The ministry has recently launched Capacity Building Frameworks on the National Urban Learning Platform (NULP), which is a content-neutral, scalable and multichannel platform that can be used for producing and delivering capacity building programmes through a 360 degree approach. For the goals to be met, everyone needs to do their part – all ministries in central and state governments, the private sector, civil society and the general public. While all SDGs are monitored by the UN at the national level, how do you see MoHUA contributing to the overall progress in this direction? How do we monitor and track our progress towards SDGs at the MoHUA level?

India's stand on SDGs affirms its commitment to the goals of eradication of poverty, inclusive urban development, and opportunities for all, enhancing productivity, increasing competitiveness and innovation, technological advancements, and urban resilience. The Government of India's national policies, missions, and programmes—Smart Cities Mission, Atal Mission for Rejuvenation of Urban

Transformation (AMRUT), Swachh Bharat Mission-Urban, Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana-Urban, DAY-NULM, and Rurban Mission—are the key ones consistent with the national goals. The set of reforms that are integral to the government's mission includes, improving governance, making municipalities fiscally robust, bringing in optimal use of land and building capacities of the urban local body officials. As of now, NITI Aayog has prepared National Indicator Framework (NIF) to monitor and measure the progress of SDGs in India. The NIF consists of 17 goals and 308 indicators which are aligned as per the global goals. It is designed to function as a tool to highlight the gaps in the monitoring of SDGs at State and city levels, collection of relevant data, and promotion of policy formulation and implement action strategies for achieving the overarching purpose of SDGs. While NIF has been adopted by the states for making progress towards achieving SDGs, the process is challenging. Awareness generation and capacity building for the local bodies in all the aspects of localisation is very important. There is a need to create cross-learning culture by generating a knowledge repository on best practices and peer-learnings. Collection of updated data and reporting along with statistical indices, geospatial data analytics and big data are required to create a data ecosystem to make NIF extremely dynamic. In addition to this, MoHUA has created its own ecosystem of monitoring, and feedback loop. There are at least five programmes such as Swachh Sarvekshan, Ease of Living Index, ClimateSmart Cities Assessment Framework, Data Maturity Assessment Framework and India Smart Cities Award Contest that assess SDGs related issues directly and indirectly. These programmes run periodically and feedback from these is used to course-correct our missions and schemes to achieve more sustainable outcomes.

AatmaNirbhar India programme has given incentives to boost the economy – local manufacturing, local markets, and local supply chains. To truly achieve the potential of a self-reliant India and strengthen the local economy, it is required to look beyond cities and lay a network of infrastructure and projects in towns, rural areas and tribal areas. From this perspective, could you please elaborate on what planning strategies are required for developing sustainable urban areas from the perspective of integrating them with the rural economy? Integration of rural-urban for me is the capacity for places and people living in the city core, periphery and regional and rural areas to be connected, physically, non-physically, through transport or communication and through economic activities. Our endeavour has been to create an enabling environment so that cities can manage their cores and rapidly expanding peripheries to become productive and livable centres. We do this through promoting the gospel of mixed land use, vibrant neighbourhoods, and good inter and intra-city connectivity. At the regional level, inter-city connectivity facilitates labour mobility and access to both markets and suppliers which in turn stimulate domestic trade in goods and services. We have National Urban Transport Policy, 2006 which guides, among other issues, matters such as this. The Urban Transport Wing under the ministry plans for these transport systems such as regional rapid transit corridors and other urban transit infrastructure and financing of metro rail projects etc, the Meerut-Delhi

RRTS, for example, is one corridor where work has already begun, and it is a matter of great pride that these high-speed, high-frequency commuter trains for RRTS are being manufactured entirely under the government's 'Make in India' policy. The environment friendly, energyefficient trains will improve the quality of life in and around the national capital region by accelerating economic growth, creating economic opportunities and at the same time reducing air pollution, carbon footprint, congestion, and accidents.

We are also working on innovative financing mechanisms in the transport sector, capacity building at institutional and individual levels under the Sustainable Urban Transport Project (SUTP), financing of various traffic/transportation studies and surveys under the Scheme for Urban Transport Planning to encourage cities to better plan and manage their urban transport systems etc. We organise Urban Mobility India (UMI) Conference-cum-Expo annually on urban transport for knowledge sharing amongst experts and stakeholders. It is projected that by the year 2030 India will have approximately 600 million urban population living in cities and towns. This huge increase in population in the coming years demands enhancing the role of a national urban policy framework for balanced, quality and polycentric urbanisation, and effective alignment and coordination across places, sectors and levels of government. What kind of mindset, technological and governance shifts do you think we need to bring around to meet the growing demands of the urban population in terms of housing, infrastructure, jobs, and education? Cities and towns are the key centres for economic growth in India. However, the economic benefits of cities are undermined because of the growing urban population exerting pressure on infrastructure, basic services, land, housing, and the environment. How can policymakers address the pressure constraints on the infrastructure to better leverage the potential of cities and towns? In this regard, I think there are two important areas that hold the key to fulfil the demands for the future. First, as urban governance and finance systems play a vital role in local and national growth, they must reduce the deficits in empowerment, resources, and accountability that hinder performance, and develop more robust mechanisms and opportunities for inter-jurisdictional cooperation in planning, financing, and delivering urban services. We need to enhance opportunities for ULBs so they can raise their own revenues. We have got a credit rating of 469 cities with a population of over 1,00,000 (2011 Census). Among these 112 had investible grades and 39 had A- or above ratings. 10 of these have raised Rs 3,840 crore. through an incentive scheme under AMRUT and many other cities are on way to raise municipal bonds to improve their financial independence. Further, the accountability gap in the ULBs can be bridged through developing better systems and practices, building sufficient capacity, and nurturing trust and productive working relationships at all levels of government.

Second, I would like everyone involved in urban decision making to keep the people and communities at the core of development. Cities are for the people and hence they have to be built around the principles of inclusiveness which are embodied in

three tenets we follow rigorously including ease of living for all, economic opportunities for all, and environmental sustainability for the planet. We have to develop a mindset that seeks the use of technology as a means and not the goal. It involves careful selection of technologies, relevant to the context of particular cities, and built around specific needs of the people. This must lead to the creation of integrated, innovative and sustainable infrastructure and services. We are promoting all these with the learnings in 100 smart cities. Our endeavour is to make these into smart cities movement so that future urban development in all cities are smart, inclusive and sustainable.

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Gujarat & Microsoft Join Hands to Ensure Education Continuity amid Lockdowns

In the wake of the COVID pandemic, when technology was most needed, especially to ensure the continuity of students' education, Microsoft India partnered with the Gujarat government and provided apt technology support ensuring education to all students through digital modes. Addressing the government's shift to technology, Pongumatla Bharati, Commissioner, Primary and Secondary Education and State Project Director (SPD), Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan, Government of Gujarat, elaborated on how the Gujarat government tackled the COVID scenario considering its impact on the education industry. She was speaking at the Education Innovation Summit – Gujarat edition jointly organised by Elets Technomedia and Microsoft India. She said, "When the exams were cancelled due to the nationwide lockdown in 2020, Gujarat adopted a multimodal strategy that focussed on various aspects – catering to students with and without devices, leverage technology to reduce the impact of the pandemic on education, and more. In April, we conducted a survey to know which student was having what type of device. Also, once the lockdown was lifted we took various steps to cater to the students who do not have access to any device." "Our aim was to ensure the continuity of everyday education for all students. So we issued various resolutions and all the HODs of various education departments came together to take steps to reduce the learning gap." The Department organised an intensive outreach programme to ensure that all the measures taken for the students and benefits offered are actually reaching the students. Moreover, to ensure that students are healthy mentally and are not under any kind of stress, psycho-social support was provided to the students. "Each day a video or some audio-video content was sent to the students through Whatsapp groups so that students can stay motivated through these," she added.

P Bharati said that teachers were instructed to reach out to at least 15 students through mobile phones and talk to them. Also, at those remote places where there were no network connections, teachers visited the homes of those students. A few immediate responses were taken when the lockdown was imposed include showing

the available e-content on news channels so that it reaches the students. Further, she said, “We prepared weekly study materials and worksheets for students which we used to release every Saturday. This was done through Whatsapp groups. Feedbacks were taken from the students and parents on the worksheets and this activity was monitored every day by the authorities.” She also mentioned the details of the survey conducted to know how many students have what type of devices. Moreover, details on TV channels broadcasting educational content, distribution of hardcopy textbooks to students, online lectures on Microsoft Teams, and more initiatives were also presented by her during her address. She also brought to light the attempts of the state government to build capacities of all the stakeholders that include training teachers to teach through online mediums. Answering a question about key focus areas for the Gujarat government in terms of the education industry, she said, “As the COVID situation is still continuing, we will definitely keep running all the initiatives we took last year and we are trying to further improve those initiatives. Another thing that we’re taking up is ‘Gyan Setu’ or a bridge course. So, as soon as the academic session begins, the government has decided to print the study material of the bridge course and distribute it to all the students. The students have to do a one-month bridge course first. The course will also be conducted through TV channels and Microsoft virtual sessions. We’ve also prepared e-content for classes 1-12 on an app named ‘Gujarat Shala’. The app also contains a learning management system. This will come in handy for the students to study.”

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A Boon in Disguise: “Pandemic Enabled Self-learning Among Children”

After the COVID pandemic, the perception of education has changed dramatically. From a time when mobile phones were prohibited in schools and students were asked to read more than just Google the facts to a time when each lecture, chapter and assignment are delivered through digital platforms. How the pandemic impacted education in Gujarat how the government took the challenge of continuing education amid the pandemic, were a few of the questions answered in the panel discussion at the Education Innovation Summit 2021. The summit was jointly organised by Microsoft India and Elets Technomedia. Bhaskar Basu, Director – Solutions Strategic Partnerships, Microsoft India, moderated the panel discussion. Panelists included Sanjay Gaden, Head, State e-Governance Mission Team (SEMT), Government of Gujarat and Dr TS Joshi, Director, Gujarat Council of Educational Research and Training (GCERT), Government of Gujarat. Sanjay Gaden, sharing his views on the COVID-19 situation said, “Considering the loss of lives and people’s health and well-being, this is a major atrocity. However, on the other side, the pandemic made people think about alternatives and devise solutions unlike the earlier approach of cribbing about the problem.” People were locked down in their homes and technology tools were the only gateway connecting the outside world. This period

imbibed a feeling among the population that this crisis may go or may not go but we should do something rather than sitting idle. So, this willingness to do something with so many restrictions and limitations sparked people's creative thinking. "Technology is no more an option but the need of the hour and this also holds true for the education sector... Whenever there is a need to reach out to the remotest corner of the country, concerning the education sector, the process should be highly decentralised. By decentralisation, I refer to alternatives that can be adapted to impart education," he added.

Addressing the challenges due to linguistic differences in imparting education, Sanjay Gaden said, "It takes the same amount of creativity in creating content, however, in a diverse country like India where different states have different languages, content needs to be prepared with linguistics differences in mind. Also, one cannot be the master of every language. Therefore, technology plays an important role here. We should leverage technology to translate the same content in different languages to increase the penetration of education to the remotest corners of the country." Further, radio can be leveraged as an effective medium to disseminate educational content as it requires the least infrastructural support, no smartphones, no screens, and has its reach in every nook and corner of the country, he added. Backing the viewpoints of Sanjay Gaden, Bhaskar said, "The one silver lining in the COVID-19 scenario is that it accelerated the adoption of technology. The pandemic has kind of necessitated the use of tools like Microsoft Teams, Microsoft 365, etc." Dr TS Joshi commenced with a comment on Bhaskar's remark "... challenges due to COVID-19..." he said, "More than challenges, I think these were opportunities. This pandemic has been such a situation that has reshaped a lot in the present and this will impact the near future. A new normal has been set in since the pandemic. People should also look at the positives of the pandemic, a teacher who is about to retire in a year or two, was not tech-savvy, is taking online classes today. This is an accomplishment." Today, even in remote villages students are leveraging smartphones to take online lectures. "I am pretty sure that the NEP 2020's goal of creating 21st-century global citizenship and preparation of smart citizens is no more far-fetched," he added.

"Education mainly aims at self-learning and the pandemic has allowed students to venture in such ways and means," said Dr Joshi. For teachers, before the pandemic, only physical classroom teaching was the only way. However, in the present scenario, digital mediums have become an added advantage. There is no doubt that even after the pandemic is over the teachers or the institutions will be taking up education in a hybrid model with partly online and partly offline, added Dr Joshi. "It is to be noted that the Government of Gujarat has been distributing physical books and learning modules at students' doorsteps to ensure the continuity of education. Also, TV channels like Doordarshan and other government and private channels started delivering academic content to students. Today, we have a channel for each class," said Dr Joshi. In his concluding note, he thanked Microsoft for their virtual meeting

tool Microsoft Teams saying “Lately, we organised a science fair on the Microsoft Teams platform. This platform enabled hundreds of students to join the fair. I would like to thank Microsoft for this.”

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Rajasthan Housing Board Ensuring Quality Housing for Everyone

The Government of Rajasthan is actively putting its best foot forward to take the Government of India’s ‘Housing For All’ mission to greater heights. And, Rajasthan Housing Board, under the Rajasthan Housing Board Scheme 2020, is implementing its plans for ensuring housing for all, especially for the economically weaker sects of the society, writes Adarsh Som of Elets News Network (ENN). With the vision to ensure affordable housing with inclusive facilities especially for the economically weaker section, low and middle-income groups, Rajasthan Housing Board (RHB) is taking strides to accomplish the mission of ‘Housing For All’. Under its ambitious scheme of 2020, the Board aims to develop state-of-the-art townships to offer an abode at an affordable price fulfilling the dreams of millions. As per the mission statement of RHB, the townships being developed will host various facilities including modern amenities like community services, hospitals, educational institutes, parking spaces, neighbourhood parks and playgrounds for children. The Board is planning to adopt new technologies in construction works to ensure the product is high on quality and low on cost. Moreover, to cater to the growing needs in an effective manner, RHB is working on a public-private partnership (PPP) model. Grounding houses and delivering it to the people for possession is not the only goal that RHB is heading to but also it is working to maintain and sustain a user-friendly dedicated website with online facilities for the intended services. In addition, an effective public grievance redressal mechanism will also be established for providing people with a hassle-free life. Earlier the Rajasthan Housing Board was considered quite a white elephant in the house. However, with the recurring efforts from the state government, the Board has grounded a total of 2,49,187 housing units in all four categories in the past 50 years, as per the data on the RHB’s official portal. Moreover, of the total houses constructed by RHB, more units account for 2,30,933 that have been given physical possession.

Rajasthan Housing Board Ensuring Quality Housing for EveryoneIn all the schemes developed by the Board, necessary infrastructure facilities like pucca, roads, electricity, water and sewer lines, street lighting, parks etc. had been developed and reserved for commercial centres, schools, hospitals, community centres etc. Some of these schemes include commercial, shops, primary schools, dispensaries, community centres constructed at their own level and the land is allocated to various institutions for the construction of large-scale schools, hospitals and community facilities. The Rajasthan Housing Board has ventured into various projects to make the Board’s operations multidimensional. The Board is working on a

Coaching Hub that is expected to be a place where as many as 60,000 students can study in a day in two-shifts. The work on the project has already started and all the clearances and administrative formalities have been completed. For this, the board aims to build a university-like complex on 6500 sqm of land area in Pratapnagar. The complex will house eight towers. The towers will not only have classrooms for tuitions but will also have a health and wellness centre for students, a library, recreational space. Besides, consultants will be hired to ensure mental wellness and a stress-free environment for students. Also, the Hub will feature sports facilities for students. Another such project is 'Fountain Square'. RHB had planned to convert its land in Mansarovar into an open public space with a large fountain in the middle. The open space will house food outlets, space for cultural programmes, street entertainers, and enough open space for people to hang out with friends, spend quality time with their families, and more. This concept is similar to large cities like London, Singapore, Dubai, etc. Furthermore, RHB is working to build Chaupatis or Food Courts near all its residential societies to get more footfall at their sites. These spaces will serve almost every kind of food, it will have areas for photography, street food, and all essential components for people to enjoy their day out.

The ventures of RHB also include All India Service Residency in Pratapnagar. A residential society especially being developed for government officers of Rajasthan cadre or those from Rajasthan but serving in other cadres. The Board's move for developing a residential society for the government officials was well-appreciated not only in the state but all across the country. However, as per Pawan Arora, Commissioner, RHB, the properties in the Residency, earlier, were for Rajasthan cadre officers only, however, after getting huge demands from across India, the Board decided to open it for all the officers in the state of Rajasthan. Another similar and prestigious project was for building around 160 houses for Members of Legislative Assembly (MLAs) was given to RHB. The project was earlier with some other organisation but looking at commendable works by the Board, the project was handed over to RHB. The Board has already commenced work on the project. Rajasthan Housing Board offers various schemes to make it convenient for the buyers to own their abode at affordable prices. To help the cause, RHB is also offering housing units in instalments that has helped the people to pay in easy EMIs. Moreover, many schemes are offered by the board and a few of the major ones launched in 2020 include:

Chief Minister Janavas Yojana 2020

Chief Minister of State Employee Housing Scheme 2020

In Jaipur, RHB has introduced Independent Housing Scheme 2020 in Mahala and Vatika and the "Weekend Home" Residential Scheme Nyala.

In Jodhpur, the board has introduced Independent Housing Scheme 2020, and Mahatma Gandhi Sambal Residential Scheme, Badii, Jodhpur Unique Registration Scheme 2020.

Mahatma Jyotirao Phule Residential Scheme, Nasirabad.

Besides this, more Independent Housing Schemes have been launched in 2020 in various parts of the state including Kishangarh, Bhilwara, Niwai, Bhinder, Banswara, Udaipur and Abu road.

RAJASTHAN HOUSING BOARD LEVERAGING TECHNOLOGY

In the past few years, it was being observed that many housing units developed by the Rajasthan Housing Board were left unsold. To overcome this challenge and to break the fallacy around the use of technology and e-services for selling houses, RHB adopted the e-auction model. The Government of Rajasthan developed an online portal that not only enabled the RHB to auction the units digitally but also allowed buyers to apply online. As per the state government, the new digital method is convenient and saves time, energy and efforts. According to RHB, the e-auction portal made auctioning the housing units easy and fast and online payment gateways added on to streamlining the entire procedure which earlier had taken days. Moreover, to make it a sure success, the Board ran advertising campaigns, announced on television and radio shows, placed banners, etc. Further, a new marketing cell was created and was given the task to market the housing units available at television talk shows, radio shows, conferences, and other modes through which mass audience can be intimated about the e-auctions and more bids can be placed. Also, the Board stationed a couple of its employees at the sites of unsold houses to set up helpdesks. These were meant to make the bidding process easier for interested buyers. Taking its e-auction model to step ahead, the Rajasthan Housing Board (RHB) took another innovative initiative “Budhwar Nilami Utsav”. The ‘Budhwar Nilami Utsav’ was a beneficial move that helped the Board in selling over 4500 houses. With this, we targetted the Indian sentiments as Wednesday or ‘Budhwar’ is considered a providential day in most parts of north India. So, it was advertised that people in Rajasthan can bid on the available housing units from Monday to Wednesday and after four in the evening on Wednesdays the bids were enlisted.

Considering announcements from the authorities, there were nearly 24,000 housing units available for the auction and efficiency in the real estate sector, Rajasthan Housing Board (RHB) had launched the first-of-its-kind mobile application ‘RHB Sajag’. Chief Minister of Rajasthan Ashok Gehlot launched the Sajag mobile application on August 25, 2020, amidst the COVID-induced nationwide lockdown. The RHB had partnered with Lockated, an Indian startup that specialises in providing PropTech solutions, for designing the Sajag app. The app has been designed with an aim to digitise the real estate sector and bring in transparency of the projects that are executed and overviewed by RHB. Moreover, the application is meant to aid RHB to track and monitor the real-time progress of the ongoing projects. Besides this, the app also offers many robust solutions including Quality Control Monitoring, Physical Progress Monitoring (Time Overrun & Project Completion), Cost Overrun Monitoring (Reporting project budget and the actual spending), RealTime Information (with attached project images), Inspection Visit Report, Construction Standards & SOP –

BIS, Alerts/ Red Flags Reporting. As cities need housing units, commercial units, and other infrastructure to aid the livelihood of the citizens similarly it needs green and open space to breathe and for improving liveability in the cities. In a noteworthy move to ensure living spaces in residential societies and housing complexes, the RHB has launched the 'RHB Green' mobile app. The move marked the Board's commitment towards the environment, beautification of the city and green development. The app aided the Rajasthan Housing Board in launching a plantation drive seeking support from the citizens. The plantation drive has been planned as a weekly affair wherein, through the app, as many as 50 people will be invited every Saturday and Sunday to plant saplings.

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Jaisalmer & Pushkar to Be 'Solar Cities': BD Kalla

Rajasthan's Energy Minister, BD Kalla said that the cities of Jaisalmer and Pushkar will be developed as solar cities in Rajasthan. Kalla's remarks came in while chairing a meeting of senior officials from district administration, transport, energy, urban and local-self-government departments. The minister highlighted that rooftop solar power systems, solar parks, solar street lights and solar powered-power electric vehicles will be key features of solar cities. As reported by a national daily, he said, "All the energy requirements of these cities will be met from solar sources." The Government of Rajasthan will implement the project under the Centre's solar city scheme. Rajasthan Renewable Energy Corporation will be the nodal agency for the project. The Union Ministry of New and Renewable Energy's solar city scheme aims to reduce the projected demand for conventional energy and try to fulfil the same with an energy-efficient power mix with more focus on enhancing supply from renewable energy sources. The project to turn Jaisalmer and Pushkar into solar cities require the preparation of a master plan considering the needs of various sectors. Also, the energy baseline has to be worked in detail in the plan factoring in the existing energy demand and supply scenario. The plan will hold a sector-wise energy consumption matrix and energy supply mix for the base year. Further, the programme assists civic bodies in preparing a master plan to improve energy efficiency by inducing more share of renewable energy for fulfilling city demands. It also assists in setting up institutional arrangements for the implementation of the master plan and creating awareness and capacity building activities.

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Liquidity Issues & Low Demands Are Major Challenges

Since the imposition of the nationwide lockdown to break the chain of COVID-19, the economics of the housing sector and various other industries distorted. This was due to a sudden halt on the economic activities across the country. Moreover, migrant

labourers lost their work and fled back to their villages that weighed on to the challenges faced by the affordable housing industry. Addressing these, Elets Technomedia Pvt. Ltd. organised the 'National Housing Summit' on August 26, 2020. Delivering his keynote address on the theme, SVR Srinivas, Principal Secretary, Housing Department, Government of Maharashtra, said, "I am of the view that, now, the time has come to go for only affordable housing. This is because due to the COVID pandemic the people are unable to afford houses in big cities like Mumbai, Delhi, Hyderabad, etc." Speaking on the improvement in the housing sector, he said, "The policies have to be city-specific not even state-specific. And, even within the city, the rates and demands are localised, therefore, the policies should be able to cater to the location-specific issues." He also pointed out that under the various policies being implemented through slum development or housing board actually see a less number of housing units being built, hardly 7000-8000, considering the stats of Mumbai. "However, the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY) was a welcoming step and I am happy to say that the works are being done under it," he added. During the pandemic, the issue is about the demand side, how to revive the demand. Secondly, the issue is of liquidity. "So, there is an urgent need to keep the money in the hands of the project promoters or developers or builders etc. A lot of money is taken through premiums so keeping the money in the hands of the project proponents and ensuring that the projects go forward and the various premiums and fee can be backend with safeguarding the government's interest through sim guarantees etc." Srinivas said. How to ensure liquidity and how to ensure fund flow in the projects? This is important because if the project stops for two or three months then, in India, monsoon steps in. And, if there is no fund flow from October to December then the project will be delayed for about a year which simply means interest payments for one year and opportunity cost to be borne for the year lost. "So, we have to be very nimble-footed as policymakers and respond very quickly in a calibrated manner," told Srinivas. Concluding his address he requested the other speakers to deliberate on the two issues majorly, liquidity and demand, through the conference.

From <https://egov.eletsonline.com/> 08/20/2021

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Andhra Govt to Develop Premium Tourist Infra at Visakhapatnam-Bheemli-Bhogapuram Beach Corridor

In an effort to boost tourism in Andhra Pradesh, the state government has proposed a plan to develop premium tourism infrastructure on the Beach Corridor – Visakhapatnam – Bheemli – Bhogapuram Beach Road. The tourism infrastructure on the state's agenda will include world-class resorts, adventure tourism facilities, golf courses, seaplane terminals, and more. Discussing developments under the Tourism Policy 2020-25, the Special Chief Secretary of Andhra Pradesh for Tourism Dr Rajat Bhargava, Archaeology and Youth Services convened a review meet and raised discussions on key tourism-related projects including the development along the

proposed Beach Corridor. Under the Beach corridor redevelopment project, the state authority has proposed to develop Rushikonda Beach as a world-class tourist destination to attract international and Indian tourists. Andhra Pradesh Tourism said, the work has already commenced and will be completed by next year. The work of extension of Beach Road from Bheemili to Bhogapuram has been taken up by the Infrastructure and Investments Department while the development of tourism infrastructure, resorts, adventures sports activities, along the proposed beach corridor is taken up by the Tourism Department. Further, under the project, the proposed beach corridor will see Seaplane terminals at Bheemli Beach and Bhogapuram Beach, an Eco-Tourism project at the beach adjoining the forest land, floating restaurant, Eco Camps, International Convention Center with Accommodation Block and a Golf Course. During the discussions, the Tunnel Aquarium project at Thotlakonda Beach was also on the agenda.

The project is being prepared on the PPP model at an estimated cost of Rs 163 crore under the Tourism Policy 2020-25. Further, the review meeting included discussions on the stranded Cargo ship into a floating restaurant, launch of the floating restaurant in Krishna River, etc. The department is looking to convert a stranded Bangladeshi cargo ship on the Visakhapatnam coast, MV MAA, into a floating restaurant with a banquet and other facilities. A sum of Rs 10.50 crore has been earmarked for the project. The idea is to convert the cargo vessel into a major tourist attraction with multi-cuisine restaurants, banquet facilities and other entertainment amenities. The state's tourism authority is aiming to launch the floating restaurant in the Krishna river between Berm Park and Bhavani Island. The setting up of restaurant facilities are ongoing. In its attempt to promote ecotourism, the state authority has planned to develop world-class eco-resorts along the Eastern Ghats. At the meeting, the government reviewed the progress of the Eco-Tourism projects in Maredumilli in East Godavari District, Lambasingi in Visakhapatnam District and Jagathipalli in Srikakulam District. Dr Bhargava said that Andhra Pradesh is a state blessed with the second-longest coastline (974 Kms) of all states in the country and perennial rivers and scenic backwaters. He said that the government is committed to utilize all these natural geographical features and develop all possible themes of tourism namely beach tourism, river tourism, eco-tourism and adventure tourism.

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SRI LANKA: Facebook Marketplace Comes

Facebook has announced that Facebook Marketplace is now available in Sri Lanka, making it easier for people to discover, buy and sell items from others in their local communities. Jordi Fornies, Director of Emerging Markets, APAC at Facebook said: "We know that people are increasingly shopping online, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. We are excited to launch Facebook Marketplace which offers a convenient way for Sri Lankans to buy and sell. We hope this new platform will make

it easier for people to find the items they need and make additional income during these difficult times.” Discovering things on Facebook Marketplace is simple. To get there, people can look for the Marketplace icon in the Facebook app or visit [fb.com/marketplace](https://www.facebook.com/marketplace). They will be able to browse listings that interest them and filter them by distance or category. They can also use the search box to find exactly what they are looking for. Listing an item for sale is just as easy as browsing for one on Marketplace. Sellers can share a photo of an item, enter a product name, description and price, confirm their location and select a category. They can also choose to post their listings to Facebook Buy and Sell Groups. Interested buyers will find the item they are looking for and message the sellers directly through Messenger. They can decide on the payment method depending on their own preferences. Facebook advises all buyers and sellers to follow local guidelines to stay safe and help prevent the spread of coronavirus. Buyers and sellers can find tips on how to use Marketplace responsibly and access the Help Center for more information.

From <https://www.lankabusinessonline.com/> 08/19/2021

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“GLX Digital Evolver” Powers Transformation of Tourism Through Digital Evolution

Good Life X (GLX) in collaboration with Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) Sri Lanka – via ‘GLX Digital Evolver’ pursue the growth and evolution of Sri Lanka Tourism in partnership with leading industry experts. The recently launched programme which is aimed at empowering businesses in Sri Lanka’s Travel & Tourism Sector to evolve digitally, coincides with the Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority’s (SLTDA) announced plans to promote Sri Lanka as a market for sustainable tourism. The three [03] month-long initiative, which is funded by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), brought together ten [10] leading experts – representing GLX and GIZ, as well as Pascal Gavotto (CEO, Fatumaru Consulting), Niranka Perera (CEO, Antyra Solutions) and Naveen Marasinghe (COO, Antyra Solutions). Speaking with Tourism Specialist, Fatumaru Consulting – Pascal Gavotto noted: “We are faced with a unique situation where much of Sri Lanka’s tourism is on the edge of collapsing, and investment is crucial to bridge the digital gap. This is a challenging position to continue encouraging Tourism SMEs to invest, work, and plan for the future whilst they struggle for business visibility and to continue with day-to-day operations. The GLX program brings a positive spirit to the Digital Evolvers, aiding them to prepare their business recovery better and be ready to compete in a post-covid, complex market.” Pascal is the Lead Expert in charge of Tourism Strategy for the programme, and points out that whilst international tourist arrivals have dropped to 1% of what they were in 2018, that the 1.8 million Sri Lankans who were traveling overseas in 2018 are now traveling internally resulting in a boost to the domestic market. “I expect that the 10 Digital Evolvers we are coaching will be far better equipped digitally to reconquer and develop their market share, having developed new skills

that will become a competitive advantage and more resilient.”

Speaking with Chief Operating Officer, Antyra Solutions – Naveen Marasinghe – the Lead Expert for Digital Strategy stated “The prevailing conditions have severely restricted revenue for the tourism sector. While this is a primary problem that the industry is struggling with, there are several other areas that can be improved upon from a digital point of view. SMEs show a keen interest to invest and understand digital marketing however they have a lack of practical experience or access to knowledge in order to do so. In terms of Digital – for the programme – as an area of expertise, we have looked at multiple topics such as digital marketing, digital distribution, and digital transformation as key areas to improve on.” Experts such as Marasinghe and Perera, from Antyra Solutions – have tracked a new shift in the consumer mindset in selecting their next vacation or travel partner. According to a recent Google study (Future of travel) – one [01] out of three [03] consumers are open to booking with a travel company they have not booked through before. Marasinghe believes that Sri Lankan travel SMEs need to seize the opportunity to capitalise on their B2C strategy. “The ability for them to position themselves digitally as a brand/organization and be visible for more new audiences will supplement this new buyer behavior. So far I am extremely pleased with the progress made with each and every participant. We have worked with the Evolvers very closely and I feel at the end of the program we will be able to uplift the participants both in their knowledge and their capacity to operate better in digital,” concluded Marasinghe. The GLX Digital Evolver program offers the ten [10] finalists an invaluable opportunity to develop in spite of the pandemic and adapt to the evolving nature of the international travel market by using digital spaces and contemporary tools to expand their businesses. The results of the ‘GLX Digital Evolver’ Programme is expected to provide participants with a visible edge, having equipped them for the changes expected in the industry.

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Central-West Asia

AZERBAIJAN: Alat Free Economic Zone Aims to Attract New Technologies

The Alat Free Economic Zone is aimed at attracting new technologies to Azerbaijan, developing the country's investment potential, Trend reports on Aug. 6 referring to chairman of the board of the authorized structure of the Alat Free Economic Zone Valeh Alasgarov. “The regulatory framework of the free economic zone envisages protection of interests of all participants in economic activity,” Alasgarov added. “Investors and legal entities will be fully exempt from taxes and payments, customs duties, taxes on employees' salaries,” chairman said. “The Azerbaijani side will provide the entire infrastructure of the Alat free economic zone, which is necessary

for conducting effective activity, namely, roads, water supply, office premises, etc.," he said.

From <https://en.trend.az/> 08/06/2021

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Smart City Azerbaijan May Provide Azerbaijan with World-Class Solutions

Smart City Azerbaijan's partnership with big companies will allow, if necessary, to integrate world-class solutions into Azerbaijan, both in terms of theory and in terms of supplying the necessary devices, founder and director general of Smart City Azerbaijan company Kuanysh Kalizhanov told Trend. "Smart City Azerbaijan is the official representative of the US HONEYWELL company in Azerbaijan and initially built its activity on the best solutions of the world vendors and partners from Turkey, Russia and Belarus," Kalizhanov said. "HONEYWELL is the world leader in the field of automation control," director general of the company said. "As of 2020, HONEYWELL has implemented 64 Safe City and 11 Smart City projects in the world. The population covered by these projects exceeds 100 million people. These are gigantic projects in which more than 100,000 IoT units (sensors, video cameras) have been applied."

Kalizhanov stressed that International Data Corporation (IDC) consulting company is another official partner of Smart City Azerbaijan. "IDC is the only company in the world with a smart city technology research program, a global vision with smart city analysts in Kazakhstan, Russia, US, Canada, Singapore, China, India, Turkey, Italy, South Africa, Japan," director general of the company said. "Moreover, IDC created the world's first classification of smart city technologies, developed a forecasting methodology, maturity assessment and benchmarking and presented an analysis of the best practices for their creation." "The company has implemented ICT projects (including smart cities) for the government of Brunei, assessed the maturity of three medium-sized cities in the Czech Republic, developed a concept for the operation and maintenance of a data transmission system from remote sensors and various devices which are used by employees of a governmental organization in Vienna, Austria, implemented several projects for the Chinese government to develop an export economy based on IoT technologies, robotization, cognitive computing and also developed principles for the implementation of IoT in smart cities for the IT and innovation department of New York," Kalizhanov said.

"IDC has implemented the concept of the "Digital Kazakhstan" state program, Smart Atyrau and Smart Almaty concept in Kazakhstan, assessed the level of maturity of the country's capital based on its own unique model, thanks to which the capital entered the international rating of "smart cities"," director general of the company said. "We have established close cooperation with the Turkish INFOLINE company, one of the most efficient software manufacturers," Kalizhanov said. "The team of this

company has created programs and mobile applications for monitoring air, water and soil quality on a scale of Turkey, food security solutions for Azerbaijan, smart technologies for farms, applications for urban management to control the treatment of residential areas from insects and many other solutions for architects and city planners," Kalizhanov said. Kalizhanov stressed that the vast experience and competence of their partner ALORA IT SOLUTIONS in the field of Geoportal (digital map of the city) aroused interest in the Mayor's Office of Baku.

From <https://en.trend.az/> 08/07/2021

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Transfer of Infrastructure To 'Cloud' Main Trend in IT - Qrator Labs

The main trend in the field of information technologies in the world, including in Azerbaijan, is the transfer of infrastructure to 'clouds', Alexander Lyamin, Founder and CEO of the Russian Qrator Labs company, told Trend. According to the CEO, 'cloud' technologies are becoming an effective tool for business in solving a wide variety of tasks, from analyzing large amounts of data to exchanging documents and automating routine processes. "Work is greatly simplified with the advent of clouds', and the speed of processes grows several times, which is not surprising. The transition to cloud technologies allows businesses to flexibly change the infrastructure to meet the needs of the business," said Lyamin. He stressed that the same trend can be traced in the field of security. "The constant increase in the level of threats and the increase in the number of high-speed attacks contribute to an increase in the proportion of business entities using external security solutions. Such solutions are specially designed for extreme loads and work under the constant influence of a large number of DDoS attacks, ensuring continuous availability of any business - from a small online store to a large corporation," said Lyamin. Qrator Labs founder also said that Artificial Intelligence (AI) and the Fourth Industrial Revolution are not far from reality. "These equipment and solutions require a well-developed infrastructure, therefore, as its cost for attackers becomes more and more attractive, there will be a tendency for an increase in the number of attacks, including on the communications infrastructure," the CEO added.

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Azerbaijan to Continue Developing National Antivirus Software on 'Cloud' Technologies

Further development of the national antivirus software will continue on "cloud" technologies, the State Service for Special Communications and Information Security, the Computer Emergency response Team (CERT) of Azerbaijan, told Trend. The CERT noted that the development of software, first of all, will be based on the analysis of behavioral data and "cloud" technologies. The team said it plans to develop a national "antivirus" based on advanced solutions and international

standards. Though, the structure did not rule out that the current version of the project could be frozen and the creation of a new anti-virus program based on other (new) technologies began. The current version of the solution operates on the basis of classical technologies for recognizing and detecting computer threats, the CERT message said. The CERT also announced the successful completion of the licensing stage for the anti-virus software. "In the future, after the development of the final version of the software, if a decision is made to launch the paid version, there is a plan to obtain an appropriate license for its sale," the message said. As the CERT added, an important aspect for the development of the Azerbaijani anti-virus program is the formulation of national experience and the training of experts in this area.

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Cybersecurity Becomes Most Pressing Global Problem, Including in Azerbaijan – Ministry

Cybersecurity has become the most pressing problem in the world, including in Azerbaijan, the Ministry of Transport, Communications and High Technologies of Azerbaijan told Trend. According to the ministry, the training of domestic experts in this area and the improvement of their professional skills is a priority task of the Information and Computing Center (ICC) under the ministry. The working environment created at the ICC plays an important role in the training of relevant cybersecurity experts, the message of the ministry reads. "The mentorship and work environment created in the cyberattack simulation lab will play an important role in the training of cybersecurity professionals. In addition, during the internship program, participants can share knowledge with each other," the message says.

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Use of Cloud Services Rapidly Developing in Azerbaijan – Ministry

The use of digital cloud services is rapidly developing in all spheres in Azerbaijan, the Ministry of Transport, Communications and High Technologies told Trend. According to the ministry, this trend can be traced not only in Azerbaijan but also at the global level. The ministry stressed that the number of areas where digitalization is used is growing intensively. An example is the spheres of information technology, transport, tourism, oil and gas, utilities, communications, agriculture, education and health, the ministry added.

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Work to Assess Quality of Internet Services Underway in Azerbaijan's Nakhchivan

Work to assess the quality of Internet services is underway in Azerbaijan's Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic, Trend reports citing Nakhchivan's Ministry of Communications and High Technologies. According to the ministry, work with the participation of authorized experts is being carried out in the Sharur and Kangarli districts. "All communication lines and subscriber devices in the autonomous republic are planned to be inspected. The detected faults will be eliminated in the shortest possible time. During the work, measuring devices that meet modern standards are used," the ministry stated.

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GEORGIA: Cost of Wholesale Internet Access Services Down

Liberalization of the fixed broadband market in Georgia is the most empowering precondition for creating the competitive environment in the area of electronic communications, Georgian National Communication Commission told Trend. "In accordance with our decisions, the cost of wholesale Internet access services for small and medium-sized operators decreased in 1H2021, the tariffs for wholesale services of access to global Internet resources reduced by half, also worth mentioning that the tariffs for interconnection in mobile and fixed networks were reduced by 4 times, we have also set new upper limit rates for interconnection services for companies with significant market power," said. All our decisions to open the wholesale market are aiming at the improvement of market conditions, strengthening the competition, and empowering the small and medium-sized operators, the source said. "All these steps will ultimately benefit consumers, who, due to increased competition, will receive high-quality Internet at a more affordable price," added the commission. "Devaluation of lari does not have a direct influence on our sphere. Though, as the Communications Commission aims at protecting the interests of consumers, we constantly review all possible changes to ensure that the conditions for the subscribers do not deteriorate," said the source. Meanwhile, the largest providers of fixed broadband services in Georgia are Msticom, Silknet, New Net, Skytel, Akhteli.

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IRAN: To Use Finnish Experience in Digitization

Information Technology Organization of Iran (ITO) announced that Iran is to use the Finnish experience in digitization, Trend reports citing Mehr. As reported, a webinar on "Finland's experience in digitization" was held with the participation of the Information Technology Organization of Iran and Finnish ICT officials. The event followed a memorandum of understanding previously signed by the Ministers of Communications of Iran and Finland. The webinar, discussing the "Overview of

digitization in Finland" and "Digital economy in Finland", was attended by the Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran to Helsinki Forouzandeh Vadieli and Maria Nikkilä, head of the digitization unit at Finland's Ministry of Finance. Finland, which ranks fourth in the world in e-government development, shared its experiences on digitization with Iranian officials.

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Oceania

AUSTRALIA: Housing Market Strong but Losing Steam

Australian home values have had the fastest annual growth in 17 years, but are slowing as housing becomes less affordable. CoreLogic data released on Monday shows the value of homes across the country rose 1.6 per cent in July. Over the past year, the national home value index has increased 16.1 per cent, representing the fastest annual growth since February 2004. Mon, 2 August 2021, 8:00 am-3-min read Australian home values have had the fastest annual growth in 17 years, but are slowing as housing becomes less affordable. CoreLogic data released on Monday shows the value of homes across the country rose 1.6 per cent in July. Over the past year, the national home value index has increased 16.1 per cent, representing the fastest annual growth since February 2004. - ADVERTISEMENT -While the market may be strong, CoreLogic's research director Tim Lawless says it's also losing steam. "With dwelling values rising more in a month than incomes are rising in a year, housing is moving out of reach for many members of the community," he said on Monday. Monthly growth had been trending lower since March, when the national value index rose 2.8 per cent. Mr Lawless said demand was driven by low mortgage rates and the prospect interest rates would remain low for some time. The continued mismatch between demand for and advertised supply of housing kept pushing prices higher. Sydney homes recorded the sharpest narrowing in price appreciation, falling from 3.7 per cent in March to two per cent in July.

"Worsening affordability is likely a key contributing factor in the slowdown here, along with the negative impact on consumer sentiment as the city moves through an extended lockdown period," Mr Lawless said. Regional housing values remain strong, with conditions in the first seven months of 2021 nearly equal to the growth in the second half of last year. Combined regional and capital markets values are up 14.5 per cent and 14 per cent, respectively, so far this year. CommSec senior economist Ryan Felsman said while the hard lockdown weighed on Melbourne property prices, rising 1.3 per cent in July, auction listings and results in the Victorian capital were picking up. He said the 0.3 per cent rise in Perth in the month showed the market in the West Australian capital "continued to confound observers", given the relative strength of the state economy. Commonwealth Bank economists expect national home prices to lift around 20 per cent in 2021 with house prices 24 per cent higher

and apartments up nine per cent over the year. But national home price growth is expected to slow to around seven per cent in 2022, led by gains of 10 per cent in Brisbane and nine per cent in Canberra, Mr Felsman said.

From <https://au.news.yahoo.com> 08/02/2021

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House Prices Likely to Rise for Now: RBA

Reserve Bank of Australia governor Philip Lowe anticipates house prices will rise further, but says there are some factors that could start working the other way, Figures released this week showed home values have risen over 16 per cent nationally in the past year, the fastest annual pace since February 2004. "It is likely we will see further increases in the next little while," Dr Lowe told the House of Representatives economics committee on Friday. But he said it was a global story, with almost every city around the world facing rising house prices, largely because interest rates are low and are likely to stay low. However, he said there are some factors that could start working in the other direction in Australia with population growth at its slowest in decades and the rate of new housing construction very high. He said every day that prices go up, it was harder for people to afford a new home, so at some point price rises will come to an end.

"But I'm afraid I can't forecast when that happens," Dr Lowe said. There has also been little sign of a deterioration in lending standards during this latest rapid rise in house prices. "There are some banks which have marginally loosened up and others that have marginally tightened up," Dr Lowe said. "The lending standards that are being applied seem sensible and reasonable." He said Australia is not in a situation that was seen in the last decade where almost half the loans in the country were interest-only, which meant not one dollar of principal was having to be repaid on a regular basis. "We are not seeing lending standards weaken," he said. If they did, he warned the Australian Prudential Regulation Authority or the RBA would take regulatory action. Regulators would also be concerned if credit growth were to pick up materially from here and looked like staying at a higher level. Dr Lowe said if double digit credit growth was sustained, while income growth was running at four or five per cent, that would be problematic. "At some point APRA would be considering interventions," he said.

From <https://au.news.yahoo.com> 08/06/2021

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Broad Perspectives to Inform Trade for All Agenda

Minister for Trade and Export Growth Damien O'Connor has appointed a Trade for All Ministerial Advisory Group to help chart the course for New Zealand trade policy. Its membership includes, business, civil society and Māori representatives who will give feedback directly to the Minister on trade policy and trade issues of importance

to the sectors and communities they represent. The Group's establishment follows on from the work completed by the Trade for All Advisory Board in 2019. "Trade for All is a chance to take a fresh look at New Zealand's trade policy," Damien O'Connor said. "As we build our trade led recovery from COVID-19 this group will help ensure that our trade policy delivers for all New Zealanders. This new advisory group will bring in the broad range of perspectives that we need to inform our decisions.

"Our goal is a trade policy that works alongside other government policies, to support sustainable and inclusive economic development," Damien O'Connor said. The Group will also advise on the implementation of the Trade for All Advisory Board's 2019 recommendations, building on the significant contribution Board members have made to the development of trade policy that benefits all New Zealanders. "Trade has been fundamental to New Zealand's story. We want both for its value to be understood and its potential benefits to reach across society. Our recovery from COVID-19 is a trade led one," Damien O'Connor said. "As part of the Trade for All agenda I'm speaking at a series of trade policy events across the country. We're also providing regular updates on our UK and EU trade negotiations, including through public webinars and the publication of summary reports following each round. "These are important steps in keeping the public informed on our trade aspirations," Damien O'Connor said.

From <https://livenews.co.nz> 08/13/2021

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Economists Fear Even Deeper Downturn

Australia's economic downturn appears to be going from bad to worse as virus lockdowns in the nation's biggest states become broader and potentially run even longer. At the weekend the NSW government extended its already lengthy Greater Sydney lockdown to the rest of the state as new infections topped 400 for two days in a row and its death toll increased. In Victoria, there are sufficient new daily virus cases to suggest Premier Daniel Andrews may extend the state's sixth lockdown beyond Thursday. The ACT is also midway through a week-long shutdown with case numbers rising. Equity Economics lead economist Angela Jackson says there is a risk the rolling lockdowns and closed borders will continue. "That means even outside the hotspot areas of NSW, Victoria and the ACT at the moment we may start to see broader economic impacts from the lockdowns in other states and territories," Dr Jackson told ABC television.

She expects the federal government will have a keen eye on upcoming key data to see if there is any early indication that the economic impacts are growing and broadening to require further stimulus. Figures to be released this week include labour force figures for July, which are expected to show the unemployment rate nudging up to five per cent after dropping to a decade low of 4.9 per cent in June. Economists had already expected the economy to contract by between one and 2.5

per cent in the September quarter, the first negative result since last year's recession. ANZ economists are now reviewing their forecasts, but expect that contraction to be deeper and the recovery slower. Economists at National Australia Bank believe the Reserve Bank of Australia's updated forecasts are in danger of being out of date within just a week of being released with the September quarter contraction likely to be a lot larger than what it had pencilled in. "NAB still expects a swift rebound in activity once restrictions start to ease when the 70-80 per cent vaccination hurdles are met - on our projections these could be reached by mid-November," they said in a note to clients. "Thus the rebound may not occur until late Q4."

From <https://au.news.yahoo.com> 08/16/2021

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Data to Show Economy Before Mass Lockdowns

New economic figures in the next week or so will provide some idea what speed the economy was travelling in the June quarter before it was struck by mass virus lockdowns across the country. While the June quarter national accounts due for release on September 1 will be somewhat dated, it will provide a starting point for an expected contraction the September quarter. "The extension of the lockdowns announced over the past week will mean a much bigger hit to the economic outlook than we were assuming just two weeks ago," AMP Capital chief economist Shane Oliver said. He now expects the economy will contract by around four per cent in the September quarter, compared with a previous forecast of a 2.5 per cent decline. "With case numbers still rising there is an increasing threat to December quarter growth," Dr Oliver warned. June quarter construction work figures are due on Wednesday.

Forecasts by economists centre on a 2.8 per cent rise in the quarter, slightly stronger than in the March quarter, with gains again expected to centre on housing construction. The housing sector continues to respond to ultra-low interest rates and the lingering impact from the federal government's HomeBuilder program. On Thursday, the Australian Bureau of Statistics will release business investment numbers for the June quarter, another key component of the growth figures contained in the national accounts. New private business capital expenditure is forecast to rise at 2.5 per cent, building on the gains recorded over the previous two months. The report will also contain future business investment intentions. Reports for business profits, inventories and international trade for the June quarter are due the following week. However, more up to date retail spending figures for July this Friday are unlikely to be as positive, coming at a time of growing restrictions in NSW and an earlier lockdown in Victoria.

Forecasts here centre on a two per cent decline in July, following a 1.8 per cent drop in June. Meanwhile, the Australian share market looks set for a firm start on Monday, helped by Friday's gains on Wall Street, although the US market ended lower on the

week following disappointing economic reports and escalating coronavirus cases in the US. The S&P 500 rose 35.87 points, or 0.8 per cent, to 4441.67, the Dow Jones Industrial Average added 225.96 points, or 0.7 per cent, to 35,120.08 and the Nasdaq composite picked up 172.87 points, or 1.2 per cent, to 14,714.66. Australian share futures rose 35 points, or 0.5 per cent, to 7423. The local market had also suffered its worst week since January last week, due to uncertainty about the economic outlook and falling commodity prices. On Friday, the benchmark S&P/ASX200 index closed 3.7 points lower, or 0.05 per cent, to 7460.9.

From <https://au.news.yahoo.com> 08/22/2021

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NEW ZEALAND: Community Housing Providers to Get Upfront Funding to Deliver New Builds Faster

Government backs CHPs with early-stage funding to deliver housing faster Builds on 'progressive partnership' approach with focus on new supply Community Housing Providers (CHP) will now to be able to access up-front funding in the early stages of new build developments to help bring on more public housing at pace, the Housing Minister Dr Megan Woods has announced following a roundtable of CHP leaders in Wellington last night. "Early stage funding brings forward some of the money Government already provides to CHPs over the course of a 25 year contract, so they can access it cover up-front costs associated with new build projects," Megan Woods said. "It will be of particular benefit to newer, smaller CHPs who may lack the asset base to secure funding to get new builds going.

"I want to make sure the timing of government payments best matches the requirements of each project on a case-by-case basis. This ensures access to funding doesn't delay the development of new housing. "This has been a simple request from the sector that will make a difference to the number of new builds CHPs can bring on. "By front loading payments we can help more new builds get underway while still providing the same level of support to the CHP that we would over the lifetime of the project. "We're committed to using all the available levers we can to get more housing built. That's why we're taking a refreshed 'progressive partnership' approach with Community Housing Providers with a key focus on 'building rather than buying' and by providing greater funding flexibility we're helping maintain a strong pipeline of new homes, now and into the future," Megan Woods said.

"Greater funding flexibility may well be of interest to Māori and Iwi Community Housing Providers as a pathway to enabling growth in their organisations. There are currently 18 Maori CHPs, or almost one third of the national total of 60," Peeni Henare, Associate Minister of Housing (Māori Housing) said. "A kaupapa Māori approach is crucial to addressing the housing crisis. The Government's partnership with Māori CHPs underpins our place based and MAIHI approach to identify and prioritise the delivery of public housing and to deliver solutions that meet the

immediate and long-term needs of whānau and communities in locations with highest need,” Peeni Henare said. “The housing crisis won’t be solved overnight, and it can’t be fixed by the Government alone. It requires the mahi of many stakeholders and the progressive partnership between the Government and CHPs will ensure that CHPs continue to play a key role,” Minister Woods says.

“CHPs have an integral role to play in delivering public housing and often bring strong community connections, knowledge and expertise in delivering housing for New Zealanders in need. The government has made a number of changes to settings to enable CHPs to bring on new public housing supply and remains committed to working with the sector to improve housing outcomes for New Zealanders. CHPs and Kainga Ora have delivered an extra 8,000 warm, dry public housing places since November 2017 taking total public housing places to 74,337. Of these, 6503 households are living in brand new homes. The total public and transitional housing funding provided to CHPs since November 2017 has more than tripled and as at March 2021 was \$1.05 billion.

From <https://livenews.co.nz> 08/12/2021

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Investments – CentrePort Launches Electric Vehicles with Support from New Zealand Green Investment Finance

One hundred percent electric vehicles are now being used to move container cargo at Wellington’s CentrePort, thanks to investment from New Zealand Green Investment Finance (NZGIF). After entering into a green credit facility provided by NZGIF, CentrePort has deployed seven French-designed and manufactured Gaussin transfer vehicles and trailers. Each unit is capable of moving two 20-foot containers and has a towing capacity of 75 tonnes. CentrePort is the first port in New Zealand to commission 100 percent electric vehicles for land-based container transfer movement. CentrePort CEO Derek Nind says the vehicles are helping CentrePort towards its target of reducing carbon emissions by 30 percent by 2030. “Reducing carbon emissions is a key aspect of CentrePort’s regeneration and our ultimate aim is to reach net zero emissions by 2040.

“The Gaussin vehicles also deliver other business benefits including supply chain efficiencies and lower running costs. That’s good for our customers as well as the environment,” Nind said. The vehicles replace diesel vehicles and will reduce carbon emissions by 230 tonnes per annum, around 8% of the port’s emissions annually. As well as assisting the port to achieve its climate change goals, it helps reduce the wider Wellington region’s carbon footprint, and provides an example for other companies in the port sector and beyond. In June 2020, NZGIF committed \$15 million to the facility in support of CentrePort’s decarbonisation and regeneration plans, providing the financing to ensure that lower carbon projects stayed high on the priority list, said NZGIF CEO Craig Weise.

“It is gratifying to see the fruits of our investment in this ground-breaking first for New Zealand. The recent Climate Change Commission advice highlighted that change needs to occur across all sectors of New Zealand’s economy. CentrePort’s ambitious decarbonisation programme, including these new vehicles, shows that decarbonisation can take many innovative forms”. The NZGIF green credit facility is financing a range of other initiatives at CentrePort including the reintroduction of rail carrying containers directly onto port after a gap of four years due to damage caused by the Kaikōura earthquake, reducing truck movements onto the port. Technical specifications of the Electric Transfer Vehicles Towing Capacity: 75 tonnes Length: 5.9 metres Width: 2.55 metres Height: 3.55 metres Maximum speed: 35 km/h Maximum speed fully loaded: 24 km/h Battery pack: Solid state battery Lithium Metal Polymer with eight-year life cycle. Battery capability: 12 hours pulling full loads More about New Zealand Green Investment Finance

New Zealand Green Investment Finance is a green investment bank established by the New Zealand Government to accelerate investment that supports New Zealand’s low carbon future. Find out more at www.nzgif.co.nz More about CentrePort CentrePort Limited (CPL) is a transport and property infrastructure firm, built around its core port business on Wellington Harbour. With a staff of over 200 and working with a range of partners CPL provides supply chain solutions and expertise including the CentreRail Service with KiwiRail, and a network of inland cargo hubs. CentrePort facilitates international and coastal shipping, the inter-island Cook Strait ferry services, and land and aviation fuel supplies. CentrePort is committed to environmental sustainability and this is a key element of the regeneration plan for the port.

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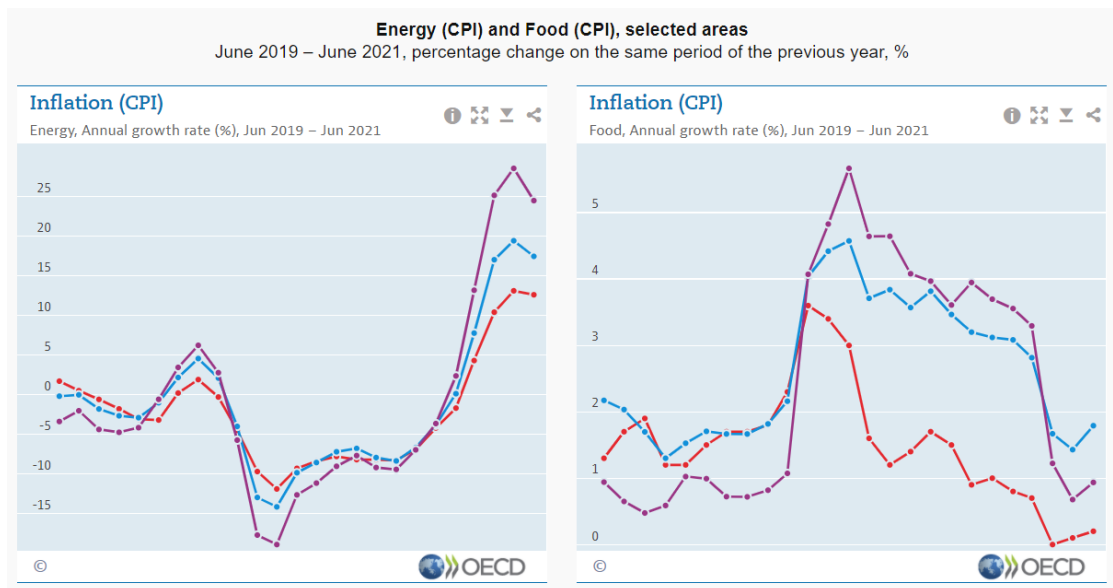
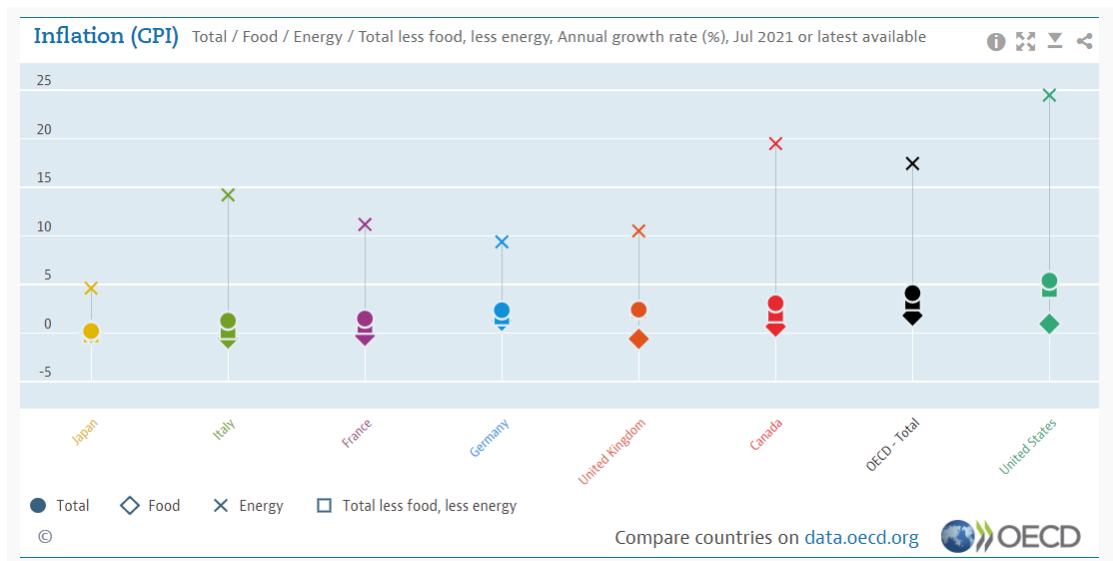
5、 Public Finance

Asia-Pacific

OECD Annual Inflation Picks Up to 4.1% in June 2021

Year-on-year inflation in the OECD area increased to 4.1% in June 2021, compared with 3.9% in May. Inflation in the euro area was significantly lower than in the OECD area as a whole, and especially than in the United States. After three consecutive months of sharp increases, energy prices in the OECD area continued to rise at 17.4% in June, but at a slower pace than in May (at 19.4%) while food price inflation increased to 1.8%, compared with 1.4% in May. OECD annual inflation excluding food and energy also increased significantly to 3.2% in June, compared with 2.9% in May, the highest rate since March 2002.

Consumer prices, selected areas
 June 2021, percentage change on the same period of the previous year, %



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US\$25 Million Grant to Build Beirut Businesses Back and Better

A US\$25 million grant will support the recovery of targeted micro and small enterprises (MSEs) directly affected by the Port of Beirut blast and sustain the operations of eligible microfinance institutions (MFIs). The Building Beirut Businesses Back and Better (B5) Fund will also help preserve private sector jobs and reduce business closure and layoffs. The B5 Fund, which was signed today, had been previously endorsed on April 29, 2021 by the Partnership Council of the

Lebanon Financing Facility (LFF), a multi-donor trust fund established in December 2020 following the launch of the Reform, Recovery and Reconstruction Framework (3RF) to pool grant resources and strengthen the coherence and coordination of financing in support of the immediate socio-economic recovery of vulnerable people and businesses impacted by the Port of Beirut explosion. The Port of Beirut explosion, which came on the heels of an ongoing economic and financial crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic, had a severe impact on the productive sector in Lebanon.

The blast caused substantial physical damage and loss of stock and inventory to approximately 10,000 privately owned businesses located within a 5 km radius of the explosion site. It significantly affected firms' productivity and revenue generation and led to substantial layoffs and bankruptcies. According to a World Bank rapid firm-level survey conducted during November and December 2020, around 17% of firms were confirmed or assumed to be permanently closed; 79% of firms experienced reduced sales (on average, a 69% decline); and 61% of firms had decreased the number of permanent workers by 43% on average. Furthermore, the survey revealed that almost half of all surveyed firms (46%)—both in Beirut and elsewhere—have been affected by the explosion either directly or indirectly. The affected businesses across a number of sectors, specifically MSMEs, are struggling to finance their reconstruction and recovery needs, and find it extremely difficult to resume service delivery, unless they receive urgent financial assistance.

The explosion also exposed the fragility of the financial sector (banking, insurance, and microfinance) Access to finance has severely deteriorated. With very limited policy responses by Lebanese authorities to support the recovery of the financial sector, firms affected by the explosion, specifically MSMEs, are struggling to finance their reconstruction and recovery needs. "The B5 is the urgent first step to extending lifeline support to businesses and ensuring their sustainability considering the multiple crises affecting the country," said Saroj Kumar Jha, World Bank Mashreq Regional Director. "Thanks to the financial support of Canada, Denmark, the European Union, France and Germany, the B5 today kick-starts the implementation of much needed priority projects planned under the LFF that will provide the Lebanese people with immediate socio-economic relief, help micro, small- and medium-sized enterprises to recover and prepare for reform and reconstruction to put Lebanon on a sustainable recovery path."

The B5 Fund will provide grants to approximately 4,300 MSEs to cover expenses related to working capital, technical services, equipment, and repairs. Around 30% of the selected MSEs will be women-owned or led that will benefit from financial and technical assistance to help them build back better. Efforts will also be made to identify and support entrepreneurs and businesses who directly or indirectly suffer from a disability as a result from the blast. The B5 Fund will also support the operational expenses of up to 5 MFIs serving micro and small businesses, low-income populations, and the informal sector at large to help them stand by the

communities they serve during the time of multiple crises and stabilize their activities until broader growth can resume. The B5 Fund is designed to disburse in a transparent and timely manner, directly through specialized and tested institutions. The Fund will be implemented by Kafalat SAL, that currently manages the World Bank-funded Supporting Innovation in Small and Medium Enterprises (iSME) Project. Under the B5 Fund, Kafalat will be responsible for the overall implementation, management, selection of intermediaries, monitoring and evaluation, with functions, staffing and responsibilities satisfactory to the World Bank and LFF donors.

The B5 Fund will adopt a zoning approach whereby eligible beneficiaries will be prioritized based on their proximity to the explosion site. The Fund adopts a simple design that permits the deployment of grants in a timely and cost-efficient manner to businesses, particularly vulnerable ones. Disbursement to grantees will be conditional on the completion of a screening done by MFIs and Kafalat to confirm their damage status based on initial assessments conducted by the Lebanese Armed Forces directly following the blast, ensuring that the same expense is not financed more than once from different sources.

A Third Party Monitoring Agent (TPMA) will be hired at the LFF level to independently verify and confirm that the criteria, selection process, assessment and use of funds are in compliance with the Project Operations Manual. Furthermore, the LFF Independent Oversight Body will also monitor fund activities. The B5 Fund is scalable and agile by design. Based on its successful implementation, additional funds from the LFF could expand its scope to benefit more Lebanese MSEs and MFIs. Generous pledges and contributions to date from the governments of Canada, Denmark, France and Germany and from the EU totaling US\$62.68 million will allow the Lebanon Financing Facility to channel international support to Lebanon to address its multiple crises. While the international community is working together to address the socio-economic recovery needs of the people of Lebanon, more donors are invited to come forward in support of the 3RF priorities under the umbrella of the LFF.

About the Lebanon Financing Facility (LFF):

Established in December 2020 in the aftermath of the August 4 Port of Beirut explosion disaster and following the launch of the Reform, Recovery and Reconstruction Framework (3RF), the LFF is a 5 year multi-donor trust fund that will pool grant resources and strengthen the coherence and coordination of financing in support of the immediate socio-economic recovery of vulnerable people and businesses impacted by the explosion. To date, the LFF has received contributions and pledges from the governments of Canada, Denmark, France and Germany and from the EU. Subject to the commitment of all Lebanese stakeholders to critical reforms, the LFF will build the foundation for medium-term recovery and the sustainable reconstruction of the Port of Beirut and affected neighborhoods. The LFF prioritizes three focus areas of interventions: 1) Socioeconomic and business

recovery; 2) Preparing for reform and reconstruction; and 3) Strengthening coordination, monitoring, accountability and oversight of the 3RF. The LFF will benefit from the World Bank's high fiduciary standards, through the application of its fiduciary framework for financial management, procurement, and environmental and social safeguards. The LLF will also ensure that programs promote gender equality and community engagement that target women, youth and vulnerable populations.

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The World Bank Provides \$90 Million to Improve Health Care Access and Quality in Chad

The World Bank has approved a \$90 million grant from the International Development Association (IDA)* to help Chad improve the use and quality of delivery of essential health services. The Health System Performance Strengthening Project (PRPSS) aims to build the capacity of Chad's health system to offer quality health care at the operational level and increase the use of health services by populations in the project areas. Particular attention will be paid to reproductive, maternal, neonatal, child, and adolescent health, as well as to nutrition services in all health districts in the eight provinces supported by the project. "While considerable efforts have focused on the COVID-19 response in Chad, there is a significant risk of weakening the health system and undermining the response to the population's other health needs," notes Clara Ana Coutinho de Sousa, World Bank Country Director for Chad. "The World Bank intends to provide an adequate response through the Health System Performance Strengthening Project, by using its operational tools and working closely with the government and the other partners."

This new project—the total cost of which is \$106.5 million with \$16.5 million in cofinancing from the Global Financing Facility (GFF) for Women, Children and Adolescents—will help improve the quality of health services in a number of ways, including by (i) institutionalizing performance-based financing (PBF); (ii) allocating resources directly to health facilities in proportion to the quality and quantity of the health services offered to the population; (iii) paying performance bonuses to the staff of health facilities in the project area; (iv) providing free maternal and child health care services to the poorest and most vulnerable at the project-supported health facilities in order to ensure equity; and (v) concluding performance contracts with health districts, provincial health directorates, and the central directorates of the Ministry of Public Health and National Solidarity, which include specific quarterly deliverables. These various mechanisms will help improve regulation, leadership and stewardship, governance, coordination and the separation of roles. "This project will address two drivers of fragility: it will improve the flow of funds to health centers and district and provincial hospitals, and will promote the accountability of health facilities and decision-making that is closer to the communities, as well as ensure that resources are used more effectively and efficiently. Health services in the country's

underserved regions will therefore help reduce social exclusion in the provinces,” noted Rasiert Pertev, World Bank Country Manager for Chad.

*The International Development Association (IDA) is the World Bank’s fund for the poorest. Established in 1960, it provides grants and low- to zero-interest loans for projects and programs that boost economic growth, reduce poverty, and improve poor people’s lives. IDA is one of the largest sources of assistance for the world’s 76 poorest countries, 39 of which are in Africa. IDA resources help effect positive change in the lives of the 1.6 billion people living in the countries that are eligible for its assistance. Since 1960, IDA has supported development work in 113 countries. Annual commitments are constantly on the rise and have averaged \$21 billion over the past three years, with about 61% going to Africa.

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World Bank Group Releases FY21 Audited Financial Statements

The Executive Boards of the World Bank Group on August 5 approved the audited financial statements for fiscal year 2021 (July 1, 2020 – June 30, 2021). The statements highlighted the strength of the financial position of the World Bank Group entities, strong demand for financing from our client countries, including due to COVID-19 and increased poverty, and the continued backing from shareholders and capital markets. A significant portion of the FY21 commitments supported measures related to the health and economic impacts of COVID-19. In response to the global outbreak, World Bank Group commitments rose to \$84.3 billion in fiscal year 2021, 15% higher than FY20. The World Bank Group’s support in FY21 included \$4.7 billion of newly approved financing for vaccines benefiting 54 countries. Despite the high level of business activity, the World Bank Group continued to maintain fiscal prudence, with a reduction in gross administrative expenses in FY21 compared to FY20. “World Bank Group support to client countries surged to \$157 billion over the last 15 months to address increased poverty, inequality, and the impacts of COVID-19,” said World Bank Group President David Malpass. “This unprecedented level of commitments helped countries strengthen health systems, protect the poor and vulnerable, support jobs and businesses, promote economic growth, and lay the foundation for a green, resilient and inclusive recovery.” Also now available are the Management’s Discussion and Analysis of financial results for the four World Bank Group institutions: the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD), which provides loans and advice to middle-income countries; the International Development Association (IDA), the World Bank’s fund for the poorest; the International Finance Corporation (IFC), the Bank Group’s private sector arm; and the Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency (MIGA), whose mandate is to help drive impactful foreign direct investment to developing countries.

Key highlights by institution of the financial statements are as follows.

IBRD

IBRD's net commitments increased 9% to \$30.5 billion in FY21 and gross disbursements increased 17% to \$23.7 billion. Commitments to lower-middle-income countries in FY21 represented 42% of the total. Considering loan repayments, net disbursements to support developing economies were \$13.6 billion in FY21. This increased IBRD's loan portfolio to \$218.8 billion, an 8% increase from the prior year. IBRD's net investment portfolio increased to \$85.8 billion as of June 30, 2021, from \$82.5 billion a year earlier. The increase is primarily due to proceeds from debt issuances partially offset by net loan disbursements during the year. IBRD raised medium and long-term debt of \$67.4 billion during FY21. The funds raised from capital markets financed development lending, bolstered liquidity and were used to replace maturing debt. The equity to loans (E/L) ratio, IBRD's capital adequacy measure, was 22.6%, slightly lower than a year ago, as the increase in total exposures slightly outpaced receipt of capital subscription payments of \$1.2 billion. IBRD reported net income of \$2.0 billion in FY21, compared to a net loss of \$42 million in the prior year, primarily due to net unrealized mark-to-market gains on the non-trading portfolios. Allocable income, the measure that IBRD uses for net income allocation decisions, was \$1.2 billion, \$0.1 billion lower than the previous year, which was primarily attributable to the increase in provision for losses.

IDA

FY21 was the first year of the implementation of the Nineteenth Replenishment (IDA19) and coincided with the onset of the COVID-19 crisis. To enable IDA to continue meeting the heightened financing needs for IDA resources, in April 2021 IDA members agreed to launch the Twentieth IDA replenishment (IDA20), one year earlier, in FY23. In FY21, IDA net commitments were \$36.0 billion, 19% higher than the previous year. Net disbursements in FY21 were \$16.5 billion, a 9% increase compared to the previous year, increasing the net outstanding loan balance to \$177.8 billion, a 10% increase over FY20. IDA's net investment portfolio increased to \$37.9 billion as of June 30, 2021, from \$35.6 billion a year earlier. The increase is primarily due to member contributions and proceeds from net new debt issuances partially offset by net loan and grant disbursements during the year. As part of its funding activities, IDA raised medium and long-term debt of \$9.4 billion during FY21 in the international capital markets. IDA's capital adequacy measure, the deployable strategic capital (DSC) ratio, was 30.4% as of June 30, 2021, 5.4% lower from a year earlier. IDA's capital continues to be adequate to support its operations. IDA reported a net loss of \$0.4 billion compared to a net loss of \$1.1 billion in the prior year. The decrease in net loss is primarily driven by the increase in unrealized mark-to-market gains on the non-trading portfolios partially offset by an increase in development grant expenses during the year. Adjusted Net Income, the financial sustainability measure that IDA uses to monitor the economic results of its operations, was \$0.4 billion, \$0.3 billion lower than the prior year. This decrease was primarily due to lower net investment revenue, higher provision for losses on loans and other exposures, partially offset by higher net interest revenue on loans.

IFC

IFC's total commitments in FY21 reached \$31.5 billion, an increase of 11 percent from the previous year, 37% of which was in low-income and fragile and conflict affected states. Long-term finance commitments increased to a record \$23.3 billion, of which \$12.5 billion was for IFC's own account and \$10.8 billion for core mobilization. Additionally, IFC delivered a record high of \$8.2 billion in short-term finance, a 26 percent increase compared to the previous year.

IFC reported net income of \$4.2 billion for FY21 compared to a net loss of \$1.7 billion for FY20. Net unrealized gains in the equity portfolio totaled \$2.6 billion in FY21 (unrealized losses of \$1.6 billion in FY20) mainly driven by the rebound in equity valuations. Release of provisions for losses on the loan portfolio totaled \$201 million in FY21 (a provision charge of \$638 million in FY20) reflecting an overall improvement in credit quality of the portfolio. IFC's capital adequacy measure, the deployable strategic capital ratio, increased to 23.4% at the end of FY21, up by 5.5% from 17.9% at the end of FY20, largely resulting from an increase in Capital Available due to capital subscription payments, an increase in retained earnings, and a decrease in the funded status of the pension plans. IFC raised medium- and long-term debt of \$12.7 billion during FY21.

MIGA

MIGA's commitments totaled \$5.2 billion in FY21. FY21 commitments include \$3.5 billion of guarantees under the Agency's COVID-19 Response Fast-track Facility to support private sector investors and lenders in emerging economies and developing countries to address the impacts of the pandemic. Gross guarantee exposure increased by \$364 million to \$23 billion as of June 30, 2021, despite the \$5.2 billion in new guarantees, due principally to the offsetting impact of commensurate portfolio run-off. MIGA reported net income of \$81.5 million in FY21 compared to \$57.2 million in FY20. The increase reflects the effect of \$8.2 million release from the reserve for claims in FY21 compared to \$37.4 million increase in the reserve for claims in FY20 combined with \$6.6 million higher operating income, partially offset by \$34.6 million lower investment income. The capital utilization ratio, MIGA's key capital adequacy measure, decreased to 44.5% from 47.5% as of June 30, 2020, largely reflecting the impact of the increase in Operating Capital.

For full versions of the Financial Statements and Management's Discussion & Analysis of the four World Bank Group institutions, please visit:

IBRD FY21 Financial Statements and Management's Discussion and Analysis

IDA FY21 Financial Statements and Management's Discussion and Analysis

IFC FY21 Financial Statements and Management's Discussion and Analysis

MIGA FY21 Financial Statements and Management's Discussion and Analysis

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World Bank and Partners Announce New Global Fund for

Cybersecurity

The World Bank announced today the launch of a new Cybersecurity Multi-Donor Trust Fund under the broader Digital Development Partnership (DDP) umbrella program. Digital transformation is accelerating in many countries, offering new opportunities for economic growth and enabling low- and medium-income countries to leapfrog development through increased productivity and improved service delivery across key sectors, including finance, health, education, and agriculture. Embracing technological transformation has increased cyber risks and threats to digital infrastructure, services, and data, which rely on increasingly connected systems. As digital transformation becomes essential to the functioning of states, economies, and societies, cybersecurity solutions must keep up. A partnership approach can help build trust, improve awareness, and deliver the technical solutions that countries require. “COVID-19 has highlighted the vital role digital technologies and applications play in a resilient development agenda. It keeps people, businesses, and public services connected. As governments are rapidly scaling up their investments into digital technologies, cybersecurity has become a pressing concern to ensure a safe and secure digital transformation for all,” said Boutheina Guerhazi, Director of the World Bank’s Digital Development Global Practice. “Fostering safe digital inclusion is of paramount importance for the World Bank’s work in helping countries reduce poverty, tackle inequality, and accelerate economic growth.”

The new fund aims to better define and systematically roll out the cybersecurity development agenda, helping to ensure a more substantial reflection of cybersecurity considerations across World Bank programs and financing. The work program will support the development of global knowledge on cybersecurity solutions for low- and middle-income countries. It will fund country maturity assessments, offer technical assistance, and support training and capacity development for cybersecurity staff in World Bank client countries. The launch of the Trust Fund is made possible with donor contributions from Estonia, Germany, Japan, and the Netherlands. “It is essential that basic cybersecurity elements are integrated into all digitalization projects in development cooperation,” said Mari Tomingas of the Cyber Diplomacy Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Estonia. “As a highly developed digital nation, we continue to share our expertise, and we are very happy about the launch of the new associated trust fund.” “Cyberattacks are becoming more complex and sophisticated across the world,” said the representatives of Japan’s Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Internal Affairs and Communication, Narichika Konno and Atsushi Umino. “Effective communication through digital technologies is a public good and can be best achieved if low- and middle-income countries are included in the effective protection of critical digital infrastructure. The importance of capacity building in matters of cyberspace is therefore increasing rapidly.”

“There is widespread agreement in the international community that significantly

more cybersecurity capacity building is needed to help low- and middle-income countries become more resilient against attacks and take full advantage of the development opportunities of the digital economy,” said Felix Kroll of the Cyber Foreign Policy and Cyber Security Coordination Staff of the German Federal Foreign Office. “All of our economies, including those of rapidly-digitizing lower- and middle-income countries, increasingly depend on good cybersecurity to grow and thrive,” said Elizabeth Vish of the Office of the Coordinator for Cyber Issues of the U.S. Department of State. “We believe the international community will be more secure, stable, and prosperous when a broad range of states has the capacity to defend their own networks.”

“Malicious code—whether you call it a software bug, a virus, malware, ransomware, botnet, or phishing—presents a risk that is globally interconnected and potentially devastating to digitally dependent societies. Addressing this risk requires collective action. Cybersecurity should be a key pillar of any development conversation,” said Kanwaljit Singh of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Progress will require partnership and collaboration between and among partners, also involving other international institutions and organizations. “Cybersecurity must become an integral part of the digital agenda. Synergies are crucial, and the activities to be carried out should be taken up broadly through development financing programs,” said Michael Thijssen of the Task Force Cyber Policies of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands. “Partnerships such as the Global Forum for Cyber Expertise (GFCE), NGOs, and research institutes can help ensure a broad stakeholder process. We are looking forward to great results to be supported through the new trust fund over the years to come.”

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East Asia

CHINA: Central Bank to Keep Monetary Policy Stable

China's central bank on Monday said it will maintain the stability of monetary policy and make it more forward-looking and effective, to render strong support to the real economy while avoiding a "flood-like" stimulus. The bank will coordinate macroeconomic policies for 2021 and 2022, boost high-quality development with moderate monetary growth, and support the continuous recovery of small and medium-sized firms as well as industries in difficulties, according to a quarterly report by the People's Bank of China (PBOC) on monetary policy implementation. Overall, China has adhered to implementing normal monetary policy since the outbreak of the COVID-19 epidemic, with the intensity of monetary policy basically returning to the pre-epidemic level in the first half of this year, the report said.

The central bank will maintain a prudent monetary policy that is flexible, precise, reasonable and moderate, stick to normal monetary policy, carry out cross-cyclical policy design, and walk a fine line between economic recovery and risk control, the report said. The report called for efforts to strengthen the flexibility of the RMB exchange rate, stabilize market expectations and enhance macro-prudential management, to ensure the basic stability of the RMB exchange rate at a reasonable and balanced level. It underscored consolidating stable and sound growth momentum and achieving balanced economic recovery, to ensure a good start to the 14th Five-Year Plan period (2021-2025). Efforts will also be made to maintain generally stable prices, and guide financial institutions to enhance support for technological innovation, small and micro enterprises, manufacturing and green development, among others, according to the report.

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China's Central Bank Injects Liquidity into Market

China's central bank pumped cash into the financial system through open market operations Monday to maintain liquidity in the market. A total of 600 billion yuan (about 92.71 billion U.S. dollars) was injected into the market via medium-term lending facility (MLF), according to the People's Bank of China, the central bank. The funds will mature in one year at an interest rate of 2.95 percent. The central bank also injected 10 billion yuan into the market through seven-day reverse repos at an interest rate of 2.2 percent. The move was intended to maintain reasonable and ample liquidity in the banking system, the central bank said. The MLF tool was introduced in 2014 to help commercial and policy banks maintain liquidity by allowing them to borrow from the central bank using securities as collateral. A reverse repo is a process in which the central bank purchases securities from commercial banks through bidding, with an agreement to sell them back in the future.

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Xi Stresses Promoting Common Prosperity amid High-quality Development, Forestalling Major Financial Risks

President Xi Jinping Tuesday stressed efforts to promote common prosperity in the pursuit of high-quality development and coordinate work on forestalling major financial risks. Xi, also general secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and chairman of the Central Military Commission, made the remarks at the tenth meeting of the Central Committee for Financial and Economic Affairs. He is also head of the committee. Common prosperity is an essential requirement of socialism and a key feature of Chinese-style modernization, Xi said, calling for adhering to the people-centered development philosophy and promoting common

prosperity while pursuing high-quality development. Noting that finance is the core of the modern economy, the president stressed that efforts to fend off major financial risks should be coordinated in line with market principles and the rule of law. Other Chinese leaders including Li Keqiang, Wang Yang, Wang Huning and Han Zheng attended the meeting. The meeting heard reports from relevant departments on advancing common prosperity as well as forestalling major financial risks and stabilizing financial development.

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China Pledges Reform, Opening-up of Corporate Credit Bond Market

Chinese authorities have issued a guideline on promoting the reform and opening-up of the corporate credit bond market as part of efforts to spur the country's economic transformation and support the building of a new development paradigm. The guideline was jointly issued by the People's Bank of China (PBOC), the National Development and Reform Commission, the Ministry of Finance and three other departments, according to a statement issued Wednesday on the PBOC's website. The document details measures for 10 aspects of the corporate credit bond market, including the legal system, information disclosure, the supervision of credit rating agencies and high-level opening-up. According to the guideline, the country will uphold a zero-tolerance attitude and punish every type of behavior related to debt evasion in accordance with law. Coordinated efforts will be made to open up the country's inter-bank bond market and the bond market in the exchanges, with measures to unify the access of foreign institutional investors and the management of cross-border capital, the document says. The authorities vow to actively promote reform and opening-up of the corporate credit bond market and build up the capacity of the market in serving the development of the real economy.

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China Pledges Further Institutional Opening-up of Capital Market

China will unswervingly advance institutional opening-up of the capital market, the country's securities regulator said Friday. The country will roll out a raft of policy measures to further open up its capital market while coordinating development and security, the China Securities Regulatory Commission (CSRC) said in its mid-year meeting on regulation. Efforts will be made to create conditions to facilitate China-U.S. cooperation on audit supervision, deepen the connectivity between Chinese mainland and Hong Kong markets, and support the stable development of Hong Kong's capital market, the CSRC said. With the registration-based IPO reform entering a critical period, the commission stressed the need to optimize the pricing

mechanism for stock issuance, improve the quality of prospectus disclosure and deepen the reform of the National Equities Exchange and Quotations, or the "new third board." The CSRC will adopt a "zero-tolerance" approach and crack down on illegal activities such as financial fraud, market manipulation and insider trading. The meeting also called for greater efforts to forestall and defuse risks, stabilize expectations and prevent secondary financial risks, while addressing risks in other areas. In a meeting on financial and economic affairs held earlier this week, China's leadership said that finance is the core of the modern economy and underscored coordinated efforts to fend off major financial risks in line with market principles and the rule of law.

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Digital Yuan Debuts in Futures Transaction

China's digital fiat currency, or the e-CNY, has been used for the first time for transactions in the domestic futures market, the China Securities Journal reported on Monday. The e-CNY has been used by the Dalian Commodity Exchange (DCE) for the payment of storage fees to a delivery warehouse, assisted by the local branches of Bank of Communications and Bank of China. The application of e-CNY in the futures market provided an efficient, zero-cost and safe payment alternative for future exchanges and market participants through real-time inter-bank payment, the newspaper reported, citing sources from the banks. Jiang Bin, manager of the delivery warehouse, said e-CNY payment charges no transaction fee and is not restricted to the operation period of the high-value payment system, which would bring convenience to enterprises by showing real-time transaction progress. The DCE said it plans to further promote business innovation and seeks to expand the use of the digital yuan while ensuring a safe and stable operation in the market. China has launched e-CNY pilots in several cities since the end of 2019, which was joined by Dalian in November 2020. As of June 30 this year, e-CNY has been applied in over 1.32 million scenarios, covering utility payments, catering, transportation, shopping, and government services.

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China to Strengthen Financial Support for Common Prosperity

The People's Bank of China has vowed to maintain the stability of macro policies and provide strong financial support for the country's bid to promote common prosperity. The central bank will take a raft of measures to maintain reasonably sufficient liquidity, better serve the real economy, enhance balanced regional development and facilitate the coordinated growth of different industries. Instead of adopting a deluge of strong stimulus policies, the bank will use various monetary tools to

maintain liquidity at a reasonable and ample level and guide appropriate growth in loans. It will take measures to keep the growth of money supply and social financing in line with nominal economic growth, while keeping the macro leverage ratio basically stable.

To better serve the real economy, the bank will keep optimizing financial services, continue to offer financial support to smaller businesses and encourage financial institutions to strengthen support in key areas and weak links of the economy, such as agriculture, manufacturing and green development. Efforts will be made to ramp up the sound and standardized growth of all types of capital, while resolutely preventing the disorderly expansion of capital, according to the bank. In order to promote common prosperity among farmers and in rural areas, the bank will continuously offer sound financial services for rural vitalization, provide financial assistance and shore up the construction of rural financial infrastructure and service systems.

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China to Increase Fiscal Support for Yangtze River Economic Belt Development

China will increase fiscal and tax support to promote high-quality development of the Yangtze River Economic Belt, a State Council executive meeting said on Wednesday. The meeting, chaired by Premier Li Keqiang, also reviewed and adopted an outline for women's development in China during the 2021-2030 period and an outline for children's development in China during the 2021-2030 period. Efforts should be made to support ecological conservation in provinces and cities along the Yangtze River and coordinate protection and restoration of the ecology of mountains, rivers, forests, farmlands, lakes and grasslands, said the meeting. Fishing in pivotal waters of the Yangtze River should be banned, and efforts should go into helping fishermen who relinquished their nets as required by a 10-year fishing moratorium, the meeting said. Provinces and cities along the Yangtze River should be encouraged to build pilot free trade zones and comprehensive bonded zones, the meeting said. It underlined supporting small and medium-sized enterprises to explore the international market and promoting the transformation and upgrading of foreign trade.

The meeting noted that remarkable achievements have been made in the development of women and children in China in recent years. The outlines set out objectives and measures in areas including health, education, social security and welfare, family, the environment and the law, and require implementing the fundamental national policy of gender equality. Women's equal rights to education, employment, starting businesses, and participating in decision-making and management must be protected, the outlines said. The social security system and

the legal system should be improved to meet women's needs and protect their lawful rights and interests, the outlines noted. More attention should go to protecting children in families, schools, society, and on the internet. Compulsory education will remain the top priority of education investment, said the outlines. Support measures for the three-child policy should be improved and multiple measures will be introduced to reduce the burden of childbearing, parenting, and education on families, the outlines noted.

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JAPAN: Mulling Easing of Crypto Restrictions

Japan needs more convincing of the merits for making cryptocurrency investing easier for its population, the nation's top regulator said. While Japanese Financial Services Agency (FSA) Commissioner Junichi Nakajima said he is open-minded about the potential benefits that assets such as bitcoin possess as a quick and cheap way to send cash, in Japan they are mainly being used for speculation and investment, not as a means of transferring money. New challenges are coming from a broader proliferation of firms involved in decentralized finance, he said. "We need to consider carefully whether it is necessary to make it easier for the general public to invest in crypto assets," said Nakajima, 58, who became head of Japan's financial regulator last month. Unlike in the US, where investors now have a multitude of ways to invest in the burgeoning asset class, Japan remains heavily restricted by comparison. The FSA last month set up a study group of outside experts and is expected to consider regulatory responses to decentralized finance in the coming months, with investors looking to Nakajima for clues on the outlook.

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Expert Urges Japan to Lead Global Health Finance amid COVID Crisis

Japan was the largest provider of development aid in response to the COVID-19 health and economic crisis among the Group of Seven industrialized nations in 2020 despite the hit its economy suffered during the pandemic, according to an independent study. Japan committed \$5.1 billion in new aid funding last year, compared to \$4.4 billion pledged by Germany, \$1.9 billion by France and \$1.0 billion by Canada, the study by Kiyoshi Kodera, a former Japanese Finance Ministry and World Bank official shows, citing data from the Overseas Development Institute, a British think tank. Among other G7 members, Britain committed \$990 million, the United States \$103 million and Italy \$50 million. "If you compare data among the G7 members, we can see that Japan played a significant role as a major donor even at the time of the coronavirus crisis," said Kodera, now a senior research associate at the London-based ODI.

Most of the \$5.1 billion in official development assistance -- which came on the heels of a 4.8 percent fall in Japan's gross domestic product in 2020, the second sharpest contraction on record -- was targeted at developing countries mainly in Asia and multilateral institutions to assist in their fight against COVID-19 and the economic crisis, he said. However, Koderu expects the United States to overtake Japan as the top aid provider among the G7 in 2021, partly because President Joe Biden's administration extended \$2 billion to the COVAX global vaccine-sharing program, the largest single financial contribution to the U.N.-backed initiative snubbed by his predecessor Donald Trump. In the absence of comprehensive data for Japan's ODA program, Koderu tallied figures such as ODA outlays in the country's initial budget for fiscal 2020, ODA spending from the reserve fund for fiscal 2019 and ODA earmarked in the fiscal 2020 supplementary budgets.

"Government agencies release information about ODA individually and sporadically. For outsiders, Japan's information looks fragmented and hard to comprehend," he said in an interview. "This has made it difficult for Japan as a whole to communicate with the world about the country's development aid in a holistic and more effective way." The Foreign Ministry can produce better global narratives by incorporating, for example, the government's contributions to trust funds run by the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank via the Finance Ministry as well, he said. Koderu retired from public service in 2016 as a Japan International Cooperation Agency vice president after holding posts such as deputy vice minister of finance for international affairs and executive secretary of the Development Committee of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, a career that earned him the nickname "Mr Development."

Besides the ODI post, the 69-year-old wears other hats such as chair of the board of WaterAid Japan, an international nongovernmental organization for water and sanitation, and board member of Save the Children Japan. While hailing Japan for offering COVID-19 vaccines and cold chain storage equipment such as refrigerated vaccine transport vehicles to poor countries in what some view as a counter to China's vaccine diplomacy, Koderu urges Tokyo to play a greater role in strengthening health systems in the developing world. "Besides vaccine supply, critical issues for developing countries are that they have a serious shortage of medical professionals who give shots, and that people are skeptical about vaccines based on misinformation and unsubstantiated rumors," he said.

"Japan can take the lead in helping poor countries train medical professionals and increase funding for vaccination campaigns as fundamental pillars for bolstering health systems in the developing world." Koderu also requested health and finance policymakers in developing countries to step up coordination so that countries such as Indonesia and the Philippines, whose percentage of state budgets dedicated to health and medical expenditures are comparatively small, can establish sustainable

health finance systems. "Without solely relying on foreign aid, developing economies must ensure sound tax revenue and budget implementation systems so that the health sector is financed by taxpayers' money," he said. "Otherwise, poor people will never be able to join universal health coverage systems, making it difficult for them to go to hospital even if they want to. They will not increase the number of doctors, nurses and local clinics in a sustainable way, either."

Kodera welcomed a pledge by the Group of 20 major economies in July to cooperate with international institutions such as the World Bank, the IMF and the World Health Organization in developing proposals for sustainable financing in an effort to strengthen future pandemic preparedness and responses. In a communique issued after a meeting in Venice, Italy, the G20 finance ministers and central bank governors tasked experts from their respective finance and health ministries to present "concrete proposals" at a joint meeting of G20 finance and health ministers to be held on the sidelines of a G20 summit in October in Rome. Japan hosted the first such joint session when the G20 leaders held a summit in Osaka in 2019. Similarly, Finance Minister Taro Aso exhibited Tokyo's leadership when he advocated an additional replenishment of the capital of the International Development Association, a member of the World Bank group, last fall as part of efforts to better fight the COVID-19 crisis.

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Hackers Hit Japanese Crypto Exchange, Steal Nearly \$100 Million

Hackers have drained Japanese cryptocurrency exchange Liquid of \$97 million worth of Ethereum and other digital coins. The company, in a tweet posted late Thursday, announced the compromise and said it is moving assets that were not affected into more secure "cold wallet" storage. The company has also suspended deposits and withdrawals. "Liquid's teams are still assessing the attack vector used and taking measures to mitigate the impact to users," the company said in a blog post. "[We] will continue to do everything in its power to mitigate the impact from this incident and restore full service as soon as possible." Liquid did not put a dollar figure on the amount, but blockchain analytics company Elliptic said its analysis estimates the losses at about \$97 million. Of that, \$45 million were in Ethereum tokens, which are being converted into Ether, preventing the hacker from having those assets frozen. Other cryptos taken in the heist include Bitcoin, XR,P and Stablecoins. Liquid is one of the 20 biggest crypto exchanges, as ranked by daily trading volume, per CoinMarketCap. In the past 24 hours, it has traded nearly \$141 million in crypto.

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Japan to Use ¥1.4 Tril in Reserve Funds for COVID Measures

Japan's cabinet on Friday decided to use 1.4 trillion yen in fiscal 2021 reserve funds, mainly for additional purchases of COVID-19 vaccines as well as securing medicines for patients. Of the amount, the government allocated about 841.5 billion yen to procure more vaccines and promote its inoculation rollout as the country struggles to contain a spike in virus infections driven by the highly contagious Delta variant. Around 235.2 billion yen was earmarked to buy the medicines casirivimab and imdevimab, which are administered intravenously in an "antibody cocktail" treatment, Finance Minister Taro Aso told a press conference. The therapy lowers a patient's risk of hospitalization or death, according to overseas clinical trials. The budgetary measure came two days after Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga told a news conference that the government will respond to "urgent tasks" such as securing enough vaccines and drugs for the antibody cocktail treatment by utilizing the reserve funds. Japan, which lags behind other developed economies in its inoculation drive, aims to finish vaccinating all eligible people in the nation who wish to receive shots "at an early date" in a window of sometime between October and November, Suga has said.

Among other expenses, 154.9 billion yen was set aside for a program providing no-interest loans of up to 200,000 yen per household for those severely affected by the pandemic, following a three-month extension of the measure to the end of November. To keep supporting businesses that have been forced to furlough employees due to worsening business conditions under the pandemic, 84.1 billion yen was allocated. The measure was due to expire at the end of September, but extended for two months. Those moves followed the government decision earlier in the month to extend the duration and expand the target areas of its state of emergency over the virus. The measure, which currently covers 21 out of Japan's 47 prefectures, is set to last until Sept 12. The government has set aside 5 trillion yen in reserve funds to deal with the pandemic under the 106.6 trillion yen initial budget for fiscal 2021 starting in April. Following Friday's cabinet approval, some 2.6 trillion yen remains in the funds.

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SOUTH KOREA: Plans to Invest 186.5 Bln Won in Development of Sensors

South Korea said Friday it plans to invest 186.5 billion won (US\$160 million) to develop technologies for sensors which are widely used in sectors ranging from automobiles to mobile devices. The country will allocate the funds to local universities and businesses starting next year through 2028, according to the Ministry of Trade, Industry, and Energy. Sensors refer to small electronic components that identify external stimulus, including light or sound, which are then converted into electronic signals. The annual global demand for sensors is expected to reach 1 trillion units in 2024, up from 100 billion estimated in 2020. "Sensors are expected to play a greater role in line with the fourth industrial revolution and the growth of the

contact-free economy," the ministry said in a statement. The ministry said the country will secure key technologies of the next-generation sensors, demand for which is expected to rise in sync with the post-pandemic economic recovery.

The funds will also be spent to improve related infrastructure at the National Nanofab Center in the central city of Daejeon. South Korea will provide local businesses with consulting programs to help them penetrate deeper into overseas markets as well. The global market for sensors is expected to reach US\$332.8 billion in 2025, rising 11 percent annually on average from \$193.9 billion tallied last year, according to the ministry's estimate. The investment is the latest step by the government to promote what it calls the Digital New Deal, which aims to invest around 58 trillion won in key digital technologies, such as network infrastructure and artificial intelligence, to create some 900,000 jobs by 2025.

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S. Korea Reviewing 2022 National Budget of Some 600 TIn Won

South Korea is seeking to draw up a national budget of around 600 trillion won (US\$513.3 billion) for next year in a bid to maintain expansionary fiscal spending amid the pandemic, government sources said Sunday. If confirmed, this would mark a 7.5 percent on-year increase from this year's national budget of 558 trillion won, according to sources at the finance ministry and the National Assembly. The government is seeking to keep the on-year growth pace of the 2022 budget in the 7-percent range, slower than an 8.9 percent gain for this year, in a bid to promote fiscal soundness. But the size of next year's budget may top 600 trillion won, depending on how the fourth wave of the pandemic plays out, according to the sources. The country is struggling to stem a recent flare-up in COVID-19 cases amid the fast spread of the highly transmissible delta variant and slow vaccinations. The number of daily virus cases surpassed 1,000 for the 40th straight day, with COVID-19 infections hitting a record high of 2,223 cases on Wednesday. The resurgence in virus cases is feared to dampen domestic demand and hamper face-to-face service segments, potentially slowing economic growth.

Against this backdrop, the government plans to prioritize supporting small merchants hit hard by the pandemic and bolstering spending for anti-virus measures in drawing up the 2022 budget. It will also focus on narrowing deepening income gaps caused by COVID-19. The country drew up two rounds of supplementary budgets totaling 50 trillion won this year in a bid to provide targeted support for micro business owners. More fiscal spending will be needed next year to compensate pandemic-stricken merchants for losses caused by state orders for business shutdowns or suspensions. The country also plans to bolster spending on developing homegrown COVID-19 vaccines with the goal of becoming the world's fifth-largest vaccine-producing nation by 2025. Narrowing income disparity will be one of the top priorities for the

government in preparing for the post-pandemic era. The South Korean economy has been on the recovery track on the back of brisk exports. But recovery remains uneven across sectors, with deepening income gaps between haves and have-nots, known as K-shaped recovery.

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S. Korea to Dole Out Cash Handouts to Ordinary People Next Week

South Korea said Monday it will begin providing emergency relief funds to people in the bottom 88 percent income bracket next week in the latest move to help them cope with the fallout from the pandemic. The government will begin to provide up to 250,000 won (US\$215) per recipient on Sept. 6 as part of an 11 trillion-won cash handout program, according to the interior and finance ministries. The money must be spent by end-December. In July, the country drew up an extra budget of 34.9 trillion won, the second of its kind this year, to finance another round of relief funds to support pandemic-hit small merchants and most other people. In May last year, the country doled out 14.3 trillion won in relief funds to all households to help them tackle the economic headwinds from the COVID-19 pandemic. The government earlier said it will provide relief aid to ordinary people before the Chuseok holiday scheduled for Sept. 20-22, a move aimed at spurring spending for the fall harvest celebration. People can spend such money at traditional markets, neighborhood supermarkets, restaurants and other designated offline stores. But the relief fund is not allowed to be used at department stores, large discount stores, entertainment establishments and on delivery apps.

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South-East Asia

INDONESIA: Budgets 185 Bln USD for State Spending in 2022

Indonesia has budgeted 2,708.7 trillion rupiahs (about 185.53 billion U.S. dollars) for state spending next year, with the main focus on COVID-19 handling and social protection for vulnerable groups, President Joko Widodo said on Monday. "It covers central government expenditures of 1,938.3 trillion rupiahs as well as transfers to regions and village funds of 770.4 trillion rupiahs," Widodo added. This budget includes 541.7 trillion rupiahs for education, 255.3 trillion rupiahs for health, 427.5 trillion rupiahs for social protection, and 384.8 trillion rupiahs for infrastructure development. The Southeast Asian country estimated that it would face a budget deficit of 4.85 percent of the gross domestic product in 2022 and 3 percent in 2023. Meanwhile, the country's economic growth next year was expected to range from 5.0 percent to 5.5 percent, slightly lower than the previous projection of 5.2 percent to

5.8 percent.

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Indonesia Records 15 Months of Trade Balance Surplus

Indonesia recorded 15 months of trade balance surplus in a row, with that in July reaching 2.59 billion U.S. dollars, according to the Central Agency of Statistics on Wednesday. The agency's head Margo Yuwono said the figure came from the non-oil and non-gas sector's surplus of 3.38 billion dollars, and the oil and gas sector's deficit of 0.79 billion dollars, also from the difference in exports of 17.70 billion dollars and imports of 15.11 billion dollars. "This indicates that our economy is getting better," Yuwono told a virtual press conference. Indonesia's largest surplus was gained from trade balance with the United States (1.23 billion dollars), followed by the Philippines (0.533 billion dollars) and Malaysia (0.40 billion dollars). Indonesia's trade balance deficit occurred with China (0.84 billion dollars), Australia (0.45 billion dollars) and Thailand (0.27 billion dollars). From January to July, Indonesia's trade balance surplus was recorded at 14.42 billion dollars, a sharp increase compared to the same period in 2020 of 8.65 billion dollars and a deficit of 3.59 billion dollars in 2019.

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Indonesia's Money Supply Continues to Grow in July

Indonesia's economic liquidity or money supply in a broad sense (M2) in July 2021 continued to grow well, according to central bank Bank Indonesia. "The M2 position in July 2021 was recorded at 7,149.2 trillion rupiahs (about 496 billion U.S. dollars), a 8.9 percent increase year-on-year," said Erwin Haryono, head of the communication department of Bank Indonesia in a statement on Wednesday. Haryono pointed out that the M2 growth in July 2021 was mainly influenced by net foreign assets and lending distribution. Meanwhile, net receivables to the central government grew by 38.7 percent year-on-year.

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PHILIPPINES: ADB Approves Loans to Improve Public Services

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) said Friday it has approved a 400-million-U.S.-dollar policy-based loan to the Philippines to help improve local governments' capacity to provide high-quality public services, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Manila-based bank said the Local Governance Reform Program Subprogram 2 will help strengthen local government units' service delivery framework, modernize local public financial management, and improve financing and

investment framework. ADB Public Finance Economist for Southeast Asia Aekapol Chongvilaivan said the program "will help ensure local governments have the capacity and adequate resources to quickly respond to the basic needs of local communities at critical times like this." The new program builds on ADB's support since 2006 to help the Philippines boost efficiency, accountability, and transparency in local governments' financial management and service delivery.

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VIETNAM: Tax Collection Reaches Record High but Slows Down as Virus Takes a Toll

Tax collection in the first seven months of this year set a record high, driven by robust banking, property, securities and automobile production sectors, but was slowing down as the virus took a toll, according to the General Department of Taxation. Statistics showed that tax collection was estimated to total VNĐ763.8 trillion from January to July, equivalent to 68.4 per cent of expectations for the full year and increasing by 13.1 per cent against the same period last year, setting a record high in terms of collection value. The General Department of Taxation said that tax collection in the period was good mainly thanks to the recovery of the economy in the final months of 2020 and the increases in tax collection from robust sectors, including banking, real estate, securities and automobile production. Tax collection from the banking sector increased by 72.9 per cent, the equivalent to VNĐ6 trillion on good credit growth, increases in banking services fees and a reduction in operating costs which helped increase banks' profits.

The real estate market also recovered in late 2020 and early 2021 with a number of projects transferred which pushed tax collection up by 61.7 per cent to VNĐ25 trillion. The increase in merger and acquisition deals in the early months of 2021 also pushed up corporate income tax collection by 2.6 times to VNĐ5.7 trillion. The tax collection from the securities sector rose by 2.47 times to more than VNĐ5 trillion in January – July. Policies to promote the consumption of domestically produced and assembled cars also helped increase tax collection by 47.1 per cent, the equivalent to VNĐ35 trillion. However, the General Department of Taxation said that tax collection was on a decreasing trend month over month with higher decreases since the fourth outbreak of the virus in late April. Statistics showed that domestic tax collection increased by 15.9 per cent in April but slowed down to 5.6 per cent in June and even dropped by 10.4 per cent in July. Tax debts also increased by 23 per cent against the end of 2020 to more than VNĐ116.8 trillion, reflecting that production and business were struggling in the COVID-19 pandemic.

The tax watchdog said that while the economy was still facing challenges as the pandemic remained complicated in a number of provinces and cities, including HCM City, Đồng Nai, Bình Dương, Long An and Bà Rịa – Vũng Tàu, focus would be

placed on removing barriers and making it easier for enterprises to maintain their production and business and attract investment, which would help increase tax revenue in the long term. The tax watchdog is also focused on implementing tax and fee exemptions, reductions and extensions for enterprises and citizens following the Government's directives to promote production and business and well as economic growth. Special attention would be attached to enhancing tax management of e-commerce and businesses on digital platforms such as Facebook, Google, Youtube and Netflix.

More support

At the meeting on Thursday, the Government basically agreed with the Ministry of Finance's proposal about a tax and fee reduction and exemption package to support citizens and enterprises affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. The package included a 30 per cent reduction in corporate income tax for those with revenue of less than VNĐ200 billion per year, a 50 per cent reduction in the third and fourth quarters of all household and individual businesses, together with a 30 per cent reduction in value-added tax for some sectors. The ministry also proposed exemption of the fee for late payments arising in 2020 and 2021 for enterprises and organisations which incurred losses for the three consecutive years of 2018, 2019 and 2020.

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Government Agrees to Buy Additional 20mln Pfizer Vaccine Doses

The Government has agreed to buy additional 20 million doses of Pfizer/BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine, on top of the contract for 31 million doses signed with the US company in May. The Ministry of Health was assigned to purchase the vaccine as soon as possible to meet COVID-19 prevention and control efforts and ensure quality and efficiency during the purchase and use of the vaccine. The price is not publicly available, but Pfizer has a 'differential pricing approach' for its vaccines, which essentially means Việt Nam could purchase the doses at a more affordable price than the developed nations like the US or the EU. Last month, Pfizer committed to supplying another 20 million doses to Việt Nam to be used specifically for children aged between 12 and 18 years old, bringing the total doses of vaccines pledged for Việt Nam to more than 51 million. Only about 1.2 million doses of Pfizer have arrived in the country, with the majority of the commitment expected to be fulfilled only in the later months of 2021 amid global shortage. Việt Nam approved the Pfizer/BioNTech mRNA COVID-19 vaccine, product Comirnaty, for emergency use on June 12, 2021. Việt Nam has received some 19 million doses of COVID-19 vaccine in total, mostly AstraZeneca and Moderna. The country has administered more than 13.7 million doses of vaccine, with 1,271,973 million people getting two full jabs.

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PM to Provide Financial Support for Covivac Vaccine Trials

The Prime Minister has decided to use over VNĐ8.8 billion from the national COVID-19 vaccine fund to support the first and second phase of clinical trials of the COVIVAC vaccine, which has been developed by the Health Ministry's Institute of Vaccines and Medical Biologicals (IVAC) since May 2020. COVIVAC uses viral vector technology on primary chicken embryo cell culture - a technique IVAC used previously to successfully produce seasonal flu vaccines. It is preserved at temperatures from 2-8 degrees Celsius. In the first phase, it was evaluated as safe, well-tolerant and immunogenic. The second phase will be carried out in Vũ Thu District, northern Thái Bình Province, with 375 volunteers. COVIVAC is the second "made-in-Việt Nam" vaccine to be approved for clinical trials by the Health Ministry, following Nanogen company's Nano Covax.

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Nearly \$40m in Aid Given to Informal Workers in 19 Southern Localities

Nineteen southern provinces and cities have provided relief aid for more than 635,000 informal workers with a total amount of nearly VNĐ911 billion (US\$40 million). Of these, HCM City assisted 462,000 workers with nearly VNĐ694 billion, Đồng Nai Province supported 22,000 with VNĐ33 billion and Bình Dương Province aided nearly 98,000 with VNĐ134 billion. Nearly VNĐ42.46 billion was offered to 45,700 workers in Bình Phước Province and over VNĐ60.2 billion was provided for more than 40,200 in Đồng Tháp as well as over VNĐ22.7 billion for 20,100 others in Vĩnh Long. According to statistics of the Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs (MoLISA), the southern provinces and cities are home to more than 10 million informal workers. To reduce difficulties for people, southern provinces and cities have issued assistance plans for those affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, including supporting policies for informal workers. Special policies have been designed for different groups such as those selling lottery tickets, drivers of motorbike taxis, street vendors as well as workers at business facilities without labour contracts. Social distancing which is extended for nearly two months in many provinces and cities has been greatly affecting the lives of informal workers, mostly labourers from other provinces, whose monthly income is unstable and do not have savings. Therefore, MoLISA suggested that provinces and cities pay attention to implementing social assistance policies for these groups to help them stabilise their lives.

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ADB Approved \$60m Package to Help Improve Climate Resilience of Infrastructure for Ethnic Minorities in Việt Nam

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has approved a \$60 million financial package to improve the climate resilience of the transport and water supply infrastructure in Việt Nam's south-central coastal provinces of Bình Định and Quảng Nam. The money will specifically target remote upland districts with large ethnic minority communities. The Climate Resilient Inclusive Infrastructure for Ethnic Minorities Project I, will upgrade 121.8km of roads using climate-resilient design standards, construct 115km of water supply pipelines, and help provide reliable weather and climate data in a timely, cost-effective manner. About 243,000 people, including 126,300 from ethnic minority groups, are expected to benefit from the project. "The project aims to improve the living conditions of ethnic minority communities in remote areas of Việt Nam," said ADB Programs Officer Nguyễn Hồng Anh. "It will better link remote rural production sites with markets and processing facilities for crops such as acacia and boost beneficiaries' access to health, education, and market services. The project will also expand access to safe water supply and irrigation."

The financing package includes \$58 million in regular ADB loans and a \$2 million grant from ADB's High-Level Technology Fund. The grant will fund the supply and installation of data systems for climate risk management. In addition, the project will include \$21.73 million in financing from the Government of Việt Nam. Việt Nam's economy grew 7.0 per cent on average from 2016 to 2018, but it slowed to 2.9 per cent in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Significant gaps exist between the economically booming coastal communities and the interior upland areas with a high ethnic minority population. About 87 per cent of ethnic minority households in Bình Định and 55 per cent in Quảng Nam are poor or near poor, compared with the provincial poverty rates of 5.5 per cent and 10.3 per cent, respectively. These areas are challenged by low-quality, fragmented transport and water resource infrastructure. Most of the ethnic minority communities are often isolated during the rainy season, cut off by flooded roads situated in hilly or mountainous terrain. Less than 60 per cent of households within the project area have access to reliable and safe water supply. Limited access to water and poor sanitation have led to high incidence of waterborne diseases and poverty. Việt Nam faces a high risk of disasters and climate change. The country experiences an estimated annual average loss of \$2.37 billion due to natural hazards, especially floods, with Bình Định and Quảng Nam among the most affected areas.

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South Asia

INDIA: Nagpur Municipal Corporation Offers 5% Rebate on Property Tax

In a move to extend benefits on property tax, Nagpur Municipal Corporation (NMC)

has started offering a rebate of 5 per cent in property tax, which is effective from July 1. NMC Commissioner Radhakrishnan B implemented the 5 per cent rebate on August 6. Prior to this, as many as 51,000 taxpayers have already benefitted from a rebate of 10 per cent that the civic body offered between April 1 and June 30. As reported by a national daily, the NMC Commissioner said, "Timely payment of tax is good for taxpayers as well as the welfare of the city and public. The COVID pandemic had brought many people under financial crisis. Considering this, I proposed a rebate in my budget, which was incorporated by the standing committee chairman and approved by the general body. A rebate of 10 per cent resulted in encouragement for timely payment of tax dues. Hence, a decision to extend the rebate was made. Also, we want to incentivise tax payments and recognise prompt taxpayers with rebates." In a meeting on July 22, the Corporation's general body nodded for a rebate of 5 per cent. Deputy Commissioner of NMC Milind Meshram clarified that those taxpayers who have paid tax for the entire current fiscal from July 1 will also get a rebate of 5 per cent. This rebate will be on general tax and other components, excluding those of the state government. People can avail of the rebate by paying tax on or before December 31, he added. Earlier, the rebates offered by the civic body were 2 to 4 per cent on general tax only. The rebate offered was very less and for a very short period. Reportedly, Meshram said, "Around 51,000 taxpayers paid property tax of around Rs 28 crore as of June 30. These taxpayers were given the rebate of around Rs 2 crore."

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SRI LANKA: CBSL Tightens Monetary Policy to Curb Inflationary Pressures; Rectify External Sector Imbalances

Sri Lanka's Central Bank has tightened its monetary policy stance to address the imbalances in the external sector and to preempt the buildup of excessive inflationary pressures over the medium term. Accordingly, the Monetary Board of the Central Bank has decided to increase the Standing Deposit Facility Rate (SDFR) and the Standing Lending Facility Rate (SLFR) by 50 basis points each, to 5.00 percent and 6.00 percent, respectively. In addition, the Monetary Board decided to increase the Statutory Reserve Ratio (SRR) applicable on all rupee deposit liabilities of licensed commercial banks (LCBs) by 2.0 percentage points to 4.00 percent, with effect from the reserve maintenance period commencing on 01 September 2021. The upward adjustments in market interest rates and the expected liquidity deficit in the domestic money market would also help the economy to absorb the large amount of currency held by the public observed since the onset of the pandemic in early 2020. Inflation, which remained moderate during early 2021, accelerated somewhat in recent months due to high food inflation and some acceleration in non-food inflation. "The envisaged improvements in aggregate demand conditions and the likely increases in global energy and other commodity prices may generate some inflationary pressures in 2022, requiring preemptive policy measures to ensure the

maintenance of inflation in mid-single digit levels over the medium term,” the Central Bank said. “The Central Bank will continue to monitor domestic and global macroeconomic and financial market developments and take appropriate measures to ensure that the economy reverts to its potential, while maintaining inflation in the targeted 4-6 percent range under its flexible inflation targeting framework.” Meanwhile, credit to the private sector has recorded a 12.9 percent growth in June compared to 7.5 percent in March this year.

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China Development Bank Agrees to Provide RMB 2Bn Term Facility to Sri Lanka

China Development Bank and Sri Lankan Government have entered into an agreement of RMB 2 Billion (approx LKR 61.5 Billion) Term Facility today, the Chinese Embassy in Sri Lanka said. The facility is to be used to support Sri Lanka's COVID-19 response, economic revival, financial stability, and livelihood betterment.

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Central-West Asia

AZERBAIJAN: Deposit Insurance Fund Ends 1H2021 With Net Profit

The Azerbaijan Deposit Insurance Fund (ADIF) completed the first half of 2021 with a net profit, Trend reports referring to ADIF's statement. According to the fund, the net profit amounted to 49 million manat (\$28.8 million). Besides, ADIF repaid early borrowed funds in the amount of one million manat (\$590,000), attracted from the Central Bank over the past 10 months. During the reporting period, an increase was recorded in the income received by the fund from banks in the process of their liquidation, in exchange for compensation payments, which increases its financial stability. As reported, from 2020 to date, ADIF has paid compensation in the amount of 655 million manat (\$385.3 million), making up 97 percent of the total amount of 676 million manat (\$397.6 million) to depositors of the liquidated banks. "The fund is currently operating with profit and, in accordance with the law, can attract borrowed funds from relevant institutions in case of liquidity problems. ADIF currently owns government bills worth 460 million manat (\$270.6 million)," added the statement.

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Central Bank Talks Formation of Positive Trend in Digital Banking Dev't in Azerbaijan

A positive trend has formed in Azerbaijan in terms of digital banking development, the Central Bank (CBA) told Trend. According to the CBA, as of July 1 of this year, 24 out of 26 banks operating in the country have been providing Internet banking services, and 22 - mobile banking services. A significant progress was recorded in the statistical indicators of digital banking services in the first half of the year. The total number of transfers from current accounts of bank clients in the first six months made up 25.5 million transactions, and the value - 93.3 billion manat (\$54.8 billion). The bank noted that 76 percent of the number (19.3 million transactions) and 70 percent of the value (64.9 billion manat or \$38.18 billion) of transfers were made through digital banking. Besides, the volume of customer transfers made through Internet banking services increased by 58.5 percent compared to the same period of last year, and the volume of transfers made through mobile banking services increased by 2.4 times. The total value of these services reached 59 billion manat (\$34.7 billion) and 1.6 billion manat (\$940 million), respectively. "The effective implementation of the measures stipulated in the Strategy for Digital Payments for 2021-2023 will allow achieving better results in terms of non-cash payments, contribute to the rapid development of digital banking services and the formation of a competitive, innovative and affordable payment environment in the country," added the Central Bank.

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Credit Insurance Market Volume Grows in Azerbaijan

The volume of fees on credit insurance in Azerbaijan increased by more than seven times on an annualized basis as of early July 2021, Trend reports with reference to the reporting data of the Central Bank of Azerbaijan (CBA). According to the CBA, which is the regulator of the local insurance market, fees for this segment in the first half of the year amounted to about 104,000 manat (\$61,176) compared to 14,600 manat (\$8,588) by early July 2020. At the same time, the payments for this type were practically zero. The fees on insurance against business interruption also increased during the reporting period in the country in annual terms. The insurance premiums were attracted in the amount of 413,700 manat (\$243,352) for this type of insurance, which is by 1.8 percent more than in the same period of last year. Business interruption or business interruption insurance is one of the forms of business risk insurance, which belongs to the class of insurance of the mixed financial risks. The purpose of this insurance is to compensate for damage from business interruption due to complete or partial business interruption due to fire, natural disaster or other insured risk. In general, Azerbaijani insurance companies collected insurance premiums in the amount of over 452 million manat (\$265.9 million) during the first six months of this year and paid 248 million manat (\$145.9 million).

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Azerbaijan, Latvia Look to Expand Co-op on Postal and Financial Services

Azerbaijan and Latvia are interested in expanding cooperation on postal and financial services, Trend reports referring to the Ministry of Transport, Communications, and High Technologies. This issue was discussed at a meeting between the Director-General of Azerpost LLC Afgan Jalilov and Head of the Latvian Post Markis Vilkans. Jalilov informed the Latvian side in detail about the new projects being implemented by Azerpost, as well as about the work carried out in the development of postal and financial services. In the course of the meeting, the parties also discussed possibilities of expanding cooperation between Azerbaijan and Latvia in the postal sector, the ministry noted. In turn, Vilkans noted that the innovative projects implemented by Azerpost LLC are of great importance for the Latvian Post and for the exchange of experience in this area. "The parties expressed interest in expanding postal and financial cooperation, developing logistics services in the postal sector, and increasing the number of postal items within the framework of e-commerce projects," the message says.

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Cashless Payments Greatly Contributing to Dev't of Azerbaijan's Economy - Ministry

Cashless payments play a significant role in accelerating the turnover of working capital and the development of the economy of Azerbaijan as a whole, the Ministry of Economy of Azerbaijan told Trend. According to the ministry, POS terminals, as a non-cash payment tool, are useful for both payment cardholders and entrepreneurs. "The use of POS terminals in business is more expedient from the point of view of the accuracy of payment amounts and the convenience of making settlements, as well as an increase in the number of customers. Moreover, non-cash payments reduce the workload of cash transactions, while increasing the security of settlements and contributing to the correct planning of the personal budget," the ministry's message added. The message reads that one of the main conditions for increasing cashless turnover is the expansion of the use of POS terminals. "We regularly inform the population and entrepreneurs about the advantages of these devices and call for the use of POS terminals. In addition, the State Tax Service has prepared a video about the convenience and benefits of using POS terminals for taxpayers," the Economy Ministry said. As the message noted, in order to stimulate non-cash payments, a number of changes were made to the country's legislation. "These measures had a positive effect on the growth of non-cash turnover, which, in turn, increased the transparency of the economy, intensified the fight against the "illicit" economy, and increased tax revenues," the ministry emphasized.

From <https://en.trend.az/> 08/29/2021

KYRGYZSTAN: UNDP Supports State Agencies and Experts to Develop New Tax Code

On August 20-24, 2021, an offsite meeting was held to develop a draft of a new version of the Tax Code of the Kyrgyz Republic with the support of the joint program “Integrated National Financing Mechanisms” implemented by UNDP and UNICEF in the Kyrgyz Republic, Trend reports with reference to Kabar. The event was attended by a deputy of the Jogorku Kenesh, representatives of the Ministry of Economy and Finance, the State Tax Service, the National Bank, business, as well as tax experts. “In accordance with the message of the President of the Kyrgyz Republic, work is underway to develop a new version of the Tax Code to improve tax legislation in order to adapt to modern business conditions, digitalize tax procedures and create equal conditions for entrepreneurial activity. Representatives of the Jogorku Kenesh, government agencies, business and experts are participating in this work. Thanks to UNDP support, a visiting meeting of the working group was organized, which contributed to the effective development of the draft tax code,” said Kubanychbek Ysabekov, Head of the Tax Policy Department of the Ministry of Economy and Finance of the Kyrgyz Republic.

During the event, the participants comprehensively discussed the articles of the Tax Code of the Kyrgyz Republic and made changes according to the dynamics of proposals and comments. Based on the results of the discussions, recommendations were developed for changing the Tax Code of the Kyrgyz Republic, which will be further agreed with a wide range of individuals and governing bodies. “INNF project aims to support state efforts to increase the state income through the amendment of the Tax Code thus enabling the state and its agencies to expel more funding to Sustainable Development Goals”, shared Zhanybek Ybrayim uulu, project coordinator at UNDP. In total, 25 people took part in the event, 14 of whom represent state bodies, and 11 – independent experts on taxation employed in business associations and non-governmental organizations. In 2020, the Government of Kyrgyzstan, together with UNDP and UNICEF, has begun developing Integrated National Financing Mechanisms (INNF), through which the country will be able to attract new sources of funding to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

From <https://en.trend.az/> 08/24/2021

UZBEKISTAN: Becoming Leader in Inflow of Foreign Investments Among Central Asian Countries

As of 2021, the amount of accumulated investments during the pandemic and crisis in the countries of Central Asia increased by 6.7 percent while the largest growth in

accumulated foreign investment is observed in Uzbekistan (+ 29.8 percent), Trend reports citing Uzbek media. In Kazakhstan, the growth was only 3.6 percent and 1.6 percent in Tajikistan. According to experts, in the pre-crisis period, the amount of foreign investments in the country increased by 2.3 times and amounted to \$ 4.2 billion. The World Bank predicts that the global economy will expand by 5.6 percent in 2021, following a 3.5 percent decline in 2020. In Central Asian countries, economy growth is projected by 3.7 percent per year. The largest economic growth is forecasted for Uzbekistan (+ 4.8 percent) and Tajikistan (+ 5.3 percent). According to experts from international institutional companies, attracting investment is a key factor in economic recovery after the crisis in Central Asia.

So, in the "pre-coronavirus" 2019, Uzbekistan became the leader in the growth of the inflow of foreign investment. Over the year, the amount of foreign investment increased immediately by 2.3 times and amounted to \$4.2 billion. Investors in Uzbekistan are attracted by the oil refining, oil production and chemical industries. The greatest interest was shown by China, Germany, the USA, Russia. It was also noted that unprecedented measures are being taken in Uzbekistan to further form a favorable investment climate and increase investment attractiveness, which contribute to an increase in the inflow of foreign investment. These measures allowed the country to improve its position in the international ranking of ease of doing business Doing business: in 2020, Uzbekistan rose by 7 positions and took 69th place, which is one of the best indicators in the region. The rating notes that Uzbekistan has made great strides in improving at least four main indicators. For example, Uzbekistan has strengthened the protection of minority investors by increasing the rights of shareholders and their role in major corporate decisions, clarifying ownership structures and increasing corporate transparency. They also simplified the payment of taxes by combining the two types, and stimulated cross-border trade by introducing risk-based checks and simplifying the requirements for import documents. At the same time, Kazakhstan improved its position in the rating from 28th to 25th place - this is the best result in the region, although the country is inferior to Uzbekistan in terms of the speed of development and attraction of investments.

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Oceania

AUSTRALIA: Business Investment at Risk of Derailment

Prime Minister Scott Morrison says the government's economic advice points to the need for short and sharp lockdowns to deal with the impacts of the pandemic. Mr Morrison's comment came as a report by Deloitte Access Economics suggested lockdowns and restrictions around the country risk derailing the recovery in business investment. Deloitte's partner Stephen Smith says many of the elements that have

seen private business investment grow since late 2020 remain in place to stand just 2.2 per cent below their pre-COVID-19 levels. "But when it comes to new investment there is never a guarantee," Mr Smith said releasing his latest quarterly Investment Monitor. "Ongoing lockdowns or the threat of restrictions are kryptonite for investment. Businesses will want to see a clear path out of COVID-19 before committing to significant new investments."

Mr Morrison said targeted lockdowns were essential to limit economic damage and were at the core of the advice given to government about dealing with the pandemic. "It showed if you don't do those short, sharp lockdowns in this phase with the Delta variant it ends up costing you even worse," Mr Morrison told 5AA radio on Monday. "It's not just in the health interest, it's in the economic interest to get on top of this as fast as we can otherwise the cost is far greater, as we are seeing in NSW." Mr Smith said despite an expected increase in vaccine supply, the Delta outbreak means that the problem is bigger and vaccine hesitancy means that the solution will be slower. At the same time, some areas of the investment landscape have become more challenging as a result of COVID-19, with many offices, shopping centres, airports and hotels suffering significantly lower usage.

Given the strength of public infrastructure investment, the high level of residential construction activity and the lack of skilled migration to Australia, it also raises the question of whether projects can be delivered on-time and on-budget, Mr Smith said. Even so, Deloitte Access Economics is forecasting investment to grow in 2021, before accelerating in 2022. "The outlook will depend on maintaining a high level of business confidence over the next year, as well as the speed at which COVID restrictions are eased," Mr Smith said. "The longer we appear to the world as a closed and risk-averse society, the more likely investment dollars will head to other countries instead." Mr Morrison said he expected the economy to "bounce back" because the fundamental settings were right. The value of investment projects rose by \$25.1 billion in the June quarter to \$783.4 billion, a 3.3 per cent increase from three months earlier.

This was largely due to additional infrastructure investment in recent government budgets and private investment in the mining and utilities industries. The value of definite projects - those under construction or committed - increased by \$18.8 billion over the quarter to \$323.4 billion. The value of projects under consideration or possible increased by \$6.3 billion over the quarter to \$460 billion. Meanwhile, the Reserve Bank will hold its monthly board meeting on Tuesday as economists predict a sharp contraction in growth in the September quarter. The weekly ANZ-Roy Morgan consumer confidence index will also be released.

From <https://au.news.yahoo.com> 08/02/2021

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New Tax to Put the Brakes on Electric Cars

Special taxes on electric cars are likely to put the brakes on sales. With Victoria introducing a road user charge for electric vehicles from July and South Australia slated to introduce a similar impost next year, a poll has found many potential buyers could be put off. The Australia Institute quizzed about 600 people in SA and found that for almost 70 per cent a user tax would make them less likely to purchase an electric vehicle. The survey also revealed more than 40 per cent had considered going electric with their next vehicle purchase and more than 70 per cent believe them good for the planet. Australia Institute SA Director Noah Shultz-Byard says it's clear new user charges will "pull the handbrake" on consumer enthusiasm for electric cars. "Our research shows that the vast majority want more EVs on the road, not less, because they are considered to be good for the climate, health and the environment," he said.

Victoria's new tax imposes a 2.5 cent charge for each kilometre travelled, putting the annual cost at \$500 for a vehicle travelling 20,000 kilometres. It narrowly passed the Victorian parliament despite an alliance of 25 car manufacturers and environmental groups writing to MPs urging them to vote against the plan. The letter, signed by Hyundai, Volkswagen, Uber and the Electric Vehicles Council among others, described the tax as the "worst electric vehicle policy in the world". SA had also planned to introduce a road user charge this year but has put it off until July, partly to gauge the impact of the Victorian legislation. When it was first proposed, Treasurer Rob Lucas said SA's charge would be based on a similar distance-travelled scheme, with motorists providing odometer readings to ensure all road users contributed fairly to the state's road maintenance investment.

"The reality is, if you're driving an electric vehicle then you're not paying fuel excise at the pump and you're contributing significantly less to the vital upkeep of our vast road network," the treasurer said. But those opposed to the measure say the tax will only slow progress towards more environmentally-friendly motoring and are calling for incentives to help reduce upfront EV costs like subsidies or stamp duty waivers. In the Australia Institute Survey, 72 per cent of respondents supported the introduction of incentives while the Australian Electric Vehicle Association said most industrialised countries were prioritising them to boost sales and create jobs. The association said the Victorian measure was the only stand-alone electric vehicle tax in the world. "No other jurisdiction has introduced such a targeted levy on the cleanest vehicles on the road without significant incentives to balance it out," it said in an open letter to the Victorian government. Regardless of the debate over taxes, electric cars sales continue to represent a tiny slice of the new vehicle market. In July, 84,161 new cars and trucks were retailed across the country with 515 of them electric and 325 plug-in hybrids. Standard hybrids, which use a petrol engine to recharge the vehicle's batteries, were more popular, with more than 5000 sold last month.

From <https://au.news.yahoo.com> 08/15/2021

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Finance Sector Urged to Act Now on Climate

Regulators and the financial sector have been warned they are making the same mistakes that led to the 2008-2009 global financial crisis when responding to climate change. A new report co-authored by former head of the Australian Coal Association Ian Dunlop says while the financial sector is starting to grapple with risks posed by warming, it needs to act now. The banking watchdog, the Australian Prudential Regulation Authority, has issued draft guidance to major companies on the financial risks of climate change, recommending they stress test their finances against temperature increases. "After 30 years of inaction and rising carbon emissions, business and finance are finally beginning to take climate change seriously," Mr Dunlop says. "However testing the system for four degrees of warming is unrealistic. Scientists consider a rise of four degrees to be an existential threat to humanity and even three degrees of warming is considered catastrophic."

He said international regulators failed to foresee the GFC and a similar failure on climate risks is on the agenda. "It is not good enough to know that the bus is going over the cliff, as the regulators' climate stress tests are telling us. The point is to stop the bus from going over the cliff in the first place," Mr Dunlop said. He said rather than testing scenarios, regulators and financial institutions should be mitigating climate risks, including by redirecting finance away from the fossil fuel industry into the new, clean economy. "If the financial sector is to survive and prosper into the future, such precautionary action must keep temperature increase to a minimum, as close to 1.5degC as possible, coupled with drawing down carbon from the atmosphere," Mr Dunlop said. The report comes a week after the United Nations released its sixth Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change assessment, warning global warming is on track to hit 1.5 degrees in the next decade and that many climate change consequences are irreversible.

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NEW ZEALAND: New Innovation Fund for More Mental Health Initiatives

The government has set up a one-off defined mental health innovation fund to further expand the support available to those who need it, Health Minister Andrew Little says. "This government is transforming Aotearoa – New Zealand's approach to mental wellbeing with greater focus on care in the community, and more emphasis on prevention and early intervention," Andrew Little said. "The \$1.2-million Mental Wellbeing Innovation Fund pilot project is for one-off defined proposals that could contribute to improving mental wellbeing, including initiatives that focus on reducing suicidal distress or behaviour." A number of requests for financial assistance from non-government organisations, iwi and other groups to support mental wellbeing

initiatives are regularly received by the Ministry of Health, but do not necessarily fit into existing tenders. This fund is another way the Government can look to support these programmes.

“Some of these proposals have merit and could contribute positively to the needs identified in He Ara Oranga: the Report of The Government Inquiry into Mental Health and Addiction, but are outside the scope of the planned procurements. “A small number of organisations will be invited by the Ministry of Health to provide proposals and participate in a closed selective tender,” Andrew Little said. “The Government’s vision is to help people stay mentally well – with the help of support available in their communities. “We are working on the bigger picture and know there is more work to do, but this is another way this government can provide services for those with immediate needs. “We want to ensure those with complex or severe needs get timely access to specialist help as part of our commitment to laying the foundations for a better future for all New Zealanders.”

From <https://livenews.co.nz> 08/06/2021

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Official Cash Rate on Hold at 0.25 Percent

The Monetary Policy Committee agreed to retain the current stimulatory level of monetary settings, keeping the Official Cash Rate (OCR) at 0.25 per cent for now. Today’s decision was made in the context of the Government’s imposition of Level 4 COVID restrictions on activity across New Zealand.

From <https://livenews.co.nz> 08/18/2021

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6、 Private Sector

Asia-Pacific

New Partnership to Improve Public Sector Governance, Increase Private Sector Participation, and Rebuild Human Capital

The World Bank Group has renewed its commitment to the continued support of Iraq, approving a new Country Partnership Framework (CPF) to form the basis of its 2022–2026 partnership with the country. The framework lays out the main development goals the World Bank Group aims to support in Iraq and proposes a series of strategic interventions to help Iraq respond to the ongoing pandemic crisis, reform the economy and rebuild human capital. The new framework comes against a background of highlighted fragility in Iraq, where the impact of the COVID-19 crisis, volatility in oil prices, and growing climate risks have compounded existing challenges. Such challenges could lead to more instability but also provide an

opportunity for a new government to realign the country's priorities by moving forward on economic reform and tackling deep structural issues. "With its inherent flexibility, the CPF will serve as a platform for the World Bank Group to address immediate needs of the poor and most vulnerable, and work on the causes and drivers of Iraq's fragility and crises," said Saroj Kumar Jha, World Bank Mashreq Regional Director. "The Bank Group is ready to support the people of Iraq by contributing to tackling corruption, building transparent and accountable institutions, and a more enabling public sector for improved business environment in Iraq."

The CPF has been drawn up in keeping with the World Bank Group's 2020–2025 Strategy for Fragility, Conflict and Violence. The Strategy allows the World Bank Group to continue to engage with countries during periods of conflict and violence in order to help them transition out of crises more successfully. The CPF is aligned with Government of Iraq (GOI) reform priorities listed in their programs and national strategies, and promotes the renewal of the social contract between citizens and the state, as well as fostering a healthy local private sector and strengthening the legitimacy and capacity of core institutions. "This CPF's foundations are aimed at improving governance, public service delivery, and private sector participation, and at strengthening human capital," said Ramzi Afif Neman, Head of World Bank Iraq Office. "In this way, we get to mainstream our priorities—citizen engagement, gender equality, and responding to climate change." Added Merli Baroudi, MIGA's Director of Economics and Sustainability, "Indeed, the Iraq Country Partnership Framework offers a strong opportunity to promote green, resilient and inclusive development in Iraq, leveraging the World Bank Group Climate Change Action Plan 2021-2025 and placing the country on a more sustainable pathway to a lower carbon future."

Having maintained its engagement and an uninterrupted field presence in Iraq since 2003, the World Bank Group has built a strong active portfolio in the country. This has resulted in important initiatives, notably in multi-sector emergency reconstruction programs in areas liberated from ISIS occupation, reforms of the public financial management (PFM) and social protection system among others, and private sector investments of more than US\$1 billion. "As Iraq rebuilds its economy, the private sector will have a critical role to play in creating jobs and more opportunities for young people. This CPF provides the framework for the World Bank Group to focus on advisory and investment engagements with the business community in priority sectors, as well as to support improving the enabling and business environment to pave the way for Iraq's private sector to lead the country's future and generate shared prosperity," said Abdullah Jefri, IFC's Manager for the Levant.

Furthermore, the sustained WBG engagement in Iraq has resulted in an accumulation of a wealth of experience on the country's economic and political context. Key lessons include the importance of national ownership, building the capacity of public institutions for sustainable development, working in partnership with international partners to drive governmental reforms, adopting flexible and

adaptable approaches in mobilizing resources, improving the business environment and ensuring access to finance for and the thriving of small and medium-sized enterprises, and adopting innovative approaches to progress in the implementation of the portfolio in the field under challenging political and security situations. The framework of the CPF will be implemented in two phases to allow the flexibility to adapt to changes over the five-year period. A first phase will cover roughly the period until a new Iraqi government is in place, with a focus on protecting the poor and vulnerable and on supporting initial government reforms. During a second phase, the Bank Group will support medium-term reforms to help shape a more diversified economy by creating a more enabling environment for the private sector and by developing human capital. Acknowledgment of the World Bank Group's role in supporting Iraq's development has been prominent over the years, especially in supporting the implementation of the Gol's reform plan, rebuilding damaged vital infrastructure from conflict and violence, improve basic service delivery, and mitigating the risks of COVID-19 pandemic by launching a 100 million immunization project. The CPF program will build on this trust to support Iraq's efforts in addressing its challenges towards a more stable and prosperous future for all Iraqis.

From <https://www.worldbank.org/> 08/05/2021

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IFC Underwrites 1st Private Sector Green Bond

The International Finance Corporation (IFC), a subsidiary of the World Bank Group, is underwriting the entire issue of a green bond recently launched by Commercial International Bank (CIB), Egypt's largest private bank. This is the first green bond from the Egyptian private sector to support the country's transition to a greener economy. The transition to a green economy is underway in Egypt, with the support of the private sector. The Commercial International Bank (CIB) recently launched the first private sector green bond, worth \$100 million. The International Finance Corporation (IFC), a subsidiary of the World Bank Group, has confirmed that it will subscribe to the full value of the issue. For the IFC, this is an important step in a multi-year effort by the Egyptian government and private sector to develop the Egyptian capital market for green finance in the country, and to help fill the infrastructure financing gap.

New loans for green projects

“Egypt is making great strides towards achieving its 2030 development agenda, which is in line with global sustainability goals. In 2020, the Egyptian government launched its first sovereign green bond issue, which was five times oversubscribed. At the Ministry of International Cooperation, we want to build on this success by establishing effective partnerships to foster green recovery,” says Rania A. Al-Mashat, Egypt's Minister of International Cooperation. CIB will use the funds raised from its loan to increase its lending to companies that want to invest in green initiatives. The bank will support the rapidly developing electric mobility in Egypt, with many

initiatives for green public transport. Loans will also be provided to companies for the construction of green buildings, renewable energy and energy efficiency projects, and water and wastewater management.

Support for sustainable housing projects

The IFC, the sole underwriter of the \$100 million green bond, promises to support the CIB by helping it develop a pipeline of energy efficiency and green building transactions. Technical assistance will also be provided to green project developers to help them adopt low-cost, environmentally friendly building solutions and participate in the EDGE certification programme. The IFC's certification scheme aims to make buildings more resource efficient. EDGE makes it possible for emerging markets like Egypt to develop green buildings quickly, easily and affordably. In the North African country, the certification programme will be supported by funding from the UK-IFC Market Accelerator for Green Construction, which offers incentives to developers who build certified green buildings. CIB's first green bond is also supported by the Green Bond Technical Assistance Program, a programme managed and administered by the IFC, aimed at creating a market for green bonds in developing countries, with funding from the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida).

From <https://www.afrik21.africa/> 08/08/2021

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World Bank Group Debars Newstech Trading and Investment Construction Joint Stock Company

The World Bank Group today announced the two-and-a-half-year debarment of Vietnam-based Newstech Trading and Investment Construction Joint Stock Company ("Newstech") in connection with fraudulent practices under the Vinh Phuc Flood Risk and Water Management Project in Vietnam. The debarment makes Newstech ineligible to participate in projects and operations financed by institutions of the World Bank Group. It is part of a settlement agreement under which the company acknowledges responsibility for the underlying sanctionable practices and agrees to meet specified corporate compliance conditions as a condition for release from debarment. The project is designed to strengthen flood risk management capacity and improve wastewater management in the central catchment of Vinh Phuc province in Vietnam. According to the facts of the case, in its bid on a contract financed by the project, Newstech misrepresented its prior experience and submitted falsified documents on the qualifications of key experts. These are fraudulent practices. The settlement agreement provides for a reduced period of debarment in light of the company's cooperation and voluntary remedial actions. As a condition for release from sanction under the terms of the settlement agreement, the company commits to developing and implementing an integrity compliance program that reflects the principles set out in the World Bank Group Integrity Compliance Guidelines. The company also commits to continue to fully cooperate with the World

Bank Group Integrity Vice Presidency. The debarment of Newstech qualifies for cross-debarment by other multilateral development banks (MDBs) under the Agreement for Mutual Enforcement of Debarment Decisions that was signed on April 9, 2010.

From <https://www.worldbank.org/> 08/18/2021

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East Asia

CHINA: Chongqing Records Increasing Number of Foreign-invested Firms

Southwest China's Chongqing Municipality saw stellar growth in the number of newly-established foreign-invested enterprises and foreign investment inflow in the first half of 2021, the municipal commission of commerce said. From January to June, the number of foreign-invested firms newly established in Chongqing increased 34.9 percent year on year. High-tech companies accounted for nearly 30 percent of the total, according to the commission. The city's foreign investment in actual use expanded 20.1 percent year on year to 4.82 billion U.S. dollars in the first six months. The municipal commission of commerce attributed the strong performance partly to broad optimism from foreign-invested firms. A recent survey by the Ministry of Commerce shows that 96.4 percent of foreign-invested enterprises are optimistic about their business prospects in China. In the first half of the year, foreign direct investment (FDI) into the city's services industry accounted for nearly 70 percent of the total. FDI from 14 Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) member states in the first six months made up approximately 30 percent of the city's total FDI, while FDI from countries and regions along the Belt and Road accounted for over 80 percent. Notably, FDI from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) surged 171.4 percent year on year, up 19.9 percentage points compared with the same period last year.

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Resilience of Industrial Sector to Help Sustain Growth in China

China's industrial activities are expected to remain robust in the coming months amid government policies to improve industrial chains, leading economic indicators show. The latest composite leading indicators (CLIs) of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) pointed to steady growth in China's industrial sector, despite signs of a moderating pace of growth in the OECD area as a whole and in most major economies. CLIs are designed to anticipate turning points in economic activity six to nine months in advance. Other leading indicators also signaled resilience in China's economic growth. The country's power consumption, a key barometer of economic activity, expanded by 12.8 percent year on year in July.

Hao Yingjie, secretary-general of the China Electricity Council, expects the country's power consumption to increase by 10 percent to 11 percent year on year for the whole year amid the steady recovery of the economy. The purchasing managers' index for the manufacturing sector, another forward-looking indicator, came in at 50.4 in July, remaining in the expansion zone despite disruptions to factory activities brought by high temperatures and floods. The resilience is the result of fine-tuned government policies to ease the pressure of commodity price hikes on firms and offer much-needed financial support to the real economy.

The country has taken a string of measures to contain price increases in iron ore, steel and other commodities, including releasing state reserves into the market and cracking down on market violations. The measures have proved effective in containing commodity prices, alleviating cost pressures on manufacturers. To further support the real economy, the country's central bank in July cut the reserve requirement ratio for eligible financial institutions, a forward-looking move that took into consideration the tax payment peak, expiring medium-term lending facilities, and the accelerating issuance of local government bonds. To support the long-term development of the industrial sector, the country has reiterated technological innovations in its industrial policies. A key meeting attended by the country's top policymakers last month stressed the importance of strengthened tech innovations to improving the resilience of industrial and supply chains. Basic and applied research should be carried out to improve weak links and tackle bottlenecks in the industrial chain, while policy support will be given to small and medium-sized enterprises with expertise in certain fields, the meeting said.

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China's Energy Storage Industry on Fast Track Thanks to Policy Stimulus

China has released a slew of policies to turbocharge the energy storage industry, which insiders believe will bring huge opportunities to enterprises in the country. Power generation firms are encouraged to build energy storage facilities and improve their capability to shift peak loads, according to a notice co-released by the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) and the National Energy Administration (NEA). Hua Yin Technology, one of the pioneering companies in China's flow battery industry, detected an opportunity soon after the policy was unveiled. "In recent years, the power storing business has become the main engine driving the company's revenue growth," said Fu Hongtao, vice president of the firm based in northwest China's Shaanxi Province. Dedicated to the vanadium industrial chain, Hua Yin Technology entered the vanadium flow battery market in 2016, and the company's electrolyte production line now has an output value of 1.6 billion yuan (about 247 million U.S. dollars).

Fu said the industry is set to make further progress as an increasing proportion of clean power sources are used across China. Data shows that China has seen leapfrog growth in its new energy generation capacity, as the newly added installed volume hit 119.87 million kilowatts in 2020, accounting for 63 percent of the nationwide total. But the steady growth of installed capacity has put a strain on the country's power system due to insufficient regulation capabilities. "Renewable energy sources including solar and wind are intermittent and volatile," said He Gang, a professor at the Xi'an Jiaotong University (XJTU), noting that the grid will see mounting pressure as electricity is used in a continuous manner. To realize the transition to a new type of power system with new energy as the main body, He underscored that new types of power storage will play an increasingly important role.

New types of energy storage technologies are, with the exception of pumped storage, those that have power as their main output form. In late July, the NDRC and the NEA released a plan for the blueprint of the industry. According to the plan, the country's total installed capacity for new types of power storing is expected to surpass 30 million kilowatts in 2025, about 10 times its present level. "It is the first time that China has set a national installed capacity goal in the sector," said NEA official Liu Yafang, adding that the policy is not just about scale but puts forward other requirements including technology and industry standards to realize high-quality development. Listed companies maintained their growth momentum in the first half of 2021. Power solution provider Kehua Data Co., Ltd. predicts its net profit attributable to shareholders will rise 65 percent to 100 percent year on year.

The industry's improvements are mainly attributable to battery technology breakthroughs, said Yu Zhenhua, head of the China Energy Storage Alliance, adding that lithium batteries led the increase in newly added installed capacity, while non-lithium technologies such as flow batteries are also accelerating their pace of evolution. Noting that all technologies have their own advantages and suitable application scenarios at the moment, He said no single technology could dominate the market now and the competition of diverse technologies will continue. To promote the industrialization of energy storage technologies, Hua Yin Technology and XJTU in April this year inked a strategic cooperation agreement to establish a flow cell innovation center. "This is a great development opportunity for us," Fu said, adding that the firm will partner further with the university in tech research and tap into the potential of the power storage industry.

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Private, Foreign Companies not Target of China's Internet Platform Regulation: Official

China's recent regulation on internet platforms is non-discriminatory and by no means targeting private and foreign enterprises only, an official said here Thursday.

The regulation aims to curb violations of laws or regulations concerning internet platforms, including those owned by the state or with mixed-ownership, said Han Wenxiu, an official with the Central Committee for Financial and Economic Affairs. "The purpose of tougher regulation is to ensure healthier, more sustained and longer-term development," he told a press conference, reiterating China's unwavering support for the non-public sector and promotion of higher-level opening-up. Han said the prevention of monopoly and disorderly expansion of internet platforms and other large tech firms is a global challenge, and China would handle it with equal efforts on regulation and support to their development. While works should be done to clear the hazards from the sector's past development, ensure data security and personal privacy and protect national security and public interests, platform economy remains a key part of the advanced productive forces and should play a role in areas including resource allocation and scientific innovation, he said. Strengthening the fight against monopoly and unfair competition will be a regular job for the Chinese government, which is expected to help create a level playing field, broaden the prospects for market entities, especially the small firms, and protect consumer interests, said Han.

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China's Electronic Information Manufacturing Sector Further Expands

China's electronic information manufacturing sector posted steady expansion in the first seven months of 2021, data from the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology (MIIT) showed. The added value of electronic information manufacturers with annual operating revenues of at least 20 million yuan (about 3.08 million U.S. dollars) rose 18.7 percent year on year during the period, according to the MIIT. In July alone, the added value of those manufacturers grew 13 percent year on year, accelerating by 1.2 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 15 percent year on year in the January-July period. In comparison, fixed-asset investment into the sector jumped by 25.4 percent from a year ago. MIIT data also showed that the operating revenue of major electronic information manufacturers went up 22.1 percent year on year to 6.33 trillion yuan in the first half of the year. At the same time, their combined profits in the period totaled 345.2 billion yuan, surging 45.2 percent year on year. In July, China's production of integrated circuits jumped 41.3 percent to 31.57 billion pieces, according to the ministry.

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China's Service Outsourcing Industry Reports Steady Growth

China's service outsourcing industry posted steady expansion during the January-July period, data from the Ministry of Commerce showed. Chinese firms inked service outsourcing contracts worth about 976 billion yuan (about 150.47 billion U.S. dollars) from January to July, up 27.8 percent year on year. The executed contract value came in at 650 billion yuan during the period, with a year-on-year increase of 26.6 percent. Outsourcing is the business practice of hiring a party outside a company to perform services and make goods traditionally undertaken by the company's employees. Of the total, offshore service outsourcing contract value rose 21.9 percent from a year ago to 551.1 billion yuan. Service outsourcing with countries along the Belt and Road saw quicker growth, with contracts valued at 109.6 billion yuan for the January-July period, rising 46.1 percent from a year ago.

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JAPAN: Public-Private Research Group to Explore Food Production on Moon

Japan's government and its space agency will join hands with food and tech companies to launch research on developing a sustainable food source on the Moon, in an attempt to encourage the private sector to enter the space business, sources with direct knowledge of the plan said. The public-private joint study could start by March, spearheaded by Space Foodsphere, a Tokyo-based space food research group comprised of dozens of entities including the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency, seasoning maker Ajinomoto Co. and system integrator NTT Data Corp., according to the sources. Technology startups such as bio-venture Euglena Co. are also among the participants in the project to be funded by the government. The basic research is designed to meet demand for a supply of food on the Moon for long-term lunar missions involving a large number of crew members, which would make constant food shipments from Earth impractical. Long-term travel to the Moon is becoming increasingly likely, with lunar exploration projects launched by the United States, China and other countries. Japan is involved in the NASA-led Artemis program, which outlines the exploration and utilization of resources in space including those on the Moon.

The public-private team will begin research at a domestic facility and then may move to a location similar to the lunar environment, such as Antarctica, according to the sources. Their study aims to help develop technologies to operate a plant factory for indoor crop yields on the Moon where the temperatures are below minus 100 C and there is a lack of water and air necessary for growing crops. The study will also include how to maintain healthy mental and physical conditions in a confined space for long periods of time. These technologies, if developed, are also expected to solve issues of farming under desertification and climate change on Earth. In the private sector, Amazon.com Inc. founder and former CEO Jeff Bezos last month flew to space aboard a rocket and capsule developed by his private space company, Blue

Origin. Japanese entrepreneur Yusaku Maezawa is also planning to orbit the Moon on the world's first-ever private space trip, organized by U.S. firm SpaceX for 2023. The global space industry is estimated to generate revenue of more than \$1 trillion in 2040, up from the current \$350 billion, according to a Morgan Stanley report.

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Percentage of Japan Companies Working on Digitization Languishes at 13%

Only 13% of Japanese companies are working on digitization, far behind the 60% in the United States, according to the Internal Affairs and Communications Ministry's fiscal 2021 white paper on information and communications. The ministry surveyed the status of digital transformation efforts by companies to develop new products and reform their organizations using digital technology. If digital transformation reaches U.S. levels, the white paper estimates it will boost sales in Japan's manufacturing sector by about 6%, or about ¥23 trillion. Sales in the non-manufacturing sector were predicted to rise by about 4%, or about ¥45 trillion. More than 50% of companies in Japan cited a shortage of human resources as a barrier to promoting digital transformation. The government predicts there will be a shortage of about 450,000 personnel in the information and communication field in 2030, making the development of human resources by the public and private sectors an urgent issue. The white paper says Japanese companies do not collaborate sufficiently with other businesses, compared to those in Europe and the United States. It also calls for the active utilization of outside personnel, saying that while it is ideal to have human resources in-house, it is difficult to do so in reality.

From <https://the-japan-news.com> 08/16/2021

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Japan Firms Strengthening Human Resources for Digital Transformation

Major electronics, information technology and communications firms in Japan have been beefing up their efforts to secure high-level IT personnel, in order to speed up digital transformation, a Jiji Press survey showed Monday. According to an industry ministry estimate, companies in the country are expected to face an estimated shortage of around 450,000 IT professionals in 2030. The survey found that 11 of 12 responding firms in the electronics, IT and telecommunications sectors have already drawn up or intend to draw up plans to increase the number of highly skillful IT professionals. On concrete ways to attract such personnel, the option of "offering favorable working conditions such as higher salaries than those of general office employees" was picked by seven companies and that of "introducing a job-based employment system" was chosen by the same number of firms, with multiple answers allowed. All the responding companies said that they are looking for IT

experts specializing in artificial intelligence, which is becoming indispensable for all technology fields.

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SOUTH KOREA: To Foster 1,800 5G Service Firms by 2026

South Korea aims to create around 1,800 companies that specialize in new 5G services in the next five years, the ICT ministry said Wednesday, to boost adoption of promising technologies powered by the latest generation networks. While the country commercialized 5G in 2019, companies have yet to fully harness the blazing fast networks that could power upcoming tech services, such as remote-controlled factories, self-driving vehicles, and 3D holograms. The ICT ministry said it aims to boost the number of companies that research and develop new 5G services from the current 94 to acquire a competitive edge in the network technology. The ministry plans to support the rollout of services that incorporate 5G, including online classes that incorporate virtual reality and augmented reality technology and a metaverse-based online marketplace for small businesses. With the increase in companies that develop the network technology, the ministry targets to apply 5G services in 3,200 locations by 2026 from the current 195. It also outlined goals to establish a city that integrates 5G services from 2023, although the project currently remains in the planning phase. As of end-June, South Korea had 16.5 million 5G users, accounting for 23 percent of its total mobile network subscriptions.

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Robots March into More Business Sectors in Korea

The advent of intelligent humanoid robots depicted in sci-fi films is still thought to be a thing of the distant future, but more South Korean companies in a wide range of industries have begun to adopt simpler robots in a bid to remain competitive in the long term. Not only telecom operators and search engines, but also tech startups that rely on online platforms are rushing to deploy robots in a bid to nurture the long-term potential of robots in connection with artificial intelligence, cloud computing and next-generation mobile technology. While automated manufacturing robots have long been deployed here, online platform companies are looking to more advanced types that can generate new value when combined with other cutting-edge technology. According to the Korea Robot Industry Promotion Agency, the domestic robot market was valued at 5.33 trillion won (\$4.57 billion) in 2019. The Korean government, sensing signs of the uptrend, announced that it would help expand the robot market value to 20 trillion won by 2025.

The push for robotics by tech firms has gained stronger momentum since the start of the pandemic early last year, with people favoring contactless transactions to avoid

coronavirus infections. Korea's telecom operators are keen to expand their robot-based businesses in an effort to utilize their massive infrastructure and subscriber bases. KT recently started selling service-purpose robots on its website, after it rolled out a 5G-based smart factory industrial robot that was jointly developed with Hyundai Robotics last year. KT said it would put together its 5G solutions and robotic technology in order to expand its share in the robot market targeting both industrial and service sectors. In particular, KT is teaming up with local hotels after it successfully introduced an automated robot butler armed with an upgraded artificial intelligence voice assistant and tech solutions that include visual mapping. KT is now planning to apply the robot concierge technology to a new breed of robots to be deployed in other fields, such as mail delivery.

SK Telecom is also forging partnerships with startups and tech companies to incorporate its 5G network solutions into robots. In April, the country's biggest mobile carrier rolled out a 5G-based disinfection robot at a local hospital, featuring a real-time location system and artificial intelligence-based facial recognition solution. LG U+, a major mobile carrier, is developing a 5G-powered autonomous robot together with Unmanned Solution, a mobility company. The prototype of the robot showcased an ability to roam around in a designated area while carrying out safety procedures to check facility equipment. LG U+ said it would roll out new robots for various purposes, such as environmental management and virus protection. Baedal Minjok, a food delivery startup, made an entry into the robot industry faster than its rivals by unveiling a robot that plays a part in serving customers in 2019. The company is testing delivery robots in several areas in hopes of developing more advanced models that can be deployed in its delivery network. Baedal Minjok said a commercial version of the delivery robot might be launched as early as next year.

Naver, the country's biggest search engine, is in a better position to utilize robotics technology. The tech giant has not only unrivalled market power, but also a wide array of advanced online platform solutions based on artificial intelligence. It is Naver Labs that is spearheading research and development for the online platform heavyweight. Naver Labs, which started as an in-house research group in 2013 and was spun off from its parent firm in 2017, is now working on 5G autonomous robots that can be manipulated using the mobile network. In the process, Naver Labs developed an artificial intelligence robot cloud and applied for over 230 patents, including those related to cloud robot systems in a building. Other tech companies are also interested in stepping into the quickly evolving robot market, even though the majority of companies that have invested in the field are yet to reap profits, as it takes time to develop robots and it is another matter to get other firms to deploy them for a fee. Korea's manufacturing companies, meanwhile, are showing interest in entering the budding robot market that can create more value with related tech solutions. For instance, Hyundai Motor Group has been working with Boston Dynamics to develop more sophisticated robots in the logistics, construction and security fields.

South-East Asia

VIETNAM: PM Approves Power Bill Cut for COVID Affected Companies

The Prime Minister has approved the Ministry of Industry and Trade (MoIT) proposal to cut power bills for enterprises for three months in provinces and cities applying social distancing, according to a Government resolution issued on Saturday. A 10 per cent reduction will be applied to electricity prices for factories or production facilities maintaining production in the provinces and centrally-run cities which are implementing social distancing under Directive 16. They include enterprises processing and preserving seafood and vegetables, and enterprises producing export goods with an export turnover of over US\$1 billion in 2020. The reduction will be applied to power bills in September, October and November, the ministry said. According to the Ministry of Industry and Trade, the pandemic is continuing its complicated development in Hà Nội, HCM City and many southern provinces and cities, seriously affecting national socioeconomic development. Therefore, the ministry and Việt Nam Electricity (EVN) proposed the Prime Minister make the reduction.

EVN estimated that the total reduction for customers this time would be worth VNĐ650 billion. On June 2, the Government issued resolution No 55/NQ-CP to reduce electricity prices from June to the end of this year to support those heavily affected by the prolonged pandemic, including tourist accommodation facilities. The reduction was estimated to be worth a total of VNĐ1.57 trillion. Early this month, the Government also approved the reduction of power prices for August and September for households in provinces and cities applying social distancing. The EVN estimated that the total reduction for customers would be worth VNĐ2.5 trillion (US\$106.4 million). There were two similar discounts offered last year. The first ran from April 16 to July 17, 2020 and supported more than 27 million customers with the total reduction reaching around VNĐ9.3 trillion. The second was from October to December 2020 with more than 25.4 million customers enjoying reductions worth VNĐ3 trillion.

South Asia

INDIA: Fortinet Expands Security Services Offerings to Protect Digital Infrastructures

Fortinet, a global leader in broad, integrated and automated cybersecurity solutions, today announced an expansion to its FortiCare and FortiGuard security services offerings, adding a new security service called FortiTrust. FortiTrust security services offer user-based licensing across all networks, endpoints and clouds, which traditionally have been siloed. Initial service levels are being offered for zero trust network access (ZTNA) and identity verification, with more offerings forthcoming. FortiTrust provides security services that follow the user across an organisation's entire security platform, enabling organisations to easily manage and secure across all form factors. Other benefits of the new offering include: Flexible user-based licensing of security services, eliminating the need to track device counts or bandwidth consumption and making it easy to calculate total cost with built-in volume discounts. Integrated single license for security services delivers desired use cases across the Fortinet Security Fabric. Easy implementation of new security services allows users to transition across various form factors, enabling organisations with hybrid architectures to shift from on-premises to cloud-delivered security. Easy options to upgrade and migrate between services. Fortinet's Expanding Security Services Portfolio. FortiTrust adds to Fortinet's existing FortiCare and FortiGuard security services portfolio. FortiCare services are available for all Fortinet Security Fabric products. FortiCare offers three levels of services, including Essential, Premium and Elite, all providing 24x7 technical support and timely issue resolution. FortiCare also offers several products and account-based services options to address the unique needs of any organization. Through FortiCare, organizations have access to Fortinet experts to help accelerate technology implementation, provide reliable assistance through advanced support, and offer proactive care to maximise the security and performance of Fortinet deployments.

FortiGuard Security Services provide organisations with different services tied to their Fortinet devices, enabling coordinated and consistent real-time defence for the latest cyberattacks. FortiGuard Security Services are tuned around different customer segments to include individual services for Enterprises, bundles for Commercial, and packages for SMBs. Leveraging industry-leading threat intelligence from FortiGuard Labs, FortiGuard Security Services offers a suite of market-leading, AI-enabled security capabilities that continuously assess risks and automatically adjust protection across the Fortinet Security Fabric. Updates and additional expansions to these services will be forthcoming. Security Services that Protect People, Devices and Data Everywhere. The proliferation of new devices and edges along with investments in digital innovations continue to expand the digital attack surface. Many organizations are challenged with protecting across their entire infrastructure as the threat landscape has become much more sophisticated and harder to manage with isolated point products and disparate services. This complexity is compounded with different pricing structures for services and multiple licensing models ranging from device-based, hardware-based and user-based that have remained siloed across form factors. Expanding on the Fortinet Security Fabric's ability to protect people, devices, applications and data everywhere,

FortiTrust provides organizations unified services offering to secure across any network, endpoint or cloud with simplified consumption and one licensing model for all form factors. As a result of Fortinet's expanded services offerings, organizations can further protect the growing digital attack surface, securing critical devices, data, applications, and connections from the data centre to the cloud to the home office and more.

FortiTrust's initial services portfolio includes FortiTrust Access and FortiTrust Identity with additional services options for SASE and CASB planned to be released. FortiTrust Access enables organisations to deploy zero-trust network access (ZTNA) with user-based licensing. Zero trust network access (ZTNA) is crucial to maintaining consistent protection, visibility and control across today's hybrid and highly distributed networks. ZTNA enables organisations to extend secure access controls to applications for any user. FortiTrust Access provides organisations services for ZTNA, including the ZTNA agent and cloud-based orchestration. This further builds on Fortinet's ZTNA solutions which uniquely identify and classify all users and devices seeking network and application access, regardless of users and their devices are on or off the network or applications are on-premises or in a cloud environment. Another FortiTrust service level is FortiTrust Identity. FortiTrust Identity offers cloud-based multi-factor authentication for identity verification. FortiTrust Identity complements FortiTrust Access, providing the necessary multi-factor authentication recommended for controlling application access. All Fortinet's services are also available through partners, presenting an opportunity for channel partners to further grow their business and offerings to customers.

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Power Minister RK Singh Launches 'Reform & Regulatory Knowledge Base for Power Sector'

The Union Minister for Power, R K Singh launched "Reform and regulatory knowledge base for power sector", an e-certification program to provide regulatory training to practitioners from diverse backgrounds, through virtual mode. Alongside, the Minister also rolled out a Regulatory Data Dashboard which is an e-compendium of data containing state-wise details of tariff and DISCOM performance. The reform & regulatory knowledge base of the power sector and the regulatory data dashboard have been developed by IIT Kanpur. The Dashboard would assist the benchmarking of the sector performance, over time and across the power sector utilities. The move will prove to aid regulators and policymakers and also the entities themselves to identify areas for improvement. Krishna Pal Gurjar, Minister of State for Power; Alok Kumar, Secretary Power; Indu Shekhar Chaturvedi, Secretary MNRE; senior officials from both the ministries; Chairperson and members of Central Electricity Authority; Abhay Karandikar, Director IIT Kanpur; representatives from states /UTs; CMDs of Power PSUs and DISCOMs; and industry representatives were present at the

occasion. Appreciating IIT Kanpur for their work, Singh said, India is preparing itself for the next generation by modernisation, however, it is in the process of making the system sustainable. Challenges of energy access and supply have been resolved by establishing capacity generation making us a power surplus nation, he added. Further, the Minister said that we have established one grid for the country and one unified market for power free from long term PPAs. Steps are being taken to strengthen the distribution system. He suggested that let the full cost be reflected in tariff and then the elected governments can provide a subsidy based on that. The regulatory framework is the key to sustainability in the power sector, said the Minister. The Minister addressed the scope of research and development for standardisation in regulatory framework by research. Adding on, he urged for enhancement of R&D in smart metering, AI-based energy accounting and cybersecurity. Calling for a shift from fossil fuels to green hydrogen, the Minister emphasised the incorporation of green hydrogen in various industries including refining, fertilisers, steel, glass, ceramics and heavy mobility.

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SBI Life Accelerates Its Digital Transformation Journey with Dell's IT Solutions

Dell Technologies' HCI solution, VxRail is enabling SBI Life Insurance to accelerate its digital transformation journey and offer a prime experience to its customers amidst the ongoing pandemic. The association has allowed the insurance giant to introduce a cutting-edge IT solution, make themselves future-ready and execute operations in remote working conditions, flawlessly. With the insurance sector moving at an extremely fast pace, SBI Life has always looked for ways to scale up its IT operations to strengthen its business continuity plans and adapt to the changing needs of the industry. The need of the hour for SBI Life was to find the best possible solution, which helped in responding to the existing and future needs of their customers, by offering the highest level of data protection and addressing the security concerns of today's data age. To address these needs and enhance its existing IT Infrastructure, the company adopted Dell Technologies VxRail technology, along with technical support from Galaxy Office Automation Pvt. Ltd. While the engagement began as a future-proofing mechanism to enhance the remote working capabilities of the workforce in 2019, it soon became apparent that it was the ideal solution to handle the disruption caused by the pandemic in March 2020. With the deployment of the new VxRail solution from Dell Technologies, SBI Life was able to offer a robust and reliable platform that was instrumental in enabling the workforce to continue working productively during the remote working phase, amid the nationwide lockdown in March 2020. The solution ensured secure and containerised access to corporate users who handled confidential and sensitive data. It supported the existing VPN system that was used by another set of employees for business applications on company-provided assets. Additionally, the deployment also helped SBI Life with

faster onboarding of employees, ease in end-point device management, and reduced time to reach the market. It offered the company optimal utilisation of their workforce, seamless connectivity and increased efficiency of processes, at a time when remote working was crucial while keeping in mind their safety and well-being.

“At Dell Technologies, we are always striving to meet the evolving needs of our customers, by offering industry-leading technology solutions, and helping them stay afloat during disruptive times”, said Amit Luthra, Director & General Manager, Storage Platforms & Solutions, Dell Technologies India. “SBI Life wanted to accelerate their digital transformation journey and with our VxRail solutions, we equipped them with a holistic IT architecture that enhanced customer experience, and at the same time ensured seamless operations for internal stakeholders. Our solutions helped them optimise operational experience at reduced risk, along with full-stack single-click lifecycle management,” he added. “The outbreak of the pandemic in the country and the imposition of immediate lockdown was a challenging phase for us, as we had to ensure that all our critical business functions were made operational for all our stakeholders, within the shortest possible time. While we were already in the process of building a future proof mechanism, the pandemic induced action just accelerated our progression. Our IT team immediately assessed the situation and after careful consideration, we successfully deployed the required platform, through collaboration with Dell Technologies. The VxRail solution helped us enable secure remote working for corporate end-users without compromising on user experience”, said Anand Pejavar, President – Operations, IT & International Business, SBI Life. Sanjay Patodia, CEO, Galaxy Office Automation Pvt. Ltd. said, “We have partnered with Dell Technologies and have created ready-to-go VDI offerings to cater to business-critical needs of customers. Basis our expertise in the sector and our combined efforts, we implemented a robust VDI infrastructure that enhanced SBI Life’s existing IT set up while maintaining their operational costs.” Adding on he said, “We are pleased to have worked together with Dell Technologies in successfully supporting the team at SBI Life and stakeholders in their digital transformational journey and hope to collaborate going ahead.”

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SRI LANKA: Companies Mobilize over Rs 75Bn in First 7 Months of 2021 via Capital Market

The Colombo Stock Exchange (CSE) has showcased a strong growth trajectory in Capital Raising by Sri Lankan corporates of all scales during the first 7 months of 2021. To date, the CSE has facilitated 12 new listings, including 07 debt IPOs with a value of LKR 47.29 Bn, 04 equity IPOs with a value of LKR 7.49 Bn and 01 SPO with a value of LKR 3.5 Bn. It should be noted that this is the highest number of equity IPOs that the CSE has facilitated since 2014 and the largest in cumulative value since 2011. In total, the stock market has facilitated the raising of LKR 77.30 Bn. This

includes LKR 10.99 Bn raised by Equity IPOs and the SPO, LKR 47.29 Bn raised by Debt IPOs, LKR 16.56 Bn raised by Rights Issues and LKR 2.46 Bn raised by Private Placements. The 05 equity Initial and Secondary public issues held during the year so far include Windforce PLC, Chrissworld Ltd, Prime Lands Residencies PLC, JAT Holdings Limited and Sanasa Development Bank all of which were launched with successful Public Issues. The first Empower Board listing, Chrissworld Limited, debuted trading successfully, which is an encouraging start for further Small and Medium Enterprise (SME) listings. With state institutions such as Ceylon Electricity Board (CEB) opting to finance their capital requirements through the Sri Lankan stock market, the CSE has established the confidence as an effective and efficient source for capital raising.

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Central-West Asia

AZERBAIJAN: Supporting Dev't of Private and Public-Private Ties with Russian Companies - Russian Export Center

Azerbaijan supports the development of private and public-private relations with the Russian companies, head of the office of the Russian Export Center Nuri Guliyev told Trend. "The Russian Export Center has gathered in Azerbaijan a big pool of the Russian key industrial companies," Guliyev added. "The pool of these companies includes the transport and design sectors, truck suppliers, information and communications companies and a number of other spheres," head of the office of the Russian Export Center said. "The products of the representatives of the companies who arrived in Azerbaijan as part of a business mission are in a great demand in the local market and there is a great potential in this sphere," Guliyev said. "Giving impetus to the development of private and public-private relations by the Azerbaijani state-owned companies is a very positive moment for strengthening cooperation," head of the office of the Russian Export Center said.

Guliyev stressed that the Russian Export Center also offers Azerbaijan financing, products, and services of the Russian Federation. "We provide Azerbaijan with a direct loan as a foreign buyer, as well as direct financing through the Azerbaijani banking structures," head of the office of the Russian Export Center said. Guliyev stressed that the Russian Federation is a key partner in Azerbaijan's foreign economic activity. "Our trade turnover is growing quite well," the head of the office of the Russian Export Center said. "So, we supported export by \$283 million in 2018, by \$511 million in 2019, by \$514 million in 2020. The contribution of the Russian Federation and the products of the Russian companies to the Azerbaijani economy is quite big." Guliyev stressed that a memorandum of understanding was signed between Russia's KAMAZ PJSC and Azerbaijan's Ganja Automobile Plant within the official part of the business mission of the Russian companies in Baku.

"KAMAZ PJSC is a key machine-building company in Russia," the head of the office of the Russian Export Center said. "Both the supply of cars and the service and maintenance of KAMAZ trucks in Azerbaijan will be very promising this agreement." The head of the office of the Russian Export Center said that the representatives of the Russian companies continue to hold key meetings with Azerbaijani companies and civil servants. "We believe that these meetings for the Russian side will end by signing new agreements and expanding the activity of the Russian companies in Azerbaijan," Guliyev added.

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Azerbaijan Privatizes Several State Property Facilities Through New Auction

The State Committee on Property Issues under the Azerbaijani Ministry of Economy held a new auction for privatization of state property, Trend reports referring to the committee. According to the committee, during the auction 13 state property facilities were privatized, including 11 vehicles, one package of shares in a joint venture, and one small state enterprise. In total, 44 requests were submitted for the state property put up for the privatization auction, four of which were submitted online. The committee 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: Eying Transforming Number of State-Owned Enterprises of Trade Ministry into Open Joint-Stock Companies

Turkmenistan plans to transform some state enterprises of its Ministry of Trade and Foreign Economic Relations into open joint stock companies, the Vice Premier Chary Gylyjov reported to President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov during an online meeting of the Cabinet of Ministers system on Friday, the country's official media reports, Trend reports citing Business Turkmenistan. Particularly, the government plans to transform Merw and Lebap state trade enterprises, located respectively in the cities of Mary and Turkmenabat, into open joint stock companies. Following the report, the Head of State said the country carries out a phased privatization of state enterprise in order to deepen cardinal reforms in the field of trade on the basis of the

active introduction of effective methods of management, and form different ownership structures for the management of retail and wholesale enterprises. The Turkmen Leader emphasized that further measures should be taken to create favorable conditions for improving the efficiency of management of state property and transforming them into joint-stock companies, increasing the share of private property in the structure of the economy and developing small and medium-sized businesses, instructing the Vice Premier to ensure the implementation of the outlined plans. During the government meeting, the Turkmen President also signed a Resolution on the establishment of the Türkmençokma Open Joint Stock Company.

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AUSTRALIA: Business Support for Mandatory Jobs Grows

A national survey of 700 companies has found almost a quarter favour mandatory COVID-19 vaccines for employees. Major employer association the Australian Industry Group found more than half backed some form of mandating. About 24 per cent said they would like to mandate vaccinations for some or all of their employees and 27 per cent wanted a health order to decide. A further 37 per cent plan to offer and encourage vaccines while the remaining 10 per cent were unsure or felt it didn't apply to their workplaces. Ai Group chief executive Innes Willox said it was clear some businesses would closely watch others imposing mandates on staff. "The group that favours health orders being in place no doubt would prefer the legal certainty that comes with such orders," he said. "However, governments do not appear to favour any significant expansion of the small number of such health orders now in place."

Mr Willox said despite the "red herring" that health orders were the only way to mandate vaccines, employers would use long-standing legal rights where lawful and reasonable. "Employers will initially look at the issue from the perspective of how they can protect their staff and their customers," he said. "As more businesses mandate vaccination, the question will shift to whether they will need to mandate vaccination for their own staff who visit businesses that have a mandate in place." The Fair Work Ombudsman has updated its advice on mandatory vaccines, setting out what is likely to be reasonable under existing law. But the federal government continues to resist pressure from business groups to provide more clarity through legislation or regulation.

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No Relief Ahead for Locked Down Retailers

Retailers are feeling the brunt of coronavirus lockdowns and there is no relief in sight. Australian Retailers Association CEO Paul Zahra says 'For Lease' signs are a common feature on CBD shop fronts in Sydney and Melbourne, where outbreaks of the Delta strain of COVID-19 have occurred. "Lockdowns have a direct impact on retail sales, as well as business and consumer confidence," he said on Monday. "Those impacts can be felt long after restrictions are eased, as it takes time for confidence and foot-traffic to build up again - it's not an immediate snap back to the way things were." Mr Zahra pointed to the latest Mastercard SpendingPulse figures, which measure in-store and online retail sales, showing a drop of 5.6 per cent in July from June. Sales were also down 6.3 per cent from July last year. Greater Sydney and surrounding areas were subject to stay-at-home orders in July, with Victoria, South Australia, parts of Western Australia and the Northern Territory also going in and out of lockdown over the course of the month.

"Delta is continuing to cause damage to businesses and livelihoods, in particular for our economic capital, Sydney, where a nine-week lockdown is confirmed with no guarantee that restrictions will ease at the end of the month," Mr Zahra said. Retailers are currently enduring lockdowns across NSW, Victoria and the ACT. "Many battle-weary businesses are on the brink of emotional and mental health collapse - not just financial difficulty," Mr Zahra said. "We need to be looking at ways we can reopen businesses where case numbers are low and vaccination rates are high as a pathway out of this situation." The Mastercard SpendingPulse data represents sales activity in the Mastercard payments network, coupled with survey-based estimates other forms of payment, such as cash and cheques. Clothing retailers suffered the biggest decline in July, with sales dropping 19.9 per cent, followed by a 5.4 per cent decline in department store spending and a 1.2 per cent fall in food retailing. Household goods spending rose 0.8 per cent. The Australian Bureau of Statistics will release retail trade figures for July on Friday. Forecasts by economists centre on a two per cent decline in July, following a 1.8 per cent drop in June.

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Push to Drive Local Renewable Investment

A proposal to let local communities invest in large-scale renewable projects in their area is being scrutinised by a federal parliamentary inquiry. Independent MP Helen Haines is pushing for the creation of another energy agency to sit alongside the Australian Renewable Energy Agency. The Australian Local Power Agency would help drive investment in renewables at a local level. It would include hinging ministerial approval for large renewable projects on locals living within 30km being given a chance to invest. Renewable energy groups, ARENA and the Clean Energy Finance Corporation gave evidence at a lower house inquiry on Friday about how this could work. Local groups wanted to see more opportunities for and investment in

renewables. Renewable Energy Albury Wodonga said northeast Victoria was largely dependent on power generation in the Gippsland region.

"Every bushfire season we are vulnerable to the loss of towers and power lines," the group said in its submission. "Renewable energy owned by the community and locally based allows a far more resilient industry and community." But the inquiry was also told of concerns that community-level investment risked slowing down projects or creating complications for other investors. The proposed \$467 million agency would involve the establishment of 50 local hubs letting communities develop their own renewable energy projects using grants of up to \$500,000 a year for five years. Dr Haines' proposal would also require all large-scale renewable projects to give local residents a chance to invest in them from July 2023. The MP for Indi in northeast Victoria pointed to the "sheer size of the pent-up energy and enthusiasm across regional Australia to act on the golden economic opportunity in locally-owned renewables".

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NEW ZEALAND: More Creative Spaces to Support Participation in the Arts

More people will be able to find social connection, and practice and participate in the arts through further funding for 36 creative spaces across the motu, Arts, Culture and Heritage Minister Carmel Sepuloni announced today. Creative spaces play an important role in our communities. They provide opportunities for disabled people, people with mental health needs and those looking for social connection to practice and participate in the arts. "The arts, culture, and heritage sector was hit particularly hard by COVID-19. The CARE fund is part of the Arts and Culture COVID Recovery Programme and underlines our Government's commitment to building back better as we secure our recovery from COVID-19," Carmel Sepuloni said. "I have seen first-hand the well-being benefits of creative spaces. There are many people in our communities who are marginalised and experience barriers to being able to make the most of their artistic skills and talents.

"Government is investing a further \$11.37 million to provide even more opportunities for people to build up their confidence and self-esteem through accessing creative spaces in their own neighbourhoods. We can't underestimate the sense of fulfilment that these spaces provide. "This funding will also give stability for creative spaces to expand their services and create employment opportunities in the sector through things like art making workshops, performing arts activities, creative writing and raranga (weaving) workshops. "I'm pleased that Manatū Taonga has partnered with Arts Access Aotearoa in delivering this initiative. With their wealth of knowledge and established relationships, they will also work with the recipients to help them with reporting, source longer-term sustainable funding, and share good practice with the

Creative Space Network,” Carmel Sepuloni said. This latest funding from the Te Tahua Whakahaumarū Creative Arts Recovery and Employment (CARE) Fund means a total of \$17.12 million has been awarded to 54 creative spaces across Aotearoa in two rounds this year. It is estimated that more than 11,000 people each year use the 90 creative spaces across Aotearoa, New Zealand.

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