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# ASIA-PACIFIC GOVERNANCE WATCH

September 2021, Issue 215

**UNPAN-AP**  
Editorial Department,  
RCOCI





# Asia-Pacific Governance Watch

September 2021, Issue 215

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## 1、 Government Policy and Legislation

### Asia-Pacific

**GMS Leaders Endorse 10-Year Strategy to Promote Sustainable, Inclusive Development amid COVID-19**

**Statement of the APEC Group on Services Encouraging Completion of the WTO Services Domestic Regulation**

### East Asia

**CHINA: Unveiling Measures on Trade, Investment Facilitation in FTZs**

**China Issues Plan for Further Developing Shenzhen-Hong Kong Cooperation Zone**

**China to Launch Pilot Programs on Business Environment to Better Benefit Firms and Individuals**

**China to Launch Trials to Further Optimize Business Environment**

**China Issues Guideline on Deepening Reform of Eco-compensation Mechanism**

**China Issues Human Rights Action Plan for 2021-2025**

**China Formulates Plan for New Infrastructure to Spur Domestic Demand, Economic Transformation and Growth Sustainability**

**China to Establish Coordination Mechanism for Integrating Core Socialist Values into Laws, Regulations**

**Highlights of Evaluation Report on China's National Human Rights Action Plan Implementation**

**China Releases Medical-security Plan to Deepen Health Reform**

**China to Tighten Regulation of Algorithms Related to Internet**

## Information Services

JAPAN: Revised State of Emergency Guidelines to Focus on Medical Services

Quad Countries Announce Slew of Tech Initiatives Including Shared Cyber Standards

Japan Approves New Cybersecurity Strategy

BOJ Chief Says Accommodative Policy to Stay Under New Prime Minister

SOUTH KOREA: Ruling Party Gearing Up for Bill on Curbing 'Unjust' Practices by Domestic Online Platform Giants

S. Korea Proposes Digital Trade Pact with ASEAN

## South-East Asia

CAMBODIA: Parliament Ratifies RCEP, World's Biggest Free Trade Pact

VIETNAM: HCM City's Master Plan to 2040 Focuses on Climate Change Adaptation

Ministry Reiterates Guidelines After Children Given COVID Jobs

Vietnam: Đồng Nai Implements Socio-Economic Recovery Plan

Hà Nội Approves 17 Resolutions for the Capital City's Development

New Resolution Eases Requirements for Work Permit Applications for Foreigners

The Ministry of Public Security Completes Draft Decree on Cybersecurity Fines

## South Asia

## Central-West Asia

AZERBAIJAN: Working Out New Draft Law on Food Safety

Azerbaijan's Policy in Field of Youth and Sports Bears Fruit Every Year – Official

Azerbaijan Sets New Rules for Collaboration of Border and Customs Authorities in Case of Emergencies

Cabinet of Ministers Approves State and Consolidated Draft Budgets for 2022

## Oceania

AUSTRALIA: New Garden Netting Laws - Don't Get Caught  
Call for Disability Pension Rules Overhaul  
Government Hits Back over Coal Phase-Out  
New Plan to Ensure Vital Medicine Supply  
Policy Must Drive Jobless Rate Down: RBA  
Climate Action May Weaken Australia

## 2、Government System and Civil Services

### Asia-Pacific

Local Government as a Data-Driven Community Platform  
OECD Appoints Yoshiki Takeuchi as New Deputy Secretary-General  
APEC Advances Robust Structural Reform Agenda for Quality Growth  
Senior Officials Lean in Together on Trade as Uncertainties Loom Large  
Women's Economic Opportunities in APEC Improve, but Persistent Gender Biases Stifle Progress  
ADB Appoints Albert Park as Chief Economist

### East Asia

CHINA: To Further Improve Medical Insurance System  
China to Reinforce People's Tribunals' Role in Primary-level Governance  
Enhanced Civil Affairs Work Contributes to Building Moderately Prosperous Society in All Respects  
China Advances Reforms to Facilitate Talent Development  
JAPAN: Launching Digital Agency to Boost Government Technology  
Jumble of New Systems Created Chaotic Response to Pandemic in Japan

## South-East Asia

**MALAYSIA: Parliament Convenes amid New Political Alignment**

**PHILIPPINES: Duterte Accepts His Party's Vice Presidential Nomination in 2022 Elections**

**THAILAND: Cabinet Cuts Social Security Contributions from 5% to 2.5%**

**VIETNAM: Investment in Institutional Improvement Is Investment for Sustainable Development**

**Special Working Groups to Be Set Up to Assist Businesses, People**

## South Asia

**INDIA: Appoints Rajiv Aggarwal, ex-IAS, as Director of Public Policy**

**JK Tripathy, retd. IPS, Named Chief Information Commissioner, Odisha**

**Digitalisation & Transformation of Governance**

**India's Urban Heritage Management Conundrum the Need for Transformative Reforms**

**SRI LANKA: STEMUP Educational Foundation Unveils Fully-automated Volunteer Management System**

## Central-West Asia

**UZBEKISTAN: Pre-election Campaigning Period Kicks Off**

## Oceania

**AUSTRALIA: Business Not Doing Enough on Human Rights**

**NEW ZEALAND: New Law Commissioners Appointed**

**Expert Group Appointed to Lead New Zealand's Future Health System**

## 3、 Management, Capacity Building and Innovation

## Asia-Pacific

Selecting an IoT Device Management Platform - with Deployment Examples

Global Smart Parking Systems Market to Clock Double-Digit Growth

Connected Futures: Meeting Citizen Needs with Smart City Technologies

Noise Mapping as a Tool for Smart Cities

Unlocking Citizen-centric Smart Cities in Asia

APEC CEO Summit to Focus on COVID, Disruption and Trust; Registrations Open

Impact of Care Work on Women's Economic Participation Wins

APEC Healthy Women Healthy Economy Research Prize

## East Asia

CHINA: Growth in 5G Use Accelerates Industrial Innovation

China Improves Business Environment, Provides Foreign Investors with Larger Markets: White Paper

Digital Innovation Empowers China's Governance Efficiency

JAPAN: Police to Increasingly Partner Up with AI to Fight Crime

Japan to Issue Online Vaccine Certificates in December

Japan Govt. Extends Coronavirus State of Emergency

Japan Mulls Tougher Punishment for Cyber Crime

Digital Technology Helps Trigger Revival of Unattended Sales Stands in Japan

To Tackle Cyberbullying, Japan Eyes Tougher Prison Sentence for Online Insults

JICA Issues Japan's 1st Gender Bonds for Female Empowerment

## South-East Asia

INDONESIA: To Continue New Capital City Project amid

## **Economic Pressure Due to Pandemic**

**Indonesia Expands Coverage of Covid-19 Vaccination Monitoring Application for Foreigners**

**THAILAND: Approving Long-Term Visa to Attract Wealthy Foreigners**

**Commerce Ministry Launches New Hotline for Consumer Complaints**

**Cabinet Approves Immediate Registration of Illegal Migrant Workers to Combat Outbreaks**

**VIETNAM: Government's Task Force Established to Help Businesses, People Affected by Covid-19**

**Politburo Asks for Best Efforts to Control Pandemic and Recover Economy**

**HCM City Proposes Giving 'Green Card' to People Vaccinated at Least Once**

**Hà Nội Boosts Technology Application in 'One Commune, One Product' Programme**

**VCCI Launches Virtual Workplace Platform on COVID-19 Response Solutions**

## **South Asia**

**INDIA: Fortinet Pledges to Train 1 Million People to Bridge Cybersecurity Skills Gap**

**India's Top Policymakers to Participate in 2nd Elets India Transformation Summit on 16-17 Sept 2021**

**RBI Allows Aadhaar e-KYC Authentication License for NBFCs to Promote Digitalisation**

**MeitY Holds Workshop to Create Roadmap for Expanding Internet to Uncovered Areas**

**Apex Brasil & Elets to Stage AgriTalks, Webinar on Agricultural Innovations & Food Security on Sept 28**

**Leverage Technology to Augment Tax Compliance**

**Leveraging Technology to Turn Vision into Reality**

**Centre to Open 75 Science Technology & Innovation Hubs for SCs & STs**

**Strengthening Cultural & Heritage Management Planning in Urban Spaces**

**UP Govt Establishes 104 STPs for Cleaning Major Rivers Under Namami Gange**

## **Central-West Asia**

**AZERBAIJAN: Ministry of Communications Extends Licenses of Mobile Operators**

**Azerbaijan Records Growth in Prices for Hybrid Vehicles**

**Azerbaijan Talks Support for Disabled Citizens Within Self-Employment Program**

**Azerbaijan and Turkey to Establish Joint Innovation, Technology Centers**

**Azerbaijan to Develop Identification and Registration System of Farm Animals**

**Bakcell Helped Young People Continue Their Education During the Pandemic**

**TURKMENISTAN: Approving Procedure for Certification of Software Products**

**UZBEKISTAN: Advancing in Global Innovation Index**

## **Oceania**

**AUSTRALIA: Push to Simplify COVID Rules for Borders**

**Aust to Host 2022 Regional Energy Summit**

**Australia-India Emissions Technology Deal**

**Joyce Calls for Caution on Net Zero Target**

**Australia Passes COVID Vaccine Milestone**

**NEW ZEALAND: COVID-19 Community Fund to Provide Support for Vulnerable Women and Girls**

**Further Government Support for People to Access Food and Essential Items**

## **4、 Economic and Social Development and ICT**

### **Asia-Pacific**



**Climate Change Could Force 216 Million People to Migrate Within Their Own Countries by 2050**

**CLIs Point to Moderating Growth**

**G20 GDP Growth Slows to 0.4% in the Second Quarter of 2021, but Large Differences Exist Across Countries**

**Boost Education Investment to Tackle Inequality of Opportunity, Says OECD**

**The Key to Complete Online Independence Is Through Crowdsourced VPNs**

**Global Economic Recovery Continues but Remains Uneven, Says OECD**

**World Bank: Tertiary Education Is Key to Rebuilding COVID-Hit Economies**

**Development in a Time of Upheaval – World Bank Group President**

**COVID-19 Resurgence Dampens Investor Sentiment in Emerging East Asia**

**ADB Maintains 8.1% Forecast for PRC Economic Growth in 2021**

**ADB Trims Developing Asia 2021 Growth Outlook to 7.1% amid Continued COVID-19 Concerns**

**COVID-19 Delays Economic Recovery — ADB**

**Transforming Agriculture Key to Asia and Pacific's Future and Survival**

**Archipelagic Economies: Spatial Economic Development in the Pacific**

**Women's Economic Empowerment Is Key to Stronger, More Resilient Economy**

**Economic Recovery in East Asia and Pacific Faces Setback**

**ADB, Partners to Set Up New Platform to Catalyze Investments in Sustainable Infrastructure in Asia**

## **East Asia**

**CHINA: Market Entities See Rapid Expansion**

**Chinese Vice Premier Stresses Promoting Digital Economy for**

## High-quality Development

China's Manufacturing Heartland Going Smart

China's Securities Regulator Pledges More Support to Real Economy

China's Regulator Stresses Opening-up, Cross-border Cooperation

China's Strengthened Economic Regulations Aim Healthy Longer-term Development

Carbon Neutrality Drives Growth of China's Investment Cooperation

China's Economy Continues Recovery, Shows Resilience

Emerging Opportunities, Policy Backdrop to Further Unleash China's Consumption Potential

Western Regions on Fast Track of High-quality Development

China's High-quality Grain Projects Boost Domestic Agriculture Development

China's Electronic Information Manufacturing Sector Maintains Stable Growth

China Confident of Making More Impressive Progress: White Paper

China Ensures Prosperity for Every Individual: White Paper

White Paper Documents China's Journey Towards Moderate Prosperity

China Sees Historic Changes to Eco-environment: White Paper

China's Industrial Profits Sustain Stable Growth in First Eight Months

JAPAN: Aiming for a Comeback in Digitization Race

Japan's Elderly Population Hits Record High

Japan E-Commerce Market to Grow by 10.5% in 2021, Says Globaldata

SOUTH KOREA: 5G Users Top 17 Mln in July Data

Online Shopping Hits Record High in July amid Pandemic

Regulator Voices Concerns About Unfair Biz Activity by Online Platforms

S. Korea's 5G Base Stations Account for 11 Pct of Total in Q2 Data

## **South-East Asia**

INDONESIA: To Inoculate 70 Pct of Population with Covid-19

Vaccines by End of 2021

PHILIPPINES: Unemployment Rate Drops to 6.9 Pct in July

Approved Foreign Investments in Philippines Up 45.5 Pct in Q2

SINGAPORE: Labor Market Improves in H1

VIETNAM: E-commerce Platforms Resume Delivery in HCM City as Ban Is Lifted in Red Zones

HCM City's ICT Initiatives Help Battle Against COVID-19

Digital Transformation Plays a Vital Role in Agricultural Development

Poor Students to Access the Internet Thanks to Special Programme

## South Asia

INDIA: Centre Plans to Encompass E-bikes Under FAME II Scheme

Achieving Sustainability Through UNESCO Designations

AWS Re/Start India Prepares Local Talent for Cloud Careers

Challenges in Achieving SDG 11.4 in the Indian Context

Cultural Heritage & Sustainable Development: The Cities We Want

Cultural Heritage for Sustainable Urban Development

From Planning to Management: Preserving Historical Areas

Heritage Concerns & Cultural Ethos of a City

Heritage-led Urban Revitalisation in India: An Integrated Approach

India En-Route to Achieve SDG 11

POSHAN Perspectives, Addressing Malnutrition in India Ends on a High Note

Preserving Heritage to Realise Sustainable Urban Development

Protecting Cultural & Natural Heritage of Cities Worldwide with Special Reference to India

RBI to Rollout Framework for Digital Retail Payments in Offline Mode

Safeguarding Cultural and Natural Heritage for Sustainable Urban Development

SRI LANKA: "GLX Digital Evolver" Powers Transformation of Tourism through Digital Evolution

## Central-West Asia

**AZERBAIJAN: CBA Expanding International Cooperation on Information, Cyber Security**

**Azerbaijan's Economic Growth Is Projected at 4.6% This Year**

**Azerbaijan to Launch E-Platform for Studying Practices of Doing Business**

**Microsoft Ready to Introduce Cloud Platform for Carbon Emission Analytics in Azerbaijan**

**All Azerbaijani Districts to Be Provided with Internet by 2024 – Minister**

**Azerbaijan to Launch E-Platform for Studying Practices of Doing Business**

**Azerbaijan Develops Solution to Protect Children from Harmful Internet Content**

**GEORGIA: Intensifying Efforts to Develop Digital Economy - European Commission**

**Cost of Mobile Internet in Georgia Has Decreases**

**TURKMENISTAN: Revealing GDP Growth for 8M2021**

**UZBEKISTAN: Number of Mobile Communication Users Exceeds 27mn**

**Uzbekistan Among Countries with "Unfree" Internet**

## **Oceania**

**AUSTRALIA: House Prices Post Record Quarterly Rise**

**Welfare Report Reveals Impact of COVID-19**

**More Employees to Remain Working from Home**

**Petrol Pump Prices Hit Three-Year High**

**Vaccine Producers Not Helping Poor: Report**

**Australia Hits 50 pct Vaccination Coverage**

**Australians Moving Money Out of Savings**

**Housing Under Spotlight as Pressures Grow**

**NEW ZEALAND: Government Invests in Scientific Research to Boost Economy, Address Climate Change and Enhance Wellbeing**

**NZ Economy's Strong Momentum Will Support Rebound from Delta Outbreak; COVID Fund Replenished**

**New Home Building Reaches Another Record High**

## **5、 Public Finance**

## Asia-Pacific

**[Air Quality Monitoring System Market Size Forecasted to Reach Value of USD 6.8 Billion in 2028 – Reports and Data](#)**

**[Record Demand for World Bank USD 5 Billion 7-Year Sustainable Development Bond](#)**

**[APG Puts Additional €500m into Smart City Infrastructure Fund](#)**

**[New Publication Illustrates the Real Cost of Speeding on People and the Environment](#)**

**[Macif/Aéma Group Invests in World Bank Sustainable Development Bond and Highlights Importance of Water and Ocean Resources](#)**

**[Climate Finance for Developing Countries Rose to USD 79.6 Billion in 2019](#)**

**[Drops in Health Spending Jeopardize Recovery from COVID-19 in Developing Countries](#)**

**[City Climate Finance Gap Fund Completes First Year of Operation with Support to 33 Cities](#)**

**[World Bank Launches Initiative to Issue USD 10 Billion in Sustainable Development Bonds while Highlighting the Urgency of Mainstreaming Climate Action](#)**

**[Launch of OECD Business and Finance Outlook 2021](#)**

**[More Efforts Needed to Boost Trust in AI in the Financial Sector, Says OECD](#)**

**[ADB Issues First Blue Bond for Ocean Investments](#)**

**[Manuela Ferro, World Bank Vice President for East Asia and Pacific](#)**

**[ADB Sells \\$3 Billion 3-Year Global Benchmark Bond](#)**

## East Asia

**CHINA: Stepping Up Fiscal Support for Yangtze River Economic Belt**

**Financial Risks Generally Controllable in China: Central Bank Report**

**China to Strengthen Digital Taxation, Global Tax Cooperation: Official**

**China's Central Bank's Lending Quota Grows by 300 Bln Yuan to Support Small Businesses**

**SOUTH KOREA: To Spend 95 Bln Won on Research of Carbon-Reduction Technologies**

**Uncertainty Lingers Over Private Spending Recovery Ministry**

**S. Korea to Invest 42.4 Bln Won in Hydrogen Tram Tech**

**S. Korea to Increase Support of Startups' Overseas Expansion**

**S. Korea's Monetary Policy Still Considered Accommodative BOK Board Member**

## South-East Asia

**INDONESIA: Parliament Approves Government's 2022 Budget**

**CAMBODIA: ADB Approves 82 Mln Usd Loan for Improving Roads Along GMS Economic Corridors**

**PHILIPPINES: To Secure More Loans to Support Covid-19 Response**

**Philippines Posts 1.04 Bln USD Balance of Payments Surplus in August**

**THAILAND: Central Bank Holds Policy Rate Steady to Support Economic Recovery**

**VIETNAM: Finance Minister Affirms State Budget Sufficiency**

**Banks to Lend \$4.3 Billion Preferential Interest Rate Loans**

**HCM City Wants Tax Reduction for COVID-Affected Businesses**

## South Asia

## Central-West Asia

**AZERBAIJAN: Detecting New Methods of Bank Fraud – ABA**

**UZBEKISTAN: Public Debt Increases**

**Uzbekistan's External Debt Hits New Record**

## Oceania

**AUSTRALIA: Economists Expect Spike in Jobless Rate**  
**Resource Export Earnings on Way to \$350b**  
**Strong Recovery Helped 2020/21 Budget**  
**NEW ZEALAND: More Financial Support for Businesses**  
**Power Bill Changes Bring Fairness to Charges**  
**Funding to Help Clean Up Contaminated Sites**

## 6、 Private Sector

### Asia-Pacific

**Launch of Reports on ASEAN's Logistics Industry to Drive Growth and Regional Economic Integration**

### East Asia

**CHINA: Smart Manufacturing in the Dark Brings Light to Industry**  
**Chinese Banks Steer Loans to Real Economy amid Recovery**  
**Foreign Investment in Agricultural Sector Grows in China's Jiangsu**  
**Inclusive Finance Benefits Small Firms, Farmers in Tibet**  
**JAPAN: NEC Utilizes Digital Technologies to Create Healthcare and Life Science Business**  
**SOUTH KOREA: Top Regulator Says Kakao's Support for Small Biz on 'Right Track'**  
**Korean Government Actively Supports ICT SMEs for Overseas Market Entry to Overcome COVID-19**

### South-East Asia

**CAMBODIA: Launching 50-Mln-Usd Guarantee Scheme to Support SMEs**  
**Cambodia Raises Monthly Minimum Wage for Garment Industry to 194 USD for 2022**  
**SINGAPORE: Manufacturing Output Growth Further Narrow to 11.2 Pct in August**  
**VIETNAM: Programme to Help SMEs Enter Foreign Markets Kicks-Off**

## South Asia

INDIA: Fortinet & Linksys Delivers First-of-its-kind Cybersecurity Enterprise Solution to Support Remote & Hybrid work

UP Govt Transforms over 2400 Panchayat Bhawans Through Digitalisation

GeM Bags CIPS Award for 'Best Use of Digital Technology' Beating Industry Toppers

Centre Issues Cybersecurity Guidelines for Power Sector

## Central-West Asia

AZERBAIJAN: Entrepreneurs to Start Exporting Products Abroad Through E-Commerce

Public-private Co-op to Contribute to Restoration of Azerbaijan's Liberated Territories – Minister

Azerbaijan's Economy Minister Talks Gov't Support to Private Sector for 8M2021

TURKMENISTAN: Largest Share of New Jobs Falls on Private Sector

UZBEKISTAN: Uzbek Bank, ICD Sign Private Sector Financing Agreement

## Oceania

AUSTRALIA: Aged Care Sector Facing Staffing Crisis Small Business Urged to Let Go of Banks

Extended Financial Help for ACT Businesses

Fund to Leverage Carbon Capture Investment

NEW ZEALAND: Additional Resurgence Support Payments to Support Business

Mental Health Stocktake Shows Strong Progress

## 1、 Government Policy and Legislation

### Asia-Pacific

GMS Leaders Endorse 10-Year Strategy to Promote Sustainable,



## Inclusive Development amid COVID-19

Leaders from the six member countries of the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) today endorsed a new 10-year strategy to promote sustainable, inclusive development and strengthen economic integration to combat threats such as the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, climate change, trade barriers, and rapid urbanization. The GMS Economic Cooperation Program Strategic Framework 2030 (GMS-2030), lays out the GMS program's mission for the first time, with a focus on regional cooperation and sustainable development. The strategy, which was released at the 7th GMS Leaders' Summit hosted by the Government of Cambodia, also calls for member countries to work together on a multi-sector, multi-thematic response to the pandemic based on a new GMS COVID-19 response and recovery plan. "ADB's near-term priority is to help economies recover from the COVID-19 pandemic," said Asian Development Bank (ADB) President Masatsugu Asakawa. "In parallel, our assistance will pave the way for inclusive, sustainable, and resilient development in the long term, in line with GMS-2030. ADB will continue to play a central role in coordinating the GMS Program and leverage ADB's financing and knowledge support by collaborating with the private sector and other development partners."

The pandemic has pushed 8 million more people in the GMS countries into poverty, and more than 340,000 migrant workers have been forced to return home. The GMS 2030 strategy calls for the subregion to overcome the challenges it faces by deepening regional cooperation and integration in key areas and continue the GMS program's work on connectivity, with a project-led approach to development and long-term regional policy cooperation. The 2021–2023 GMS COVID–19 Response and Recovery Plan aims to help countries address the health, economic, and social impacts of the pandemic through regional cooperation in key areas, complementing country response plans. The plan includes measures to protect the health of people, animals, crops, and food products, as well as urban environments. It also seeks to promote the safe, orderly movement of labor and support open borders, as well as inclusive, green, and resilient economic activities. An initial list of priority projects worth \$3.1 billion has been identified to support the plan. The GMS program was established in 1992 to strengthen regional cooperation by encouraging cross-border economic and trade relations. Since then, ADB has supported regional cooperation projects in key sectors such as health, transport, tourism, urban development, environment, human resources development, agriculture, and energy through 109 cross-cutting investments and 230 technical assistance projects. ADB has mobilized \$27.7 billion in financing for the GMS program, with 45% contributed by ADB, 22% by GMS governments, and 33% by development partners and the private sector. ADB provided \$5.7 billion to the GMS program from 2018 to 2020.

From <https://www.adb.org/> 09/09/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## **Statement of the APEC Group on Services Encouraging Completion of the WTO Services Domestic Regulation**

As the preeminent services forum within APEC, the Group on Services has: (1) promoted domestic regulation of services as a priority issue for improving global trade in services, as reflected in the adoption in 2018 of the APEC Non-binding Principles on Domestic Regulation; (2) identified domestic regulation as one of the key issues in the final push on services towards completing the Bogor Goals, as reflected in the 2020 Final Report to Ministers of the APEC Committee on Trade and Investment; and (3) recognized the positive role the WTO Services Domestic Regulation Joint Statement Initiative is playing in progressing an outcome as highlighted in the 2021 Joint Statement of the APEC Ministers Responsible for Trade.

Acknowledging the difficulties which may be faced by service sector suppliers, particularly those of developing economies, in meeting licensing and qualification requirements and procedures, and technical standards;

Recognizing APEC economies' right to regulate and to introduce new regulations on the supply of services in order to meet policy objectives;

Noting the increasing barriers to services trade arising from the COVID-19 pandemic and the important role improved services trade can play in economic recovery;

Recalling the APEC Group on Services-endorsed studies and workshops on domestic regulation that noted the good performance of APEC economies on measurements of domestic regulations, the ground-breaking disciplines on domestic regulation in free trade agreements (FTAs) and regional trade agreements (RTAs) in the APEC region, and the significant economic gains to be made by broader adoption of improved domestic regulation practices;

Recognizing the high level of current participation of APEC economies in the WTO Services Domestic Regulation Joint Statement Initiative and each APEC economy's position in the WTO Services Domestic Regulation Joint Statement Initiative;

the APEC Group on Services congratulates participants in the WTO Services Domestic Regulation Joint Statement Initiative on the progress made to date, encourages them to redouble their efforts to conclude the negotiations by the WTO's 12TH Ministerial Conference, and encourages all remaining WTO members to consider joining the initiative, and stands ready to provide whatever support we are able toward completing that goal.

*From <https://www.apec.org/> 09/15/2021*

[TOP ↑](#)

### **East Asia**

#### **CHINA: Unveiling Measures on Trade, Investment Facilitation in FTZs**

The State Council has issued a guideline on promoting reform and innovation measures to facilitate trade and investment in the country's free trade zones (FTZs). China will open up wider to the investments made by Hong Kong and Macao investors, innovate the development of import trade, unleash the potential of new trade models, facilitate the import of medicine products, and boost the construction of opening-up channels, according to the guideline posted on the website of the State Council on Friday. The country will also speed up the development of multimodal transportation, further enrich the varieties of commodity futures, introduce overseas investors to trade in futures, improve regulatory policies on bonded futures settlements and innovate the management of bank accounts, the document said.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 09/03/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## **China Issues Plan for Further Developing Shenzhen-Hong Kong Cooperation Zone**

China's central authorities have issued a new plan for further developing a cooperation zone for the southern metropolis of Shenzhen and the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region. According to the plan, the reform and opening up of the Qianhai Shenzhen-Hong Kong Modern Service Industry Cooperation Zone will be comprehensively deepened. The plan, issued by the Communist Party of China Central Committee and the State Council, was made public on Monday. The general plan to establish the cooperation zone was approved by the State Council in 2010. A total of 11,500 Hong Kong-invested companies have been registered in the zone, with registered capital reaching 1.28 trillion yuan (about 198 billion U.S. dollars), according to official data released in late August. The total area of the cooperation zone will be expanded to 120.56 square km from 14.92 square km, said the new development plan. The new blueprint was formulated to help Qianhai better play an exemplary and leading role in the development of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, said the plan. By 2035, Qianhai will boast world class business environment, and will become an engine for high-quality development with strong capability in global resource allocation, breeding innovation and leading coordinated development, according to goals laid out in the new development plan.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 09/06/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## **China to Launch Pilot Programs on Business Environment to Better Benefit Firms and Individuals**

China will roll out pilot programs on the business environment in several selected cities in support of local reform effort in better benefitting firms and individuals, the State Council's executive meeting chaired by Premier Li Keqiang decided on Wednesday. The improvement of the business environment is a fulcrum in

unleashing market vitality and social creativity, and promoting high-quality development. The implementation of the Regulation on Improving the Business Environment will be advanced and a market-oriented, world-class business environment governed by a sound legal framework will be nurtured across the nation. On this basis, pilot programs on the business environment will be launched in Beijing, Shanghai, Chongqing, Hangzhou, Guangzhou and Shenzhen, cities home to a relatively large number of market entities. The goal is to better meet the needs of market entities and the public and align with advanced international standards, by deepening the reform of government functions.

"We need to further deepen the reform of government functions to improve the business environment and more effectively energize market entities," Li said, "During the first half of this year, 77,000 market entities were added on an average day. Revitalizing market entities is crucial for anchoring market expectations and maintaining steady economic performance." The meeting required greater efforts to break regional compartmentalization and local protectionism. Unwarranted restrictions on cross-regional business operations will be lifted. The hidden barriers against non-local enterprises in such areas as government procurement will be eliminated. Inter-regional recognition and verification of seven types of electronic licenses for passenger and cargo transportation will be promoted.

Market entry and exit will be made more convenient for market players. In addition to issuing paper permits and licenses, electronic business licenses will be issued in tandem, to make it easier for firms to get things done online. Procedures for opening bank accounts will be simplified and the time needed cut. Annual reports for market regulation, social security and tax will be integrated into one. Exploratory efforts will be made on the market access thresholds in response to the development of new business forms and models. Once a bankruptcy case is filed, bankruptcy administrators are allowed to inquire about information on the enterprises involved held by relevant institutions in accordance with the law, and dispose of seized property without going through the discharge procedures.

Investment and construction will be made more convenient. Competent government departments will conduct a package assessment covering geological disasters and soil and water conservation before approving land use as part of their fulfilling due responsibilities. Enterprises may start construction right away once obtaining the land-use permit, without the need for duplicate assessments. The approaches of pre-commitment compliance and integrated online processing will be applied to granting construction permits of utility access projects including water, electricity, gas and heating. "We need to solve more issues that acutely affect market entities and better bring out the effect of the country's macro policies. The views of market entities should be better heeded. Companies, especially micro, small, and medium ones, are facing many difficulties now. Their concerns must be taken most seriously.

The government must work hard in fostering a market-oriented, world-class business environment governed by a sound legal framework," Li said.

The meeting highlighted the need to open up at a higher level. The online verification of relevant port documents with some major trading partners will be promoted. Business-related registration procedures for investors from Hong Kong and Macao will be streamlined. Bonded fuel service for ships engaged in international voyages will be supported. Innovative and more effective regulation will be promoted. In areas concerning people's life and health such as food, medicine, vaccine and safety, a punitive compensation system will be implemented. Long-term mechanisms against arbitrary charge, fine and apportion will be established. Intermediary monopoly and compulsory services will be rectified, and differential treatment of enterprises in the acquisition of qualifications, tendering and bidding, protection of rights and other areas overhauled, to ensure fair competition.

Services for enterprises will be improved. A compensation and relief mechanism will be established for any damage of the lawful rights and interests of enterprises due to policy change and planning adjustment. Unified registration for pledge of movable property and rights will be improved. Information silos will be addressed at a faster pace. System interconnection and data sharing between departments and localities will be expanded, to help resolve the problem of repetitive requirements for market entities to submit documentation and have more matters handled on a one-stop basis online. "We need to explore innovative oversight approaches, better bring out the exemplary role of the pilot programs, and accumulate experience, so as to develop a unified and open, competitive and orderly market system," Li said.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 09/08/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## **China to Launch Trials to Further Optimize Business Environment**

China will pilot innovations and reforms on improving the business environment in some cities to bring more benefits to enterprises and people, according to a State Council executive meeting held on Wednesday. The meeting, chaired by Premier Li Keqiang, stressed the important role of optimizing the business environment in stimulating the vitality of market entities and social creativity, as well as promoting high-quality development. While emphasizing work to promote the creation of a market-oriented, law-based and internationalized business environment across the country, the meeting decided to launch trials in the cities of Beijing, Shanghai, Chongqing, Hangzhou, Guangzhou and Shenzhen, which host a large number of market entities. A slew of measures will be taken in the cities to pilot reforms by streamlining administrative procedures in line with international standards.

Efforts will be made to further break regional division and eliminate local protection, while promoting the construction of a unified, open and competitive market system, according to the meeting. Measures will be taken to facilitate market entry and exit, and to improve the convenience for investment and construction for market entities, while deepening opening-up in the cities, said the meeting. The country will enhance the long-term mechanism for curbing arbitrary charges, fines and apportionment, while treating enterprises equally in the fields including qualification, bidding and the protection of rights and interests to safeguard fair competition. Enterprises will also be provided with better services with streamlined procedures, according to the meeting. The meeting also adopted a draft of implementation measures on cracking down on illegal behaviors in the securities and futures sector to better protect the legitimate rights and interests of investors.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 09/08/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## **China Issues Guideline on Deepening Reform of Eco-compensation Mechanism**

China has released a guideline on deepening the reform of the country's ecological compensation mechanism to speed up the building of ecological civilization. The guideline, jointly released by the general offices of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and the State Council, details measures for the country to realize long-term ecological compensation goals set for 2025 and 2035. By 2025, an ecological compensation mechanism that is aligned with economic and social development should be basically built up. The classified compensation system targeting ecological elements such as rivers, natural forests and wetlands, and the comprehensive compensation system that features fiscal support will be improved. In the meantime, a market-oriented and diversified compensation pattern will be formed with the whole society more actively participating in ecological protection.

By 2035, the country will form an ecological compensation mechanism that meets the requirements of ecological civilization in the new era, according to the document. The classified compensation system will take into account factors including the economic and social development of the ecological protection areas, and the protection costs of diverse ecological elements. Efforts will be made to explore a protection mode that facilitates local governments to strengthen coordination in practicing ecological protection measures, said the document. While focusing on national ecological security priorities, the country will enhance the comprehensive compensation system with policies that conform to the financial capacity and promote equal access to basic public services. Efforts will be made to give full play to the role of market mechanism to promote diversified compensation and help regions that conduct ecological protection measures obtain benefits, so as to encourage the whole society to participate in ecological protection.

According to the document, the country will accelerate the building of a national market for trading energy use rights and carbon emission rights, which is to involve voluntary emission reduction projects on greenhouse gases in the fields of forestry, renewable energy and methane utilization. To expand market-oriented financing channels, financial institutions, qualified non-financial firms and insurers are encouraged to provide green services and products, the document added. Supporting policies regarding the rule of law, ecological environment monitoring, and fiscal and taxation will also be introduced to deepen reform of the country's ecological compensation mechanism. Related parties should take their responsibilities to protect ecological environment, and mechanisms to evaluate and supervise the implementation of the policies regarding ecological protection will be further improved, the document said.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 09/12/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## **China Issues Human Rights Action Plan for 2021-2025**

China on Thursday published the latest human rights action plan, setting the objectives and tasks of respecting, protecting and promoting human rights in the period from 2021 to 2025. Titled "Human Rights Action Plan of China (2021-2025)," the document was released by the State Council Information Office. The action plan has eight parts: "Introduction," "Economic, Social and Cultural Rights," "Civil and Political Rights," "Environmental Rights," "Protecting the Rights of Particular Groups," "Education and Research on Human Rights," "Participating in Global Human Rights Governance," as well as "Implementation, Supervision and Assessment." China has formulated and implemented three action plans on human rights since 2009. During this period, the Chinese people have prospered, their rights have been better protected, the policies and legal measures protecting the rights of particular groups have improved, and the legal safeguards for human rights have been strengthened, said the action plan. China has also fully participated in global human rights governance, making a major contribution to the international cause of human rights, it added.

The action plan lists a range of targets for the 2021-2025 period. China will promote the free, well-rounded and common development of all individuals as the general goal, it said. The Chinese government will hold fast to its people-centered approach, and exert itself to meet the people's growing expectations for human rights protection. It will guarantee the principal position of the people, and ensure that development is for the people and relies on the people, and that development benefits are shared by the people, it said. China will protect the people's economic, social and cultural rights to meet their expectation for a better life, and create more favorable economic, social and cultural conditions to achieve this goal, read the plan. Efforts will also be made to safeguard the civil and political rights and promote effective participation in social

affairs, thus laying a sound democratic and legal foundation for well-rounded development of the people, the plan said.

China will cherish clear waters and green mountains as invaluable assets, the plan said, adding that the country will continue to respect, work with, and protect mother nature, and promote the harmonious coexistence of humanity and nature. The plan said that China will reinforce the equal protection of the rights and interests of particular groups and providing them with extra assistance, to ensure all have an equal share in the fruits of development, and to provide policy support for the well-rounded development of all. It added that the country will conduct extensive research, education and training, and build awareness in this field, to create a social atmosphere of respecting and protecting human rights. China will participate in global human rights governance, the plan said. China will engage itself in all work relating to the UN human rights mechanisms, propel the international community to establish a more just, fair, reasonable and inclusive governance system, and work together to build a global community of shared future, it added.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 09/09/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## **China Formulates Plan for New Infrastructure to Spur Domestic Demand, Economic Transformation and Growth Sustainability**

China has formulated a plan for new infrastructure to spur domestic demand, economic transformation and growth sustainability. The State Council's executive meeting chaired by Premier Li Keqiang on Wednesday adopted the 14th Five-Year Plan for New Infrastructure Development, to spur domestic demand, economic transformation and growth sustainability. In the 14th Five-Year Plan period (2021-2025), a well-calibrated layout will be made for the development of new infrastructure, underpinned by information networks and technological innovation. This is conducive to sustaining growth, readjusting the structure and benefiting the people. "We should better harness the key role of effective investment," Li said, "Advancing new infrastructure development will help mobilize effective investment, sustain growth, readjust the structure and enhance people's wellbeing." Information infrastructure development will be accelerated. National backbone networks and metropolitan area networks will be fortified with higher bandwidth in a coordinated way. Gigabit fiber optic networks will be remodeled to deliver faster connection.

The commercial use of new-generation mobile communication networks of scale will be advanced. Space-based information infrastructure will be improved for satellite communications, navigation, remote sensing and other purposes. Ubiquitous and collaborative Internet of Things will be developed. Integrated infrastructure will be steadily developed. A multi-tiered industrial internet platform will be fostered to promote collaborative innovation. In line with advancing the new urbanization, smart infrastructure will be built in transportation, logistics, energy, and urban utilities.



Agriculture will be made more digitized. Infrastructure related to people's lives such as telemedicine and online education will be advanced. "The planning and construction of new infrastructure should move forward along with technological advances and innovation. We may plan ahead wherever possible, yet also take a fact-based approach and take things forward step by step," Li said. In-depth integration among universities, research institutes and high-tech enterprises will be facilitated, to strengthen capabilities of high-level, interdisciplinary and frontier research.

The research and development of industrial generic technology will be supported. Open and specialized makerspaces will be developed, to spur entrepreneurial activity and innovation. "Government investment, such as central budgetary investment and local government special-purpose bonds, should be better utilized, to mobilize investment from the private sector, and advance the development of new infrastructure in a well-calibrated and well-paced way," Li said. Investment from diversified channels will be encouraged, and openness and cooperation advanced. The private sector and overseas investors will be supported in participating in the investment and operation of new infrastructure. China will take an active part in the formulation of relevant international rules and standards. Security supervision systems will be improved, to enhance the capacity for security safeguards.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 09/22/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## **China to Establish Coordination Mechanism for Integrating Core Socialist Values into Laws, Regulations**

A guideline released by Chinese authorities called for the establishment of a coordination mechanism to integrate core socialist values into the development of the rule of law. The guideline was jointly released by the Publicity Department of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee, the Commission for Political and Legal Affairs of the CPC Central Committee, the General Office of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress (NPC) and the Ministry of Justice. The mechanism will be responsible for ensuring that core socialist values are incorporated into legislative items and judicial interpretations in the annual legislation working plans of the NPC Standing Committee and the State Council, said the document. It also called for setting up provincial coordinating bodies across the country.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 09/27/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## **Highlights of Evaluation Report on China's National Human Rights Action Plan Implementation**

The National Human Rights Action Plan of China (2016-2020), released by the Chinese government in September 2016, has been fully implemented, according to an evaluation by third-party experts. All of the 168 objectives and tasks have been completed, many of which have been completed ahead of time or over the goals set in the Action Plan, said an evaluation report on the Action Plan implementation unveiled Wednesday. "Generally speaking, from 2016 to 2020, China adhered to the people-centered development concept, earnestly implemented the constitutional principle of 'respecting and protecting human rights,' and took practical measures to actively promote the implementation of the objectives and tasks" of the Action Plan, read the report. The evaluation was conducted by the China Society for Human Rights Studies and the Human Rights Institute of Southwest University of Political Science and Law. Highlights of the evaluation report are as follows:

### **ECONOMIC, SOCIAL, CULTURAL RIGHTS**

On the front of safeguarding people's economic, social and cultural rights, the Chinese government has achieved excellent results in various indicators. The indicators include meeting the target of eradicating extreme poverty, implementing full coverage of social insurance, improving the system of property protection, enhancing the capacity of primary-level medical and health services, and promoting the standardization of and equal access to basic public cultural services. However, further efforts should be made in aspects including implementing the paid annual leave system, protecting the basic rights and interests of workers in flexible employment, and regularizing the application of the special working-hour system.

### **CIVIL, POLITICAL RIGHTS**

On the protection of civil and political rights, indicators were rated as excellent in terms of the protection of citizens' personal freedom in accordance with the law, the improvement of the protection of lawyers' rights to practice law, the improvement of the speedy processing mechanism for minor criminal cases and the speedy adjudication procedure for criminal cases, the improvement of the legal system for religious affairs, the improvement of the level of informatization and centralization of government affairs, the promotion of the disclosure of information on law enforcement and justice, and the protection of the right to information and democratic participation of employees in enterprises and institutions. At the same time, there is still room for further improvement in aspects including the full implementation of the principle of adjudication of evidence and the establishing of a relief system for victims of crime.

### **RIGHTS OF SPECIFIC GROUPS**

The Chinese government has taken a series of effective initiatives to guarantee the rights of specific groups in a favorable manner, raising the level of protection of the rights of ethnic minorities, women, children, the elderly and the disabled, said the report. Major progress has been achieved in such indicators as eliminating absolute poverty in ethnic minority areas, preventing and combating crimes of trafficking in

women and children, completing the elderly care system, improving the social welfare system and assistance system for the elderly, and providing rehabilitation services for persons with disabilities. Meanwhile, further improvements are needed in ensuring paid parental leave for male employees, building nurseries for children aged under three and developing social organizations for the elderly.

### **HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION, RESEARCH**

From 2016 to 2020, the Chinese government has taken major initiatives such as strengthening human rights education and adding new human rights research platforms to effectively raise society's awareness of respecting and protecting human rights. Remarkable progress was seen in indicators such as supporting universities to develop and offer courses related to human rights education, recruiting masters and doctoral students in human rights law studies and supporting experts and scholars in universities to carry out research on human rights theory with Chinese characteristics in various ways. Six research units were selected as the third batch of national bases for human rights education and training in 2020. However, the spread of human rights knowledge in society needs to be further improved.

### **INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS COOPERATION**

The Chinese government has received recognition in submitting the reports on implementing an array of international human rights conventions on schedule, participating in the work of the UN's human rights mechanisms, successfully passing the third round of country-specific human rights reviews by the UN Human Rights Council. Excellent results have also been attained in enhancing international consultation and cooperation and providing technical assistance in the human rights field demanded by other developing countries. At the same time, the preparatory work for the ratification of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights needs to be further strengthened.

*From <http://www.news.cn/> 09/29/2021*

[TOP ↑](#)

## **China Releases Medical-security Plan to Deepen Health Reform**

China has released its latest medical-security plan, issued by the General Office of the State Council, with the aim of benefiting people in all sectors of society. The plan, designed for the 14th Five-Year Plan period (2021-2025), states that China should establish a multi-tiered medical-insurance system with universal coverage that benefits both urban and rural residents in a fair and sustainable way. It highlights the coordinated advancement of the demand-side management of medical insurance and supply-side reform of medical services, in order to better serve the public. According to the plan, China should enhance the medical-insurance system through collaborative governance, optimizing medical-insurance payments and the drug pricing mechanism, while strengthening the medical-fund supervision system. Efforts should also be made to build up a strong supporting system with a solid legal basis

and better digital services, reads the plan. By 2025, China will see a more matured medical-insurance system that is equal, law-based, secure, smart and coordinated, the plan says.

To meet people's diverse demands for medical security, more efforts will be made to enhance the basic medical security system, improve the mechanism that provides insurance and aid for the treatment of major and serious diseases, and boost the synergy between health insurance and medical assistance, said Shi Zihai, deputy director of the National Healthcare Security Administration (NHSA). Over the next five years, a key task is to establish and improve a long-term mechanism that prevents and defuses the risk of disease-induced and relapse into poverty, Shi said. "People's access to new and quality medicines should also be increased," said Shi. The NHSA will continue to optimize the spending of medical-insurance funds and dynamically adjust the catalog of medicines covered by medical insurance to incorporate more cost-effective items. The NHSA will also further improve the mechanism for the trans-provincial on-the-spot settlement of medical bills via medical-insurance accounts and expand its scope of coverage along with better smart online services.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 09/29/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## **China to Tighten Regulation of Algorithms Related to Internet Information Services**

Chinese regulators will strengthen the management of algorithms related to internet information services to foster "healthy" and "orderly" development of the industry. A three-year campaign will seek to put in place a sound management mechanism and supervision system, and a standardized algorithm ecosystem, according to new guidelines issued by nine ministries or departments including the Cyberspace Administration of China. The guidelines urged enterprises to strengthen their sense of responsibility, and set up responsibility systems for algorithm security and sci-tech ethical review systems. Legal violations and malpractices related to algorithms will be severely punished, the guidelines stipulated. The guidelines also demanded efforts to prevent the abuse of algorithms, prohibiting activities that use them to tamper with public opinion, attack competitors and infringe upon the rights and interests of internet users.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 09/29/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## **JAPAN: Revised State of Emergency Guidelines to Focus on Medical Services**

The government on Wednesday unveiled a draft of revised state of emergency

guidelines that place more emphasis on the burden on medical services. The revised guidelines, which are being deliberated by the government's novel coronavirus countermeasures panel headed by Shigeru Omi, would allow the government to lift a state of emergency if the daily tally of new cases is on a downward trend, among other criteria. The state of emergency currently in place in Tokyo and 20 other prefectures is scheduled to end on Sunday. The government is planning to refer to the new criteria during discussions on whether to end or extend the declaration. Decisions on issuing or ending a state of emergency have been based on five criteria: pressure on medical services; the number of patients receiving medical treatment; PCR test positivity rates; the number of new infections; and the percentage of patients with unknown infection routes. The spread of the highly contagious delta variant led to a surge in infections over the summer even though COVID-19 vaccination rates have been increasing, mainly among the elderly population.

The proportion of patients with mild or moderate symptoms has surged, and many people have been told to recuperate at home or made to wait for hospital beds. The government has been reviewing its pandemic criteria as it claims that the existing guidelines are not in line with the current infection situation. Under the guidelines being considered, the government will consider such factors as the number of people with severe or moderate symptoms and the number of people recuperating at home. The number of cases in which there have been problems transporting emergency patients will also be considered, taking into account the pressure on medical services. "Experts have suggested the status of medical services should be the focus when making decisions," said Economy, Trade and Industry Minister Akira Nishimura at a meeting of the panel on Sunday. "We came to the conclusion that decisions should be made while taking into account criteria such as the number of patients recuperating at home or awaiting hospitalization," Nishimura said.

From <https://the-japan-news.com> 09/06/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## **Quad Countries Announce Slew of Tech Initiatives Including Shared Cyber Standards**

The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, better known as the Quad, has announced various non-military technology initiatives aimed at establishing global cooperation on critical and emerging technologies, such as AI, 5G, and semiconductors. The various technology initiatives were announced after the leaders of Quad countries -- comprised of Australia, India, Japan, and the US -- met on Friday, which marked the first time the group has come together in person. Among the initiatives announced by the security bloc was the intention to develop new global cybersecurity standards across various technology sectors. "With respect to the development of technical standards, we will establish sector-specific contact groups to promote an open, inclusive, private-sector-led, multi-stakeholder, and consensus-based approach," the Quad said in a joint statement.

As part of work to be undertaken towards establishing these global technology standards, the Quad said it would publish a Quad Statement of Principles, which will be a guide for implementing responsible, open, high-standards innovation. "We are working to make cyberspace and emerging and critical technologies trusted and secure, in open societies, solving problems, and addressing the supply chain challenges that in many ways hold the keys to our security and our prosperity and our environment in the 21st century," Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison said. A new Quad Senior Cyber Group will also be established. The group will consist of "leader-level experts" who will meet regularly to advance work between government and industry to drive the adoption and implementation of shared cyber standards; development of secure software; growth of the tech workforce; and promotion of scalability and cybersecurity of secure and trustworthy digital infrastructure.

The security bloc will also begin cooperation focused on space and combatting cyber threats, promoting resilience, and securing critical infrastructure together, the countries said. For space specifically, the Quad nations will identify new collaboration opportunities and share satellite data for peaceful purposes such as monitoring climate change, disaster response and preparedness, sustainable uses of oceans and marine resources, and on responding to challenges in shared domains. Other technology initiatives announced by the Quad over the weekend was a new fellowship that will be established together with industry. The fellowship will provide 100 graduate fellowships to science, technology, engineering, and mathematics graduate students across the four countries. New initiatives to improve semiconductor supply chains, 5G deployment and diversification, and monitor biotech scanning trends were also announced.

In announcing these new initiatives, the Quad sledged China, although China was not named, by jointly saying: "We will continue to champion adherence to international law ... to meet challenges to the maritime rules-based order, including in the East and South China Seas". "We affirm our support to small island states, especially those in the Pacific, to enhance their economic and environmental resilience," the Quad added. The movements from Quad countries follow various international pacts coming to the fore in recent weeks, with Quad members, Australia and the US, joining the UK to establish the AUKUS security pact. AUKUS, made public a fortnight ago, was established by the three governments to address defence and security concerns posed by China within the Indo-Pacific region. The trilateral security pact's focus has so far been military-heavy unlike the Quad's new initiatives, with AUKUS' first initiative being to help Australia acquire nuclear-powered submarines. Meanwhile, both China and Taiwan have formally applied to join the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), one of the world's largest trade pacts.

From <https://www.zdnet.com> 09/27/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## Japan Approves New Cybersecurity Strategy

At a meeting of Japan's cyber security headquarters, a new draft of a three-year strategy was approved, in which Russia, North Korea and China appear as countries posing a threat of cyber attacks, Report informs, citing foreign media. The cyberspace and space security situation around Japan is becoming very tense. Russia, China and North Korea have been repeatedly suspected of carrying out various kinds of actions in cyberspace, according to a document published on the headquarters website on September 28. Japanese Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi added that the country's government "intends to continue to implement measures to protect the country from cyber threats and to strengthen measures to ensure the country's national security." To strengthen cyber potential, Japan also intends to closely cooperate with the participants in the Quadripartite Dialogue on Security, which also includes Australia, India and the United States, the document says.

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[TOP ↑](#)

## BOJ Chief Says Accommodative Policy to Stay Under New Prime Minister

The Bank of Japan will maintain its "extremely" accommodative monetary policy even after a government under Fumio Kishida, the newly elected leader of the ruling party, is formed as faster economic growth is critical, BOJ Governor Haruhiko Kuroda said Thursday. Hours after Kishida was elected president of the Liberal Democratic Party on Wednesday, Kuroda told an online forum hosted by the European Central Bank that Japan's economic growth could return to pre-coronavirus pandemic levels later this year or early next year, but that the BOJ will further ease monetary policy if needed. "Whatever kind of fiscal policy or regulatory policy or any other policies that the new government, the new Cabinet pursues, we, at the Bank of Japan, will continue to maintain extremely accommodative monetary policy in order to achieve the 2 percent price stability target as soon as possible," Kuroda said. "This is our mandate and that mandate is not likely to change," the longest-serving BOJ governor said in English.

During his campaigning for the party's top post, Kishida, a former foreign minister, said bold monetary policy as well as the 2 percent inflation target, which he called a "global standard," should be maintained. Financial markets have been looking for any signs that the new leader will change course from "Abenomics," an economy-boosting measure that relies heavily on monetary easing, pursued by former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and his successor Yoshihide Suga. Kishida is almost certain to become the next prime minister replacing Suga, following his victory in the LDP leadership election on Wednesday, as the party and its junior

coalition partner hold a majority in both chambers of the parliament. Under an agreement with the government in 2013, the central bank pledges monetary easing to attain the 2 percent inflation target. Kuroda said both the BOJ and the government have their own roles but working together has its merits. The BOJ has been stepping up purchases of Japanese government bonds as part of its asset-buying program, keeping borrowing costs low.

"The Japanese government has expanded its spending substantially while the BOJ has maintained the low interest rates under so-called yield curve control, resulting in some positive synergy effects or policy mix effects of these policies," Kuroda said. Japan's fiscal health is the worst among advanced economies with its debt more than twice the size of its economy. Kishida has long been considered a fiscal hawk. As economic activity has been picking up despite the spread of COVID-19, inflation has been accelerating in the United States and Europe but not in Japan. The BOJ's 2 percent inflation target is still far off, with core consumer prices remaining flat in August. Kuroda said the underlying price trend is positive in Japan but the country needs more time to hit the target. "In the future, in the coming years, we must achieve the 2 percent price stability target. That is true. But at this moment, economic recovery, faster growth is the most important challenge faced by us," he said.

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[TOP ↑](#)

## **SOUTH KOREA: Ruling Party Gearing Up for Bill on Curbing 'Unjust' Practices by Domestic Online Platform Giants**

The ruling Democratic Party (DP) is gearing up to enact a new law targeting "unjust" business practices by domestic online platform giants that have rapidly grown to control a lion's share of the market. Last month, the party controlling an absolute majority at the National Assembly led a parliamentary approval of a law banning Google and Apple from forcing app developers to use the platforms' payment systems. The approval made South Korea the first country to introduce such curbs on global tech giants' in-app billing policies, which have come under increasing scrutiny around the world. Party officials said the DP plans to pass a bill targeting domestic tech giants, such as Kakao Corp. and Naver Corp., at the ongoing regular parliamentary session. About 10 different versions of the envisioned bill have been submitted for parliamentary review since last year amid growing concerns over the increasing predominance of mainstream online platforms.

Behind the legislative efforts are a consensus within the party that the companies' unfair business practices, based on their dominant market presence, such as high commission rates imposed on those running business on their platforms, have gone unchecked for years. The two online giants, controlling mainstream internet portals, Naver and Daum, respectively, have aggressively expanded into online commerce



ranging from online shopping and transportation to entertainment, posing a threat to the survival of small merchants. In a parliamentary speech a day earlier, DP floor leader Rep. Yun Ho-jung warned of looming regulations. "We still have a long way to go. The issue of prohibitively-heavy 20 percent commission, imposed by online platforms on consumers and businesses running on their platforms, remains unresolved," Yun said. "We will definitely rectify the uneven playing field between platform operators and businesses running on them."

In a recent seminar targeting Kakao's aggressive business expansion, DP Chairman Rep Song Young-gil hinted at the party's imminent action against the platform giants, saying "a market dominance issue has been on the other side of Kakao's breakout success." According to party officials, the DP plans to conduct an internal survey of the online platform market to formally raise the need for regulation during a parliamentary audit of the government, slated for next month. Rep. Jin Sung-joon, a DP member whose committee recently hosted a public hearing on the issue, said the focus of the party's upcoming legislation will be on "guaranteeing the power of businesses running on platforms to counter" any abusive practices by online platform giants. "(We) need a measure that will empower those businesses to form a group to have bargaining power against platform operators," the lawmaker noted.

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[TOP ↑](#)

## **S. Korea Proposes Digital Trade Pact with ASEAN**

South Korea on Monday proposed a new pact on digital trade with Southeast Asia to cope with the changing global business environment and forge deeper economic ties with the region. Trade Minister Yeo Han-koo held a virtual meeting of economic ministers with his ASEAN counterparts to share opinions on various issues, covering trade and the environment, according to the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy. ASEAN comprises Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Thailand, Singapore and Vietnam. During the meeting, Yeo said South Korea wishes to carry out joint studies on launching a new pact on digital trade with ASEAN similar to the Digital Economy Partnership Agreement (DEPA), which currently comprises Singapore, New Zealand and Chile. South Korea recently officially declared its intention to join DEPA as well, in line with its efforts to broaden ties in areas beyond conventional free trade agreements, including digital identities, e-payments, data protection and cross-border data flows.

The two parties also vowed to maintain strong trade ties to overcome the economic fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic, and make joint efforts to cope with the rise of more contagious variants, including the delta strain. The combined amount of trade between South Korea and the regional bloc reached US\$92.5 billion over the first six months of 2021, up 18 percent from a year earlier, the ministry data showed. South Korea and ASEAN plan to make efforts to implement the Regional Comprehensive

Economic Partnership (RCEP) in the near future. The mega trade pact, which accounts for one-third of the world's gross domestic product, was inked in November last year, with participants covering ASEAN, South Korea, China, Japan, Australia and New Zealand. Economic leaders of South Korea and ASEAN also agreed to cooperate in order to cope with climate change, while refraining from having environmental regulations emerge as new hurdles for free trade.

From <https://en.yna.co.kr> 09/13/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## South-East Asia

### **CAMBODIA: Parliament Ratifies RCEP, World's Biggest Free Trade Pact**

PHNOM PENH, Sept. 9 (Xinhua) -- The National Assembly of Cambodia on Thursday ratified the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), the world's largest free trade agreement (FTA), which comprises 15 Asia-Pacific countries. Ninety-three lawmakers, who were present during the parliamentary session, unanimously adopted the pact, which will be next reviewed by the Senate before being submitted to King Norodom Sihamoni for endorsement. Signed on Nov. 15, 2020, the RCEP is a mega trade deal between 10 ASEAN member states (Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam) and its FTA partners, namely China, Japan, South Korea, Australia and New Zealand. Cambodian Commerce Minister Pan Sorasak said the Cambodian government has projected that the RCEP accord will boost the country's gross domestic product (GDP) by 2 percent, exports by 7.3 percent and investment by 23.4 percent. "The RCEP agreement will become the core foundation for trade and investment in the region, further expand regional value chains and create more employment and market opportunities for peoples and businesses in the region," he told the parliament.

"It also gives support to the world on the multilateral free trade system," he added. Cheam Yeap, chairman of the National Assembly's Commission of Economy, Finance, Banking and Audit, said that the pact will enter into force 60 days after six ASEAN member states and three of the non-ASEAN signatories ratified the agreement. "This agreement will create an open trade and investment atmosphere for the region and will ultimately contribute to global economic growth and development," he said. Covering a region with a combined gross domestic product (GDP) of 26.2 trillion U.S. dollars, or about 30 percent of global GDP, the RCEP agreement is an unprecedented, modern, comprehensive, high-quality and reciprocal mega-regional trading arrangement that accommodates the broadest possible interests, conditions and priorities of different countries. Once in effect, the deal will eliminate tariffs on as much as 90 percent of goods traded between its signatories over the next 20 years.

## **VIETNAM: HCM City's Master Plan to 2040 Focuses on Climate Change Adaptation**

HCM City's master plan calls for the city to be developed into the nation's largest economic hub for tourism, industrial services and high-tech agriculture by 2040, with a focus on climate change adaptation. According to a Government decision on the master plan, the city is expected to have 13-14 million people by 2040 and 16 million by 2060. It plans to allocate 100,000-110,000ha of land for urbanisation by 2040. The city will remain the country's economic and technological hub, focusing on innovation as part of the national urban development strategy. Under the master plan, the city will develop a complete infrastructure linking the city with neighbouring provinces. The newly established Thủ Đức City will be developed into an innovative city model that will support the development of HCM City and the southern region. The city will integrate urban development with transit-oriented development (TOD), including underground-based public transport solutions. The master plan requires the effective use of the city's natural conditions and ecosystems to protect the environment and adapt to climate change. The Government has asked the city People's Committee to develop a plan to allocate capital and approve the total cost estimate, and work with the Ministry of Construction and others to make adjustments to the master plan. The city has also set a goal by 2060 to become an international trade and financial centre in the Asia-Pacific region. The city will create an appealing working environment with a diverse culture, heritage conservation, and a scenic river system. HCM City has faced serious flooding for more than 20 years. The previous city's development plan, which was done before 1975, was designed for only two million people. It has failed to keep pace with the rising population.

### **New Thủ Đức City**

According to a recently revised master plan submitted to the city government by the Department of Planning and Architecture, the new Thủ Đức City, formed by merging districts 2, 9 and Thủ Đức District, will have 18,930ha of land for urban construction by 2030, and 19,994ha by 2040. It currently has a population of more than 1 million. The figure is expected to reach 1.5 million by 2030, and 1.9 to 2.2 million people by 2040 and 3 million by 2060. The new Thủ Đức City will implement a range of key projects to create an innovative ecosystem. These include the Quang Trung Thủ Đức Software Park, the Advanced Technology and Innovation Centre (under the Department of Science and Technology), a High-Performance Computing Centre, a Creative Start-up Centre, an Advanced Research Institute (under the National University of HCM City), and a Centre for Research and Pharmaceutical Production Products, among others. The new city will also focus on developing quality human resources. HCM City will offer special incentives to attract investment in these projects. As the city's eastern gateway, the new Thủ Đức City will be developed

into a centre of innovation to assist the growth of HCM City and seven key economic hubs in the South.

*From <https://vietnamnews.vn> 09/18/2021*

[TOP ↑](#)

## **Ministry Reiterates Guidelines After Children Given COVID Jabs**

The Ministry of Health on Thursday urgently asked agencies and localities to strictly follow the ministry's guidelines over COVID-19 vaccinations after reports of children under 18 years old getting jabs. As well as the unregulated vaccinations, there were reports about the use of two different kinds of COVID-19 vaccines for a person, but the combination was not in accordance with the health ministry's guidelines. According to the ministry, unregulated vaccinations and vaccine use have a negative impact on the direction, management and implementation of the COVID-19 vaccination drives in Việt Nam. The ministry emphasised that currently in Việt Nam, COVID-19 vaccinations are only for people over 18 years old. Once the ages for vaccination is adjusted, the ministry will issue another guidelines, according to the document signed by Deputy Minister of Health Đỗ Xuân Tuyên and sent to local health departments on Thursday. On the same day, Thốt Nốt District authority in the southern city of Cần Thơ confirmed that 57 children aged below 18 got Pfizer jabs on August 11 at the vaccination site based at Thốt Nốt Secondary School.

Of the vaccinated children, the youngest is 12 years old, said Trần Minh Thắng, chairman of Thốt Nốt District People's Committee. A total of 362 people including 57 children received COVID-19 doses at that time at that site. The district authority organised a meeting on Thursday morning to examine the unregulated vaccinations. Director of the district's Healthcare Centre Nguyễn Kim Hải was accused of improper understanding about the health authority's documents and vaccination regulations, which resulted in the COVID-19 vaccines being offered to non-eligible people. "We are verifying responsibilities of involved individuals and groups," Thắng said, adding that sanctions would be decided later. As COVID-19 vaccine supplies to Việt Nam remain limited and can only meet a fraction of the needs, the country has been giving priority to vaccinate groups from 18 years old and above – including medical personnel, frontline workers, elderly people and people with underlying health conditions. When more supplies and appropriate types of vaccines are available, the health ministry would issue guidelines for vaccination of children. Early this month, the ministry announced that it signed an amendment to the original deal of 31 million doses with Pfizer for another 20 million doses specifically for nine million children between 12-18 years old. The 20 million Pfizer doses are expected to be delivered in the final quarter of the year. Việt Nam has received more than 38 million doses of COVID-19 vaccines, most of which are AstraZeneca.

*From <https://vietnamnews.vn> 09/18/2021*

[TOP ↑](#)

## **Vietnam: Đồng Nai Implements Socio-Economic Recovery Plan**

The southern province of Đồng Nai has started the gradual restoration of socio-economic activities, while ensuring the prevention and control of the COVID-19 pandemic, from Monday. Plan No 11102/KH-UBND of the provincial People's Committee aims to restart business following a period of social distancing. The province is home to 103 communes, wards and towns classified as green areas. In addition, the Center for Disease Control of the province has classified 25 communes, wards and townships as risk zones; 23 communes and wards are high-risk zones and 19 communes and wards are very high-risk zones. Leaders of the provincial Department of Health said that the key task in the coming days is to strengthen inspection and supervision of cross-infection in concentrated isolation areas and hospitals; strictly control hostels in locked down areas; strengthen testing, screening, and strictly control the source of infection at companies implementing the "3 on-site" model. Regarding vaccinations, up to now, the whole province has administered 1,848,424 doses of COVID-19 vaccine to 1,750,190 people, accounting for 77.65 per cent of the provincial population aged above 18 years, including 98,234 people receiving two full doses of COVID-19 vaccine. The province's plan is to speed up vaccination for workers in factories to gradually restore normal production after Monday. There are more than 610,000 workers in industrial zones in the province. Recently, businesses with a large number of employees have been given priority for the first dose of vaccine.

### **Đồng Nai holds dialogue with FDI firms**

Authorities of Đồng Nai held a dialogue session with associations and foreign direct investment (FDI) businesses in the southern province on Saturday to help remove difficulties amid the COVID-19 pandemic. At the event, participating firms praised Đồng Nai's business climate and agreed with the province's pandemic prevention measures. They said the authorities have provided prompt assistance, particularly regarding administrative procedures, to facilitate enterprises in arranging accommodation for workers to stay and work at their facilities. They suggested the province consider easing a number of criteria in its economic recovery plan, particularly concerning regulations on vaccination rate, trade and travel from Monday. Fielding queries from firms at the dialogue, Cao Tiến Dũng, Chairman of the provincial People's Committee, sympathised with their difficulties. He said local authorities will stand side by side with firms and create all conditions possible for them to overcome obstacles and recover production activities. Nguyễn Hồng Lĩnh, Secretary of the provincial Party Committee, said that more vaccines will be distributed for the enterprises. Some companies presented more than VNĐ17 billion (US\$743,000) worth of medical equipment and goods to support the province's pandemic prevention activities.

*From <https://vietnamnews.vn> 09/20/2021*

[TOP ↑](#)

## **Hà Nội Approves 17 Resolutions for the Capital City's Development**

Hà Nội People's Council has approved 17 resolutions for the capital city's development, as its two-day meeting ended on Thursday. The second session of the 15th-term municipal People's Council was held both online and in-person, taking place on September 22 and 23. The resolutions included; a five-year socio-economic development plan, a five-year medium-term public investment plan for 2021-25, developing infrastructure in suburban areas, fees for public schools in the 2021-22 school year, supportive policies for students affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and upgrading old apartment buildings in Hà Nội. The resolutions were unanimously approved by the delegates. Specifically, fees for studying online in public schools will be reduced by 25 per cent. Speaking at the meeting, the chairman of the Hà Nội People's Council Nguyễn Ngọc Tuấn said that these new policies would promptly solve people's problems, promote economic and social development, and ensure security and national defence. The resolutions play an important role in implementing the city's political agenda, both this year and for the rest of the term.

Tuấn urged the implementation of the resolutions to ensure that tangible results could be achieved, including improving the quality of life for the city's inhabitants. Authorities should deploy more effective solutions to manage the pandemic, through prioritising resources on pandemic prevention and control, whilst also promoting socio-economic development. The municipal People's Committee and its associated groups would continue to review policies to support people and businesses in the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, said Tuấn. Chairman of the Hà Nội People's Committee Chu Ngọc Anh said that the city has proactively adopted guidelines to manage the COVID-19 pandemic, and will adjust plans and policies to suit the developing situation. Protecting people's health is the first and most important task at hand. Anh affirmed the city's determination to overcome the unprecedented difficulties COVID-19 has caused, by ensuring socio-economic development targets for this year are met to create momentum for the capital to develop in the coming years. The Municipal People's Committee is aware of the challenges the city will face and will make every effort to act decisively to meet the goals of the People's Council, said Anh. The Hà Nội People's Council will lay out detailed plans and assign responsibilities to departments, branches and localities to implement their duties effectively.

From <https://vietnamnews.vn> 09/23/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## **New Resolution Eases Requirements for Work Permit Applications for Foreigners**

Thanks to Government's Resolution No. 105/NQ-CP on support for enterprises, cooperatives, and business households, the criteria for obtaining a Work Permit as a

foreigner in Việt Nam has been eased. To resolve some of the difficulties facing enterprises and foreign workers, this resolution has been approved by the Prime Minister and was issued on September 9. To facilitate foreign workers coming to work in Việt Nam, the Government requested the Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs to relax some of the regulations and conditions on granting and extending Work Permits, while ensuring pandemic prevention and control measures are not compromised. Under Point A, Clause 3, Article 3 of Decree No. 152/2020/ND-CP, foreigners must hold a Bachelor's degree or higher, or an equivalent degree, and have at least three years of work experience in the field were trained. That experience and academic qualification must match the job that the Work Permit application is related to. This rule has now been eased; foreigners must still hold a Bachelor's degree or higher, or an equivalent degree, and have at least three years of work experience in a field relating to the Work Permit application.

However, Point A, Clause 6, Article 3 of Decree No 152/2020/ND-CP states that the requirement for "having at least three years of work experience in the specialities that workers were trained in" has now been amended to "having at least three years of work experience that matches the jobs foreigners plan to work in Việt Nam". Point B, Clause 4, Article 9 of Decree No. 152/2020/ND-CP supports this with the term "giấy chứng nhận" (testimonial). This means that previous issued Work Permits can now be used as documentation to prove eligibility for new Work Permit applications, removing the need for all previous experience to have been gained outside of Việt Nam. It now reads: "The papers proving experts and technical workers under regulations in Clauses 3, 6 in Article 3 of this Decree are: diplomas, degrees, certificates, testimonials; confirmation documents issued by agencies, organisations, and enterprises in other countries about the years of experience of experts and technical workers; or the already granted work permits to prove experience."

*From <https://vietnamnews.vn> 09/27/2021*

[TOP ↑](#)

## **The Ministry of Public Security Completes Draft Decree on Cybersecurity Fines**

The act of buying and selling personal data of over 10,000 people should result in a fine of VNĐ80-100 million (nearly US\$3,500), according to a proposal by the Ministry of Public Security. The Ministry of Public Security completed a draft decree on sanctioning administrative violations in the field of cybersecurity to collect comments from agencies, organisations and individuals. Notably, in the draft decree, the Ministry of Public Security dedicated a section with 17 articles to stipulate penalties for violations in the protection of personal data. The Ministry of Public Security said that information and data security have received attention, but no sanctions have been applied. Personal information data is used, stolen, disclosed, exchanged, sold for profit, or solicited from customers when using services. Personal information of users of applications and services in cyberspace is being collected, exploited and

used publicly by enterprises providing digital content, e-commerce, and foreign data storage applications. "These are behaviours that need to be sanctioned to increase the effectiveness of the law, increase deterrence, and prevent crime," the Ministry of Public Security emphasised.

The fine will be double the above regulation for acts of disclosing or losing personal data after it has been transferred across the border, causing consequences to 100,000 data subjects who are Vietnamese citizens; and three times more with the act of disclosing and losing personal data after crossing the border, causing consequences for 1 million data subjects who are Vietnamese citizens. Acts of disclosing or losing personal data after it has been transferred across the border, causing consequences on more than 1 million data subjects who are Vietnamese citizens, will be subject to a fine equal to 5 per cent of total revenue in Việt Nam. In addition, the draft decree being consulted by the Ministry of Public Security also stipulates the form and penalties for violations of regulations on information security, cyber attack prevention, implementation of network security protection activities, and the prevention and control of acts of using cyberspace, information technology and electronic means to violate the law on social order and safety. The full text of the draft decree on sanctioning of administrative violations in the field of cybersecurity has now been posted on the Government's portal at [chinhphu.vn](http://chinhphu.vn) and the Ministry of Public Security's portal at [mps.gov.vn](http://mps.gov.vn) for comments for two months starting from September 20.

*From <https://vietnamnews.vn> 09/27/2021*

[TOP ↑](#)

## Central-West Asia

### **AZERBAIJAN: Working Out New Draft Law on Food Safety**

A new draft law on food safety has been developed in Azerbaijan, Trend reports on September 2. The draft law is planned to be submitted for discussion at the autumn session of the Parliament of Azerbaijan. This draft legislation covers issues of control over the quality of food products imported into Azerbaijan and produced in the country, and also provides for the use of new rules in this area.

*From <https://en.trend.az> 09/02/2021*

[TOP ↑](#)

### **Azerbaijan's Policy in Field of Youth and Sports Bears Fruit Every Year – Official**

The policy pursued in Azerbaijan in the field of youth and sports bears fruit every year, Yusuf Mammadaliyev, Head of the Youth Policy and Sports Department of the Presidential Administration of Azerbaijan, said, Trend reports. Mammadaliyev made the remark during the event on introducing the newly appointed Minister of Youth and



Sports Farid Gayibov to the ministry's staff. He noted that the name of Farid Gayibov is well known in the world of sports. "Farid Gayibov was elected President of the European Gymnastics Federation. The head of state has trust in him, thanks to his knowledge and experience," Mammadaliyev said.

*From <https://www.azernews.az/> 09/08/2021*

[TOP ↑](#)

## **Azerbaijan Sets New Rules for Collaboration of Border and Customs Authorities in Case of Emergencies**

The Cabinet of Ministers of Azerbaijan has announced new rules for collaboration of border and customs authorities in the event of force majeure and emergency situations, Trend reports citing the Cabinet of Ministers. The government made a decision 'On approving the list of territories of deployment and the number of checkpoints across the state border of Azerbaijan and the Rules for organizing and coordinating work at checkpoints across the state border'. According to these documents, in the event of any emergency, the border and customs authorities carry out mutual information exchange and carry out the following joint measures to eliminate the consequences of the incident: - taking under the protection of injured persons, damaged goods and vehicles; - creation of conditions for unhindered access of rescuers, firefighters and special equipment to checkpoints across the state border. The activities of border and customs authorities during the war, natural disasters and other emergencies, as well as epidemics, are regulated by the current legislation of Azerbaijan in this area. Passing through the state border of sick or citizens with disabilities, pregnant women are provided by border and customs authorities by mutual agreement in an extraordinary manner.

*From <https://en.trend.az/> 09/11/2021*

[TOP ↑](#)

## **Cabinet of Ministers Approves State and Consolidated Draft Budgets for 2022**

Azerbaijani Cabinet of Ministers has approved the state and consolidated draft budgets of Azerbaijan for 2022, Trend reports on Sept. 24. The relevant decision was signed by Prime Minister Ali Asadov. "The state and consolidated draft budgets of Azerbaijan for 2022 and indicators of the consolidated budget for the next three years" and "Concept and forecast indicators of economic and social development of Azerbaijan for 2022 and the next three years" were approved in accordance with the decision. These projects, together with other documents stipulated in the law "On the budgetary system", will be presented to the Azerbaijani president.

*From <https://www.azernews.az/> 09/25/2021*

[TOP ↑](#)

## **AUSTRALIA: New Garden Netting Laws - Don't Get Caught**

For decades keen gardeners have been covering their prized fruit trees and flowers in netting to protect them from preying wildlife. But in an Australian-first, it's now the prey that are being protected. Victoria this week implemented regulatory changes which require netting used by households to be fine enough so that creatures can't get stuck and possibly perish. Among the fatalities have been flying foxes, magpies, possums and sulphur-crested cockatoos, with Wildlife Victoria responding to 285 netting cases in 2020. "We believe our case numbers are just the tip of the iceberg. It's highly likely that a lot of animals may not be called in to Wildlife Victoria because they may already be deceased or they haven't been noticed," spokeswoman Lisa Palma said. In March 2018, 44 rainbow lorikeets were trapped in netting covering an apple tree in suburban Melbourne and 25 of them died.

The regulatory changes by Agriculture Victoria kicked in on Wednesday, requiring a mesh size of 5mm by 5mm or less at full stretch. "Netting with a large mesh size is more likely to entangle animals and their struggling can cause deep cuts and strangulation, often leading to death," the Agriculture Victoria website reads. "Reducing the mesh size of netting will greatly reduce the risk of animal entanglement." Fines of up to \$2700 can apply for the sale or use of unapproved netting. "When you go to someone's home and see a small animal struggling against the netting, it's a terribly sad situation. Many animals are so badly injured, they have to be euthanised," Ms Palma said. "By switching to the appropriate netting, domestic fruit tree growers will make a huge difference to wildlife welfare in this state. "It's important for all Victorians to remember that as humans, we share our homes, backyards and landscape with native wildlife. It's their home too." The new regulations do not apply in commercial settings.

From <https://au.news.yahoo.com> 09/04/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## **Call for Disability Pension Rules Overhaul**

Many people who should be eligible for the disability support pension find themselves stuck on the lower-paid dole or don't receive any income support at all. Economic Justice Australia will tell a Senate inquiry into the disability pension the existing rules need changing because they are confusing and unfair. Leanne Ho, the organisation's CEO, said apart from struggling to survive on the lower rate of payment, people with severe impairment who can't get onto DSP struggle with mutual obligations and the risk of having their payments suspended if they can't comply. "The income support system is not working as intended to support people with disability," she said. DSP provides income security for people with disability who are unable to work more than 15 hours a week. But many people can't access it because claim processes and evidence requirements are complex and confusing.

EJA wants changes to the way impairment tables are used by Centrelink to assess claimants' medical reports for each of their medical and psychiatric conditions. As well, the "program of support" - such as a work preparation program - requirement should be abolished because it meant people with severe disability can be indefinitely relegated to activity-tested payments such as JobSeeker. And the system of obtaining medical evidence should be simplified for people with psychiatric impairments, who often have problems ensuring the evidence gathered complies with all the rules, EJA says. The inquiry will hear from a range of groups including Anglicare, the Australian Council of Social Service and the Australian Federation of Disability Organisations.

From <https://au.news.yahoo.com> 09/06/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## **Government Hits Back over Coal Phase-Out**

The federal government has hit back at a senior United Nations official's call for Australia to accept coal's days are numbered. Selwin Hart, the UN's assistant secretary-general and special adviser on climate action, told the ANU's Crawford Leadership Forum the phasing out of coal is a prerequisite of limiting global warming to 1.5C. "If the world does not rapidly phase out coal, climate change will wreak havoc right across the Australian economy: from agriculture to tourism, and right across the services sector," he said. But he said coal workers and their communities were entitled to a "just transition" to new jobs. Resources Minister Keith Pitt said coal would remain a significant contributor to the Australian economy well beyond 2030. "The future of this crucial industry will be decided by the Australian government, not a foreign body that wants to shut it down costing thousands of jobs and billions of export dollars for our economy," Mr Pitt said on Monday.

He noted in the three months to July, coal exports soared to \$12.5 billion - a 26 per cent increase on the previous quarter. But while it was Australia's second largest export, the nation accounted for six per cent of the world's total annual production behind China, India and Indonesia. "Coal will continue to generate billions of dollars in royalties and taxes for state and federal governments, and directly employ over 50,000 Australians." Labor leader Anthony Albanese said the market was leading the energy industry away from coal-fired power toward cheaper renewables. "This is an opportunity for Australia," he said. Mr Hart said the region was looking to Australia for leadership, especially on the target of net zero emissions by 2050. Prime Minister Scott Morrison has said it is the government's "preference" to get to net zero by mid-century, but has not formally committed to it.

"National governments responsible for 73 per cent of global emissions have now committed to net zero by mid-century, and we urge Australia to join them as a matter of urgency," Mr Hart said. All countries have been encouraged by the UN to submit enhanced "nationally determined contributions" - or NDCs - before COP26 climate

summit in Glasgow in November. Mr Albanese said he was committed to net zero emissions by 2050 as it was "good for jobs, good for lowering prices, as well as being good for lowering emissions and good for the environment". A spokeswoman for Emissions Reduction Minister Angus Taylor said Australia had a strong 2030 target and a clear plan to meet and beat it. British high commissioner Victoria Treadell said a higher level of ambition for the 2030 and 2050 targets was needed from all countries. "We are very much hoping we will see that new level of ambition and I know it is something your prime minister is looking at, working hard to try to find a position in time for Glasgow," she told Sky News.

From <https://au.news.yahoo.com> 09/06/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## **New Plan to Ensure Vital Medicine Supply**

The federal government and pharmaceutical industry have finalised a new agreement to guarantee the supply of vital medicines from 2022. Drug companies have agreed to hold additional stocks of medicines onshore, of between four and six months, to better protect against supply volatility against the backdrop of COVID-19. The government's agreement with Medicines Australia also includes about \$5 billion in spending for Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme medicines starting July next year. Health Minister Greg Hunt says the agreement will help ensure pharmacies have continuous stocks of subsidised medicines and reduced cost for patients. "Australians will have early access to new life changing medicines regardless of where they live," he said on Tuesday.

From <https://au.news.yahoo.com> 09/07/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## **Policy Must Drive Jobless Rate Down: RBA**

A Reserve Bank of Australia official has again stressed the central bank won't be jacking up interest rates to cool a heated housing market. RBA assistant governor Michele Bullock says if financial stability concerns emerge from strong demand for mortgages, that will be dealt through so-called macro-prudential tools to curb housing activity. "Monetary policy really needs to get unemployment down and inflation up," she told an online Bloomberg seminar on Wednesday. "I don't think we can afford to be distracted from that." She said lending standards were being maintained by banks at present, and expects credit demand for housing to peak at 11 per cent early next year, compared with its current seven per cent pace. There are clear signs that the broader economy needs support at a time when around half the population is in lockdown battling coronavirus.

A pointer to the future performance of the Australian economy suggests annual growth continues to slow. The Westpac-Melbourne Institute leading index, which indicates the likely pace of economic activity three to nine months into the future, fell

again in August. But it does suggest annual growth will hold just above its long-term rate of around 2.8 per cent for now. "The leading index has held up surprisingly well during this downturn but it seems likely that there is more weakness on the way," Westpac chief economist Bill Evans said on Wednesday. The index fell from 1.4 per cent in July to 0.5 per cent in August. It was 3.4 per cent in March. Mr Evans expects weakness in components of the index, such as falling commodity and stock prices, will weigh on the index in September. Westpac expects the economy to contract by four per cent in the September quarter as a result of lockdowns in NSW and Victoria, before making a modest 1.6 per cent recovery in the December quarter as restrictions are eased.

"By December we would be expecting to see signs of this recovery in the leading index as it paves the way for a very strong rebound in 2022," Mr Evans said. Westpac expects growth to surge by 7.4 per cent next year. For now, the impact of restrictions is clearly being felt in the labour market, which saw 146,300 jobs lost in August. The National Skills Commission confirmed job advertising on the internet fell by 5.6 per cent in August, the third consecutive monthly decline after a 12-year high in May. The data - a pointer to future employment growth - recorded the biggest fall in locked-down NSW, declining by 9.2 per cent, followed by a nine per cent drop in jobs ads in the ACT. Victoria and Queensland both fell by 5.9 per cent. All eight occupational groups monitored by the commission fell in August.

From <https://au.news.yahoo.com> 09/22/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## **Climate Action May Weaken Australia**

Barnaby Joyce claims Australia's economy could be weakened if it takes action on climate change at the expense of key export markets. The United Nations is using a meeting of world leaders in the US to emphasise how important it is for countries to pull their weight on emissions reductions. Acting Prime Minister Barnaby Joyce argues Australia must ensure it can support its economy first and foremost to be "a good ally". "I'm sure that those within the American administration clearly understand that a weak Australia is a no-use Australia," he told Sky News on Thursday. "To be a strong Australia we have to have a strong economy, we have to earn the export dollars, we have to be able to support ourselves." Pressure is building on the Nationals to agree to more ambitious climate targets ahead of COP26 talks in Glasgow in November. "We've met every agreement that we've made. Other countries have not. I'm not saying America hasn't. But other countries have not," Mr Joyce said.

Australia is yet to update its 2015 commitment to cut emissions between 26 and 28 per cent on 2005 levels by 2030. Prime Minister Scott Morrison, currently in the US, aims to update this target by COP26 but the Liberal leader will need support from the Nationals. Climate was on the agenda when Mr Morrison met with US House

speaker Nancy Pelosi. US President Joe Biden brought climate envoy John Kerry to his meeting with Mr Morrison. UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson has urged the world to "grow up" and stop trashing the planet, while China says it will not build new coal-fire power plants overseas. Australian coal exports have been one of the casualties from increasingly strained diplomatic ties with China. Labor's foreign affairs spokeswoman Penny Wong warns the government's failure to commit to net zero by 2050 risks leaving Australia behind and undermining its relationship with the US. "It diminishes us in the region, thus hobbling our ability to add value to the alliance as a partner of choice for our neighbours," she told the United States Studies Centre.

From <https://au.news.yahoo.com> 09/23/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## 2、 Government System and Civil Services

### Asia-Pacific

#### Local Government as a Data-Driven Community Platform

Data, technology and customer experience (CX) are among the trends shaping the future of local governments, a new report shows. "The Future of Local Government" by KPMG International states that because the public interacts with local governments the most, those agencies are best poised to make a for constituents and businesses. "It is anticipated that game-changing technology will be central to forging local government organizations that are digitally enabled, data-driven and effectively serving the remarkably diverse array of stakeholders they serve across their localities and communities," the report states. "Technology, smart data use and emerging automation can transform local authorities organization-wide to fully integrated front, middle and back offices and transform core processes and workforces, enhancing self-service accessibility, response times, performance and operational efficiency." Using data to drive decision- and policymaking is becoming increasingly crucial. Historically, government data has been stored across an array of sources, databases, systems and departments; one in four local officials surveyed by Forrester Consulting said public datasets housed in multiple databases and lines of business systems are a significant obstacle to executing new customer-focused strategies.

"Bringing disparate data sources together to tap into the immense power of analytics and data-based business insights will play a critical role in reshaping local government for a new era," the report states. More important than just unifying data, however, is protecting it. Local officials working toward a digital customer-centric service model must establish a trusted identity management ecosystem. "Smart data integration and secure management of trusted digital identities" is key to "enabling

governments to serve their communities and stakeholders,” the report adds. Use of modern technologies is another trend, and it relates back to data. Seventy-six percent of survey respondents said their organization has a good or excellent data and analytics strategy, while 65% said their agency is good or excellent with data governance, but only 38% said their organization is good or excellent at data collection, enrichment and transfer. Data factors into another trend: CX in general and personalized services in particular. Forrester’s survey found that 51% of respondents believe their CX meets expectations, while 36% believe they occasionally or consistently exceed them.

Lafayette, La., is one example of a city providing personalized CX related to services. As part of its Smart City program, it has launched a 311 portal to encourage and respond to public requests, a traffic-monitoring system to alleviate congested roadways and a blockchain application to manage maintenance and safety of the city’s vehicles, according to the report. Another example is the use of a database by residents of localities in India’s Tamil Nadu state to access government services rather than going to an office in person. Blockchain secures the exchange of information. Respondents said that the three main obstacles to executing a CX strategy are data privacy and security (36%), the lack of qualified workers (33%) and a lack of real-time understanding of demand across channels and programs (31%). Still, almost half -- 48% -- said they plan to somewhat or significantly increase their investment in digitally enabled technology architecture, and 54% will invest in insight-driven strategies and actions, according to the report. “Smart data integration and secure management of trusted digital identities -- combined with newly integrated teams and processes -- will play a significant role in enabling governments to serve their communities and stakeholders,” the report states. For the report, KPMG commissioned Forrester to conduct research and interviewed government leaders in global economies in the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, Saudi Arabia and others.

From <https://gcn.com/> 09/02/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## **OECD Appoints Yoshiki Takeuchi as New Deputy Secretary-General**

Yoshiki Takeuchi has been appointed as a new Deputy Secretary-General at the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development replacing outgoing Deputy Secretary-General Masamichi Kono. Mr Takeuchi, a Japanese national, is currently serving as Special Advisor to Japan’s Minister of Finance after a distinguished career over nearly four decades at the Japanese Ministry of Finance. Over the past decade, he served as Vice-Minister for International Affairs, Director-General of the International Bureau and has held other senior positions, including as Deputy Minister in many international fora such as the G7, G20, IDA and IMFC. He has worked closely with international organisations, including the IMF, the World Bank,

the Asian Development Bank and other regional development institutions. Yoshiki led Japan's G20 Presidency finance team as Director General of the International Bureau, with a particular focus on digital taxation, quality infrastructure investment, capital flow management, and global imbalances. He holds a postgraduate degree from the University of Oxford and conducted research at Chatham House. "Yoshiki brings a wealth of experiences and knowledge to the senior leadership team at the OECD. I look forward to working with him very closely, as we continue to ramp up our efforts to help optimise the strength and quality of our recovery, address climate change, better manage the digital transformation of our economies, and support the sustainable expansion of global trade", OECD Secretary-General Mathias Cormann said. "My sincere gratitude and best wishes go to Masa Kono for his outstanding service to the OECD as Deputy Secretary-General for more than 4 years. He has provided strong leadership, in particular in the areas of financial services and climate change policy," Mr Cormann said. For further information on the appointment, journalists are invited to contact OECD Media Office (Tel: + 33 1 45 24 97 00). Working with over 100 countries, the OECD is a global policy forum that promotes policies to preserve individual liberty and improve the economic and social well-being of people around the world.

From <https://www.oecd.org/> 09/15/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## **APEC Advances Robust Structural Reform Agenda for Quality Growth**

To achieve sustainable and inclusive growth, APEC member economies advanced structural reform efforts in order to underpin the rebuilding of economies post-pandemic with a focus on productivity, innovation and ease of doing business. "With the pandemic lasting longer than we expected and putting economic activities under threat, the need for stronger concerted efforts among APEC economies and a more focused strategy for structural reforms to address economic challenges has become more critical than ever," said Dr James Ding, Chair of the APEC Economic Committee. Economies have implemented a wide range of measures to curb the spread of COVID-19, imposing restrictions and at the same time, providing wide-ranging support such as cash transfers and subsidies to people. While it has been crucial in protecting economies and livelihoods, the unprecedented stimulus is not sustainable for the long term. "Structural reforms, however, can provide an effective means of improving the efficiency and simplicity of conducting business that will be essential for recovery and harnessing the growth potential," added Dr Ding.

In June, structural reform ministers agreed to revitalize and enhance the APEC structural reform agenda and endorsed the Enhanced APEC Agenda for Structural Reform (EAASR), which outlines four areas of work that will contribute to strong, sustainable and inclusive economic growth:

Creating an enabling environment for open, transparent, and competitive markets



Boosting business recovery and resilience against future shocks  
Ensuring that all groups in society have equal access to opportunities and greater well-being

Harnessing innovation, new technology, and skills development to boost productivity and digitalization

Economic Committee members discussed the implementation plan for the new structural reform agenda highlighting the need for a review mechanism, intensifying engagement with the private sector and enhancing collaboration across APEC policy groups.

“The new structural reform agenda or EAASR is fundamental to economic recovery as it presents an opportunity for all APEC economies to reset and build back better in this era of digital economy,” explained Dr Ding. “We are looking to promote not only more productive and more innovative economies but also more inclusive and sustainable economies.” The committee also made progress on its annual flagship publication, the APEC Economic Policy Report, which is expected to be published in November. This year, the report will focus on structural reform and the future of work, looking at how COVID-19 affects the labor market and its disproportionate impact on women and vulnerable groups. “The future of work is even more significant now as the pace of digitalization and automation have been accelerated by the pandemic,” explained Dr Ding. “The upcoming report will provide insights for what future work entails for all of our economies and how we should respond and facilitate this advancement without risking people’s livelihoods.”

“There is no denying the significance of the APEC structural reform agenda,” said Dr Rebecca Sta Maria, Executive Director of The APEC Secretariat. “The committee’s work on competition policy, ease of doing business, regulatory reform, good governance and many others, are driving and supporting members in implementing reforms at home, which will push APEC’s objective to achieve strong, balanced, secure, sustainable and inclusive growth.” The committee also actively promotes initiatives to strengthen economic and legal infrastructure, which include the collaborative framework for online dispute resolution to help small businesses resolve cross-border business-to-business disputes. Trade flows in the region have increased ninefold since 1989 and member economies have since then doubled their gross domestic product (GDP) per capita, mainly by implementing structural reforms.

*From <https://www.apec.org/> 09/01/2021*

[TOP ↑](#)

## **Senior Officials Lean in Together on Trade as Uncertainties Loom Large**

APEC senior officials are convening to push bold and practical trade policies, seeking to secure recovery as the uncertainty of the pandemic looms large over efforts to prepare for future shocks. “APEC is at a critical juncture as we grapple with

the prolonged economic and health crisis. APEC has a responsibility to chart the way forward in order to achieve strong, balanced, secure, sustainable and inclusive growth across the region,” noted Vangelis Vitalis, the 2021 New Zealand Chair of APEC Senior Officials. “In the midst of these uncertainties, member economies are joining and working together based on our shared belief that more trade and more openness, together with structural reform and enhanced collaboration represent the best response to the pandemic,” added Vitalis, who is also the Deputy Secretary for Trade and Economic Affairs of New Zealand’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade. Officials have been mandated by ministers to consider how trade can help address the immediate crisis and help drive economic recovery across the region. This includes work on how to ensure vaccine manufacturing, supply and distribution, supporting global vaccine-sharing efforts, and addressing barriers to the flow of essential goods and services that can help address the pandemic, in a bid to ensure that the region’s health systems cover all people.

A recent economic update by the APEC Policy Support Unit showed that the recovery is still heavily dependent on vaccination progress and distribution across the region. Despite varied rollouts, positive economic growth of 6.4 percent is expected for APEC this year. APEC policy groups and senior officials reported on progress made to realize the 2020 Ministers’ Responsible for Trade Declaration on Facilitating the Movement of Essential Goods, including work on vaccines and related goods and services, as well as medical supplies and digital trade. “There are a number of initiatives that we would like to advance, including to modernize the list of environmental goods and services as a contribution to sustainability,” said Vitalis. Originally agreed in 2012 to reduce tariffs to no more than 5 percent, the APEC List of Environmental Goods covers 54 products that positively contribute to green growth and sustainable development. APEC remains the only intergovernmental body with an agreed list of environmental goods. Work is underway to consider the identification of environmental services as a complement to the ongoing work on goods.

“We are also working to find commonalities between the 21 member economies on how we can boost digital trade in the region through the internet and digital economy roadmap, while at the same time addressing gaps that allow everyone to enjoy the benefits of this sector,” he added. Vitalis also highlighted New Zealand’s role as host of APEC 2021 in converting the APEC vision of an open, dynamic, resilient and peaceful Asia-Pacific community by 2040—known as the Putrajaya Vision—into a program of work and implementation plan relevant to challenges APEC economies face today and over the next two decades. “There is rising protectionism across the world, which challenges all of us to rethink and lean in to support the fundamentals of regional economic integration and the international trade architecture,” Vitalis added. “On top of that, the social license for trade policy and for economic integration is increasingly under strain as we witness the unequal impact of COVID-19 on women, small businesses and Indigenous peoples.” “As a region, we need to work together to

ensure APEC effectively responds, not just to the immediate crisis, but also to the longer-term need to build a sustainable and resilient regional economy that benefits everyone.”

From <https://www.apec.org/> 09/03/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## **Women’s Economic Opportunities in APEC Improve, but Persistent Gender Biases Stifle Progress**

APEC member economies continue to make notable strides toward advancing women’s participation in the regional economy, but inadequate policies, sociocultural gender biases remain, holding back further progress, according to the APEC Women and the Economy Dashboard 2021, which was just updated. Updated every two years, the dashboard, prepared by the APEC Policy Support Unit, tracks developments in five key areas: access to capital and assets; access to markets; skills, capacity-building and health; leadership, voice and agency; and innovation and technology. In this year’s update, the dashboard adds a new digital-related indicator, reflecting the increased relevance of technology in people’s daily lives, accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic. “The disproportionate impact of the pandemic on women highlights existing gaps in our effort to advance women’s economic potential. If we don’t take action we could well reverse progress achieved by women so far,” said Dr Rebecca Sta Maria, Executive Director of the APEC Secretariat. “The dashboard is an important tool to monitor, track and inform member economies of the corrective policies we must put in place, and sooner rather than later.”

The report reveals noteworthy progress in terms of women’s access to jobs, recognizing members’ efforts in promoting gender equality in policies and practices. All APEC economies allow women to work the same night hours as men, while 18 economies have non-discriminatory hiring policies based on gender. “We continue to see the rate of unemployment for women in APEC decline, from 4.4 percent in 2008 to 3.7 percent in 2020,” said Carlos Kuriyama, a co-author of the report. “However, only 10 APEC economies in 2020 have a mandate for equal pay for work of equal value, a slow progress compared to eight economies that already had these requirements in 2008,” Kuriyama added. “Also in some economies, women are not allowed to work in the same industries as men.” Weak policies and gender bias continue to stifle progress in several key areas. For example, while women’s access to property and inheritance remains high, they still face restrictions accessing credit, mainly due to creditors’ discrimination based on gender and marital status. “These inconsistent policies weaken efforts toward ensuring wider access to capital and assets for women,” said Rhea Crisologo Hernando, a co-author of the dashboard, which is an initiative of the APEC Policy Partnership for Women and the Economy.

Looking at how the acceleration of digital technologies is affecting women, the report

warns of the likely risk of more women being unemployed. “Data from some APEC economies suggest that women are more likely than men to be employed in an occupation that is at high risk of automation,” she added. “Yet, the proportion of women graduates in science, technology, engineering and mathematics fields tends to be lower than that of men.” Retaining women in workplace requires active policies for retraining and reskilling, as well as supportive measures to facilitate childcare services, allowing women to have work-life balance. The report also highlights the lack of women’s representation in public leadership roles with only 23.9 percent of seats in parliaments held by women, the highest level reached since 2008. “Low representation of women in the highest political decision-making bodies could slow down efforts in ensuring gender equality in policy initiatives that promote women’s economic participation and social inclusion,” said Hernando. “There are different ways that economies could raise awareness to address gender biases and move toward an equal society, but the message is the same: addressing discriminatory policies and attitudes require collective awareness and action. And the time to start is now,” Kuriyama concluded. The APEC Women and the Economy Forum will take the issue of women’s advancement forward, addressing long-standing structural barriers and impediments to women’s full and meaningful participation in the economy. The forum will take place later this month, on 24 September.

From <https://www.apec.org/> 09/10/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## **ADB Appoints Albert Park as Chief Economist**

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has appointed Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (HKUST) professor Albert Park as its new Chief Economist. He will assume office on 15 December 2021. As Chief Economist, Mr. Park will serve as Director General of the Economic Research and Regional Cooperation Department, where he will lead ADB’s work on policy research and regional cooperation and integration. The department produces key analytical forecasts and reports, including the Asian Development Outlook, the bank’s flagship economic publication. “Asia and the Pacific’s remarkable achievements in development are facing severe challenges in the form of COVID-19 and climate change,” Mr. Park said. “I look forward to contributing to ADB’s long and established presence in providing knowledge and policy advice that will help shape a green, resilient, and inclusive recovery for the region.”

Mr. Park has more than 2 decades of experience as a development economist. A well-known expert on the economy of the People’s Republic of China, he has directed a number of large-scale research projects in the country. He has also served as an international consultant for the World Bank and a member of the steering committee for the Asia-Pacific Research Universities’ Population Ageing Hub. Mr. Park has worked on a broad range of development issues including poverty and inequality, intergenerational mobility, microfinance, migration and labor markets, the

future of work, and foreign investment. Mr. Park is Chair Professor of Economics and Director of the Center for Economic Policy at HKUST. Previously, he served as a founding director of HKUST's Institute for Emerging Market Studies, professor at the University of Oxford, and associate professor at the University of Michigan. He has also held editorial positions at a number of leading economic journals. A national of the United States, he received his bachelor's degree in economics from Harvard University and his doctorate in applied economics from Stanford University.

From <https://www.adb.org/> 09/29/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## East Asia

### **CHINA: To Further Improve Medical Insurance System**

China will further improve its medical insurance system during the 14th Five-Year Plan period (2021-2025) to better meet people's demands for medical services and drugs, according to a State Council executive meeting held on Wednesday. The meeting, chaired by Premier Li Keqiang, adopted a plan for national medical security during the period. Acknowledging the achievements made since the country advanced the new round of medical reform, including putting in place the world's largest basic medical insurance network covering the entire population, the meeting stressed improving the multi-tiered medical insurance system. Support policies for medical insurance will be refined in a category-based manner, it said. The serious illness insurance scheme will better dovetail with the basic medical insurance schemes to improve insurance benefits, according to the meeting, which also underscored improving the major disease relief mechanism for disadvantaged groups.

A mechanism will be improved where treatment is provided before the medical bills are paid in case of major epidemics, and policy measures for maternity insurance will be improved, according to the meeting. Development of the tiered diagnosis and treatment system and medical consortiums will be advanced, and eligible medical institutions at the primary level will be listed as designated medical insurance institutions to improve medical services at the primary level, according to the meeting. Centralized drug bulk-buying will continue to be implemented, and drugs with high clinical value and notable benefits for patients will be made reimbursable under the basic medical insurance schemes in a timely manner, the meeting added. The meeting also underlined improving services of medical insurance handling and intensifying the oversight of medical insurance funds.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 09/15/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

### **China to Reinforce People's Tribunals' Role in Primary-level Governance**

China has rolled out measures to boost the role of people's tribunals, the lowest level of courts in China, in primary-level social governance, according to a guideline issued by the country's top court. The guideline, published Wednesday by the Supreme People's Court (SPC) on promoting high-quality development of people's tribunals, requires establishing community-based systems for the rule of law supported by people's tribunals. People's tribunals should step up coordination with local governments to prevent and settle civil disputes, serve rural vitalization, protect the legitimate rights and interests of rural residents, and drive civilization progress in rural areas, it says. The guideline requires people's tribunals to thoroughly implement the Civil Code in handling cases typical to the primary level, such as cases involving domestic affairs, private lending and personal injury damages.

Efforts should be made to protect the safety and dignity of left-behind children, women, the elderly and other vulnerable groups. Litigation service centers with self-service equipment will be set up at people's tribunals, the guideline says, adding further efforts will be made to deliver cross-regional case-filing services. Data from the SPC shows that by August 2021, China had a total of 10,145 people's tribunals in operation, of which 6,201 were in rural areas. According to the data, people's tribunals nationwide accepted 20.4 million cases between 2016 and 2020, of which nearly 20.3 million were concluded.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 09/15/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## **Enhanced Civil Affairs Work Contributes to Building Moderately Prosperous Society in All Respects**

China has made progress in enhancing civil affairs work since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China in 2012, laying a solid foundation for building a moderately prosperous society in all respects, a civil affairs official said Friday. Efforts were made to ensure disadvantaged groups are not left behind in the process of realizing moderate prosperity as well as in improving primary-level social governance and basic social services, said Li Jiheng, minister of civil affairs, at a press conference. By the end of 2020, over 19 million poor people were covered by the subsistence allowance system or the relief and support system for people in extreme difficulties, said Li. Efforts were also made to strengthen the security network to ensure basic living standards for people with difficulties. By the end of 2020, over 44 million people were covered by the urban and rural subsistence allowance system, with the average allowance standards increasing by 105 percent and 188 percent, respectively, over 2012, Li said.

In 2020, temporary assistance was provided to about 13.8 million people, he added. A classified security system for children in difficulty was established to help orphans, disabled and left-behind children, Li said, noting that over 250,000 de facto

unattended children have been included by the country's security system for the first time since 2020. By the end of 2020, nearly 27 million people with disabilities benefited from the living allowance system for the disabled with difficulties and the nursing care subsidy system for the severely disabled, Li said. He added that timely assistance was also provided for people affected by the epidemic and natural disasters. Speaking of the progress in grassroots social governance, Li said social organizations played an active role in facilitating poverty eradication and improving social services. During the period of 2016 to 2020, more than 90,000 social organizations invested 124.5 billion yuan (about 19 billion U.S. dollars) into poverty-relief programs that benefited more than 100 million people, said Zhan Chengfu, vice minister of civil affairs.

China's charity organizations spent 50 billion yuan annually to help poor groups and people in need in recent years, and charity organizations, enterprises and individuals donated over 39.6 billion yuan to support the fight against COVID-19 in 2020, said Wang Aiwen, vice minister of civil affairs. Basic social services directly related to people's well-being, such as elderly care, marriage and funeral services, have been upgraded and expanded to meet public expectations. By the end of 2020, old-age allowance, elderly care service subsidies and nursing care subsidies for elderly people with disabilities had benefited 31 million, 5.35 million and 813,000 senior citizens, respectively, according to Li. To better respond to the aging population, the Ministry of Civil Affairs will continue improving elderly-care facilities and exploring new modes of service during the 14th Five-Year Plan period (2021-2025), vice minister of civil affairs Gao Xiaobing said.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 09/17/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## **China Advances Reforms to Facilitate Talent Development**

After working as a ceramics painter for 18 years, Li Xiaogui is overjoyed that this year he will be awarded the senior professional title, the highest of its kind. "It'll be a recognition of my work and can motivate us to keep improving our skills," said Li, a famous ceramic painter in Jingdezhen, an ancient porcelain capital in east China's Jiangxi Province. His promotion was made possible after China's Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security issued a professional title system reform guideline for arts and crafts personnel in February, allowing them to have the highest professional title for the first time. Major tasks of China's professional title system reform have been completed after five years of effort, which are expected to affect around 80 million professionals, according to the ministry. "We have included senior titles in 11 new work categories including engineering, economics, and accounting, which will benefit nearly 30 million professional technicians," said Liu Dongmei, an official with the ministry.

Under the reform, people working in 13 new industries, such as animation and gaming, sports injury prevention and express engineering, can be assessed and granted job titles based on their skills. "The reform gives more credit to people's practical work performance instead of merely looking at their academic certificates, papers or seniority during the technical assessment," said Liu, adding that medical workers should be assessed mainly by their practical clinical ability and teachers by teaching quality. Besides reforming the professional title system, China is ramping up efforts to create a level playground for men and women in the workplace to help female talent break the glass ceiling and further succeed. In July, the Ministry of Science and Technology and the All-China Women's Federation, as well as other 10 departments, launched a series of measures to support female researchers in playing a greater role in sci-tech innovation.

The document has put forward 16 specific measures relating to six aspects of career development of female talent, such as training high-level female sci-tech talent, supporting their innovation and entrepreneurship capabilities, improving the evaluation mechanisms, and supporting their research during pregnancy and nursing periods. Cao Lina published a paper in Nature, as the first author, on a new catalyst for hydrogen fuel cells at the age of 29. Now, the 31-year-old associate researcher at the University of Science and Technology of China has more confidence in her research after hearing these new measures. In the field of physical chemistry, most scientific research equipment is bulky, and females do appear a little short on physical strength.

But Cao said that women have certain advantages, such as meticulous observation, rational planning and patient execution, allowing them to play unique roles in scientific research. "The golden age of a research career overlaps with the peak reproductive period of women, and people have limited energy, which means difficult decisions for many female sci-tech talent," Cao said, adding that the new policy now helps ensure their career is not interrupted because of pregnancy. The policy also aims to cultivate more young female talent through providing gender-equality education, encouraging female students to participate in sci-tech competitions, and setting up scholarships for outstanding female college students in science and engineering. Another breakthrough of this policy is supporting female talent to obtain more sci-tech resources and enhance their participation in the sci-tech decision-making process.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 09/29/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## **JAPAN: Launching Digital Agency to Boost Government Technology**

Japan was looking to give its government services and record keeping a technological upgrade with Wednesday's launch of a new Digital Agency, hoping to



bring a much needed overhaul to antiquated systems that have had their shortfalls highlighted by the pandemic. Japan currently relies heavily on old fashioned paperwork for its people to apply for government services, while central and local government offices use different systems to store and manage data, lacking compatibility. The lack of digitalization in government services for the public became a major problem during the pandemic, causing delays and mishandling of applications for financial subsidies and support, as well as slowing medical data transmission needed for virus measures. Fax-based data sharing at local health centers caused delays in recording and sharing information related to COVID-19 patients.

Problems were also reported with the vaccination reservation system and a separate system for giving updates on the rollout. A lack of digitalization also caused delays at many schools early in the pandemic last year as they switched to online classes. Promotion of digitalization has been one Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga's political priorities since he took office last September as a way to push administrative reforms. Some of the problems raised by the pandemic have since been improved, but the launch of the new agency is aimed at cementing such changes and expanding them elsewhere. Chief Cabinet Secretary Katsunobu Kato said the government through the Digital Agency will strive to promote a society where all citizens can enjoy the convenience of digital services without causing "digital divide" and privacy concerns.

The agency, headed by Digital Transformation Minister Takuya Hirai, has about 600 staff, including 200 hired from the private sector, with the remainder transferred from other ministries. The agency aims to digitalize administrative procedures in 31 areas such as elderly care and childrearing, while standardizing different systems used by municipalities within five years, officials said. The agency will also aim to digitalize COVID-19 vaccine certificates for those who have completed vaccinations by the end of the year. Citizens will be able to obtain official family registration records needed to obtain passports or other purposes without submitting or mailing a form to government offices. The agency will also promote use of a 12-digit "My Number" assigned to each individual issued as a multi-purpose identification card that can access bank accounts and other public and private services.

From <https://japantoday.com> 09/02/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## **Jumble of New Systems Created Chaotic Response to Pandemic in Japan**

The COVID-19 pandemic shined a spotlight on the delay in the digitizing of society, a centerpiece policy of Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga aimed at smoothing administrative procedures. Suga put the issue in the forefront after the bitter experience of seeing the government's "analog dependent" response at the start of the pandemic, which occurred while he was Chief Cabinet Secretary. The initial

response by the Cabinet of then Prime Minister Shinzo Abe was chaotic. Public health centers would receive a report of confirmed infection cases by fax from medical institutions, and manually input the information of infected individuals into their computers. As the number of newly infected grew day by day, processing capability could not keep up, causing delays in the compilation of accurate data. To address the situation, the Health, Labor and Welfare Ministry last May began using the HER-SYS system that allows medical institutions to directly input data on infected patients, but the many items needed to be input made it time consuming.

When the government provided a uniform ¥100,000 benefit to all residents, online applications overwhelmed the system, prompting local governments one after another to resort to having people apply by mail. The Suga administration also stumbled in the rollout of vaccines. The Cabinet Secretariat's IT strategy office, which is in charge of preparing for the launch of the Digital Agency, handled the Vaccination Record System (VRS) for recording and managing vaccinations, but did not get it to operate well. "Vaccination records of residents have to be input into both the VRS and the system that our city created on its own," said Akihiro Kimura, head of the city coronavirus response office of Ashikaga, Tochigi Prefecture. The VRS records such details as the names of inoculated residents and dates of vaccinations, but does not have the function of managing reservations for vaccinations. The two doses of the vaccine need to be administered at a specific interval, making it necessary that the date of the first shot and the reservation date for the second be handled simultaneously. The Ashikaga city government decided to use its own system, which included this function, together with the VRS, but priority was put on inputting information into its own system.

As a result, there were nearly 20,000 cases of data not yet input into the VRS in early July. Ashikaga was not alone. Many local governments got backlogged inputting information, leaving the central government unable to grasp how the vaccination rollout was progressing. Behind this disorderly jumble of new systems was a lack of cooperation between government agencies and between the central and local governments. The health ministry initially planned to use the "immunization register" that each municipal government already keeps for other vaccinations, but later found that it would take two to three months before the records could be processed. The Prime Minister's Office regarded this as problematic, and the IT strategy office decided to introduce the VRS at the beginning of this year. However, by that time, Ashikaga and numerous other local governments had already begun creating their own systems. "The central government failed to coordinate on how a nationwide system should be built," Kimura pointed out. There were also glitches in COCOA, a smartphone app introduced by the health ministry to notify those who may have come into contact with an infected person. There were cases of the notifications not being sent, and the problem was left unfixed. Not only did health ministry officials lack knowledge about the app, there was a lack of cooperation with the contractor that designed it.

The central government's sense of crisis is strong. "Neither the collaboration between the public and private sectors nor between the central and local governments was enough," Takuya Hirai, appointed as digital minister, said in remorse, then stressed that the Digital Agency launched in September will create systems easier for local governments to use. A major role for the Digital Agency will be to standardize systems used by the central and local governments, thereby smoothing the way for cooperation. A common platform will be developed for the central government's ministries and agencies, while a system will be prepared for local governments with standard specifications for links to each sector. In this way, the cacophony of multiple systems can be avoided. "For example, if there is a future outbreak of a new infectious disease, the central government can create a unified system to manage all data, from the delivery and stockpile of vaccines to the vaccination records of individuals," an official in charge at the IT strategy office explained. "This will be accessible by every ministry and agency and local government all around the country."

The central government is aiming to have all local governments switched over to the standardized system by fiscal 2025. The timeline, initially set vaguely as "sometime in the 2020s," was made clearer at the command of the prime minister. While the central government has been rushing to get local governments on board, there are those critical of the move. "Large-scale local governments have been carrying out their own administrative services for residents and have their own systems," an Osaka City official said. "It will be difficult to standardize everything by fiscal 2025." Local governments across the country have expressed uneasiness with the plan, wondering if the project will steadily progress. The Digital Agency is an organization meant to help extend the benefits of digitization to the people. There are many issues that still need to be addressed to achieve Suga's vision of "digitization that is user-friendly and leaves no one behind," such as thoughtfully grasping the actual situation of local governments that cannot make the shift and extending support to them.

From <https://the-japan-news.com> 09/11/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## South-East Asia

### **MALAYSIA: Parliament Convened amid New Political Alignment**

Malaysia's second parliament session of the year convened on Monday amid changes in the balance of power between the ruling coalition and the opposition. This is the first gathering of the Lower House of the Parliament since the appointment of Ismail Sabri Yaakob as the new prime minister in August, with the country facing political pressures, a sluggish economy and the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. The session is scheduled to last until Oct. 12. In his address to the

present members of parliament (MPs), the country's King Sultan Abdullah Sultan Ahmad Shah urged cooperation and stability to help the country recover from its many challenges and thanked the government and opposition MPs for coming to a cooperative agreement. "I also welcome and greatly appreciate the efforts towards realizing the new bipartisan cooperation approach among all quarters that will create a new political landscape and bring about changes in the country's administration system," the King said in his opening speech. While describing such political maturity as a positive change, Sultan Abdullah said only with strong unity, solidarity and togetherness of the people as a big Malaysian family, can the country face all challenges and trials.

He also cautioned the MPs to avoid becoming complacent and satisfied in the efforts to curb COVID-19 in the country and urged the implementation of a whole-of-society effort strategy with effective communication narratives. Like his predecessor former Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin, Ismail Sabri also commands a narrow majority among MPs and cross party cooperation is seen as crucial for him to govern effectively. Ismail Sabri has taken a more conciliatory tone in dealing with the opposition since being appointed in August. He met with opposition leaders and offer to work together by inviting them to join the national recovery council and the special committee on COVID-19. Malaysia has seen daily fresh infections hover around the 20,000 mark since August, with deaths reaching a new high on Saturday after 592 deaths were reported, pushing the total fatalities to 20,711 as of Sunday, while there are some 237,277 active cases. The government has ramped up its vaccination rate with some 227,476 doses administered on Sunday alone and some 65.4 percent of the population have received at least one dose and 52.6 percent are fully vaccinated. Restrictions have largely been eased across the country and more economic sectors being allowed to operate, with domestic tourism opening up in some states and inter-district travel being allowed.

*From <http://www.xinhuanet.com> 09/13/2021*

[TOP ↑](#)

## **PHILIPPINES: Duterte Accepts His Party's Vice Presidential Nomination in 2022 Elections**

Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte formally accepted on Wednesday the ruling party PDP-Laban's nomination to run for vice president in next year's national elections. "No words can express my gratitude for your continued trust and confidence in my leadership and for nominating me as the party's official vice presidential candidate in the 2022 election," Duterte, 76, said in a speech during the party's national convention held in Pampanga province, north of Manila. The party also nominated Duterte's long-time aid and Senator Christopher Go as the party's official presidential candidate, while Go declined the nomination. "I have already respectfully declined your endorsement through a letter I sent last week. I am hoping that the party will continue to respect my decision," Go said, adding he would

continue to support the party and urged them to prioritize other personalities who are interested to run for presidency. Eight government officials are also named as PDP-Laban's official senatorial candidates in next year's polls. Candidates for the 2022 elections will officially file their candidacy in October. Duterte thanked his party mates and political allies for their support of his administration. "I cannot thank you enough for your strong support for the administration's priorities, especially our fight against illegal drugs, terrorism, corruption, and poverty." "I am hopeful that this will allow me to continue serving the Filipino people and help lead the entire nation towards greater progress," Duterte added. Duterte said his running for the vice presidency is due to "a sense of love of country." "I want to see the continuity of my efforts even though I may not be the one giving the direction." Duterte 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.

*From <http://www.xinhuanet.com> 09/08/2021*

[TOP ↑](#)

## **THAILAND: Cabinet Cuts Social Security Contributions from 5% to 2.5%**

"The aim is to alleviate the financial burden of business owners and their employees during the Covid-19 situation," Labour Minister Suchart Chomklin said on Wednesday. "Monthly employee contributions under Article 39 of the Social Security Act will be cut from 432 baht to 235 baht." Article 39 applies to those who have stopped working but wish to maintain their social security benefits. Social Security Office secretary-general Thossaphol Kritwongwiman said this measure should help up to 480,000 businesses and 13 million employees. For more information on social security or labour-related issues, call Labour Ministry's 1506 hotline.

*From <https://www.nationthailand.com> 09/22/2021*

[TOP ↑](#)

## **VIETNAM: Investment in Institutional Improvement Is Investment for Sustainable Development**

Prime Minister Phạm Minh Chính on Thursday asked ministries, agencies and localities to pay more attention and spend more resources to build and improve institutions, saying that "investment in institutional improvement is investment in sustainable development." "Legislation building and institutional improvement are for the sake of the nation and people. This important work must go in line with the fight against corruption and interest groups," he said. PM Chính chaired a national online meeting on institutional building and improvement yesterday, emphasising that the work was among strategic breakthroughs he planned to make during his term. He asked for recommendations to solve pending problems relating to institutions, particularly those related to the socialist-oriented market economy and international

integration. Not only naming the problems, but the recommendations should also include specific responsibilities of individuals, agencies and organisations in addressing relevant issues. At the meeting, Chính highlighted detailed requirements and tasks relating to institution building.

First, heads of ministries/agencies and chairpersons of provinces/cities People's Committees directly command, oversee, examine the institution-building activities.

Second, institutional improvement policies and directions of the Communist Party of Việt Nam must be specified in detailed legal regulations.

Third, measures are sought to make institutions become a momentum and leverage for social development in which human resources, natural resources and cultural values are promoted to the fullest.

Fourth, shortcomings of the current legal framework and institution shall be detected and amended properly so that people and enterprises must be at the centre of all policies and legislation. Law enforcement must be supervised closely.

Finally, decentralisation must be strengthened and go along with effective supervising tools/measures, improved accountabilities and administrative procedure simplification.

Minister, Chairman of the Government Office Trần Văn Sơn said that it was necessary to have detailed regulations on the coordination among agencies in legislation building as well as sanctions for individuals, especially heads of the agencies which failed to complete their assigned tasks. Sơn said that agencies that are assigned to compile legal documents are responsible for the content of the proposed draft of the legal documents. They should minimise controversial content before submitting the draft to Government and Prime Minister, Sơn said, adding that law compiling agencies should actively discuss with others and seek agreement on the controversial issues.

*From <https://vietnamnews.vn/> 09/17/2021*

[TOP ↑](#)

## **Special Working Groups to Be Set Up to Assist Businesses, People**

Prime Minister Phạm Minh Chính has ordered ministries, agencies, and localities to set up special working groups to tackle difficulties facing businesses and people amid the COVID-19 pandemic. According to the Government Office, on August 30, the PM issued a decision on the establishment of his special working group for addressing difficulties the COVID-19 outbreak has caused to businesses and people. To carry out solutions relevant to each ministry, sector, and locality in a timely manner, the PM asked ministries, ministry-level agencies, Government agencies, and provincial-level People's Committees to quickly set up special working groups headed by their leaders. These working groups have to direct the effective implementation of tasks and solutions stated in the National Assembly and the

Government's resolutions, as well as the PM's directions; proactively coordinate with related ministries, sectors, localities, and agencies; actively grasp information and take timely measures to handle difficulties, obstacles, and proposals; and assist enterprises in their production and business activities to safely and flexibly adapt to the COVID-19 pandemic. They also need to cut unnecessary administrative procedures while not creating "sub-permits" so as to not adversely affect enterprises' operations and people's lives, thereby helping to promote socio-economic development and achieve the best possible socio-economic outcomes. The PM also demanded they make reports on the settlement of difficulties on a monthly basis or when necessary, and propose solutions to the issues beyond their jurisdiction to the Cabinet leader, according to the Government Office.

*From <https://vietnamnews.vn> 09/28/2021*

[TOP ↑](#)

## South Asia

### **INDIA: Appoints Rajiv Aggarwal, ex-IAS, as Director of Public Policy**

Rajiv Aggarwal, ex-IAS officer and former Uber executive has assumed the post of Director of Public Policy at Facebook India. Aggarwal will replace the outgoing Director of Public Policy Ankhi Das who resigned in October 2020 after getting embroiled in a controversy. As per a statement issued on September 20, Aggarwal, as a Director of Public Policy, will define and lead crucial policy development initiatives for the social media giant in India. The role will focus on creating policies on an agenda that covers user safety, data protection and privacy, inclusion and internet governance. The ex-IAS will report to Ajit Mohan, Vice President and Managing Director of Facebook India. Also, he will be a part of the India leadership team, the statement added. Mentioning his last assignment, the statement read, Aggarwal's last role was with Uber as Head of Public Policy for India and South Asia. He has 26 years of experience as an IAS officer and had worked as a District Magistrate in nine districts across Uttar Pradesh. During his tenure with the government, Aggarwal has steered India's first-ever national policy on Intellectual Property Rights (IPRs) as Joint Secretary in the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade, Ministry of Commerce. He also played an instrumental role in the digital transformation of India's IP offices, said the statement. On Aggarwal's appointment, Ajit Mohan said that Facebook is an ally for the exciting economic and social transformation that India is witnessing, with digital playing a central role. "We realise we are deeply immersed in the fabric of India and we have the opportunity to help build a more inclusive and safe internet that benefits everyone in the country. I'm thrilled that Rajiv is joining us to lead the Public Policy team," he added. Bringin his rich administrative and policymaking experience to the table, Rajiv Aggarwal will help further our mission to build transparency, accountability, empowered and safe communities, said Mohan.

## **JK Tripathy, retd. IPS, Named Chief Information Commissioner, Odisha**

Retired IPS officer of 1985-Batch and former Tamil Nadu top cop, Jalada Kumar Tripathy has been named new Odisha Chief Information Commissioner (CIC). Following a meeting chaired by Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik on September 23, the Department of Personnel, Government of Odisha issued orders to assign the post of CIC to Tripathy. The government notification announcing Tripathy's assignment read, "In pursuance of sub-section (3) of section-15 of the Right to Information Act, 2005 (22 of 2005) and on the recommendation of the Committee constituted for the purpose, the Governor of Odisha is pleased to notify the appointment of JK Tripathy as the State CIC, Odisha Information Commission from the date he assumes office." The former IPS belonged to the Tamil Nadu cadre and is a native Odisha. He has served in the state of Tamil Nadu in various important capacities including Director General of Police (DGP) and Commissioner, Chennai Police over the past 30 years of his career stint. After Sunil Mishra, the former CIC of Odisha has resigned on August 15 this year, the post was lying vacant. The notification was issued after the Governor of Odisha Ganeshi Lal gave a go-ahead. According to the norms, Tripathy will hold the post for a five-year tenure from the date of joining or attaining the age of 65 years, whichever is earlier. Currently, the state information panel is run by four information commissioners.

## **Digitalisation & Transformation of Governance**

Ever since the catastrophic COVID-19 pandemic has occurred, the world has seen a dramatic change where cleanliness and social distancing became the new global habit, masks a global trend and remote working a necessity. No one can ever be thankful for a deadly pandemic that claimed millions of lives, however, a fact can't be ignored that it gave a sudden boost to digitalisation that has transformed not only businesses, education, meetings, governance and even human lives. Such a transformation has played a crucial role in making us future-ready. With this wave of digitalisation sweeping across the country, India has witnessed numerous government initiatives that have further empowered the country's digital infrastructure and enabled easy access and delivery of government services to people. From Aadhaar to UPI-enabled digital payments and from providing door-step delivery of civic services to direct benefit transfer (DBT) to beneficiaries, a lot has been transformed in the direction of good governance. Thanks to the digital revolution. The August 2021 issue of the eGov Magazine aims to draw light on how the digital transformation has impacted governance in the country and enabled the



authorities and the people to battle the COVID pandemic. Also, the enclosed articles will focus on how digitalisation has driven good governance in the country by inducing transparency in government schemes.

From <https://egov.eletsonline.com/> 09/27/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## **India's Urban Heritage Management Conundrum the Need for Transformative Reforms**

The World Heritage Convention aims to protect the most outstanding cultural and natural heritage places on Earth. Countries (States Parties) that have adhered to the World Heritage Convention accept an obligation to manage World Heritage properties on their territory to the highest standards of protection and periodically report on actions taken. Globally, UNESCO has enlisted 1154 sites as "World Heritage Sites", of which, India has a total of 40 such sites till July 2021, writes Prof. Saswat Bandyopadhyay, Team Leader, World Bank – Cities Alliance Funded, Inclusive Heritage Cities Development Programme, Phase-I, India and Coordinator of Heritage Cities Group, Peer to Peer Exchange Network (PEARL). The recent nomination of Dholavira as the 40th UNESCO World Heritage Site in India was received with greater enthusiasm and celebration all over the country. Similar enthusiasm was also displayed during the nomination of the Historic city of Ahmedabad in 2017 and the walled city of Jaipur in 2019. However, after the initial euphoria of being inscribed as a "UNESCO World Heritage site", very few follow up actions are visible on the ground in these front running "world heritage cities" in India. According to some local news reports, the city of Ahmedabad today lags far behind fulfilling its commitments as a UNESCO World Heritage City. Similar reports are also emanating from the walled city of Jaipur. Like the recent case of Liverpool, both these two cities are glaring at the risk of losing their world heritage status, if no substantial follow up actions are initiated towards managing their heritage assets. According to the census 2011, India had over 7935 urban settlements, of which 4041 were statutory towns majority of which are endowed with incredibly rich cultural, built and natural heritage assets. However, India in general, and its cities in specific, continue to struggle to manage these assets and continue to lose them at an alarming pace.

Interestingly, India has a long legacy for the protection of heritage assets. The Archaeological Society of India was founded in 1861 with the mandate of "superintending a complete search over the whole country and prepare a systematic record and description of all archaeological and other remains that are unique for their antiquity, historical interests and beauty". This was followed by the Indian Treasure Trove Act of 1878, which is still operational and helpful in building its antiquarian wealth. The act pertaining to ancient monuments was enacted in 1904, followed by the Antiquities Export Prohibition Act of 1947. The Ancient Monuments Act was re-enacted as the Ancient Monuments Act and Archaeological Sites and

Remains Act of 1958. This was further amended and updated in 2010. Similarly, item 67 of the union list, item 12 of the state list and item 40 of the concurrent list of the constitution highlight the need for heritage conservation and protection. While these legislative instruments together were largely successful in safeguarding India's ancient sites and monuments, however, the legal and financial instruments towards the management of heritage assets in urban areas, have remained quite sketchy. Over the decades, the very definition of heritage has also undergone fundamental changes from its earlier confinement of tangible monuments to a variety of tangible and intangible elements, located in diverse contexts. The laws creating municipal corporations in India do not specifically mention that the protection of heritage is a subject within the jurisdiction of the municipal corporation.

Consequently, municipalities do not consider it their responsibility to safeguard the heritage assets and properties. When the 74th Constitutional Amendment was passed, a list of 18 functions was enumerated in the 12th Schedule under Article 243W which would devolve to the Urban Local Body. However, there is no mention of "heritage", except for entry 13, which mentions, "promotion of cultural, educational and aesthetic aspects". In response to this regulatory void, some states like Rajasthan Gujarat, Andhra, Karnataka, Maharashtra and Puducherry and municipal corporations like Hyderabad, Ahmedabad and Mumbai have attempted to develop their own context-specific regulatory and institutional frameworks. In 2011, the Town and Country Planning Organisation (TCPO), Government of India, has also launched a Model Heritage Regulations to guide these state-specific initiatives. However, these initiatives have mostly remained sporadic and case-specific, national-level mainstreaming have not been attempted so far. In India, the public discourses related to heritage management are largely dominated by Conservation Architects who generally specialise in the conservation of facades, historic buildings, and artefacts. In the presentday context, the subject of urban heritage management demands a complex set of skills and knowledge pertaining to structural engineering, municipal laws, infrastructure technologies, disaster management, urban planning, finance and governance, besides the knowledge of conservation.

So far, the professional education and training of conservation professionals have not been able to respond to these emerging complexities and challenges of urban heritage management in the context of emerging economies like India. Much of the heritage conservation narratives and discourses are drawn from the northern contexts like Europe and America and local theorisation have not developed. Limited exposure to the issues of climate change, poverty, public systems and governance, infrastructure, combined with the ultracrepidarian attitudes, have led to narrowly focussed discourses, without making any major value addition to the overall urban heritage management paradigm in the country. The other major challenge of heritage management in India is the issue of heritage economics and finance. Conservation and management of heritage assets are resource-intensive. For example, the majority of the 3000 listed heritage buildings in Ahmedabad are under private

ownership. A very conservative estimate towards the conservation of these buildings would vary anywhere between Rs 2100-3000 crore. Added to this is the cost of restoration of public spaces, utilities, fire and disaster safety equipment etc. An area of approximately 2.50 sq km of the core precincts (out of the total 5.50 sq km area inscribed) may require investments to the tune of Rs 1000- 1200 crore. There exists a policy vacuum about the role of the society and the state in maintaining these “privately-owned” heritage assets. Although, there have been some sporadic attempts to use land value capturing tools like “Heritage TDRs” to incentivise the private heritage homeowners.

However, to date, no credible analysis of how to finance heritage conservation actions at an urban scale is available. Recognising the complexities and pressure associated with the historic cities due to rapid urbanisation, climate change, economic meltdown and growing poverty and inequality, in 2011, UNESCO launched the “historic urban landscape (HUL)” to strike a new balance between the urban development and heritage management. In its “New Life for Historic Cities”, in 2013, this historic urban landscape approach was further explained through the iconic image, called “Layers of the City”, where the need to understand the broader urban development and geographic contexts were emphasised: “Cities are dynamic organisms. There is not a single ‘historic’ city in the world that has retained its original character: the concept is a moving target, destined to change with society itself. To preserve the urban historic landscape, strategic and dynamic alliances need to be built between various actors in the urban scene, foremost between public authorities that manage the city and developers and entrepreneurs that operate in the city.” The “ Layers of the City” clearly highlights the multi-disciplinary and collaborative nature of modern heritage management which intertwines the disciplines of Architecture, Engineering, Technology, Planning, Management, Finance and other related subject areas. Target 11.4 under SDG 11 calls for strengthening efforts to protect and safeguard the world’s cultural and natural heritage. To achieve the SDG 11.4 targets, India needs a paradigm shift in its approach towards urban heritage management.

From <https://egov.eletsonline.com/> 09/30/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## **SRI LANKA: 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](http://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://egov.eletsonline.com/> 09/19/2021

## Central-West Asia

### **UZBEKISTAN: Pre-election Campaigning Period Kicks Off**

The period of pre-election campaigning for the presidential election in Uzbekistan, scheduled for October 24, has started, Trend reports referring to the Uzbekistan's CEC. According to the press service of the CEC, the members of the commission considered the issue of campaigning for presidential candidates. In accordance with Article 44 of the Electoral Code, pre-election campaigning begins on the day following the last day established for the registration of candidates. Campaigning on Election Day and the day before the start of voting is not allowed. It is prohibited to conduct campaigning accompanied by the provision of goods, services (except information) to voters, free of charge or on preferential terms, and the payment of funds. It is also prohibited to disseminate false information, as well as information discrediting honor and dignity of candidates. During campaigning, all presidential candidates will be provided with equal conditions for access to state-owned media through the free provision of equal airtime and print space. In state-owned media, airtime and print space can also be allocated on a paid basis, but in this case, the terms of payment must be the same for all candidates. In accordance with Article 46 of the Electoral Code, airtime or print space can be allocated in state and non-state media also on a paid basis. Presidential candidates from five political parties of Uzbekistan are: - UzLiDeP party - Shavkat Mirziyoyev (over 300,000 signatures of voters); - "Milliy Tiklanish" party - Alisher Kadirov (287,900 signatures of voters); - Ecological Party - Narzullo Oblomuradov (231,200 signatures of voters); - People's Democratic Party of Uzbekistan - Maksuda Varisova (225,000 signatures of voters); - "Adolat" - Bakhrom Abdukhalimov (more than 213,000 signatures of voters).

From <https://en.trend.az> 09/20/2021

## Oceania

### **AUSTRALIA: Business Not Doing Enough on Human Rights**

Many Australian businesses are failing to adequately meet their international human rights obligations, a new report has found. The report, released on Thursday by the Australian Human Rights Commission, urged many businesses to take issues over human rights more seriously, expressing concern about aspects such as modern slavery practices and the land rights of Indigenous people. The report was released to coincide with the 10th anniversary of United Nations guiding principles on business and human rights being formally adopted. Director of the Australian Human Rights Institute Justine Nolan said more accountability was needed from businesses

in the country to prevent human rights abuses. "There is still a significant gap in translating human rights policies into practice," Professor Nolan said. "The pandemic has highlighted the need for stronger social safeguards and a people-centred approach to business."

The report recommended the federal government ensure businesses meet their human rights responsibilities by strengthening modern slavery enforcement, and legislate human rights due diligence by companies. "While some positive legislative and policy developments have occurred over the last decade, the approach to date has been ad hoc and lacked cohesion," the report said. "For many Australian businesses, a voluntary 'corporate social responsibility' mindset remains prevalent and awareness of UN guiding principles is low." Of particular concern was business handling of human rights issues surrounding Indigenous people in Australia. The report highlighted the destruction of Indigenous land and cultural sites, such as Juukan Gorge in 2020 by mining company Rio Tinto, as part of the wider issue. "There are many examples where companies have failed to engage in meaningful human rights due diligence processes and obtain free, prior and informed consent before permanently destroying culturally significant sites," the report said. "Access to justice and compensation for land dispossession is a key area of 'unfinished business' that remains unresolved for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples." The commission's report called for greater accountability from major corporations as well as ensuring human right abuse victims had access to remedies. "Despite some key areas of progress, much work remains to be done to address the significant governance gaps in corporate accountability for adverse human rights impacts," the report said.

From <https://au.news.yahoo.com> 09/23/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## **NEW ZEALAND: New Law Commissioners Appointed**

Justice Minister Kris Faafoi has announced the appointment of three new members of Te Aka Matua o te Ture | Law Commission. The new appointees are: Hon Justice Christian Whata, who has been appointed for a term of one year; beginning on 12 October 2021. Geof Shirtcliffe, who has been appointed for five years; beginning on 6 September 2021. Professor Claudia Geiringer, who will take up her appointment on 2 May 2022. The Law Commission is an independent Crown entity, whose role includes reviewing New Zealand law and making recommendations for its development and reform. Minister Faafoi said Justice Whata, Mr Shirtcliffe, and Professor Geiringer all have outstanding legal credentials. "I am delighted they have accepted appointment to the Law Commission. They all bring complementary skills, which will add to the strength for the Commission," Kris Faafoi said.

The Minister also acknowledged the service and commitment to the Commission of outgoing Law Commissioner, Associate Professor Donna Buckingham. "In particular,

I want to note Associate Professor Buckingham's work reviewing the law which governs how DNA is used in criminal investigations and her contribution working with the Ministry of Justice on search and surveillance law," Kris Faafoi said. Further information about the appointees: Justice Whata (Ngāti Pikiao and Ngāti Tamateatūtahi) is a High Court Judge since 2011 and has been appointed to undertake a short-term project leading the Commission's work in relation to tikanga Māori, with a particular focus on the relationship between tikanga Māori and State law. Mr Shirtcliffe, who was previously a corporate partner at the law firm Chapman Tripp specialising in the fields of company and commercial law, will start his work with the Commission leading a project on adult decision-making capacity, Ngā Huarahi Whakatau. Professor Geiringer is the Chair in Public Law at Victoria University and an expert in human rights, and constitutional and administrative law. Professor Geiringer will take up her appointment in May 2022.

From <https://livenews.co.nz> 09/03/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## **Expert Group Appointed to Lead New Zealand's Future Health System**

An outstanding group of people with extensive and wide-ranging governance and health experience have been appointed to lead the Māori Health Authority and Health New Zealand, Health Minister Andrew Little says. "This Government is building a truly national health system to provide consistent, high-quality health services right across the country. This is another step towards fixing the health system so it works for everyone," Andrew Little said. "The future health system will mean New Zealanders will be able to have equitable access to healthcare to live longer, with the best possible quality of life, no matter who they are or where they live." Rob Campbell, an experienced professional director with extensive union, public and private sector governance experience has been appointed as the Chair of Health New Zealand. With his extensive experience leading large organisations these skills will be essential to lead Health New Zealand which will become the country's largest employer.

Sharon Shea, current Chair of the Bay of Plenty DHB and an experienced leader across the health, disability and community sector has been appointed as Co-Chair of the Māori Health Authority and will also serve as a board member of Health New Zealand. Tipa Mahuta, current Deputy Chair of the Counties Manukau District Health Board, with a background in facilitation, research, policy and community development, and extensive Iwi governance experience, has been appointed Co-Chair of the Māori Health Authority. Health New Zealand will bring together the country's 20 DHBs, a workforce of about 80,000, an annual operating budget of \$20 billion and an asset base of about \$24 billion. The Māori Health Authority will work alongside Health New Zealand with a joint role in developing system plans, commissioning for primary and community services, and will commission kaupapa

Māori services. The Māori Health Authority will also work alongside the Ministry of Health to develop strategies and policies that work for Māori.

“This marks a significant milestone in progress towards a more equitable health system,” Associate Health Minister Peeni Henare said. “The new Māori Health Authority will be a gamechanger for our people. It will grow kaupapa Māori services and give Māori a strong voice in a new system focused on improving the disproportionate health outcomes that have long affected our whanau. “Tā Mason Durie’s steering group worked tirelessly to support this appointment process –Tā Mason in particular has ensured we have secured the best possible candidates and combination of skills and experience for what is needed in our future health system,” Peeni Henare said. “The members of the new boards share a dedication to improve the country’s health and wellbeing with a strong community focus. I am confident our new health entities are in the best possible hands to drive this long overdue transformation,” Andrew Little said. ENDS

Editor’s note Board member biographies and further information on the health reform is available at [www.futureofhealth.govt.nz](http://www.futureofhealth.govt.nz) Health New Zealand members include: Rob Campbell (Chair) – an experienced professional director with extensive union, public and private sector governance experience. Amy Adams – a former New Zealand National Party politician, Member of Parliament for Selwyn and Cabinet Minister. Cassandra Crowley – a Chartered Accountant and a Barrister and Solicitor of the High Court of New Zealand, with extensive governance experience. Vui Mark Gosche – a senior leader within both the Samoan and Pasifika communities, and across the health, disability and community sectors of New Zealand, and former Member of Parliament and Cabinet Minister.

Dame Karen Poutasi – medically qualified with a specialisation in public health and significant governance and leadership experience in the health and education sectors, including CE of the New Zealand Qualifications Authority and Director General of Health. Vanessa Stoddart – a senior leader with executive and governance experience in the manufacturing, packaging, airline and engineering industries with a strong focus on change management and performance improvement. Dr Curtis Walker – a general physician and kidney specialist with MidCentral DHB who has extensive experience in governance, clinical leadership and public policy. Sharon Shea – current Chair of the Bay of Plenty DHB and an experienced leader across the health, disability and community sector. Ms Shea will also serve as Co-Chair of the Māori Health Authority.

Māori Health Authority members include: Sharon Shea (Co-Chair) – current Chair of the Bay of Plenty DHB and an experienced leader across the health, disability and community sector. Ms Shea will also serve on the Health New Zealand Board. Tipa Mahuta (Co-Chair) – current Deputy Chair of the Counties Manukau District Health Board, with a background in facilitation, research, policy and community



development, and extensive Iwi governance experience. Dr Sue Crengle – a specialist in general practice and public health medicine, and an experienced researcher who is Professor, Hauora Māori, at Otago Medical School. Dr Mataroria Lyndon – Equity Lead at Mahitahi Hauora Primary Health Organisation and a Senior Lecturer in Medical Education at the University of Auckland. Lady Tureiti Moxon – an experienced leader in the Māori health, education, social, and justice sectors at a local, regional and national level.

Fiona Pimm – an executive leader with extensive experience in governance roles in the health sector, government agencies, community NGO, local iwi and runanga. Awerangi Tamihere – an senior leader with extensive experience working across central government, regional crown entities, the private sector, and with her local iwi. Dr Chris Tooley – an experienced governor and Chief Executive of Te Puna Ora o Mataatua based in Whakatāne which provides healthcare and social services across the Eastern Bay of Plenty. He ohu matatau kua kopoua ki te ārahi i te rāngai hauora o Aotearoa hei ngā rā ki tua He ohu kātuahehe tēnei kua kopoua ki te ārahi i Te Rōpū Mana Hauora Māori me Hauora Aotearoa. He rōpū whai wheako huhua noa ki ngā mahi whakahaere, he whānui hoki ō rātou pūkenga ki ngā kaupapa hauora,” te kōrero a te Minita Hauora, a Andrew Little.

“E hiahia ana tēnei kāwanatanga ki tētahi rāngai hauora ā-motu motuhake hei whakarato i ngā ratonga hauora whai kiko, whai mana puta noa i te motu. He takahitanga anō tēnei ki te whakatikatika i te rāngai hauora kia whai hua ai ki te katoa,” te kōrero a Andrew Little. “Ka kitea te mana ōritenga o ngā whai wāhinga a Aotearoa whānui ki ngā kaupapa tuku hauora hei ngā rā ki tua kia ora rawa atu ai te tangata ahakoa ko wai, ahakoa nō hea.” Inā te huhua o ngā wheako kaitohutohu matua a Rob Campbell, me tōna mārāma ki te hautū i ngā kaupapa uniana, rāngai tūmatanui, tūmatawhāiti hoki, i kopoua ai ia hei Toihau mō Hauora Aotearoa. Mā te whānuitanga o ōna mōhio ki te ārahi i ngā whakahaerenga mahi nunui, koinei ngā pūkenga e tika ana ki te ārahi i a Hauora Aotearoa kia toko ake hei wāhi tuku mahi nui rawa atu o tēnei motu a tōna wā. Kua kopoua a Sharon Shea, te Toihau o Te Poari Hauora ā-rohe o Te Waiariki, hei Hoa-Heamana ki Te Rōpū Mana Hauora Māori, ā, ka noho hoki ia hei mema ki te poari o Hauora Aotearoa. Kua roa ia e ārahi ana i ngā kaupapa whai pānga ki te hauora, te hunga hauā me te rāngai hapori hoki.

Kua kopoua hoki a Tipa Mahuta, te Toihau Tuarua mō Te Poari Hauora ā-Rohe ki Manukau, hei Hoa-Toihau ki Te Rōpū Mana Hauora Māori. Ka hāngai ōna pūkenga ki ngā mahi huawaere, rangahau, kaupapa here, whakawhanake hapori, me te nui hoki o ōna wheako mō āna mahi hautū ā-Iwi. Ko tōna 20 ngā Poari Hauora ā-Rohe puta noa i te motu ka whakakotahitia mai e Hauora Aotearoa, he ohu mahi 80,000 tāngata te nui, he tahua pūtea ā-tau \$20 piriona te nui, me tētahi kohinga rawa \$24 piriona te nui. Ka mahi tahi Te Rōpū Mana Hauora Māori me Hauora Aotearoa ki te waihanga i ngā mahere pūnaha, te whakarite i ngā ratonga mātuatua, hapori hoki, me te whakarite mai i ngā ratonga Māori. Ka mahi tahi Te Rōpū Mana Hauora Māori me Te

Manatū Hauora ki te waihanga rautaki, kaupapa here hoki e whai hua ana ki a ngāi Māori. “E tohu ana tēnei i te nekehanga hirahira ki tētahi rāngai hauora whai mana ōrite,” te kōrero a te Minita Hauora Tuarua, a Peeni Henare.

“He kaupapa nui, taioore Te Rōpū Mana Hauora Māori mō te iwi. Ka whānui ake ngā ratonga Māori, ā, ka pāorooro te reo a ngāi Māori ki tētahi pūnaha hou e aro ana ki te whakatikatika i te tuwhenatanga o ngā putanga hauora kua roa nei e tāmi nei i ō tātou whānau.” “I whakapaua ngā werawera e te rōpū i aratakina e Tā Mason Durie ki te tautoko i te tukanga kopou tāngata – mātua rā nā Tā Mason te whakaūnga, kua whiria ngā tāngata papai rawa i runga i ngā tautōhitotanga me ngā wheako whānui e tika ana mō tā tātou pūnaha hauora hei ngā rā ki tua,” te kōrero a Peeni Henare. “E ngākau tapatahi katoa ana ngā mema kei ngā poari hou nei ki te whakatikatika i te whai oranga o te motu i runga i te aro pū ki ngā hapori. Ko tāku e whakapono nei, ka ārahitia ā tātou hinonga hauora hou e tēnei huinga tāngata ki te whakatutuki i ēnei kawenga mahi kua roa nei e hiahiatia ana,” te kōrero a Andrew Little.

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[TOP ↑](#)

### 3、 Management, Capacity Building and Innovation

#### Asia-Pacific

#### Selecting an IoT Device Management Platform - with Deployment Examples

An IoT device management platform is your toolbox for gaining insights into all of your deployed devices, and managing their uptime, security and functionality. The importance of such a solution grows with the size of your network. Not only that, but the lack of management software can actually inhibit the scalability of your device deployment. How will you reach those devices, troubleshoot them, reboot them, and update their firmware? In the companion blog post to this one — [What Is IoT Device Management?](#) — we talk about the specific remote management tasks that IoT managers need to be able to perform. In this blog post, we will provide some use case examples that illustrate the importance of an IoT device management platform, as well as additional insights on how IoT management tools work and how to evaluate their features, which is a critical step in selecting the best IoT solutions partner.

Who Needs an IoT Device Management Platform?



So, who needs a software platform to manage their deployed hardware? Aren't all those devices programmed to reliably perform a function, and can't you just connect them, make sure they're working, and go on with your day? Maybe — if you only have a few devices and you can physically access them quickly and easily when needed. Otherwise, you will need a management platform that gives you the ability to gain insights on the performance of all of your devices at a glance, troubleshoot them and perform updates.

IoT device management solutions come in different shapes and sizes, but they typically give you access to each of those deployed devices from an office environment or a mobile device in the field. This enables your IoT managers and IT personnel to troubleshoot devices and manage them from a dashboard. These tasks can include:

- *Setting up notifications for certain conditions*, like sensor readings that are out of normal range.
- *Updating device functionality* by sending new configurations out to any or all devices with just a few clicks.
- *Enhancing the edge computing performance of your deployed network* to improve efficiency and data management.
- *Deploying security patches to all devices* on your network to address new industry information or discovered threats.
- *Ensuring your devices can report on their battery level* so batteries can be replaced promptly.

For these reasons and more, to keep your device network up-to-date, you will need an IoT device management platform to not only reach and manage your devices, but to listen to them as well. Most importantly, the platform must have sophisticated built-in security, so that only authorized devices and users can gain access to your device network.

IoT Deployment Examples: The Case for a Connected Device Management Platform

Internet of Things devices can be deployed anywhere. While it's not uncommon for devices such as radio modules, gateways and cellular routers to be installed close at hand, many such devices end up far afield, in difficult-to-access places, moving vehicles or dangerous environments. Let's look at some important use cases for remote IoT device control.

### Smart City Lighting



Smart cities today are moving to automated, sensor-based lighting systems that detect changing lighting conditions and the presence of vehicles. These smart lighting systems are far more energy efficient, as they automatically turn off when they are not needed. As the devices to detect and control the lights are installed on top of a light post, they are physically unreachable except by a technician in a truck outfitted with a “cherry picker,” which is a highly expensive proposition. Additionally, there are thousands of these devices in a deployment. Managing configuration, security, or functionality updates for all of those devices is highly impractical. See a [smart city lighting](#) case study.

### Farming and Precision Agriculture



Agriculture is one of the top industries for adoption of IoT technologies for a range of applications. from automated feeding systems to tank and feed bin monitoring, smart irrigation, activating frost fans, and other automated processes. In precision agriculture, IoT devices can be deployed at varying points across thousands of acres of farmland. For example, GPS-enabled IoT devices are deployed in automatic watering systems, not only to activate irrigation based on soil moisture sensors and rotate the system across a defined crop area, but also to locate the systems if they have rolled off course. Operators must have the ability to remotely access the devices for troubleshooting to ensure these systems are functioning properly. Increasingly, artificial intelligence is incorporated into these applications to enable automated decision-making processes based on incoming data. See a [precision agriculture case study](#).

#### Mobile Applications and Fleet Management



IoT devices like high-performance cellular routers can be in constant motion — such

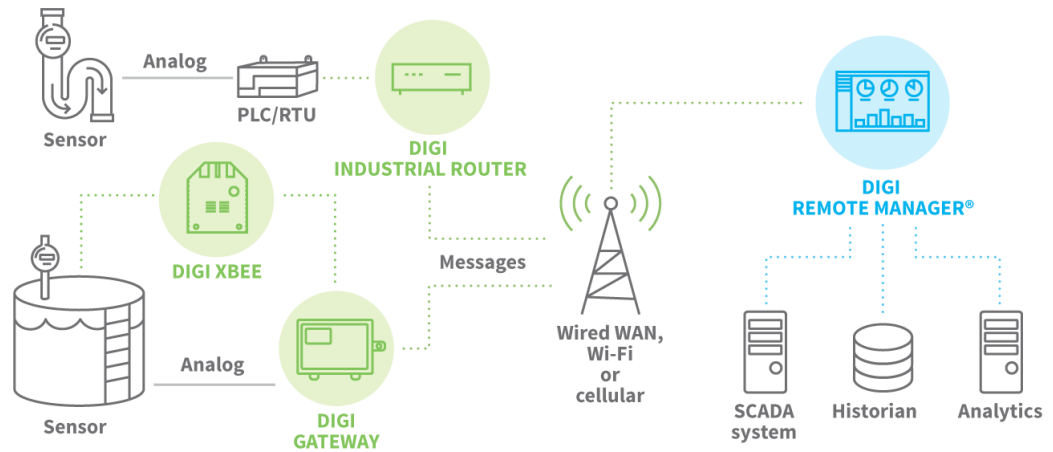
as in city transit systems, supply chain and delivery services. For example, in buses, subways and light rail systems, IoT devices are tasked with everything from fare collection to security monitoring to providing operator GPS and passenger Wi-Fi. These systems have become more complex and mission critical for transit agencies, which means the ability to manage them remotely and gain visibility across the city is paramount. In supply chain and package delivery, IoT devices monitor and track fleets, vehicle operator metrics and the status of deliveries across large metro areas and trucking routes. These applications have a critical need for reliability, which requires the ability to remotely monitor, troubleshoot and manage them from a centralized location. For some examples of fleet management and transit applications, see the Command Alkon case study to learn how the company deploys remote monitoring for fleet telematics, and learn how SEPTA used Digi solutions to meet the federal PTC mandate requirements for rail systems.

### Industrial IoT Applications



The definition of the Industrial Internet of Things (IIoT) is broad. It includes emerging Industry 4.0 applications for automation, machine learning and artificial intelligence on the factory floor. It also covers a vast number of applications in oil and gas, mining, water and wastewater management, and environmental remediation projects. IIoT also includes remote monitoring of wells, communications systems and clean energy installations such as solar panels and windmills. It even includes digital signage on city streets, in subways and on highways, as the devices supporting these deployments must be industrial-grade to handle temperature extremes, moisture and vibration. In Industrial IoT, therefore, connected devices can be integrated in remote areas, underground systems, construction projects, digital signs in subways, on bridges and overpasses, or deep within a maze of pipes in an oil refinery. All of these devices require monitoring, management and periodic firmware updates. In IIoT deployments, devices may have a service life of a decade or more.

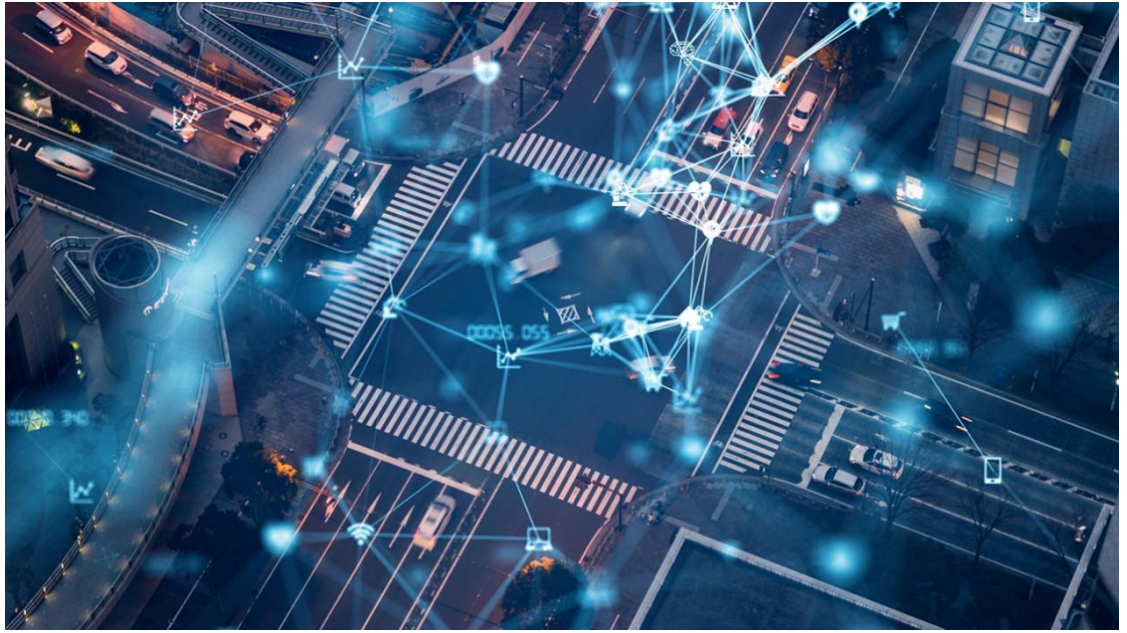
So it is inevitable that feature enhancements, security patches and firmware updates will be needed from time to time. The following diagram shows an IoT device deployment and the role the Digi Remote Manager platform plays in a SCADA system.



Here are some industrial IoT case study examples:

- See how [Wake, Inc.](#) helps construction project managers monitor the concrete curing process with Digi Remote Manager
- Read about AFCEC's efficient, cost-saving wireless communication system and monitoring solution at the [Joint Base Cape Cod superfund site](#)
- Learn how [croppx](#) built an advanced monitoring and management program for irrigation systems with connectivity to sensors for reduced costs and improved operations
- Read about a major [oil and gas operation](#) that improved operations and remote monitoring with Digi solutions

Traffic Management — A Case Study



Today, municipalities are upgrading their communications systems citywide to improve the reliability of their infrastructure, as well as the ability to remotely configure, monitor and manage their deployments. Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS) projects enable sophisticated and future-oriented capabilities, including vehicle detection systems, responsive signal timing for traffic flow and vehicle-to-vehicle communications, all of which will be enhanced by the full rollout of 5G. In building out improved infrastructure to support these forward-thinking initiatives, departments of transportation like New York City DOT are taking advantage of the most up-to-date future-proofing technologies on the market today while preparing their municipal traffic monitoring and management for the connected vehicle and autonomous vehicle future. New York City, for example, completed an enormous city-wide upgrade, deploying 14,000 Digi cellular routers at intersections throughout the city's 5 boroughs.

You can read about it in the [case study](#), and our [blog post](#) on the deployment. For this discussion, the key component was the Digi Remote Manager® IoT device management platform, which facilitated the massive deployment in record time with zero touch configuration. This capability, developed and supported by the Digi Professional Services team, ensured that the installers in the field were able to set up and connect devices without having to perform complex commissioning steps during on-site installation. These are just a few of the many reasons for the need for device management in the Internet of Things across the commercial, government and industrial landscape. But they all demonstrate one thing: monitoring and managing all of those devices requires centralized management and control.

The Role of IoT Device Management Platforms





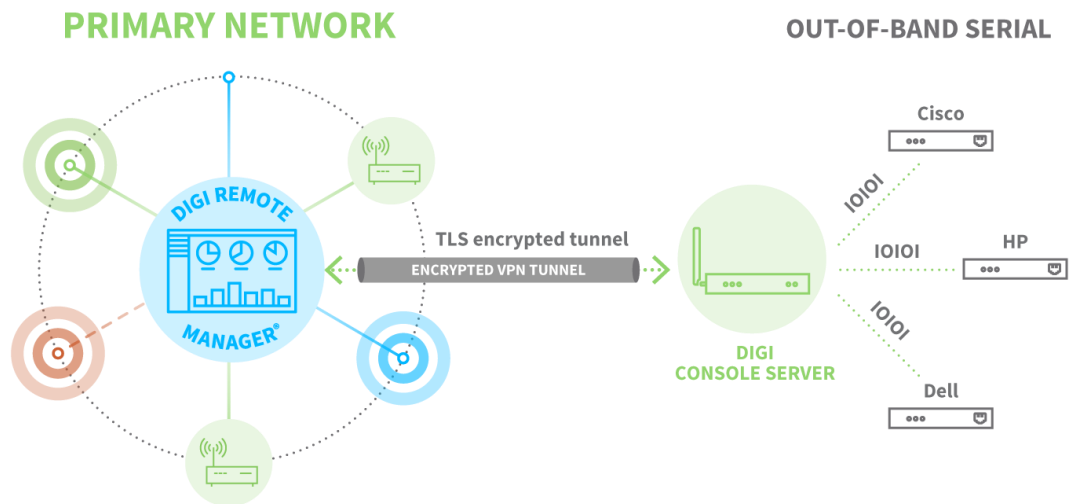
To summarize what we have discussed so far, when planning an IoT deployment it is important to keep in mind that an IoT network is not static. It is like a living organism. And it is not possible for humans to keep an eye on dozens, hundreds, thousands — or *millions* — of devices to manage their security and uptime effectively. Nor is it possible to manually perform updates to all of those devices.

Therefore, the IoT device management platform has some very important functions:

- **Installation/authentication:** Installing devices and setting up a network can be labor-intensive and therefore expensive. A full-featured management platform like Digi Remote Manager®, simplifies and expedites this process, facilitating everything from mass configuration to device authentication as devices are added to the network.
- **Configuration management:** IoT managers must have the ability to reconfigure and manage deployed devices to manage data transfer, device wake-up times and security. A sophisticated IoT device management platform like Digi Remote Manager also performs automated configuration management for security monitoring, and resets the configuration back to its approve state in the event of tampering.
- **Security integration:** Every aspect of building and deploying connected device networks must be designed to detect, manage and thwart security threats, and the IoT device management platform is a key cog in the IoT ecosystem. See the Digi Remote Manager technical brief on Security, Compliance and Virus Detection for information on the security controls built into Digi RM.
- **Monitoring:** Monitoring is the key feature of an excellent platform - enabling insights into issues or outages anywhere in the deployment. Network metrics can also reveal patterns and trends that affect performance or indicate security

threats. Administrators can set alerts to automatically notify them about certain conditions, and generate status reports at desired intervals.

- **Remote access:** Every successful IoT deployment includes the capability to perform maintenance and troubleshooting across the entire deployed network. For example, Digi Remote Manager offers these capabilities not only for Digi devices, but also enables out-of-band access to any device with a serial interface. See the following diagram for an illustration of this functionality in an IoT network.



For more details on the functions of the management system, see in the related blog post, [What Is IoT Device Management and Why Do You Need It?](#)

Evaluating IoT Device Management Platforms



Device management starts with your initial selection of an IoT device. It is critical to work with a device vendor that offers an integrated, sophisticated and secure IoT device management platform that enables you to configure, monitor and manage your device network seamlessly from an application interface.

#### Include IoT Software in the Device Purchasing Decision

There are some important reasons to evaluate and select a device vendor with the IoT device management platform in mind:

- Configuring and enrolling devices in the network should happen through the software, which will then have a record of every device ID, its device type and configuration, and its location on the network.
- The ability to configure large groups of devices simultaneously and monitor their security effectively ensures scalability. Without these capabilities, enterprises cannot roll out large deployments, keep tabs on them or effectively manage them.
- Not all IoT device management systems are alike. The key features of the program must match your deployment, device configuration, edge computing, remote access, and monitoring requirements. It is also important to evaluate the cost and ROI of the device management platform to ensure it meets your needs.

***Note: As a cautionary tale, it is far more challenging to add an IoT device management program to a device network after deployment.***

#### Key Features of an IoT Device Management Platform



Most platforms for managing your IoT device network include basic capabilities to authenticate and configure devices, deploy new firmware updates to groups of devices in order to update device functionality or security, and remotely troubleshoot issues. But for many applications today, it's important to have much more comprehensive control (and contextual IoT device management) via an intelligent network solution.

Here are some additional key features to look for, and the value they provide for intelligent application management:

- **Robust, sophisticated APIs:**
  - Look for an API explorer that offers seamless navigation of the API library and easy testing of the API functionality.
  - Look for the ability to connect your own software or database program to the remote management program. This feature enables integration of the remote management program functionality into your own system, as well as the ability to send data to a database in order to create customized reports and analytics from the IoT device management platform data.
- **Customizable dashboard:**
  - It is important to be able to edit your application interface to your needs and specifications. For example, Digi Remote Manager enables you to customize your dashboard widgets, as no two IoT deployments are alike. This functionality enables managers to set up at-a-glance views or charts that provide insights into the most critical conditions of their specific network.
  -
- **Sophisticated monitoring and reporting:**
  - Ensure that the platform offers a comprehensive management dashboard that enables network administrators to monitor the entire deployment and drill down

into device groups or individual devices to investigate anomalies. Look for a platform offering cloud-based analytics to provide useful insights into any problems that occur across a fleet of connected devices.

- The system should produce program logs to track performance and help identify and diagnose problems. For example, if a device's power usage spikes for an unknown reason, program logs should provide administrators with data about the time and circumstances of the usage spike so they can analyze and address the issue.
- **Ability to send custom scripts to deployed devices:**
  - This functionality enables application managers to send files such as Python scripts to the deployed devices. For example, Digi Remote Manager provides authorized file system access to devices for the purpose of downloading scripts and other files. An example of this would be to set up a secure Wi-Fi hotspot login page to enable access to the Wi-Fi on a router.
- **Ability to group and control device groups:**
  - A key ability of a device management platform is control over device configurations, and should be standard with any such platform. A key differentiator to look for is the flexibility to create any device group and apply a specific configuration. For example, if you have one device type that you deploy to three different applications, you must be able to set the configuration separately for each application. Digi Remote Manager offers this flexibility, but not all IoT management programs do.
  -
- **Access to edge devices:**
  - Enabling edge computing is a critical feature of an increasing number of IoT deployments today, to reduce latency in the transfer of data, and to improve the efficiency of the network. Your IoT device management platform should enable this access to ensure you can manage the flow of data from the edge.
- **Out-of-band management:**
  - The ability to reach and troubleshoot offline IoT devices can be crucial for many applications. While some remote management tools require *upgrades* to access this important functionality, Digi Remote Manager enables out-of-band access through its basic-level service. This is done via serial connection through a combination of Digi Remote Manager and cellular products running the Digi Accelerated Linux (DAL) operating system.
- **White labeling:**
  - For those who want to develop solutions that incorporate their own branding, this is an important capability. For example, Digi Remote Manager offers white labeling options to enable value added resellers to incorporate the functionality into their solutions. As an example, some customers use Digi Remote Manager APIs to customize the software for specific use cases or language localization. See the Enlazza customer story for an example.

To learn more about how to securely manage your IoT device deployment with sophisticated IoT device management software, contact Digi today

at [www.digi.com/contactus](http://www.digi.com/contactus). Or visit [shop.digi.com](http://shop.digi.com) to start a free trial of Digi Remote Manager.

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[TOP ↑](#)

## **Global Smart Parking Systems Market to Clock Double-Digit Growth**

Smart parking systems are gaining popularity due to the growing adoption of these systems by various end-users, such as governments and commercial buildings. Furthermore, favorable government initiatives for developing smart cities and smart parking infrastructure are also driving the growth of the global smart parking systems market. A study recently conducted by the strategic consulting and market research company BlueWeave Consulting revealed that the global smart parking systems market was worth USD 4.5 billion in 2020 and is further projected to reach USD 17.2 billion by 2027, at a CAGR of 21.2% during the forecast period (2021-2027). Smart parking systems are gaining popularity due to the growing number of autonomous vehicles, technology integration, growing concerns related to traffic and parking issues, and the increasing adoption of these systems by various end-users, such as governments and commercial buildings. Furthermore, favorable government initiatives for developing smart cities and intelligent parking infrastructure are also driving the growth of the global smart parking systems market. For instance, Patna Municipal Corporation (India), in July 2021, announced the project to develop 38 smart parking systems across the city on a pilot basis.

### **Increasing Concerns Related to Parking Across the Globe is Expected to Drive the Growth of Global Smart Parking Systems Market**

Finding a vacant parking space in a downtown area or a crowded city is difficult in most develop and developing countries. Moreover, finding vacant parking spaces in hospitals, shopping complexes, commercial buildings, hotels, airports, etc., is an equally challenging task. The growing number of car sales around the world and the requirement to park them appropriately has propelled the global smart parking system market to new heights. IBM conducted a study in 2018, which found that around 30% of city traffic is caused by drivers trying to find a parking spot. Smart parking systems solve the problem related to parking by linking the parking system with an intelligent parking system. Moreover, prior booking, SMS & live updates regarding reservations help users overcome parking challenges. For instance, in May 2021, L&T Technology developed an A.I. solution for a smart parking system. Intel Corporation assisted in developing this technology. This new intelligent parking system recognizes license plates, shows the actual parking occupancy rate in real-time, and provides real-time parking availability information. It will save a lot of time for drivers and can lead to reduced traffic on roads. These factors expected to drive the global smart parking systems market.

## Growing Investment in Smart City Projects and Government Initiatives Are Propelling the Market Forward

Smart city projects have led to the growing demand for smart parking systems around the world. Moreover, the governments of different countries are promoting smart city projects and implementing smart parking systems to ensure smooth traffic in the city. The integration of AI (Artificial Intelligence) further supports the growing implementation of smart parking systems in smart cities around the world. AI provides facilities like dynamic messaging, parking sensors, real-time occupancy data of parking spots, and available parking spots to ensure smooth parking of the vehicle. According to Libelium Comunicaciones Distribuidas, a Spanish Smart Parking company, smart parking can reduce traffic volume by 8%, gas emission by 40%, and time spent by 43%, with an increase of 35% in parking revenues. The Australian Government's USD 50 million smart city projects also cover the implementation of smart parking across the country. The "Integrated Smart Parking System" project is one such project in Australia to increase parking in public spaces for the people. To control traffic and parking, governments are promoting the latest technologies in smart cities, which is projected to drive the global smart parking market during the forecast period. Request For Free Sample Report @ <https://www.blueweaveconsulting.com/report/global-smart-parking-systems-market/report-sample>

## The Hardware Segment Holds the Largest Share in the Component Segment

Based on components, the smart parking systems market is segmented into hardware and software. The hardware segment consisting of pucks, cameras & LPRs, smart meters, signage, and parking gates holds a significant share in the smart parking system market. Cameras, and smart meters, are widely deployed in on-street parking. The growing demand for on-street parking in cities has resulted in widespread hardware implementation. Since most people park their cars on-road for several hours, governments are installing more hardware and cameras on-road to maintain traffic flow, driving the growth of smart parking systems. In July 2021, Sony published a new showcase of how its IMX500 sensors, backed by artificial intelligence (AI) processing, are at the core of three "smart city" trials in Rome, Italy.

## Impact of COVID-19

The COVID-19 affected many industries negatively, and the smart parking systems market was no exception. In the wake of the lockdown, the demand for smart parking decreased dramatically. According to NAIOP, the Commercial Real Estate Development Association, the New York City is projected to lose around USD 600 million in parking revenues in 2020. On the other hand, TomTom Traffic Index reveals that traffic decreased in 387 major cities around the world in 2020. Additionally, the 2020 Global Traffic Scorecard by INRIX states that the number of hours spent by the US drivers in traffic went down from 99 hours in 2019 to 26 hours in 2020. For German drivers, the number went down from 46 hours to 26 hours. Fewer hours in traffic directly means less traffic on roads and decreased demand for smart parking

systems. Reduced traffic on roads and closing of offices, malls, gyms, restaurants, among others, led to reduced parking demand. The Chicago Mayor announced that, based on first six months of the year, the city was poised to write 52% fewer parking tickets in 2020. Smart parking systems markets, however, are expected to rebound by the end of 2021 due to mass vaccination campaigns and companies planning to call in their employees.

#### Global Smart Parking Systems Market: Regional Insights

Geographically, the smart parking systems market is categorized into North America, Europe, the Asia-Pacific, the Middle East & Africa, and Latin America. North America accounted for the largest share in the smart parking system market in 2020 and is likely to dominate during the forecast period. The presence of global leaders, enormous traffic jams, colossal vehicle fleet, and integration of the latest technology are some of the factors supporting the dominant market share of North America in the global smart parking systems market. For example, the State of Michigan has teamed up with Ford, Bedrock, and Bosch to launch America's first-of-its-kind test lab for emerging parking technology – the Detroit Smart Parking Lab. The lab opens in September 2021, allowing companies to test parking-related mobility, logistics, and electric vehicle charging technologies.

#### Competitive Landscape

Some of the key players in the smart parking systems market are Altiux Innovations, Amano McGann, Inc., Amco S.A., BMW AG (ParkNow GmbH, Parkmobile LLC), Cisco Systems, Inc., CivicSmart, Inc., Deteq Solutions, Flowbird, gtechna, INDECT Electronics & Distribution GmbH, KapschTrafficCom, LibeliumComunicacionesDistribuidas S.L., Robert Bosch GmbH, Siemens AG, Municipal Parking Services, Inc., Nedap N.V., and other prominent players. The growing applications of smart parking systems and extensive R&D in this domain are creating lucrative opportunities for the key players. Additionally, the market players are collaborating with each other and partnering with the government to gain an advantage over competitors.

#### Recent Developments

In August 2021, Bhubaneswar Smart City Limited (BSCL) announced that the much-awaited smart parking project in the city between SishuBhawan and Vani ViharChhak would start from September 2021. After the project is implemented, commuters will be required to reserve a parking spot via mobile applications before leaving their houses for any destination within the smart city. In August 2021, Smart Parking Limited announced the acquisition of Enterprise Parking Solutions (EPS) Limited. EPS was founded in 2017 and manage 68 parking sites across the UK. All 68 sites will be added to the Smart Parking Limited enterprise and will also be integrated to the Smart Parking back office system to create synergy between supply chain, processing and account management. Don't miss the business opportunity of the global smart parking systems market. Consult our analysts to gain crucial



insights and facilitate your business growth. The in-depth analysis of the report provides information about growth potential, upcoming trends, and statistics of the global smart parking systems market. It also highlights the factors driving forecasts of total market size. The report promises to provide recent technology trends in the smart parking systems market, along with industry insights to help decision-makers make sound strategic decisions. Furthermore, the report also analyzes the growth drivers, challenges, and competitive dynamics of the market.

From <https://www.globenewswire.com/> 09/07/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## **Connected Futures: Meeting Citizen Needs with Smart City Technologies**

Connectivity is the thread that weaves our futures together — with the potential to make our cities more resilient and bring new opportunities to all. Any vision for building back a better world must reinforce connectivity to enable the next generation of digital innovations. This is crucial to ensure our advancements are inclusive, substantial and sustainable — and the smart city can be the foundation of these aspirations. The provision of more robust infrastructure is now a palpable human need, with connectivity regarded widely as a human right in the digital age. Basic public services have and continue to digitise; thus, connectivity has a vital impact on the lives of citizens around the world. This is built into the foundations of urban living as smart cities evolve. In its recent report, 'Smart Cities and Inclusive Growth', the OECD highlights the exciting role that national governments can play in enabling innovative solution delivery, capacity building, and upscaling.<sup>1</sup> Data and connectivity are the lifeblood of the smart city. As we enter the zettabyte era, with more devices coming on stream, there is a risk that local governments could become overwhelmed if they are not prepared effectively. A zettabyte is the equivalent of 1 trillion gigabytes — about 250 billion DVDs' worth of storage. Consider that humans and machines will generate, at minimum, 175 Zettabytes of data over the next five years alone and we can understand the urgency. But we should not fear, as 5G is here, and can drive solutions to our seismic data challenges.

### Unlocking connectivity with 5G

5G technologies promise lightning speed digital capabilities that lay the ground for next-generation connectivity opportunities — and everyone should be prepared. The governments that support the digital transformation of their businesses and economies will be at the forefront of cutting-edge innovations. These are only now possible with the convergence of maturing digital technologies. They have the potential to drive flourishing economies and connect citizens to their digital futures. Preparing for 5G provides a unique opportunity to focus economic recovery on greater equity of access to transformational technology, for a resilient, digitally hybrid world. That means levelling the playing field when it comes to educating businesses on what 5G really means for them, how to prepare — and how to use 5G to transform.

Governments play a key role, helping to keep the pace, elevating economic outlooks and laying the foundations for future innovations.

5G is the key to unlocking experiences that were once just figments of our imagination. It will make hyper-connected and responsive smart cities a reality, with autonomous vehicles and real-time personalised services on the go. It will take today's remote working to the next level, making mixed-reality a real contender in the workplace — whether that's with three-dimensional employee training in enterprise or remote precision surgery in health care. But before we can truly unlock these opportunities, the foundations must be set. One of the integral facets to these foundations is Edge computing, which is the prerequisite for 5G connectivity and is already turbocharging IoT devices that connect our cities and homes. By embracing the potential of Edge computing, which can capture, store, process and analyse data where the data is generated, instead of in a centralised data-processing location, we can accelerate and unleash the power of 5G within practical, public and societal settings.

#### 5G unleashed: Turbocharging digital twins

Urban digital twins are a practical example of edge computing today — and the 5G possibilities of tomorrow. Digital twins provide virtual representations of a city's physical assets. They use data analytics and machine learning to update simulation models in real time — as their physical equivalents change. This technology is not new. The concept of making a duplicate or 'twin' of an asset to enable simulations and predict outcomes based on changes in the operating conditions finds its origins in the 1960s, with the Apollo space program. It has evolved to crunch a two-day process into two hours, with the technology continuing to advance rapidly and meet the needs of a modern and digital urban future. Advances in edge computing and in-memory processing — enabled by scalable computing, along with new pervasive network technologies like 5G to support streaming data — make it possible to interconnect these twins today. They are becoming an essential part of everything from city planning to improving health care, keeping smart cities running safely and enabling sustainable innovation.

Look no further than Victoria, where the government is investing over \$35 million to build a digital twin of the state so that a centralised data platform will be accessible to all. Through this large-scale and open collaboration, industries, governments and communities will be able use the data to enhance real-world outcomes through planning and monitoring. It will enable city managers to test accessibility options, see the potential impact of new construction, manage emergency responses and monitor city health. Thanks to all the potential use cases that exist, the digital twin market is projected to rapidly grow within the next few years. The market was valued at \$3.1 billion in 2020 but is expected to reach \$48.2 billion by 2026.<sup>2</sup> This wouldn't be possible without the convergence of connective and digital technologies, or the nurturing of innovation.

What's ahead?

Looking ahead, connective technologies like 5G will build our future cities and help ensure we can co-exist equally and sustainably. Digital twin developments provide only a small window into what is possible. With 5G's rapid speeds and high latency, we have the chance to witness innovation at its finest — making the unimaginable real. Putting this in the smart city arena demonstrates the value this can bring to urban residents, while highlighting the importance of maintaining a citizen-centric design. Ultimately, governments can arm themselves with critical data that will hero the needs of their future citizens — everybody wins.

1 [https://www.oecd.org/cfe/cities/OECD\\_Policy\\_Paper\\_Smart\\_Cities\\_and\\_Inclusive\\_Growth.pdf](https://www.oecd.org/cfe/cities/OECD_Policy_Paper_Smart_Cities_and_Inclusive_Growth.pdf)

2 <https://www.marketsandmarkets.com/PressReleases/digital-twin.asp>

From <https://www.govtechreview.com.au/> 09/15/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## Noise Mapping as a Tool for Smart Cities

Noise Map is the tool to represent the distribution of sound level in a graphical manner. Noise mapping can help identify the amount of noise in a particular region at a given time. There are various ways through which this tool can contribute to smart city applications. The mapping of noise is trickier and innovative in the form of its implementation. Therefore, Noise mapping has a particular set of applications pertaining to noise pollution or environmental noise. For instance, detecting noise in urban parts of the city can help with transportation infrastructure management. These applications would use vehicle noise and honkings as a reference. Such implementation of technologies doesn't require masses to upgrade their vehicles or carry additional devices. Furthermore, representing noise on geographical information systems (GIS) can allow the analysis of city areas, allowing public density watch for various administration purposes.

How Does Noise Mapping Work?

Noise mapping is a data-driven system, just like any other IoT application. Noise gathering infrastructures require capturing of noise data at specific intervals of time. Moreover, these systems have to take data from famous and reliable reference points. After collecting the data, these systems calculate average equivalent noise levels. This data is then essentially mapped on with a GIS to provide a graphical representation to the end-users through the internet. Once available, this data is recorded in the database as long as needed. Otherwise, it is always available on mobile devices and computers for instantaneous monitoring and alerts. Diving deeper on the technicality, noise mapping systems would interlink a weighted sound level, the background noise level, and the peak noise level. These different values accumulate to provide various traffic insights, including vehicle horns, traffic volume, and vehicle infotainment systems. Implementation of noise mapping systems can be

helpful in high traffic areas such as popular roads, highly sensitive areas, road junctions, commercial centers, and crossroads. Based on the spot, city administration can set a noise level threshold. These thresholds can act as reference points to identify if the noise limit is exceeded and needs immediate attention.

#### Noise Mapping & Importance Of Geographical Information Systems (GIS)

Geographical Information Systems are often core additions to noise mapping systems. GIS provides complete insight for smart city layers on a single platform. Different government administration departments can be in synchronization with the latest information thanks to a central GIS. GIS serves the purpose of visually representing old data in an effortless manner. Most of the GIS can also perform calculations and show the transformed data over a local user interface or the internet. The latter approach of Internet-based GIS is more popular than with other IoT-based smart city applications. To emphasize further, online noise mapping is helpful in order to ensure that the public is clear about strategic noise mapping and planning. Online noise mapping is the best way to ensure that the masses can access comprehensive and clear data easily. As such, many governments themselves support the idea of an online interface. Representing this information over the internet on a web page would allow users with accessibility. Thus, users can access those systems via mobile devices and computers.

#### Noise Action Planning For Smart Cities

After the preparation of noise mapping, Noise action planning follows as the next step. Action planning authorities and administrations prepare a noise action plan in a case where the noise exceeds the set threshold level. Noise action plans lay the foundation to manage the noise levels and reduce the environmental noise. Noise mitigation measures are essential for smart city infrastructures to improve further. As a result, cities can plan alternate routes, additional infrastructures, and traffic accumulation. Noise mapping is one of the credible technologies for smart cities to come. Traffic application and infrastructure management are just one of the noise mapping applications. Noise mapping can also be useful to identify human engagement in workspaces for Covid-19 prevention protocols. Furthermore, noise pollution can be monitored to restrict any ill effects of noise around anesthesia patients in hospitals. To conclude, there are many different and out-of-the-box themed ideas that will allow massive growth for smart cities. Making the most out of existing nature and ambiance is the efficient way to proceed with technological transformation.

From <https://www.iotworlds.com/> 09/18/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## **Unlocking Citizen-centric Smart Cities in Asia**

Asia's city leaders are among the world's most forward-thinking when it comes to smart cities. In fact, the Asia-Pacific region is set to account for 40% of the global

smart city spending, or \$800 billion by 2025 and 80% of all economic activities is expected to shift to cities in the years to come. Rapid urbanization, demographic shifts, climate change and advancements in technology have all been drivers for disruption for a need for smarter cities. This transformation has been further accelerated by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, which revealed vulnerabilities, but also prompted cities to seek out new technologies to help them deal with COVID-related disruptions. Digital transformation will be high on the agenda at the upcoming World Smart City Expo (WSCE) . Ahead of that, I share my reflections and observations from across the region on post-crisis efforts in innovation, and how they are transforming cities in Asia. More crucially, how we can stay on track to unlock the realization of smart cities in Asia with our learnings from the pandemic.

### Thinking differently

During the World Cities Summit 2021, where government representatives and industry experts discussed livable and sustainable city challenges, Randeep Sudan, former World Bank executive and Board Advisor of analyst firm, Ecosystem, shared about how city leaders need to “think ahead, think across, and think again to build resilient and sustainable cities of tomorrow”. This includes having strategic foresight to plan and think ahead, thinking across projects to leverage synergies, and thinking again to stay innovative. I couldn’t agree more. Faced with sudden disruption and a need for continuity amid the pandemic, cities have been forced to think differently like never before. Microsoft has been a trusted ally for many of these cities in their pandemic response, especially in helping them think differently to overcome challenges and drive business continuity. When IT staff at the city of Kobe, Japan were overwhelmed with more 40,000 calls a day from citizens seeking information about crisis-related assistance programs and volunteer opportunities, they leveraged Microsoft’s Power Platform to develop an application that could respond to all but the most complex issues. This reduced call volumes by 90 percent, while reassuring citizens that their needs were being met.

Also in Japan, the City of Osaka embraced cloud and remote working shortly before the pandemic began. With Microsoft Teams, about 2,000 workers—nearly 10 percent of the entire city staff – were able to work remotely and could remotely train 518 new recruits and transferees. In Sydney, the New South Wales government and the homelessness sector used the By Name List app, powered by Microsoft’s data collection tool, to help 1,000 rough sleepers to find accommodation. The government’s COVID-19 taskforce continues to make plans to use the app to plan for citizens’ exit from temporary accommodation into permanent supported housing. For the public transportation industry specifically, the need to “think differently” could not be more apparent – people avoided mass transport options and public places almost overnight, following necessary lockdowns imposed in the early months to contain the virus spread. Did you know that with more people opting to travel in their own vehicles, public transport ridership has fallen by an average of 62% since the start of COVID-19? Some cities in Asia are seeing a more severe drop, like Kuala Lumpur

(76.1%) and Tokyo (77%).

To drive business continuity while ensuring public safety amid more crunched budgets, Kuala Lumpur's Mass Rapid Transit Corporation was able to continue building massive rail line extension through the pandemic with Bentley software hosted on Azure. This has enabled more than 1,500 users to collaborate, while reduced errors and design conflicts, improving collaboration efficiency by 35 percent, while ensuring the completion of the project on time and within budget. In Mr Sudan's words earlier, city leaders need to do more than think differently, but also think across, think ahead, and think again. This means working toward a more sustainable future and reconsidering current processes and infrastructure. For instance an India-based startup, SUN Mobility accelerates mass electric vehicle usage with cost-efficient, cloud-connected swappable batteries, in New Delhi and beyond.

From <https://www.msn.com/> 09/07/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## **APEC CEO Summit to Focus on COVID, Disruption and Trust; Registrations Open**

An entrepreneur who started a no-frills airline, an award-winning scientist and broadcaster focused on helping humanity and protecting nature, and an internationally renowned tech reporter and innovator are the first to be announced in the speaker line-up at the APEC CEO Summit 2021. Registrations are now open. The summit will be held as a physical and virtual event for the first time in APEC's history. Attendees in Auckland, New Zealand, will be joined online by delegates from around the world on 11 and 12 November. Thousands of delegates including top-tier executives, business leaders, entrepreneurs and experts are expected to attend. "Delivering comprehensive, private-sector perspectives to APEC's Leaders and impacting positively on the challenges we are all facing requires strong inputs from the region's business community," said the summit Chair, Barbara Chapman. "The summit, as part of the APEC process, really provides the opportunity for businesses to engage in the agenda, especially as the region learns how to live with COVID and navigate life after the pandemic."

The first three virtual speakers were announced last week, when registrations were opened. They are Dr David Suzuki, a gifted interpreter of science and nature; Amber Mac, an award-winning podcaster, TV host, bestselling author and technology reporter; as well as one of Asia's most recognizable entrepreneurs, Tony Fernandes. "With the health pandemic and economic crisis impacting the way the region does business, policy development has to be well-coordinated, coherent and complimentary. The only way that governments can do this is by allowing different voices in the room, including all parts of society at the table," said Dr Rebecca Sta Maria, Executive Director of the APEC Secretariat. "Having inputs from the business community through the APEC CEO Summit is crucial in the development of sound

policies in APEC to ensure resilience in our economy and better prepare for future shocks,” Dr Sta Maria added.

The APEC CEO Summit 2021 will focus on five themes:

The State of the World with and post-COVID: economic recovery, trade and protectionism.

The Digital Disruption Opportunity: digital transformation, technology and innovation, and the importance of digital equity.

The Primacy of Trust: ESG (environmental, social, governance) – the next focus for business, and business as a force for good.

The Future of Energy: clean technology, renewable energy, and energy transition.

The Sustainability Imperative: sustainable growth, climate change, food sustainability.

Visit the APEC CEO Summit 2021 website for the latest news and information on the program, speakers and registration. Members of the media are welcome to attend the APEC CEO Summit 2021, virtually, and in person for New Zealand-based media. To attend, media representatives must complete the registration form. A photo of a business card or press ID, or an email or letter confirming employment may be requested to support the application. Visit this page for more information.

From <https://www.apec.org/> 09/16/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## **Impact of Care Work on Women’s Economic Participation Wins APEC Healthy Women Healthy Economy Research Prize**

An innovative study investigating the correlation between aging parents’ long-term care needs and women’s economic participation wins the 2021 APEC Healthy Women Healthy Economies Research Prize. Announced during the APEC Women and the Economy Forum last Friday, the study found that among all family members, women are usually the primary caregivers of aging parents. This affects women’s labor force participation and income stream. “We found that labor force participation decreases substantially as a result of caregiving needs for married women and women who have children,” said Chen-Wei Hsiang of Chinese Taipei, the co-author of the winning study who is currently pursuing his PhD at University College London. “Our research suggests that caregiving demands can have longer-term impacts on women’s economic prospects, making it more difficult for them to re-enter the workforce,” Hsiang added. “Economies’ long-term care policies should be better targeted to help women’s economic participation.” Hsiang co-authored the study with Dr Ming-Jen Lin of National Taiwan University and Dr Kuan-Ming Chen of the United States’ National Bureau of Economic Research. Their study recommends that policymakers take into account women’s responsibility in providing long-term care for their parents and develop policies that can ease the burden or facilitate caregiving services.

### Watch: Winners of the 2021 APEC Healthy Women Healthy Economies

According to an APEC policy brief, the pandemic has exacerbated the caregiving burden on women and has directly affected their employment situation. Additionally, care work continues to be undervalued despite its essential role. “Unpaid care work, which disproportionately falls on women’s shoulders, is vital for societies to function,” said Renee Graham, Chair of APEC’s Policy Partnership on Women and the Economy. “If we are to build back better and build back more inclusively, we must find ways to support the women who perform the majority of this labor—often without recognition or full appreciation for the important work they are doing.” Dr Ying Yang of China and Nurliyana Binte Daros of Singapore were the runners up for this year’s prize.

Dr Yang’s research explored ways to alter the screening and intervention window periods of thyroid function in pregnant women, and recommended advancing both procedures to pre-pregnancy in order to reduce the risk of complications resulting from maternal thyroid dysfunction. Nurliyana’s research focused on the experiences of illness and complications related to type-two diabetes in low-income women, and the importance of coordinating care between health and social workers and removing such barriers. The APEC Healthy Women Healthy Economies Research Prize aims to spotlight and spur the creation of sex-disaggregated data and is supported by Merck. The winning entry receives USD 20,000 and the two runners-up receive USD 5,000 each.

“In order to help women across the APEC region reach their full economic potential, the unpaid care gap must be recognized as a major barrier to women’s economic empowerment,” said Liz Henderson, Regional Vice President, Merck Biopharma Asia Pacific. “Developing the policy tools that can help us address the unpaid care gap will require the perspectives of diverse stakeholders, whom we look forward to continue convening via APEC Healthy Women, Healthy Economies.” The Healthy Women, Healthy Economies initiative aims to improve women’s health and economic empowerment through public-private partnerships. Published in 2015, the Healthy Women, Healthy Economies Policy Toolkit highlights five areas for improving women’s health across five areas: workplace health and safety; health awareness and access; sexual and reproductive health; gender-based violence; and work/life balance.

From <https://www.apec.org/> 09/28/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## East Asia

### **CHINA: Growth in 5G Use Accelerates Industrial Innovation**

In the Eshan She Ethnic township in Tonglu County, in east China's Zhejiang Province, schools of fish are farmed in green rice paddies. With the help of 5G



technology, local farmers are kept well informed of the growth of both rice and fish. Farmers use 5G sensors and high-definition cameras for real-time monitoring, with data analysis helping inform them when to feed and medicate, according to Wang Yifan from the Hangzhou branch of China Mobile, which has taken part in the smart agricultural program. Wang shared this agricultural application of 5G at the 2021 World 5G Convention this week. The event, which opened in Beijing on Tuesday, saw over 1,500 industry experts and entrepreneurs from 20 countries and regions participating online and offline. There are over 10,000 cases of innovative 5G use in China, covering the fields of industry, health care, education and transportation, Han Xia, chief engineer of the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology, told a convention forum on Tuesday. Essential to China's 5G application boom is the development of the world's best 5G infrastructure.

China's 5G base stations in operation make up over 70 percent of the global total, while the country has over 80 percent of the world's 5G terminal connections, Han said. As the technology matures and its real-life application becomes more popular, 5G is changing all walks of life in China, assisting the development of both the economy and the society. In addition to the internet and communication industries, traditional industries such as mining and construction have also embraced 5G technology and gained benefits. The ready-to-open Universal Beijing Resort has built many artificial hills, with the design, construction and maintenance all using 5G technology, said Yang Binhe with contractor China Construction Second Engineering Bureau. The integration of 5G, AI and cloud will provide strong impetus to innovation and economic growth, empower brand-new business models, services and sources of revenue, while accelerating the digital transformation of a wide range of industries, said Alex Rogers, President of Qualcomm Technology Licensing (QTL) and Global Affairs, Qualcomm Incorporated, during a video speech at the conference on Tuesday.

According to Rogers, Qualcomm expects the global shipments of 5G smartphones to reach nearly 500 million units in 2021 and over 750 million units in 2022. Rogers said 5G will have a major impact on the global economy. According to global business information provider IHS Markit, 5G is projected to create over 13 trillion U.S. dollars of global economic output, along with more than 20 million jobs, in 2035. Han Xia called for more efforts to promote the integrated development of cross-sector 5G application technologies, build mutually beneficial and cooperative industrial ecosystems and strive for the scale development of the industries. "We will strengthen communication and cooperation with other countries around the world on 5G technology, standards, industries and policies, and jointly create an international cooperation environment that draws on each other's strengths," said Han.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 09/01/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

**China Improves Business Environment, Provides Foreign**

## Investors with Larger Markets: White Paper

China is steadily improving its business environment and providing foreign investors with larger markets, said a white paper released Tuesday by China's State Council Information Office. In 2020, China took 31st place among 190 economies in the World Bank's ease of doing business ranking, rising from 91st place in 2012, according to the white paper titled "China's Epic Journey from Poverty to Prosperity." The country has formulated high-standard policies to facilitate free trade and investment, including enacting the Foreign Investment Law, implementing pre-establishment national treatment, and expanding market access by reducing the number of items on the negative list, said the white paper. China has received a new high of more than 1 trillion yuan (about 156 billion U.S. dollars) of foreign direct investment in 2020, according to the white paper.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 09/28/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## Digital Innovation Empowers China's Governance Efficiency

As digital technology is being fully integrated into the production and life of humankind, China is stepping up efforts to improve its digital governance to create better lives for all. At an expo titled "the Light of Internet," various types of cutting-edge digital technologies and products empowering digital governance and promoting inclusive development were showcased to the audience. The expo was held as part of the 2021 World Internet Conference Wuzhen Summit, which concluded on Tuesday in Wuzhen, east China's Zhejiang Province. Zhejiang, which has been designated as a demonstration zone for promoting common prosperity, is driving its governance modernization with digital reform. For instance, Wusi Village in Huzhou City has benefited from the local government's efforts to build the first 5G base station in the village. Dynamic data about the production, life and ecological environment of the village was displayed on digital platforms, providing valuable information for the government to improve public services for rural residents.

"Thanks to the convenience and the opportunities brought by the digital transformation, more and more young people have chosen to come back to start businesses and live in the village," said Sun Guowen, Party secretary of Wusi Village. Other healthcare services have adopted digital medical care to effectively facilitate high-quality medical resource distribution, enabling residents, especially those in remote areas, to access high-quality medical services without leaving home. At Wuzhen Internet Hospital, patients can make consultations online, get their e-prescriptions, and make medical insurance claims via their mobile phones. One of the earliest adaptors of this technology, the hospital's medical platform connects with 31 Internet hospitals across the country, and nearly 20 of them have been covered by medical insurance. The stories of Wusi village and Wuzhen epitomize China's actions to enhance digital governance efficiency through digital innovation to benefit

more people. To reduce the regional gap and advance inclusive development, the country has actively developed public services in digital forms such as online classrooms and "smart" libraries.

China's efforts in enhancing digital governance efficiency have been recognized by the world. According to the 2020 United Nations E-Government Survey, China's Online Service Index (OSI), as a core index to measure the development of national e-government services, has risen sharply to 9th place in the world. Meanwhile, with the rapid development of digital technologies, cybersecurity has been facing new challenges. To better capture the "digital dividends," China has formulated laws and regulations to sustain the healthy development of the Internet industry. The Standing Committee of the 13th National People's Congress, China's top legislature, has adopted a new law on personal information protection. The law makes provisions prohibiting the excessive collection of personal information and big data-enabled price discrimination against existing customers.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 09/29/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## **JAPAN: Police to Increasingly Partner Up with AI to Fight Crime**

Whether the criminal activity you're dealing in is money laundering, stalking or selling drugs on social media, AI is coming for you, as Japan's police partner up more with the increasingly efficient multitasking technology. The National Police Agency is exploring the potential and limits of artificial intelligence in investigations and security operations via trial runs. Some AI-based techniques have already yielded significant benefits in crime detection tests. "We are aggressively forging ahead with trials for more advanced, improved police activity," a senior NPA official said. "However, so that police officers can make final judgments on their own, we have no plans to leave everything to AI." The NPA in fiscal 2019 began a verification test of an AI system that analyzed images of dozens of models of vehicles. Based on its analysis of still images of cars taken from security cameras near crime scenes, the system showed the five most likely car models in order of probability.

The number of car models that the system is able to analyze is expected to rise to around 1,000 this fiscal year. The upgraded system to be tested will scan videos to identify target vehicles and extract scenes showing the same models. An AI system used to aid money laundering investigations compares potentially illegal transactions reported from financial institutions and other organizations with cases that have previously been connected to crimes. Examining a range of factors, the technology gauges the extent of risk to pinpoint which instances should be investigated first. After a test of the system in fiscal 2019 verified the method's effectiveness, the NPA is now looking to put it into full use by the end of this fiscal year.

The NPA conducted a similar experiment to detect suspicious behavior in crowds at

large events for security purposes but encountered a few problems with it that still need to be ironed out. People's movements and other elements were analyzed based on videos taken in the experiment of places around the venues to pick out potential terrorist activity. The findings revealed the precision level was higher for relatively uncrowded areas, but the suspicious behavior detection accuracy fell for sites where there were so many people that they were recorded overlapping each other in the videos. An NPA official said that while the police plan to use the system as is, they hope to upgrade it. "We will take advantage of the technology, such as combining it with a new technique to be developed from now on, keeping the outcomes accumulated through experiments in mind," the official said.

From fiscal 2020, the NPA began a test to identify potentially dangerous behavior caught on video by security cameras at police boxes and other police facilities. If the system detects suspicious acts such as people loitering, lingering in the same places or pulling out a weapon on the video, it sends that information out to local police headquarters and police stations. The positive results of a trial of the system at 10 police substations and a few smaller counterparts for which Chiba and Gifu prefectural police are responsible led the NPA to utilize the technology to build a new system to detect and report suspicious acts and alert police officers. In another verification test, complaints about stalkers and violence against partners were screened to determine the level of risk the person filing the complaint faced. The analysis was carried out based on a check list detailing the victims' allegations and their relationships with the accused.

The findings suggested the system would help police officers make decisions on cases, and the NPA plans to review the points in its check list based on them. An additional program is under way in fiscal 2021 that helps officers patrolling the streets easily refer to citizens' names, drivers' license information and their automobile registration numbers during questioning. Specialized centers equipped with AI at local police headquarters record audio data of officers' requests for information. The NPA is next looking into whether ways can be found for AI to filter out background noise and eliminate other potential bad telecommunications conditions that might cause officers' audio to be difficult to discern. The NPA also expects to start using AI to sift through social media posts to catch communications linked to illegal drug trafficking in fiscal 2021. Information on buying and selling cannabis and other substances will be recovered and analyzed with attention paid to internet slang.

The system is anticipated to make it much easier for police to identify problematic posts and request their deletion. Ko Shikata, a criminology professor at Chuo University who is knowledgeable about police operations, noted AI will help police to do more than just improve the efficiency of daily tasks. "Use of AI will also make investigations and other activities fairer, because misjudgments can be prevented with it," Shikata said. Shikata also dispelled concerns about police relying on AI. "The current way of using the technology simply aims to support officers' decision-making,

not to replace police officers," he said. "As long as the final judgments are made by humans based on law, adoption of AI won't pose any adverse effects." The professor also noted that "combining knowledge on AI accumulated by police and the private sector may lead to the development of more advanced technologies needed by both sides."

From <https://www.asahi.com> 09/02/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## **Japan to Issue Online Vaccine Certificates in December**

The Japanese government will issue online COVID-19 vaccination certificates, starting in December. The government plans to issue the certificate via a QR code through a smartphone app. The code will be scanned to process vaccination information. Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga and all other cabinet members will attend a digital society promotion conference on Monday, where they will officially approve the "digital vaccine passports." The project will be designated as a priority for the Digital Agency, which was launched Sept. 1. An image of Japan's proposed digital COVID-19 vaccination certificate displayed on a smartphone. The government and municipalities currently issue vaccine certificates on paper. Municipal offices nationwide handle the work and applications generally must be made on paper. The certificates are intended for overseas travel rather than domestic use.

The government has begun devising a method to read and confirm the QR code displayed on the smartphone app at airports. The most recent Group of Seven summit, in its joint statement, said a common standard was necessary to regulate flows of people, including mutual authentication of apps. Specifications will be set based on standards drawn up by organizations such as the International Civil Aviation Organization. Japan will create a system that complies with these international standards. It will also consider whether smartphone-based certificates can be used for domestic purposes such as dining out, travel and admission to events.

From <https://newsonjapan.com> 09/05/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## **Japan Govt. Extends Coronavirus State of Emergency**

Japan's government is extending the coronavirus state of emergency in many parts of the country. It will remain in place for 19 prefectures, including Tokyo and Osaka, until the end of September. Prime Minister Suga Yoshihide says new infections are declining across the country, but warns the number of serious cases remains high. Suga said, "Experts say we should consider various factors when deciding whether to lift the emergency declaration. These include hospital occupancy rate, the number of seriously ill patients, the number of new cases, the number of people isolating at home, and the extent to which the vaccines are improving the situation. So we made

our decision based on these points." Suga stressed that the government would finish giving shots to everyone who wants them in October or November. He added the government plans to ease restrictions, using a system that checks vaccination certificates or negative test results. The state of emergency is currently in place for 21 prefectures and was set to run through Sunday.

Under the new plan, Miyagi and Okayama prefectures will shift to less strict quasi-emergency measures. The minister in charge of the coronavirus response says the medical system remains strained in most areas under the state of emergency. The health ministry says there are nearly 2,200 COVID-19 patients across Japan who are in serious condition. Officials say they are focused on bolstering the medical system and making sure new cases will keep declining. Japan's state of emergency is less rigid than lockdowns in other countries. The government calls on people to avoid crowds and work from home as much as possible. It urges bars and restaurants not to serve alcohol and to close early. Department stores and shopping malls are asked to limit customers. And major event venues have been told to restrict audiences. Authorities across Japan confirmed more than 10,000 coronavirus infections on Thursday.

Suga has already announced he is not seeking reelection as leader of the main ruling Liberal Democratic Party. The move means he is effectively stepping down as Prime Minister. Suga emphasized the decision was so he could focus entirely on fighting the coronavirus. Suga said, "My duty as Prime Minister is to lay the groundwork for us to overcome the current crisis and return to our normal lives with a sense of security." He added, "I will continue to devote myself to the duties of the office until my very last day as Prime Minister." Suga also touted his achievements of the past year. He said he was proud of his work accelerating the vaccination rollout, strengthening the Japan-US alliance, and hosting the Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games. Suga was pressed by reporters on who he would back as his successor. He said he would decide on September 17, when official campaigning starts. The LDP leadership election will take place on September 29.

From <https://newsonjapan.com> 09/10/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## **Japan Mulls Tougher Punishment for Cyber Crime**

Japanese Justice Minister Yoko Kamikawa said on Tuesday that the country is considering the introduction of a tougher jail sentence as part of penalties for cyber crimes. Kamikawa told a press conference that she would ask her advisory panel on Thursday to review the plan to impose a prison term of up to one year or a fine of up to 300,000 yen (\$2,726) for online insults and extend the statute of limitations for three years, reports Xinhua news agency. Currently, the penalty is a less than 30 days of detention or a fine of less than 10,000 yen, and the statute of limitations is only one year. Kamikawa said: "Online insults provoke similar posts one after another,

which can lead to irreversible human rights violations... As we see growing criticism against online abuse, we need to designate the act as a crime to be seriously dealt with and curb it." Hana Kimura, a 22-year-old woman, was a professional wrestler and cast member of the popular Netflix reality show "Terrace House" in May 2020.

She committed suicide because of a barrage of hateful messages on social media, which was a well-known case of cyberbullying in Japan. However, two men found guilty in the case were only fined 9,000 yen. Provisions on insults have not been drastically reviewed under Japan's Penal Code, as the law was established in 1907. Defamation, a similar concept that involves an untrue statement referring to a specific action, could be penalized with a prison term of up to three years or a fine of up to 500,000 yen in Japan. However, it is not suitable to include insults under this penalty. After the death of Kimura, Parliament in April introduced a law for establishing an easier court procedure for helping victims of cyberbullying to seek perpetrators. With the legislation, which is expected to be effective in the fall of next year, victims can obtain information of the harassers through only one court proceeding instead of going through at least two court proceedings, with one of them for social media operators and the other for the internet service provider, at present.

From <https://www.glamsham.com> 09/14/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## **Digital Technology Helps Trigger Revival of Unattended Sales Stands in Japan**

Honesty boxes — unattended tills set up for customers to pay for purchases on the honor system — might conjure images of stands in rural areas lined with fresh vegetables and fruit, but recently, they've been popping up in urban areas, too. Premium peaches and nectarines filled the shelves of the "F Stand" honesty box in front of a cafe in Tokyo's Sugamo district in August. Sold in pairs, the peaches cost ¥1,200 and the nectarines were ¥900. Customers were able to pay for their items using e-money services by scanning a QR code attached to the stand, which also had a sign informing customers it only stocks fruit that has been harvested in the last 48 hours. "Farmers showcase the products on social media and you can see the picking and packing processes, so you can shop with confidence," a customer picking up nectarines said. "The fruit has a rich aroma compared to what you find in supermarkets. Once you start eating them it's hard to stop"

F Stand is operated by Makoto Aarii, 35, a Yamanashi Prefecture-native who gets fruit from farmers in the prefecture and sells them from about five honesty boxes in Tokyo. He uses social media to let customers know when he has restocked the stands, which are not kept at the same locations permanently. Aarii launched the initiative last year to help people get their hands on fresh fruit, as the sector was hit hard by the coronavirus crisis. Selling items from an unattended stand was a way to cut costs and limit person-to-person contact amid the pandemic. Although Aarii was concerned

that light-fingered opportunists might take fruit without paying, he said no products had been stolen as the stands are in areas where people are always passing by. Fruit and vegetables are not the only products that are being sold from unstaffed outlets. The Yukimatsu Gyoza chain sells frozen dumplings at about 200 unmanned stores, mainly in the Kanto region.

Freezers at the outlets are stocked with only one kind of item: a pack containing 36 frozen gyoza that costs ¥1,000. For security purposes, cameras are installed in the stores, which each have payment boxes that resemble offertory boxes typically found at Japanese shrines and temples. Kengo Takanouchi of the chain's operating company said people were less likely to misbehave if they saw something that reminded them of a place of worship. Sales at the gyoza shops have been strong, and the company plans to expand the business nationwide. With many people reducing in-person contact due to the pandemic, honesty boxes have evolved in the digital era. Used clothes and electric appliances are among some of the more surprising items found at some locations.

Yasuhiro Yamazaki of the Distribution Economics Institute of Japan said "The increase in honesty boxes may be a reflection of business difficulties rather than strategic initiatives." With their novelty appeal attracting attention on social media, some regional areas are hoping to utilize the revival of unmanned stores to revitalize their communities. A project combining art and farming was launched last year on the Miura Peninsula, in Kanagawa Prefecture. Locally-grown vegetables are sold from a hut artistically decorated by fabrics in an initiative called Koyart, which combines the words "Koya" (hut) and "art." The project is aimed at promoting communication between local residents and visitors. "If the hut as an architectural structure also has the function of selling vegetables, many ideas will be born," said Mikio Koshihara, a professor at the University of Tokyo who is involved in the project. "It might also help to create connections between people."

From <https://the-japan-news.com> 09/17/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## **To Tackle Cyberbullying, Japan Eyes Tougher Prison Sentence for Online Insults**

Japan plans to introduce a tougher prison sentence as part of penalties for online insults amid growing calls to tackle cyberbullying, Justice Minister Yoko Kamikawa said Tuesday. Kamikawa told a news conference that she will ask her advisory panel to examine the plan to impose a prison term of up to one year or a fine of up to ¥300,000 (\$2,725) over insults at its meeting Thursday. At present, the penalty against insults is detention for less than 30 days or a fine of less than ¥10,000. The Justice Ministry is also planning to extend the statute of limitations for insults from one year to three years. "Online insults provoke similar posts one after another, which can lead to irreversible human rights violations," Kamikawa said. "As we see



growing criticism against online abuse, we need to designate the act as a crime to be seriously dealt with and curb it.”

Recent high-profile cases in Japan involving insults in cyberspace include the death of Hana Kimura, 22, a professional wrestler and cast member of the popular Netflix reality show “Terrace House” in May 2020. She apparently committed suicide after receiving a barrage of hateful messages on social media. Two men in Osaka and Fukui prefectures were penalized ¥9,000 each for their insults against Kimura, but there were voices of concern that the penalties were too light. In Japan, the penalty against defamation, which involves an untrue statement referring to a specific action, is a prison term of up to three years or a fine of up to ¥500,000. In comparison, insults are bad-mouthing someone using phrases like “annoying” or “creepy” without referring to a specific action. As provisions on insults under the country’s Penal Code have not been drastically reviewed since the law was established in 1907, there have been urgent calls to address the matter.

The advisory panel is expected to discuss how to find a delicate balance between freedom of expression and tougher regulations on online abuse. Following Kimura’s death, the Diet in April enacted a law to establish a simpler court procedure that will help victims of cyberbullying to identify those who make defamatory posts online. Under the legislation, expected to take effect by fall next year, cyberbullying victims will go through only one court proceeding to identify individuals who make hateful posts online, saving them time and costs related to such requests. At present, people, in general, must go through at least two court proceedings — one against social media operators and the other against internet service providers to obtain information on their harassers. In a time of both misinformation and too much information, quality journalism is more crucial than ever. By subscribing, you can help us get the story right.

From <https://parentsecurityonline.com> 09/20/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## **JICA Issues Japan's 1st Gender Bonds for Female Empowerment**

The Japan International Cooperation Agency issued the country's first gender bonds on Monday to promote women's empowerment and education and ensure gender equality in developing nations. The government-backed aid agency raised a combined 20 billion yen (\$181 million) in bonds with maturities of 10 years and 20 years to fund projects in places where women do not have the same opportunities as men to receive education, work, and participate in political activities. Women-focused assistance has taken on greater importance amid the coronavirus pandemic, with more females subject to domestic violence and deprived of chances for employment or education, according to JICA. The increase in violence against women is a result of people spending more time at home under hard lockdown measures to fight the COVID-19 outbreak implemented in some nations. JICA's gender bonds are part of

social bonds that are used to address various challenges. Gender equality is among the 17 sustainable development goals set by the United Nations. The aid agency has launched bonds designed to achieve specific targets. Among them are "TICAD bonds" to help African development, taking the name from the Tokyo International Conference on African Development, a high-level governmental dialogue between Japan and African nations. In response to the coronavirus pandemic, it has issued bonds to improve medical systems and enhance public health in developing nations.

From <https://japantoday.com> 09/28/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## South-East Asia

### **INDONESIA: To Continue New Capital City Project amid Economic Pressure Due to Pandemic**

Indonesia will continue its plan to build a new capital city in East Kalimantan province on the island of Borneo despite the economic pressure due to the current COVID-19 pandemic, President Joko Widodo said Wednesday. Widodo made the remarks at a meeting with a senior minister and several business associations. "The president said the development plan of a new capital city will continue to be carried out," Coordinating Minister for Economic Affairs Airlangga Hartarto said after the meeting. Widodo announced in August 2019 that a new capital city would be built between the districts of North Penajam Paser and Kutai Kartanegara in East Kalimantan province. With an area of about 127,000 square km, East Kalimantan is home to more than 3.7 million people. The relocation of the capital city is highlighted in the 2020-2024 National Medium-Term Development Plan. The groundbreaking was initially expected to be conducted in August last year, but it was delayed due to the pandemic. According to Hartarto, the project was estimated to take up to 20 years.

From <http://www.xinhuanet.com> 09/08/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

### **Indonesia Expands Coverage of Covid-19 Vaccination Monitoring Application for Foreigners**

Indonesia's Ministry of Health announced on Tuesday that it has expanded its test and trace application's outreach and language services for its citizens and foreigners who received COVID-19 vaccine inoculations in other countries and will return to Indonesia. The application is a monitoring tool so that people could move safely in public places such as shopping centers, offices, and tourist sites in Indonesia. "We have listed several brands of COVID-19 vaccines used in other countries, more or less similar to those in Indonesia, such as Sinovac, Sinopharm, Pfizer, Johnson & Johnson, Moderna, AstraZeneca, and others," Setiaji, the ministry's Chief of Digital Transformation Office, said at a virtual press conference. The application's language services are being expanded to English, Chinese, Arabic, Japanese, and Russian in

order to reach more foreigners. Foreigners only need to apply for registration on a website, and then the authorities will verify the data to their respective embassies, said the ministry.

*From <http://www.xinhuanet.com> 09/14/2021*

[TOP ↑](#)

## **THAILAND: Approving Long-Term Visa to Attract Wealthy Foreigners**

Thailand on Tuesday approved measures to attract long-term stay of high-potential foreigners, aiming to attract 1 million people in the next five years. Government Spokesman Thanakorn Wangboonkongchana said the cabinet has approved in principle investment and economic stimulus measures to attract four target groups including global citizens, foreign retirees, remote workers who intend to work in Thailand and highly-skilled professionals. One of the major measures is the introduction of a long-term resident visa, a new type of visa exclusively granted to high-potential foreign groups. Under this category, a number of privileges will be given, such as exemption of 90-day reports to immigration office, according to Thanakorn. There are also some amendments to related laws or regulations, such as land ownership, exemption from foreign income tax, and exemption on the mandatory local hiring quota, the spokesman noted. According to the Office of the National Economic and Social Development Council(NESDC), the implementation period of these measures would be five fiscal years (2022-2026), during which approximately 1 million foreign residents are expected, with the cash flow of 1 trillion Baht in the economic system, an increase of domestic investment by 800 billion Baht, and 270 billion Baht of tax income. Thanakorn added that these measures will be reevaluated every five years.

*From <http://www.xinhuanet.com> 09/14/2021*

[TOP ↑](#)

## **Commerce Ministry Launches New Hotline for Consumer Complaints**

The Commerce Ministry has set up a special 1569 nationwide hotline for people to file complaints if they find themselves having to pay unnecessarily high prices for necessities. The ministry has also warned shopkeepers that they can face more than seven years behind bars and/or a fine of 140,000 baht if they take undue advantage of consumers, especially in areas hit by natural disasters. Commerce Minister Jurin Laksanawisit told the press on Sunday that his ministry wants to ease people's burden, especially those already suffering from floods. As part of this effort, it has instructed all provincial offices to closely monitor prices and take action if shopkeepers are caught making profits. Apart from making necessities available at affordable prices, the ministry will also ensure people have access to other necessary products like tools as well as cleaning and building equipment to repair

their homes once the floods recede, Jurin said. "Dealing with floods is actually the responsibility of the Interior Ministry with cooperation from provincial governors, the Department of Disaster Prevention and Mitigation and other state agencies. But if people find themselves having to pay unnecessarily high prices, then they can file a complaint via the 1569 hotline, which has been set up by the Commerce Ministry's Department of Internal Trade," the minister said.

*From <https://www.nationthailand.com/> 09/27/2021*

[TOP ↑](#)

## **Cabinet Approves Immediate Registration of Illegal Migrant Workers to Combat Outbreaks**

The Cabinet on Tuesday approved immediate registration of undocumented migrant workers in a bid to curb further outbreaks of Covid-19. The move means foreign workers who do not have work permits can be registered quickly so they are covered by disease controls. Labour Minister Suchart Chomklin explained that the Covid-19 infection rate remained high in industrial areas of Bangkok and surrounding provinces. The large number of undocumented migrant workers in these areas triggered a high risk of outbreaks. The Labour Ministry had therefore proposed guidelines for managing workers from Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar. Under the Cabinet-approved proposal, employers of unregistered migrant workers are required to register them with work permits. The move will enable authorities to keep tabs on migrant workers so as to strengthen disease controls.

*From [https://www.nationthailand.com](https://www.nationthailand.com/) 09/28/2021*

[TOP ↑](#)

## **VIETNAM: Government's Task Force Established to Help Businesses, People Affected by Covid-19**

A task force, led by Deputy Prime Minister Lê Minh Khái, has been established to help businesses and people affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. It is an interdisciplinary organisation with the function of supporting the Government and Prime Minister Phạm Minh Chính to research, direct and coordinate in solving important tasks to help businesses and people that are suffering. The task force was set up after Prime Minister Phạm Minh Chính recently signed the Decision 1447/QĐ-TTg. It has three deputy heads – Minister of Planning and Investment Nguyễn Chí Dũng; Minister of Finance Hồ Đức Phớc and Minister of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs Đào Ngọc Dung. The task force aims to tackle difficulties and problems of both people and businesses then propose solutions to fix them to the Prime Minister. It has the right to request ministries, ministerial level agencies, Government agencies and provincial-level People's Committees to provide information, coordinate in implementation, arrange officials to solve problems within the agencies' competence; and invite heads of relevant central and local agencies, organisations, associations and experts to consult in performing the task force's

missions. The task force was told to send a report of the progress to Prime Minister Phạm Minh Chính every month or any time if required. Khái – head of the task force could use the seal of the Prime Minister to serve the performance of the task force's assigned missions.

*From <https://vietnamnews.vn/08/31/2021>*

[TOP ↑](#)

## **Politburo Asks for Best Efforts to Control Pandemic and Recover Economy**

The Politburo has asked for best efforts in pandemic prevention and control while executing socio-economic development targets at its meeting held on Friday to discuss the Government report on the implementation of the socio-economic development plan for the remainder of 2021 and 2022. The meeting, chaired by Party General Secretary Nguyễn Phú Trọng, also heard Government reports on the implementation of the State budget in 2021 and plans for 2022; the financial and State budget plan for 2022-24; and time proposed to carry out the salary policy reform. The Politburo agreed the pandemic prevention and control since the beginning of the year has achieved positive results, production and business activities have been maintained, and social security is ensured, particularly for people and workers in pandemic-hit areas. However, with the rapid spread of the Delta variant since the fourth outbreak, the socio-economic development of the country is facing many difficulties and challenges which may last through the year and to early 2022, affecting the possibility to fulfil set targets for the rest of the year. The Politburo has told ministries, agencies and localities to stay alert and continue study to supplement, complete and implement pandemic prevention and control measures with priorities giving to ensuring vaccine sources and medicine; and resolutely prevent and control COVID-19 to protect people's health and lives; closely watch the situation to proactively build proper and feasible plans and solutions to cope with the pandemic which may last for a long time.

It is necessary to proactively prepare pandemic prevention and control plans and effectively implement the economic recovery and development programme, be ready to adapt and cope with any situations, tap opportunities from quick recovery trends of big economies, and support job generation, income increase, and improvement of living conditions for labourers, the Politburo said. The Politburo agreed with the plan to propose the Party Central Committee and the National Assembly to allow delaying the timeframe to carry out the salary policy reform. Concluding the meeting, Party General Secretary Trọng said the reports were carefully made and they analysed and assessed correctly, objectively, and comprehensively the pandemic situation and prevention and control tasks as well as socio-economic development and State budget from early this year with forecast for the remaining months of 2021. The reports would serve as a foundation for the building of the socio-economic development plan and State financial and budget plan in line with the real situation,

ensuring pandemic prevention and control and socio-economic development from now until the end of 2021 and for 2020.

*From <https://vietnamnews.vn> 09/18/2021*

[TOP ↑](#)

## **HCM City Proposes Giving 'Green Card' to People Vaccinated at Least Once**

HCM City's Department of Health has proposed giving the COVID-19 'green card' to people who have received at least one dose of vaccine. The plan was sent to the city's Steering Committee on COVID-19 Prevention and Control on Saturday after a meeting between its departments of health, information and communications, and planning and investment. A COVID-19 'green card' is a certificate of vaccination, provided to people who have developed antibodies against COVID-19 due to being vaccinated, or having recovered from the virus and completed mandatory quarantine. The health department proposed giving this card to people at least two weeks after they receive the first dose of vaccine (for vaccines that require two shots) and also to patients who recovered from COVID-19 and are able to present a certificate of recovery from their local health authorities. Certificates of recovery are also required for patients who treat themselves at home and have fully recovered, according to a set of instructions on identifying COVID-19 recoveries signed by Dr Lê Hồng Nga, deputy director of the HCM City centre of disease control, on Saturday. "For those who tested themselves and self-quarantined at home, after they get a certificate of recovery from the health centres of their wards, communes and towns, or from teams of medical staff who take care of COVID-19 patients at home, they will be certified as having completed self-quarantine," the instructions read. "Those who can't get such a certificate will have to get vaccinated against COVID-19." There were 90,203 patients receiving treatment at home in HCM City as of Friday.

*From <https://vietnamnews.vn/> 09/20/2021*

[TOP ↑](#)

## **Hà Nội Boosts Technology Application in 'One Commune, One Product' Programme**

Under the 'One Commune, One Product' (OCOP) programme, investment in technology is key to improving both product quality and the effectiveness of production. OCOP goods are highly localised products, often food, that come from a small specific area. In recent years, OCOP businesses in Hà Nội have made efforts to invest in applying technology to production, help improving product standards and raising product quality, under the OCOP Programme. Forty-seven products from Ba Vì District have been evaluated and obtained a high ranking in the OCOP Programme. Of them, 34 products have achieved a 4-star rating as quality products such as; dairy products, ostrich sausage, vermicelli, and vegetarian products. Businesses in the district have utilised technology in breeding and processing.

Nguyễn Thị Mai, General Director of Ba Vì Dairy Farm Joint Stock Company said her company has worked with 20 dairy farming households in Ba Vì District. To ensure milk quality, the company and dairy farmers have developed a hygienic barn system equipped with an automated milking system. The company has also invested in advanced production lines to ensure high-quality dairy products. As a result, 10 out of 20 various kinds of dairy products have been recognised as 4-star products by the Hà Nội People's Committee. The company's dairy products are currently sold in Hà Nội as well as neighbouring provinces such as Hải Dương, Hưng Yên, Yên Bái, Bắc Giang and Bắc Ninh.

Đỗ Quang Trung, Vice Chairman of Ba Vì District People's Committee, said "Over the last months, to build and develop OCOP goods in Ba Vì, the district authority has implemented many solutions to support cooperatives and firms. After being certified as OCOP goods, all cooperatives and businesses now know how to apply science and technology into their production, to enhance product quality and output". Businesses in Đông Anh District of Hà Nội have also implemented technology into their production. As a result, many OCOP goods from the district have been exported, such as eco-friendly straws made from fruit and vegetables, director of the Song Hong Co-Op, Lê Văn Tám, said. Tám said "1,500sq.m of arable land has been turned into six growing areas by applying Israeli greenhouse farming technology, to grow organic vegetables and fruits to make the raw materials for the production of eco-friendly straws. Besides replacing plastic straws, the unique product is also a nutritious foodstuff with a unique taste. The straws are made from 100 per cent organic ingredients and the use of advanced production lines ensures good quality.

Every day, his cooperative produces about 50,000 straws that are supplied to domestic supermarkets, coffee shops, airports and tourist companies, as well as foreign countries such as South Korea and Germany. Head of the Economic Office of Đông Anh District, Nguyễn Văn Thiêng, emphasised that "firms and cooperatives in Đông Anh District have learned how to apply high-tech solutions to produce high-quality OCOP goods, allowing them to gain a firm foothold in the domestic market. As a result, the value of OCOP products has increased by 15-25 per cent." According to Nguyễn Văn Chi, Permanent Deputy Chief of the Hanoi Office of New Rural Development Program Coordination, "The application of science and high technology is a key factor in helping OCOP goods improved in terms of quality while stimulating competitiveness. To continue enhancing the quality of OCOP goods, Hà Nội will continue to support businesses, cooperatives and localities in applying technology, biotechnology, and scientific and technological advances into the production of agro and forestry products, especially regional specialities."

*From <https://vietnamnews.vn/> 09/26/2021*

[TOP ↑](#)

**VCCI Launches Virtual Workplace Platform on COVID-19 Response Solutions**

HÀ NỘI A virtual workplace platform named VCCI-Workplace was launched late last week by the Business Cooperation Council in Response to COVID-19 under the Việt Nam Chamber of Commerce and Industry (VCCI) to help enterprises in the fight against COVID-19 and resume production and business. According to VCCI, given the complicated developments of the COVID-19 pandemic, businesses will have to live with the pandemic in the long run. Thus, it set up the Business Cooperation Council in Response to COVID-19 and coordinated with Facebook to build the virtual platform. The council aims to promptly update and reflect arising issues and difficulties facing the business community and to collect the community's recommendations and suggest related policies and solutions to coping with COVID-19 to the Government and relevant agencies. It will create links among business leaders for cooperation, and information and experience exchanges to combat COVID-19 and sustain production and business operations. The platform works round the clock to collect enterprises' feedback on their issues and proposals to the government and to provide them with consultancy. It will also help connect participating enterprises for experience sharing, mutual support, and trade promotion. All businesses can participate but only those who are chairmen, general directors, and directors of the businesses are eligible to interact on the platform. Interested representatives from enterprises can register on the council's website at <https://covid19.vcci.vn>. According to Nguyễn Quang Vinh, General Secretary of VCCI and head of the council's secretariat, the VCCI-Workplace platform will allow fast and multi-dimensional information sharing and support in making timely decisions as well as more effective teamwork, helping to improve the cooperation between the council and members who are business representatives.

*From <https://vietnamnews.vn/> 09/26/2021*

[TOP ↑](#)

## South Asia

### **INDIA: Fortinet Pledges to Train 1 Million People to Bridge Cybersecurity Skills Gap**

“On the heels of the Biden Administration calling for cross-sector leaders to tackle the cybersecurity challenges affecting organizations and people globally, Fortinet is furthering its commitment to significantly reduce the cyber skills gap as part of this initiative. With the rise of sophisticated threats, organizations are more at risk than ever before. To further address these issues, today Fortinet announced additional outcomes we will strive to achieve as we grow our programs and strategic partnerships to address the talent shortage that plagues our industry, ultimately reducing security risks and threats.” Fortinet, a global leader in broad, integrated and automated cybersecurity solutions, today bolstered its commitment to address the cybersecurity skills gap by pledging to train one million people globally across the next five years through its Training Advancement Agenda (TAA) initiatives and



Network Security Experts (NSE) Training Institute programs. Additionally, Fortinet's TAA initiative includes a strong focus on attracting greater diversity through the NSE Security Academy Program, Education Outreach Program and Veterans Program as part of its Corporate Social Responsibility efforts. The skills gap is a significant challenge for organisations of all sizes. According to an (ISC)2 report, in order to fill the cybersecurity skills gap worldwide, 3.12 million professionals are needed. This issue is compounded with the growing sophisticated threat landscape with a recent report from Fortinet's FortiGuard Labs finding that ransomware has increased ten-fold. As many organisations struggle to find talent to fill critical roles needed to help combat these threats, strained security teams are challenged to keep pace with the evolving threat landscape and face more security risks.

The Biden administration is calling on organisations across private and public sectors to assist in an initiative to reduce security risks by helping to develop more cybersecurity talent. For a number of years, Fortinet has been dedicated to closing the skills gap with the establishment of its training programs and TAA initiative, including making all its NSE self-paced training courses available to anyone for free at the beginning of the pandemic in 2020. Fortinet will further build on this longstanding commitment with a pledge to train 1 million people in the next five years. Fortinet's TAA and NSE Training Institute programs provide cybersecurity training and certifications, career growth resources and hiring opportunities to make a career in cyber attainable for all, including women, minorities, veterans and students. Below are key highlights and recent accomplishments contributing to Fortinet's work thus far to bring new talent into the field and build the future cyber workforce to close the cybersecurity skills gap. Cultivating partnerships with business leaders and the public sector: Fortinet collaborates with global leaders to foster a skilled, inclusive and diverse cyber workforce, including IBM, Salesforce and the World Economic Forum. Through our Education Outreach Program, partnerships extend to various sectors, including academia, government and non-profits, to ensure all populations – such as women, minorities and veterans – are provided with opportunities and resources for a career in cyber. For example, in the last two years alone, Fortinet has certified more than 2,000 veterans and their spouses. Momentum with the NSE certification program: The Certification Program is an eight-level training and certification program designed to provide technical professionals with independent validation of their network security skills and experience. With more than 6,80,000 certifications issued and more than one million hours of training consumed from the onset of the pandemic to now alone, the award-winning NSE Certification Program continues to gain traction by offering one of the industry's top cybersecurity training programs. Through this program, Fortinet is helping professionals and others to learn new skills, reskill or upskill in cybersecurity.

Building a cyber-aware workforce with the information security awareness and training service: Fortinet is helping develop a cyber-aware workforce with its Information Security Awareness and Training Service, introduced in 2020 free of cost

for organisations of all sizes. Fortinet's Information Security Awareness and Training Service offer industry-leading cybersecurity awareness components to educate people about today's cyber threats, such as phishing, social engineering, and ransomware attacks, and how to protect against them. The awareness and training service is suitable for the entire workforce, from technical to non-technical employees and contractors. Additionally, this free service was developed in alignment with NIST guidelines: NIST 800-50 and NIST 800-16. Developing OT skills through training and career pathways: With critical infrastructures being a target for many recent cyber attacks, it is crucial for OT organisations to have the proper security and skilled professionals to protect themselves. Fortinet has introduced a new OT security course as part of its NSE level 7 certification to expand technical skills for securing OT environments. OT security is also covered in NSE 4, NSE 5 and NSE 6 courses. Additionally, adding to its four existing pathways, Fortinet recently released a new education pathway focused on Operational Technology with information on the potential job opportunities that exist related to this environment. This new OT education pathway serves as a roadmap on what training and certifications are helpful for anyone exploring a career in OT security roles and aligns to the National Initiative for Cybersecurity Education's (NICE) cybersecurity workforce work roles.

From <https://egov.eletsonline.com/> 09/15/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## **India's Top Policymakers to Participate in 2nd Elets India Transformation Summit on 16-17 Sept 2021**

Elets Technomedia is organising India's largest two-day virtual conference – 2nd Elets India Transformation Summit & Awards on 16th – 17th September 2021. This Summit will be one-stop platform for policymakers, industry leaders, academic and galaxy of luminaries to deliberate on Governance in the post COVID-19 era in the country. In times of COVID-19 pandemic and its economic and social repercussions, public governance is most important. Governance arrangements have played a critical role in countries' immediate responses, and will continue to be crucial both to the recovery and to building a "new normal" once the crisis has passed. Through e-governance, government services are made available to citizens and businesses in a convenient, efficient and transparent manner. In a fast-growing and demanding economy like India, e-governance has become essential. The rapid growth of digitalization has led to many governments across the globe to introduce and incorporate technology into governmental processes. Government of India & State Governments, Policy Think Tanks and Industry Leaders gracing a common platform to come together and discuss the issues, challenges and transformational opportunities beckoning New India.

From <https://egov.eletsonline.com/> 09/20/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## **RBI Allows Aadhaar e-KYC Authentication License for NBFCs to**

## Promote Digitalisation

In a move to promote digitalisation, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has decided to allow NBFCs and payment service providers to enrol for obtaining Aadhaar e-KYC Authentication Licence. Fintech players are of the view that the move will keep a check on frauds apart from boosting digitalisation in the sector. RBI has cleared that payment system providers and payment system participants wanting to obtain Aadhaar Authentication License – KYC User Agency (KUA) License or sub-KUA License may submit their application to the bank for further submission to Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI). Ankit Bhatnagar, Head of Product, Mswipe, commenting on the RBI's move said that it will be helpful in improving trust levels among customers because only those entities having the license will be permitted to conduct eKYC. "Now with eKYC, non-banking entities offering financial services can improve compliance and also ensure that the popular mechanism of customer on-boarding for which they had to depend on third party players can be offered directly through a KUA licence," he added. While, Head Innovation and Product Development for Infracore Technologies Limited, Manoj Chopra opined that the initiative will ease the onboarding of customers for NBFCs, NBFC-Micro Finance Institutions (NBFC-MFI), payment system operators and payment system participants. As of now, NBFCs' were reliant on offline Aadhaar validation that include paper-based authentication mechanisms. This was a cumbersome process as it include sharing of physical documents like photos, IDs, certificates, etc., he added. Gurjodhpal Singh, CEO, Tide India called the move "welcoming for fintech ecosystem." The initiative by the apex bank will promote digitisation that will result in a forward-thinking approach to ensure speedy delivery of financial products in the sector thus improving the experience for customers, Singh added. The RBI recently raised alerts and cautioned people against frauds in the name of KYC. Also, the bank asked people not to share their key information and passwords with unidentified persons or agencies.

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[TOP ↑](#)

## MeitY Holds Workshop to Create Roadmap for Expanding Internet to Uncovered Areas

With an aim to make India gain a place among the world's largest connected countries, the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) has organised a workshop on the theme "Connecting all Indians" to brainstorm a roadmap to boost internet penetration in currently uncovered villages and towns across the country. The workshop witnessed the participation of both public and private stakeholders including the big telecoms and internet service providers Reliance Jio, Airtel, officials from the Ministry and the Department of Telecommunications, Ministry of Communications. During the workshop, the BharatNet project was also reviewed eyeing the vision of the Prime Minister of India

to have the world's largest fibre-based rural broadband connectivity. The deliberations at the workshop shed light on strategies to immediately cover the left out geographies and regions. Union Minister of State for MeitY Rajiv Chandrashekhar chaired the workshop. While setting the tone of the discussions, Chandrashekhar laid out the objectives of the present government to connect all Indians with open safe and trusted and accountable internet. The Minister said, "It is PM Modi's vision through Digital India to empower all citizens with the power of the internet and to simultaneously expand digital economy and jobs." The workshop opened the platform for all the participating stakeholders from the public and the private sector to put forward their vantage points on strategising for expanding the internet penetration to remote corners of the country.

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[TOP ↑](#)

## **Apex Brasil & Elets to Stage AgriTalks, Webinar on Agricultural Innovations & Food Security on Sept 28**

Apex Brasil (Brazilian Trade & Investment Promotion Agency) in a media partnership with Elets Technomedia, New Delhi, is organizing AgriTalks India-Brazil on 28 Sept'21 at 16:00 Hrs IST (07:30 BRT) through a virtual platform on the theme "Agricultural innovation and food security". The program is being supported by the Indian Agricultural Research Centre (IARI), PUSA KRISHI, Invest India, Embassy of Brazil in New Delhi, EMBRAPA (Brazilian Agricultural Research Corporation), Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock & Supply (MAPA), Ministry of Science, Technology, Innovations and Communications (MCTI) and Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MRE), Brazilian Government as 'Associate Partners'. AgriTalks India-Brazil aims to strengthen India-Brazil agriculture cooperation by facilitating cross border dialogue on Agri-Tech Innovations. Participants at the event would include policy makers from Indian and Brazilian Ministries of Agriculture, Food Processing, MSME, Agriculture Influencers, Agri-tech Startups, Incubators, Agriculture Universities, Researchers, Academia, Agribusiness & Food Industry Leaders and opinion makers etc. The program will include discussions on sustainable & competitive agriculture practices, Brazilian agri-business opportunities, low cost agriculture technologies, Digital Agriculture, sustainable & competitive tropical agriculture, technology partnerships between startups, bilateral investment opportunities, and strengthening India-Brazil institutional partnerships in the field of Science, Technology & Agri-Innovations etc. AgriTalks India-Brazil is a step forward in enhancing India-Brazil cooperation in the agriculture sector and contribute towards meeting global food security.

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[TOP ↑](#)

## **Leverage Technology to Augment Tax Compliance**

In order to make the operations and management hassle-free, the Union Finance

Minister Nirmala Sitharaman has asked tax officials to leverage technological tools to enhance tax compliance and make the system effective and efficient. As per a report by a national daily, Sitharaman said this in a meeting with officers across the country to take feedback on the income tax department's new faceless assessment and appeal mechanism. The meetings were conducted in Delhi and Mumbai. The meetings focused on gaining feedback from tax officials from across the country to further improvements in the mechanism. The meeting saw objections from a section of income tax officials on moving to a faceless assessment and appeal mechanism. However, for the government, it was best to increase transparency and accountability. The Finance Minister said that this would help better compliance even on the GST platform without the need to be intrusive. The GST Network matches with other data filings such as income tax, etc. to identify bogus claims.

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[TOP ↑](#)

## **Leveraging Technology to Turn Vision into Reality**

Harshal Desai from Elets Technomedia was the moderator for the panel discussion. He welcomed all the speakers, briefed the audience on the theme and set the tone of the conference before opening the forum for discussions. Desai said, "With the Digital India Mission, the government ecosystem has actively adopted digitalisation to turn the vision of ensuring good governance into reality. Through technology, the government is ensuring that the services are available to all the citizens online and the service delivery should be at the doorstep and processed in a transparent manner." Much done but a lot is yet to be done, he said, there are still many areas where technology penetration is required and the government needs to strengthen those. On this note, he opened the conference for discussions. B Sundar, Special Secretary, IT, Electronics & Communications Department, Government of Andhra Pradesh B Sundar, Special Secretary, IT, Electronics & Communications Department, Government of Andhra Pradesh, said, "Post bifurcation of the erstwhile state of Andhra Pradesh in 2014-15, we have started adopting technologies for a wide variety of tasks. In fact, we were one of the first states to implement a real-time government system where we used a plethora of technologies including AI, IoT and AI tools to help with monitoring government schemes, criminal activities, help us with mundane tasks like ensuring working of streetlights across the state and so on." There were more important works that needed to be optimised through technology like there are government departments that use citizens' data which is fragmented and scattered across government systems. There was no common citizens' repository. Ideally, this repository should be at a single common platform so that there should least scope for tampering with the data. "However, because of the scattered data, the chances of tampering were immense and plugging these leakages were really difficult. It was like a cybersecurity scenario where you always have to be a step ahead to figure out what hackers are up to. On higher levels, there are algorithms working to safeguard the systems but at the ground level, at CSCs,

the vulnerability to cyber attacks is more. Also, there have been instances when people have changed their credentials to avail of government benefits. So we realised that before adding more high-end technologies to our systems we need to strengthen the basic technologies that are in use.” he added.

Adding to the creation of citizens’ data repository and strengthening cyber framework in the state, he said, “We’re in a process of building a common citizens’ data repository. Next what we realised is that we have a huge volume of services made available online, nearly 500 services, however, nearly 48 per cent of the people are not availing benefits because of the lack of internet and access to smartphones.” The government has been struggling with telecom service providers to get towers installed and increase the penetration of the internet in the state. “In the last two years, with our recurring efforts, we have been able to bring down the percentage from 48 to 39,” he added. Further, he said that bridging this digital divide is quite a task for the state’s IT department. This is because the urban sect is already up to date with the technologies and long for more but to keep them awaited and bring the rural sect at par is difficult. This is to be understood that IT departments cannot work in silos. There is a need for collaborations with the telecom service providers, cybersecurity service providers, need for better infrastructure, and more. “So, my submission to this discussion is we need to understand how all our departments are functioning, bring them together and ensure a common data repository and then look at how many citizens are not able to leverage benefits and work to take them in,” he concluded. Further, he raised concerns regarding variation in the cost of telecom services and infrastructure across states and called for a common template to be implemented across the country.

Manoj Kumar Mishra, Secretary, Department of Electronics and Information Technology, Government of Odisha. Manoj Kumar Mishra, Secretary, Department of Electronics and Information Technology, Government of Odisha, opened up by saying that the challenge to convert vision into reality is immense in the government majorly because the level of data availability and integration is quite low. “We have many departments and layers and bring all of these on one single platform through which technology can be leveraged is the hardest part,” he added. Addressing the significance of technology amid the COVID-19 pandemic, Mishra said, “As they say ‘every cloud has a silver lining’ so, if COVID-19 is the cloud then the IT department is the silver lining. IT Departments have never been given this much attention before... The pandemic has been a boon for us in a way that it has opened up. Opportunities for the technology sector to flourish and grow at a pace like never before. However, we definitely cannot be thankful for such a tragic scenario that claimed millions of lives.” Speaking of challenges in terms of turning “vision into reality”, he pointed out, “When the present government under Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik in 2019 for the fifth term, we had two big announcements. Firstly, he said that “I do not want my citizens to come to government offices unless it is constitutionally or legally mandated.” This one statement encompasses a complete vision document. In

Odisha, a state where the penetration of mobile signals are not there across the state due to tribal regions and mountainous regions, there were immense challenges to ensure digital government services to people. However, I am delighted to tell you that we have achieved 60 to 65 per cent of our goal by now and we're working on further increasing the penetration of the internet and digitalisation in the state. All thanks to Technology." If telecommunication initiatives like Jio would not have been there so many would have not been able to connect with the government, he added.

"To make that vision into reality we had to do a business process reengineering in almost every government department and there were nearly 480 services that need to be automated. Technologically a solution can be proposed easily but making that technology available is another challenge," Mishra said. Further, addressing the e-governance initiatives taken he said, "We came up with 'Moh Sewa Kendras'. In every Gram Panchayat, we created a physical government-aided facility so the villages do not have to travel. Therefore, people need not have to visit district headquarters but can avail all government services. available online, at the facility." In 2018, the state government came up with a farmer income augmentation scheme called KALIA – Krushak Assistance for Livelihood and Income Augmentation scheme. This was the first such scheme in the country. Even the Centre's scheme for farmers came four months later. To implement the scheme effectively we had to use technology." The biggest challenge was the authentication of the information available about the farmers and the land they own. To resolve it, gram panchayats were activated and people were asked to quote the land they own. Then a list of names with their quoted land area was put up in the same village so that if there is any discrepancies the villagers can make the government bodies aware of the fact. In this process, a huge number of applications were received and filed after data verification. Finally, beneficiaries were listed and benefits are provided to them through Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) in their bank accounts, he added. Kumar Vineet, Special Secretary & Managing Director, Department of IT & Electronics & Uttar Pradesh Development Systems Corporation Limited, Government of Uttar Pradesh. Kumar Vineet, Special Secretary & Managing Director, Department of IT & Electronics & Uttar Pradesh Development Systems Corporation Limited, Government of Uttar Pradesh, started off supporting Manoj Mishra's quote "we're trying to surpass challenges through technology." Speaking on e-governance initiatives in Uttar Pradesh, he said, "Considering the ecosystem of UP, we are focussing on faceless administration. As faceless it can be, as touchless it can be, as secure it can be as beneficial it will be for society. So, we have common service centres (CSCs) at all the places. We have one CSC per village in UP. Then we're using penetration of fibre optics and we've covered nearly 60 per cent of our rural areas. We're looking forward to implementing a cybersecurity framework. In this regard, we connected with National Cyber Coordination Centre (NCCC) so we can have our data centre incorporated in the cybersecurity framework. We're trying to develop a data security lab so that we can provide services and information.

Adding to the initiatives, Vineet said, “We have our policies on IT for the adoption of technology and implement various interventions, manufacturing of electronic goods. We will also roll out a data centre policy soon.” In a nutshell, the entire ecosystem of Uttar Pradesh is being developed in two phases. The first is G2C which should be as faceless and as smooth as it can be and as close or easily accessible to the user as possible. The second is G2B. We’re trying to make ‘Government to Business’ operations as seamless as possible and bring in transparency. On similar lines, soon we will have the National Digital Health Programme in our state, he added. Apart from the augmentation of G2C and G2B processes, the state is also aiming for improving the DBT ecosystem in the state so that no common man has to go to any government office or bank to fetch benefits of the government schemes. He concluded by saying, Uttar Pradesh is trying to develop an ecosystem that is transparent, secure and faceless. Genie Gan, Head of Public Affairs, Asia Pacific, Kaspersky, commenced her address by saying, “The overarching theme of the conference touches on a variety of topics like artificial intelligence (AI), machine learning (ML), data, Digital India, safe and secure cities, etc. All of these topics have been overshadowed by the COVID pandemic, however, these will always remain relevant as we’re trying to adjust with the new norms and new ways of living.”

The advent of new and advanced technologies like AI, cloud computing, even quantum computing, and more have transformed businesses. These have enabled micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) and startups to grow rapidly. However, with the rise in technology, the emergence of cyber threats have also surged, she pointed out. Adding to the rising cyber threats and cyber attacks, she said, “For India specifically, cyber threat is a real problem and it has grown significantly after the onset of the COVID pandemic.” Citing data from Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT) India, Genie highlighted, “Nearly 1.2 million cases of cyber attacks were reported in the year 2020. This was three folds more when compared with cyberattacks in 2019.” In the coming times with the adoption of newer technologies and 5G in critical infrastructure, there is a growing need to safeguard systems from cyber threats and strengthen cybersecurity measures, she added.

Besides the government entities, private companies are also not safe from such attacks. She said, “The issue is not just limited to the loss of competitive information such as patterns in intellectual property but also the loss of employees’ private data, a company’s DNA that rests on intellectual property, connected supply chains and more. All of this is highly important and valuable and needs to be safeguarded.” As per estimates, one in two Indian companies has experienced data breaches involving a loss or theft of over 1000 records containing confidential customer information in the past two years alone. So the challenge is both widespread and local and will require granular cybersecurity solutions. Sapna Ahuja, COO, MapMyIndia, said, “All the speakers have established the fact that digital transformation is important for the growth of the country and improve lives and sustainability. We strongly feel that



for digital transformation to succeed, a geospatial transformation is also crucial.” She cited speakers’ remarks on challenges faced in consolidating scattered data and bring on a single platform. She said, “A lot of those data sets can be put together on a common platform, in comparatively an easier way, through geospatial technology.” “Today, geospatial technology is not about looking at maps only. It is about having intelligent maps that can process data and provide a single window to analyse various attributes to stitch the information coming from various departments, different sectors like education, health, rural development or urban affairs, etc.

Putting all this data together and making actionable data out of it and being able to do evidence-based decision making are crucial aspects to enhance efficiency and effectiveness of the government,” she pointed out. Elaborating on the work of MapMy India, Sapna said, “For the last many years we have been working closely with the governments at Centre, state and city levels. Since the widespread of the COVID-19 in India, nearly from the beginning of April in 2020, MapMy India has been constantly making available information to citizens of India on the location of containment zones, treatment centres, health facilities, vaccination centres, and more. We’ve been aiding the government through our hyper-local real-time data to effectively manage the health services throughout the pandemic. In addition, these technologies can be used as solutions for multi-modal transportation, multi-modal logistics, making taxation more transparent, making government processes more transparent, and more. So, MapMy India has been involved with various departments at different levels with the help of our mas, IoT, geospatial analytical capabilities. And, we would continue to be in the work to improve the lives of people across the country, she added.

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[TOP ↑](#)

## **Centre to Open 75 Science Technology & Innovation Hubs for SCs & STs**

In an effort to boost the scientific talent and bridge the gap among communities, the Centre has decided to set up 75 Science Technology and Innovation (STI) Hubs across the country exclusively for Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs). Union Minister Jitendra Singh, on October 6, said that the move aims to support scientific talent among SCs & STs and contribute to the socio-economic development of the communities. As per the Minister, the decision to open 75 STI Hubs for SCs and STs was taken following a high-level review meeting with senior officials of the Department of Science and Technology (DST). He said that as many as 20 STI Hubs including 13 for SCs and seven for STs that have already been set up by DST. These will directly benefit 20,000 people from the communities through various interventions and will spread across the farm, non-farm and allied livelihood sectors. The Minister expressed that the STI Hubs are being established with an objective to develop, nurture and ensure the delivery of apt and relevant

technologies for the creation of sustainable livelihoods for the SC and ST population. According to the Union Minister of State (IC) for Science and Technology, STI hubs will fulfil three-fold objectives. Firstly, it will address the weakest linkages in the predominant livelihood systems through science and technology interventions. Secondly, it will lead to the creation of social enterprises based on the strengths in livelihood systems and lastly, it will improve the knowledge systems through inputs of science and technology for strengthening livelihoods.

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[TOP ↑](#)

## **Strengthening Cultural & Heritage Management Planning in Urban Spaces**

Culture is a marker of humanity's collective conscience and a tribute to its inventiveness. It is the primary anchor for people and communities to define their identities and experiences of everyday life, particularly in the context of cities where local cultures act as effective resources in encouraging social integration and peace, writes Jitendra Singh Chouhan, Chief Executive Officer, Ujjain Smart City Ltd. Culture is regarded as the fourth pillar of sustainable development as it contributes transversally to many Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – safe and sustainable cities; decent work and economic growth; reduced inequalities; environmental conservation; gender equality; and peaceful societies. With growing international sensitivity around the topic, cities around the world have started considering cultural heritage management as the nexus for crossdisciplinary inquiries on biodiversity, ecosystem services, and human wellbeing challenges in these changing social, economic, and environmental conditions of today. In the past, cities have leveraged local cultural resources to inspire, catalyse and drive socio-economic change, and enhance local resiliency and development potential. Nowhere is it more apparent than in India where culture has interfaced with the political economy through its various manifestations of local practices, oral traditions, and cultural expression to influence policy decisions on the local economy or the provision of critical services (water, housing, public transport, etc). But unplanned expansion and construction in the face of rapid urbanisation threaten to derail the historic areas and heritage assets of our cities, and their evolution. Despite wielding a huge influence in the past, the rich heritage legacy of our cities is underutilised in modern infrastructure development. A sector-based approach ignores the cross-cutting benefits that incorporating urban heritage brings to a city's socio-economic development. Legislative frameworks, policies, and programs have traditionally been tailored to different sectors of urban infrastructure, while culture and heritage have been limited to 'mainstreaming' efforts. For ensuring sustainable development, it is important to address cultural heritage management as a domain in its own right. 'Mainstreaming' should not imply that culture is just a transversal dimension and hence less visible and less present for development projects and in people's minds.

Urban heritage is understood as the historic layering of values that have been produced by successive and existing cultures in cities. It is an accumulation of traditions and experiences, recognised as such, in their diversity. For such culturally rich cities, it naturally follows that culture must be at the heart of development policies to ensure human-centred, inclusive, and equitable urban development. There are examples from around the world (Matera in Italy; Ouro Preto in Brazil; Ostersund in Sweden; HRIDAY cities in India) where an integrated approach has proven to be successful in provisioning critical infrastructure in those historic areas which generally tend to be overpopulated and under-serviced. It has also led to greater buy-in from the local communities and has proved effective in reducing urban poverty. This is relevant in the case of Ujjain which is one of the oldest cities in the sub-continent. One of the seven janpads of ancient India, there was a time when this city was the capital of a big empire and a central node for land and water trade routes. Enjoying immense political and economic importance, Ujjain served as a centre of science and culture in northern India; for instance, since the fourth century B.C.E., it has served as the first meridian of longitude for Hindu geographers. It is no surprise to find that Ujjain is home to numerous legends of Indian history, such as the stories of Kalidas, Emperor Ashoka, King Vikramaditya, Banbhata and Varahmir. Ujjain is also very rich in natural resources and biodiversity. There are seven water bodies in the city named as Sapt-Sagar. River Kshipra, which was once majestic and massive, was an important means of trade and transport. The city had huge forests of various indigenous species, housing a plethora of bird populations. Today, Ujjain is a leading heritage city in the country with prominent temples such as the Mahakaleshwar Jyotirlinga and Harsidhhi Shaktipeeth adorning the cityscape. In fact, Ujjain has hundreds of temples, and the sizable economy of the city is directly linked to tourism and trade. The Mahakaleshwar temple area succinctly captures all the challenges and opportunities of incorporating heritage in urban development. A very densely populated area with old structures, natural resources and high archaeological value, the temple and its surrounding areas need to accommodate the already stretched infrastructure and public management systems for a disproportionately high population during festive days. To put this into context, approximately 75 million pilgrims visited the city within a month during the Kumbh Mela (Simhast) in 2016, i.e., around 2.5 million pilgrim visits per day. Over the years, this overstressing and increasing urbanisation has also had severe impacts on the city's water bodies.

Decision-makers and stakeholders in Ujjain recognised that managing the underlying tangible heritage and the archaeological treasure trove around the temple premises was important, especially when we recollect that the temple (along with the city) was pillaged several times in the past for its riches. Additionally, there was cognisance that the natural heritage of the city, i.e. water bodies, and flora and fauna, were also at risk and needed to be conserved. It was therefore imperative that we considered the redevelopment of the Mahakaleshwar area as the core focus of the city's efforts in the Smart Cities Mission (SCM) through the MahakalRudrasagar Integrated

Development Approach (MRIDA) project. The objective was to sustainably increase the carrying capacity of the area while enhancing the cultural experience of pilgrims and tourists and preserving/ restoring the public spaces and temple precinct. Distributed into three phases, the MRIDA project is a flagship project in the Indian urban domain. The second phase of the project, MRIDA-II, is co-financed by the CITIIS program (funded by AFD and the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs). CITIIS is a joint program of the Ministry of Housing & Urban Affairs, The French Development Agency (AFD), the European Union and the National Institute of Urban Affairs (NIUA). USCL is one of the twelve cities that won the CITIIS challenge in 2019 and it has been awarded a grant of Rs 80 crore from the Government of India for this project. While efforts were being made under phase 1, it was only under the influence of the program objectives of CITIIS that we were able to thoroughly conceptualise a coherent strategy for Cultural and Heritage Management planning in Ujjain. The core objective of our planning was to provide adequate civic amenities for the floating population with minimum impact to the riches of the historic town. Integrating culture into local sustainable development contexts adds additional complexities of place and socio-cultural resonance to urban planning. The challenges must be explicitly addressed. Assumptions and prevailing myths about the culture that continue to seep into policy and project discussions stall progress in integrating culture into urban development in more systematic and comprehensive ways. This was the approach undertaken in Ujjain.

We realised that heritage conservation and management must be carried out on a continuous basis, and a comprehensive listing and grading are required to achieve the task of effective conservation. Long-term management of heritage requires a nuanced understanding of measuring and evaluating the impact of cultural policies, plans, and projects. Culture cannot be measured and monitored like other areas of urban development since it has important non-quantifiable and invisible dimensions. To know that culture is contributing to strengthening and enriching local sustainability, resilience, and holistic development, the measurement or assessment criteria must focus on stages of improvement (qualitative criteria) in combination with quantitative criteria. As part of the CITIIS program, Ujjain Smart City Limited (which is the executing agency for the project) prepared a Cultural and Heritage Management Plan (CHMP) as part of the Environment and Social Management Plan (ESMP) commitments made in relation to the management of cultural and natural heritage during the construction and commissioning phase of the project. This was done in accordance to the World Bank's Environmental and Social Standards (ESS 8) which form part of the World Bank's Environmental and Social Framework.

As a part of the planning process and with the guidance of renowned experts in the field who were part of the Technical Assistance provided by CITIIS, we used the following benchmarks to guide our activities:

- Heritage conservation is best understood as a socio-cultural activity, not simply as a technical practice; it encompasses many activities preceding and following any act

of material intervention.

- It is important to consider the contexts of a heritage conservation project—social, cultural, economic, geographical, administrative—as seriously and as deeply as the artefact/site itself is considered.
- The study of values is a useful way of understanding the contexts and sociocultural aspects of heritage conservation.
- Traditional modes of assessing ‘significance’ rely heavily on historical, art historical, and archaeological notions held by professionals, and they are applied basically through undisciplined means.

The CHMP prepared defined the avoidance, minimisation, and mitigation measures necessary to ensure that negative impacts to known and unknown cultural heritage features/sites because of project activities are prevented or, where this is not possible, reduced to as low as reasonably practicable during the execution phase of the project. View of Ramghat showing iconic Shree Venkateshwar Dharamshala (Bombay wale ki Dharamshala) and Ranoji ki Chhatri by Scindia. The approach used by USCL considered the relation between tourists and residents, aiming to address it as a relationship rather than focusing on the potential tensions and seeing art as something that can facilitate that relationship, particularly when residents are given a voice as creators. The local or regional tangible and intangible heritage is easy for people to relate to through their own memories. That means that this kind of heritage— especially in the recent past—becomes a very efficient tool when it comes to creating learning experiences that can really reach people in community, culture, and pilgrims. All aspects of the project were considered and activities were defined during each phase of the project. In all, more than 100 ‘Mitigation Measures’ across 19 ‘Impact Types’ were identified across 48 sites contained within the project boundaries. In complement, a detailed ‘Chance Find’ procedure was established that outlined actions required if previously unknown heritage resources, particularly archaeological resources, are encountered during project construction or operation. Emphasis was laid on stakeholder consultation and engagement, scholarly research about the site to know of any event or a significant site associated items, detailed survey, and assessment of the site to know of any potential unknown cultural heritage and finally training of the working staff along with a monitoring specialist to make sure no harm is caused to the heritage of the city. In addition to the above, USCL has employed a Conservation Architect (CA), whose responsibilities include:

- Promoting compliances with the Heritage Management Plan and procedures for the project activities.
- Ensuring that all required approvals for archaeological work have been obtained from the appropriate government bodies.
- Coordinating, scheduling, developing the scope of work and supervising the archaeological works of the contractor.
- Verifying and establishing the cultural heritage significance of any finds during the project with help from the third party subject experts or agencies as may be applicable.

- Carrying out cultural heritage training.
- The monitoring of archaeological works, trial trench investigations and rescue excavation work will be the responsibility of the conservation architect
- Undertaking archaeological excavations and investigations.

By experiencing diverse cultural practices, young people are provided with favourable conditions for a more satisfactory intellectual, emotional, moral, and spiritual existence, having the chance to live, work, explore, communicate, create, and express themselves in unconventional and completely unknown ways. The project is realised in a dialogue between identity and diversity, individual and group contributing to cultural diversity through a common process of shared activities, interactions and exchange between the elderly and the young. The recognition that heritage relates to the environment and to landscape and that it is conveyed in knowledge, beliefs and values, places heritage in close connection with a wide range of practices and places. This also points to the need to acknowledge the place of heritage in several policy fields and indeed to the policies and strategies that relate to sustainable development at the local, national, regional, and global levels. We, in Ujjain, realise that it is not just the local government that has an integral role to play in holistic heritage conservation, but also citizens, civil society organisations, and heritage professionals, among other stakeholders, that contribute to the prominent role of cultural heritage in society and the economy. To continue to value, protect and preserve it, we must strengthen the existing links between cultural heritage and sustainable development, and incorporate the appropriate rights-based, people-centred practices.

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[TOP ↑](#)

## **UP Govt Establishes 104 STPs for Cleaning Major Rivers Under Namami Gange**

In an effort to boost the cleaning of the Ganga river, the Government of Uttar Pradesh has established as many as 104 sewage treatment plants (STPs) with a total capacity of 3298.84 MLD (million litres daily) under the Namami Gange programme. The move is aimed at tapping the drains falling into the rivers. Apart from Ganga, there has been significant improvement in the condition of all the major rivers in the state including Gomti, Saryu, Yamuna, Rapti. The state government is of the view that the construction of the STPs has been a major development in controlling several water-borne diseases in Uttar Pradesh. With STPs to prevent unchecked and untreated water to enter the rivers, the Government of Uttar Pradesh is working towards providing domestic sewerage connections in the urban areas. As a part of the Namami Gange programme, the STP and sewerage line provided to Anupshahr in Bulandshahr district of UP, adjacent to the river Ganga, shunned the fall of contaminated water in the river. The sewerage lines were laid at a cost of Rs 78 crore including the other miscellaneous and associated works. In a similar fashion,

an STP of 120 MLD capacity is being set up to treat the sewer water of the GH Canal (Haider Canal) in the Gomti river in Lucknow. The setting up of STPs has been completed under the scheme to prevent the flow of the sewage directly in the rivers crossing the cities of Ghaziabad, Meerut, Agra, Loni, Saharanpur, Bijnor, Pilkhua, Muzaffarnagar, Rampur, Gorakhpur, Sultanpur, and Ayodhya. The Sisamau Nala in Kanpur, a 128-year-old drain, is considered one of the major reasons for the contamination of the Ganga river. Nearly 140 MLD of sewage from the Nala is being tapped by I&D and treated with plants at Bingawan (80 MLD capacity) and Jajmau (60 MLD capacity).

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[TOP ↑](#)

## Central-West Asia

### **AZERBAIJAN: Ministry of Communications Extends Licenses of Mobile Operators**

The Ministry of Transport, Communications and High Technologies of Azerbaijan has extended the relevant license agreements of mobile operators. The license agreements with Azercell LLC, Bakcell LLC, and Azerfon LLC have been extended for 10 years, Trend reports, referring to the Ministry of Communications. "These agreements include licenses by the type of activity for cellular (mobile) communication services (technological standards 2G (GSM), 3G (UMTS) and 4G (LTE)," the Ministry said. License issuance will allow mobile operators to provide subscribers with more efficient, high-quality, and professional services using technologies and technological standards of a new generation. Licensing contributes to the development of a stable and secure digital infrastructure in the country, as well as to the acceleration of digital transformation. Mobile operators have been operating on the basis of appropriate licenses since 1996. Thus, LLC "Azercell" and LLC "Bakcell" entered the market in 1996, and LLC "Azerfon" - in 2005.

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[TOP ↑](#)

### **Azerbaijan Records Growth in Prices for Hybrid Vehicles**

Prices of hybrid vehicles have risen by up to 15 percent in Azerbaijan over recent months, expert in the field of motor transport Elnur Aliyev told Trend. According to Aliyev, among these vehicles, the greatest interest of buyers is Toyota Prius. "In general, the demand for hybrid vehicles increased all over the world. They are imported to Azerbaijan mainly directly from the US or through Georgia. Most often, vehicles manufactured in 2006-2008 are imported by Azerbaijan. They are bought from the US via auctions. Previously, at these auctions there were fewer buyers, so these vehicles could be bought at a lower price," he said. "Currently, demand is great, so the prices have grown. It's natural that this price growth affects prices in

Azerbaijan. For example, two-three months ago, Toyota Prius (manufactured in 2008) in good condition could be bought for 12,500 manat (\$7,350), whilst at present it's sold for 13,800 manat (\$8,120) -14,000 manat (\$8,240). Interest in these cars is associated with economical fuel consumption," concluded the expert.

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[TOP ↑](#)

## **Azerbaijan Talks Support for Disabled Citizens Within Self-Employment Program**

One of the activities of the Small and Medium Business Development Agency (SME) of Azerbaijan is to encourage social entrepreneurship, support the development of entrepreneurship among citizens with disabilities and youth, Chairman of the Board of the Agency Orkhan Mammadov said, Trend reports. Mammadov made the remark at a forum entitled 'Social entrepreneurship in Azerbaijan: current situation and prospects.' The forum was held with the support of the SME Development Agency and the State Employment Agency, by the organization of the Public Council under the agency and in partnership with the Organization of Disabled Entrepreneurs Public Association. "The SME Development Agency is supporting the implementation of the self-employment program. Up until now, 400 citizens have been supported to join this program," Mammadov said. According to the chairman, with the support of the agency, citizens with disabilities are being trained to take part in the self-employment program. The SME Development Agency also supported the sale of handicrafts made by people with disabilities at various exhibitions. "In addition, the agency effectively cooperates with the Organization of Disabled Entrepreneurs Public Association. Within the framework of the 'Employment Marathon,' which started to support the employment of participants in the second Karabakh war and members of martyr families, 190 business entities who joined our call, created 345 vacancies. So, already 73 people have been employed in 38 economic entities," Mammadov said. He thanked all entrepreneurs who supported this charity event.

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[TOP ↑](#)

## **Azerbaijan and Turkey to Establish Joint Innovation, Technology Centers**

Azerbaijan and Turkey will create a joint research center in the field of innovations and technologies, as well as the Bilim Bakı center, Trend reports citing the State Agency for Public Services and Social Innovations Under the President of Azerbaijan (ASAN Service). According to the Service, the relevant documents in Turkey were signed by Chairman of the State Agency Ulvi Mehdiyev and the Head of the Turkish Baykar Makina company, Chairman of the Board of the 'Turkish team' technology fund Haluk Bayraktar. The launch of the Bilim Bakı center is scheduled for the near



future. It will be created in the ASAN Hayat complex, which will host trainings on technology, artificial intelligence, Internet of Things (IoT), robotics, programming, cybersecurity, energy technologies, astronomy, aviation science and in a number of other areas. In the research center, it is planned to develop innovative solutions based on orders, to carry out research and development work, as well as to commercialize their results in the industry and the sphere of services for the implementation of joint projects.

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[TOP ↑](#)

## **Azerbaijan to Develop Identification and Registration System of Farm Animals**

A system of identification and registration of farm animals is being developed in Azerbaijan, in order to ensure biological safety and create control mechanisms in the field of safety of animal products, Trend reports via the Azerbaijani Food Safety Agency. The system will contain information about the product manufacturer, processing plant, and other information, including the identification number assigned to the farm animal, as well as information about vaccination of livestock, veterinary drugs used for therapeutic and preventive purposes. The system will allow tracking product shipments from the farm to the consumer.

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[TOP ↑](#)

## **Bakcell Helped Young People Continue Their Education During the Pandemic**

Bakcell and “SOS Children’s Villages Azerbaijan” Association are showing constant support to children deprived of parental care and children and youth from disadvantaged families. “Supporting uninterrupted education of youth during the COVID-19 pandemic” was yet another project implemented within the frames of this long-term cooperation. Thanks to this initiative, 30 teenagers were able to continue online education during the lockdown. For this purpose, “SOS Children’s Villages” in Baku and Ganja were provided with necessary quantity of computers and the internet connectivity. As a result, academic performance of children living under the organization’s patronage has exceeded the results of the 2018/2019 academic year, i.e. the year before the pandemic. “COVID-19 has changed the world and we had to find new ways to contribute to education of youth, which is one of the top priorities of our CSR Strategy.

We are doing our utmost to enable as many children as possible to have high quality education, they are the future”, says Rainer Rathgeber, Bakcell CEO. It should be noted that since the year 2009, Bakcell supports the children deprived of parental care and children and youth from disadvantaged families within the frames

of cooperation with “SOS Children’s Villages Azerbaijan” Association. The “Start and improve your own business” project implemented by Bakcell jointly with the association became the winner of the received “National CSR 2018” award. This project was implemented to help realizing business ideas of young persons living under the patronage of the Association, or graduated from other boarding schools. Young persons, who participated in the project, have established their own businesses with financial support of Bakcell. Bakcell implements the “Bakcell Stars” CSR program, which is considered to be one of the largest-scale corporate social responsibility programs in the country.

The program serves the purpose of supporting and providing equal rights and opportunities to children and youth with special needs and support their complete integration to the society, as well as supporting education and skill improvement of these children and teenagers, helping them prepare for building their own business in the future and improving the well-being. About Bakcell Bakcell offers a wide range of products and services to users of modern mobile communications. The company provides its customers with the best-in-class mobile internet. For more information about Bakcell products and services, please visit [www.bakcell.com](http://www.bakcell.com) or call 555. For press releases, please visit [www.bakcell.com/en/news](http://www.bakcell.com/en/news). If you are not a Bakcell subscriber, but wish to find out about Bakcell and its products and services, please call 012 498 89 89 About SOS Children's Villages Azerbaijan Association Public Union SOS Children's Villages-Azerbaijan Association was established in 1999 under an agreement signed between the Government of the Republic of Azerbaijan and SOS Kinderdorf International operating in 137 countries.

The official opening ceremony of the Baku SOS Children's Village was held in 2001 with the participation of national leader Heydar Aliyev. In 2005, Ganja SOS Children's Village was established. The main goal of the SOS Children's Villages Azerbaijan Association, which has been operating for 20 years, is to provide family-like care to children and youth deprived of parental care, prevent children from entering institutions and provide social services to families in difficult living conditions. For more information about SOS Children's Villages Azerbaijan and its activities, please visit [www.soschildren.az](http://www.soschildren.az) or call 012 498 82 98.

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[TOP ↑](#)

## **TURKMENISTAN: Approving Procedure for Certification of Software Products**

Based on the Law of Turkmenistan "On Electronic Document, Electronic Document Management and Digital Services", the Main State Service of "Turkmenstandartlary" developed and approved the Software Certification Procedure, Trend reports citing Turkmen media. The content of the document is published on the website of the Ministry of Justice of Turkmenistan. The new Procedure applies to all ready-to-use

software products created in Turkmenistan, as well as foreign software used in the country. According to the document, certification will be carried out by the relevant cybersecurity department of “Turkmenstandartlary”. The document was developed in order to comply with the copyright for software developed in Turkmenistan and to strengthen the cybersecurity of the local network infrastructure.

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[TOP ↑](#)

## **UZBEKISTAN: Advancing in Global Innovation Index**

Uzbekistan took 86th place in the global rating of innovations in 2021, moving forward by 7 positions compared to last year, Trend reports referring to the rating of the Global Innovation Index, Trend reports citing the Ministry of innovative development. This ranking was published by Cornell University in the USA, INSEAD Business School in France and the World Intellectual Property Organization. This index is calculated based on the average of the two sub-indices. The first one takes into account the level of development of institutions, human capital and research, while the second includes the development of technology, as well as the results of creative activity. The current study is titled “Driving Innovation in the COVID-19 Crisis”. The study presents a global innovation ranking of 132 economies based on 81 indicators. “Despite the enormous human and economic toll caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, governments and companies in many parts of the world have increased investment in innovation,” the report said.

In the sub-index of available resources and conditions for the introduction of innovations in the country, Uzbekistan took 75th place, and in the sub-index of practical results of the introduction of innovations - Uzbekistan rose by 18 positions and took 100th place, respectively. According to the rating indicators, Uzbekistan has the following strong indicators in the world: "The number of graduates in science and engineering" - 7th place, "Ease of doing business" - 8th place, "Labor productivity" - 8th place, "Gross capital formation" - 7th place, "Public spending on education" - 28th place. In 2021, Uzbekistan ranked 10th among lower middle income countries. Among the countries of this group, Uzbekistan is a leader in the indicators of institutions, human capital and science, infrastructure and development of the domestic market. The first three places in the ranking were taken by Switzerland, Sweden and the USA. Kenya (85) and Indonesia (87) were next to Uzbekistan. Russia has 45 line, Kazakhstan - 79, Kyrgyzstan - 98, and Tajikistan - 103.

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[TOP ↑](#)

## **Oceania**

### **AUSTRALIA: Push to Simplify COVID Rules for Borders**

The federal government wants nationally consistent rules for 23,000 boarding school students navigating coronavirus-induced border closures. A draft plan to simplify arrangements for students, particularly those from remote Indigenous communities, will be referred to the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee. It sets out principles for states and territories to consider when creating their respective border rules. The plan has been spearheaded by Regional Education Minister Bridget McKenzie following distressing accounts of students being separated from their families. "Stories have included a teenager left to suffer agonising mental health issues while their families were denied permission to travel across state borders to them," the minister said on Tuesday. "I have heard of students who have, or are considering leaving school, even in years 10 or 12, because they feel they can no longer cope with the isolation and anxiety caused by being separated from their loved ones."

From <https://au.news.yahoo.com> 09/07/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## **Aust to Host 2022 Regional Energy Summit**

Australia will host a clean energy summit next year under the Quad umbrella and take a bigger role in the supply of critical minerals in the Indo-Pacific region, Prime Minister Scott Morrison says. Mr Morrison was speaking outside the White House at the end of the first in-person meeting of the leaders of Australia, the United States, India and Japan which make up the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue. The gathering of the four major democracies was being closely observed by China, which earlier this week said it was "doomed to fail". Mr Morrison said he and US President Joe Biden were "on the same page" on China, which has been steadily increasing its military and political influence in the Indo-Pacific region to the alarm of the US and others. "What we talked about today is how we achieve a free and open Indo-Pacific and the way you do that is that countries like Australia and India and the United States and Japan, we stand up for the values that we believe in," Mr Morrison told reporters in Washington.

"We resist any suggestion or any pressure that would come on any of us to be anything different to what we are, and we want that opportunity for all countries in the Indo-Pacific." On the planned climate summit to be held in Australia in 2022, Mr Morrison said it would be an "applied summit" focusing on expert research and technology. It aims to deliver a roadmap to transfer scientific knowledge on clean energy to countries in the Indo-Pacific. "This is about ... pulling together a very clear work program as to how clean energy supply chains can be built up," Mr Morrison said, without giving more details. In tandem, the Quad leaders recognised the role a resource-rich Australia can play in the supply of critical minerals to support energy and other technologies. "We are really good at digging stuff up in Australia and making sure it can fuel the rest of the world when it comes to the new energy

economy," Mr Morrison said.

Critical minerals are metals and non-metals, like rare earth elements, deemed "at-risk" due to scarcity, geopolitical issues, trade policy or other factors. They are used in the manufacture of semiconductors, mobile phones, flat-screen monitors, wind turbines, electric cars, solar panels and many other high-tech products, including defence equipment. Mr Morrison was speaking ahead of the release of the official Quad communique, and before he leaves the US to head back to Australia. Mr Morrison, Mr Biden, Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi also discussed the supply and delivery of more than one billion COVID-19 vaccine doses for developing Indo-Pacific countries. This builds on talks at the last meeting of Quad leaders in March, which was held online. As part of their discussions on regional security issues, the leaders underlined their support for people trying to leave Afghanistan following the Taliban takeover of the country and the departure of US troops after 20 years. Mr Morrison said the Quad, including Australia, wanted to help as many people as possible under their humanitarian programs. "We want to be able to facilitate that," he said without giving further details.

From <https://au.news.yahoo.com> 09/24/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## **Australia-India Emissions Technology Deal**

Australia has struck an agreement with India to support low-emissions technology sharing between the two nations. Prime Minister Scott Morrison met with Indian leader Narendra Modi in Washington ahead of the first face-to-face Quad talks which will include the leaders of Japan and the US. A new Australia-India technology partnership will focus on hydrogen development and ultra low-cost solar programs to help reduce carbon emissions. Mr Morrison said India's economic growth needed to be supported alongside global ambitions to tackle climate change. "Unless we can get the technology transformation occurring in developing countries, then I fear that the ambitions that so many have for addressing climate change will be frustrated," he told reporters in the US. "If we want to make a difference on climate change, we've got to make a difference everywhere, not just in advanced economies."

Australia is inching towards a commitment to net zero emissions by 2050 amid immense international pressure in the lead-up to United Nations climate talks in Glasgow in November. The prime minister said he wanted to ensure the developing world made a transition to cleaner energy through technology. "Australia will certainly do our bit, and the bit we're doing in particular is to meet and beat the commitments that we've made," he said. Mr Modi released a communique after the meeting saying the leaders underlined the need to urgently address climate change and agreed over the possibilities for clean technology. "In this regard, prime minister Modi highlighted the need for a broader dialogue on environment protection," it said. The leaders also

discussed defence co-operation and trade agreements ahead of a ministerial meeting next week.

Trade Minister Dan Tehan will meet with Indian counterpart Piyush Goyal with Mr Morrison and Mr Modi keen for an ambitious approach particularly on digital agreements. Former prime minister Tony Abbott travelled to India in August on behalf of Australia to follow up stalled Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement negotiations. Mr Modi reiterated his invitation for Mr Morrison to visit India. "The prime ministers agreed that as two vibrant democracies in the region, the two countries needed to work closer together to overcome the challenges in the post-pandemic world." Australia's prime minister was due to visit India in January last year but cancelled his trip because bushfires were raging across the nation.

From <https://au.news.yahoo.com> 09/24/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## **Joyce Calls for Caution on Net Zero Target**

Barnaby Joyce has warned the Nationals will not back a 2050 net zero greenhouse gas emissions target without power reliability guarantees. The deputy prime minister argues the United Kingdom's gas crisis, which has sent prices skyrocketing and triggered a carbon dioxide shortage, shows the need to be cautious on climate policy. Carbon dioxide is used for such things as manufacturing and extending the life of packaged fruit and vegetables. "I'm going to be really careful that we don't have the 1.5 million people in the UK who recently have lost their provider," Mr Joyce told reporters in Tamworth. "I'm not going to support a process that leads to 850,000 people two nights ago losing their energy provider." Treasurer Josh Frydenberg acknowledged a split within the coalition on climate change ambition after he made the economic case for a net zero target.

Mr Frydenberg said not shifting to cleaner power sources could lead to reduced capital markets access, which could affect interest rates and the viability of major projects. "Australia has a lot at stake," he told the Australian Industry Group. "We cannot run the risk that markets falsely assume we are not transitioning in line with the rest of the world." Labor's climate change spokesman Chris Bowen described the speech as a pathetic con job from someone with "net zero credibility" on climate action. "Josh Frydenberg declaring that climate change is bad is like the captain of the Titanic deciding that icebergs are bad," he told reporters. Mr Bowen said Mr Joyce had engaged in normal Liberal-National scaremongering about cleaner energy, sparking a counterattack from the Nationals leader. Labor has committed to spending \$20 billion on rewiring the electricity grid and \$200 million on community batteries if it wins the next election.

The government is adamant its technology roadmap will guide \$20 billion in funding decisions which will lead to lower carbon emissions. Prime Minister Scott Morrison

insists the government has made no commitments despite mounting expectation the target will be locked ahead of a major conference in November. Australia has become increasingly isolated over its refusal to adopt a 2050 net zero emissions goal. While an increasing number of moderate Liberals have urged the prime minister to adopt the target, Nationals and other conservative MPs oppose the move.

From <https://au.news.yahoo.com> 09/25/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## **Australia Passes COVID Vaccine Milestone**

Three in four Australians aged 16 and over have now had at least their first COVID-19 vaccine, as deaths in NSW and Victoria continue to rise. In another milestone for the quickening national rollout, Australia hit 75.4 per cent first-dose vaccination of its 16-plus population on Saturday. "I'm pleased to report 75 per cent of the nation's 16s and over, have rolled up their sleeves to receive a first vaccine dose," federal Health Minister Greg Hunt said on Twitter. "This means we have less than one million first doses to go before we hit 80 per cent." The ACT leads the way out of all states and territories with 85.93 per cent first dose coverage, ahead of NSW (85.18 per cent) and Victoria (76.91 per cent). Minor easing of COVID-19 restrictions will be triggered in Victoria at the 80 per cent single-dose target, which is forecast to be hit mid-week.

More substantial reopening of coronavirus-riddled Victoria and NSW hinges on both states reaching 70 and 80 per cent second-dose markers, under their separate national plan-aligned roadmaps. Nationwide, 50.95 per cent of Australians 16 and over are now fully vaccinated. That rate is higher than the national average in NSW (59.25 per cent) and lower in Victoria (46.95 per cent). It comes as another 12 Australians died with COVID-19 as the federal government put pressure on the states to open up home quarantine to get more people home. Eleven of the deaths were in NSW, which on Saturday reported 1007 new locally acquired cases. Three of those deaths, including a man in his 40s, involved people in their homes and not diagnosed with the virus until after they died. Nine had not received a single vaccine dose. In Victoria, authorities reported 847 new local infections - the highest daily tally since the start of the pandemic. There was also one death, a man in his 80s. Tourism and Trade Minister Dan Tehan, meanwhile, encouraged the states to rethink their position on home-based quarantine as Christmas nears. "It would be wonderful if every state and territory began to trial it like they are in South Australia," he said. "The early indications there are that it is working and working well."

From <https://au.news.yahoo.com> 09/26/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## **NEW ZEALAND: COVID-19 Community Fund to Provide Support for Vulnerable Women and Girls**

Minister for Women Jan Tinetti today announced a \$2 million community fund that will provide support for women and girls adversely affected by COVID-19. “We know that women, particularly those who are already vulnerable, are disproportionately affected by the kind of economic disruption caused by COVID-19,” Jan Tinetti said. “We want to act quickly to reach those women and children detrimentally affected by the current lockdown who are not being reached by other government supports. We know from last lockdown this kind of funding can help safeguard women’s wellbeing as they deal with reduced working hours, job losses, increased caring responsibilities and an increase in domestic violence. “Many NGOs supporting women continue to face reduced income but increased demand for their support and services. This is particularly the case for organisations supporting Pacific women and their families in South Auckland.”

From 17 September relevant organisations can apply for up to \$50,000 each for work which will improve outcomes for women and girls. This may include a range of initiatives such as providing essential items, culturally-appropriate mental health support and support for women in unsafe family situations. “I hear about so many women who look after their family first and put themselves last, regularly going without food so their children have enough to eat. “This will help to ease the worst impacts of lockdowns on women in need and help them find a firm footing to recover well,” Jan Tinetti said. Applications for the fund will open on 17 September and can be made via the Ministry for Women’s website. Applications will close on 1 October.

Media contact: Ravi de Silva 021 805 451 Notes for editors: The funding is to support organisations who work to improve outcomes for women and girls. The objectives of the fund are to: prioritise grassroots investments – making sure funds are spent to improve outcomes for women, and where they are needed most support women in all their diversity who face intersectional challenges within their communities such women in Māori, Pacific, rural and migrant communities support the Ministry’s and government’s priorities for women and girls – ensuring healthy and safe communities, reducing family and sexual violence and improving child wellbeing. Each organisation can apply for up to \$50,000 funding. Funding will be allocated shortly after the application deadline closes. A \$2 million fund for community organisations that support women and girls in Aotearoa was established last year and provided funding to 155 largely volunteer organisations working at grassroots level with hard-to-reach communities.

From <https://livenews.co.nz> 09/09/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## **Further Government Support for People to Access Food and Essential Items**

The Government is responding to need for support in Auckland and has committed a further \$10 million to help people access ongoing food and other essential items,



Minister for Social Development Carmel Sepuloni announced today. This latest tranche is targeted at the Auckland region, helping providers and organisations to distribute over 50,000 more food parcels, and 20,000 essential wellbeing packs. “Our Government is focused on keeping New Zealanders safe from COVID-19. We’re committed to also ensuring people, whānau and communities are able to continue accessing the support they need, especially households who are self-isolating,” Carmel Sepuloni said. Since 17 August 2021, a total of \$69.31 million in additional funding has been provided by Government agencies to support providers and organisations serving their communities.

“Our Government’s response so far has recognised the need for whānau-centred support, iwi-led responses for their local community, as well as support for Māori, Pacific and disabled communities. “In particular, the Pacific community in Auckland has been impacted by the current outbreak. They’ve made up over half of those having to self-isolate, resulting in entire support networks not being able to activate and mobilise. “MSD has developed strong relationships and established an approach to working with and supporting Pacific social service providers across Auckland. This includes working with MSD-funded Community Connectors who are embedded with Pacific providers to support the broader Pacific workforce network. “This funding aims to support them and provide continuity through what is a challenging time, and as we stamp out COVID-19 from the community.

“The rapid public health response required to contain the spread of the Delta Variant of COVID-19 has highlighted the need to ensure an equally rapid welfare response. “The Ministry for Social Development will continue to work with key agencies across the system to ensure that support is coordinated and targeted to areas and populations with the greatest need. “We’re committed to making sure our response to COVID-19 is rapid, coordinated and efficient, and ensuring people and our communities aren’t carrying the burden of lockdown alone.” Carmel Sepuloni said.

From <https://livenews.co.nz> 09/13/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## 4、 Economic and Social Development and ICT

### Asia-Pacific

#### **Climate Change Could Force 216 Million People to Migrate Within Their Own Countries by 2050**

The World Bank’s updated Groundswell report released today finds that climate change, an increasingly potent driver of migration, could force 216 million people across six world regions to move within their countries by 2050. Hotspots of internal climate migration could emerge as early as 2030 and continue to spread and

intensify by 2050. The report also finds that immediate and concerted action to reduce global emissions, and support green, inclusive, and resilient development, could reduce the scale of climate migration by as much as 80 percent. Climate change is a powerful driver of internal migration because of its impacts on people's livelihoods and loss of livability in highly exposed locations. By 2050, Sub-Saharan Africa could see as many as 86 million internal climate migrants; East Asia and the Pacific, 49 million; South Asia, 40 million; North Africa, 19 million; Latin America, 17 million; and Eastern Europe and Central Asia, 5 million.

"The Groundswell report is a stark reminder of the human toll of climate change, particularly on the world's poorest—those who are contributing the least to its causes. It also clearly lays out a path for countries to address some of the key factors that are causing climate-driven migration," said Juergen Voegelé, Vice President of Sustainable Development, World Bank. "All these issues are fundamentally connected which is why our support to countries is positioned to deliver on climate and development objectives together while building a more sustainable, safe and resilient future." The updated report includes projections and analysis for three regions: East Asia and the Pacific, North Africa, and Eastern Europe and Central Asia. It builds on the novel and pioneering modeling approach of the previous World Bank Groundswell report from 2018, which covered Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, and Latin America. By deploying a scenario-based approach, the report explores potential future outcomes, which can help decision-makers plan ahead. The approach allows for the identification of internal climate in- and out- migration hotspots, namely the areas from which people are expected to move due to increasing water scarcity, declining crop productivity, and sea-level rise, and urban and rural areas with better conditions to build new livelihoods.

The report provides a series of policy recommendations that can help slow the factors driving climate migration and prepare for expected migration flows, including: Reducing global emissions and making every effort to meet the temperature goals of the Paris Agreement.

Embedding internal climate migration in far-sighted green, resilient, and inclusive development planning.

Preparing for each phase of migration, so that internal climate migration as an adaptation strategy can result in positive development outcomes.

Investing in better understanding of the drivers of internal climate migration to inform well-targeted policies.

From <https://www.worldbank.org/> 09/13/2021

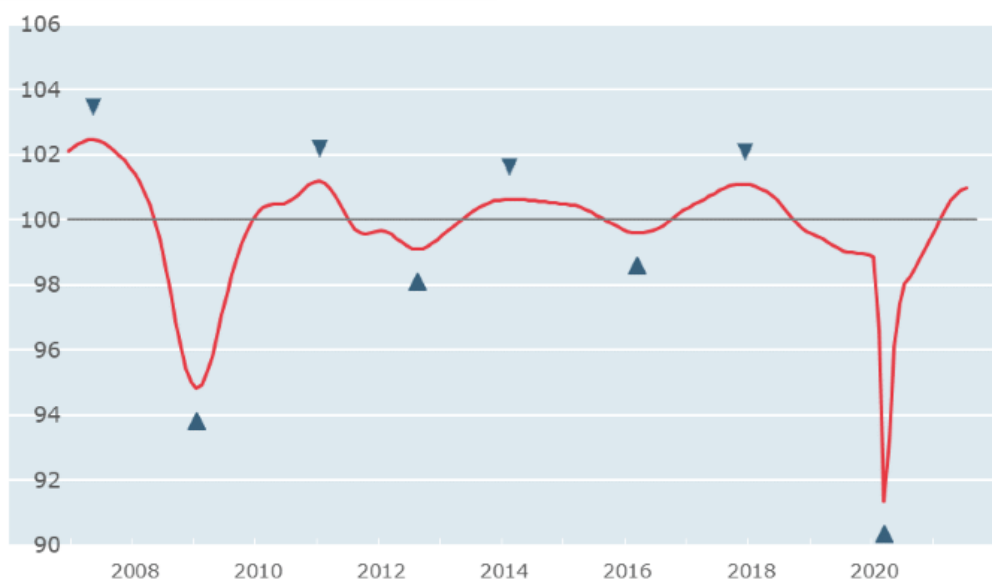
[TOP ↑](#)

## **CLIs Point to Moderating Growth**

The OECD Composite leading indicators (CLIs), designed to anticipate turning points in economic activity relative to trend, indicate that growth remains at above-trend

levels but is moderating in the **OECD area as a whole**. Among the major OECD economies, the signs of a moderating growth at above-trend levels, flagged in last month's assessment, have been confirmed in **Canada**, the **euro area as a whole**, including **Germany** and **Italy**, and in **the United Kingdom**. In **France** the CLI points to a moderation in the pace of growth and remains below trend levels. In contrast, the CLIs for the **United States** and **Japan** now point to stable growth above trend levels. Among the major emerging-market economies, the CLIs for **Russia** and **China** point to a steady increase in growth above trend levels. The CLI for **India** remains below trend but continues to signal stable growth, whereas in **Brazil** the CLI continues to anticipate slowing growth from above trend level. 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 CLIs and their 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.

OECD area : moderating growth



Visit the interactive [OECD Data Portal](#) to explore this data further.

From <https://www.oecd.org/> 09/14/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## G20 GDP Growth Slows to 0.4% in the Second Quarter of 2021, but Large Differences Exist Across Countries

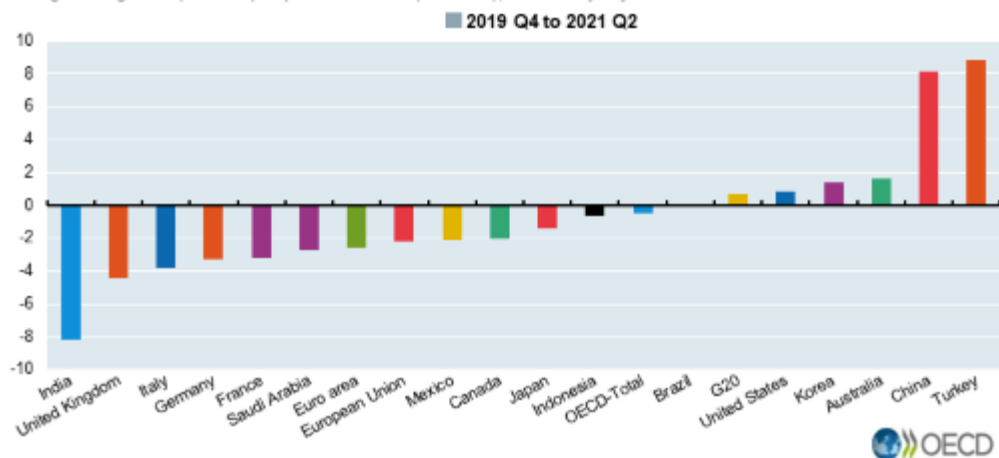
Gross domestic product (GDP) of the **G20** area grew by 0.4% in the second quarter of 2021, down from 0.9% in the first quarter of 2021. However, this figure conceals

large differences in the growth observed across countries. Among the G20 economies, GDP growth slowed in **Turkey** (to 0.9%, from 2.2%), **Korea** (to 0.8%, from 1.7%) and **Australia** (to 0.7%, from 1.9%). GDP contracted sharply in India (by (minus) 10.2%, after 2.3% growth). GDP also contracted, to a lesser extent, in **Canada** (by (minus) 0.3%, after 1.4% growth) and **Brazil** (by (minus) 0.1%, after 1.2% growth). GDP growth resumed in the **United Kingdom** (to 4.8%, following a contraction of (minus) 1.6%), in the **European Union** as a whole (to 2.1%, following a contraction of (minus) 0.1%), in **Germany** (to 1.6%, following a contraction of (minus) 2.0%), in **Saudi Arabia** (to 1.1%, following a contraction of (minus) 0.5%) and in **Japan** (to 0.5%, following a contraction of (minus) 1.1%). Remaining G20 economies recorded accelerating growth rates in the second quarter of 2021: **Italy** (2.7%, from 0.2%), the **United States** (1.6%, from 1.5%), **Mexico** (1.5%, from 1.1%), **China** and **Indonesia** (1.3% in both countries, from 0.4% and 0.3%, respectively) and **France** (1.1%, from 0.0%). In the second quarter of 2021, GDP for the **G20 area** as a whole exceeded its pre-pandemic level (Q4-2019) by 0.7%, driven by **China**, which, together with **Turkey**, recorded the highest recovery rates (8.2% and 8.8%, respectively). However, the majority of countries are still lagging behind pre-pandemic levels, with **India** experiencing the largest gap (minus 8.1%), followed by the **United Kingdom** (minus 4.4%) and **Italy** (minus 3.8%).

Source: [OECD Quarterly National Accounts Database](https://www.oecd.org/)

### Quarterly GDP in volume terms for the G20 economies

Percentage change compared to pre-pandemic level (2019 Q4), seasonally adjusted data



From <https://www.oecd.org/> 09/15/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## Boost Education Investment to Tackle Inequality of Opportunity, Says OECD

Governments should boost their investment in education in order to tackle the

sources of inequality of opportunity. This would help create a more level playing field for people of all ages to acquire the skills that power better jobs and better lives, according to a new OECD report. Education at a Glance 2021 says that one in five adults across the OECD has not attained upper secondary education and in some countries, a significant share of children leave school early. In 2019, at least one in ten school-aged youth were not in school in about a quarter of OECD countries. But some countries have made progress: between 2005 and 2019, the out-of-school rate at upper secondary level dropped by more than 15 percentage points in Mexico, Portugal and the Russian Federation. Socio-economic status has a greater impact on the literacy skills of 15-year-olds than gender or country of origin, but some education systems are far more resilient to social disadvantage than others, says the report. Socio-economic status also tends to influence the programme orientation students pursue, with those without tertiary-educated parents more likely to pursue vocational tracks at upper secondary level. Those without upper secondary education face disadvantages in the labour market. In 2020, the unemployment rate of young adults that had not completed upper secondary education was almost twice as high as those with higher qualifications.

“The COVID-19 pandemic has hit our health, economic, and social sectors hard and exposed some systemic weaknesses hampering genuine social mobility,” said OECD Secretary-General Mathias Cormann, launching the report in Paris. “Equality of opportunity is a key ingredient for a strong and cohesive democratic society. Unlike policies that address the consequences, education can tackle the sources of inequality of opportunity. Boosting investment in better and more relevant education will be key to helping countries deliver long-term economic and social prosperity.” Immigrant background tends to influence learning trajectories while employment prospects of foreign-born adults vary greatly across countries, finds the report. In almost all countries with available data, the upper secondary completion rate of first or second generation immigrants was lower than that for students without an immigrant background. Labour market outcomes vary greatly for foreign-born adults with different levels of education, reflecting the supply and demand for different skills, the difficulties tertiary-educated foreign-born adults face in gaining recognition for their education and experience earned abroad, and lower wage expectations of foreign workers in some countries.

Gender disparities also persist. Boys are more likely than girls to repeat a grade and underperform in reading, and less likely to complete upper secondary education. Boys are usually overrepresented in vocational paths and less likely to enter and graduate from tertiary education. Women also outnumber men in participation rates to formal adult learning. Yet they remain less likely to be employed and earn less than men across all levels of educational attainment and OECD countries, even among those having graduated from the same field of study. Investment in education is key, but rising educational spending has not generally led to improved outcomes, suggesting that countries need to look harder at how to invest resources most

effectively, and to match resources with needs. On average across countries, expenditure on educational institutions amounted to approximately USD 9 300 per student at pre-primary level in 2018; USD 10 500 at primary, secondary and post-secondary non tertiary level; and USD 17 100 at tertiary level. The public sector funds 90% of total expenditure on primary and secondary institutions on average, often compulsory in most OECD countries, and 66% at tertiary level.

Two-thirds of countries reported increasing public expenditure to education in 2020 to support the educational response to COVID-19 and about three quarters reported increasing it in 2021. Sustaining these investments will be critical to reverse learning losses, develop teachers' capacity to tailor learning strategies to individual students' needs, and leverage investments made to integrate technology in education. Lifelong learning has become more critical for adults to upskill and reskill in a changing world. Yet, more than half of adults did not participate in adult learning in 2016, and the pandemic further reduced opportunities to do so. Educators need to work more closely with other government sectors and business to help promote flexible pathways in and out of education that evolve alongside labour market demands, according to the report.

Education at a Glance 2021 includes a special spotlight report: The State of Global Education – 18 months into the pandemic. The report reveals that the extent of lost learning opportunities in the classroom has been significant in many countries. The higher the education level, the longer schools were fully closed on average. The number of days of full school closure represents roughly 28% of total instruction days over a typical academic year at pre-primary and more than 56% at upper secondary level on average across OECD countries. This has consequences on equitable learning: while the majority of education systems around the world shifted to remote learning, students from disadvantaged backgrounds may find it more difficult to study effectively from home.

Education at a Glance provides comparable national statistics measuring the state of education worldwide. The report analyses the education systems of the OECD's 38 member countries, as well as of Argentina, Brazil, China, India, Indonesia, the Russian Federation, Saudi Arabia and South Africa. Further information on Education at a Glance, including country notes and key data, is available at: <http://www.oecd.org/education/education-at-a-glance/>. Journalists are invited to contact OECD Director for Education and Skills Andreas Schleicher (tel. + 33 1 45 24 18 97) or the OECD's Media Office (tel. + 33 1 45 24 97 00). Working with over 100 countries, the OECD is a global policy forum that promotes policies to preserve individual liberty and improve the economic and social well-being of people around the world.

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[TOP ↑](#)

## The Key to Complete Online Independence Is Through Crowdsourced VPNs

Geolocation is a key pillar of how the internet functions. Previously founded on the egalitarian principle of complete transparency and total openness is now routinely altered by geolocation services. Simply put, this means that users can access various sets of websites based on where they are surfing the web from. This results in online information silos, which have negative consequences such as restricting knowledge sharing, limiting cultural interchange, and allowing political discourse to be twisted. It comes as no surprise then that global Virtual Private Network (VPN) usage is currently at an all-time high, having risen to 27.1% in 2020. However, the question remains, how can we ensure that everyone gets equal access to the online freedoms granted by VPNs? The answer lies in crowdsourcing. In this article, I'll explain what crowdsourced VPNs are, how they rely on users contributing their IP addresses to a global network and why ultimately they are the unsung heroes of internet freedom.

### Defending democracy and the right to free expression

According to statistics, countries with less internet freedom have a larger percentage of VPN users. As a result, VPNs are essential for many people to have access to accurate, unfiltered information. VPNs enable legacy systems to work remotely, it provides a second layer of defence against misconfigured, unpatched, or poorly designed internal services, it protects internal network servers from external, unauthenticated attackers, and, among other things, it forces traffic between a device and external services through internal, protective monitoring tools. VPNs are essential to the modern-day accessing of data accurately, safely and freely. However, because crowdsourced VPNs are often monetised by developers to produce various software products, it's up to the individual to make sure they're using a compliant supplier who understands the many ways for deploying VPNs. These resources are, of course, available to anyone, which is what makes it such an attractive proposition.

### Defending the interests of consumers

In 2020 there were over two billion (2.14B) people that have made at least one purchase online. Given the continued growth of the worldwide e-commerce business, it's no wonder that merchants are using geotargeting to increase earnings. Whether it's purchasing a gift, renting a vehicle, or booking a flight or hotel room, shoppers are now routinely presented with different prices based on their region. Those browsing from a more affluent country are typically shown inflated prices; when it comes to tourism, locals tend to be offered better rates than tourists. Consumers could use a VPN to accurately investigate pricing and safeguard their own interests.

### Accessing global content and culture

Over half (51%) of VPN users previously reported that their primary reason for installing a VPN was to unlock content unavailable within their geolocation. This is by

far the most common use case for VPNs, which act as a single point of access to the entirety of global digital entertainment, cultural and educational content. In addition to allowing you to watch your favourite series, VPNs also play a key role in helping migrants stay connected to their country of origin. VPNs are also often used by students to access academic papers and circumvent their institutions' restrictive Internet usage policies. When it comes to unlocking content, crowdsourced VPNs have several user experience advantages compared to subscription-based alternatives or free options that rely on advertising revenue. Traditional VPNs use data centre IP addresses, which are often picked up by content blockers. By contrast, crowdsourced VPNs use the anonymised personal IP addresses of other users participating in the network. To mitigate privacy and security concerns without compromising on UX, unwanted target sites are blacklisted to prevent illegal traffic.

What is the digital sharing economy's next step?

The sharing economy, which was coined to characterise services like Airbnb and Uber, is now expanding to cover not only our physical but also our digital assets. Crowdsourced networks have been behind several recent high-profile product launches, including Apple AirTags. These small tracking devices help users locate personal objects, like keys, luggage, vehicles and electronics, using Apple's crowdsourced "Find My" network. The network consists of approximately one billion connected Apple devices that detect and anonymously report the Bluetooth signals emitted by AirTags. In fact, crowdsourced VPNs have been around for years. This technology was ahead of the curve when it came to the current crowdsourced network trend, representing one of the earliest examples of community-driven active consent for online networks. Given that cyber behemoths like Apple and Amazon have lately endorsed the concept of crowdsourcing, it's safe to predict that the sharing of digital assets will grow more common in the future. Public understanding of crowdsourced networks will continue to increase. So too will growing awareness of the compelling arguments in favour of VPN use and the importance of abiding by the comprehensive legal and ethical considerations involved. Looking forward, it is safe to say that crowdsourced VPNs will no doubt see an uptick in demand.

From <https://browsifyapp.com/> 09/20/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## **Global Economic Recovery Continues but Remains Uneven, Says OECD**

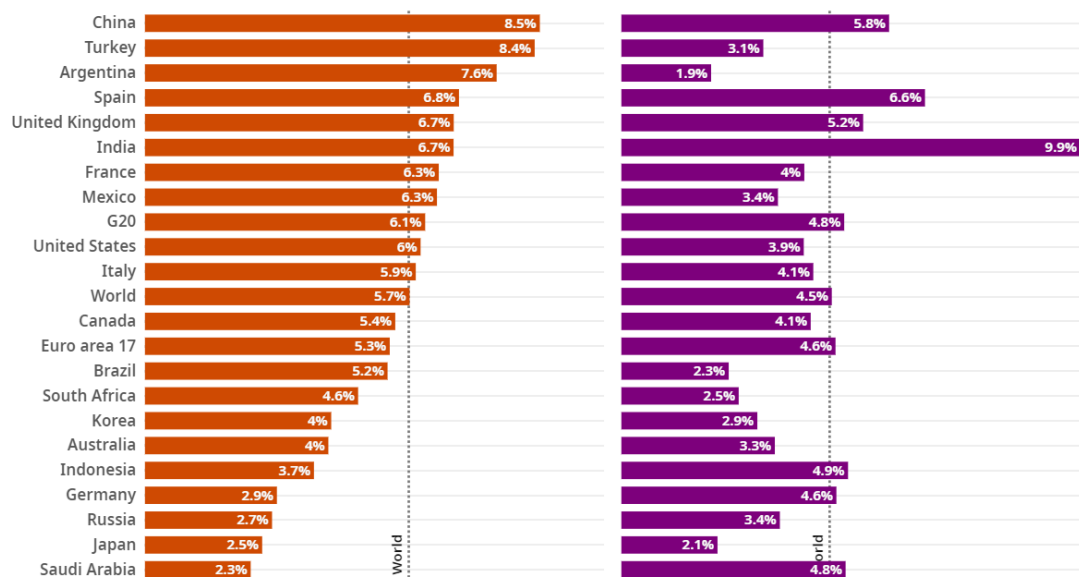
The global economy is growing far more strongly than anticipated a year ago but the recovery remains uneven, exposing both advanced and emerging markets to a range of risks, according to the OECD's latest Interim Economic Outlook. The OECD says extraordinary support from governments and central banks helped avoid the worst once the COVID-19 pandemic hit. With the vaccine roll-out continuing and a gradual resumption of economic activity underway, the OECD projects strong global growth of 5.7% this year and 4.5% in 2022, little changed from its May 2021 Outlook of 5.8%



and 4.4% respectively. Countries are emerging from the crisis with different challenges, often reflecting their pre-COVID 19 strengths and weaknesses, and their policy approaches during the pandemic. Even in the countries where output or employment have recovered to their pre-pandemic levels, the recovery is incomplete, with jobs and incomes still short of the levels expected before the pandemic.

## Real GDP growth projections for 2021 and 2022

%, year-on-year

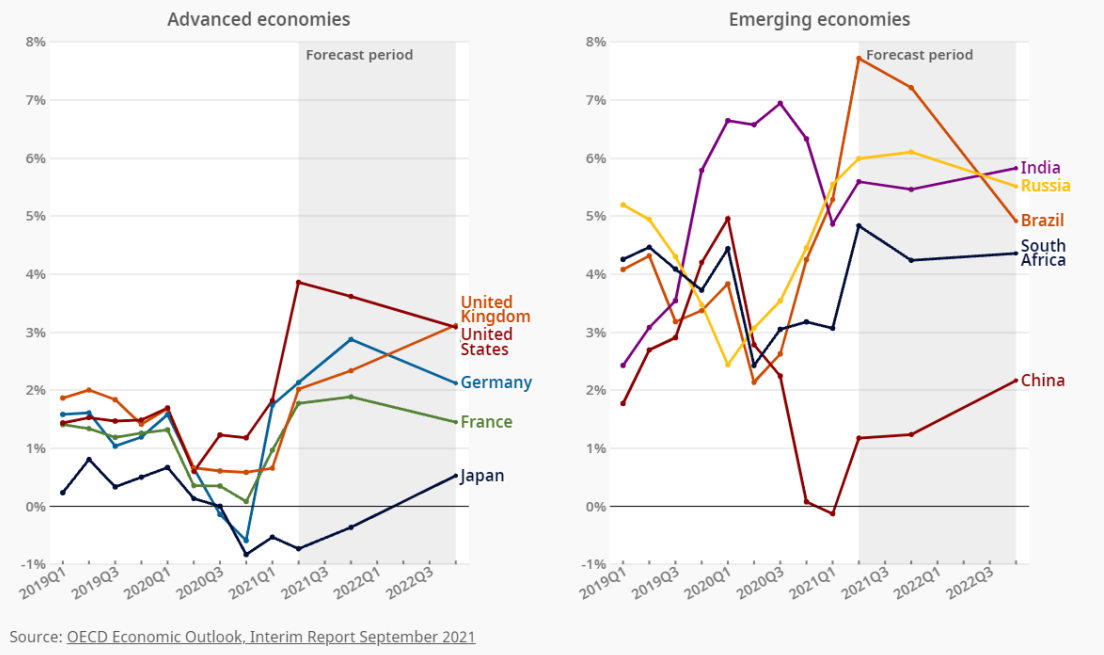


Source: [OECD Economic Outlook, Interim Report September 2021](#)

Large differences in vaccination rates between countries are adding to the unevenness of the recovery. Renewed outbreaks of the virus are forcing some countries to restrict activities, resulting in bottlenecks and adding to supply shortages. There is a marked variation in the outlook for inflation, which has risen sharply in the US and some emerging market economies but remains relatively low in many other advanced economies, particularly in the euro area. A rapid increase in demand as economies reopen has pushed up prices in key commodities such as oil and metals as well as food, which has a stronger effect on inflation in emerging markets. The disruption to supply chains caused by the pandemic has added to cost pressures. At the same time, shipping costs have increased sharply. But the Interim Outlook says that these inflationary pressures should eventually fade. Consumer price inflation in the G20 countries is projected to peak towards the end of 2021 and slow throughout 2022. Wage growth remains broadly moderate and medium-term inflation expectations remain contained.

## Inflation is rising but is expected to moderate

%, year-on-year



The report warns that to keep the recovery on track stronger international efforts are needed to provide low-income countries with the resources to vaccinate their populations, both for their own and global benefits. Macroeconomic policy support is still needed as long as the outlook is uncertain and employment has not yet recovered fully, but clear guidance is called upon from policymakers to minimise risks looking forward. Central banks should communicate clearly about the likely sequencing of moves towards eventual policy normalisation and the extent to which any overshooting of inflation targets will be tolerated. The report says fiscal policies should remain flexible and avoid a premature withdrawal of support, operating within credible and transparent medium-term fiscal frameworks that provide space for stronger public infrastructure investment.

Presenting the Interim Economic Outlook alongside Chief Economist Laurence Boone, OECD Secretary-General Mathias Cormann said: “The world is experiencing a strong recovery thanks to decisive action taken by governments and central banks at the height of the crisis. But as we have seen with vaccine distribution, progress is uneven. Ensuring the recovery is sustained and widespread requires action on a number of fronts – from effective vaccination programmes across all countries to concerted public investment strategies to build for the future.” Ms Boone said: “Policies have been efficient in buffering the shock and ensuring a strong recovery; planning for more efficient public finances, shifted towards investment in physical and human capital is necessary and will help monetary policy to normalise smoothly once the recovery is firmly established.” For the full report and more information, visit the Interim Economic Outlook online. Media queries should be directed to the OECD

Media Office (tel: +33 1 4524 9700). Working with over 100 countries, the OECD is a global policy forum that promotes policies to preserve individual liberty and improve the economic and social well-being of people around the world.

From <https://www.oecd.org/> 09/21/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## **World Bank: Tertiary Education Is Key to Rebuilding COVID-Hit Economies**

COVID-19 is devastating human capital around the world, affecting lives and livelihoods and posing risks for long term growth and productivity enhancement. As the world seeks to build back better into a new era of green and equitable economic growth, a new World Bank report stresses that smart investments and reforms in tertiary education systems are at the heart of the big transformations required throughout economies and societies. Tertiary education is vital for the development of human capital and innovation to spur long term growth. “Tertiary education is central to the development process – it is essential for the creation of opportunities, competitiveness, and growth,” said Mamta Murthi, World Bank Vice President for Human Development. “We encourage countries to address the challenges brought by the pandemic, to build back better, more equitable, efficient, and resilient tertiary education systems. This will build the essential professional expertise required to drive public and private sector development, including, among others, the doctors, nurses, teachers, engineers, technicians, scientists, and managers needed to support effective education, health service delivery, and to drive productivity and growth.” Presented during the United Nations’ General Assembly meetings, the new policy approach paper, *Steering Tertiary Education, Toward Resilient Systems that Deliver for All*, reinforces the imperative that every country invest thoughtfully and strategically in diversified, well-articulated, and inclusive tertiary education systems. It examines the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the global tertiary education sector and identifies policies that can promote a resilient recovery.

The report proposes a framework to guide policies and investments in tertiary education comprised of five principles to STEER tertiary systems and institutions toward greater relevance and impact:

**Building diversified Systems** – shaping a strong contribution of tertiary education to both growth and competitiveness, and also social cohesion and human development; and positioning tertiary education in a lifelong learning context with flexible pathways allowing for access to different types of institutions and greater adaptability to the labor market needs and opportunities.

**Investing smartly in new Technologies** – profiting from digitalization, to support improvement of teaching and research capacity, innovation and agility in service delivery, as well as the building of a digital ecosystem, which, overall, make tertiary education systems more resilient.

**Ensuring Equity in access and financing** – acknowledging that inequity is a form of

injustice and acting to ensure that equity and inclusion in access and success are a driving ethos for an effective and relevant tertiary education system.

Achieving Efficiency in resource utilization – improving information systems by utilizing evidence to strengthen oversight and management; devising and deploying governance, financing, and quality assurance instruments that are designed to deliver more value for investments.

Acquiring Resilience in service delivery so that learning continues – acknowledging the need for resilience planning, by taking stock of the successes and failures of the COVID-19 response at the systems and institutional levels; utilizing adaptive governance frameworks to embed immediate and strategic resilience interventions as well as leveraging digital technologies.

Jaime Saavedra, World Bank Global Director for Education, emphasized that, “Building back better tertiary education systems requires a holistic view of the tertiary ecosystem, removing the barriers that lead to isolated siloes of universities, technical institutions, colleges, and tertiary technical and vocational education institutions. They should all be part of one single ecosystem that assures opportunities of lifetime learning for all.”

The World Bank has been providing support for tertiary education reforms and innovation since 1963, collaborating with governments, tertiary education institutions, and other stakeholders across the globe. With more than \$9 billion in investment projects, the World Bank is the largest external financier of the tertiary education sector. Now and in the future, the World Bank will continue to support the development of agile, equitable, and efficient tertiary education systems and dynamic tertiary education institutions. This development is enabled by goal-oriented steering, effective financing geared toward performance, and purposeful quality assurance. It aims at a strong contribution of tertiary education to equitable growth, social cohesion with strong democratic foundations, climate resilience, and the success and social mobility of students.

From <https://www.worldbank.org/> 09/27/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## **Development in a Time of Upheaval – World Bank Group President**

World Bank Group President David Malpass today called our current era of high inequality and reversals in global development progress a “time of upheaval,” and he outlined steps to help boost economic growth, shorten the crisis, resume development, and lay a strong foundation for a future that is more prosperous and better prepared for global disasters like COVID19. “Reversals in development threaten people’s lives, jobs, livelihoods, and sustenance. In many places around the world, poverty is rising, living standards and literacy rates are falling, and past gains on gender equality, nutrition and health are sliding backwards. For some countries, the debt burden was unsustainable before the crisis and is getting worse. Rather

than gaining ground, the poor are being left behind in a global tragedy of inequality. This drastic narrowing of economic and social progress is creating a time of upheaval in economics, politics and geopolitical relationships.” Speaking in Khartoum as the first Bank Group President to visit Sudan in nearly 40 years, Malpass noted recent progress the country has achieved. “Over the past few years, you have made a tremendous effort to put people on a forward path, amid very adverse conditions. Two years ago, Sudan’s transitional government inherited a deeply damaged economy and society that had suffered decades of conflict and isolation. Even as the people resolved to break with the past, Sudan faced extraordinary headwinds: from the COVID-19 pandemic, from a locust plague, from unprecedented floods, and an inflow of refugees escaping conflict from across the border.”

“Yet the country pressed forward with bold reforms, re-engaging with the international community, clearing World Bank arrears with the help of a U.S. bridge loan, and in June reaching the decision point for the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries - or HIPC - initiative...While there is much work ahead, I commend the Sudanese authorities, civil and military, for their efforts and achievements in working together toward a better future. It’s critical to avoid political slippages because there is no development without peace and stability. I would also like to acknowledge the remarkable resilience of the Sudanese people – your drive to build a better Sudan despite the challenges is truly inspiring.” Malpass noted the global pandemic has taken massive toll on poverty: “The COVID-19 crisis has resulted in increased poverty rates again after decades of steady decline. It has pushed nearly 100 million people into extreme poverty, with several hundred million more becoming poor, many of them in middle-income countries.”

He noted that while a turnaround is possible, risks remain. He recalled how the deadly Spanish Flu of 1918-20 was followed by extremely rapid economic growth – but also by wider inequality, and dangerous financial vulnerabilities that culminated in the prolonged Great Depression. Malpass posed a question for the international community: What should we do to boost growth that is inclusive, broad-based, and sustainable and avoid a lost decade for development? “First, we need a stronger focus on the key priorities, with clarity on how we approach and measure them...And second, we need much bigger scale to achieve impact.” Malpass noted four areas in which determined action should make a difference: achieving economic stability; leveraging the digital revolution; making development greener and more sustainable; and investing in people.

#### Achieve economic stability

Malpass noted that many developing countries made extraordinary efforts to support their people and keep economic activity going during the pandemic. “Many have gone beyond what they could afford, especially as debt in developing economies was at record highs when the pandemic hit.” When the debt service suspension initiative – or DSSI – expires at the end of this year, low-income countries that

resume debt service payments will see their fiscal space shrink to purchase vaccines and finance other priority expenditures, Malpass said. “It’s time to pursue a gradual and people-oriented fiscal consolidation and restructure unsustainable debt. Enhanced and accelerated implementation of the G20’s Common Framework will be critical on this front.”

Malpass called for greater global cooperation, including private sector participation, to provide debt relief to the world’s poorest countries and fund growth-enhancing investments. “In Sudan, for example, global cooperation that included the U.S., France and the UK helped the country clear its arrears with the World Bank, IMF and other IFIs, making possible more than \$50 billion in debt relief in what will be the largest HIPC initiative ever.” In addition to better debt management, Malpass said countries have to eliminate wasteful public expenditures, make service delivery more efficient, and reallocate public resources to their most productive uses. “This is also a time for proactive debt management to reprofile payments while international interest rates remain low. There need to be concrete steps to improve the transparency of debt contracts, increase accountability and ensure decisions draw on comprehensive information. Lower-income countries need to prioritize concessional financing and avoid the high interest rate financing that has become increasingly problematic. Focusing this agenda for each country and measuring the progress will be critical.”

#### Leverage the digital revolution

The faster adoption of digital solutions can radically expand access to finance and create new economic opportunities, Malpass said, noting that digital solutions can increase competition in product markets and enable people to sell services online, connecting them to national and global markets. “Supporting this transformation requires many actions at scale: investing in digital infrastructure, eliminating monopolies in the telecom sector, providing national IDs, and creating an enabling regulatory environment.” “The digital revolution can also transform the public sector. For example, it allows a radical rethink of safety nets systems. Across the world we are seeing programs move from in-kind and cash delivery to digital delivery, direct to people’s bank accounts or visible on their phones. Similarly, in both the formal and informal sectors, new payment systems enable daily purchases through phones, using QR codes and other technologies. Kenya and many other African countries have extensive experience on this,” said Malpass.

#### Make development greener and more sustainable

Malpass noted that the international community is strongly committed to slowing the increase in atmospheric carbon and to reducing climate impacts on the most vulnerable. “A key step is to stop the creation of new coal-fired plants, decommission existing ones, and substitute them with cleaner sources of electricity. We should support countries in a “just” transition, which includes taking care of the workers affected.” “This is also the time to reinvigorate often-stalled power sector reforms. Energy subsidies are expensive and distortive, while removing them needs to be

done in ways that solve underlying inefficiencies and increase access. Aiming for clean, affordable energy requires competition in electricity generation and distribution, as well as a truly independent regulator...Transportation is another major source of emissions. With more urbanization expected in developing countries, infrastructure and design of cities can make an enormous difference. Instead of sprawling metropolises where commuters spend hours on the road, governments can aim for more compact cities with efficient and clean public transportation systems. In the climate change efforts, both mitigation and adaptation, and the development effort more broadly, we need to prioritize and focus efforts for the largest impact per dollar spent and look for solutions that are rapidly scalable.”

#### Invest in people

Malpass highlighted the importance of investing in people's long-term health and education – the human capital agenda. “Strengthening education and health systems takes more than just providing budgetary resources in an efficient and prioritized way. For example, aligning incentives for teachers and health care providers – public or private – with the needs of the people they serve is important. And finding scalable solutions to enhance health care and improve the quality of education, including through distance learning, is also critical. “Nowhere is human capital accumulation more important than in conflict-affected countries, where most poor people live today. Assisting refugees and host communities is a key priority. Security is essential, but soldiers can't win the battle of development. Change is more likely to come from small victories won across millions of households over time.” Malpass noted the role the World Bank Group can play. “The World Bank Group is uniquely endowed and positioned to support countries with the four priorities I have outlined -- through finance and know-how for governments, while mobilizing the private sector. We have unmatched experience working with countries, using technical experts across all the key sectors.”

#### Combat reversals in development

“This unprecedented crisis has set in motion a time of upheaval. The many choices in coming years will determine whether developing countries suffer a lost decade or can usher in rapid growth and economic transformation,” said Malpass. To succeed requires the active participation of the public and private sectors across countries, civil societies and foundations, indeed the whole international community working together. These efforts require leaders to be ambitious for the prosperity of people. And they require focus and scale throughout our development work.”

From <https://www.worldbank.org/> 09/30/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## **COVID-19 Resurgence Dampens Investor Sentiment in Emerging East Asia**

The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic's resurgence in recent months has

dampened investor sentiment in emerging East Asia even as accommodative policy stances have kept financial conditions stable, according to the latest issue of the Asian Development Bank's (ADB) Asia Bond Monitor. The People's Republic of China (PRC), Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, and Viet Nam posted declines in yields on short-term (2-year) and long-term (10-year) government bonds from 15 June to 27 August. The decline of long-term bond yields in most markets tracked looming uncertainty about recovery prospects amid rising COVID-19 cases. Equity indexes dropped and currencies depreciated in most emerging East Asian markets, while foreign portfolio investments flowed outward. Local currency bond markets in emerging East Asia grew to \$21.1 trillion at the end of June, driven by the continuing increase in government bond issuance. Governments continued to tap local currency bond markets to support pandemic containment and recovery. Outstanding local currency bonds increased 2.9%, accelerating from 2.2% the previous quarter. Government bonds increased 3.3% to \$13.1 trillion, compared with 2.1% growth in the previous quarter.

"The emergence of COVID-19 variants and renewed mobility restrictions in some places are stifling the earlier momentum toward a sustained recovery," said ADB Acting Chief Economist Joseph Zveglic, Jr. "However, financial conditions in emerging East Asian economies remain stable, even as they cope with the continuing uncertainty. Some central banks have used small-scale asset purchase programs to improve bond market liquidity and boost private investor confidence. Long-term debt is making up more of the region's local and foreign currency debt structure, and the region's sustainable bond markets are expanding." Emerging East Asia comprises the PRC; Hong Kong, China; Indonesia; the Republic of Korea; Malaysia; the Philippines; Singapore; Thailand; and Viet Nam. Growth in sustainable bonds in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) economies jumped to 30.4% from 0.6% in the prior quarter, reaching \$23.6 billion at the end of June. Sustainable bonds in the ASEAN region plus the PRC; Hong Kong, China; Japan; and the Republic of Korea totaled \$345.2 billion, equivalent to 19% of global sustainable bond stock. Green and sustainability bond issuance in the region during the first half of 2021 exceeded the issuance for all of 2020.

Market risks remain rooted in the resurgence of COVID-19 and its impact on the region's economic recovery. Coupled with a strong recovery in the United States (US), this could push further capital outflows and local currency depreciation that will increase external debt burdens. Potentially higher US bond yields could spill over to the region and increase local currency financing costs. The latest issue of the Asia Bond Monitor discusses the likelihood of a strong but divergent global economic recovery amid uneven vaccination and growth rates; emerging East Asian central banks' asset purchase programs; and debt buildup in the region. Other highlighted issues include the growing importance of incorporating social risks into the investment value chain and expanding the use of social bonds to support projects related to health care, clean water, food security, and gender equality.



## **ADB Maintains 8.1% Forecast for PRC Economic Growth in 2021**

The People's Republic of China (PRC) is expected to see 8.1% economic growth in 2021 as solid exports as well as increased fiscal support in the second half of the year will offset a more protracted recovery in household consumption, according to a new report by the Asian Development Bank. The PRC's economy is projected to expand 5.5% in 2022, according to Asian Development Outlook 2021 Update, released by the bank today. The forecasts for this year and next were unchanged from projections made by ADB in April, even as concerns about the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic continued to weigh on economies globally. "The PRC's economy recovered further in the first half of 2021, driven by strong exports and improving consumption," said ADB Country Director for the PRC Yolanda Fernandez Lommen. "For this year and the next, consumption will continue to be the main growth driver, followed by investment and net exports."

Consumer price inflation in 2021 is forecast to stay well below its 2020 rate as pork price deflation keeps food prices in check. Nonfood inflation is expected to remain moderate for the rest of 2021. As household demand will recover only gradually, companies will find it difficult to increase prices for services. The inflation forecast for 2021 is therefore lowered to 1.3%, but the forecast for 2022 remains unchanged at 2.3% to accommodate revived food price inflation. With a solid recovery in household consumption and retail sales, consumption regained its position as the main contributor to growth, adding 7.8 percentage points in the first half of 2021. Net exports are forecast to contribute slightly more to growth in 2021 than expected earlier, despite a projected decline in the trade surplus, reflecting higher commodity prices. The net export contribution to growth should retreat in 2022 as the current account surplus moderates.

Investment contributed 2.4 percentage points to growth in the first half of 2021, or 0.9 percentage points more than a year earlier. In the first 7 months, driven by investment in manufacturing and real estate, fixed asset investment came back from a 1.6% contraction in nominal terms a year earlier to increase by 10.3%. Though labor market statistics do not measure underemployment, available data indicate that the labor market has improved in line with economic recovery. By the end of June 2021, rural labor migrants in urban areas had nearly returned to their 2019 numbers. The surveyed urban unemployment rate was 5.1% at the end of July 2021, or 0.2 points lower than at the same point in 2019.

## **ADB Trims Developing Asia 2021 Growth Outlook to 7.1% amid**

## Continued COVID-19 Concerns

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) lowered its 2021 economic growth outlook for developing Asia, amid continuing concerns over the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. ADB forecasts growth of 7.1% this year, according to an update of its flagship economic publication, Asian Development Outlook (ADO) 2021. That compares with a projection of 7.3% in April. The growth outlook for 2022 is raised to 5.4% from 5.3%. New COVID-19 variants, renewed local outbreaks, the reinstatement of various levels of restrictions and lockdowns, and slow and uneven vaccine rollouts are weighing down the region's prospects. "Developing Asia remains vulnerable to the COVID-19 pandemic, as new variants spark outbreaks, leading to renewed restrictions on mobility in some economies," said ADB Acting Chief Economist Joseph Zveglic, Jr. "Policy measures should not only focus on containment and vaccination, but also on continuing support to firms and households and reorienting sectors in the economy to adapt to a 'new normal' once the pandemic subsides to kickstart the recovery."

COVID-19 cases in developing Asia have risen since the Delta variant of the virus emerged in April. New daily cases peaked at 430,000 in May. More than 163,000 new daily cases were recorded on 31 August. Meanwhile, vaccination progress in developing Asia remains uneven and lags behind that of advanced economies. As of 31 August 2021, 28.7% of the region's population had full vaccine protection, compared with 51.8% coverage in the United States and 58.0% in the European Union. The recovery path within the region remains uneven. East Asia's growth forecast for this year has been raised to 7.6% from 7.4% in April, as a surge in global demand fuels exports from the region. East Asia's growth prospects for 2022 are unchanged at 5.1%. Growth projections for the People's Republic of China, the region's largest economy, remain at 8.1% in 2021 and 5.5% in 2022. The economic growth outlook for Central Asian economies this year is raised to 4.1% from 3.4% projected in April, amid improved prospects for Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan. The subregion's 2022 outlook has improved to 4.2% from 4.0%.

ADB expects economic growth of 8.8% in South Asia this year, compared with the 9.5% forecast in April for the subregion. However, the outlook for 2022 has improved to 7.0% from 6.6%. The projection for India—the subregion's largest economy—is downgraded to 10.0% from 11.0% in 2021, while the outlook for next year has improved to 7.5% from 7.0%. The forecasts for Southeast Asia and the Pacific have also been revised downward, as economies in these subregions continue to grapple with new virus variants, continued lockdowns and restrictions, and slow vaccine rollouts. Southeast Asia's growth projections for 2021 and 2022 have been lowered to 3.1% and 5.0%, respectively, from forecasts of 4.4% and 5.1% in April. The Pacific's economy is set to contract 0.6% this year, compared with 1.4% growth projected in April, before expanding 4.8% in 2022. Inflation in developing Asia is

expected to remain in check, at 2.2% this year and 2.7% in 2022. The current trend of higher international commodity and food prices could stoke inflation in some of the region's economies.

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[TOP ↑](#)

## **COVID-19 Delays Economic Recovery — ADB**

The economic recovery in the Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR) slowed amid a second wave of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic that has led to lockdowns and lower consumer spending, according to a report released today by the Asian Development Bank (ADB). The country's economy is expected to grow by 2.3% in 2021, compared with the 4.0% expansion forecast in April, according to the Asian Development Outlook (ADO) 2021 Update. The global recovery is expected to spur domestic growth in 2022, albeit lower than projected in ADB's previous forecast. "Policies to reduce the spread of the coronavirus have curbed output in manufacturing and hurt growth in the retail trade, transport, and tourism services," said ADB Country Director for the Lao PDR Sonomi Tanaka. "Curtailed economic activity has increased joblessness and reduced household incomes, especially among women and those with lower education. A swift recovery from the pandemic depends on policies that support businesses and households to adapt to the 'new normal'."

With lower domestic demand, inflation stayed at 3.1% on average in the first 7 months of this year. The kip has depreciated against foreign currencies, with the spread between official and parallel rates for the kip and US dollar exceeding 20% during July, reflecting a domestic shortage of currency following large external public debt payments. Revenue collections are yet to return to pre-pandemic levels, with public finances remaining constrained. The report says the country's economic recovery will be supported by the issuance of new mining licenses and earnings from electricity exports, as well as the planned opening of a railway linking the Lao PDR with the People's Republic of China. With a forecast of warmer temperatures and rainfall on-trend, rice and cash crop harvests are expected to be stable. Challenges remain. New measures to contain COVID-19 outbreaks and the pace of the vaccine rollout will impact the country's economic prospects. Measures to strengthen macroeconomic management and improve investor sentiment remain essential to the economic recovery and household welfare, as reported in ADO 2021 in April.

From <https://www.adb.org/> 09/22/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## **Transforming Agriculture Key to Asia and Pacific's Future and Survival**

Governments in Asia and the Pacific must transform agriculture to make it more

modern, climate-proof, and inclusive as the region recovers from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, according to a new report by the Asian Development Bank (ADB). With 76% of Asia's poor living in rural areas, raising agricultural productivity and income is key to fighting poverty, according to the theme chapter of Asian Development Outlook 2021 Update released today. The latest edition of ADB's flagship economic publication urges governments to enact policies that integrate technology, infrastructure investments, innovation, and regulatory reforms to ensure food security and continued economic development. According to the report, the COVID-19 pandemic has pushed an additional 75 million to 80 million people in developing Asia into extreme poverty. This in turn is causing greater food insecurity. Worldwide, hunger will surge by about a third this year, according to an assessment by the US Department of Agriculture. Of the 291 million additional people suffering from food insecurity globally, 72% are in Asia—particularly in Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, and Pakistan.

“Agriculture has supported Asia and the Pacific's rapid economic growth in recent decades, but multiple challenges are driving the need to modernize and transform the sector—from COVID-19 to climate change and urbanization,” said ADB Acting Chief Economist Joseph Zveglic, Jr. “Policies that support this transformation are crucial in order to put food on the table and protect the region's recovery and sustainable development.” Beyond the pandemic, climate change is the biggest challenge facing agriculture in Asia. Increases in extreme weather are threatening crop production and overall sustainability. From 2008 to 2018, Asia suffered \$207 billion in crop and livestock production losses to disasters, or 74% of the global total, according to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. To address this, government policies can promote a range of solutions such as early warning systems for extreme weather, climate-resilient agricultural infrastructure and production practices, and affordable crop insurance. Other challenges include the adverse effect of rapid urbanization on farm labor productivity; changing food preferences, such as increasing demand for meat; outdated infrastructure, particularly in terms of water and irrigation management; and obsolete government support measures.

Developments in areas such as aquaculture and digital technology have the potential to help transform agriculture in Asia and the Pacific. Aquaculture now accounts for about half of the world's fishery production and is growing fast. About 90% of aquaculture production is in Asia. Meanwhile, digital technologies, including mobile phones and applications, can increase technical knowledge among the region's 350 million smallholder farmers, helping them adopt innovative practices and get up-to-date market information. Government policies should transition away from traditional production support, the report says. They should focus more on investing in research and development, encouraging innovation, and pursuing market-oriented development. At the same time, governments must protect the rights of farm workers, including migrants and women, to ensure everyone benefits from the sector's

transformation.

From <https://www.adb.org/> 09/22/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## **Archipelagic Economies: Spatial Economic Development in the Pacific**

A new World Bank report on the challenges facing the Pacific region's outer island communities identifies investment in people and livelihoods as a key for inclusive economic growth. Archipelagic Economies: Spatial Economic Development in the Pacific looks at the challenges Pacific governments must address to provide services and infrastructure to populations spread across hundreds of islands spanning the vast Pacific Ocean. The report puts forward a series of practical steps that countries can take to overcome these challenges in a way that supports resilient and inclusive economic growth. "Many Pacific countries are faced with significant challenges in delivering services and connecting remote, outer island communities; with difficult decisions around resources and how to best invest often limited resources into outer island communities," said the report's lead author, World Bank Lead Economist for Fiscal Policy and Sustainable Growth Robert Utz. "This report aims to provide Pacific governments, development partners and decision-makers with evidence to assess options for fostering development for the people in those outer islands, so they can make stronger contributions to the larger economic development of the whole country."

The report identifies six guiding economic policy principles:

- 1) Policy solutions that seek to achieve equitable increases in living standards need to be grounded in an understanding of the economic implications of the Pacific region's unique economic geography.
- 2) Outer islands' development should be assessed from a spatial perspective; one that considers interactions with the country's main island and the region beyond.
- 3) A balanced approach that combines investments in urban areas to accommodate migration from outer islands to main islands with support for outer island populations is likely to achieve better welfare and equity outcomes than an approach that neglects one side or the other.
- 4) Growth-enhancing investments should be guided by clearly-identified opportunities, rather than by a desire to try to equalize economic opportunities across islands.
- 5) With limited scope to close the gap in economic opportunities between outer and main islands investments to promote livelihoods and human development should be given preference.
- 6) Outer islands are subject to a complex political economy of intra-island and outer island-main island relationships that need to be considered in development interventions.

“This is an important and timely study,” said Denton Rarawa, Senior Economic Advisor at the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat. “The current COVID-19 crisis has highlighted the need to address the institutional, service delivery and capacity gaps of nations across the Pacific. As we strive for greater vaccination rates and begin to think about how we’d like to rebuild after the pandemic, I believe this report has a lot to offer the future of the Pacific, especially in our efforts to leave no one behind.” The Archipelagic Economies report is a companion publication to the World Bank’s Pacific Possible series, which in 2017 and 2018 looked at opportunities for economic growth in Pacific Islands Countries across key sectors including tourism, fisheries, and labour mobility. The World Bank works in partnership with 12 countries across the Pacific, supporting 87 projects totaling US\$2.09 billion in commitments in sectors including agriculture, aviation and transport, climate resilience and adaptation, economic policy, education and employment, energy, fisheries, health, macroeconomic management, rural development, telecommunications and tourism.

From <https://www.worldbank.org/> 09/23/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## **Women’s Economic Empowerment Is Key to Stronger, More Resilient Economy**

Ministers and officials in the APEC region renewed their commitment to gender equality and women’s economic empowerment and to creating conditions that will drive inclusive, effective and enduring economic growth after the COVID pandemic subsides. Addressing the significant and disproportionate impact of the pandemic on women and girls, ministers, officials and business leaders pledged to implement policies that will improve women’s access to capital and markets, strengthen women’s labor force participation, increase access to leadership positions and support women’s education, training and skills development. Leading the discussion at the 2021 APEC Women and the Economy Forum, which was held virtually, New Zealand Minister for Women Jan Tinetti called attention to how the pandemic has driven many women out of the workforce and negatively affected their well-being. “We know that much of the essential work has been carried out by women, and that they have been crucial to our COVID response—as scientists, healthcare professionals, educators and other essential workers,” Minister Tinetti said. “We also know that women often carry out significant unpaid care responsibilities.” According to the updated APEC Women and the Economy Dashboard, the shift to digital technologies during the pandemic has increased the burden of employed women who are working from home to shoulder the bulk of domestic tasks and care work.

Related: Women’s Economic Opportunities in APEC Improve, but Persistent Gender Biases Stifle Progress

Minister Tinetti urged member economies to join together and take bold, collective actions to minimize the risk of COVID-19, which has set back years of hard-won progress. Members are united to intensify the collection, analyses, dissemination

and usage of sex-disaggregated data to get more clarity about existing barriers and inform an effective response to backsliding. “The current challenges present officials with a great opportunity to reset, change the status quo and enable women and girls to fulfil their potential, for the benefit of all,” Minister Tinetti, who chaired the forum on Friday, added. “We know our economies stand to gain substantially from achieving our goals for women and girls, including by creating the conditions for greater productivity, prosperity, innovation and improved quality of life.” Member economies agreed to carry out policies that enable and promote women’s participation in the formal economy by addressing gender-based pay gaps and occupational segregation as well as tackling discriminatory legal and regulatory barriers for women entrepreneurs and women-led small businesses.

Ministers also pledged to promote work-life balance and equal sharing of unpaid domestic work and care by exploring measures that expand affordable and accessible child and elder care facilities and access to social protection systems. Members will continue to share best practices incorporating technological and digital solutions, which can improve the ability to manage paid and unpaid work. “The decisions and responses that we make now can lay the foundation for a stronger future for women and girls, and a more resilient, inclusive economy,” Minister Tinetti noted. Minister Tinetti highlighted that while achieving equality is no easy task, gender-responsive policies and approaches are “critical for effective, inclusive and sustainable growth, especially in the wake of the pandemic. “Together, we can seize the opportunity before us to address long-standing structural barriers to women’s full and meaningful participation in the economy,” Minister Tinetti concluded.

From <https://www.apec.org/> 09/24/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## **Economic Recovery in East Asia and Pacific Faces Setback**

The East Asia and Pacific region’s recovery has been undermined by the spread of the COVID-19 Delta variant, prolonging the distress for firms and households, likely slowing economic growth and increasing inequality, the World Bank said on Monday. Economic activity began to slow down in the second quarter of 2021, and growth forecasts have been downgraded for most countries in the region, according to the World Bank’s East Asia and Pacific Fall 2021 Economic Update. While China’s economy is projected to expand by 8.5%, the rest of the region is forecast to grow at 2.5%, nearly 2 percentage points less than forecast in April 2021. Employment rates and labor force participation have dropped, and as many as 24 million people will not be able to escape poverty in 2021. “The economic recovery of developing East Asia and Pacific faces a reversal of fortune,” said World Bank Vice President for East Asia and Pacific Manuela Ferro. “Whereas in 2020 the region contained COVID-19 while other regions of the world struggled, the rise in COVID-19 cases in 2021 has decreased growth prospects for 2021. However, the region has emerged stronger from crises before and with the right policies could do so again.”

The damage done by the resurgence and persistence of COVID-19 is likely to hurt growth and increase inequality over the longer-term, the Update finds. The failure of otherwise viable firms is leading to the loss of valuable intangible assets, while surviving companies are deferring productive investments. Smaller companies have been hit the hardest. While most firms have faced difficulty, larger firms are likely to see a smaller decline in sales and more likely to adopt sophisticated technologies and receive government support. Households have suffered, especially poorer ones, which have been more likely to lose income, suffer greater food insecurity, have children not engaged in learning, and make distress sales of scarce assets. The resulting increase in stunting, erosion of human capital, and loss of productive assets will hurt the future earnings of these households. Increased inequality between firms could also increase inequality between workers. “Accelerated vaccination and testing to control COVID-19 infections could revive economic activity in struggling countries as early as the first half of 2022, and double their growth rate next year,” said East Asia and Pacific Chief Economist Aaditya Mattoo. “But in the longer term, only deeper reforms can prevent slower growth and increasing inequality, an impoverishing combination the region has not seen this century.”

The report estimates that most countries in the region, including Indonesia and the Philippines, can vaccinate more than 60 percent of their populations by the first half of 2022. While that would not eliminate infections, it would significantly reduce mortality, allowing a resumption of economic activity. However, the region will need to make a serious effort on four fronts to deal with long COVID: addressing vaccine hesitancy and limitations in distribution capacity to prevent plateauing coverage; enhancing testing, tracing, and isolation to control infections; increasing regional production of vaccines to reduce dependence on imported supplies; and strengthening health systems to deal with the prolonged presence of the disease. International assistance is needed to support national efforts in all these areas, especially in countries with limited capacity. Beyond containing COVID-19, a comprehensive strategy will be needed to boost growth and ensure it is inclusive. The report identifies accelerated technology diffusion as a possible silver lining of the crisis that could boost productivity, democratize education, and transform state institutions. However, complementary reforms are necessary. Equipping firms with the skills to embed technology in their business must be accompanied by openness to trade and investment and by competition policies that strengthen incentives for firms to adopt new technology. Implementing long-delayed reforms in education to improve teaching quality and curriculum relevance could ensure wider access to the benefits of new learning technologies.

From <https://www.worldbank.org/> 09/27/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

**ADB, Partners to Set Up New Platform to Catalyze Investments in Sustainable Infrastructure in Asia**



The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has signed a memorandum of understanding with HSBC, Temasek, and Clifford Capital Holdings to set up a debt financing platform to boost commercial development of sustainable infrastructure projects in Asia, with an initial focus on Southeast Asia. The platform aims to turn marginally bankable projects into bankable ones by providing concessional capital and addressing policy and regulatory constraints hampering private investments in sustainable infrastructure. The partners' initial focus will be on clean transport, renewable energy and energy storage, and water and waste management. Additional areas such as climate adaptation, agriculture and land use, and technology-led solutions could be included in the future. "As developing countries in Asia transition toward a greener and sustainable future, ADB is stepping up its engagement with governments and other aligned actors to expand the pool of bankable, sustainable infrastructure projects, increase their risk-return profile, and attract financing from private investors," said ADB Vice-President Ahmed M. Saeed. "ADB will provide technical assistance in project development and sector reforms and work with our partners to use blended finance and other risk mitigation solutions to mobilize sustainable infrastructure financing across Asia." Developing Asia needs to invest \$26 trillion, or \$1.7 trillion a year, from 2016 to 2030 to maintain its growth momentum, end poverty, and address climate change. Southeast Asia is one of the most vulnerable regions to climate change.

The public sector has financed most of Asia's infrastructure projects, but it cannot meet the rising demand in the region. Increasingly, governments are encouraging the private sector to invest in infrastructure. However, up to 65% of Asia's infrastructure projects are not considered bankable, and it requires significant upfront cost and time on project preparation to get the projects to a bankable stage. Marginally bankable projects typically face a range of barriers to accessing private sector finance. These may include a variety of capability, policy, and economic issues which can impact a project's ability to attract commercial financing. The initiative aims to bridge the financing gap by helping countries develop bankable sustainable infrastructure projects based on global standards. Following an initial feasibility assessment, it is envisaged that HSBC and Temasek will be equity partners in the platform and ADB and Clifford Capital Holdings will be strategic partners. The platform will apply international best practices for environmental, social, and governance, in line with safeguards standards set by international financial institutions. It may also consider emerging initiatives such as the FAST-Infra Sustainable Infrastructure Label.

From <https://www.adb.org/> 09/30/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## East Asia

### CHINA: Market Entities See Rapid Expansion

China's market entities registered fast growth in recent years, with the total number rising from 55 million in 2012 to 146 million at the end of July, said the State Administration for Market Regulation (SAMR). In breakdown, the number of companies more than trebled to 46 million, while that of self-employed businesses reached 98 million, about 2.5 times the 2012 number, Zhang Gong, head of the SAMR, told a press conference Monday. He attributed the healthy expansion of market entities to the steady long-term growth of China's economy and its vast market, continuous optimization of the country's business environment, and hard work of entrepreneurs and employees. New-market entities, most of which are micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises, have contributed to employment by creating more than 13 million new jobs annually in recent years, Zhang added.

He also noted China's self-employed businesses offered around 300 million urban and rural job posts, while all kinds of market entities nationwide employed about 300 million migrant workers. To restore sound market order and promote fair competition, China's market regulatory authorities have introduced a series of laws and regulations while cracking down on behaviors impeding fair competition in areas including the platform economy, health care, and public services. Since 2018, related authorities have investigated and dealt with 332 monopoly cases and 36,000 cases involving unfair competition, Zhang said. In the next stage, the SAMR will resolutely oppose monopolies and prevent the disorderly expansion of capital to create a level playing field for all types of market entities.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 09/06/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## **Chinese Vice Premier Stresses Promoting Digital Economy for High-quality Development**

Vice Premier Liu He on Monday stressed advancing the digital economy for the high-quality economic and social development of China. 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 International Digital Economy Expo 2021, which opened Monday in Shijiazhuang, capital of north China's Hebei Province. He underlined attracting and training talent, continuously improving the legal environment, appropriately constructing infrastructure in advance, optimizing the supply of resources and services, safeguarding fair competition, and opposing monopoly. The vice premier also called for efforts to vigorously support the development of the private economy, and encourage the private sector to play a greater role in stabilizing growth and employment and promoting structural adjustment and innovation.

The private sector contributes more than 50 percent of the tax revenue, more than 60 percent of the GDP, and over 70 percent of the technological innovations; it also provides more than 80 percent of the urban employment and accounts for more than

90 percent of market entities in China, Liu said. He emphasized continuing reforms to develop a socialist market economy, unswervingly promoting high-level opening-up, and resolutely protecting property rights and intellectual property rights. The principles and policies for supporting the development of the private economy have not changed and will not change in the future, Liu said.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 09/06/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## **China's Manufacturing Heartland Going Smart**

A walkie-talkie has to pass repetitive drop tests and button-pressing trials to meet factory inspection standards. In Hytera, a leading walkie-talkie manufacturing company based in Shenzhen, south China's Guangdong Province, most tests used to be conducted manually by quality inspectors. "Workers pressing the on/off buttons tens of thousands of times a day were more prone to develop negative emotions. The testing accuracy was also hard to guarantee," Sun Meng, senior vice president of the company, recalled. In 2011, the company started upgrading its production line and introduced robots for intelligent manufacturing. Now, sorting, labeling and coding of raw materials, assembling of parts, handling of products and quality tests are being done by robots. With more than 20 intelligent production lines, the company's production automation rate has crossed 70 percent, said Sun. "The yield rate and the production efficiency have greatly improved," he said, adding that the number of factory workers has decreased from more than 3,000 to about 1,000. The transformation of Hytera represents smart transition in the Pearl River Delta in Guangdong, with a cluster of manufacturing companies.

For the province, home to some 3 million industrial companies, the automation and digitalization of the manufacturing sector has become a must-take course for high-quality development. Bi Yalei, secretary-general of Shenzhen Robotics Association (SRA), said with improved domestic industrial robot technology and reduced prices, more enterprises have started to adopt cost-effective China-made robots for automation transformation, especially the small and medium-sized manufacturing companies that are more cost sensitive. Figures show that the output of industrial robots in Shenzhen witnessed a 75.5 percent year-on-year growth in the first seven months of this year, while the growth rate in the city of Dongguan was 123.3 percent year on year from January to June. A report released by the SRA said the output value of industrial robots in Shenzhen reached 90.4 billion yuan (about 14 billion U.S. dollars) in 2020, up 9.98 percent from 2019.

The growth was 7.65 percentage points higher than that of the previous year. According to the provincial department of industry and information technology, more than 15,000 industrial enterprises are engaged in digital transformation using industrial internet technology, and over 500,000 companies have adopted cloud technology. Introducing artificial intelligence technology, TCL China Star

Optoelectronics Technology Co., Ltd., a producer of semiconductor displays, has also replaced quality inspectors with robots, cutting the labor force of the sector by half and increasing efficiency nearly 10 times. The company is trying to collect and analyze data of the entire production process, including the temperature and humidity, hoping to further improve the yield rate. "We have to maximize production efficiency through high-level intelligence to further enhance the competitiveness of Made-in-China products," said Ding Liu'an, an employee with the digitalization office of the company.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 09/06/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## **China's Securities Regulator Pledges More Support to Real Economy**

China's securities regulator has pledged more support to advance a "virtuous cycle" between the real economy and the capital market. China will further strengthen the role of market function in serving the real economy while guarding against capital idling and risk accumulation, according to Yi Huiman, chairman of the China Securities Regulatory Commission. Facing multiple challenges including the epidemic, rising commodity prices and disrupted supply chains, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are having a hard time, and extending support to foster their development is a major task for global economic recovery, Yi noted. He pledged efforts to deepen reforms of the New Third Board, set up the Beijing stock exchange and speed up fostering a full-chain institutional system for the capital market to serve the innovation and development of SMEs. As part of efforts to deepen reforms of the New Third Board, China recently announced the decision to set up the Beijing stock exchange. Built upon the New Third Board, the Beijing bourse will host eligible companies traded on the equity exchange platform and pilot the registration-based IPO system.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 09/08/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## **China's Regulator Stresses Opening-up, Cross-border Cooperation**

China's securities regulator has pledged to roll out more measures to expand opening-up, while calling for strengthening cross-border regulatory cooperation. China will study and introduce relevant measures to further expand opening-up, including expanding the country's Stock Connect programs and increasing the supply of international futures products, according to Yi Huiman, chairman of the China Securities Regulatory Commission. Major global financial centers, with developed capital markets, should offer services to global investors and facilitate cross-border financing and investment, Yi noted, stressing that the centers should

not be used as the platform and tool for governments to suppress other countries. Adhering to the principles of mutual respect, effective communication, mutual benefit and win-win results, China will carry out pragmatic cooperation with relevant parties in areas including the supervision of China-concept stocks, cross-border audit supervision and law-enforcement cooperation, Yi said.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 09/09/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## **China's Strengthened Economic Regulations Aim Healthy Longer-term Development**

China recently launched a series of anti-monopoly probes and stepped up economic regulations over some tech companies. These measures do not indicate a departure from decades of market opening and engagement with the world, they rather reinforce that the commitment of the world's second-largest economy to reform and opening-up remains unchanged. Many insiders as well outsiders have taken notice of these enhanced regulations. Chinese authorities' talks with leading online game enterprises and platforms such as Tencent and NetEase held on Wednesday suggest the same. A closer look would reveal that China's strengthened regulations are specific and problem-oriented. They should not be taken as a wide-ranging crackdown for the sake of cracking down on private companies, but prescriptions for certain persistent ailments. The latest measures targeting online gaming giants, which include shortening the duration of online gaming services available to minors, are aimed at improving youth development.

The regulations and investigations involving corporate giants with a huge trove of Chinese data aim to protect the privacy and data security of numerous consumers, as well as the security of the state. For some tech giants -- known as "platform companies" in China -- which play a dominant role in their respective markets, the regulations and investigations address unfair practices such as the notorious "er xuan yi," or "choose one from two." The monopolistic demand of some platform companies from much smaller merchants, if goes unchecked, could undermine fair competition, stifle market access and innovation, and ultimately harm consumer interests and the entire economy. There are also regulations and investigations that seek to balance the relationship between big platforms and their workforce, ensuring workers' legitimate rights and interests vis-a-vis big capital.

In a nutshell, the broad stroke that China is cracking down on tech companies is biased. It is worth pointing out that with the rapid development of the digital economy, other major global economies have also been moving to beef up supervision and regulation over giant tech companies. Governments across the Atlantic are making efforts in digital industrial policy formulation, increasing their regulatory and governance capabilities in preventing monopolies in the digital economy, safeguarding data security, bridging the digital divide, and combating illegal tax

evasion. China is not regressing as some media accused. On the contrary, it has adopted a more forward-looking approach to the universal challenges and issues facing many countries. In forestalling and defusing the risks brought about by the disorderly and even barbaric expansion of capital, China is also putting people first and not corporate giants. The country aims to promote common prosperity for all and not just a few.

In its pursuit of a unified, open, competitive and orderly market, China has not and will not stop promoting fair competition, market reforms, a supervision system and strengthened anti-monopoly regulation. The country will strive to build a high-standard market system. Tech companies are encouraged to perceive the big picture and serve the country's economic and social development. They are also urged to play active roles in promoting scientific and technological progress, market prosperity, improvement of people's lives, and participate in cross-border competition. China's firm determination and prudent practices will optimize its economic structure, capital markets and governance in the longer term as well as reduce risks and facilitate fair market competition. China will also unswervingly promote high-level opening-up, protect property and intellectual property rights, and enhance policy transparency and predictability.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 09/09/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## **Carbon Neutrality Drives Growth of China's Investment Cooperation**

China's low-carbon commitment, particularly the endeavor to achieve its carbon-neutral target, has become a new driving force for the country's inbound and outbound investment. The message has been signaled by global and Chinese investors at the ongoing 21st China International Fair for Investment & Trade (CIFIT) which is held in Xiamen, east China's Fujian Province. China aims to have CO2 emissions peak before 2030 and achieve carbon neutrality before 2060. Even prior to setting the goal, China had invested heavily in energy conservation and emission reduction, and now it's ramping up efforts to achieve the timeline. The pursuit has not only created opportunities for global investors but also fostered an increasing number of local companies which are capable of investing abroad with their globally leading green technologies.

### **OPPORTUNITIES FOR GLOBAL INVESTORS**

"China's carbon-neutral ambitions encouraged us to boost investment here," said Feng Yan, Vice President of Air Products China. "China intensively focuses on climate and environmental protection, an area which happens to be our company's strong suit." The American-owned supplier of gases for industrial uses is heavily investing in projects of liquid hydrogen which can be used, for instance, in hydrogen fuel cell automobiles, and Hydrogen metallurgy, a technology that applies hydrogen

instead of carbon as a reducing agent. Last year, the company invested in a liquid hydrogen project in Jiaxing city, east China's Zhejiang Province. "We've expanded our investment in China significantly in recent years, and we are planning more investment here for the next five years," Feng told Xinhua.

Moreover, the company which is also developing CCUS technology (Carbon capture, utilization and storage), planned to embrace the "bright market prospect" of the technology in China, Feng said. "We hope we could contribute to the realization of the carbon peak and carbon neutrality objectives of China." China's carbon-neutrality endeavor drives demand for new energy vehicles, and many automobile multinationals set their eyes on this booming sector. Volkswagen has built two MEB (Modular electric drive matrix) plants in two different manufacturing bases of the group in China, for the production of pure EVs, according to Zhi Yixiang, director of corporate and joint-venture affairs, Volkswagen Group China. He reiterated at CIFIT the goal of delivering over 1.5 million new energy vehicles per year in China by 2025. "There is not one market in the world other than China that is big enough for so many new energy vehicle producers to exist," Zhi said.

Moreover, many local players are leading in electrification and digitization of the auto industry, which means cooperation opportunities for Volkswagen, he said, naming the benefits brought by China's fast-developing new energy vehicle sector. Photovoltaic (PV) is another sector where China's world-class development and vast demands attracted global producers to invest here. Alessandro Barin, CEO of FuturaSun, an Italian manufacturer of PV modules that operates a production plant in Taizhou, east China's Jiangsu Province, said his company planned to double the annual production capacity of the Taizhou factory to 2 gigawatts (GW) in near term. "We believe the clean energy sector will continue to gain momentum in the coming years," said Barin during the fair.

### **CHINESE GREEN INVESTMENT ABROAD**

Amid China's carbon-neutral drive, many industries and enterprises flourished and began taking their expertise to other countries. Recent years have witnessed more and more Chinese new energy producers investing abroad. Gang Yufeng with the China Electricity Council said the new energy industry had provided an excellent platform for Chinese enterprises to go global, as roughly 30 percent of China's outbound investment falls in the new energy sector. China's high-tech company SVOLT Energy Technology Co., Ltd is investing up to 2 billion euros (2.4 billion U.S. dollars) in production sites for battery cells in the German state Saarland. Pascal Strobel, head of the Automotive Saarland, an auto-industry network of the German state, said in his video speech delivered at a China-German investment forum during the fair, that the SVOLT investment demonstrated "the good interplay between German engineering and Chinese innovative power."

Contemporary Amperex Technology Co., Ltd. (CATL), China's largest automotive lithium-ion battery maker, started construction on a manufacturing facility in the German state of Thuringia in 2019 with an investment of 1.8 billion euros (about 2.05 billion U.S. dollars). The project is expected to start operation by the end of this year, and will provide automotive batteries for the soaring new energy vehicles in Europe. JinkoSolar Holding Co., Ltd, an NYSE-listed Chinese PV company, has set up production plants in the United States and Malaysia, and is building a new one in Vietnam this year, in addition to their China production plants. Qian Jing, vice president of JinkoSolar, said at a China-U.S. carbon neutrality cooperation forum during the fair, JinkoSolar has evolved from "sell globally" to "make globally" and further to "invest globally." "We are leading the world with constant innovations in research & development as well as business models, to the end of sending a clear signal to the world that PV is pivotal to alter the energy mix," she said. Matthew Margulies, vice president of China Operations of the U.S.-China Business Council, said at the same forum, Chinese businesses have the expertise to make real changes to address the challenges, such as by promoting energy-mix transformation and decarbonizing supply chains.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 09/10/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## **China's Economy Continues Recovery, Shows Resilience**

China's economy maintained the trend of recovery in August despite disruptions from the COVID-19 epidemic and natural disasters, showing the resilience of the world's second largest economy. The country's industrial output showed stable growth in August this year, with the value-added industrial output, a key indicator reflecting industrial activities and economic prosperity, expanding 5.3 percent year on year, according to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS). The figure was up 11.2 percent from the level in August 2019. In the first eight months, industrial output gained 13.1 percent year on year, resulting in an average two-year growth of 6.6 percent, NBS data shows. High-tech manufacturing became a shining point in the industrial output as the country strived for industrial and technological upgrading. Last month, the output of the sector jumped 18.3 percent year on year, accelerating by 2.7 percentage points compared with the figure registered in July. China's retail sales of consumer goods went up 2.5 percent year on year in August, down by 6 percentage points from the previous month.

The sporadic outbreaks of COVID-19 and natural disasters such as floods hindered travel and held back consumption during the summer holiday, NBS spokesperson Fu Linghui said, adding that the high base factor also resulted in the steep year-on-year drop. However, the cumulative growth for the last eight months showed that retail sales gained 18.1 percent year on year, which means consumption remained generally stable and the recovery trend was unchanged, said Fu. With the containment of the Delta variant outbreak in early September, retail sales growth



may rebound in September, Nomura Securities said in a research note. Fu is optimistic about future consumption activities, considering the upgrading demands of the large middle-income group of over 400 million people, the stable job market and the increasing profitability of enterprises. China's job market remained generally stable, with the surveyed urban unemployment rate standing at 5.1 percent in August, unchanged from that in July. During the first eight months of this year, the country created 9.38 million new jobs in its urban areas, achieving 85.3 percent of the annual target.

The surveyed unemployment rate of young people saw an apparent drop in August, bolstered by the country's economic recovery and a series of policies to support job-seeking by college graduates. The unemployment rate of those aged between 16 and 24 was down by 0.9 percentage points from that in July to 15.3 percent, NBS data shows. China's fixed-asset investment went up 8.9 percent year on year in the first eight months of this year, with the average growth rate over the past two years standing at 4 percent. Investment in the manufacturing sector stood out, with a 15.7-percent yearly increase during the period. Fu said that, despite the recovery, the international environment is still complex and severe, and the sporadic COVID-19 outbreaks and natural disasters such as floods have affected the country's economy. "The foundation of the economic recovery still needs to be consolidated," Fu added.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 09/15/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## **Emerging Opportunities, Policy Backdrop to Further Unleash China's Consumption Potential**

Although China's consumer market slackened amid the recent COVID-19 resurgence and floods, emerging opportunities and the consolidated policy backdrop will lend steam to the country's consumption growth looking ahead. The epidemic situation and floods hindered travel and held back consumption during the summer holiday, sending the year-on-year growth rate of retail sales of consumer goods to 2.5 percent in August, down by 6 percentage points from July, according to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS). Acknowledging the short-term factors weighing on August's consumption performance, NBS spokesperson Fu Linghui Wednesday told a press conference that the overall stable recovery momentum of consumption has not wavered. The cumulative growth of retail sales in the first eight months remained sound, at 18.1 percent, Fu noted, adding that the two-year-average growth rate slightly eased from that in the first seven months to 3.9 percent, maintaining overall stability.

Among the retail sectors surveyed by the NBS, online consumption remained vibrant, with sales in consumption-upgrade sectors squeaking out growth in August, according to Fu. In the first eight months, online sales of physical goods expanded by

15.9 percent year on year, accounting for 23.6 percent of the total retail sales during the period. In August alone, sales of goods in consumption-upgrade sectors, including sports and entertainment goods, and cultural goods and office utilities, both grew faster than in July, surging 22.7 percent and 20.4 percent from a year earlier, respectively, the NBS data shows. Citing the aforementioned data, Fu told the press conference that the consumption scale is still expanding, while the consumption structure is upgrading and new growth drivers are developing. In the meantime, China's consumer market also boasts great growth potential, especially in the sectors of eco-friendly and smart products, as well as those related to the elderly population.

To unleash the consumption potential, Fu said the country will strengthen effective supply by expanding production scales of smart home appliances and low-carbon products to meet people's aspirations for a better life. The spokesperson is optimistic about future consumption activities, citing the upgrading demands of the large middle-income group of over 400 million people as an important factor at the press briefing. Also noticing the short-term pressure on the country's consumer market, the country's top economic planner pledged to strengthen cooperation with relevant departments on the overall planning of consumption activities. Supervision will be optimized to improve the consumption environment, Chang Tiwei, an official with the National Development and Reform Commission told a press briefing Thursday, adding that the market order will be further regulated to give consumers confidence in spending.

Reforms to spur consumption vitality, including removing administrative limits on shopping activities and relaxing market entry to the service consumption sector, will also be promoted, while weak links in logistics and e-commerce systems in rural areas will be strengthened, Chang added. Also being optimistic about the future market prospects, Chang said that as COVID-19 is brought under control and consumption-promotion policies gain more steam, consumption will maintain restorative growth momentum later this year. "Consumption will still serve as the cornerstone of China's economic development," the NBS spokesperson Fu Linghui noted, expecting the epidemic-control efforts to take hold and the consumption environment to continue to improve.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 09/16/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## **Western Regions on Fast Track of High-quality Development**

One day ahead of the opening of 18th Western China International Fair (WCIF) from Sept. 16 to 20, DPD Group, a leading parcel delivery network in Europe, set up a new regional headquarters in Chengdu, capital of southwest China's Sichuan Province. It is the group's fourth regional headquarters on the Chinese mainland, following the ones in Beijing, Shanghai and Zhengzhou. "It's a natural process for

large logistics enterprises to expand their presence from the coastal regions to the inland areas. Chengdu, the only city in central and western China with two international airports, will bring new opportunities for DPD to expand the cross-border e-commerce logistics business from China to Europe and Southeast Asia," said Johnson Zhang, DPD Group's chief representative for Greater China. Zhang added that starting in October, each week the group will operate six cargo flights from Chengdu to London, Paris and Amsterdam.

After China put forward the West Development Strategy in 1999, the country's western regions have achieved remarkable progress. The accelerating GDP growth in western China suggests a narrowing development gap between the country's east and west. A new guideline on advancing high-quality development in the western regions was released last year, which will present an even promising development prospect for the regions. The upgrading and transformation of traditional industries and the emergence of new industries are constantly broadening the prospect of the western regions. A total of 758 investment projects have been signed at this year's WCIF. Southwest China's Tibet Autonomous Region, which boasts rich cultural resources and local specialties such as highland barley and yak, had been lagging in large-scale development due to a lack of criteria, certificates and investment.

Tibet last year set up a regional brand, namely "The Third Pole of the Earth," to boost these industries through brand marketing, standardized production so that these industries can better serve rural vitalization and stimulate high-quality development. "We have implemented blockchain-powered source tracing, third-party certification, product insurance and other measures to help Tibet's characteristic products achieve supply-side structural reform," said Gele Basang, head of the Lhasa-based The Third Pole of the Earth Industrial Development Co., Ltd. This is the first time Luis Schmidt Montes, Chilean Ambassador to China, attended the WCIF. "I was deeply impressed by the prominent achievements China's western regions have made in scientific and technological innovation, especially in the fields of new energy vehicles, artificial intelligence and 5G technology," he said at the fair.

Statistics show that the number of departing China-Europe freight trains in the western region continues to increase, and accounts for over half of the country's total. Last year, the number of rail-sea intermodal trains in the new land-sea corridor in western China registered a 105 percent year-on-year increase. The western regions now are home to five pilot free trade zones, 40 comprehensive bonded zones and 47 state-level economic development zones. The Chengdu-Chongqing economic circle which is under construction is expected to further inject new momentum to drive the economic growth and high-quality development of the western regions, with 252 agreements already signed since it was brought up early last year.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 09/21/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## **China's High-quality Grain Projects Boost Domestic Agriculture Development**

China's implementation of high-quality grain projects has promoted supply-side structural reform in agriculture, helped to increase food supply, and reaped benefits for farmers, an official with the National Food and Strategic Reserves Administration said Thursday. China implemented the projects in 2017. Since then, the central government has allocated 21.5 billion yuan (about 3.32 billion U.S. dollars) from the central budget to the projects. The local government and social investment added 60 billion yuan, said Zhang Wufeng, head of the administration. The country has added over 50 million tonnes of high-quality grain through the projects during the period, the data showed. The implementation of high-quality grain projects led to high yields of grain with better quality, promoted the high-quality development of agriculture, and increased farmers' income in China, Zhang added.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 09/23/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## **China's Electronic Information Manufacturing Sector Maintains Stable Growth**

China's electronic information manufacturing industry maintained stable growth in the first eight months of the year, 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 3.09 million U.S. dollars) expanded 18 percent year on year during the period. The growth rate went up 11 percentage points from the same period a year ago, the MIIT said. The export delivery value of major enterprises in the sector increased 14.3 percent year on year in the Jan.-Aug. period while fixed-asset investment in the sector jumped 24.9 percent. According to the MIIT data, the electronic information manufacturing sector raked in 413.9 billion yuan in total profits in the first seven months, surging 43.2 percent year on year. The operating revenue of the sector from January to July totaled 7.41 trillion yuan, up 19.3 percent.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 09/25/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## **China Confident of Making More Impressive Progress: White Paper**

China is confident that it has the capabilities and resources to realize the second centenary goal and make more impressive progress, said a white paper released by the State Council Information Office Tuesday. Despite China's realization of moderate prosperity in all respects, it still faces tough challenges such as unbalanced and inadequate development, said the white paper titled "China's Epic

Journey from Poverty to Prosperity." The world today is experiencing a level of change unseen in a century, with greater instability and uncertainty, it said, stressing that the country will propel its unique modernization forward and make substantial progress in well-rounded human development and common prosperity. China aims to achieve basic socialist modernization by 2035 and become a modern socialist country that is prosperous, strong, democratic, culturally advanced, harmonious, and beautiful by the middle of the 21st century.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 09/28/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## **China Ensures Prosperity for Every Individual: White Paper**

China adopted a targeted strategy to help poor people rise out of poverty and achieve moderate prosperity along with the rest of the country, according to a white paper released Tuesday. By the end of 2020, all of the 99 million rural poor, and all of the 832 counties and 128,000 villages classified as poor under China's current poverty line, had shaken off poverty, said the white paper titled "China's Epic Journey from Poverty to Prosperity" released by the State Council Information Office. The government has substantially reduced poverty in ethnic minority groups and areas, and the incomes and welfare of the registered poor in rural areas have improved substantially, according to the white paper. The per capita disposable income of rural residents in poor areas reached 12,588 yuan ( 1,946 U.S. dollars) in 2020. This represents an average annual growth rate of 9.2 percent in real terms from 2013 to 2020, 2.2 percentage points higher than the average growth for rural residents nationwide. In addition, their ability to keep themselves free from poverty has steadily increased, basic medical services are guaranteed for the poor, and access to safe drinking water has been ensured, said the white paper.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 09/28/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## **White Paper Documents China's Journey Towards Moderate Prosperity**

China's State Council Information Office Tuesday issued a white paper to document the country's journey to moderate prosperity in all respects, or Xiaokang, and share its experience in modernization. The white paper, titled "China's Epic Journey from Poverty to Prosperity," said the realization of moderate prosperity in all respects, as declared in July, marks a critical step towards national rejuvenation for the country. "Achieving moderate prosperity fulfills a long-cherished dream of the Chinese nation," it said. The document hailed the unremitting hard work by the Communist Party of China (CPC) and the Chinese people and looked into what China has accomplished in realizing prosperity through all-round development for all. "To

realize moderate prosperity has required great perseverance and represents a notable achievement on the part of the CPC and the people," it said.

Moderate prosperity in China, according to the document, is evident in the following respects: sustainable and sound economic development, expanding people's democracy, a flourishing cultural sector, improvement in people's wellbeing and great changes to the eco-environment. It has also ensured prosperity for every individual, integrated urban-rural development and coordinated development across regions, said the white paper. Building a moderately prosperous society in all respects means that all sectors, all people and all regions should benefit from it, Zhao Chenxin, an official with the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC), said, highlighting a balanced, coordinated and sustainable development. While achieving a historic transformation from a low-income country to an upper-middle-income country, China adopted a targeted strategy and has helped all of its 99 million poor rural people rise out of poverty by the end of 2020.

Ning Jizhe, deputy head of the NDRC, said China's Gini coefficient, an index reflecting inequality where zero equals perfect equality, showed a downward trend in recent years. Last year, the country's Gini coefficient declined to 0.468 from 0.491 in 2008. The country's ratio between the per capita disposable income of urban and rural residents has been declining steadily for 13 consecutive years since 2008, Ning said, adding that the ratio stood at 2.56:1 in 2020. Amid economic advancement, the country has made strong headway in preventing and controlling pollution, attaining major achievements in its drive to keep the skies blue, the waters clear, and the land pollution-free, according to the white paper. Regarding realizing moderate prosperity in all respects as a major contribution China has made to the world, the white paper also expounded on how the world will benefit from China's prosperity.

As the world's most populous and largest developing country, China has contributed to global peace and development by achieving moderate prosperity in all respects, it said. In achieving a moderately prosperous society, China has helped dramatically reduce the world's poverty-stricken population and gain a new experience of modernization for humanity, while its all-round opening up has promoted win-win cooperation, said the white paper. "China's experience offers a new option for those countries and peoples who are looking for both rapid growth and independence, and its success provides them with considerable opportunities for development," it said. Ning said moderate prosperity in China means huge opportunities for the global economy, citing estimations that in the next five years, the country's imports of goods are expected to exceed 10 trillion U.S. dollars, and its outbound direct investment is likely to top 550 billion dollars.

"This will surely provide a strong impetus for the steady recovery and sustained development of the global economy," he said. Despite the remarkable achievements, the white paper said China still faces tough challenges such as unbalanced and

inadequate development, while the world today is experiencing a level of change unseen in a century, with greater instability and uncertainty. But the country is confident that it has the capabilities and resources to make more impressive progress, it said. China aims to achieve basic socialist modernization by 2035 and become a modern socialist country that is prosperous, strong, democratic, culturally advanced, harmonious and beautiful by the middle of the 21st century. The country will propel its unique modernization forward and make substantial progress in well-rounded human development and common prosperity, said the white paper.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 09/28/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## **China Sees Historic Changes to Eco-environment: White Paper**

China has seen historic changes to its ecological environment, according to a white paper on moderate prosperity released by the State Council Information Office Tuesday. A sound ecological environment is the most inclusive contributor to people's wellbeing, and a salient feature of moderate prosperity in all respects, said the white paper titled "China's Epic Journey from Poverty to Prosperity." China has made strong headway in preventing and controlling pollution, attaining major achievements in its drive to keep the skies blue, the waters clear, and the land pollution-free in 2020, according to the white paper. In cities at or above prefecture level, 87 percent days reached good or excellent air quality. Up to 94.5 percent of the drinking water sources serving urban communities reached the required standards. Approximately 90 percent of polluted farmland and more than 93 percent of polluted land plots were rendered safe for use, the white paper said.

The country has the highest growth in forest resources and the largest area of man-made forests in the world, the white paper noted. By the end of 2020, it had raised its forest coverage to 23 percent of its land mass and the vegetation coverage of its grasslands to 56.1 percent. China also tops the world in terms of new energy use and progress in energy conservation. Between 2015 and 2020, its energy consumption per unit of GDP fell by 13.2 percent and carbon emissions dropped by 18.8 percent, it added. By enacting the strictest Environmental Protection Law in its history, and formulating or amending a range of other laws and regulations, the country has created a legal framework on the ecological environment that covers all environmental factors in major fields, said the white paper.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 09/28/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## **China's Industrial Profits Sustain Stable Growth in First Eight Months**

Profits of China's major industrial firms maintained steady growth momentum in the first eight months of the year as industrial production continued to firm up and business operations kept improving, official data showed on Tuesday. Industrial firms with annual business revenues of at least 20 million yuan (about 3.1 million U.S. dollars) saw their combined profits surging 49.5 percent year on year in the Jan.-Aug. period to 5.6 trillion yuan, data from the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) showed. The volume jumped 42.9 percent compared with the 2019 level, putting the average Jan.-Aug. growth for 2020 and 2021 at 19.5 percent. In August alone, major industrial companies raked in profits of 680.28 billion yuan, up 10.1 percent year on year, NBS data showed. Business operations of China's industrial firms continued to improve last month, despite the impact of floods, a relatively high base and a sporadic resurgence of COVID-19 cases, said NBS senior statistician Zhu Hong. Profits of the high-tech manufacturing sector posted a robust increase of 17.5 percent in August, up 7.4 percentage points from the average level of industrial firms, Zhu added. In particular, the pharmaceutical manufacturing sector saw its profit soar 70.5 percent year on year, driven by strong demand for COVID-19 vaccines.

The mining and raw materials manufacturing sector continued rapid profit growth, said Zhu. Boosted by high prices of bulk commodities, the coal industry saw its profit increase by 241 percent, up 30 percentage points from a month ago. Profits of oil and gas exploitation industry surged 257 percent, and those of nonferrous metals and chemical sectors rose by 98.9 percent and 66.5 percent, respectively. Zhu also highlighted a steady recovery in profits of consumer goods manufacturers such as chemical fiber and textile industries, due to rebounding market demand and rises in product prices. Meanwhile, Zhu cautioned against multiple challenges likely to impact companies' profits, including a resurgence of COVID-19 infections, high commodity prices and chip shortages. In the next stage, a slew of measures will be taken to further shore up growth of industrial firms, including enhancing epidemic control, ensuring supplies of commodities as well as cutting taxes and fees, Zhu added.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 09/28/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## **JAPAN: Aiming for a Comeback in Digitization Race**

The Digital Agency was launched on Sept. 1 to remedy Japan's slow progress in digitizing its society, a serious issue as the country lags behind other advanced nations. With the birth of a new government agency, attention is focused on whether the country can break out of a seemingly hopeless situation. Factors, such as the rise of IT giants, have brought about a sea change in the global economic environment. Part 3 of the ongoing Yomiuri Shimbun series "Digital Tech Rushes Forward" examines the changing structures in our society. The offices of the Digital Agency in a building complex located in Kioicho, Tokyo, look like an IT company workplace. In late August when the agency was preparing for its launch, online



conferences were being held everywhere. Some staff members were wearing T-shirts and standing around while working with computers.

“We’ve gathered a highly skilled staff, including engineers specializing in data design and application development,” said Masaki Saito, a 37-year-old official in charge of personnel affairs. The Digital Agency has been established as part of the “digitization of administrative procedures,” a centerpiece policy of Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga’s administration. To the public, the most tangible work the agency will do is implementing measures related to the My Number personal identification system. Taking effect in 2016, My Number is a system in which a 12-digit number is assigned to every resident in Japan. So far it has mainly been used for administrative procedures in three areas: taxation, social security administration and disaster response. At the top of the agency’s to-do list is to fully expand the use of IC chip-equipped Individual Number Cards to serve as health insurance cards, slated to start in October.

“It used to take quite a while to manually input the information on the health insurance card into the computer system,” said Yosuke Toyoda, a 51-year-old pharmacist at Sanae Yakkyoku, a pharmacy in Adachi Ward, Tokyo. “But [with Individual Number Cards,] that information is read instantly.” Sanae Yakkyoku adopted the system in March, earlier than other pharmacies. If a person has their Individual Number Card read at a terminal and their identity is confirmed via facial recognition, such personal data as their name, date of birth and health insurance card number will be entered into a computer. From October onward, other functions will be added, reportedly including one that can check a person’s prescription medication record. Within fiscal 2022, if a person has bank account information registered on the card’s designated website Mynaportal, they can automatically be paid public benefits in times of disaster. Residents will also be able to carry out administrative procedures via smartphone. The integration of Individual Number Cards and driver’s licenses is planned to start at the end of fiscal 2024.

Japan has lost the race to digitize its society over the past two decades. In 2001, Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori’s Cabinet spelled out the “e-Japan strategy,” which aimed to digitize administrative services. In 2003, the government set up the Basic Residents’ Registration Network, known colloquially as Juki Net, and started to issue Juki Cards that contained personal information. The card was originally envisioned as an official ID card that could be utilized for various purposes, such as filing tax returns online. However, issuance stopped at the end of fiscal 2015. The card’s penetration rate at that time was a mere 5.6%. Digitization of administrative procedures has made little progress since then. According to a survey conducted by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, the online use of administrative services in Japan was just 7.9% in 2019, the lowest among the 29 countries polled. The propagation of Individual Number Cards holds the key to the success of the Digital Agency. Both the central and local governments have been

touting the system's various benefits and calling on people to obtain a card. However, the campaign has not been going well. The central government has set a target of having most people get a card by the end of fiscal 2022, but the acquisition rate stood at 37.4% as of Aug. 26.

"The situations in which the card can be utilized have been limited so far, and there's been little inconvenience in people's daily lives from not having the card," an Internal Affairs and Communications Ministry official offered as the reason why the card has not been embraced. But that is not the only reason. The public is concerned about the management of personal information. In fiscal 2020, the Personal Information Protection Commission received reports of 132 cases in which the cards were used inappropriately by the central or local governments, exceeding 100 cases a year for the fifth consecutive year. Also, an incident occurred in Kanagawa Prefecture in which hard drives with My Number information on them were resold through an online auction. "The card hasn't become popular because public trust in the government is low," said Yukiko Miki, managing director of an organization advocating freedom of information. "As there is concern over the use for unintended purposes, the government must properly explain the purpose of the cards and the measures taken to prevent personal information from being leaked."

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[TOP ↑](#)

## Japan's Elderly Population Hits Record High

A Japanese government survey shows the number of people aged 65 or older, and their ratio to the overall population, are both at record highs. The survey was conducted ahead of the Respect for the Aged Day national holiday on Monday. The internal affairs ministry estimates that, as of Wednesday, the elderly population was 36.4 million, up 220,000 from last year. The ministry says the ratio of elderly people to the overall population was 29.1 percent, marking a rise of 0.3 percentage points. Japan's total population fell by 510,000 from last year. UN data shows this proportion is the largest in the world, and is more than five percentage points higher than Italy's 23.6 percent, the second highest. Of the elderly people in Japan, 15.83 million were male and 20.57 million were female. The ministry also says the number of elderly workers in Japan rose for 17 consecutive years to reach 9.06 million last year, or 13.6 percent of the total workforce, which is also a record high. The ratio of workers aged 65 or older to all elderly people rose for nine consecutive years to reach 25.1 percent, the highest ratio among the major countries.

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[TOP ↑](#)

## Japan E-Commerce Market to Grow by 10.5% in 2021, Says Globaldata

The Japanese e-commerce market is estimated to register a strong growth of 10.5% in 2021, as consumers are increasingly shifting from offline to online, according to GlobalData, a leading data and analytics company. Japan has a well-developed e-commerce market and has registered sustainable growth over the last five years supported by high mobile and online penetration and high consumer preference for online transactions. Consumers are increasingly shifting from in-store to online purchases, with e-commerce being one of the few areas that has shown positive impact from the pandemic. An analysis of GlobalData's E-Commerce Analytics reveals that e-commerce sales in Japan are estimated to reach JPY22.4 trillion (US\$217.5bn) in 2021. E-commerce sales are expected to rise further at compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 5.9% between 2021 and 2025, to reach JPY28.2 trillion (US\$273.4bn) in 2025. Ravi Sharma, Lead Banking and Payments Analyst at GlobalData, comments: "The pandemic has pushed e-commerce activities in the country, as concerned consumers are increasingly using online channel for their purchases to avoid getting exposed to disease vectors.

With social distancing rules in place and closure of several brick and mortar stores, shoppers had to embrace online channel even for day-to-day shopping." According to the 'Survey of Household Economy' conducted by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, over 50% of households (with two or more members) ordered goods and services over Internet in July 2021. In addition, the average monthly expenditure on online shopping per household in July 2021 was up by 11.5% compared to monthly average of 2020. According to GlobalData's 2021 Financial Services Consumer Survey\*, payment cards are the most preferred payment method for e-commerce purchases in Japan, accounting for 64.2% share in 2021. Meanwhile, alternative payment solutions such as PayPay, Amazon Pay, Apple Pay and Google Pay are increasingly being used for online payments, with PayPay accounting for 4.9% share followed by Amazon Pay (3.8%). Mr Sharma concludes: "The COVID-19 pandemic has brought in a permanent shift in consumer buying behavior pushing them towards online, a trend that is expected to continue even beyond the pandemic times."

From <https://www.globaldata.com> 09/23/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## **SOUTH KOREA: 5G Users Top 17 Mln in July Data**

South Korea's 5G user base continued to expand in July to reach over 17 million users, data showed Wednesday, with the growth expected to pick up later this year on the back of launches of new devices. The total number of 5G subscriptions stood at 17.08 million in July, up around 616,000 from the previous month, according to the data from the Ministry of Science and ICT. The latest figure accounts for around 24 percent of the total 71.71 million mobile network subscriptions in the country. South Korea, which has a population of 51.3 million, first commercialized 5G networks in April 2019 and has so far secured 5G coverage across its 85 cities. SK Telecom Co.,

the country's largest wireless carrier by subscriptions, had just over 8 million 5G users in July, followed by KT Corp. at 5.2 million and LG Uplus Corp. at 3.8 million.

The number of 5G users is expected to grow at a faster pace with the launches of Samsung Electronics Co.'s new foldable smartphones -- the Galaxy Z Fold3 and the Galaxy Z Flip3 -- last month. The new phones have met rave reception in South Korea, with preorders for the devices topping 800,000 units over a one-week period that ended Aug. 23. Apple is also set to unveil its next iPhone devices as early as this month, and their release will likely encourage more users to migrate to 5G networks. The latest ministry data comes after an ICT ministry report a day earlier found that average 5G download speeds in South Korea reached 808.45 megabits per second (Mbps) in the first half of this year, an improvement from 690.47 Mbps in the second half of last year.

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[TOP ↑](#)

## **Online Shopping Hits Record High in July amid Pandemic**

Online shopping in South Korea hit a record high in July on the back of strong demand for food delivery services and the purchase of foodstuffs amid the pandemic, data showed Friday. The value of online shopping transactions stood at 16.2 trillion won (US\$14 billion) in July, up 24.9 percent from a year earlier, according to the data from Statistics Korea. The July reading marked the largest since November 2001, when the statistics agency began compiling related data. Amid an economic recovery and tougher virus restrictions, online purchases of goods and services gained ground, led by demand for foodstuffs, food delivery and electronics, the agency said. Purchases made through smartphones, tablets and other mobile devices rose 33.8 percent on-year to 11.7 trillion won in July. Mobile shopping accounted for 72.3 percent of the total value of online shopping. Online transactions of food delivery services jumped 72.5 percent on-year to 2.38 trillion won, and those of food and beverages rose 30 percent to 2.07 trillion won. Purchases of electronic goods increased 48.3 percent on-year to 2.06 trillion won thanks to demand for home appliances, including air conditioners. Online shopping of travel-related services inched up 2.1 percent to 823 billion won in July due largely to last year's low base and increased activity.

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[TOP ↑](#)

## **Regulator Voices Concerns About Unfair Biz Activity by Online Platforms**

The country's chief antitrust regulator on Friday expressed concerns about unfair business activity by online platform operators amid their growing market dominance in a contactless consumption trend caused by the pandemic. Joh Sung-wook, chief

of the Korea Fair Trade Commission (KFTC), made the remarks amid concerns powerful platform operators, such as Naver Corp. and Kakao Corp., have abused their dominant market status and engaged in unfair business practices against contractors. "Life has become more convenient, but concerns about side effects have grown," Joh told a forum. "Online platforms provide new opportunities for market access, but concerns about unfair business activity linger. Consumers are given more choices, but damage on them is also on the rise," she said. In a non-contact consumption trend, Naver and Kakao have come to have a powerful presence as they have aggressively expanded into new businesses, posing a threat to the survival of small merchants.

In particular, Kakao has relentlessly expanded its business portfolio into many fields, ranging from the banking service, entertainment and taxi-hailing business. Against this backdrop, the ruling Democratic Party is seeking to legislate a new bill aimed at regulating unfair business practices by mainstream platform giants. Earlier, the KFTC submitted to parliament a bill designed to take punitive actions against unfair business practice by online platform operators. Under the bill, online platforms will be levied a hefty fine if they conduct abusive or illegal business activity against contractors registered as sellers. Separately, the National Assembly endorsed an act in August that will curb the dominance that Google and Apple exert over payments on their app stores. The move enabled South Korea to become the first nation in the world to enact such a law.

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[TOP ↑](#)

## **S. Korea's 5G Base Stations Account for 11 Pct of Total in Q2 Data**

The number of 5G network base stations in South Korea accounted for just 11 percent of the total in the second quarter, data showed Monday, amid continued user complaints against the latest generation networks. As of the April-June period, there were 162,099 5G base stations in the country, compared with a total of 1.47 million mobile network base stations, according to data from the Korea Communications Agency. The number of 5G base stations was far outnumbered by around 1 million 4G base stations and over 300,000 3G base stations. In comparison, the number of 5G users accounted for 23.8 percent of the total in July at just over 17 million, while there were 50.5 million 4G users and around 4 million 3G users. The latest data comes as local mobile carriers have faced complaints from 5G users over spotty connection and slower-than-expected speeds since the networks' launch in April 2019. Earlier this year, some 5G users filed a lawsuit against the country's three major carriers -- SK Telecom Co., KT Corp. and LG Uplus Corp. -- seeking compensation for disappointing network services. Under growing pressure to improve services, the three carriers earlier this year agreed to share their 5G base stations in remote rural areas to speed up coverage expansion. South Korea aims to establish nationwide 5G coverage by the end of next year.

## South-East Asia

### **INDONESIA: To Inoculate 70 Pct of Population with Covid-19 Vaccines by End of 2021**

The Indonesian government has targeted to inoculate 70 percent of the country's population with COVID-19 by the end of this year, Indonesian President Joko Widodo said Tuesday. "We want at least 70 percent of the population in all the provinces to be vaccinated by the end of this year," Widodo said. As many as 189.94 million people represent 70 percent of the Indonesian population totaling 271.35 million. Indonesia is targeting to administer COVID-19 vaccinations to 208.26 million people, an increase compared to the previous target of 181.5 million people after the inoculation coverage included children aged 12 to 17 years old. If 70 percent of the people receive injections of the COVID-19 vaccines, herd immunity is expected to be formed and the transmission of the coronavirus will slow down, Widodo said. Indonesia started the COVID-19 vaccination program on Jan. 13 this year and it has so far given the first doses of COVID-19 vaccines to 68.20 million people and the second doses to 39.16 million people.

From <http://www.xinhuanet.com> 09/07/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

### **PHILIPPINES: Unemployment Rate Drops to 6.9 Pct in July**

Around 3.1 million Filipinos were out of work in July, down from 3.8 million reported in June, according to a Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) survey released on Tuesday. The PSA reported that the unemployment rate decreased from 7.7 percent in June to 6.9 percent in July. In an online briefing, PSA head Dennis Mapa said that July's unemployment rate is the lowest since April last year when the government placed the country under COVID-19 lockdown. "The labor force continues to recover as we build on the 11.8 percent economic growth recorded in the second quarter of 2021," the country's economic managers said in a joint statement. "The unemployment rate fell to its lowest since the start of the pandemic due to more relaxed quarantines," said the team comprising Socioeconomic Planning Secretary Karl Kendrick Chua, Finance Secretary Carlos Dominguez, and Budget officer-in-charge Tina Rose Marie Canda.

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[TOP ↑](#)

### **Approved Foreign Investments in Philippines Up 45.5 Pct in Q2**

The total foreign investments approved in the second quarter in the Philippines

recorded a 45.5-percent year-on-year growth, reaching 22.5 billion pesos (450.55 million U.S. dollars), the Philippine Statistics Agency (PSA) said on Thursday. The statistics agency said the foreign investment commitments for the second quarter were mainly driven by investments from Britain, which accounted for 55.6 percent, followed by South Korea and the United States. The PSA said the information and communication industry bested all other sectors as it stands to receive 12.53 billion pesos (250.89 million U.S. dollars), or 55.7 percent of the total investment pledges. From April to June, approved projects with foreign interest were projected to generate 17,013 jobs, said the PSA.

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

[TOP ↑](#)

## **SINGAPORE: Labor Market Improves in H1**

Singapore's labor market improved in the first half of 2021 as resident employment grew and unemployment continued to ease, according to the statement on labor market developments released by the Ministry of Manpower (MOM) on Wednesday. The ministry said in the statement that the city-state's resident employment increased by 28,500 in the first half of 2021, while its non-resident employment declined by 32,600. As a result, the total employment decreased by 4,000 in the six months. Migrant domestic workers are excluded in the above numbers. Meanwhile, Singapore's seasonally-adjusted overall unemployment rate reduced to 2.7 percent in June, the resident unemployment rate fell to 3.5 percent, and the citizen unemployment rate declined to 3.7 percent. The ministry said the country's labor market recovery has been uneven across sectors, with domestically-oriented sectors, tourism-related sectors and aviation-related sectors continuing to be impacted by COVID-19, while growth sectors such as the financial and insurance services sector, professional services sector and the information and communications sector saw sustained demand for manpower. "The labor market has largely continued its gradual recovery although it has not fully returned to pre-COVID conditions," the ministry said. "We expect labor market recovery to continue for the second half of the year, but in an uneven manner across sectors."

*From <http://www.xinhuanet.com> 09/15/2021*

[TOP ↑](#)

## **VIETNAM: E-commerce Platforms Resume Delivery in HCM City as Ban Is Lifted in Red Zones**

E-commerce platforms have resumed deliveries in HCM City and some of the city's extremely high risk areas (red zones) since August 30, a week after they were banned. Shopee told Việt Nam News: "Following the instructions allowing shippers to resume operations under certain conditions, Shopee has swiftly co-ordinated with our shipping partners to increase the number of delivery people and provide them with safety kits." It has also quickly increased the number of workers at sorting

warehouses to complete the orders, it said. Periodic disinfection of the warehouses are strictly followed in close co-ordination with local health authorities. Trần Tuấn Anh, director of Shopee Vietnam, said: "We have ensured compliance with all applicable regulatory measures during this period to enable easy access to essential products for our users. Shopee is always committed to adapting to the situation and ensure our users' demand is met, and continues to take part in the supply chain of foods and other essential goods." To resume shipping in red zones, Shopee said it is collaborating with delivery partners to constantly equip riders with traffic guidelines and vaccination certificates.

Also, its delivery persons are required to strictly comply with the Government's 5K preventive measures and contactless delivery, it said. Another e-commerce platform, Lazada Vietnam, also said it has resumed shipping since August 30. It told Việt Nam News that it has delivered thousands of orders, and the number is expected to increase in the coming days. It has focused on expanding the supply of goods and ensuring the safety of employees, partners and customers like providing drivers with quick test kits and helping them get vaccinated, it said. Through September it is offering a discount of up to 50 per cent to customers in Hà Nội, HCM City, Long An, Bình Dương and Đồng Nai. James Dong, general director of Lazada Vietnam and Thailand, said: "The application of social distancing has contributed significantly to the prevention of the epidemic, but also caused the delivery of goods to take a long time, greatly affecting consumers, manufacturers and suppliers. "Therefore, we greatly appreciate the decision of the Government and the authorities in allowing the delivery staff to resume work again at this time. "As an e-commerce platform connecting people's shopping needs with business partners and sellers, Lazada will continue to make efforts to expand product supply and develop human resource to join hands with the Government and the community to fight the epidemic."

Other platforms like Tiki and Sendo said they are actively working on resuming operations in HCM City's red zones. Sendo has yet to resume delivery but said it would announce resumption soon. TikiNOW Smart Logistics, Tiki's delivery subsidiary, is in the process of resumption of operations and said it would announce details when completing plans. Recently, due to the social distancing measures in HCM City, deliveries by e-commerce platforms have been slow, especially after they were banned in the eight red zones of Thủ Đức City and the districts of Gò Vấp, Bình Tân, Bình Thạnh, Districts 12 and 8, Bình Chánh and Hóc Môn. Many consumers said they have had to wait for delivery of orders for a very long time, often for more than a month, and so they are pleased with resumption of shipping. Đỗ Phạm Hồng Minh of District 7 said despite not living in a red zone, he faces many difficulties in buying essential goods. "I ordered washing soap on an online platform. It has been a month, but I have not received the product. "The resumption of delivery services is really very good news for HCM City's residents, especially those living in red zones." A woman in Gò Vấp District who asked not to be named, said the information about the resumption of delivery services in the previously banned areas made her very



happy especially with the new school year starting soon. “For weeks I tried to buy notebooks and other school items for my children but failed. I live in a red zone and so it is even more difficult. Now shipping services are resuming... really good news for me and my children.” The city People’s Committee’s decision to allow resumption of delivery services all over the city is part of efforts to ensure the supply of food and other essential goods amid the social distancing. To resume operations, delivery persons need to be vaccinated against COVID-19 and carry a negative COVID-19 test report.

*From <https://vietnamnews.vn/> 09/06/2021*

[TOP ↑](#)

## **HCM City's ICT Initiatives Help Battle Against COVID-19**

Several information and communication technologies (ICT) initiatives developed by HCM City have helped in the fight against the pandemic. The city’s app Y Tế HCM, for example, has helped to detect, trace and manage thousands of COVID-19 cases. The app allows users to make health and travel declarations, look up COVID-19 test results, and search facilities where COVID patients are receiving treatment. It also helps medical workers manage health status and provide remote treatment for COVID patients at home, as well as find information about new patients. The city will soon upload vaccination data to the application to complete its population database. As of September 9, the city has provided COVID-19 vaccinations to more than 6.7 million people, with a vaccination rate of 200,000-250,000 people per day. The city has installed 100 QR-code scanning cameras at COVID-19 checkpoints in 21 districts and Thủ Đức City for domestic travel checks. Sr Lieutenant Colonel Lê Mạnh Hà of the city Department of Public Security said the department is uploading names of people with travel permits and those allowed to travel on the road without a permit to the national population database.

When the data is updated, travel permits may later be cancelled and travelers will just need the QR codes to move through the checkpoints. The Việt Nam Fatherland Front in the city has introduced an app called An Sinh where needy people can call for help and receive support. People register for help via the application and wait for approval from local authorities who are in charge of checking the information. When the registrations are approved, donors can support them via the app. All donations are showed clearly on the app. As of September 6, more than 200,000 people had signed up on An Sinh. Besides mobile apps, the city has launched a website at <https://bando.tphcm.gov.vn/ogis> with statistics of infected cases and locations of locked-down areas, medical facilities and pharmacies. It has upgraded the 115 emergency portal, which can now handle 6,000 calls per day to meet residents’ demand. The city is also using a callbot for its 1022 portal, which receives information about COVID-19 control and prevention and requests for support from residents.

*From <https://vietnamnews.vn/> 09/16/2021*

## Digital Transformation Plays a Vital Role in Agricultural Development

To achieve ambitions to become a modern-oriented industrialised nation by 2030 and a developed country with high income by 2045, Việt Nam must succeed in the digital transformation process, in which agriculture is one of the priority areas, Minister of Foreign Affairs Bùi Thanh Sơn said. Minister Sơn gave the statement at the Vietnam Agricultural Digital Transformation International Forum 2021, themed “Keeping up with market trends, ensuring the pivotal role of the economy during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.” which was held virtually on Thursday by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), the Vietnam Digital Agriculture Association (VIDA), and e-newspaper VnExpress. The forum is a place for dialogue and public-private policy activities between the Government, private sector and stakeholders. It was also an activity within the framework of the Vietnam International Agricultural Exhibition 2021 (AgriTech Expo 2021). Sơn said the Vietnamese Government attaches great importance to accelerating digital transformation, considering it a breakthrough and an opportunity to boost socio-economic development. Minister Sơn said the COVID-19 pandemic poses major challenges to Việt Nam’s agriculture and it’s important to promote digital transformation in agricultural development.

"To prepare for Việt Nam’s economic growth post-pandemic, MOFA will work closely with relevant ministries, sectors, localities and businesses and expand international cooperation. We aim to boost digital transformation in agriculture," said Minister Sơn. Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development Lê Minh Hoan said over the years, the agriculture sector has been instrumental in supporting economic growth during difficult times. At present, the agriculture sector makes up 14 per cent of the country’s GDP and employs 40 per cent of the total workforce. He said the labour productivity and output in the sector have reached their limits in terms of technology, affected by depleted natural resources and negative impacts from climate change. Hoan said it was essential for the sector to change the mindset from agricultural production to the agricultural economy. Hoan pledged to offer all resources and the most favourable policies for businesses wishing to bring added value to Vietnamese agricultural products and improve their trademarks. The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD) would strongly support the digital transformation process and replace agricultural technology models because the Vietnamese agricultural sector is not only the “backbone” of the economy in difficult times, but was also a measurement of sustainability of the country, he said.

Trương Gia Bình, president of the Vietnam Digital Agriculture Association told participants that a strong push for digitalisation is needed, especially in e-commerce, e-payment, logistics, and production that could turn Việt Nam into a global power in agriculture production. Bình added favourable weather conditions in Việt Nam mean

farmers could work all year round, even in winter, not to mention two-thirds of the population live in rural areas. Delivering a speech at the forum, Deputy Minister of Information and Communications Nguyễn Huy Dũng said Việt Nam, given its starting point as an agricultural country, had banked on the sector to grow both in the past and at present. During the pandemic, the role of the sector was increasingly important to ensure society's survival, said Dũng. Lack of resources, digital infrastructure, and financial preparation were key barriers to the digitalisation process in Vietnamese agriculture, he said. "Furthermore, farmers play an important role in agricultural digital transformation, but it is not easy for them to approach and adapt to new technologies. So, more training and support are needed to equip farmers with the necessary digital tools."

Commenting on this problem, Kohei Sakata, head of Digital Farming Solution Incubator of Asia-Pacific region at Bayer Corporation, said there were many digital farming solutions on the market but they were not designed for smallholder farming. Most of these solutions focused on commercial farming with large acres and high affordability. When it came to the pain points of the smallholder farmer segment in Việt Nam, the biggest challenge was that the value chain was broken and farmers could not capture the value they created due to this value chain inefficiency. The forum consisted of two discussions that focus on policy orientations and the theme "Shaping Việt Nam's digital agriculture until 2035" with presentations by 20 speakers representing local authorities and leaders of businesses and corporations. Participants at the event also shared scenarios of Việt Nam's agricultural digital transformation by 2035, key issues in Việt Nam's agricultural development strategies towards digitalisation given complicated impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, supply chain disruption and climate change.

*From <https://vietnamnews.vn/> 09/18/2021*

[TOP ↑](#)

## **Poor Students to Access the Internet Thanks to Special Programme**

The COVID-19 pandemic has had many impacts socio-economic life, in which education is one of the most affected industries and the sector has implemented online teaching and learning to adapt to the new situation. An online ceremony to launch the programme "Sóng và máy tính cho em" (Internet connection and computers for students) chaired by Prime Minister Phạm Minh Chính on September 12 touched the community's hearts. It called for increased care for poor students who cannot afford computers as online learning becomes the "new normal". The programme is to implement the Prime Minister's direction on prioritising and supporting disadvantaged students who lack online learning facilities. It ensures fairness in accessing new teaching and learning methods, thereby contributing to the development of a digital society. In response to the PM's call, Hà Nội immediately implemented a programme to support poor students. Hà Nội's programme has

received support from different organisations, said chairwoman of the Hà Nội Women's Union Lê Kim Anh.

Specifically, the Vietnam Joint Stock Commercial Bank for Industry and Trade (Vietinbank) – Nam Thăng Long Branch presented 25 laptops worth VNĐ270 million (US\$11,800); the Nam Từ Liêm District Women's Union gave VNĐ50 million (\$2,100); the Hà Đông District Women's Union gave VNĐ10 million (\$440); and the Tây Hồ District Women's Union presented 20 iPads worth VNĐ42 million (\$1,800) and other learning equipment. Others districts' and towns' women's union have also presented 115 electronic devices including computers, laptops, iPads and smartphones to poor students in Quốc Oai, Ba Vì, Đan Phượng, Đông Anh and Gia Lâm. Anh said the union would encourage organisations, enterprises and individuals to support the programme with new or old electronic devices that are still in good condition. The devices will be given to poor students to help their online learning. Especially, each worker of the union will also donate a part of their salary to the programme. The Hà Nội Women's Union organised a training course for parents to help their children in online learning. Lê Đức Thuận, director of the Ba Đình District Education and Training Division, said in response to PM Chính's programme, the division worked with the district red cross society to present 235 computers to poor students in the district.

#### **Schools also joined the programme.**

The Nguyễn Tri Phương Junior Secondary School in Ba Đình District on September 14 launched a programme to help poor students at the school. The school planned to buy 11 computers each worth VNĐ7.1 million (\$312) for poor students or whose parents are invalids and martyrs. Each of them will also receive VNĐ2 million (\$88) to install internet connections. The school library will be equipped with eight new computers for students to use or borrow. Phạm Thị Hương Giang, principal of the school, said: "Seeing co-operation and support from the State leaders, enterprises and the community, the education sector feels it is not left behind." "COVID-19 is a short-term enemy whereas poor education and poverty is a long-term enemy which need efforts of the whole society. I highly appreciate all people's help in connecting and donating computers to poor students," she said. Nguyễn Khắc Tuấn, a maths teacher at Vietschool Pandora Primary and Junior Secondary School in Hà Nội told the Lao Động (Labour) newspaper that the programme was meaningful, but could face financial difficulties. At present, the programme really needs co-operation of the whole society.

Besides funding for computers, enterprises could support poor students with software or data packages for internet use. Tuấn suggested enterprises work closely with localities to give proper support to students, not only when the new school year starts, but also in the long term. The work needs to be done regularly and continuously so that students in difficult circumstances could receive stable and long-term support for the road ahead, he said. Lê Thu Thảo, a teacher of the Hoàng

Liệt Junior Secondary School in Hoàng Mai District in Hà Nội, expressed her belief that the programme would help shorten the distance between different areas, especially remote mountainous areas. Amid the fourth industrial revolution, students in remote areas would receive support from the programme, and online learning would no longer be a luxury, she said. The “Sóng và máy tính cho em” (Internet connection and computers for students) aims that by the end of this year, the whole country would be connected to the internet. As many as one million poor students will be equipped with electronic devices for online learning. In the 2022-23 period, no poor students will lack computers for online learning.

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[TOP ↑](#)

## South Asia

### **INDIA: Centre Plans to Encompass E-bikes Under FAME II Scheme**

In another move to boost EV among the buyers, the Centre is looking to extend provisions under the FAME II subsidy scheme for the buyers of passenger cars meant for personal use. As per the government sources, the authorities were exploring ways to include electric bikes under the Faster Adoption and Manufacturing of (Hybrid &) Electric Vehicles (FAME) scheme and cut down the cost for customers eyeing its growing popularity. The inclusion of e-bikes will make the FAME II scheme a complete package covering the entire range of EVs for personal use, commercial use and public transport. As of now, the scheme encompasses only electric two-wheelers, three-wheelers, four-wheeled passenger vehicles and goods carrying vehicles. The chee provides the buyer with demand incentives that bring down the overall cost of the vehicle. It had hiked the benefits offered from Rs 10,000 per kWh to Rs 15,000 per kWh which accounts for a 50 per cent rise. In the case of buyers of passenger cars and e-bikes purchased for personal use, the government may come up with a revised structure of incentives or benefits under the scheme, however, nothing on the ground has been kickstarted yet, reported a national daily. The Steering Committee for Advancing Local Value-Add and Exports (SCALE), a joint government-industry panel tasked with fast-tracking growth of the Indian manufacturing sector, has also batted for providing demand incentives for electric bicycles. The committee, headed by the Managing Director of Mahindra & Mahindra Pawan Goenka, in its report to the Ministry of Commerce has recommended FAME like incentives worth Rs 5000 per unit for e-bicycles to reduce its cost at least by Rs 3,000. The Centre launched the FAME II scheme in April 2019 to drive greater adoption of EVs in India. The scheme was launched with a budget outlay of Rs 10,000 crore to aid 7,000 e-buses, 5,00,000 e-three-wheelers, 55,000 e-passenger vehicles and nearly a million e-two-wheelers. As far as the statistics go, around 1,24,415 vehicles have benefited under the scheme. These vehicles include as many as 99,652 electric two-wheelers; 23,059 electric three-wheelers; and 1,693 electric

four-wheelers. If state-wise registrations are accounted, Karnataka has 25,725 EVs registered, Tamil Nadu has 19,222 EVs while Maharashtra stands third with 13,384 EVs, next is Uttar Pradesh with 7,990 EVs, Rajasthan with 10,010 EVs and Delhi with 8,897 EVs.

From <https://egov.eletsonline.com/> 09/28/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## **Achieving Sustainability Through UNESCO Designations**

“Culture is who we are and what shapes our identity. No development can be sustainable without including culture. UNESCO’s work promoting cultural diversity, and UNESCO’s Culture Conventions, are key to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development,” Shikha Jain, Director, DRONAH and Chairperson, DRONAH Foundation quotes UNESCO, as she writes about how Jaipur has conserved its culture and craft capturing the true essence of sustainable development. While it is easy to prescribe the applications of SDGs at the policy level, its actual implementation in various cultural heritage sites, cities and settlements specifically in the context of complex Indian cities remains a huge challenge. Jaipur City has achieved two urban-level UNESCO designations as a World Heritage City (2019) and as UNESCO Creative City of Crafts and Folk Arts (2015). One of the primary objectives of these inscriptions is that they serve as tools to achieve sustainable development goals for the city. Jaipur envisions itself as a city that fosters the creativity and imagination of its people using its rich cultural heritage to showcase a model of sustainable development that has continued and adapted since centuries. While the World Heritage tag for a city often focuses on the conservation of its tangible attributes, urban characteristics, monuments and iconic landmarks; in the case of Jaipur, an extra initiative was taken to recognise it additionally for its intangible value of crafts under criteria (vi). Much before this celebrated inscription for World Heritage in 2019, Jaipur was already a part of the UNESCO Creative City Network in 2015, a designation that is mooted from the Municipal Corporation itself for the entire city to celebrate and sustain its creative economy; the rich repository of crafts and folk arts in case of Jaipur.

The UNESCO Creative Cities Network was a unique opportunity for Jaipur to highlight its myriad crafts and folk arts and ensure that these traditional forms of creative expression are equipped to meet the needs of the present and the future. In long term, Jaipur’s participation in the network will further the growth and development of local arts and crafts ensuring a direct impact on the socioeconomic sustainability of the city. Jaipur was conceived as an urban planning model in the early 18th century, and also as a city designed to promote trade and commerce. It has flourished as a centre of arts and crafts since then. Historically, the city is said to have housed ‘chhattis karkhanas’ ( ‘36 industries’ ) majority of which included crafts like gemstones, lac jewellery, stone idols, miniature paintings and others each with a specified street and market designed for each craft that continues to date. During the

19th century, the local crafts received further momentum with British period influences in special exhibitions held in the UK, the establishment of institutions such as Rajasthan School of Arts and Albert Hall Museum. While the local traditions of guilds continued, formal institutions for crafts, policies and programmes by Government and private sector further contributed to national and international recognition of Jaipur crafts and folk arts in the 20th and 21st centuries. As a centre for crafts and folk arts, Jaipur offers a thriving economic environment based on tourism as well as trade and commerce. Crafts, one of the leading industries in Jaipur, contributes significantly to the local economy. It is for this reason that even crafts that were not established during the 18th century in Jaipur have found their way to the city as recently as the 1960s. Jaipur is unique among other creative cities of crafts not only because of the large number of crafts being practised actively but also because crafts as utilitarian products are an intrinsic part of the daily lives of locals and domestic visitors. Jaipur has 53,460 craft units with a total of 1,74,972 artisans and craftspeople.

While informal training of entrepreneurs continues in Jaipur through master craftspersons and guild systems, there are formal educational institutes for degree programmes. The Rajasthan School of Arts was institutionalised by the Government in 1988 to provide Bachelor and Master degrees in visual arts. Indian Institute of Crafts and Design (IICD) in Jaipur is a unique institution that synergises traditional knowledge and craft skills with contemporary needs to evolve methodologies relevant to modern India. It provides undergraduate and postgraduate programmes addressing a range of crafts. It also has special programmes and incentives to encourage children of traditional artists and craftspersons. Institute of Gems and Jewellery provides programmes on Jewellery design. Jawahar Kala Kendra started by the government have allocated spaces to organise short term training programmes in arts and crafts which are used by NGOs to host programmes. While the World Heritage tag for Jaipur presented an additional commitment of mapping and protecting all crafts streets in the walled city as significant attributes contributing to its Outstanding Universal Value, the Municipal Corporation was already committed to enhancing and upgrading these crafts streets as part of aligning the creative city projects to sustainable planning. Jaipur Nagar Nigam Heritage for walled city is developing Heritage Walks in specific streets of Jaipur to provide direct access to local craftspersons and their workspace. Chowkri Modikhana Heritage Walk showcasing thatheras (brass utensil craftsmen) and lac bangle making is one such initiative. The walk is being conducted since 2005. Jaipur Municipal Corporation upgraded the walk area in 2014-15 thus improving the living environment for artisans and extended it further under the Smart City program in 2019-20. These works could be monitored through the Heritage Cell of Municipal Corporation to ensure appropriate conservation as per commitment for World Heritage. Furthermore, the Municipal Corporation is committed to enhancing more crafts streets such as the Khazanewalon ka Raasta including havellis and houses of stone craftspeople to be undertaken in the next phase of works under Creative City Projects (2021-24).

Besides this, adaptive reuse of historic buildings such as the Rajasthan School of Arts into a Crafts Museum under Smart City Projects is a good example of collective safeguarding of the tangible-intangible or the living heritage of the city. Developing major crafts streets of Jaipur as special heritage walks to promote direct access to artists and craftspeople in the walled city along with conservation and up-gradation of these historic settlements and traditional industries aims to establish Jaipur Crafts City as a role model of sustainability. The project will directly benefit artisans living and working in the area, local residents and visitors to Jaipur. It will enhance the overall living environment of the artisans and will give direct access to sales of crafts products once the heritage walks are promoted through tourism. Up-gradation of services in these areas have improved the general living conditions for craftspeople while regular heritage walks by a wide range of visitors provide greater accessibility for direct sales. This when replicated in other crafts streets of Jaipur will greatly enhance socio-economic sustainability for the city.

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[TOP ↑](#)

## **AWS Re/Start India Prepares Local Talent for Cloud Careers**

Today, Amazon Web Services (AWS) announced the launch of AWS re/Start in India. AWS re/Start is a free skills-development and job training program that prepares learners for cloud computing careers. The 12-week program is offered at no cost to learners, and previous technology experience is not required to apply. Research from AlphaBeta (a strategy and economics consulting firm) indicates that digitally skilled workers currently represent 12 per cent of India's workforce. By 2025, the number of workers in India requiring digital skills will need to increase nine times. In India today, 76 per cent of digital workers expect cloud computing will be a required competency for them to perform their jobs proficiently by 2025. AWS re/Start helps address this challenge by delivering free training and also supporting participants as they launch cloud computing careers. AWS re/Start is a skills-based training program that covers fundamental AWS Cloud skills and practical career skills, such as interviewing and resume writing. Through real-world, scenario-based exercises, labs and coursework, students build Linux, Python, networking, security and relational database skills. The program prepares participants for entry-level cloud roles in operations, site reliability, infrastructure support and more. In addition, the program prepares and covers the cost for participants to take the AWS Certified Cloud Practitioner certification exam, so they can validate cloud skills with an industry-recognized credential. In India, AWS re/Start will host cohorts based in six cities, including Bengaluru, Chennai, Kolkata, Mumbai, Pune, and Thiruvananthapuram. The program collaborates with five local education organisations, including EduBridge Learning, Edujobs Academy, iPrimed Education, Rooman.Net, and Vinsys IT Services, to deliver virtual training by an expert instructor. AWS re/Start will work with these organisations to connect program graduates to potential employers.



Amit Mehta, Head of AWS Training and Certification – India, Amazon Internet Services Pvt. Ltd (AISPL), said, “The industry demand for cloud adoption is far outpacing the number cloud-skilled workers available, leaving organisations struggling to find and hire the talent needed to implement cloud services. To overcome the lack of supply, cloud talent must be cultivated from non-traditional sources. AWS re/Start brings new talent into the cloud ecosystem by skilling unemployed and underemployed individuals with little or no technology experience and preparing them to launch a cloud career.” Capgemini, a global leader in consulting, digital transformation, technology, and engineering services with approximately 150,000 employees in India, is providing financial assistance for AWS re/Start, and plans to interview and hire select program graduates into various cloud roles. Capgemini, an AWS Partner, will work closely with EduBridge Learning to facilitate this. Pallavi Tyagi, CHRO of India at Capgemini, said, “At Capgemini, we are committed to shaping the talent landscape in India by providing opportunities for individuals to transition into high-demand roles while building their careers. AWS re/Start aligns with that focus and reflects our commitment to helping new recruits get the future they want. As AWS re/Start scales in the country, we believe it will be game-changing for more and more Indians looking to reskill, and take advantage of opportunities in a dynamic and evolving cloud and technology services job market.” Girish Singhania, CEO at EduBridge Learning, said, “We seized on the opportunity to be part of this program with AWS because we believe technology skills are critical to India’s future workforce. We are excited to engage non-tech learners through AWS re/Start, as they have not previously considered a career in tech. This program also ties in well with EduBridge’s high-level goal to bridge the gap between skilled talent and organisations looking to hire.”

Vikrant Patil, CEO at Vinsys IT Services Pvt. Ltd., said, “As an AWS Training Partner, Vinsys IT has three years of experience delivering AWS Training to IT professionals. With a vision to make learning accessible to learners with a curious mind, we are excited to now bring free foundational cloud training to individuals who aren’t yet working in technology, and help them build a career in this exciting space. This thoughtful initiative can help people in India who are interested to learn about cloud computing, but fall short of resources.” AWS re/Start is delivered in 25 countries: Australia, Belgium, Canada, Costa Rica, Denmark, Egypt, Finland, France, Germany, Ghana, India, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Kenya, Lebanon, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Nigeria, Spain, South Africa, Sweden, Tunisia, UK, and the US.

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[TOP ↑](#)

## **Challenges in Achieving SDG 11.4 in the Indian Context**

With Sustainable Development Goal 11 (SDG 11), countries have pledged to “make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable”. Within this

goal, target 11.4 aims to “strengthen efforts to protect and safeguard the world’s cultural and natural heritage” with the objective of making cities and human settlements more sustainable, economically vibrant and more climate-resilient, writes Manu Bhatnagar, Principal Director, Natural Heritage Division, Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH). The UNESCO Institute of Statistics defines cultural and natural heritage, pertinent to SDG 11.4, as – Cultural heritage includes artefacts, monuments, a group of buildings and sites, museums that have a diversity of values including symbolic, historic, artistic, aesthetic, ethnological or anthropological, scientific and social significance. It includes tangible heritage (movable, immobile and underwater), intangible heritage (ICH) embedded into cultural and natural heritage artefacts, sites or monuments. The definition excludes ICH related to other cultural domains such as festivals, celebrations, etc. It covers industrial heritage and cave paintings. Natural heritage refers to natural features, geological and physiographical formations and delineated areas that constitute the habitat of threatened species of animals and plants and natural sites of value from the point of view of science, conservation or natural beauty. It includes private and publically protected natural areas, zoos, aquaria and botanical gardens, natural habitat, marine ecosystems, sanctuaries, reservoirs, etc. Conservation of cultural heritage refers to the measures taken to extend the life of cultural heritage while strengthening transmissions of its significant heritage messages and values. In the domain of cultural property, the aim of conservation is to maintain the physical and cultural characteristics of the object to ensure that its value is not diminished and that it will outlive our limited time span.

Conservation of natural heritage refers to the protection, care, management and maintenance of ecosystems, habitats, wildlife species and populations, within or outside of their natural environments in order to safeguard the natural conditions for their long-term permanence. This article addresses SDG 11.4 in relation to urban areas with regard to built and natural heritage only. Going further, the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) developed the Indicator 11.4.1 which is defined as the “total per capita expenditure on the preservation, protection and conservation of all cultural and natural heritage, by the source of funding (public, private), type of heritage (cultural, natural) and level of government (national, regional, and local/municipal).” This indicator is a proxy to measure the target and monitor the changes over the years. A perusal of the Central Government Budget [2019-20] shows that the allocations to the Ministry of Culture and Ministry of Environment Forest and Climate Change [MoEF&CC] stand at a paltry 0.001 per cent each out of which the bulk amount is earmarked for revenue expenditure and little is left for plan expenditure. Examining the annual budget of a major north Indian state for the same year the Culture department’s budget is a mere Rs 14 crore which is less than a tiny fraction of 1 per cent and for environment and forests stands at a mere 0.0003 per cent mostly allocated to revenue expenditure. The private sector allocation could not be ascertained but surely, presently, cannot be more than peanuts. Thus, the per capita expenditure towards SDG 11.4 is exceedingly minuscule. India, with more

than 8000 urban settlements, is on an urbanisation spree. The man to land ratio in India is 460 persons per sq.km.[2019] whereas the USA with just 36 persons per sq km or France with 120 persons per sq km do not face similar pressures on their cultural and natural properties. Moreover, India is at an early stage of infrastructure and housing development which is resulting in massive urban expansion and re-densification which in turn is putting built and natural heritage in urbanisms and their peripheries under enormous pressure.

A further challenge is the order of priorities amongst administrators, public representatives and the business community as well as the awareness of heritage in the public mind space. There is a feeling amongst the former that heritage premises and river floodplains are inefficient utilisation of precious urban space, landforms should be levelled for easy absorption in the urban matrix and that forests can be compensated for in other locations. The public is far too engrossed in their daily struggles to be sensitive to heritage. An aspiring middle class often goes in for crass commercialisation of heritage properties whereas land hunger drives encroachment of water bodies, riparian zones and ingress into forests. The last challenge is both the weak institutional and regulatory framework combined with a reluctance in enforcement. While there are well-articulated laws for the protection of natural heritage the laws regarding the protection of built heritage do not extend to premises beyond notified monuments. The Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act, 2010 was enacted by the government to stop the rampant encroachment and construction around monuments and sites of archaeological importance. However, this law has been sought to be diluted and it is noted that beyond metropolises there is little awareness of this law which is mainly honoured in the breach. Laws/Regulations for heritage protection are seen as hurdles in development. How can these daunting challenges be overcome? There are no silver bullets or short term solutions. However, the following policy directions could have positive outcomes. Enhancing the budget outlays of central and state governments for culture and environment to substantive levels, say even 0.5 per cent of the overall budget, with a judicious division between revenue and plan expenditure, and with significant allocations for reorientation of stakeholders, can go a long way in mainstreaming of heritage as an engine of development. The monetisation of ecosystem services can also alter the cost-benefit ratios in favour of protecting natural heritage. A similar tool to monetise the abstract values of built heritage can change decisions in favour of built heritage.

Generating awareness of the economic value of built heritage in terms of tourism, generating pride in the urban character and historical identity are essential building blocks in protecting and conserving heritage. Similarly, our administrators, public and political representatives even during training/early stages of a career as also in the public at large must be sensitised to the benefits of nurturing natural heritage by way of recognizing ecosystem services, health and recreation and psychological benefits. Awareness of benefits, particularly economic, is the first step towards safeguarding

heritage. Embedding conservationists and ecologists in planning departments, urban local bodies and relevant committees is another vital step that should help in mainstreaming concerns for heritage in the decisionmaking processes. Development pressures on heritage need to be neutralised by a combination of imaginative planning, economic incentives such as transfer of development rights, a massive effort to list/document heritage and vigorously enforce heritage protection regulations/laws. There is a long road ahead but as is famously said – ‘the journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.’

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[TOP ↑](#)

## **Cultural Heritage & Sustainable Development: The Cities We Want**

The 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were conceived at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development in 2012 (Rio de Janeiro). The objective was to formulate a set of universal goals that meet the urgent environmental, political and economic challenges facing our world, writes Junhi HAN, Chief, Culture Sector, UNESCO New Delhi. “The Future We Want”, the Outcome Document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio de Janeiro, 2012) mentioned specifically about the importance of safeguarding cultural heritage by stipulating, “We recognize that many people, especially the poor, depend directly on ecosystems for their livelihoods, their economic, social and physical well-being, and their cultural heritage”. It further stipulates “the need for conservation, as appropriate, of the natural and cultural heritage of human settlements, the revitalisation of historic districts and the rehabilitation of city centres.” This is the culmination of the debate on the importance of culture in particular cultural heritage in relation to its role and potential to contribute to Sustainable Development, intensified since the 1990s on all levels of international stakeholders. However, it would be important to underline that the very idea of the role of culture in sustainable development was already there in 60-70s, the “age of decolonisation”. René Maheu, the then Director-General of UNESCO at a Conference in Venice, highlighted, “The idea of development has, in fact, gradually become broader, deeper, and more varied so that going beyond the purely economic aspects of improving man’s lot, it now also embraces the so-called social aspects... Man is the means and the end of development.” In the concept of development, the centre of gravity thus began to shift from the economic to the social, and mental well-being of individuals.

A decade later, UNESCO member countries, in the intergovernmental UNESCO Conference on Culture in 1982, adopted the “Mexico Declaration”, one of the most important landmark documents in culture since the end of the Second World War which recognises the role of culture as a driving force for sustainable development. The Declaration affirmed that “Man is the origin and the goal of development, it is vital to humanise development, the ultimate goal of which is the individual in his

dignity as a human being and his responsibility to society. Development implies for every individual and every people access to information and opportunities to learn and to communicate with others.” The acknowledgement of the role of culture and cultural heritage for Sustainable Development in the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development in 2012 (Rio De Janeiro) was indeed the result of several decades’ efforts deployed by the international community, notably UNESCO. The linkages between heritage protection and development have deep roots in the World Heritage Convention, where the concept of heritage protection is not only based on the inseparability of culture and nature but is firmly integrated with comprehensive development planning which is enshrined together in this international legislation. The World Heritage Convention was one of a group of environmental treaties adopted after the 1972 United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, held in Stockholm, Sweden. The Stockholm Conference, which for the first time placed environmental concerns on the international agenda, brought a global focus to the understanding that environment and economic development are inextricably linked that environmental safeguards are not possible without socio-economic development.

By bringing together the conservation of cultural and natural heritage under a single legal instrument, the World Heritage Convention pioneered some of the thinking which during the later 1970s and 1980s evolved to become the core of the concept of sustainable development, first articulated in the report of the Bruntland Commission Our Common Future (1987) and later elaborated in Agenda 21 of the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 20 years after the Stockholm Conference and more recently in the outcome document “the Future We Want to Live” adopted in the UN Conference in Rio De Janeiro in 2012, which served the basis of the SDG 2030. The importance of the nomination process lies not only in ensuring the adequate protection and management of potential World Heritage Sites but for the process to serve as a means to encourage the adoption of comprehensive and integrated policies and actions to conserve and manage other sites of national, regional or local importance. States Parties are encouraged to involve the local communities as well as all ministries within the central government in the nomination process. At all levels of authority, the World Heritage Convention can and should be used as a tool for linking heritage protection and development, in addition to socio-economic benefits to be received from tourism perspectives for local communities. In 2015, the General Assembly World Heritage Convention adopted a policy document “POLICY FOR THE INTEGRATION OF A SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT PERSPECTIVE INTO THE PROCESSES OF THE WORLD HERITAGE CONVENTION”.

The World Heritage Committee considered that the role of World Heritage properties, as a guarantee of sustainable development needed to be strengthened and their full potential to contribute to sustainable development needed to be harnessed. To this end, the Committee advises the States Parties to consider in their implementation of

the Convention the three dimensions of sustainable development, namely environmental sustainability, inclusive social development and inclusive economic development, together with the fostering of peace and security. These reflect the concern for “planet, people, prosperity and peace”, identified as areas of critical importance in the 2030 UN Agenda for Sustainable Development. Urban Heritage, including its tangible and intangible elements, is a key social, cultural and economic asset for cities. It constitutes a complex and dynamic layering of heritage meaning and values, created, interpreted by successive generations in the past. In adopting the Sustainable Development Goals, United Nations Member States committed to ‘make cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable’ (SDG 11). One of the concrete actions to achieve SDG 11 is to safeguard the world’s cultural and natural heritage and this includes naturally historic towns, embedded of their intangible and tangible heritage which are assets of every historic town bridging local communities into economic, social and environmental dimensions of development. The loss of cultural heritage, tangible and intangible, provided by urban heritage can therefore undermine the community’s potential to share the benefits of development among its members. For a decade, the international community, notably the United Nations fully acknowledge that the conservation and development of urban heritage as a central component of a development agenda. To this end, they also need to be effectively utilized according to their developmental potential.

The conservation of buildings and public spaces in historic cities in Asia is recently getting more and more to centrestage as an important aspect of development. For example, in many cities, entrepreneurs and property investors are interested in the economic values of historic buildings: their capacity to accommodate contemporary demands while keeping the attributes that confer its heritage values. Perhaps one of the most viable urban policies and valid conservation strategies that can balance in harmony urban heritage conservation with development would be to promote the adaptive rehabilitation of heritage monuments for contemporary uses. The assets of this approach are to allow the historic buildings and urban heritage to retain a social and cultural memory of cities through sound adaptive reuse of its material urban heritage. The current trend: monument-based, and government-financed approach that restricts the use of protected properties and relies on public funds cannot continue to be viable at the long term level in dealing with the vast urban heritage of most communities and of sustaining conservation efforts. It is essential for cities to engage in debate about their heritage, identify its multiple layers of values as well as the threats to its preservation, and strengthen the value of its contributions to sustainable development, as suggested by the 2011 UNESCO Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape. To this end, the regulations affecting the use of tangible heritage must progress from preventing changes to its attributes and uses towards promoting the sensible adaptive rehabilitation of the urban heritage to satisfy contemporary requirements. Private owners of monuments and buildings should be provided with some incentives such as tax-reduction when they undertake either conservation/ restoration or re-adaptive use of their historic houses/ buildings which

is already in practice in many European countries.

The re-adaptive use of historic monuments also greatly contributes to environmental issues. Currently, the construction industry is one of the most polluting industries in the world and the construction of new buildings and infrastructure development are today the biggest contributors to greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. Indeed, embodied energy of conventional construction materials such as cement or energy required throughout a building cycle to extract, process, transport, assemble, maintain, repair, demolish and dispose of a building – makes the construction sector the most energy-intensive of the global economy. It represents over 35 per cent of global energy consumption and accounts for 40 per cent of global CO2 emissions. Most countries still use massively concrete because it is the cheapest material in construction but concrete makes the planet sick. So conserving historic buildings and using them by maximising their re-adaptive use is not only important because it is part of our history and feed us with cultural identity but also the first ecological choice for sustainable development and for the future of cities. Indian cities face unprecedented urbanisation and will have to absorb 416 million more inhabitants into urban areas by 2050. This may result in rapid and uncontrolled infrastructure development which often takes place at the expense of natural ecosystems and citizens' wellbeing. In addition, India is the sixth most vulnerable country to climate changes in the world as per the risk index of COP 23. Core areas of historic cities of India are also often a concentration of poverty. 21 major Indian cities are going to run out of groundwater soon if not already run out. Bangalore and Chennai have already lost around 80 per cent of their water bodies over the last 40 years. Currently, most of European cities biggest concern is how to make their cities greener and more resilient. Isn't it high time that Indian authorities should brainstorm collectively on an environment-friendly urban development strategy, making its cities more inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable. According to a 2010 Report, over 70 per cent of the infrastructure that will exist by 2030 in India is yet to be built which means there is an urgent need to propose a new paradigm to make urbanisation sustainable, particularly in line with the SDG 11.4. India is one of the richest countries in the world in terms of built heritage and a great number of historic centres still remain preserved offering a great opportunity for India's historic cities to unlock the potential of their urban heritage for sustainable development. Indian historic towns will benefit hugely by putting urban heritage in its proper place as a development asset; time for urban heritage to become a fully integrated component of the sustainable development of cities.

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[TOP ↑](#)

## **Cultural Heritage for Sustainable Urban Development**

India's current approach towards addressing the challenges of urbanisation is focused on four broad objectives: (i) urbanisation must generate growth and enhance

economic productivity and competitiveness; (ii) it should be inclusive and sustainable; (iii) it should aim at preservation and revitalisation of history, culture and heritage; and (iv) it should contribute to the development of rural areas and strengthen ruralurban interdependencies. Cultural heritage of cities plays a pivotal role in meeting the above objectives by not only building a sense of belonging and of identity, but also in steering economic growth. Both tangible heritage and intangible culture and heritage, not only attracts tourism and brings investment but also promotes social cohesion, inclusion and equity. The conservation of cultural heritage and traditional settlement patterns is a key element for inclusive economic and social development and poverty alleviation, for improving the livability and sustainability of urban areas, as well as for the new development of surrounding areas. Our culture and heritage and their preservation and conservation, are the key assets which we pass on to the future generation, not as museum relics but as living changing models of adaptability. Our planning instruments should explicitly recognize the importance of these issues. We also must recognize and celebrate places whose identity is the unique result of its characteristics—the geography, the climate, their materials and their habits. Protecting and safeguarding foundations, to build new future cities, is the key to sustainability. The sustainable development goals proposed for urban culture and heritage should be seen as critically important, not only for preserving and adapting our historic places but also serve as models for new urban settlements and redevelopment.

This issue is a collection of eight articles and two interviews related to cultural and natural heritage conservation in India. They highlight the need for a holistic understanding and assessment of the cultural and natural heritage across social, environmental, and economical aspects. The broad themes covered in the articles include: heritage buildings, conservation and restoration, protecting and conserving the biodiversity and natural heritage, heritage and natural conservation policies, and expenditure on conservation of cultural and natural heritage (by source of funding and level of government). NIUA is committed to help 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. This collaboration is demonstration of the same. Teams at NIUA and e-Gov magazine have enthusiastically worked to collate a diverse range of knowledge-base on the cross-cutting issues on heritage sector 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.

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[TOP ↑](#)

## **From Planning to Management: Preserving Historical Areas**

Urban heritage conservation presents unique challenges, especially in the Indian



context. Many of our heritage assets are living structures, deeply entwined in the lives, rituals, livelihoods and aspirations of millions of residents and visitors alike. The Dwarkadhish Temple in Dwarka, Gujarat, derives its value from the deep sacred bond that devotees all over the world have with it apart from being a historical architectural marvel of its time, write Manvita Baradi, Director, Urban Management Centre; Anurag Anthony, Chief Technical Officer, Urban Management Centre; and Kaninik Baradi, Strategic Initiatives Officer, Urban Management Centre. Urban heritage conservation is a balancing act between preservation and development for its diverse stakeholders. Growth, urbanisation and evolving needs of their users are to be perceived as a threat and yet, without these pressures, the structures would languish in disrepair and ignobility. In many parts of the world, local governments serve as anchors for heritage management and this role has been evolving in India as well. The Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 11.4 – ‘strengthen efforts to protect and safeguard the world’s cultural and heritage’ – highlights the importance of sustainable measures to protect and safeguard cultural and heritage assets. Heritage City Development and Augmentation Yojana (HRIDAY), a central sector scheme of the Government of India was launched in June 2015 by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA) for 12 heritage cities in India, including Dwarka, Gujarat.

The HRIDAY Mission appointed Urban Management Centre to conceptualise, plan, design and handhold Dwarka Municipality to execute heritage and civic development works worth Rs 28 crore in and around the heritage assets of Dwarka. At present, the Dwarka Municipality does not have the financial capacity to operate and maintain the assets. Their annual budget was around Rs 31.59 crore or Rs 7,890 per capita in the year 2015-16. The per capita budget for the resident population is comparable to Ahmedabad at around Rs 7,500 per capita. However, with a floating population 100 times the resident population in Dwarka, their budget seems dwarfed. Upon completion of the New Gomti Ghat and Samudra Narayan Beachfront Development in 2015, the Dwarka Municipality incurred Rs 6 lakh energy bill in its first month. The civic body could not afford such expense and hence switched off the lights thereafter. If operated regularly, only the street lighting bill for these projects would cost the municipality nearly 13 per cent of their own income. Repair, maintenance and housekeeping costs of all the assets worth Rs 120 crore would be at least Rs 6 crore or 2/3rd of the annual income of the civic body.

The Municipality’s annual income from their own sources (tax and non-tax based) is less than 30 per cent of their total budget while the rest comprises state government grants. With such high dependency on the state government grants, sustainable operations and management of civic and developmental projects is questionable. As per the Service Level Benchmarks (SLB), 2016 for water and sanitation, the cost recovery in solid waste management was only nine per cent. A staffing assessment reveals that the Dwarka Municipality is working with just half of the sanctioned posts. With the restriction on fresh recruitments imposed by the state government and poor

financial health for outsourcing, the civic body finds it challenging to hire facilities management agencies for operations and management of the projects. The municipality faces constant opposition from their elected officials against levying of user charges for facilities, including the Sudama Setu, a footbridge across the Gomti River built on public-private partnership (PPP). The lack of political will towards sustainable operations and management is adding to the neglect of these assets. With these challenges, the recently created assets by the HRIDAY Mission face a grim future with only 20 per cent of the operations and management requirements being fulfilled of the revenue sources generated by the HRIDAY projects. To strengthen the sustainability of operations and management, we recommend the following: Revenue enhancement: The Dwarka Municipality must rationalise their taxes, tariffs, rentals and user charges on its services to improve the cost recovery. In addition, it should create an inventory and monetise its assets including land holdings, vending spaces, advertising spaces, parking and introduce a development fee on the hospitality services including transport, hotels and restaurants. Dwarka Municipality operates a 'Dwarka/ Bet Dwarka Darshan Bus Service' successfully and claims it to be sustainable, if not profitable.

Lessons from such examples may be adopted in other paid services to improve its financial sustainability. The Dwarka Municipality could also levy entry fees for vehicles, similar to the environmental/tourism/pollution fee charged by places like Mount Abu, Mahabaleshwar and Matheran. The local administration could set up a special purpose vehicle (SPV) for operations and management of HRIDAY and other recently completed projects in Dwarka. The SPV should be empowered to collect user charges/ fees from the visitors to avail the services provided by these projects. The MoHUA may also create a revolving fund to enable borrowing by HRIDAY cities for hosting special events/festivals/fairs which may generate additional income for the municipalities. The borrowing may be supported/supplemented by respective state tourism departments. Convergence with tourism and transport departments: The Tourism Department of Gujarat may contribute a share of the revenue towards the operation and management of assets proportionate to the visitors to tourist destinations such as Dwarka. Likewise, the Gujarat State Road Transportation Corporation (GSRTC) may also contribute a share of their revenue from the bus fares to and from Dwarka for local development. Enhancing urban heritage management capacity: The local administration must build the capacity of their staff in urban heritage management. At present, continued learning options in heritage management are limited to conventional master's degrees in conservation. The Urban College offers a course in heritage management focusing on the local government's needs to address these specific challenges. Dwarka Municipality must conduct a detailed feasibility study to assess the enforceability and fix taxes, tariffs, fees and charges for each of the above recommendations. Structural reforms like these may help to protect and safeguard the world's culture and heritage in alignment with SDG 11.4.

From <https://egov.eletsonline.com/> 09/30/2021

## **Heritage Concerns & Cultural Ethos of a City**

Architectural development can change the cultural scene of any landscape even if the geographical context remains the same, hence it is important to understand the cultural value of a place. Culture is a non-tangible entity with no single methodology to affect its continuity. The ambience of a historic area to some degree has culture generating properties. An effective method would therefore be to have a comprehensive inventory of the significant architectural features of an area. Whatever vicissitudes the passage of time may bring to a site, a complete and accurate heritage record permits the survival of the site meaning forever, writes Vipul B Varshney. Large-scale migration and big investments in the infrastructure with a political heat suddenly transported this oriental town of Lucknow to a city of national importance with train and air links to other parts of the country. The expansion was so fast and enormous that the original character and face got lost and marginalised in the process. The need to pursue development opportunities with which to sustain the local economy at optimum levels eclipsed the urgency of heritage concerns. In some cases, the heritage had to bow out of existence to literally pave the way for the modern. Clearing of the old has not eased the movement of the traffic, on the contrary, it has sealed the option to explore alternative ways of dealing with it. Kaiserbagh – the once palace precinct which was surgically cut open by the British after the first war of Independence but had vastitude of heritage buildings lost its grace and elegance in this race of development lately. Protection of national-level monuments by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) and the state level monuments by the State Archaeology Department is proving to be inadequate with a large-scale renewal of the inner cities that have taken place in the recent past. The loss of heritage fabric of our cities is severely damaged and unless some drastic action is taken immediately we may not have much to conserve. Although legally the position has not altered much, yet the public and administration's response towards the issues of heritage has softened and the urgency of the situation is rapidly dawning upon them. The environment in favour of conservation is much more favourable today than ever before.

In this situation, INTACH with its over 40 years of experience has a vital role to play. It is the largest single body outside the government with technical, emotional and managerial capacities to suggest solutions to tackle heritage issues. What is most important is that it has a membership and people who have heritage concerns in mind can join the organisation. This way it represents the general public who expect it to be more effective in the field of heritage conservation. One of the most important early steps in any conservation project is the preparation of an as-found record. Heritage recording may be carried out to many levels of detail and information and may employ a broad range of techniques. The determination of appropriate levels and methodologies requires a clear understanding of recording needs within the

agency or individual authorising the work. INTACH has been currently preparing a national register of heritage buildings and monuments in the country and under this program listing of several cities and towns has been completed. In Lucknow, heritage listing was done in 1997 and then again in 2015 with a better understanding of the technique, level and methodology. This created an authentic record of not only the existence of such monuments at a particular time but also the status and loss of the heritage monuments over the years. There is, however, a need to develop and refine the recording process with inventory linkages to some of the physical and cultural attributes which establish the city's character. Therefore aerial mapping carried out by using stereo photogrammetric cameras to establish three-dimensional plots to go with the listing, which hand-records the document and notes down the features, materials and conditions, would raise the level of inventory to a higher plane and increase the chances of its incorporation in the development plan documents.

The restoration and redevelopment of Chattar Manzil Palace complex into a City Cultural centre where amenities from a food court to arts and crafts bazaar – Meena Bazaar, museum, cultural interpretation centre and to add a Boat trail on River Gomti is proposed by INTACH Lucknow Chapter and is underway. It would also place the monuments in their larger context and enlarge the conservation vision beyond monuments to streetscapes, areas and regions. Placing the historical research, which the listing is, in its geographical realm would root it better in the development planning framework and the chances of its incorporation in large reality would be improved. It has to be kept in mind that the historic areas have an ambience that generates culture and sociological patterns. Ultimately, it is the continuity of these fragile cultural and sociological patterns that conservation is all about. Most of the old cities of India such as Lucknow, Ahmedabad, Jaipur, Indore, etc. have areas (usually bullion markets or sarafa bazaars) that get converted into eating joints in the evening. Myths associated with the culinary specialities such as the exact quantities made by so-and-so, or the fifth generation of such-and-such recipe etc. attract customers to these joints. At Lucknow's Chowk, especially Hussainabad – the Moharram processions have a special meaning to the people and of course Imambaras. The matams and the jaloos with sozkwani drown this city part in total gloom whereas, at Khirniwala Maidan in Bhopal, people get together to play chess every evening. Sometimes there are twenty to twenty-five chess boards placed along a ledge in an evening. People come great distances on their scooters to participate. The popularity of the event can be seen from the graffiti on the wall that warns chess players to end their game before twelve.

Heritage areas are also decaying areas and have been considered as slums in the planning documents. This may be because the inner cities that house most of our heritage have a human scale and treat with sympathy the not-so-abled. The meandering narrow streets provide corners of shelter to the tired and the weak. Socially disabled and discards often seek shelter in the decaying body of the old structures. The concept of the BID is based on the lines of areas like Times Square in

New York, where local businesses get together to assist the government in cleaning up their area, improving public facilities, installing street furniture, creating better security and thereby enhancing their own neighbourhood. This model could be quite successful in Indian cities, given the limitations of the municipal agencies in our country. The restoration and redevelopment of a business district of Hazratganj in 2011 in Lucknow is one of the finest examples of public participation. The case of encroachment brings to the fore the importance of a legal framework for the protection of the heritage buildings and areas that are not in the possession of the government. What is also required is the preparation of development plans for heritage areas, buildings and precincts by bodies other than the government. The concepts like heritage Zones, Archaeological Parks and others may have to be deliberated upon with the legal framework in mind. Experience of Mumbai, Delhi, Chennai, Pondicherry, Ahmedabad, Hyderabad etc. can provide frames of reference for other towns and cities to work out their specific cases.

From <https://egov.eletsonline.com/> 09/30/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## **Heritage-led Urban Revitalisation in India: An Integrated Approach**

India has experienced fast urbanisation since its independence. Urbanisation is best defined as 'messy' due to the unplanned, spontaneous growth and the resulting city sprawl. Very few greenfield planned cities have been developed in the post-independence era and there has been unrelenting population pressure on the existing cities. This has resulted in urban decay, exacerbated due to less than adequate response to the demand for urban services, writes Dhiraj Ajay Suri, Senior Adviser – Inclusive Development, National Institute of Urban Affairs (NIUA). Indian cities are also characterised by historic city core areas with dense populations but also a high concentration of the city's heritage assets. Urban heritage in India includes tangible assets such as manmade heritage structures and natural landscape, and intangible assets such as traditional crafts and practices. The urban heritage not only provides a distinct identity to the city but has also provided critical services, such as housing and water supply, for example, the historic step-wells and ponds. Varanasi best exemplifies the relevance of heritage assets in core dense settlements. Historically, the city had over 100 ponds which not only provided water for household use and open spaces in the neighbourhoods but also formed the flood management system as these were interlinked and connected to the Ganges. The unplanned expansion of Indian cities in the face of migration-led fast urbanisation has resulted in chaotic construction to accommodate the growing population with little concern for the significance of historic areas and heritage assets for the city's character formation and evolution. There is a conflict in historic city cores between retaining the city-defining heritage and meeting the habitat needs of the growing population. The ponds in Varanasi, for example, have been lost over the years to the demands of urbanisation. The city core areas historically had mixed land use –

serving as the economic hub and also housing the city's elite class. Over the years, these areas have become commercial hubs with reverse gentrification – the elite moved out to better planned residential neighbourhoods in the city and the poor migrants moved in due to low rentals of the dilapidated buildings and proximity to employment opportunities.

The approach to preserving the heritage-defined city identity may be to move from the exclusive focus on conservation and preservation of heritage structures to the inclusive approach to use the rich heritage legacy for contemporary social, ecological and economic development in cities. In effect, it would mean an expansion of the monument-centric approach to cover historic precincts and improve the urban services to the benefit of the communities (local area development); use the tangible and intangible assets to catalyse the local economic development; and, stronger linkage of heritage-based economic enterprises with the city value chain. The endeavour should be to promote an integrated rather than sectoral approach for the provision of critical infrastructure and services in historic cores and integration of these areas and the heritage in the broader city-wide socio-economic and physical development. The approach will also contribute to the reduction in urban poverty since historic areas in many cities have a large concentration of the urban poor. The cities need to be equipped with the requisite knowledge, application tools and skillsets for integrating cultural heritage management with city development. There is the need to adopt a people-centric, area-based approach to heritage conservation and city development “inclusive urban renewal”, which places heritage valuation and conservation at the core of city-wide development. The aim should be to unlock the assets of the local communities for improved living standards and socio-economic opportunities for poor residents while promoting a culturally dynamic growth pattern at the city level and stewarding its unique heritage. The integrated approach requires that the national policymakers, state governments, urban local bodies and sector professionals in India are equipped with knowledge on good practices; there are appropriate institutional arrangements in cities; and, financial and management incentives are designed to enable them to revisit their development strategies and manage their unique heritage as a vital element of inclusive city development and investments. An institutional set-up, at the city level, needs to be designed and implanted for multi-stakeholder engagement and integration of cultural heritage management with city development and local economic development. The communities in the cities need to be mobilised and engaged with other stakeholders in the valuation and profiling of city heritage assets, preparation of city heritage management plan and an investment plan for the management of prioritised heritage assets and local economic development.

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[TOP ↑](#)

## **India En-Route to Achieve SDG 11**

As the population in cities is surging day by day, the civic services, resources and environment take a toll. With an aim to make the urban centres across the globe more liveable, sustainable and resilient, the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 11 addresses the issue and provides guidelines for countries to form a framework to improve their cities. Addressing the role of SDG 11 in India, Sameer Unhale, Joint Commissioner, Directorate of Municipal Administration, Maharashtra, interacted with Adarsh Som and Harshal Desai of Elets News Network (ENN). What is your take on SDG 11 and how does land-use planning plays a crucial role in making urban centres across the globe more sustainable and resilient? SDGs are a global consensus on important goals we all should strive for. As cities are important players in the urbanised planet in the 21st century, SDG 11 will have important implications on the impact on and of cities. Amongst various aspects of city institutions and processes, land-use planning is very significant and our cities depend on nature as well as on form of land use. Therefore, fostering any innovation in land-use planning will directly have the potential to make a city sustainable and livable. Land-use planning will be a very important tool we have in terms of implementing sustainable urbanisation. However, an issue that often comes in the discussion of land-use planning is that it is taken in a very narrow sense which I think needs to be changed.

It needs to be more integrated, holistic and more inclusive considering the various interconnections of innumerable elements under the umbrella of the urban landscape. We cannot constrain land-use planning only to instruments of Zoning, Land Reservation for a specific purpose, FAR, etc. It has to be improved and enhanced. We need to bring more innovative planning tools for bettering urban land-use planning. Moreover, there is a need to get a comprehensive view of the various purposes for which land-use planning is done. It should include social aspects; economic aspects; cultural aspects; issues of gender, child, disability, etc. Therefore, the purpose of any planning mechanism for land use or otherwise should take into consideration the essential aspects of making cities livable for all the citizens. We tend to use more and more western notions of land use and planning. They probably need to be Indianised to suit our geography and society. This is also a way through which we can make our existing land-use planning mechanism better and make it address the concerns of the common people. Sustainability and environmental planning also need to be closely integrated with the present framework of land-use planning along with the economic and financial aspects. Land use planning, along with the other aspects of city governance, administration and management can help cities realign their energies to achieve SDG 11.

How can citizen engagement impact urban planning? In what manner our present-day participatory governance system extends opportunity to citizens to share their insights in urban planning exercise? Urban development is a state subject in our Constitution. There have been a set of advisories from the Union Ministry to bring in uniformity and principles of sustainability and innovation in the purpose and

functionality of planning authorities. However, States have their own town planning Acts and will have to incorporate the changes suggested by the central government. Land-use planning is an activity that essentially needs to be done at the city level. However, the technological capacities and manpower often make it conducted by the State functionaries. There is scope wherein modern technology can be leveraged to infuse a participatory culture of the planning process. Generally, after being prepared by the technical team, the “Draft Plan” is put out in the public domain for the people to suggest or object to it. However, technology can make the very process of making this draft plan participatory. The citizens could be engaged and through crowdsourcing of draft plans. Such participation in the initial stages itself becomes important as once the plan is prepared it gets very technical and hard to understand for common citizens. Also, they do not get a chance to interact with the planning authority apart from hearings on the suggestions or objections. Therefore, crowdsourcing the planning process could make planning easy and social media can also be used to engage citizens while creating draft plans. Collective wisdom that emerges would be closest to attaining SDGs at the city level. Innovation in urban planning is essential.

Availability of many apps in the digital ecosystem, satellite maps & GIS, planning and design simulation, digital twinning of cities etc. also offers the possibility for citizens to participate in preparation of city plans and get a better idea of how a city can be built and maintained. This evolution in planning technology will make it easier to bring the citizens and communities closer to cities. It is also important because the city plan directly impacts the citizens and stays with them for decades. Further the element of time frame in land-use planning has important implications for SDGs. When we have to achieve them as early as by 2030, we will have to make planning and its implementation fast-tracked. Land-use planning at a city needs to be in a comprehensive, holistic and integrated way. Urban planning is though not the only domain where citizen engagement plays a crucial role. Citizens participation is also required in the maintenance of a city. From cleanliness, anti-pollution measures, improved mobility, waste management, water resources, and so forth. The city government must take up measures to attract citizens in engaging with the city and join hands with the community organisation in making the cities liveable. We, at the Thane Smart City, had collaborated with the UNGC (India Network) to make Thane the first SDG city. An effort of SDG budgeting was done at the city level. I hope that SDG budgeting and financing will also be important to achieve SDG 11 at the city level.

How is the ‘ClimateSmart Cities Assessment Framework’ that the Government of India has launched to achieve its targets under the Paris Agreement is being implemented? The impact of the urban world on the climate and environment is substantially higher than the geographical footprint that they actually occupy. Therefore, the Climate Smart Cities Assessment Framework has been an important educational exercise for cities to clarify the set of actions that need to be taken to



make a city “Climate-Wise”. It provides the city administrators with a set of indicators on how to move ahead imbuing sustainability in a city’s core structure and operations. This framework is a noteworthy strategy at the national level to help cities run their civic operations in an environment-friendly manner. The features on the national rankings of the various ClimateSmart cities are welcoming measures as they will make the cities and citizens aware and try to incentivise them to work towards various elements included in city planning. The 15th Finance Commission has also extended funding exclusively and specifically on some ClimateSmart targets through a tied grants mechanism. Financing for water and solid waste management, amongst others, are the two areas that have been linked and funded for various cities in India and would help in achieving the targets associated with the SDGs. From 2015 onwards, we’re seeing many efforts towards citizen engagement to the New Public Management Framework. So making a platform for citizens to participate and engage with the government authority on city issues is important. The sheer importance of citizen participation can be viewed in ‘Swachh Bharat Abhiyan’ which played a major role in improving solid waste management across the country. This momentum can be used also in the Climate Smart cities. Please share a few best practices for civic bodies to improve the overall sustainability in their respective cities and work on developing a healthy, clean and sustainable environment to make cities more livable?

There have been many best practices in Indian cities across the States and efforts to document them and publish them will help. In Maharashtra, a ‘Majhi Vasundhara City Competition Framework’, conducted under the Department of Climate Change and Department of Urban Development is being implemented. It aims to preserve the five elements of the environment in cities and towns of the state. ‘Majhi Vasundhara’ can be dubbed as ‘My Earth’ Mission. It also has a city ranking mechanism that ranks cities on the basis of their work in preserving the natural and clean environment and sustainable development. Community engagement with individual e-Pledges along with the ‘City Reward’ mechanism is creating traction for this mission in both urban and rural habitats of the State. While I was working as the CEO of Smart City Thane, we had developed a mobile application called ‘DigiThane’. It was an idea to digitally facilitate the citizens to connect and experience their city. We also innovated a feature for plastic waste management in the city. The app enabled the civic administration to connect with more than 800 rag pickers to the end-recyclers and connecting with the citizens at the locality or the area level. Community engagement should help in achieving SDG at the city level.

We prepared a small network of automated weather monitoring and AQI monitoring stations. The data from these stations were made available on the public platform through the DigiThane app. Thus, we could bring climate and sustainability data directly to citizens. The DigiThane was also awarded the National Smart City Award in 2021 by the Union Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA). Apart from technological interventions and innovative approach, there is one area that remains

untapped and that is using our traditional knowledge. We are blessed to have a long tradition in knowledge related to the environment & sustainability available across the country. We can make urban lives better and live in harmony with our nature and planet. The SDG framework also resonates with our constitutional philosophy as amplified in the Fundamental Rights and the Directive Principles of State Policy. Therefore, not only technology, citizen engagement and community participation but our traditional knowledge could also be utilised to make our cities Climate-Wise and help Indian cities to achieve not only SDG 11 but also other targets in the SDG framework related to the urban living.

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[TOP ↑](#)

## **POSHAN Perspectives, Addressing Malnutrition in India Ends on a High Note**

Elets Technomedia and CMAM Association organised POSHAN Perspectives, the first in the series of webinars on Child Nutrition. The webinar largely focussed on brainstorming solutions to eradicate severe acute malnutrition (SAM) among the children in the country. It witnessed expert insights and knowledge-rich deliberations from a wide spectrum of eminent speakers from policymakers to industry leaders and domain experts. Addressing the summit, Hemant Kumar Meena, Deputy Secretary (Women & Child Development), NITI Aayog, said, "Centre has launched POSHAN Abhiyan to fight malnutrition in the country. Under this, the government is ensuring that mass awareness should be generated on the issue... The Centre is in regular touch with state authorities through digital modes to ensure proper implementation of POSHAN Abhiyan. We've partnered with UNICEF for SAM management activities." Further, he also spoke about leveraging technology tools for better monitoring, tracking and gathering data on malnourishment in the country to enhance focus on tackling the SAM issue. Dr Manoj Nesari, Adviser (Ayurveda), Ministry of AYUSH, was the key speaker at POSHAN Perspectives. He presented on the works carried by the Ministry of AYUSH to improve the status of women and child nutrition, health and growth across the country with insights from Ayurvedic science. He said, "The first thing important is apt nutrition before & during the pregnancy to ensure a healthy child and keep up with the health of the mother as well." He also highlighted how the Ministry has come up with a set of guidelines on Kuposhan Mukh Bharat based on Ayurveda.

Followed by key addresses there was a panel discussion moderated by Deepti Gulati, Nutrition & Health Specialist. She deliberated on POSHAN Project that she carried in Rajasthan with CMAM Association. Discussions saw deliberations from Khurram Naayaab, Head Operations, Project Nand Ghar, Vedanta Limited; Ravi Bhatnagar, Director External Affairs and Partnerships, Reckitt Benckiser; and Akshat Khandelwal, President, CMAM Association. Speaking on one of the major objectives of his Project Nand Ghar, Khurram Naayaab said, "The first 1000 days of a child is

critical and we want to target child at the early stage to prevent them slipping into malnutrition.” Adding to it he said, “We’re partnering with organisations for biofortification of wheat and rice so these grains are sown in a way that they’re naturally fortified.” Deliberating at the webinar Akshat Khandelwal, President, CMAM Association, said, “As per national family health survey we see that there are nearly 80 lakh children suffering from severe acute malnutrition (SAM) in the country.” Further, he spoke on how CMAM is aiding children suffering from SAM by providing them food with apt nutrition. He said, “Take-home ration is moderate in protein & high on carbs and sugars which is ok for a regular malnourishment but for SAM a specialised food like RUTF which has high lipid content is needed.” The webinar comprehensively addressed all the major aspects of fighting the severe acute malnutrition problem in India, saw probable solutions from the government, industry and academic experts and ended on a high note.

From <https://egov.eletsonline.com/> 09/30/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## **Preserving Heritage to Realise Sustainable Urban Development**

For a long time, sustainable urban development had kept issues like reducing carbon footprint, energy consumption, waste management, economic aspects of a city, etc. on the mainstream and culture and heritage conservation has been sidelined. We need to understand that no sustainable urban development is possible without preserving the heritage of the city and the culture that it imbibes to it. Realising the fact, the United Nations (UN) has made sure to add preservation of the world’s culture and heritage as Target 11.4 under its Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 11. Heritage sites are way more than old and tattered buildings. These not only open up avenues for the tourism industry but each of the sites is a tangible asset that symbolises the culture of the city and its people framing its sociological setup. Moreover, heritage sites provide an identity to the city and all of these aspects are too much to be ignored when it comes to urban development. Hence, for civic authorities to carry out sustainable urban development in its true essence, it becomes imperative to preserve the heritage and culture of the city. For a country like India that has loads to offer in the realm of heritage and culture, preservation becomes even more important. The Government of India has been proactive in this approach and has launched schemes like Heritage City Development and Augmentation Yojana (HRIDAY). However, state-level Archeological bodies are not enough to preserve these historical gems as it gets heavy on the cost. Therefore models like PPP can be experimented to not only preserve the heritage but also enhance citizens’ engagement and empower the cultural bond of citizens with their cities.

This issue of the eGov Magzine is themed “Culture & Heritage for Sustainable Urban Development” is based on UNs SDG 11.4 that states “strengthen efforts to protect and safeguard the world’s cultural and natural heritage”. The issue holds insightful

articles on how India is heading to achieve SDG11.4 and preserve its cultural and natural heritage. Also, the magazine holds an exclusive interview with Durga Shanker Mishra, Secretary, Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, on the theme. This issue of the eGov Magazine is an initiative by Elets Technomedia and the National Institute of Urban Affairs (NIUA) to bring to light the government's efforts, experts insights and Indian scenario on preserving cultural and natural heritage to make sustainable urban development a reality in its true essence.

From <https://egov.eletsonline.com/> 09/30/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## **Protecting Cultural & Natural Heritage of Cities Worldwide with Special Reference to India**

Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 11 aims 'to make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable'. But is it possible to make cities inclusive, resilient, sustainable and, therefore, safe, without recognising the natural and cultural heritage of cities? Hence, target 11.4 has been rightly laid down to include protection of the world's cultural and natural heritage. And to achieve SDG target 11.4, countries have pledged to 'strengthen efforts to protect and safeguard the world's cultural and natural heritage', writes Gurmeet S Rai, Founding Director and Principal Conservation Architect, Cultural Resource Conservation Initiative (India) Pvt Ltd. Almost every Indian city has a rich legacy of cultural and natural heritage. While protection is accorded by national and state-level bodies to monuments and sites of national and regional significance, there is inadequate agency within institutions, particularly urban local bodies and community-based organisations or community groups, to engage with the heritage of local significance. A key challenge in the protection, conservation and management of the cultural and natural heritage in Indian cities is the absence of a clear recognition of this 'heritage'. In most cases, the lists of heritage have not been prepared while in others, the lists are not comprehensive. Inclusive processes are necessary for drawing up a list of what comprises 'heritage' for a particular city and its people, and these processes need to be participatory, continuous and dynamic. Such an integrated approach can only be possible if the urban local bodies take it upon themselves to support the identification, protection and conservation of heritage through policies, plans, programmes and procedures. Partnerships between organisations and communities are critical to achieving a sustainable outcome supported by measurable indicators. Recent initiatives in India for heritage conservation and development within historic cities through various programmes supported by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA) along with its technical advisory arm, the National Institute of Urban Affairs (NIUA) have demonstrated to the local governments how to integrate heritage conservation and revitalisation within a development framework. In Puri, recognising the natural and cultural heritage of the temple town, three heritage zones were identified under the HRIDAY programme. Little is known about the unique water resource of the town in which millions of devout Hindus visit the Shree Jagannath

Temple to pay their respects annually. In spite of being located on the coast of the Bay of Bengal, Puri has sweet groundwater. This could be attributed to its geological characteristics as well as the river Musa which defines the northern, eastern and western limits of the town. Several pokhris (natural and man-made ponds) in jagaghars (traditional community centres) on the northwestern part of the city are also responsible for holding the rainwater which recharges the groundwater. Over time, the groundwater has steadily become brackish due to the backflow of the seawater, as more water is being pumped out of the ground than the quantities recharging the aquifers. Protecting these pokhris and jagaghars is critical for the sustenance of this historic town. The significant attributes of this historic town's planning include the built heritage of temples, mathas, etc. and also vernacular buildings such as the jagaghars with their pokhris, something that needs to be recognised by the urban local body.

In the city of Amritsar, under the HRIDAY programme, a wide range of buildings that are significant heritage were identified for conservation and adaptive reuse. The Old Office of the Deputy Commissioner was conserved as designed by Bhai Ram Singh, the carpenter-designer-architect from Amritsar, who was renowned for his Indo-Saracenic style of architecture, and who became the first native principal of the Mayo College of Arts in Lahore. The project was to 'recognise' the unsung architect, conserve the building, and further, to reposition it within the community as a library, a gallery to Bhai Ram Singh (to house drawings of works undertaken by him), and a cafeteria. The building is located within the compound of the newly built district mini secretariat. The colonial-period gates of the city were conserved to house public libraries for children. The British-period pump house and powerhouse on the Upper Bari Doab Canal were restored and repurposed to become recreational facilities for the local communities. Rambagh Gate, the only surviving 19th-century city gate from the times of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, was restored along with the remnants of the ramparts which house a primary Government School and a hundred-year-old Municipal Printing Press. This ensured that heritage conservation was a 'people-centred' project as it impacted the lives of children and teachers by improving the quality of their classrooms and play areas, alongside the working environment of the staff at the Municipal Printing Press. The Gate itself was revitalised into the Lok Virsa or People's Museum.

However, despite the local interest, these initiatives failed to engage the local entrepreneurs, community groups and citizens in the sustainable management of the renewed heritage assets, as the legal tools and organisational structure of the urban local bodies are not adequate enough to address the required processes and procedures. The heritage of a city is not constituted merely by its buildings but by all such attributes that represent the cultural continuum of people and that are manifest in its material culture. In Srinagar, the historic core is popularly known as the 'downtown'. The crafts of the region are widely practised in this area that is a cultural lifeline of the city. While the water systems comprising the lakes, canals, backwaters

and river Jhelum is the natural heritage, the floating garden, houseboats and shikaras as also the heritage of the city and its people. These also need to be recognised, and conservation of these components of the historic urban landscape needs to be part of the development processes. Meticulous planning along with financial tools to support conservation and sustainable management are both critical as several custodians of this heritage lack adequate resources for their conservation. Cultural heritage includes both tangible and intangible heritage. While tangible heritage comprises both movable and immovable heritage, including buildings, structures, spaces such as gardens, plazas, nodes such as riverfront ghats, avenues, public squares, etc., intangible heritage includes cultural practices and industries such as handicrafts and handmade products. The livelihood of large sections of society and communities is directly dependent on these practices which have led the United Nations forums to recognise heritage as an important driver of the economy. Prior to the current travel restrictions and closure of heritage sites due to COVID-19, people travelled the world to visit cultural and natural heritage sites, thus contributing to the local economies. In the midst of the current pandemic, the culture sector has been hit hard, thus severely jeopardising the livelihood of many artists and communities.

While the SDG indicator 11.4.1 for protecting cultural and natural heritage is defined as total expenditure (public and private) per capita spent on the preservation, protection and conservation of all cultural and natural heritage, sustainable management can only be achieved through institutional reforms at the level of the urban local bodies, supported by financial resources from both state and national government programmes. However, plans, policies and procedures need to be put in place within urban local bodies for the identification, safeguarding and protection of cultural (movable and immovable) and natural heritage. Local-level programmes for heritage management must address the needs of communities and stakeholders, and generate diverse educational, awareness-raising, and research programmes. Partnerships must be strengthened at local levels for the protection and sustainable development of cultural and natural heritage.

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[TOP ↑](#)

## **RBI to Rollout Framework for Digital Retail Payments in Offline Mode**

In a move to further enhance the digital payments ecosystem in the country, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) proposed to introduce a framework for carrying out retail digital payments in offline mode across the country, on October 8. The move simply refers to the introduction of a facility where digital transactions could be carried out even in situations where the internet connectivity is low or not available viz. offline mode. Governor of RBI Shaktikanta Das said that a pilot project based on this innovative technology facilitating digital payments in offline mode has been

successful. Learnings from the pilot indicate that there is a scope to introduce such solutions, especially in remote areas. Das said this in a virtual address after the MPC meeting. As per a statement from the apex bank on Developmental and Regulatory Policies dated August 6, 2020, the bank has announced a scheme to conduct pilot tests of innovative technology that enables retail digital payments in situations where the internet connectivity is low or not available. The RBI has carried out three successful trials in different parts of the country under the scheme from September 2020 to June 2021. These trials involved small-value transactions covering a volume of 2.41 lakh for the value Rs 1.16 crore. Based on the takeaways from the pilots and the encouraging feedback, the apex bank has now proposed to launch a framework for carrying out retail digital payments in offline mode across the country.

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[TOP ↑](#)

## **Safeguarding Cultural and Natural Heritage for Sustainable Urban Development**

The cultural and natural heritage are an integral part of urban fabric. It is imperative to appropriately prioritize its conservation while implementing urbanisation plans. This is also explicitly addressed under SDG 11.4. Highlighting MoHUA's approach to conservation of India's heritage-cities, Durga Shanker Mishra, Secretary, Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA) shares his thoughts in an exclusive interview with the National Institute of Urban Affairs (NIUA). Q The SDG 11.4 focuses on strengthening the efforts to safeguard the cultural and natural heritage and integrates sustainable development perspectives into the processes of preservation and conservation. Could you highlight what strategies or key actions have been taken to achieve sustainable urbanisation along with heritage and natural conservation for India? The Ministry recognised the fact that the past efforts of heritage conservation in the country were often carried out in isolation. The needs and aspirations of the local communities as well as the main urban development issues such as local economy, livelihoods, service delivery, and infrastructure provision in the areas were not considered. It was also acknowledged that heritage development of a city is not about development and conservation of a few monuments, but holistic development of the city including planning, quality of life, cleanliness, security is required for reinvigorating the city's soul and explicit manifestation of its character. In my opinion, it's high time that we stop addressing independent sector problems and come together on one table to look at our cities' development collectively. Heritage conservation should not be treated as a 'special task' rather it should be as mainstream as sanitation, housing, livelihood, because it has cross-cutting implications. With this in mind we conceptualised the scheme HRIDAY (Heritage City Development and Augmentation Yojana) to undertake strategic and planned development of heritage cities aiming at improvement in overall quality of life with specific focus on sanitation, security, tourism, heritage revitalization and livelihoods retaining the city's cultural identity. The City Hriday Plans became a comprehensive

document for the cities, which they can revisit every few years and plan for a sustainable future. This itself was an effort towards integrating heritage conservation with overall sustainable urban development as stipulated in SDG 11.4.

Q It has been more than six years since the Heritage City Development and Augmentation Yojana (HRIDAY) was launched by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs. Could you elucidate on the achievements of the scheme and what kind of interventions by the Ministry do you think would help us in safeguarding cultural and natural heritage in future? The Heritage City Development and Augmentation Yojana (HRIDAY) was launched by the Ministry in January 2015 and since its inception, the scheme had focussed on holistic development of the heritage sites for the selected cities. One of the achievements of this scheme was the preparation of the City Hriday Plans (CHPs) which mapped all the tangible and intangible heritage assets of the city and identified a shelf of projects for the city administration to implement. Some of these projects were prioritised and implemented during the tenure of the scheme but I am sure the rest will be taken up by the respective Urban Local Bodies within their yearly budget provisions. Another noteworthy feature of the scheme was the nomination of technical experts and professionals called the HRIDAY City Anchors. Most of them appointed had an extensive understanding of the city's background and culture. This arrangement helped the National Mission Directorate at the Ministry to give appropriate attention to each of the 12 cities. Further, the City Anchors also acted as the facilitators between the City Mission Directorate and the CLAM-C (City Level Advisory and Monitoring Committee) which contributed to a comprehensive shelf of projects in the CHP.

Regarding the future interventions to safeguard the cultural and natural heritage, the Central and the State governments should work together to form policies that can help in conserving our cultural heritage. One of the ways which are not explored adequately for natural and cultural heritage conservation is the PPP model. This could be beneficial as the cities would be spared of the financial burden while getting a head start and they can later work out a financially and technically sustainable model. The Centre and the States can extend the required technical support through their own organisations such as the Archaeological Survey of India, the State Archaeology Departments and policy think tanks such as the National Institute of Urban Affairs and NITI Aayog. Q The natural and cultural heritage assets play a crucial role in supporting local economies, livelihoods and quality of life in human settlements. At the same time, these are under threat and immense pressure due to the impacts of urbanisation, climate change, and human factors. In this regard, could you suggest how conservation professionals can harness heritage assets as a resource for inclusive and sustainable local and regional development? Indeed, we are at significant crossroads, where the choices we make today to tackle urbanisation, climate change and other challenges would have a long-term impact on the cities and their residents.



Global organisations that work for the cause of cultural heritage such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) and the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) have already laid the foundation and identified approaches and tools for cities and sites to follow. For instance, the 'Historic Urban Landscape' approach recommended by UNESCO integrates the goals of urban heritage conservation and those of social and economic development. It also encourages cities and authorities to combat the challenges of urbanisation, climate change, excess tourism and market exploitation by defining tools for knowledge and planning, civic engagement, financial and regulatory systems. I believe a few cities such as Quito in Ecuador and Ballarat in Australia have already shown encouraging outcomes. This ought to be our way forward for dealing with historic cities and heritage sites. As rightly put, the potential of heritage assets, be it natural or cultural, further tangible or intangible, should be harnessed for demonstrating inclusive development. This could be achieved in multiple ways, tourism being one of them, where we have several states such as Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh already paving the way through. Another way is to actually link the artisans and craftsmen to the market directly, which can encourage innovation, adaptation and this eventually shall enhance livelihoods.

Q Indicator for achieving SDG 11.4 accentuates the 'total per capita expenditure on the preservation, protection and conservation of all cultural and natural heritage, by the source of funding (both public and private)'. Do you think integrating public and private funding for the conservation of cultural and natural heritage would help us in achieving this target? What, in your opinion, would be ways to do this? Integrating public and private funding for the conservation of cultural and natural heritage would prove beneficial in achieving the targets of SDG 11.4. In my opinion, there would be two important avenues that can be explored for the same: one is harnessing the potential of science and technology for enhancing conservation efforts and the other is educating people about the cultural heritage and raising awareness among the citizenry. As we have seen in other Government of India's missions launched and operated by the Government of India, such as the Smart Cities Mission or AMRUT, technology has played a major role in overcoming a challenge or addressing issues that had been identified in the urban environments. Similarly, many countries and organisations have led the way in engaging innovative technology to sustain efforts in the conservation and preservation of cultural heritage. Along with Geographical Information Systems (GIS) and drone surveys that are used to map cities and larger areas, several projects have also demonstrated the use of LiDAR technology for a more accurate digital documentation of historic buildings and sites. These are certainly encouraging initiatives and hence, appropriate investment in innovation, science and technology seems key to strengthen our efforts.

Another component worthy of additional investment is education and awareness regarding cultural heritage and the value they hold. We see that not many people are aware of the heritage that exists around them or the value that it holds in the city, the

region, in the country or globally. We need to develop easy-to-understand knowledge imparting resources so that people themselves start to develop a sense of ownership towards cultural heritage and contribute to protecting and conserving it for future generations. Q 'Atmanirbhar Bharat' programme has given incentives to boost the economy in terms of local manufacturing, markets and supply chains. To truly achieve the potential of a self-reliant India and of strengthening the local economy, it is essential that we look beyond the infrastructural interventions and give equal attention to economic strategies. From this perspective, what role does sustainable tourism play in boosting local economic development? Tourism is a complex phenomenon for every city. While it contributes to the economy, several cities have started acknowledging the fact that the present-day tourism demands need to be catered to in a thoughtful manner. Research has shown grave consequences of mass tourism in sensitive areas. This is the reason why the term 'sustainable tourism' was coined that 'includes concern for economic, social and environmental issues as well as attention to improving tourists' experiences and addressing the needs of host communities who should also be considered as important as the visitors. As stated by the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO), "achieving sustainable tourism is a continuous process and it requires constant monitoring of impacts, introducing the necessary preventive and/or corrective measures whenever necessary".

Further, the Cape Town Declaration of 2002 alludes to 'sustainable tourism' as something that, generates greater economic benefits for local people and enhances the well-being of host communities, improves working conditions and access to the industry, involves local people in decisions that affect their lives and life chances and is culturally sensitive, encourages respect between tourists and hosts and finally builds local pride and confidence. In my opinion, this is exactly where the role of urban authorities and experts come into play. Technical and financial aid offered by the Government can help the locals nurture market linkages while keeping their identity integral. With the world getting smaller and so many possibilities opening up with technology, local businesses can flourish sans the existence of an intermediary. With the right assistance, they can become financially more aware and self-sustainable. While the Atmanirbhar Bharat programme has been launched to aid the country out of the economic crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, I concur with the fact that if we focus on self-sustainability while protecting the identity of the place, we can boost the local economy, eventually contributing to the local economic development. Adaptive reuse is the theme of restoration works in Smart City Indore. I think that the essence of 'Atmanirbharta' can be best understood in light of the tourism industry. Tourism is one of the sectors supporting the 'economy' pillar of the Atmanirbhar programme. But, after facing the challenges from the economic shutdown in the COVID pandemic, the tourism industry should now move towards a sustainable future. We need to focus on preparing comprehensive tourism recovery plans to rebuild destinations, encourage innovation and investment, and rethink the tourism sector. The tourism industry and local governments should strengthen their

support mechanisms to the local businesses and the workers, particularly giving attention to the most vulnerable destinations in the recovery phase. These actions are essential but to reopen the tourism economy successfully and get businesses running, more needs to be done in a coordinated way as tourism services are very interdependent.

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[TOP ↑](#)

## **SRI LANKA: “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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[TOP ↑](#)

## Central-West Asia

### **AZERBAIJAN: CBA Expanding International Cooperation on Information, Cyber Security**

The Central Bank of Azerbaijan (CBA) is expanding international cooperation in the field of information and cyber security, the CBA told Trend. According to the bank, work continues studying international experience in the field of information and cyber security, as well as the application of solutions based on technologies of other central banks in the banking sector of Azerbaijan. "Within the framework of international cooperation, the CBA has established contacts with the central banks of Turkey, Russia, Singapore, Poland, Germany, UK and several other developed countries. Besides, we cooperate with international organizations specializing in cyber-security. Work on expanding the contacts will be continued," the bank said. In order to ensure information security in Azerbaijan, the 'Procedure for managing information security in banks' has been developed. The document establishing the minimum requirements in the field of 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 by the decision of the Board of the Central Bank and included into the State Register of Legal Acts of Azerbaijan.

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[TOP ↑](#)

## **Azerbaijan's Economic Growth Is Projected at 4.6% This Year**

Economic growth of 4.6% is forecast in Azerbaijan by the end of 2021, Trend reports citing the Ministry of Finance. According to forecast, GDP of Azerbaijan will increase by 4% in 2022. Over the seven months of this year, Azerbaijan's GDP grew by 2.7%.

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[TOP ↑](#)

## **Azerbaijan to Launch E-Platform for Studying Practices of Doing Business**

The Azerbaijani Small and Medium Business Development Agency will launch an online platform for studying best business practices by late 2021, the agency told Trend. "The agency's E-SME House portal helps Azerbaijani businessmen to get centralized access to information necessary for entrepreneurial activity. In addition, a businessman can use G2B (government-to-business) and B2B (business-to-business) services," the SME Agency said. "The implementation of this project is important from the point of view of establishing operational contact between business and government agencies, ensuring transparency and accountability of the business, expanding G2B and B2B relations, and digitalizing business processes. Organization of the portal's work on the principle of a 'single window' will simplify the use of the system," the agency said. Moreover, the 'Business Navigator' subsystem provides for the implementation of various information systems with digital workflow on the platform. The 'Entrepreneur's Electronic Cabinet' subsystem will allow businessmen to receive the necessary information, make online payments, and also interact with other project participants, the agency said.

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[TOP ↑](#)

## **Microsoft Ready to Introduce Cloud Platform for Carbon Emission Analytics in Azerbaijan**

Microsoft is ready to familiarize all Azerbaijani manufacturers with a cloud-based carbon analytics platform for business, General Manager of Microsoft Azerbaijan Gachay Mirzayev told Trend. According to Mirzayev, manufacturing companies around the world are using cloud technologies for digital transformation. "Microsoft has recently presented a cloud-based carbon analytics platform for business. We are witnessing environmental disasters driving climate change around the world. We believe this solution will enable companies to measure and analyze their own carbon emissions, and set specific goals for sustainable development and achievement", he said. Besides, the general manager noted that the company recently announced its

new Microsoft Cloud solution for manufacturing. "This solution provides capabilities that support the core processes and requirements of manufacturing. These complex manufacturing solutions include familiar and new functions that bring people, resources, workflows, and business processes together for greater flexibility of organizations. We are ready to introduce all local manufacturers to this solution," Mirzayev further said. He pointed out that Enterprise Skilling initiatives are helping Microsoft customers identify organizations that are in the process of digital transformation. "We also support efficient hyper-automation of workflows directly in applications, without the need to write code," added the general manager.

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[TOP ↑](#)

## **All Azerbaijani Districts to Be Provided with Internet by 2024 – Minister**

All districts of Azerbaijan will be provided with the Internet by 2024, Head of the country's Transport, Communications and High Technologies Ministry Rashad Nabiyev, Trend reports. According to Nabiyev, one of the key tasks of the ministry is to create the necessary infrastructure for digital transformation. "Azerbaijan, as well as a number of foreign countries face problems with access to the Internet. Until 2024, the whole of Azerbaijan, even the most remote districts, will be provided with a fiber-optic internet connection," he added.

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[TOP ↑](#)

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[TOP ↑](#)

## **Azerbaijan Develops Solution to Protect Children from Harmful Internet Content**

The Institute of Information Technologies of the Azerbaijan National Academy of Sciences (ANAS) has developed a solution to detect malicious content on the Internet, Trend reports on Sept. 30 citing the institute. According to the institute, the protection of children and teenagers from malicious information in the Internet environment is one of the urgent tasks. "Recently, obscenities, calls to hatred, terror, and others have been recorded more often in social networks, forums, blogs, and other sources on the Internet," the institute said. "All the facts negatively impact the psychology of children and teenagers. In this regard, a national solution has been developed to detect and filter such content." The institute has already developed a sign language recognition system, a national anti-plagiarism system, methods for managing e-education, as well as several methods for evaluating e-government services.

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[TOP ↑](#)

## **GEORGIA: Intensifying Efforts to Develop Digital Economy - European Commission**

Georgia is working to strengthen its efforts in the area of digital economy, to promote economic and business opportunities, strengthen digital competences and develop e-trade, the press office of the European Commission told Trend. "The new broadband development strategy will inter alia seek to narrow the digital divide between rural and urban areas," said the source. According to the source, the promotion of ICT and development of telecommunications infrastructure throughout the country are priorities under the Georgia socio-economic development strategy. "Georgia continues to approximate its public procurement legislation to the EU acquis. Amendments have been prepared to establish an independent and impartial Dispute Resolution Council, to which all legal and physical persons will be entitled to appeal in connection with tendering procedures," said the commission. "The amendments are expected to grant sufficient powers to the Review Body to assess direct procurement," the source noted.

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[TOP ↑](#)

## **Cost of Mobile Internet in Georgia Has Decreases**

The cost of mobile internet in Georgia has decreased, Trend reports referring to the Georgian National Communications Commission. As of July 2021, the average

cost of one gigabyte of internet on the market is 81 tetri (26 cents), which is 24 tetri (8 cents), or 22 percent less than the price for the same period in 2020 - 1.05 lari (34 cents). With the reduction of tariffs in the market, the number of subscribers using 4G services is growing. Currently, 3.2 million subscribers use mobile internet, which is 16 percent more than in 2020. In total, 63 percent of active SIM cards in Georgia use mobile internet every month. In 2020, the consumption of mobile internet in Georgia reached 192,337 terabytes. At the same time, the growth trend continued in 2021, and the volume of Internet consumed in July was 28,800 terabytes, which is 71 percent more than in the previous year. The consumption of mobile internet per subscriber also increased and averaged 9.4 GB.

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[TOP ↑](#)

## **TURKMENISTAN: Revealing GDP Growth for 8M2021**

President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov during the online cabinet meeting on Friday noted the Turkmen economy's growth despite the global coronavirus pandemic, adding that the country's GDP increased by 6.2% during the past eight months, Trend reports citing Business Turkmenistan. The Head of State said from January to August, 56 large facilities were put into operation in Turkmenistan, instead of the planned 30 facilities, noting that other numerous buildings will also open by the end of the year, the country's official media reports. In the past eight months, residential buildings with a total area of around half a million square meters were commissioned throughout the country, according to the Turkmen Leader. The head of state noted with satisfaction that the reform of the scientific and educational sphere continues, production facilities are being modernized, and a market economy is being formed. Highlighting the development of new oil and gas fields, President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov noted the ongoing construction of Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan power transmission and communications lines and the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India gas pipeline, as well as preparations for the implementation of other international projects. The Turkmen Leader said the country continues to pursue its policy of developing the private sector and the attraction of entrepreneurs in the implementation of economic reforms. The online cabinet meeting also considered other topical issues of the socio-economic development of Turkmenistan.

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[TOP ↑](#)

## **UZBEKISTAN: Number of Mobile Communication Users Exceeds 27mn**

By July of this year, the number of mobile subscribers in Uzbekistan exceeded 27mn, the statistical committee has reported. It said that the number of subscribers expanded by 14.3% compared to the same period in 2020. Approximately 24.87mn



mobile subscribers are individuals. Their number in the period under review increased by 8.8%. According to the calculations of the committee, there were 72 subscribers for every 100 people of the population.

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[TOP ↑](#)

## **Uzbekistan Among Countries with "Unfree" Internet**

Uzbekistan has once again remained on the list of countries with an "unfree" Internet, according to the international non-governmental human rights organization Freedom House. The annual report assesses the state of the Internet in countries according to three criteria: - accessibility/obstacles to access; - content restrictions; - violations of user rights. According to the information provided in the report, the level of Internet freedom in Uzbekistan was estimated at 28 points in 2021 compared to 57 points in 2020.

From <https://uzreport.news/> 09/23/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## **Oceania**

### **AUSTRALIA: House Prices Post Record Quarterly Rise**

House prices rose 6.7 per cent in the June quarter, the fastest pace in quarterly growth in at least 18 years, the Australian Bureau of Statistics says. The residential property index, which is the weighted average of Australia's eight capital cities, was 16.8 per cent higher over the year. "The continued growth in property prices was occurring at a time of record low interest rates," ABS head of prices statistics Michelle Marquardt said. "Persistently low levels of stock on the market were being met with strong demand and properties transacting at an increasingly rapid rate." The total value of Australia's 10.7 million residential dwellings rose by \$596.4 billion to \$8.9 trillion in the June quarter, the largest quarterly rise since ABS began the series in 2003. The mean price of residential dwellings in Australia rose by \$52,600 to \$835,700. More up to date data compiled by CoreLogic showed annual house prices rose 18.4 per cent in the year to August.

Reserve Bank of Australia assistant governor for economics Luci Ellis told federal politicians supply was a major factor in driving prices higher. "You don't increase affordability by giving people more money to spend on housing. All that does is bid up prices," Dr Ellis told an inquiry into housing affordability and supply. "You certainly don't improve people's welfare by making it easier for people to borrow more and more." She said that was the policy solution that was chosen in the US in the 2000s, which resulted in the global financial crisis. Building more homes would not bring down prices either, but it did matter, she said. "The important point is if you want lower housing prices you don't get there by increasing demand," she said. Treasury

officials told the House of Representatives standing committee on tax and revenue that government initiatives have assisted home buyers over the hurdle of saving for a deposit.

But Crystal Ossolinski, director of the department's domestic demand unit, said interest rates had a key impact on the housing market. "Over the past year we've seen debt servicing increase a little bit, it certainly has not increased in line with prices and this reflects interest rates rates have fallen dramatically," she said. The RBA's cash rate, which steers the interest rate on mortgages offered by retail banks, sits at a record low 0.1 per cent. The central bank does not expected to lift the rate before 2024. Treasury officials dismissed the suggestion that housing investors had a more beneficial tax arrangement over owner-occupiers, such as through negative gearing and the capital gain tax gains. They pointed out that owner-occupiers didn't pay any capital gains on their property, which is also not included in the pension assessment. They argued investors added to housing supply by renting out their properties, which also keeps rents low. But they said state government zoning needed to be looked at, along with stamp duty, which might help affordability.

From <https://au.news.yahoo.com> 09/14/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## **Welfare Report Reveals Impact of COVID-19**

Australians are less lonely and more socially cohesive but are likely to be less satisfied with their life in 2021 compared to pre-pandemic levels. The latest welfare and wellbeing report released on Thursday by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare has revealed the extent of how aspects of life have changed in the wake of COVID-19. It showed more people have experienced severe psychological distress since the pandemic started, while the number of residents who receive income support payments is higher compared to the start of 2020. The institute's deputy chief executive Matthew James said the report, which is released every two years, revealed a key snapshot about how daily life has been affected by the pandemic. "The COVID-19 pandemic has touched many aspects of our lives and prompted a renewed community focus on the welfare and wellbeing of Australians," he said.

The report found the average life satisfaction level as of August was at 6.5 out of 10, the same level as April 2020. However, that figure was down on 6.9 at the start of 2020. More than 36 per cent of people said they were lonely some of the time, which was down from 45 per cent in April last year. One in 10 Australians have experienced severe psychological distress as of last month, an increase from levels of eight per cent four years ago. The institute said while the number of income support recipients has decreased from 5.8 million to 5.4 million in the year to June 2021, it was up by seven per cent on March last year. Mr James said the year 12 attainment rate for people in Australia was up from 83 to 89 per cent, while the number of trainees and apprentices decreased almost four per cent. Social Services Minister Anne Ruston

said the impacts of the virus had been more constrained in Australia compared to other countries. "It was heartening to see the economy bouncing back with the total number of employed people returning to pre-pandemic levels in May 2021," she said. "Unfortunately, the current lockdowns are again taking their toll, but as our vaccination rates across the country continue to rise, I'm confident our economy will rebound quickly."

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[TOP ↑](#)

## **More Employees to Remain Working from Home**

More Australians will be working from home compared to pre-pandemic levels even after COVID-19 restrictions are eased, a new Productivity Commission report has found. The report said the move to large numbers of employees working from home could increase the country's productivity levels. While fewer than eight per cent of Australians were working from home before the coronavirus outbreak, that number has since increased to 40 per cent. Productivity Commission chairman Michael Brennan said the move to larger numbers of people working from home would be the biggest shift in employment in decades. "It is inevitable that more Australians will work from home," Mr Brennan said. "The forced experiment of COVID-19 has greatly accelerated take up of technology, including that which assists working from home opportunities."

The report said governments should support a transition to more employees working from home as jurisdictions emerge from lockdown. Three-quarters of employees surveyed said they considered themselves as more productive working from home compared to being in the office. Mr Brennan said after a mass roll out of working from home set ups during the first stage of the pandemic, many businesses and employees were trialling which model of working was best for them. "Working from home won't suit everyone or every business, but for many employees, working from home arrangements will be a factor in deciding which job to take," he said. "Some employees have indicated they would be prepared to take less pay in return for the ability to work from home." The report said workers being able to spend two days at home would result in 13 per cent of all employment hours in the country being worked remotely. Despite the report mentioning that working remotely reduced levels of physical activity, the commission said working from home represented a positive gain to society. "The central workplace will remain the dominant model for the foreseeable future," the report said. "But the increase in working from home is potentially of great benefit to a substantial portion of the Australian workforce."

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[TOP ↑](#)

## **Petrol Pump Prices Hit Three-Year High**

Rising international oil prices have pushed Australian petrol prices to their highest level in nearly three years nationally, and to record highs in some parts of the country. The only consolation is that people enduring a coronavirus lockdown are unlikely to be using their car. The Australian Institute of Petroleum said the national average for petrol prices rose 3.2 cents to 157.4 cents a litre. Commonwealth Securities senior economist Ryan Felsman said this is the highest level in 35 months. Worse still, the Brisbane average price of unleaded petrol jumped by 16.7 cents to a record high 172.8 cents a litre, and in Melbourne the average price lifted by 12 cents to a new peak of 166.9 cents a litre. "Upward pressure on international crude and imported refined petroleum prices are likely to keep domestic petrol prices elevated," Mr Felsman warned.

Filling the car up is one of the biggest outlays for a households' weekly budget and comes at the detriment of general retail spending. Retailers are already struggling to keep afloat as a result of coronavirus lockdowns. Australian Retailers Association CEO Paul Zahra said lockdowns in NSW, Victoria and the ACT are threatening the survival of small businesses, and some discretionary retailers, particularly those in CBD locations. "However, there is hope on the horizon with NSW set to start to open back up next month and Victoria and the ACT expected to follow suit," Mr Zahra said. "The timing couldn't be more important as retailers gear up for the festive trading season when most discretionary retailers make up to two-thirds of their profits for the year." NSW is promising to ease restrictions when vaccination rates hit 70 per cent, for people aged over 16 who've had two doses.

Research conducted by the association and Roy Morgan found Australians are set to spend over \$11 billion on Christmas presents this year, with 79 per cent saying they plan to spend the same or more than they did last year. "However, the immediate challenges remain around the lockdowns and a lot of pain continues to be felt in parts of the country where stay-at-home orders are in place," Mr Zahra said. New figures from Mastercard SpendingPulse, which measures in-store and online retailing across all forms of payment, showed sales increased by 1.1 per cent in August compared to July, but were down 2.3 per cent from a year earlier. The biggest annual falls were in clothing retailing, down 15 per cent, and department stores, off 3.5 per cent. However, household goods sales rose 4.5 per cent and food retailing was up 0.2 per cent.

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[TOP ↑](#)

## **Vaccine Producers Not Helping Poor: Report**

Major pharmaceutical companies that have developed COVID-19 vaccines have been accused of fuelling a human rights crisis over their refusal to boost supply in poorer countries. A new report by Amnesty International released on Wednesday said six companies including Pfizer, AstraZeneca and Moderna have not prioritised delivering doses to developing nations. Pfizer is contracted to provide more than 40

million doses to Australia this year and 85 million booster shots in 2022 and 2023. Moderna will supply 25 million doses while 53.8 million AstraZeneca shots - mostly produced in Melbourne - are a key part of the program. The report found that while just over half of people in developed countries have been fully vaccinated, in poorer countries, the figure is less than one per cent.

Amnesty International's secretary general Agnes Callamard said the refusal of pharmaceutical companies to share vaccine technology with vulnerable areas was a global human rights failure. "Against the backdrop of these gross inequalities, BioNTech, Moderna and Pfizer are set to make \$130 billion combined by the end of 2022. Profits should never come before lives," she said. "It's plunging parts of Latin America, Africa and Asia into renewed crises, pushing weakened health systems to the very brink and causing tens of thousands of preventable deaths every week. "In many low-income countries, not even health workers and people at-risk have received the vaccine." The new report found just 0.3 per cent of the nearly six billion vaccine doses distributed globally have gone to low-income countries. Other findings from the report showed Pfizer delivered nine times more vaccines to Sweden alone than all low-income countries combined.

Amnesty said the refusal of the vaccine developers to share the intellectual property rights of the immunisation with others was a major concern. The human rights organisation has called for two billion doses of COVID vaccines to be distributed to low and middle-income countries before the end of the year. "No one should spend another year suffering and living in fear," Ms Callamard said. "Armed with billions of dollars of tax-payers money and expertise from research institutions, pharmaceutical companies have played a pivotal role in developing life-saving vaccines, but now they must take immediate action to provide billions more people with the chance to be inoculated." Prime Minister Scott Morrison will this week attend a COVID summit at the White House hosted by US President Joe Biden. Mr Biden is expected to announce a pledge to vaccinate 70 per cent of the global population by September 2022.

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[TOP ↑](#)

## **Australia Hits 50 pct Vaccination Coverage**

Half of Australia's population aged 16 and above has been vaccinated against coronavirus. A record 347,796 doses were administered in the past 24 hours, fuelling the milestone as the nation edges towards 70 and 80 per cent coverage targets. Almost three-quarters of people 16 and over have received at least a first dose. Chief Nursing Officer Alison McMillan urged anyone in the remaining 25 per cent to get vaccinated so Australia could return to normal life. "We should all be incredibly grateful and proud of what we are achieving as a country," she told reporters in Canberra on Friday. "Each time anybody gets a vaccine, it takes us a step closer to

those things that we are all missing for all of us who continue to be under restrictions." Vaccine rollout co-ordinator John Frewen said Australia would receive its full allocation of 11 million Pfizer and Moderna mRNA vaccines in October despite concerns of a shortfall. Lieutenant General Frewen said Pfizer had confirmed delivery schedules across the month after a global distribution issue was solved.

National cabinet was last week warned October's Pfizer supplies could be up to 2.5 million below what was originally planned. "At that stage we only had the first two weeks - and what we received in the first two weeks was half of what we were anticipating," Lt Gen Frewen said. "Pfizer have now said they will make up the full month's allocation across week three and, we expect, week four." Outbreaks in NSW and Victoria continue to rage with more than 1700 new cases in Australia's most populous states on Friday. A man who attended Wednesday's anti-lockdown protest in Melbourne is being treated for coronavirus in hospital. There were 1043 infections in NSW and 11 deaths, while Victoria reported 733 cases and another fatality. Canberra recorded 19 new cases. NSW - where 57.8 per cent have been fully vaccinated - is on track to reach the nationally agreed targets ahead of COVID-free states such as Queensland and Western Australia. Victoria and South Australia are about 46.5 per cent, while Queensland and WA are hovering at 44 per cent. The ACT - which like NSW and Victoria remains in lockdown - leads the nation with 59.5 per cent double-dose coverage, while Tasmania has reached 55.1 per cent. The NT is on 50 per cent.

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[TOP ↑](#)

## **Australians Moving Money Out of Savings**

Australians are shifting money out of savings accounts and into other investments. A national survey conducted by comparison site Finder has found 29 per cent of people with a nest egg in the bank have moved at least a portion of it due to the historically low rates they're earning. One in 10 of the 1015 respondents interviewed in July, or the equivalent of 2.1 million Australians, transferred some of their savings to what they described as an investment account. Some have opted to diversify with shares, with seven per cent shifting money into micro-investing apps like Raiz and seven per cent using some of their savings to top up super. A further five per cent have moved some of their savings into cryptocurrency. Reserve Bank data shows one-year term deposit rates dropped to just 0.25 per cent in May, their lowest since 1982. Three-year term deposits fell to 0.3 per cent, their lowest in nearly 40 years.

Record low rates have made it tough for people to earn interest on money sitting in traditional accounts, according to investing expert Kylie Purcell. "Instead, moving a portion of savings into shares gives people the opportunity to earn a higher return," she said. "Certain shares and funds also pay out dividends, which can give you an extra boost of cash." The research shows Australians, on average, have a touch

under \$23,400 invested in shares, an amount equivalent to 50 per cent of their savings. On average men invest more heavily in shares than women (\$36,004 to \$9,884 respectively). They also have a higher ratio of shares to savings than women at 74 per cent compared to 29 per cent. Ms Purcell says anyone keen to start investing needs to do their research before diving in. "Investing is a smart way to increase your net wealth but it's essential to do your due diligence first," she said.

"Putting all your eggs in one basket is never a smart move - diversifying your investments between different funds and different asset classes helps to reduce risk." For those unsure where to start, ETFs or exchange traded funds are often recommended because they're considered safer than buying individual stocks. The average Australian has about \$900 in cryptocurrency and \$260 in micro-investing apps or about three per cent and one per cent of what they have in savings. Superannuation is Australia's biggest investment, with the average person having around \$119,000 in super or approximately 236 per cent of what they have in savings. Despite the trend away from parking money in the bank, 56 per cent of Finder's survey respondents said they hadn't or hadn't yet moved any money from their savings account. Eleven per cent said they had placed money into an investment account, 12 per cent said they had shifted funds from their regular account into cash savings and 15 per cent revealed they did not have any savings.

From <https://au.news.yahoo.com> 09/25/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## **Housing Under Spotlight as Pressures Grow**

The next couple of days will see a suite of economic indicators to provide an update on the state of Australia's booming housing market in terms of prices, lending and building. There are rising worries about the impact of record low interest rates on lending as borrowers chase ever-increasing house prices. The International Monetary Fund in its latest report on Australia warned that this is leading to concerns about affordability and financial stability. It recommends tightening lending standards and reforms to boost housing supply, as well as targeted support for low-income households to improve housing affordability. Australia's financial regulators have been monitoring the impact of low interest rates on house prices and mortgage demand for some time. New home loans where debt is at least six times greater than income rose to a record 22 per cent in the June quarter - up from 16 per cent a year earlier.

The regulators are now looking at new measures, with a report released on Wednesday stating they were "mindful that a period of credit growth materially outpacing growth in household income would add to the medium-term risks facing the economy, notwithstanding that lending standards remain sound". "Against this background, the council discussed possible macroprudential policy responses," the Council of Financial Regulators said in their quarterly statement. The Australian

Prudential Regulation Authority plans to soon publish an information paper on its framework for implementing macroprudential policy. Reserve Bank assistant governor Michele Bullock told a conference last week "sustained strong growth in credit in excess of income growth may result in vulnerabilities building in bank and household balance sheets". The bosses at the Commonwealth Bank and the ANZ told a federal parliamentary committee they are already cautionary in their lending criteria.

The RBA will release its monthly credit data for August on Thursday, which measures the accumulation debt in various sectors of the economy. In July, housing credit was growing at its fastest annual pace since since May 2018. The Australian Bureau of Statistics will also release building approvals for August. Economists' forecasts centre on a further five per cent decline in the month after a hefty 8.6 per cent drop in July as the benefit from the federal government's successful HomeBuilder program continues to unwind. On Friday, the CoreLogic home value index for September will be released, alongside lending figures from the ABS. The ABS will also release job vacancy figures for the three months to August on Thursday. Job advertising has been weak in recent months as a result of coronavirus lockdowns in major states, which has already translated into a sharp decline in the number of people in employment.

From <https://au.news.yahoo.com> 09/30/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## **NEW ZEALAND: Government Invests in Scientific Research to Boost Economy, Address Climate Change and Enhance Wellbeing**

Research, Science and Innovation Minister Hon Dr Megan Woods has today announced the recipients of this year's Endeavour Fund to help tackle the big issues that New Zealanders care about, like boosting economic performance, climate change, transport infrastructure and wellbeing. In total, 69 new scientific research projects were awarded over \$244 million, through New Zealand's largest contestable research fund. "This year we have invested over \$13 million to help New Zealand transition to a low-carbon future. Projects such as the University of Auckland led 'Wirelessly Powered Transport Infrastructure for a Low-carbon Future' will not only develop the necessary technology to wirelessly power vehicles, it will also create economic opportunities for New Zealand businesses to commercialise the technology, as we recover from COVID-19," says Research, Science and Innovation Minister Megan Woods. "Over \$11 million is being invested in research to address climate change related risks, including the Scion led 'Extreme wildfire: Our new reality – are we ready?' and 'Fish futures: preparing for novel freshwater ecosystems, led by Cawthron Institute. "It's also key that a te ao Māori worldview is integrated into our research. Manaaki Whenua's 'Te Weu o te Kaitiaki – Indigenous regeneration pathways' project is a great example of this. It uses whakapapa frameworks to



re-imagine biocultural solutions to restore ecological systems, reconnect people to place, and deliver sustainable economic growth for communities,” Megan Woods said.

From <https://livenews.co.nz> 09/07/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## **NZ Economy’s Strong Momentum Will Support Rebound from Delta Outbreak; COVID Fund Replenished**

The economy showed strong momentum in the period leading up to the recent Delta COVID-19 outbreak, which bodes well for a solid economic rebound, Grant Robertson said. GDP rose 2.8 percent in the June quarter, following on from a 1.4 percent increase in the previous March quarter. This was a significantly better result than most forecasters had predicted. Treasury had forecast a rise of 0.8 percent in May’s Budget, and economic commentators using more recent data had forecast around a 1.2 percent rise. Internationally, the OECD average was 1.6 percent. “This is a very positive result and shows New Zealanders’ confidence in our economic recovery roadmap. Excluding the September 2020 quarter, this is the strongest quarterly growth that we have seen since 1999. The economy in the June 2021 quarter was 4.3 percent above where it was in the pre-COVID December 2019 quarter,” Grant Robertson said.

“Household spending remained buoyant, led by retail spending on electronics and furniture, eating out and holidays. The services industries, which make up two-thirds of the economy, grew strongly with higher activity in engineering, architectural and consulting services. “Activity in the construction sector continued to rise, driven by residential building, while there was solid growth in manufacturing. Businesses’ confidence in the economy was also reflected in investment levels, which remained high and above pre-COVID levels in the December 2019 quarter. “This bodes well as we come out of lockdown. It shows our science and health-led plan has continued to work for the economy. Our quick and decisive response to this outbreak, including providing cashflow and confidence through schemes such as the Wage Subsidy, will also help the economy to rebound quickly again. We do know, however, that the impact has been uneven and we will continue to work with affected sectors to support them in these challenging times.”

On an annual basis, the economy grew 5.1 percent. The size of the economy was \$340 billion. “New Zealand continues to outperform many of the countries we compare ourselves to,” Grant Robertson said. Compared with New Zealand’s 2.8 percent quarterly growth, Australia rose by 0.7 percent, the United States by 1.6 percent and Japan by 0.5 percent, while Canada declined by 0.3 percent. Only the United Kingdom grew by more, up 4.8 percent, reversing recent falls in activity. COVID Fund Replenished “The stronger economy has been reflected in the Government’s books, with lower deficits and debt position than had been predicted,

and well below that of other nations that we compare ourselves against,” Grant Robertson said. “Ministers have decided to use the greater fiscal headroom to top up the COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund (CRRF) by an extra \$7 billion.

There is also an additional \$3 billion available to spend from money previously allocated in the fund that has not been spent. We have already boosted support to business in this lockdown and the extra funding will be targeted at further economic support as well as building resilience in our health system, supporting the vaccination rollout and border and MIQ provision. “We are in a strong economic position to protect lives and livelihoods and plan for the gradual and careful opening up of New Zealand to the rest of the world to secure the recovery. Our focus remains on keeping New Zealanders safe, accelerating the recovery and dealing with long-standing issues such as climate change, housing and child wellbeing despite the uncertainty and volatility globally around the ongoing impact of COVID-19,” Grant Robertson said.

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[TOP ↑](#)

## **New Home Building Reaches Another Record High**

Government support for the building sector continues to shine through in the latest consent numbers, showing more homes are being built than ever before, says Minister for Building and Construction Poto Williams. “For the sixth month in a row, the annual number of residential building consents have reached another all-time high,” Poto Williams said, Estimates from Statistics New Zealand released today show the number of new homes consented in the year ended June 2021 is at a record high of 46,453. This is an increase of 24 per cent from the August 2020 year. “This government’s investment in the construction sector is creating more jobs, helping us to retain and grow construction skills, and building more warm, dry, secure housing at a critical time. More people have moved into construction than any other sector since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. This is fantastic for our communities, our economy, and our housing delivery programme. A strong sector means we can build back better,” Poto Williams said.

A report released yesterday by the Ministry of Businesses, Innovation and Employment identified ways in which the construction sector has changed in the past year through tracking the sector’s key trends and economic performance. The report shows a steady increase in demand for multi-unit homes. The total number of multi-unit homes consented in August 2021 was 21,164, an increase of 35 per cent from the year prior. “It is encouraging to see a shift in the type of homes we are building; apartments and town-houses will help us deliver affordable, healthy and energy-efficient homes,” Poto Williams said. “There is no doubt that New Zealanders needs are changing and the building landscape is evolving. “This past year we’ve seen the introduction of innovative building designs, technologies and materials.

These innovations present further opportunities to introduce efficiencies, increase worker health, safety, and well-being, improve the building quality and help New Zealand reach our climate change goals. “We will continue to work closely with the industry to ensure we are building back better for all New Zealanders,” Poto Williams said.

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[TOP ↑](#)

## 5、 Public Finance

### Asia-Pacific

#### **Air Quality Monitoring System Market Size Forecasted to Reach Value of USD 6.8 Billion in 2028 – Reports and Data**

Increased investment by governments in better air quality will drive market growth. The global air quality monitoring system market size is expected to reach USD 6.8 billion in 2028 at a CAGR of 7% according to a new report by Reports and Data. Air pollution has unintended consequences for the environment and ecological balance, especially in densely populated and developing countries like India and China, as well as poorly controlled fossil fuel usage in many countries and global warming, among other factors. Governments have been allocating larger portions of their budgets to environmental pollution management, which includes the construction of air quality monitoring systems and smart city projects, both of which would serve as important drivers for air quality monitoring systems market growth over the forecast period. About 100 haze days have occurred in Jing-Jin-Ji, the Yangtze River Delta (YRD), and the Pearl River Delta (PRD) in the last three years, according to estimates from China’s Ministry of Environmental Protection (MEP), with PM2.5 concentrations two to four times higher than WHO requirements. These accidents have caused public concern due to the potential for negative health effects. According to new estimates from the 2010 Global Burden of Disease (GBD), outdoor air pollution is a much bigger public health problem than previously believed, causing 2.1 million premature deaths in Asia per year. Outdoor air pollution is now classified among the top ten global risks, as well as among the top five or six in Asia’s developing countries, for the first time. The initial cost of air quality monitoring systems is substantial, but the ongoing costs are low. The high initial cost will restrict the market to some degree, but this is only expected to last a short time because rising demand would lead to lower prices. The ongoing cost is due to the need to replace the air filter on a regular basis, which is not a significant expense but may be out of reach for certain users.

From <https://www.i-policy.org/> 09/02/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## Record Demand for World Bank USD 5 Billion 7-Year Sustainable Development Bond

The World Bank (International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, IBRD, Aaa/AAA) priced a USD 5 billion 7-year Sustainable Development Bond maturing in September 2028. The deal attracted nearly 150 orders and an orderbook reaching over USD 10.2 billion, a record for the World Bank in the maturity. Orders were anchored by globally diverse central banks and bank treasuries, who were joined by asset managers, corporates and other official institutions. World Bank bonds support its mission to help members achieve sustainable and inclusive development. Deutsche Bank, J.P. Morgan, Morgan Stanley and RBC Capital Markets are the lead managers for the transaction. The bond priced at a spread vs. the reference US treasury of + 8.3 basis points, resulting in an equivalent annual yield of 1.155%. “This is a tremendous outcome for the first USD fixed rate benchmark of the World Bank’s new fiscal year and first public trade after the summer break,” said **Jingdong Hua, Vice President and Treasurer, World Bank**. “The robust demand that made this deal so successful also gives a strong signal of momentum for the market as a whole.”

### Investor Distribution:

By Geography		By Investor Type	
Europe/Middle East/Africa	53%	Central Banks/Official Institutions	47%
Asia	28%	Banks/Bank Treasuries/Corporates	38%
Americas	19%	Asset Managers/Insurance/Pension Funds	15%

### Lead Manager Quotes

“An outstanding result for the World Bank once again, taking advantage of a strong post-summer USD Supranational, Sovereign and Agency (SSA) market and attractive yield curve steepness to bring another 7-year Sustainable Development Bond benchmark, matching the size of the largest 7-year SSA USD benchmark which was launched by the issuer back in April this year. The headline orderbook breaking the World Bank’s prior records in that maturity coming out at \$10.2 billion highlights the continued appeal of its triple-A credit to global investors, as well as to those seeking sustainable investment products. Deutsche Bank is delighted to have supported the World Bank in this prestigious transaction,” said **Katrin Wehle, Managing Director, Sovereign, Supranational & Agency Origination, Deutsche Bank**. “The World Bank reopens the USD long-end issuance and kick starts its new fiscal year’s USD benchmark funding with an impressive \$5 billion 7-year benchmark. The Sustainable Development Bond attracted the largest USD 7-year order book in the SSA space to date, and priced at the tightest mid-swap reoffer

spread for a 7-year benchmark since 2015 – again proving the World Bank’s global investor reach and widespread support for its development mission and its work in reaching the Sustainable Development Goals,” said **Keith Price, Head of Frequent Borrower Group, J.P. Morgan**.

"A privilege to be part of World Bank's first USD benchmark of the fiscal year. The stunning reception of the 7-year benchmark, which saw demand in excess of \$10.2 billion, further reaffirms the issuer's appeal with the global institutional investor base," said **Ben Adubi, Head of SSA Syndicate, Morgan Stanley**. "The World Bank's spectacular return to the USD market with an unprecedented second USD 5 billion 7-year benchmark this year for the World Bank, reinforces its status as the preeminent issuer of Sustainable Development Bonds. The sheer size and quality of the book as well as the pricing achieved highlights the incredible investor franchise they have built up over years of hard work. Our congratulations to the World Bank team for setting yet another benchmark for benchmarks," said **Jigme Shingsar, Managing Director, RBC Capital Markets**.

#### Transaction Summary

Issuer:	World Bank (International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, IBRD)
Issuer rating:	Aaa /AAA
Amount:	USD 5 billion
Settlement date:	September 13, 2021
Maturity date:	September 13, 2028
Issue price:	99.799%
Issue yield:	1.155% semi-annual
Denomination:	USD 1,000
Coupon:	1.125% p.a., payable semi-annually in arrear
Listing:	Luxembourg Stock Exchange
ISIN:	US459058JZ74
Clearing system:	Fedwire, Clearstream, Euroclear
Lead managers:	Deutsche Bank, J.P. Morgan, Morgan Stanley and RBC Capital Markets
Senior co-lead managers:	Daiwa, National Bank Financial Canada and Wells Fargo

For more information on the World Bank Group and COVID-19: [www.worldbank.org/en/who-we-are/news/coronavirus-covid19](http://www.worldbank.org/en/who-we-are/news/coronavirus-covid19)

From <https://www.worldbank.org/> 09/02/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

#### APG Puts Additional €500m into Smart City Infrastructure Fund

Dutch pension fund APG has made a further €500m commitment to the Smart City Infrastructure Fund (SCIF). APG and infrastructure manager Whitehelm Capital said

SCIF has closed its second funding round, bringing its total fund size to €750m. The companies said the global fund has fully committed the initial €250m of capital APG invested in 2018. APG is investing on behalf of its pension fund client ABP. The fund targets investments that enable the implementation of a wide range of smart city infrastructure solutions, allowing cities to more efficiently allocate resources and improve the lived environment. Since the first close, SCIF has committed to four smart city investments. The initial investments have focused on the US, where SCIF is working with its joint venture partner SiFi Networks to roll out fibre networks in medium-sized cities. The companies said the fund has a pipeline of attractive opportunities globally, with a particular focus on diversifying across a broad range of technologies and infrastructure sectors. Graham Matthews, Whitehelm Capital's CEO, said: "We are delighted to be expanding our relationship with APG and entering the next phase of growth of the Smart City Infrastructure Fund. We believe that Smart City solutions will play a key role in improving the efficiency and sustainability of the world's cities.

"SCIF provides a funding model for these essential projects. Ultimately Smart Cities will improve the daily lives of citizens across the world, and we are excited to be playing a key role in enabling these projects." Carlo Maddalena, senior portfolio manager at APG, said: "The increase in our investment in the Smart City Infrastructure Fund is a testament to our commitment to invest in long-term sustainable and resilient infrastructure projects that generate attractive risk-adjusted returns for our pension fund clients. "The urbanisation trend is steadily accelerating globally and is reshaping the urban city firsthand. Alongside our partners, we will continue to develop projects that entail the roll-out of next-generation information and communications technologies to address these challenges and provide tools for city officials to build, run and manage cities in a better and more sustainable way for the years to come."

From <https://realassets.ipe.com/> 09/03/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## **New Publication Illustrates the Real Cost of Speeding on People and the Environment**

Reducing road speeds represent a major yet under-appreciated opportunity not only to improve road safety and save lives but also promote sustainable mobility, and benefits such as increased efficiency and inclusion, according to a new publication by the World Bank's Global Road Safety Facility (GRSF). The report, titled "Road Crash Trauma, Climate Change, Pollution and the Total Costs of Speed: Six graphs that tell the story,"<sup>[i]</sup> sheds light on common misunderstanding of the impacts of speed on road safety, congestion, pollution, and the cost of travel. Well-established evidence in the note makes a stronger case for lowering speed to be one of the most effective ways to enhance road safety. For example, a one percent increase in speed results in a 3.5 to 4-percent increase in deaths. It finds that applying lower speed

limits might make more economic sense. Analyses of higher speeds often focus only on the benefits of saving travel time and omit critical economic costs in the form of crashes, emissions, fuel, and vehicle maintenance. Meanwhile, several studies show that in high-income countries, travel speeds which are economically optimal are lower than expected and typically lower than the posted speed limits.

“We understand that there is a strong need for evidence-based and targeted interventions to improve road safety in Vietnam,” said Rahul Kitchlu, the World Bank Acting Country Director for Vietnam. “We hope that policy makers can leverage this publication to develop measures that work, especially as the country is preparing an updated version of the National Road Safety Strategy and Action Plan.” The note argues that rather than relying on enforcement alone, a combination of vehicle policies, road design, and engineering would allow for a stronger, more sustainable, and often more politically viable strategy for speed management. The note also highlights other benefits fundamental to sustainable mobility associated with lower speeds. They include reduced climate change impacts of road transport, increased efficiency (fuel and vehicle maintenance), improved inclusion, and walkability. Despite extensive efforts, the number of road crashes in Vietnam remain high. In 2018, the National Traffic Safety Committee of Vietnam reported 18,700 traffic crashes killing 8,200 and injuring another 14,800 people. This averages to around 22 road traffic fatalities and 41 road traffic injuries per day. 82% of those killed or injured on the roads fall into the economically productive age groups between 15 and 64 years.

From <https://www.worldbank.org/> 09/08/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## **Macif/Aéma Group Invests in World Bank Sustainable Development Bond and Highlights Importance of Water and Ocean Resources**

The World Bank (International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, IBRD, Aaa/AAA) today issued a EUR 200 million, 30-year callable bond due September 2051. This Sustainable Development Bond is the latest example of the World Bank’s engagement with investors on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Through this engagement, the World Bank and Macif (Aéma Group), are raising awareness for SDG 6, Clean Water and Sanitation, and SDG 14, Life Below Water. Macif (Aéma Group) was the sole investor in the bond. Merrill Lynch International was the underwriter of the transaction. *“Intimately linked to the sea, it is natural that Macif (Aéma Group) decided to once again support the World Bank’s initiative to raise awareness for the access of clean water and the health of our oceans,”* said **Sabine Castellan Poquet, Chief Investment Officer, Aéma group/Macif**. *“We are pleased to once again join Macif in highlighting the critical need to protect water and ocean resources and thank them for their investment in our bonds to support the World*

*Bank's sustainable development activities,"* said **Heike Reichelt, Head of Investor Relations and Sustainable Finance, World Bank Treasury.**

The COVID-19 pandemic poses additional threats to water and oceans as difficult short-term choices between health and the environment result in an increased use of single-use plastics and increased production of medical waste, which can end up in the Earth's oceans. The World Bank, as the largest multilateral funder for ocean and water projects in developing countries, is committed to ensuring access to safe and clean water and the sustainable use of ocean and marine resources. The World Bank's overall oceans program includes projects that range from implementing large regional fisheries programs, to tackling all sources of marine pollution, protecting critical marine habitats and supporting coastal development around the globe. The World Bank champions the Blue Economy agenda more generally, finding solutions and providing the analytical work needed for governments to create an enabling environment for the sustainable development of coastal, marine economies. This includes through support from PROBLUE, a multi-donor trust fund housed at the World Bank.

#### **Transaction Summary**

Issuer:	International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, IBRD
Issuer rating:	Aaa/AAA (Moody's / S&P)
Maturity	30-year
Amount:	EUR 200 million
Settlement date:	9 September 2021
Coupon:	1.1601% per annum
Coupon payment dates:	9 September annually from and including 9 September 2022 up to and including the Maturity Date
Maturity Date:	9 September 2051, subject to early redemption
Issue price:	100.00%
Listing:	Luxembourg Stock Exchange
ISIN:	XS2384460585
Clearing system:	Euroclear/Clearstream
Lead manager:	Merrill Lynch International

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

[TOP ↑](#)

#### **Climate Finance for Developing Countries Rose to USD 79.6 Billion in 2019**

Climate finance provided and mobilised by developed countries for developing countries totalled USD 79.6 billion in 2019, up 2% from 78.3 billion in 2018, according to new figures from the OECD. The small increase was driven by a rise in public climate finance provided by multilateral institutions, while bilateral public



climate finance commitments dropped, as did climate finance mobilised from private sources. **Climate Finance Provided and Mobilised by Developed Countries: Aggregate trends updated with 2019 data** is the OECD's fourth assessment of progress towards the UNFCCC goal of mobilising USD 100 billion per year by 2020 to help developing countries tackle and adapt to climate change.

## Climate finance for developing countries

Climate finance provided and mobilised by developed countries, in USD billions



The gap in the private finance time series in 2015 is due to the implementation of enhanced measurement methodologies. As a result, private flows for 2016-18 cannot be directly compared with private flows for 2013-14.

Source: OECD (2021), Climate Finance Provided and Mobilised by Developed Countries



“Climate finance continued to grow in 2019 but developed countries remain USD 20 billion short of meeting the 2020 goal of mobilising USD 100 billion,” **OECD Secretary-General Mathias Cormann** said. “The limited progress in overall climate finance volumes between 2018 and 2019 is disappointing, particularly ahead of COP26. While appropriately verified data for 2020 will not be available until early next year it is clear that climate finance will remain well short of its target. More needs to be done. We know that donor countries recognise this, with Canada and Germany now taking forward a delivery plan for mobilising the additional finance required to reach the USD 100bn a year goal.” The report finds that public climate finance from developed countries reached USD 62.9 billion in 2019. Bilateral public climate finance accounted for USD 28.8 billion, down 10% from 2018, and multilateral public climate finance attributed to developed countries accounted for USD 34.1 billion, up by 15% from 2018. The level of private climate finance mobilised was down 4% at USD 14.0 billion in 2019, after USD 14.6 billion in 2018. Climate-related export credits remained small at USD 2.6 billion, accounting for just 3% of total climate finance.

The report also shows that out of the overall climate finance in 2019, 25% went to adaptation (up from 21% in 2018), 64% went to climate change mitigation activities

(down from 70% in 2019), and the remainder to crosscutting activities. More than half of total climate finance targeted economic infrastructure – mostly energy and transport – with most of the remainder going to agriculture and social infrastructure, notably water and sanitation. Asia has been the main beneficiary of climate finance over 2016-19 with 43% of the total on average, followed by Africa (26%) and the Americas (17%). Climate finance for Least Developed Countries rose strongly in 2019 (up 27% on 2018) but funding for Small Island Developing States fell back to 2017 levels (from USD 2.1 billion to 1.5 billion) after a temporary increase in 2018. This data confirm that SIDS face specific challenges in accessing climate finance. The international community needs to consider financing for climate that is appropriate for the challenges that SIDS face, less fragmented, easier to access, predictable and long-term.

Mr Cormann emphasised that, “It is more urgent than ever that developed countries step up their efforts to deliver finance for climate action in developing countries, particularly to support poor and vulnerable countries to build resilience against the growing impacts of climate change.” In terms of public finance instruments, public grant financing jumped by 30% from 2018 to reach USD 16.7 billion in 2019, after having remained stable the three previous years. In contrast, the volume of public loans, which had increased significantly up to 2018, fell by 5% in 2019. As a result, the share of grants in overall public climate finance was 27% in 2019, while loans (both concessional and non-concessional) represented 71%.

From <https://www.oecd.org/> 09/17/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## **Drops in Health Spending Jeopardize Recovery from COVID-19 in Developing Countries**

Despite what will likely be the fastest economic growth in the aftermath of any recession in the last 80 years, 52 countries are expected to reduce per capita government spending below pre-COVID levels over the next five years. Based on a new World Bank paper released today, this will leave them unable to finance their share of a COVID-19 vaccine roll-out, invest in better preparedness to protect themselves from future crises and make progress toward Universal Health Coverage. According to “From Double Shock to Double Recovery: Widening Rifts,” governments will have to make bold choices to avoid falls in government health spending. In a group of 126 countries, per capita government spending is projected to exceed pre-COVID levels by 2026. In 52 countries, by that time, overall government spending will however remain below 2019 levels. A return to pre-COVID-19 growth rates in per capita government health spending in the poorest of these countries would require the share of spending assigned to health to almost double, from 10 percent to 20 percent.

“The economic shock from Covid-19 is threatening the capacity of governments to

spend sufficiently on health, threatening COVID-19 recovery and health security for all,” said Mamta Murthi, World Bank Vice President for Human Development. “Cash-strapped countries will have to make tough choices in health investment to safeguard essential health services, stay on a path toward Universal Health Coverage, and build resilience for the future.” While bringing the current pandemic to an end will require significant investments in vaccines and vaccination programs, countries must also build resilience by investing in preparedness and ensure affordable health services for their populations, especially poor people. Yet, according to the paper, this is becoming a near impossibility for some countries. “The projected net growth in health spending during 2021 and 2022 will cover only 28 percent of the countries’ cost share of a vaccine roll out in low-income countries, and 43 percent in lower-middle income countries,” said Christoph Kurowski, lead author of the paper. “And the projected growth in government health spending in these countries by 2026 will cover approximately only 60 percent of the necessary annual investment to strengthen and maintain public-health preparedness and response capabilities.”

The Global Financing Facility (GFF), which supports the continuity of essential health services as part of COVID-19 response efforts, has been sounding the alarm of the secondary health crisis for vulnerable populations and the need to secure appropriate levels of financing to provide essential health services and respond to emergencies in the future. While it won’t be easy to boost development assistance for health at a time when high-income countries are also struggling, they have a vital interest in supporting a global recovery. Progress toward Universal Health Coverage is critical for human capital development and a full return to inclusive growth everywhere. Only together, can countries bridge the health financing rifts to build a healthier, more secure, more prosperous future for all.

From <https://www.worldbank.org/> 09/21/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## **City Climate Finance Gap Fund Completes First Year of Operation with Support to 33 Cities**

The City Climate Finance Gap Fund (the Gap Fund) has approved technical assistance for 33 cities across the developing world since its operational launch in September 2020, filling a critical gap in technical assistance funding to help cities turn their climate ambitions into finance-ready projects. Marking its one-year operational launch anniversary today, the Gap Fund has received over 140 expressions of interests and approved technical assistance for 33 cities in India, Mexico, Ethiopia, Morocco, Democratic Republic of Congo, Panama, Senegal, Vietnam, Kosovo, Montenegro, Ecuador, South Africa, Vanuatu, Colombia, Indonesia, Brazil, Guatemala, Uganda and Ukraine. An additional 30 cities are currently undergoing a detailed assessment for potential Gap Fund support, with a total target of at least 180 cities. The Gap Fund is currently capitalized at €55 million, with a

target of at least €100 million and the potential to unlock an estimated €4 billion in investments. The aim is to help cities understand their exposure to climate challenges, develop plans and strategies to reduce emissions and vulnerability to climate risks, and identify and prioritize climate-smart urban infrastructure investments.

The Gap Fund demonstrates a unique collaborative model: With funding from Germany and Luxembourg, the Fund is co-implemented by the World Bank and the European Investment Bank in partnership with the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit and works directly with city groups and networks including GCOM, ICLEI, C40 and CCFLA. This concerted effort has helped raise awareness about the importance of cities and urban systems in the climate agenda and could not come at a more critical time, as the latest Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report confirms that cities are the hotspots of global warming, with the global urban climate finance gap estimated in the trillions of dollars, especially in South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa. The Gap Fund also contributes cutting-edge knowledge, tools and recommendations. For example, by featuring in the State of Cities Climate Finance Report Part 2: Enabling Conditions for Mobilizing Urban Climate Finance, which provides critical systems-level conceptual frameworks and recommendations for city, country and climate decision-makers. The Gap Fund has also developed or packaged user-friendly practical tools and notes for operational practitioners and project developers on the ground. The way cities develop in the coming years, especially in these regions, will influence the trajectory of future greenhouse gas emissions, and the susceptibility of cities to increased flood risks and urban heat island effects. The focus on cities is also reflected in the World Bank's Climate Action Plan, which has identified cities and urban systems as a focus area on a par with energy, transport, food and industry.

Some of the Gap Fund's most recent grant activities include:

San Miguelito, Panama: Identify climate-smart and energy-efficient urban interventions for new cable car infrastructure, with the potential to cut emissions and reduce vulnerability to floods.

Dakar, Senegal: Integrate low-carbon and climate-resilient considerations into the planning, development and construction of affordable and green housing in the greater Dakar region, including piloting a green building certification incentive for building developers.

Mangalore and Kolar, India: Prepare a climate diagnostic report for solid waste management as well as an action plan for improving and financing low-carbon solid waste management services, including a pre-feasibility study.

Bogota, Colombia: Provide technical assistance for greenhouse gas and air quality analytics, city-wide coordination and recommendations to incorporate low-carbon and climate-resilient considerations in the Low-Carbon Vital Neighbourhoods in Bogota– the first pilot in Latin America to implement a "Proximity City Urban Development Model" (also known as the 15-minute city model).

Chefchaouen, Morocco: Prepare a study on low-carbon solid waste management activities including waste sorting, biogas recovery, leachate treatment and the use of solar energy.

Vinnytsia, Ukraine: Support climate change adaptation measures along the Southern Bug River, such as new green spaces along the embankments, development of beaches to improve river transport and the construction of a new bridge to improve walking routes north and south of the city.

Campinas, Sao Paulo State, Brazil: Promote climate change adaptation and reduce flood risks through nature-based solutions along the Capivari river.

Danané, Côte d'Ivoire: Support the deployment of a fleet of 600 low-carbon, low-cost solar tricycle taxis to meet the city's most pressing mobility needs for people, including expectant mothers, and cargo.

Escuintla, San José and Iztapa, Guatemala: Assess the quality of existing waste generation and characterisation data of municipal solid waste and make any necessary additions, compare organic solid waste treatment alternatives and suggest improvements to the existing organisational structure and governance.

Santa Marta, Colombia: Improve and enhance the city's urban forest and forest management, and identify funding opportunities at regional, national or international level as well as links to other potential natural infrastructure projects along Santa Marta's ecological corridors.

Rio de Janeiro, Brazil: Improve hydrological modelling to assess urban flood risks and economic modelling to assess the viability of restoring wetlands as a natural barrier in flood-prone areas and carry out stakeholder consultations.

Makindye Ssabagabo, Uganda: Study existing waste generation, carry out a characterisation study of municipal solid waste using random and seasonal data, and compare organic solid waste treatment alternatives.

Palembang, Musi Rawas and Lubuklinggau cities, Indonesia: Prepare a cost-benefit analysis, strategy and action plan for green, resilient construction and energy-efficient affordable housing in these three cities. Project would help inform the national Government One Million Housing program which aims to provide incentives for developers to build 220,000 homes per annum and to upgrade 160,000 affordable homes.

From <https://www.worldbank.org/> 09/23/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## **World Bank Launches Initiative to Issue USD 10 Billion in Sustainable Development Bonds while Highlighting the Urgency of Mainstreaming Climate Action**

The World Bank (International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, IBRD, AAA/Aaa) is raising awareness for the urgency to integrate climate change considerations in all activities and decisions. As part of a plan to issue USD 10 billion

in Sustainable Development Bonds, the World Bank will engage with investors to highlight the World Bank's holistic approach to mainstreaming climate action. As detailed in its newly updated Climate Change Action Plan, the World Bank helps countries integrate climate change into their development strategies and apply climate financing in ways that achieve the most positive impact. Applying a "whole of economy" approach with developing country clients helps the World Bank mainstream climate considerations across its portfolio, including in high emitting sectors as well as sectors not typically associated with climate action such as health, education, trade, and governance. "Left unchecked, climate change will push 130 million people into poverty over the next decade. We must mobilize everyone and everything we can to reverse today's climate trends and in doing so we need to support vulnerable communities and help them adapt," said Anshula Kant, World Bank Group Chief Financial Officer. "To achieve the scale necessary, we must go beyond just green projects to support the greening of entire economies. With investor engagement around our own issuance and climate strategy, we hope to illustrate to investors why a similar holistic approach is critical for the markets," she added.

In 2020, the World Bank provided more climate finance than ever. Over 90 percent of all IBRD projects had climate components, representing 33 percent of all commitments by value. Recognizing that communities in developing countries are often the most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change including droughts, floods and coastal erosion, the World Bank committed to deliver at least half of its climate funding for climate change adaptation, and help its members become more resilient. Jingdong Hua, Vice President and Treasurer, said, "World Bank Sustainable Development Bonds provide investors with an opportunity to support positive climate impacts in developing countries through a liquid investment with high-credit quality. As previous World Bank investors have done through Sustainable Development Bond themes such as Water & Oceans, Gender, Health and Nutrition, and Food Loss and Waste, their participation signals their commitment to meeting the world's challenges head-on. We are pleased to launch this initiative and look forward to engagement with investors ahead of COP26." World Bank Sustainable Development Bonds provide funding to World Bank projects and programs in its member countries, including those aimed at meeting the objectives of its Climate Change Action Plan. The World Bank leverages capital from member governments to raise funding in the capital markets from private entities such as asset managers, pension funds, bank treasuries and official institutions.

"While issuing Sustainable Development Bonds we highlight the next step of how we, as a lending institution, are making sure that all World Bank activities maximize climate change mitigation and adaptation efforts", said Bernice Van Bronkhorst, Global Director, Climate Change, World Bank. "In addition, the funds raised will then support the financing of the full range of the World Bank's development activities, which are also now aiming for greater climate impact. This is the kind of holistic approach that our recently announced Climate Change Action Plan is driving

forward.” With annual issuances between USD 50 – USD 60 billion, all World Bank bonds finance programs that support the Sustainable Development Goals. World Bank Sustainable Development Bonds are aligned with the sustainability bond guidelines published by the International Capital Markets Association (ICMA). A key priority for the World Bank’s engagement in the capital markets is to encourage investors take a comprehensive approach to mainstream climate and sustainability in all of their decision-making, while building strategic partnerships to raise awareness for the role of private sector financing in development.

From <https://www.worldbank.org/> 09/23/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## **Launch of OECD Business and Finance Outlook 2021**

The OECD Business and Finance Outlook 2021, the Organisation’s annual flagship publication providing data and analysis on the trends shaping business, finance and investment, will be released on Friday 24 September at 11.00 CEST (09.00 GMT). This year’s edition focuses on the potential and challenges of artificial intelligence (AI) applications for business and finance. It highlights the ways that AI is transforming market structures, business models and corporate behaviour, focusing on key policy areas such as finance, competition, responsible business conduct and security concerns related to foreign direct investment in AI. It also examines the supervisory technology tools that can help to ensure regulatory oversight, detection and enforcement by governments in these areas. A webinar to discuss the report’s findings will take place the same day at 15.15 CEST. Browse the agenda and register. Journalists will be allowed advance access to the electronic version of the report, by e-mail and under embargo. In asking to receive the report under embargo, journalists undertake to respect the OECD’s embargo procedures. Requests to receive the report by e-mail under embargo should be sent to [embargo@oecd.org](mailto:embargo@oecd.org). The report will be sent under embargo on Thursday 23 September. To get advance access to OECD reports, complete this short form. For further information, contact Spencer Wilson of the OECD Media Office (+33 1 45 24 81 18). Working with over 100 countries, the OECD is a global policy forum that promotes policies to preserve individual liberty and improve the economic and social well-being of people around the world.

From <https://www.oecd.org/> 09/24/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## **More Efforts Needed to Boost Trust in AI in the Financial Sector, Says OECD**

Governments, financial regulators and firms should step up their efforts to work together to address the challenges of developing and deploying trustworthy artificial intelligence (AI) in the financial sector, according to a new OECD report. The OECD Business and Finance Outlook 2021 says that investment in AI finance is on the rise.

The financial and insurance sector has consistently been within the top 10 industries in terms of the amount of VC investments in AI start-ups, investing over USD 4 billion worldwide in 2020. Almost 65% of VC investments in the sector went to American AI start-ups. As AI applications become increasingly integrated into business and finance, the use of trustworthy AI will become increasingly important for ensuring trustworthy financial markets, says the report. AI has the potential to facilitate transactions, enhance market efficiency, reinforce financial stability, promote greater financial inclusion and improve customer experience. But AI also raises unique challenges to privacy, autonomy, transparency and accountability, which are particularly complex in the financial sector, according to the Outlook.

Critically, increasingly complex AI algorithms that are difficult, or even impossible, to explain could amplify existing risks in financial markets or give rise to new risks. Transparency, fairness, data governance and accountability are key to managing risk as determinants of trustworthy AI. Failing to foster these qualities in AI systems could lead to the introduction of biases generating discriminatory and unfair results, market convergence and herding behaviour or the concentration of markets by dominant players, which can all undermine market integrity and stability. Existing financial regulations may fall short of addressing systemic risks presented by wide-scale adoption of AI-based FinTech by financial firms, says the report. These conditions have led to a critical juncture for the deployment of AI applications in business and finance, according to the Outlook. Financial regulators are grappling with whether and how to adapt existing rules, or create new ones, to keep pace with technological advances in AI applications, while striking the right balance between managing risks and supporting innovation.

At the international level, the OECD AI Principles, adopted in May 2019, became the first international standard agreed by governments for the responsible stewardship of trustworthy AI. The OECD, together with international partners working to support financial markets and financial sustainability, must reinforce efforts to facilitate multilateral engagement on implementing the Principles in the context of financial markets and other business sectors. The official launch of this year's Outlook takes place in a webinar today, 24 September, at 15.15 CEST. Browse the agenda and register. In recognition of the close links between AI and other transformative technologies, the launch of this year's Outlook takes place as part of the OECD's fourth annual Global Blockchain Policy Forum that runs until 1 October. For more information, journalists are invited to contact Spencer Wilson of the OECD Media Office (+ 33 1 45 24 81 18). Coopérant avec plus d'une centaine de pays, l'OCDE est un forum stratégique international qui s'emploie à promouvoir des politiques conçues pour préserver les libertés individuelles et améliorer le bien-être économique et social des populations dans le monde entier.

From <https://www.oecd.org/> 09/24/2021

[TOP ↑](#)



## **ADB Issues First Blue Bond for Ocean Investments**

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) today issued its first ever dual-tranche blue bonds denominated in Australian and New Zealand dollars that will finance ocean-related projects in Asia and the Pacific. The A\$208 million (around \$151 million) 15-year issue was purchased by The Dai-ichi Life Insurance Company and arranged by Citigroup Global Markets Limited. The NZ\$217 million (around \$151 million) 10-year issue was purchased by Meiji Yasuda Life Insurance Company and arranged by Credit Agricole CIB. The bonds were issued under ADB's expanded Green and Blue Bond Framework. "Having our first Australian dollar 15-year and New Zealand dollar 10-year blue bonds under ADB's Green and Blue Bond Framework is a new milestone for sustainable ocean finance. The tenor reflects the needs and our long-term support for the sector," said ADB Vice-President for Finance and Risk Management Ingrid van Wees. "With our framework, we set a new standard for blue financing in the market that can be replicated." The bonds are part of ADB's Action Plan for Healthy Oceans and Sustainable Blue Economies launched in 2019, which aims to catalyze sustainable investments in Asia and the Pacific by committing to invest and provide technical assistance of at least \$5 billion by 2024.

"The Action Plan for Healthy Oceans and Sustainable Blue Economies is a vital part of ADB's strategy to expand the necessary support for its developing member countries (DMCs) to invest in healthy oceans, ensure the achievement of SDG 14, and contribute to the security and prosperity of the region," said ADB Vice-President for Knowledge Management and Sustainable Development Bambang Susantono. Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 14 addresses "life below water" and is one of 17 SDGs established by the United Nations in 2015. The funding gap to support healthy oceans is getting wider every year and the scale of the problem requires a leap from small transactions to transformative market deals. Innovative financial products like blue bonds diversify and expand the investor base, thereby increasing the amount of capital that can be invested in ocean health. ADB's expanded Green and Blue Bond Framework has received a Second Party Opinion from the leading evaluator of green bond investment frameworks CICERO Shades of Green. This provides investors with confidence that ADB bonds are mitigating climate change and protecting ocean health.

An example of an eligible project that may be financed by the bond is the Greater Malé Waste-to-Energy Project in Maldives, which will stem the flow of plastics and other wastes to the ocean and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Another is the Anhui Huangshan Xin'an River Ecological Protection and Green Development Project in the People's Republic of China which will reduce non-point source pollution to the marine environment from "source to sea" by supporting green farming and controlling pesticide and fertilizer use. ADB's blue bonds are replicable, scalable, and aim to grow the ocean economy across Asia and the Pacific. The proceeds will finance projects that enhance ocean health through ecosystem restoration, natural

resources management, sustainable fisheries and aquaculture, reduction of coastal pollution, circular economy, marine renewable energy, and green ports and shipping. At the same time, these investments will support sustainable economic growth and jobs for the future. DMCs can adopt ADB's approach and issue sovereign blue bonds to finance important ocean health projects that will both protect vital ocean resources and provide a much-needed economic boost.

From <https://www.adb.org/> 09/10/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## **Manuela Ferro, World Bank Vice President for East Asia and Pacific**

Manuela V. Ferro, an economist and senior leader in the World Bank, is the new World Bank Vice President for East Asia and Pacific. Ms. Ferro brings over three decades of experience across Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, Africa and the Middle East, and South Asia and has held several leadership positions in the World Bank. As Vice President in charge of operational policies and country programs, her last senior leadership position, she oversaw the Bank's largest crisis response to the COVID-19 (Coronavirus) pandemic. As Director of Strategy and Operations for Latin America and the Caribbean, Ms. Ferro oversaw the Bank's operations in a large region of middle-income countries and small states, and as Director for Poverty Reduction and Economic Management she led the economic dialogue with the Middle East and North Africa.

Ms. Ferro will oversee the Bank's support to East Asia and the Pacific (EAP) for a sustainable and resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. While in 2020 many EAP countries successfully contained COVID-19, successive waves of the pandemic are slowing overall growth and job creation and widening inequality in 2021. "The World Bank has been a long-time partner in East Asia and Pacific and is committed to supporting the region's recovery at this critical time," said Manuela V. Ferro, World Bank Vice President for East Asia and Pacific. "As Vice President for East Asia and Pacific, I look forward to forging strong partnerships with countries and development partners." Ms. Ferro holds a Ph.D. in development economics from Stanford University and an engineering degree from the Technical University of Lisbon, Portugal. She is known for her strategic leadership, a track record of impactful country programs, and a history of forging productive partnerships with client countries and development partners. Ms. Ferro will manage Bank relations with 26 countries, over 1000 staff, and the World Bank's portfolio in East Asia and Pacific, totaling around US\$40 billion.

### World Bank Group COVID-19 Response:

Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, the World Bank Group has deployed over \$157 billion to fight the health, economic, and social impacts of the pandemic, the fastest and largest crisis response in its history. The financing is helping more than

100 countries around the world strengthen pandemic preparedness, protect the poor and jobs, and jump start a climate-friendly recovery. The Bank is also supporting over 50 low- and middle-income countries, more than half of which are in Africa, with the purchase and deployment of COVID-19 vaccines, and is making available \$20 billion in financing for this purpose until the end of 2022.

From <https://www.worldbank.org/> 09/16/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## **ADB Sells \$3 Billion 3-Year Global Benchmark Bond**

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) returned to the US dollar bond market with the pricing of a \$3 billion 3-year global bond, proceeds of which will be part of ADB's ordinary capital resources. "This 3-year transaction closes out a phenomenal year for ADB in the capital markets," said ADB Treasurer Pierre Van Peteghem. "Given the robust orderbook in excess of \$6.6 billion, final pricing was set 2 basis points inside initial price thoughts with a print size of \$3 billion that was in line with our remaining funding requirement from the US dollar global market for 2021." "Investor interest in our good work was as ever impressive, particularly amid lingering concerns over the COVID-19 pandemic. We thank ADB's global investors for their continued support of our mission and the financial assistance provided to our members during these turbulent times," Mr. Van Peteghem added. The 3-year bond, with a coupon rate of 0.625% per annum payable semi-annually and a maturity date of 8 October 2024, was priced at 99.946% to yield 9.1 basis points over the 0.375% US Treasury notes due September 2024. The transaction was lead-managed by BofA Securities, Morgan Stanley, Nomura, and RBC Capital Markets. A syndicate group was also formed consisting of BNP Paribas, CIBC Capital Markets, Scotiabank, and SEB. The issue achieved wide primary market distribution with 20% of the bonds placed in Asia; 44% in Europe, Middle East, and Africa; and 36% in the Americas. By investor type, 65% of the bonds went to central banks and official institutions, 24% to banks, and 11% to fund managers and other types of investors. ADB plans to raise around \$34 billion–\$36 billion from the capital markets in 2021.

From <https://www.adb.org/> 09/29/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## **East Asia**

### **CHINA: Stepping Up Fiscal Support for Yangtze River Economic Belt**

China will provide fiscal incentives to support the high-quality development of the Yangtze River Economic Belt, with funds set aside to finance green projects, the Ministry of Finance said Friday. According to the detailed plan released on its website, the ministry will increase transfer payments to key areas of ecological significance in the region, guide funds to support pollution control, and direct

investments from the National Green Development Fund into green projects in the region. The ministry also vowed to improve infrastructure in the region, and it plans on mobilizing investment from the central budget to finance local water conservancy and waterway construction projects. Local governments are encouraged to issue bonds for major public welfare projects under the premise that risks are under control, the ministry said.

It also voiced support for accelerated development of opening-up platforms and faster transition towards innovation-driven development in the region. The Yangtze River Economic Belt covers nine provinces and two municipalities, accounting for more than 40 percent of the country's population and economic aggregate. China's top leadership has called for efforts to turn the economic belt into the country's main focus for green development, the major artery for a smooth "dual circulation" of domestic and international markets, and the main force spearheading high-quality economic development.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 09/03/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## **Financial Risks Generally Controllable in China: Central Bank Report**

Overall financial risks in China have decreased and are generally controllable as regulatory measures take hold, according to an annual report released by the People's Bank of China. The report, which assessed the stability of China's financial system since 2020, pointed out that the continued rapid expansion of the country's macro leverage ratio was curbed effectively, various high-risk institutions dealt with in an orderly manner, and risks related to shadow banking reduced. Financial order was restored comprehensively during the period, the report noted. Businesses of peer-to-peer (P2P) lenders have all been shut down as a result of regulatory crackdown on the sector, where investors sidestep traditional lenders such as banks to lend directly to borrowers. Illegal fund-raising, cross-border gambling, underground banks and other illegal financial activities were curbed. Progress has been made in forestalling risks related to private equity funds and financial assets trading venues, while regulation of large fintech firms was strengthened, according to the report. Solid efforts should be made to advance reform of small and medium financial institutions to defuse risks and lower credit risks, as well as ensure the stable operation of stock, bond and foreign exchange markets and prevent the impact of external risks, said the report.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 09/05/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## **China to Strengthen Digital Taxation, Global Tax Cooperation: Official**

China will step up efforts to advance the intelligent upgrade of taxation, and contribute to global cooperation in the sector, an official said. China has outlined its road map to establish intelligent taxation in the 14th Five-Year Plan period (2021-2025), Wang Jun, head of the State Taxation Administration, said at the opening ceremony of the second conference of the Belt and Road Initiative Tax Administration Cooperation Forum (BRITACOF) on Tuesday. Wang, also the first chair of the Belt and Road Initiative Tax Administration Cooperation Mechanism (BRITACOM) Council, noted the use of e-invoices and big data technology in the digitalization of taxation. The BRITACOM is a non-profit official mechanism for tax administration cooperation amongst the jurisdictions that subscribe to the Belt and Road Initiative, aiming to promote trade and investment liberalization and facilitation in member countries by strengthening tax administration cooperation.

Under joint efforts, the BRITACOM has seen a continued expansion since it was set up two years ago, Wang said. Now it consists of 36 council member tax administrations and 30 observers. To get on board the digitalization of taxation, China has been working on promoting the application of new technologies, according to Wang. Looking ahead, Wang called for more international exchanges, training courses, and a global cooperation mechanism to boost information-based taxation. Themed "Digitalization of Tax Administration", the three-day conference has attracted representatives of 61 countries and regions such as Kazakhstan, Russia, United Arab Emirates and 12 international organizations. The first conference of BRITACOF was convened in Wuzhen, east China's Zhejiang Province in April, 2019.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 09/08/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## **China's Central Bank's Lending Quota Grows by 300 Bln Yuan to Support Small Businesses**

The People's Bank of China (PBOC) raised the quota of special central bank lending by 300 billion yuan (46.44 billion U.S. dollars) to provide stronger support for micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) facing difficulties. The funds released will be channeled to eligible locally incorporated banks at preferential interest rates over the next four months. In turn, this will encourage the banks to issue more loans to micro and small businesses (MSBs) and self-employed businesses at rates around 5.5 percent on average, thus pushing down the financing costs of MSBs, said the PBOC in a statement. The 300 billion yuan central bank lending will be given in a reimbursement approach. The locally incorporated banks issue loans to MSBs and self-employed businesses before applying for the equivalent amount of this special central bank lending. In this way, the central bank lending policy will be targeted, providing direct support. Central bank lending in support of MSMEs, such as with this special monetary tool designed by the PBOC to support financial institutions to issue MSB loans, has yielded positive results in recent years. Moving forward, the PBOC

will urge all its branches to ensure proper implementation of the special central bank lending and guide the expansion of credit issuance for MSBs. As a result, the statement added that this would fully leverage the positive role of monetary policy tools in stabilizing businesses and securing employment.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 09/12/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## **SOUTH KOREA: To Spend 95 Bln Won on Research of Carbon-Reduction Technologies**

South Korea's industry ministry said Thursday it plans to spend 95 billion won (US\$81.5 million) to develop new solutions to cut the emission of carbon at local factories, in line with the country's vision to go carbon neutral by 2050. The budget will be allocated to research projects for the so-called carbon dioxide capture, utilization and storage (CCUS) technology through 2025, according to the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy. The technology is applied to capture carbon dioxide from factories and plants before it is released into the air, and it is later stored or used in other industries. South Korea said it plans to first find ways to capture carbon dioxide from the cement and petrochemical industries, along with liquefied natural gas plants. The projects also include developing solutions to store carbon dioxide indefinitely. The ministry plans to select institutions that will carry out the research projects in October. South Korea has been making efforts to cut the emission of carbon while promoting the use of sustainable resources, such as hydrogen, as carbon neutrality has emerged as a global agenda item for fighting climate change since the Paris climate accord went into effect in 2016.

From <https://en.yna.co.kr> 09/09/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## **Uncertainty Lingers Over Private Spending Recovery Ministry**

The South Korean economy is facing continued uncertainty about the recovery of domestic demand as the latest resurgence in COVID-19 cases is denting person-to-person service sectors, the finance ministry said Friday. In its monthly economic assessment report, the ministry said the country's exports have extended solid growth momentum and the job market has improved despite the fourth wave of the pandemic. "But uncertainty over domestic demand has continued, centering on face-to-face service segments," the Ministry of Economy and Finance said in the Green Book. The fourth wave of the pandemic and the toughest-ever virus curbs are feared to dampen improving private spending, potentially sapping economic recovery momentum. For about two months, the greater Seoul area, home to half of the country's population of 52 million, has been under the toughest social distancing rules, which include business restrictions and a ban on private gatherings of three or more people after 6 p.m.

The number of daily virus cases exceeded 1,000 for the 73rd straight day, with the country adding 2,008 new COVID-19 cases Friday, raising the total to 281,938. The finance ministry earlier said card spending did not decline amid the current wave of the pandemic in stark contrast from consumption patterns shown during previous flare-ups in virus cases. Credit card spending grew 7.9 percent on-year last month, marking the seventh straight month of gains. Sales at department stores increased 14.4 percent. But domestic sales of automobiles fell 7.1 percent on-year, marking the sixth consecutive month of declines, and sales at discount stores slid 2.5 percent in August. Finance Minister Hong Nam-ki said the potential economic fallout of the current wave of the pandemic will be "inevitable" starting in August. The government expected Asia's fourth-largest economy to grow 4.2 percent this year. The Bank of Korea forecast economic growth of 4 percent.

From <https://en.yna.co.kr> 09/17/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## **S. Korea to Invest 42.4 Bln Won in Hydrogen Tram Tech**

South Korea said Thursday it plans to invest 42.4 billion won (US\$35.8 million) through 2023 to develop core technologies for hydrogen-powered trams. The budget will also be spent to find ways to modify hydrogen fuel cells used by Hyundai Motor Co.'s Nexo SUVs and use them in trams, according to the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy. Hydrogen trams, which run on fuel cells, are considered to be more price-competitive over conventional public transportation, such as subways, as they do not need massive power infrastructure. The global market for hydrogen-powered trains is expected to reach 18 trillion won in 2050, significantly rising from 700 billion won estimated for 2025, according to the ministry. The ministry said it plans to develop hydrogen fuel cells with a capacity of 380 kilowatts, whose performance is equal to around four units of Nexo SUV. South Korea will also build a hydrogen charging station for trams by 2022 and launch a test run in the southeastern port city of Ulsan. The mass production of hydrogen trams is expected to begin in 2024, with the country seeking to export them to Southeast Asian and European countries as well. South Korea has been promoting the so-called hydrogen economy, with the government making efforts to apply the resource in various fields ranging from transport to energy storage in line with its goal to go carbon neutral by 2050.

From <https://en.yna.co.kr> 09/23/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## **S. Korea to Increase Support of Startups' Overseas Expansion**

South Korea said Monday it plans to increase support for overseas expansion by startups and smaller firms as part of efforts to strengthen its ties with Southeastern Asian countries and nations in Eurasia. The government plans to further promote economic cooperation with the 10-member states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and Europe based on the outcome of summit diplomacy with

such nations, according to the Ministry of Economy and Finance. The country will pursue cooperative projects for venture firms in the green energy and digital fields through policy dialogue channels with the ASEAN and Europe. The government will pick more than 100 promising startups every year to support their global outreach in specialized sectors, including fintech and cultural contents. It also plans to further create funds with Singapore and Vietnam to back smaller companies' overseas forays. The move is part of the Moon Jae-in administration's efforts to implement its signature New Southern Policy and New Northern Policy. The New Southern Policy is aimed at strengthening Seoul's strategic ties with the ASEAN. India is another key partner in the drive. The New Northern Policy is designed to improve South Korea's partnerships with Russia and other countries located north of the peninsula.

From <https://en.yna.co.kr> 09/27/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## **S. Korea's Monetary Policy Still Considered Accommodative BOK Board Member**

South Korea's monetary policy is considered still loose although the Bank of Korea delivered its first pandemic-era rate hike in August, a member of the BOK's rate-setting board said Wednesday. The remarks by Suh Young-kyung are expected to reinforce market expectations that the central bank may again raise its key rate later this year or early next year. "In spite of a hike in the key rate in August, the current monetary policy is still loose," Suh told a forum in Seoul. The BOK must address concerns about a buildup of financial imbalances even though inflation has been kept below its target of 2 percent, Suh said. In August, the BOK raised the key rate by 0.25 percentage point to tackle rising inflation and rein in surging household debts, ending 15 months of record low interest rates amid signs of improvements. It marked the first rate increase since May last year, when the BOK cut the key rate to a record low of 0.5 percent. Earlier this month, the BOK said it will gradually adjust its monetary easing as it seeks to meet its inflation target of 2 percent for this year amid signs of a robust recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the BOK said the timing of another rate hike will depend on a resurgence of COVID-19 infections and risks of financial imbalances.

From <https://en.yna.co.kr> 09/29/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## **South-East Asia**

### **INDONESIA: Parliament Approves Government's 2022 Budget**

The Indonesian parliament on Tuesday approved the government's spending budget of 2,714.15 trillion rupiahs (about 190 billion U.S. dollars) for 2022, a legislator said. The approved target is slightly higher than the earlier proposed budget of 2,708.68 trillion rupiahs (189.60 billion dollars), Bobby Adhityo Rizaldi, a member of the



parliament's budget committee, said during a hearing at the House of Representatives in Jakarta on Tuesday. Furthermore, the updated budget is also higher than this year's budget outlook of around 2,697 trillion rupiahs (188.79 billion dollars). Next year's budget consists of 1,944.54 trillion rupiahs (136.11 billion dollars) allocated for the central government spending and 769.61 trillion rupiahs (53.87 billion dollars) for the regional administration spending. "The committee has also agreed that next year's economic growth projection was set at 5.2 percent," said Rizaldi. During the hearing, the committee also approved next year's national revenue target at approximately 1,846 trillion rupiahs (around 129.22 billion dollars). Therefore, both legislators and the central government agreed and set a fiscal deficit target of 868 trillion rupiahs (60.78 billion dollars) for 2022, roughly 4.85 percent of the country's gross domestic product.

*From <http://www.xinhuanet.com> 09/28/2021*

[TOP ↑](#)

## **CAMBODIA: ADB Approves 82 Mln Usd Loan for Improving Roads Along GMS Economic Corridors**

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has approved a loan of 82 million U.S. dollars to Cambodia for improving 48 km of roads in Prey Veng and Kandal provinces to boost economic development along the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) Southern Economic Corridor, the ADB said in a statement on Wednesday. The new assistance is the second phase of the Road Network Improvement Project series, which aims to strengthen Cambodia's link with Vietnam and support the development of cross-border facilities in the two provinces, it said. It added that the new upgrade will use disaster- and climate-resilient design and help the Ministry of Public Works and Transport better manage roads by reducing vehicle overloading, which often damages roads and leads to premature repairs. ADB transport specialist Mohammad Nazrul Islam said road transport is the primary means of moving goods and people in Cambodia and between GMS countries.

"The project will expand access to education, health, and other public services among local communities, especially poor, rural residents," he said. "It will also better connect them to markets and economic opportunities through a more efficient, safe, and climate-resilient road network connecting Cambodia with Vietnam along the GMS Southern Economic Corridor." Cambodia's economy grew 7.8 percent a year on average from 1998-2019, but suffered a 3.1 percent contraction in 2020 because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the statement said. It added that the country's transport sector faces challenges, including insufficient infrastructure investment and sustainability, and most of Cambodia's rural roads and provincial roads are unpaved, as its national roads have limited capacity. To address these challenges, the Cambodian government has developed a national plan to build high-quality, sustainable, and climate-resilient infrastructure that can accommodate the country's population and employment growth by 2030, the statement said, adding that the

roads under the project are included in the project list of the master plan. The first phase of the project, which was approved by ADB in 2017, covers 147 km of national roads in the provinces of Prey Veng, Siem Reap, and Svay Rieng along the GMS Southern Economic Corridor.

*From <http://www.xinhuanet.com> 09/29/2021*

[TOP ↑](#)

## **PHILIPPINES: To Secure More Loans to Support Covid-19 Response**

The Philippines will continue its money borrowings this year and in 2022 to support its COVID-19 response measures and economic recovery program amid the pandemic, Finance Secretary Carlos Dominguez said on Monday. "We will continue with our sustainable and prudent borrowing to fund both economic investments and the pandemic response," Dominguez told legislators during Monday's briefing before the House of Representatives committee on ways and means, stressing the country's indebtedness stays "within the prescribed bounds of fiscal viability." Dominguez explained that the incurring debt during the pandemic helps generate a higher level of economic activity needed to keep the economy afloat. However, he stressed the need to use the borrowings prudently. "We should use them to beef up our health requirements and to generate productive economic activity. If we do not do these things, the economy will collapse even further. We have to spend wisely," Dominguez told the committee.

The Philippines' debts ballooned to 11.61 trillion pesos (roughly 232 billion U.S. dollars) at the end of July 2021, according to data by Bureau of the Treasury of the Philippines. The House committee held the briefing for deliberating on several bills seeking the creation of an oversight body to monitor and oversee the government's borrowings and indebtedness. The coronavirus epidemic has necessitated additional spendings to reinforce the country's health system, purchase medical equipment, and procure vaccines, Dominguez said, adding this has temporarily brought the deficit level to 7.6 percent last year, or almost double the threshold that the government tried to maintain. Dominguez stressed that the 15-percentage point increase in the debt-to-GDP ratio from 39.6 percent in 2019 to 54.6 percent in 2020 "is still within the prescribed bounds of fiscal viability." The Philippines is grappling with a surge of COVID-19 infections fueled by the highly infectious Delta variant. The Southeast Asian country now has reported over 2.1 million confirmed cases of COVID-19, including 34,337 deaths.

*From <http://www.xinhuanet.com> 09/06/2021*

[TOP ↑](#)

## **Philippines Posts 1.04 Bln USD Balance of Payments Surplus in August**

The Philippines posted a surplus of 1.04 billion U.S. dollars in overall balance of payments (BOP) in August, higher than the 657 million dollar BOP surplus recorded a year earlier, Philippine central bank data showed. The Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP) attributed the surplus to the additional allocation of special drawing rights to the Philippines, given the International Monetary Fund's efforts to increase global liquidity amid the pandemic and the BSP's income from its investments abroad. However, the BSP said this surplus was partly offset by the national government's foreign currency withdrawals from its deposits with the BSP as it settled its foreign currency debt obligations and paid for various expenditures and the BSP's net foreign exchange operations. "The BOP surplus in August reduced the cumulative BOP deficit in January-August 2021 to 253 million U.S. dollars from a deficit of 1.3 billion U.S. dollars in the first seven months of the year," the BSP said in a statement released Thursday. Notwithstanding, the BSP said the current year-to-date BOP level reverses the 4.77 billion dollar surplus recorded in the same period a year ago. "Based on preliminary data, this cumulative BOP deficit was partly attributed to a wider merchandise trade deficit and lower net foreign borrowings by the national government compared to the same period last year," the BSP said. The BSP said the BOP position reflects an increase in the final gross international reserves level to 107.96 billion dollars as of end-August 2021 from 107.15 billion dollars as of end-July 2021.

*From <http://www.xinhuanet.com> 09/24/2021*

[TOP ↑](#)

## **THAILAND: Central Bank Holds Policy Rate Steady to Support Economic Recovery**

Thailand's central bank on Wednesday maintained its key interest rate at a low level again amid efforts to promote economic recovery. The Bank of Thailand Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) held the policy rate unchanged at 0.5 percent, for the 11th straight meeting and since May 2020, citing high uncertainties of the economic outlook. The MPC maintained its growth forecast for the economy at 0.7 percent this year, but raised that for 2022 to 3.9 percent from the projection of 3.7 percent it made in August. Although the economy in the third quarter of 2021 was affected by pandemic control measures and a slowdown in exports, progress on vaccination and earlier-than-expected easing of restrictions would help restore private sector confidence and boost private consumption for the rest of 2021, said Titanun Mallikamas, secretary of the MPC. Titanun said the MPC would continue to put emphasis on supporting the economic recovery, and stand ready to use additional appropriate monetary policy tools if necessary. Thailand on Wednesday reported 10,414 new COVID-19 cases and 122 more deaths, taking the total number of infections to nearly 1.6 million and the death toll to 16,620 since the pandemic began, according to the Center for COVID-19 Situation Administration (CCSA), the country's COVID-19 task force. On Monday, the CCSA approved a package of measures to ease restrictions, including shortening the mandatory quarantine period for those

who arriving from Oct. 1 and allowing more businesses and venues to reopen in 29 regions under the maximum control, including the capital Bangkok.

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[TOP ↑](#)

## **VIETNAM: Finance Minister Affirms State Budget Sufficiency**

Finance Minister Hồ Đức Phớc has affirmed that the State budget is enough for expenditures planned by the National Assembly (NA) and the Prime Minister. Answering reporters' queries about the State budget situation amid the pandemic at present, Phớc said following the Prime Minister's directions, ministries, agencies and localities saved at least half of the cost of conferences and working trips at home and abroad, and 10 per cent of other regular expenditures this year to supplement financial resources for the COVID-19 fight and other necessary tasks. So far, about VNĐ14.62 trillion (US\$635 million) from regular expenditures have been saved. The finance ministry suggested the PM submit a proposal to the NA Standing Committee on using the saved sum to add to the central budget reserve fund 2021 and provide for ministries, agencies and localities to fight the pandemic in the most effective manner. According to the minister, up to VNĐ21.4 trillion from the State budget has been used for anti-pandemic efforts. Meanwhile, the national COVID-19 vaccine fund has raised nearly VNĐ8.7 trillion. The ministry also proposed measures to support firms such as extending deadlines for payment of added value, corporate and individual income taxes, and land lease this year; reducing telecom and electricity bills, bank interest rates, and environment protection taxes. It also suggested the Government issue the aid package worth VNĐ26 trillion for employers and employees who meet difficulties amid the pandemic. Phớc added that the ministry will continue recommending measures to the Government and the legislature to increase budget saving, as well as ensure spendings for pandemic combat and social welfare for residents, contributing to rapid economic recovery and development.

From <https://vietnamnews.vn> 09/20/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## **Banks to Lend \$4.3 Billion Preferential Interest Rate Loans**

Banks will lend more than VNĐ100 trillion (US\$4.3 billion) with preferential interest rates of 3-4 per cent per year to support the economy, according to Nguyễn Tuấn Anh, director of State Bank of Vietnam (SBV)'s Credit Department of Economic Sectors. The rate cut is estimated to be worth VNĐ3 trillion, Anh said at a preferential interest rate event held last week by Vietnam Economic Review. In addition to this support package, the banking industry has also implemented many other support policies for firms and individuals, Anh said, adding the banking industry had restructured VNĐ520 trillion in loans for borrowers and cut interest rates of VNĐ16 trillion since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. "The very large number has

shown the banking industry has tried its best in recent times to share difficulties with firms and people during the pandemic," Anh noted. However, expert Lê Xuân Nghĩa said the VNĐ3 trillion rate support package is too small to create a rebound for the economy to recover. Therefore, he said, the size of the aid package should be larger. Nghĩa suggested the central bank should use its monetary policies to cut rates by some 1 per cent per year besides another stimulus package with an interest rate reduction of roughly 2-3 per cent per year. He expected the measures would create a stronger interest rate reduction effect for businesses.

The support packages should be widely applied for all industries and businesses with simpler procedures. Accordingly, businesses that have faced difficulties, reduced revenue, had negative profits and had no collateral, can also access the support packages, Nghĩa said. Besides, Nghĩa also proposed the Ministry of Finance consider the issuance of bonds to borrow from people or the central bank. He estimated the central bank's foreign currency reserves are now very large, about four times higher than that in 2009. Regarding credit growth, SBV's Anh said the banking industry has been actively boosting lending in the past two months, but credit demand is still weak due to the impact of the pandemic. He expected credit would increase more rapidly after the social distancing measures are removed. According to the SBV, credit by the end of last month increased by 7.18 per cent compared to the beginning of this year, and is expected to reach 12 per cent for the whole year. Anh affirmed that banks haven't tightened lending, but created favourable conditions for firms to access bank loans. "The credit growth target this year is 12 per cent, but if necessary, the rate can be adjusted to create favourable conditions for firms," Anh said.

*From <https://vietnamnews.vn> 09/27/2021*

[TOP ↑](#)

## **HCM City Wants Tax Reduction for COVID-Affected Businesses**

The HCM City People's Committee has made several suggestions for a Ministry of Finance decree to support businesses and individuals affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, including ensuring bank lending rates are no more than 2 per cent higher than deposit interest rates. In a document it sent to the Government, it also suggested reducing corporate income tax, value added tax and land rents, extending tax payment deadlines and subsidising interest. It called for cutting corporate income tax by 50 per cent for businesses with annual revenues of less than VNĐ200 billion (US\$8.8 million) this year and by 30 per cent for 2022 and 2023. It said the costs of testing workers, medical treatment, food and living costs, and personal protective equipment such as masks should be tax deductible. It called for waiving income tax, value added tax, natural resources tax, and environmental protection tax on household and individual businesses in the second half of 2021 and the next two years, and income tax for some employees. It sought a halving of value added tax for the last three months of this year and the next two years. The deadline for filing tax

should be extended until the second quarter of next year without penalty for late payment, it said. It suggested that the land rent payable should be cut by 50 per cent for all businesses this year, and fully waived for tourism and related businesses. Procedures to borrow from banks and rolling over debts should be simplified, it added.

*From <https://vietnamnews.vn/> 09/28/2021*

[TOP ↑](#)

## Central-West Asia

### **AZERBAIJAN: Detecting New Methods of Bank Fraud – ABA**

New methods of fraud have been detected in Azerbaijan, Trend reports, referring to the Association of Banks of Azerbaijan (ABA). Fraudsters, on behalf of the Association or banking organizations, request payment information from bank card holders (card data, phone numbers, confirmation codes, etc.). "Despite various measures taken in this direction, in context of the development of digital payments, in particular, the growth of e-commerce turnover, new methods of fraud have been used in Azerbaijan," the ABA said in a statement. "Neither the Association nor the banking structures make such phone calls. If you face such a situation, it is recommended not to provide your card details and contact your bank immediately," the statement said.

*From <https://www.azernews.az/> 09/28/2021*

[TOP ↑](#)

### **UZBEKISTAN: Public Debt Increases**

Uzbekistan's public debt amounted to \$24.2 billion or 38.5 percent of GDP as of July 1, Trend reports citing Ministry of Finance. According to the Ministry of Finance, the state external debt compared to the previous quarter increased by about \$800 million and amounted to \$21.8 billion (34.7 percent of GDP). At the same time, the debt raised on behalf of the government is \$15.4 billion and under the guarantee of Uzbekistan - \$6.4 billion. The state domestic debt increased by \$200 million and amounted to \$2.4 billion (3.8 percent of GDP). The domestic debt under state guarantees is \$2.1 billion. As a result, the balance of external debt attracted by Uzbekistan increased by \$363.4 million, and by \$319.1 million under the guarantee of the state. The main creditors of Uzbekistan were the Asian Development Bank - \$5 billion, the World Bank - \$3.8 billion, the State Development Bank of China and others - \$2.2 billion. The foreign currency structure of external debt is mostly accounted for by the US dollar - 70.3 percent, the Japanese yen - 11.7 percent, and in the form of special drawing rights (SDR) - 9.2 percent.

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

[TOP ↑](#)

## Uzbekistan's External Debt Hits New Record

The volume of the total external debt of Uzbekistan as of July 1, 2021, for the first time reached \$35.9 billion, an increase in six months by 6 percent, or by \$2 billion, Trend reports citing Central Bank. This amounts to about 57 percent of GDP. Total external debt includes government and external public debt, as well as private sector debt. In the first half of the year, public sector debt increased by \$627.9 million (+ 3 percent) and amounted to \$22 billion. The growth is explained by the attraction of new external borrowings and payments on them, as well as the decline in the prices of bonds placed on the international financial markets and changes in rates. Private sector debt increased by \$1.4 billion (+ 11 percent), mainly due to increased borrowing by banks and other sectors. In just six months, the public sector attracted loans totaling \$1.2 billion, and the private sector - for \$3.2 billion. Borrowing was mainly carried out by banks - \$1.6 billion. including the oil and gas and energy sector which attracted \$379 million and enterprises from other sectors of the economy - \$1.2 billion.

At the same time, the main reason for the significant growth in the "other sectors" component compared to last year is the issuance and placement of UzAuto Motors securities in the international financial markets with a par value of \$300 million at 4.85 percent for a period of 5 years. Following the results of six months, the state debt was repaid for \$429 million: \$353.4 million for the principal debt and \$206.5 million for interest. Payments on private external debt amounted to \$1.6 billion in principal and \$238.8 million in interest. Deputy Finance Minister Akhadbek Khaidarov noted that after a sharp increase in state budget expenditures due to the crisis in 2020, it is now planned to reduce the indicator to the pre-crisis level - to 27 percent of GDP. In addition, in the coming years, the government plans to keep the level of public debt at around 50 percent, and the budget deficit at around 2 percent.

From <https://en.trend.az> 09/23/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## Oceania

### AUSTRALIA: Economists Expect Spike in Jobless Rate

Economists expect the unemployment rate could spike to five per cent when August job figures are released, reflecting the impact of having half the population in COVID-19 lockdown. If correct, it will end the impressive decline in the jobless rate to a 13-year low of 4.6 per cent in July, after hitting 7.4 per cent during the depths of last year's recession. Reserve Bank governor Philip Lowe warned this week that the unemployment rate could hit the "high fives" for a short period of time with the economy expected to contract by at least two per cent in the September quarter. But he also conceded the jobs figures will be difficult to interpret over coming months, and hours worked, rather than headcount, may be a better guide to the health of the

labour market. He said with the labour market having been tightening before the latest virus outbreak with reports of skill shortages, it is creating a strong incentive for businesses to keep employees on their books.

"It doesn't make sense to let workers go, only to have trouble hiring when restrictions are eased," Dr Lowe said in a speech. The fall in the unemployment rate to 4.6 per cent in July was unexpected, but was distorted by large changes in the NSW and Victorian labour markets, the nation's most populous states. While there was a large drop in employment and hours worked in NSW, this was offset by an increase in jobs and hours worked in Victoria, which was reopening from a previous lockdown at the time. The unemployment rate was also dragged down by a fall in the participation rate of those in or seeking employment. As such, while economists' forecasts centre on a rise in the jobless rate to five per cent in Thursday's labour force report for August, given the uncertainty surrounding the result, predictions range from a rise to 4.8 per cent to a jump to 5.5 per cent.

The number of people employed is also expected to drop by 100,000 in August, but again forecasts range from a 50,000 decline to a 300,000 slump. Shadow treasurer Jim Chalmers believes much of this economic damage could have been avoided. He will tell the Business Council of Australia in a speech on Thursday it's not about being "heroes of hindsight" - as Prime Minister Scott Morrison has described it - but about "failures of foresight". "An inability to anticipate the obvious," Dr Chalmers will say. "Because amidst all these ups and downs of the last two years one thing has been certain - the recovery has always been hostage to federal government responsibilities like vaccinations and quarantine."

From <https://au.news.yahoo.com> 09/16/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## **Resource Export Earnings on Way to \$350b**

Australia's resources and energy exports are forecast to earn a record \$349 billion for 2021/22, despite lower iron ore prices and the global disruption caused by COVID-19. The latest federal industry department's Resources and Energy Quarterly report found high commodity prices, solid growth in export volumes and a weaker Australian dollar are driving a surge in export earnings. It forecasts overall export earnings to hit \$349 billion in 2021/22, before dropping to around \$299 billion in 2022/23. The previous financial year set a record \$310 billion in total export earnings. "The sector has gone from strength to strength and is performing better than it was pre-pandemic, further building on Australia's reputation as a reliable and stable supplier of resources and energy," Resources Minister Keith Pitt said. The report noted Australia overtook China as the world's largest gold-producing country in the first half of 2021, with earnings forecast at \$29 billion in 2021/22, before easing to \$27 billion in 2022/23.



Iron ore export earnings are forecast to drop from \$153 billion in 2020/21 to \$132 billion in 2021/22, due to lower world prices. But export volumes of iron ore are expected to grow from 868 million tonnes to 939 million tonnes by 2022/23. Coal prices have more than recovered all of their 2020 losses on the back of global shortages. Supply problems and surging demand from steel producers have seen Australian metallurgical coal prices hit multi-year highs. Exports of metallurgical coal are forecast to hit 186 million tonnes by 2022/23, with revenue forecast to rebound from \$23 billion in 2020/21 to \$33 billion in 2021/22. Thermal coal export values are forecast to rise from \$16 billion in 2020/21 to \$24 billion in 2021/22, before easing to \$19 billion in 2022/23. LNG export earnings are forecast to hit \$56 billion in 2021/22.

From <https://au.news.yahoo.com> 09/29/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## **Strong Recovery Helped 2020/21 Budget**

The final outcome for the federal budget in the 2020/21 financial year was an underlying deficit of \$134.2 billion, Treasurer Josh Frydenberg says. This compares with a forecast \$161 billion deficit made at the time of the May budget. "What is driving this improvement to the budget bottom line is more people in work and less people on welfare," Mr Frydenberg told reporters in Canberra on Thursday via video link. Since the May budget, the unemployment rate has fallen below five per cent for the first time in a decade. "We recognise that since this final budget outcome, the economy has been hit by the Delta variant," the treasurer said. "But with the vaccination rates fast approaching the 70 and 80 per cent targets, restrictions will be eased, and what these numbers confirm is that when restrictions are eased, the Australian economy bounces back." The improvement in the budget position consisted of \$20.1 billion in higher receipts and \$6.7 billion in lower payments. Mr Frydenberg said the improvement in receipts was driven by higher tax receipts on the back of a stronger labour market, increased consumer spending and higher commodity prices. "Our effective fiscal management has been endorsed recently by comments by the IMF and the OECD and Australia retaining its AAA credit rating from the three leading credit rating agencies," he said.

From <https://au.news.yahoo.com> 09/30/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## **NEW ZEALAND: More Financial Support for Businesses**

Today's decision to keep Auckland in a higher COVID Alert Level triggers a third round of the Wage Subsidy Scheme which will open for applications at 9am this Friday. "The revenue test period for this payment will be the 14th to the 27th of September. A reminder that this is available for those in Auckland, but also those around the country who can establish that their revenue loss is a result of Alert Level 3 or 4 in Auckland," Grant Robertson said. Friday is also when eligible businesses can apply for another Resurgence Support Payment (RSP) to help them pay their

rent and other fixed costs. This is available to all businesses that can show a 30 percent drop in revenue while anywhere in the country is at Alert Level 2. “The RSP was originally intended to be a one-off payment, but after consultation with our business community we have agreed to make it a three-weekly payment – in recognition of the challenges businesses are facing,” Grant Robertson said.

“I know it is tough to go through a second Alert Level 4 lockdown in New Zealand when we have been enjoying a restriction-free lifestyle for so much longer than our international counterparts. “It’s partly for that reason that we are actually providing more support to businesses in this current lock down than we did when we last had level 4 restrictions. “Over a month in alert level 4 last year an eligible business with 10 employees would have received about \$23,000 in support, whereas this outbreak it will be about \$35,000 for the same sized firm. “So far this outbreak the Government has paid out almost \$1.8 billion in wage subsidies and \$531 million in Resurgence Support Payments. “The economy is operating above pre-COVID levels thanks to our strong public health response. These principles will continue to guide our approach to supporting the economy, businesses and workers at this challenging time,” Grant Robertson said.

“The Ministry of Social Development are doing a great job of administering the wage subsidy and have approved over 427,000 applications from employees and sole traders,” Carmel Sepuloni said. “Ninety-one percent of approved applications are paid within three working days. The applications taking longer are largely sole traders. The reason for this is mostly due to data in the application not matching with data held by Inland Revenue. “MSD is working with applicants and Inland Revenue on resolving these as quickly as possible. This includes calling an average of 7,000 applicants a day to check information and working with them to make the changes needed to get their application processed. “Over 25,000 delayed applications for the initial wage subsidy have been processed over the past week. “It is really important that businesses make sure the details they provide MSD match the details held on their business by Inland Revenue. This small check will mean they receive support as quickly as possible,” Carmel Sepuloni said.

From <https://livenews.co.nz> 09/13/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## **Power Bill Changes Bring Fairness to Charges**

A key recommendation of an independent panel to make electricity charges fairer across all households will be put in place, the Energy and Resources Minister Megan Woods has announced. “Phasing out the regulations on ‘low-use’ electricity plans will create a fairer playing field for all New Zealanders and encourage a switch to electric technologies,” Megan Woods said. The regulations will be phased-out over five years, starting from 1 April, 2022, with support for households who might be affected by the changes. Currently, the cost of delivering electricity through lines charges to those on

low-use plans is supplemented by other households on standard-use plans. The 2019 Electricity Price Review panel found the low fixed charge regulations are poorly targeted and are not equitable – or fair to everybody – and recommended the change. During the phase-out, about 60 per cent of households are likely to benefit from lower power bills.

“While the low fixed charge regulations were intended to help some struggling households, they can put more of a financial burden on those who don’t qualify for low fixed charges, particularly larger families and those living in poorly insulated homes who have higher electricity needs and have to pay the much higher standard fixed charge,” Megan Woods said.

About 59 per cent of households are now on low fixed charge plans, so that means those on standard-use plans are charged more to make up for the under-recovery of fixed charges from those on the lower rates. This change will mean the sector can implement new, fairer pricing plans for distributing electricity. “Ultimately, this will help the industry to more efficiently manage the load on the network during peak times, avoiding costly network upgrades and helping to keep prices lower for consumers,” Megan Woods said. Minister Woods says there are some perverse outcomes from low fixed charge regulations.

“Wealthier households with low fixed charges have more options to reduce their power use through energy-saving measures like double glazing, smart appliances and solar panels. “But low-use households who are also low-income households can under-heat their homes to save on power bills because their variable rates on electricity use are high,” Megan Woods said. “High variable rates also discourage households from switching from higher carbon technologies like gas heating, to low carbon technologies like EVs and heat pumps. “Cleaner, low emissions technologies are important for achieving our goals to have net zero carbon by 2050. We need regulations that make it easier for people to switch from fossil fuels to electric alternatives, not harder,” Megan Woods said. The electricity sector is developing a \$5 million power credits scheme to help with the transition for some households on low fixed charges who may face higher power bills. Details on the scheme are being finalised. Meanwhile Cabinet has agreed to a review in late 2023 of the regulation phase-out, to assess any impacts on low-income households and whether additional support is necessary. Visit the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment webpage for more information.

From <https://livenews.co.nz> 09/20/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## **Funding to Help Clean Up Contaminated Sites**

The Government is supporting the clean-up of contaminated sites in Northland, Dunedin and Southland to reduce risk to people’s health and protect the environment. Environment Minister David Parker said the funding announced today, through the

Contaminated Sites Remediation Fund, will help us turn previously hazardous sites into safe, usable public areas. “Supporting remediation investigations moves us closer to removing risks from hazardous materials so we can ensure New Zealanders live in a clean, safe environment,” David Parker said. Northland Regional Council and the Department of Conservation will receive \$150,950 to investigate the contamination of the Puhipuhi Mercury Mine site in Northland, north of Whangarei. Conservation Minister Kiri Allan said: “The failed attempt to profitably mine mercury between 1910 and 1945 left us with contaminated soil and waterways.

“This investigation will take us one step closer to cleaning up the site and returning it to a safe space that everyone can enjoy.” Funding the investigation affirms Aotearoa New Zealand’s commitment to working towards ratification of the Minamata Convention on Mercury which protects people and the environment from harmful exposure to mercury. In Dunedin, the Otago Regional Council has received \$200,000 to complete a feasibility assessment and develop a remedial action plan for the tar well area of the former Gasworks site in South Dunedin. The storage and disposal of gasworks waste between 1862 and 1987 contaminated the site. “The wider Gasworks site has already been remediated so this project will look specifically at the tar well, which is expected to contain approximately 1,400 m<sup>3</sup> of tar and tar-contaminated water,” David Parker said. “A robust remediation plan will help ensure hazardous waste can be removed and the health of the community protected.”

The Southland Regional Council and the Department of Conservation have been granted \$35,000 to complete an investigation of the landfill at the Little Tahiti site in Fiordland. An initial investigation in 2013 confirmed there was waste over large areas of the Little Tahiti site, near Milford Sound, and found a range of contaminants including heavy metals, pesticides and asbestos from the dumping of waste during the construction of access roads. “This funding will determine the extent of contamination so we can take steps to protect the area and prevent further damage to this iconic and popular tourist site,” David Parker said.

From <https://livenews.co.nz> 09/23/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## 6、 Private Sector

### Asia-Pacific

#### **Launch of Reports on ASEAN’s Logistics Industry to Drive Growth and Regional Economic Integration**

ASEAN and the OECD launched the OECD Competition Assessment Reviews: Logistics Sector in ASEAN and the OECD Competitive Neutrality Reviews:

Small-Package Delivery Services in ASEAN reports at the ASEAN Economic Ministers Meeting today. The reports identified legislative and regulatory issues in the bloc's logistics services sector that would hinder it from reaching its full potential. The reports provided robust, pragmatic, non-binding policy recommendations to ASEAN governments to help the industry boost overall growth and expedite its recovery from the negative economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The GDP of ASEAN has almost doubled since 2005. Its growing middle class now forms a large potential group of consumers. Yet further growth and greater prosperity are constrained by regulatory obstacles that impede competition in its logistics industry, reducing efficiency, driving up costs for businesses and not maximising consumers' welfare, and hampering regional and international trade. OECD's research and analysis, supported by the UK Government's ASEAN Economic Reform Programme, concluded that practical, low-cost policies recommended to improve the regulation of ASEAN's logistics industry will empower existing industry participants and encourage new entrants to identify and take advantage of fresh opportunities and the resulting market efficiencies. In turn, this would benefit businesses and consumers, and ultimately accelerate growth and development across the bloc's economies.

#### Engine of growth

Thanks to globalisation and free trade, ASEAN's prosperity has grown substantially, in which its logistics sector played a major role. The sector now accounts for approximately 5% of the bloc's GDP and employment, providing jobs for around 17 million people. In noting the importance of the logistics services sector to the economies of the ASEAN Member States (AMS) and the wider region, the Secretary-General of ASEAN Dato Lim Jock Hoi, said in his opening remarks, "ASEAN's commitment towards a seamlessly integrated ASEAN, remains as strong as ever. The service industries are the main driver of growth, accounting for approximately 50% of ASEAN's GDP in 2019. The logistics sector was the second-biggest contributor to services output, accounting for approximately 24% of all such trade in ASEAN. It is therefore hard, not to overemphasize, the importance of the logistics sector to ASEAN Member States, and to the wider regional economy."

#### Economic opportunities

In some ASEAN Member States, logistics costs account for up to 20% of the price of finished goods, almost double the global average. This is a de facto levy on consumers and businesses alike that could be reduced by addressing obstacles to competition in supply chains. Rethinking regulations governing foreign direct investment in the logistics sector would help member states grow their economies. It has been estimated that reducing barriers to trade and FDI restrictions to the global average could deliver a boost to GDP of up to 17% over the medium to long term. Additionally, pro-competitive policies have a gender dimension. Some studies estimated that the removal of gender bias in the economy, including logistics, may increase GDP in the region by up to 30%. If a number of the competition restrictions identified by the OECD in ASEAN's logistics industry were lifted, the bloc's

economies could be better off by more than USD 4.5 billion annually. This is a very conservative estimate as it does not take into account spill-over effects such as increased employment, lower barriers to market entry for small and medium-sized enterprises and improved cross-border trade.

#### Policy proposals

OECD Competition Assessment Reviews: Logistics Sector in ASEAN and OECD Competitive Neutrality Reviews: Small-Package Delivery Services in ASEAN are the culmination of three years of independent research by OECD on regulatory and legislative obstacles to competition in the logistics industries of all 10 ASEAN Member States which was facilitated by the ASEAN Secretariat. In the course of its research, the OECD analysed more than 700 pieces of legislation across the bloc, met with more than 280 ASEAN stakeholders, and cooperated closely with many public stakeholders in the region. The reports propose hundreds of recommendations to remove obstacles to competition in the logistics business, level the industry playing field to drive growth and employment, and expedite ASEAN's exit from the economic hardship brought upon it by the COVID crisis. Mathias Cormann, Secretary-General of the OECD, said, "As we seek to optimise the strength and the quality of the recovery, greater openness and pro-competitive reforms will be a crucial element to stimulate the growth of new businesses and jobs, especially small and medium-sized enterprises, which account for almost 90% of all enterprises across the whole bloc and nearly half of all employment."

#### Fostering competition

The OECD Competition Assessment Reviews: Logistics Sector in ASEAN report assessed the impact of regulation on competition in the sector. It covers five main subsectors of the logistics market: freight transportation, including transport by road, inland waterway and maritime; freight forwarding; warehousing; small-package delivery services; and value-added services. Meanwhile, the OECD Competitive Neutrality Reviews: Small-Package Delivery Services in ASEAN report examined the effects of state-owned enterprises on competition in the bloc's small-package delivery market. This market segment is a critical part of the logistics industry due to its role in the rapid expansion of e-commerce, whose growth has been dramatically accelerated by COVID-19. Dato Dr. Amin Liew Abdullah, Chair of the AEM Meeting and Minister at the Prime Minister's Office and Minister of Finance and Economy II, Brunei Darussalam said, "While the project started in 2018, the policy recommendations have taken into account the COVID-crisis to remain relevant to contribute to structural and regulatory shortcomings, which can help ASEAN economies resume sustainable growth and job creation by enhancing competitiveness, encouraging investment and stimulating productivity in the logistics sector, with economy-wide effects and consumer benefits.

He further added that the current economic and pandemic crisis confronting ASEAN and the world has brought on the need to reset competition policy and its

implementation to suit the current economic and social context. Competition policy and law cannot work in isolation from other public policies and must be complemented by other related industrial policies, with robust implementation to support a competitive business environment.” The two reports are part of the OECD’s Fostering Competition in ASEAN project. The project, a partnership between the OECD and ASEAN, supported by the UK Government’s ASEAN Economic Reform Programme. It reviewed regulatory constraints on competition in all 10 ASEAN Member States to identify regulations that hinder the efficient functioning of markets and may unlevel the playing field to the disadvantage of businesses and consumers.

Greg Hands, Minister for Trade and Policy, represented the UK Government in the meeting. He said, “Total trade between the UK and ASEAN nations was worth £33.8 billion in 2020, making ASEAN equivalent to the 4th largest non-EU trading partner for the UK. Now, with our new ASEAN Dialogue Partner Status, we are even more committed to deepening ties with member countries, supporting jobs and promoting inclusive economic growth. Enhancing competition and promoting a level playing field for businesses is a priority for the UK government, and the reports launched today will make a valuable contribution towards supporting fairer competition and boosting international trade.” For more information, journalists should contact the OECD Media Office (+ 33 1 45 24 97 00). Working with over 100 countries, the OECD is a global policy forum that promotes policies to preserve individual liberty and improve the economic and social well-being of people around the world

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

[TOP ↑](#)

## East Asia

### **CHINA: Smart Manufacturing in the Dark Brings Light to Industry**

From steel plates and mobile phones to household motors and rocket ignition device parts, more Chinese enterprises use artificial intelligence (AI) to empower their production lines, introducing a "dark factory" mode of 24-hour uninterrupted and unattended production. Dark factories, also called smart factories, are entirely run by programmed robots with no need for lighting. It is expected to reduce labor costs, improve production efficiency and product quality, and carry out production under dangerous circumstances to ensure the safety of workers. To replace people with machines to do high-intensity, repetitive, and even dangerous work is an essential step toward smart manufacturing in China's iron and steel industry. A dark factory of the Baogang Group in northern China's Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region uses robots to separate the slag from liquid steel. The slag discharge rate was reduced from 10 percent to 9 percent, and the one percentage point could save nearly 100,000 U.S. dollars every year for the factory.

Xi'an Aerospace Propulsion Institute is a research base for China's solid-fuel rocket engines. The production demand at the institute has been growing rapidly with the accelerating development of China's space industry in recent years. Without increasing human and material resources, the institute achieved a 24-hour production mode for rocket ignition parts. At night, automated equipment carries out the initial processing of parts at the dark factory. During the day, experienced workers give the finishing touches. The collaboration between machines and people doubles the production efficiency. At a dark factory in Beijing, mechanical arms carefully pinch the two sides of a smartphone screen and fold it repeatedly like human hands. It requires more than 200 steps to make the foldable phone developed by Xiaomi Corporation, most of which are completed by intelligent equipment. According to the company, the dark factory has an annual production capacity of one million smartphones.

Megvii, a Chinese AI unicorn headquartered in Beijing, built a dark factory model workshop for a household motor manufacturer in east China's Zhejiang Province. Xu Qingcai, senior vice president of Megvii, told reporters that it is typical for AI to empower traditional manufacturers to improve quality and efficiency. Xu said a smart upgrade includes three aspects. First is the intelligence of a single device. At the dark factory in Zhejiang, Megvii deploys robots to lift cargo. With QR codes and navigation, the robots can locate the cargo precisely, and the robots are simple to be controlled. AI algorithm can also improve the recognition rate of stained and wrinkled QR codes. The factory doesn't need to change new QR codes frequently. The second is the intelligence of the system. The dark factory in Zhejiang achieved the integration of multiple types of equipment and realized the interaction among warehouse control system, warehouse management system, enterprise resources planning, and production enforcement system.

The third is the intelligence at the scene. AI at a specific production scene can perceive, think, execute and evolve. The brain of the household motor dark factory is an AIoT (AI and Internet of Things) logistics management platform called Hetu developed by Megvii. It can learn and adapt the production scene to realize managing and supervising the equipment and production line as well as allocating some tasks to the machines. At the 2021 World Artificial Intelligence Conference in July, Xiao Yaqing, Minister of Industry and Information Technology, said that China's AI development had made remarkable progress in industrial applications with deepening integration of AI technologies and real economy businesses.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 09/08/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## **Chinese Banks Steer Loans to Real Economy amid Recovery**

China's six major banks cranked up loan support for the real-economy sectors in the first half of the year (H1), as demand was further unleashed amid sound recovery



momentum. The latest semi-annual reports of the six largest state-owned commercial banks show that each of the four biggest lenders issued more than one trillion yuan (about 154.97 billion U.S. dollars) of new loans in H1, injecting cash into key real-economy sectors such as small and micro firms, agricultural and emerging industries. The demand from businesses for credit loans was further unleashed as epidemic-control efforts took hold and economic fundamentals sustained upward momentum, said Wang Jiang, head of the China Construction Bank (CCB). With the structure of credit-loan supply optimized and the financing services becoming more targeted and precise, the banks played a positive role in forging the recovery of the real economy, industry professionals noted.

The Industrial and Commercial Bank of China (ICBC) took the lead in steering loans to small and micro-sized enterprises, followed by the Agricultural Bank of China (ABC) and Bank of China (BOC). The growth rate of inclusive loans issued by the ICBC stood at 40.4 percent in H1, while that for the ABC and BOC also surpassed 30 percent. Green loans grew steeply within the context of China's carbon goals. By the end of June, the ICBC, ABC, BOC and CCB all reported a green-loan balance of more than one trillion yuan. The lenders also ratcheted up financial support for strategic emerging industries, led by the BOC. The bank saw loan issuance to the sectors skyrocket 83.5 percent from the end of last year. Zhang Qingsong, head of the ABC, said the bank stepped up credit-loan support for rural vitalization. By the end of June, the bank reported that the balance of loans issued to county-level regions stood at 5.9 trillion yuan. Based on the principle that "houses are for living in, not for speculation" and the country's regulatory control on forestalling and defusing financial risks, loans to China's property sector saw slower expansion in the first six months.

Official data shows that outstanding property loans went up 9.5 percent from last year to 50.78 trillion yuan as of the end of June. According to the banks, the new loan quotas issued were mainly for meeting residents' demands for buying their own houses to live in. Over the next half year, loan issuances will maintain steady growth momentum, while the structure of credit loans will be further optimized, the banks said. As credit-loan demand for rural vitalization, the green economy and advanced manufacturing are robust, the Bank of Communications will step up project reserves for those sectors, said Liu Jun, head of the bank. Personal loans will also be emphasized by the banks during the period. The Postal Savings Bank of China said it will provide more credit loans to retail businesses, with a focus on agricultural projects and small and micro-sized loans. The ABC will prop up financial support for county-level regions, private businesses and manufacturing sectors that lack cash inflows, said Zhang.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 09/08/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

**Foreign Investment in Agricultural Sector Grows in China's**

## **Jiangsu**

The foreign direct investment (FDI) in actual use in the agricultural sector in east China's Jiangsu Province reached 283 million U.S. dollars in the first half of this year, authorities said Tuesday. The value was 9.7 percent higher year on year, according to the provincial department of agriculture and rural affairs. Since 2010, the province has introduced nearly 1,600 foreign-funded agricultural projects and the FDI in actual use has totaled 13.1 billion yuan. The investment projects have gradually expanded from farming and breeding to processing, tourism and other sectors involving the primary, secondary and tertiary industries.

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[TOP ↑](#)

## **Inclusive Finance Benefits Small Firms, Farmers in Tibet**

Inclusive finance has seen rapid development over the past five years in southwest China's Tibet Autonomous Region, benefiting numerous businesses and people on the plateau, according to an official. The region has mainly targeted small businesses, farmers, herders and urban low-income groups in providing inclusive financial services in the 2016-2020 period, Li Yufu, deputy head of the Lhasa central sub-branch of the People's Bank of China, said at a press conference this week. At the end of last year, the banking network in Tibet covered more than 80 percent of townships, and every 10,000 people owned 7.13 automated teller machines, up 4.7 percent year on year, data from the Lhasa central sub-branch showed. Financial services have become more accessible, with the region's number of per capita non-cash transactions up 13.63 percent year on year to 135.81 last year. People in Tibet owned an average of 3.11 bank cards at the end of 2020.

Last year, the region has stepped up financial support for entrepreneurship and innovation, as the balance of such loans surged 42.64 percent from the beginning of 2020 to 4.54 billion yuan (about 706 million U.S. dollars) at the end of the year. Li said the Lhasa sub-branch of the central bank has also organized financial institutions in Tibet to consolidate the results of poverty alleviation. At the end of June 2021, the balance of microcredit stood at 1.9 billion yuan in Tibet, supporting more than 143,000 households that had escaped poverty. By the end of 2019, all registered poor residents in Tibet had shaken off poverty, marking the elimination of absolute poverty in the region for the first time in history.

From <http://www.news.cn/> 09/16/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## **JAPAN: NEC Utilizes Digital Technologies to Create Healthcare and Life Science Business**

NEC Corp has announced an initiative to create healthcare and life science business that utilizes AI and other digital technologies as part of the creation of future growth businesses. NEC said it will focus on the three areas of medical care, lifestyle support and life science, aiming for a business value of 500 billion yen in 2030. Currently, in the field of healthcare, in addition to the spread of new types of coronavirus, the growing number of people with lifestyle-related illnesses, such as certain forms of cancer, is now a common challenge worldwide. NEC has contributed to the efficiency and sophistication of medical services through the provision of reception systems (1) and electronic medical record systems for more than 50 years. Furthermore, NEC began full-scale entry into the drug discovery business in 2019 (2), with the aim of promoting innovative next-generation medical care based on the results of research activities to date. This new initiative aims to accelerate and expand the healthcare-related business more than ever before and to grow the business toward the creation of social value.

Specifically, NEC will expand business in the following three areas by taking advantage of its leading-edge biometrics technologies, "Bio-Idiom" (3), featuring the world's No. 1 face recognition accuracy (4), as well as its portfolio of leading artificial intelligence technologies, "NEC the WISE" (5), including video analytics and graph-based relationship learning developed by NEC laboratories. The first area is the "Medical Care" business, featuring digital support for medical care; the second is "Lifestyle Support" business, which helps individuals in their daily lives; and the third is "Life Science" business, which supports personalized medical care with technology. Through these three areas of business, NEC aims to create a world in which individuals may live more freely and comfortably.

In addition, NEC will promote R&D with an eye toward 2030 and the needs of hospitals, nursing care, rehabilitation, and other situations. NEC will also launch the Healthcare and Life Sciences Project Management Office (PMO) to support the acceleration of business development across the NEC Group. Furthermore, NEC will create new value in the healthcare and life sciences fields through co-creation with a wide range of external partners. In November, for example, NEC will launch NEC Expert Committee on Healthcare and Life Sciences, aiming to implement a future image of society with experts from a variety of positions and perspectives. NEC aims to support society and the healthcare sciences field through the provision of services and products tailored to individuals, including both consumers and healthcare professionals.

From <https://japantoday.com> 09/17/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## **SOUTH KOREA: Top Regulator Says Kakao's Support for Small Biz on 'Right Track'**

South Korea's top telecommunications regulator said Wednesday that Kakao Corp.'s

plan to support small businesses is on the "right track" amid growing scrutiny against the internet giant's market dominance. On Tuesday, Kakao said it would create a 300 billion-won (US\$256 million) fund to support small merchants and scrap some of its services that compete with them in a move to soothe growing regulatory scrutiny. "Kakao is making efforts to improve, and I think it is on the right track," Han Sang-hyuk, the head of the Korea Communications Commission, said ahead of his meeting with mobile carriers. He, however, added that Kakao's plan still needs to be checked if it meets the public's standards and that regulations could be required if there are areas that could be improved. Kakao's mobility unit has recently been under fire for allegedly levying unfair fees on taxi drivers that use its taxi-hailing service. Last week, Han said he was looking into the controversy and shared the concerns of the taxi drivers. As part of Kakao's support plans announced a day earlier, Kakao Mobility, the country's leading taxi-hailing service operator, said it will lower its paid membership price for taxi drivers and scrap a paid hailing service.

From <https://en.yna.co.kr/> 09/15/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## **Korean Government Actively Supports ICT SMEs for Overseas Market Entry to Overcome COVID-19**

The Ministry of Science and ICT of Korea (MSIT, Minister: Hyesook Lim) and the Korea Association for ICT Promotion (KAIT, President: Jung Ho Park) held the World Online ICT Show (WOW) 2021 Business Meeting to support overseas market entry of Korean small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in the ICT industry experiencing difficulties in marketing route development due to the prolongation of COVID-19. Over 80 Korean ICT SMEs and 62 buyers from 29 countries, including the U.S., Brazil, Belgium, China, and Vietnam, attended the business meeting held on September 15 and 16 using the WOW platform. The platform is an online show platform to help domestic ICT businesses enter overseas markets and expand export in the difficult times after the COVID-19 pandemic.

The meeting was held online and offline concurrently at the venue in COEX. For companies that could not attend the fair, an online consultation service was provided in the form of a three-way video conference with the buyers and interpreters. To realize the successful export contract of the attending companies, a prior demand survey was conducted for business matching with buyers. In addition, to overcome the limitations of the contactless format of this event, a directory book on the participating companies' products was produced and distributed to buyers to provide sufficient information about the companies. Moreover, the participating SMEs were provided with opportunities to receive professional trade and IR consulting services in order to help them resolve their current difficulties.

Through the fair, not only was export consulting to a scale of USD 57 million carried out, but also some companies concluded MOUs. For instance, More Dream Inc.

entered into a USD 50,000 MOU with MAIZA Tech of Malaysia to export multilingual keyboard technology for smartphones. Other companies including Hurien and HelloFactory are also in the process of positive discussion to enter into MOUs with overseas buyers. A KAIT official said, "We will continue striving to help businesses achieve substantial outcomes through systematic follow-up management support and monitoring, such as by holding the second export fair during November targeting businesses that are highly likely to win orders."

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[TOP ↑](#)

## South-East Asia

### **CAMBODIA: Launching 50-Mln-Usd Guarantee Scheme to Support SMEs**

State-owned Credit Guarantee Corporation of Cambodia (CGCC) on Wednesday launched a 50-million-U.S. dollar Co-Financing Guarantee Scheme (CFGs), aiming at supporting small and medium enterprises (SMEs). The CFGs is a guarantee scheme that will act as collateral or security for 70-80 percent of the loan amount so that it will reduce the physical collateral required from the borrowers, a CGCC's press statement said. The scheme will support the growth of new loans in the banking sector to enable SME owners to borrow from the CGCC's Participating Financial Institutions (PFIs), the statement said, adding that 19 PFIs will be able to offer higher loan amounts and the risk exposure will be shared with the CGCC up to 80 percent. "The launch of the CFGs by CGCC is timely to provide additional support to the SMEs Co-Financing Scheme Phase II," Economy and Finance Ministry secretary of state and the CGCC's chairman Ros Seilava said in the statement. The CFGs is the second credit guarantee scheme offered by the CGCC, the statement said, adding that the CGCC first launched the 200-million-dollar Business Recovery Guarantee Scheme in March 2021 to support the economic recovery during the COVID-19 pandemic. To date, the CGCC has assisted 85 businesses by providing credit guarantees for their loan applications from the PFIs, the statement said.

From <http://www.xinhuanet.com> 09/22/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

### **Cambodia Raises Monthly Minimum Wage for Garment Industry to 194 USD for 2022**

Cambodia on Tuesday set a new monthly minimum wage for the kingdom's garment, footwear and travel goods industry at 194 U.S. dollars for 2022, up 1.04 percent from the current 192 dollars, Labor Minister Ith Samheng announced. "This new minimum wage will take effect from January 1, 2022 onwards," he said in a statement. The garment, footwear and travel goods industry is Cambodia's largest export sector, employing about 750,000 people in approximately 1,100 factories and branches. The

Southeast Asian country exported garments, footwear and travel products worth 6.8 billion dollars during the first eight months, from January to August of 2021, according to a government report. Pav Sina, president of the Collective Union of Movement of Workers, said the union was not satisfied with the new minimum wage, but due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it was hard to demand a higher wage. "The increase of two dollars is too little and it cannot cope with the rising cost of living," he told reporters.

*From <http://www.xinhuanet.com> 09/28/2021*

[TOP ↑](#)

## **SINGAPORE: Manufacturing Output Growth Further Narrow to 11.2 Pct in August**

The Singapore Economic Development Board (EDB) announced on Friday that the country's manufacturing output growth on a year-on-year basis narrowed to 11.2 percent in August, from the revised 16.4 percent in July and 28.3 percent in June. Excluding biomedical manufacturing, the output grew 13.6 percent year on year this August, compared to the revised 6.7 percent growth in July and 25.4 percent growth in June. On a seasonally adjusted month-on-month basis, Singapore's manufacturing output increased 5.7 percent in August. Excluding biomedical manufacturing, output grew 8.8 percent. As for the performance of different clusters, the electronics cluster's output expanded 15.4 percent year on year in August, while the chemicals cluster's output grew 0.4 percent, the precision engineering cluster's output grew 22.9 percent, the transport engineering cluster's output increased 23.5 percent, and the general manufacturing cluster's output rose 6.2 percent. The biomedical manufacturing cluster saw its output contracted 0.6 percent year on year in August, compared to the revised 78.6 percent expansion in the previous month.

*From <http://www.xinhuanet.com/> 09/24/2021*

[TOP ↑](#)

## **VIETNAM: Programme to Help SMEs Enter Foreign Markets Kicks-Off**

The "90-day Amazon Launchpad" programme, designed to help small and medium-sized firms boost exports to global market via e-commerce, kicked-off on September 9. Under the programme, 50 enterprises were selected to be trained via email and webinar, online or directly, by Amazon Global Selling staff to do business on cross-border e-commerce platforms. They will not only be provided with information and knowledge of e-commerce but be assisted to study and apply digital tools to do market research, access customers and analyse consumption trends such as big data and artificial intelligence. After 90 days, the enterprises are expected to master skills for trading online via e-commerce platforms. The three-month programme is part of the Go Digital - Go Global package which is a component of the project to support businesses in digital transformation in 2021-25

as outlined by the Ministry of Planning and Investment, cooperating with USAID LinkSME, AGS and other partners.

From <https://vietnamnews.vn/09/10/2021>

[TOP ↑](#)

## South Asia

### **INDIA: Fortinet & Linksys Delivers First-of-its-kind Cybersecurity Enterprise Solution to Support Remote & Hybrid work**

Fortinet, a global leader in broad, integrated and automated cybersecurity solutions, and Linksys, a global leader in wireless networking products, today announced a new joint solution to enable enterprise organisations to support and secure work-from-home networks. Linksys HomeWRK for Business | Secured by Fortinet is the first-ever enterprise solution to deliver secure network connectivity for both corporate and personal needs in one easy-to-setup unit optimised for business applications and collaboration tools, including Zoom. The announcement serves as another proof point of both companies' long-term commitment to delivering enterprise-grade performance and security for the hybrid era and follows earlier news of Fortinet's investment in Linksys and the launch of Linksys HomeWRK for Education | Secured by Fortinet to bring reliable connectivity and security to students at home. With the increase in remote and hybrid work, enterprise IT teams are struggling to enable their workforce to work effectively from anywhere while protecting their organisation from security threats including ransomware, malware and phishing attacks, introduced by home networks. A recent survey from Sungard Availability Services revealed that "only one in five companies are fully confident their infrastructure security can support long-term remote work." Cybercriminals continue to take advantage of the expanded attack surface; the latest FortiGuard Labs Global Threat Landscape Report revealed that average weekly ransomware activity in June 2021 was more than tenfold higher than levels from one year ago. Enterprise IT teams are also challenged to support their at-home employees with a simple plug-and-play solution that delivers connectivity that can support all of the capabilities they have in-office. To enable enterprise IT teams of all sizes to ensure enterprise-grade security and high-performance connectivity for remote and hybrid workers at home, Fortinet and Linksys are launching Linksys HomeWRK for Business | Secured by Fortinet. This offering builds on Fortinet's commitment to building a safer Internet by protecting people, devices, and data everywhere, and delivers the following key benefits for enterprise organisations:

Fast, Reliable, and Secure Wi-Fi Mesh Connectivity. Built with the latest Wi-Fi 6 tri-band technology and Linksys' powerful Velop Intelligent Mesh software, Linksys HomeWRK for Business | Secured by Fortinet enables high-performance, secure corporate and personal networks for users at home via a single device. Enterprise IT teams can easily distribute the provision-free hardware to employees to replace their

existing home router to establish both corporate and personal networks. With a blanket of mesh Wi-Fi coverage, employees can enjoy a fast and consistent whole-home Wi-Fi connection, without worrying about a weak signal or dead spots. Fortinet and Linksys have teamed up with Zoom, a leader in video communications, to provide the best experience for video conferencing, voice calls and screen sharing. With quality of service (QoS) networking technology that prioritises and optimises traffic for Zoom and other business collaboration applications, users can be confident that their next meeting, webcast or remote interview goes off without a hitch even during times of high non-critical traffic such as gaming or video streaming. The solution is integrated with industry-leading Fortinet security to safeguard against cyber threats introduced by home networks and automatically blocks suspicious malware, prevents intrusions, filters harmful content, and more. This joint solution showcases the power of Security-Driven Networking; by placing security in the home office on the device itself – converging networking and security together – it delivers a much better user experience. The zero-touch provisioning solution streamlines the employee onboarding experience with simple plug-and-connect devices that don't require physical assistance from corporate IT teams to install. The solution also includes a guided app for the ideal placement of nodes at home.

An intuitive management console enables enterprise IT managers to monitor and diagnose the performance of all devices connected to the corporate network in real-time via a single portal. The solution will be natively integrated with Fortinet management systems to further streamline management for existing Fortinet customers. Employees are also able to manage their personal network via a separate console with visibility and control of all personal devices. Protect remote employees' privacy with support for multiple networks for separate personal use. While the corporate network is managed by the IT team, employees maintain complete ownership of the personal network and security settings, allowing all household members to benefit from a fast and secure connection for non-corporate devices, such as laptops and gaming consoles. Corporate and personal networks are separated with no visibility or access to personal information granted to corporate IT teams. This joint venture and resulting joint solution bring together proven technology from two industry leaders to solve some of the biggest challenges of effectively enabling remote and hybrid work. By combining proven Wi-Fi 6 mesh technology from Linksys and industry-leading enterprise-grade security from Fortinet on the same device, Linksys HomeWRK for Business | Secured by Fortinet creates a networking environment at home that is equivalent to being at the office. The joint solution will be available in the United States in Q4 2021 and globally beginning in Q1 2022 on affordable hardware-as-a-service subscription plans that require no upfront investment for enterprise IT teams. Two levels of service give enterprises flexibility in supporting their remote and hybrid workers: Standard – includes two nodes with standard Fortinet security, and Advanced – includes two nodes with advanced Fortinet security. Additional nodes to extend coverage are available for purchase.



“Our goal was two-fold. First, make it very simple for anyone to set up a fast and reliable home Wi-Fi network. Second, provide enterprise IT with the ability to secure and manage the business aspects of that work-from-home Wi-Fi network just as they do with any other device attached to the network. The Linksys and Fortinet joint venture is not just a simple OEM agreement of two distinct parties, it’s the start of a completely new market,” said Rajesh Maurya, Regional Vice President, India & SAARC at Fortinet. Harry Dewhirst, CEO, Linksys, said, “Last year, companies and their employees were catapulted into a remote work era with little to no preparation. In that time, they’ve done what they can to make it work. It’s clear that remote work is the future of work and through Linksys HomeWRK for Business | Secured by Fortinet, we are not simply providing a solution to make it work. We are providing companies a way to enable employees to securely and safely connect to their work, thrive in remote environments and operate with peak productivity and efficiency.” “We’re entering a phase of reopening where the hybrid model is becoming increasingly prevalent, and even in this new era of work, the importance of efficient and effective collaboration remains top of mind. Fostering collaboration starts with a reliable and safe network, and for organisations building forward, empowering employees with holistic solutions that yield fast and secure connectivity and optimisation for collaborative tools will be key,” said Pat Jensen, Distinguished Architect, Zoom.

From <https://egov.eletsonline.com/> 09/20/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## **UP Govt Transforms over 2400 Panchayat Bhawans Through Digitalisation**

With efforts to boost digital connectivity in the rural sects of the state, the Government of Uttar Pradesh has announced to have transformed nearly 2,492 Panchayat Bhawans under the Rashtriya Gram Swaraj Abhiyan (RGSA). As per a statement by the UP government, the digitally-enabled Panchayat Bhawans have brought improved connectivity for effective implementation of the welfare schemes in a transparent manner at the grassroots level. The move has not only helped people to know about welfare schemes but has also made these schemes more accessible. As reported by a national daily, “Uttar Pradesh is consistently on the path of development and its rural population is an integral part of this growth trajectory. Ensuring that the benefits of the welfare schemes are provided to every needy, the government has left no stone unturned to transform the rural and remote areas of the state through digitalisation,” said a UP government’s spokesperson. In another move to empower the youth in the state, the state government is running skill development programmes for as many as 10 lakh youths to enhance their livelihood in the rural parts of the state. Also, the Yogi Adityanath-led government is planning to create better employment opportunities for the youth under MGNREGA. According to the data from the state government, as much as 116 crore man-days employment has been provided to nearly 1.50 crore workers. The UP government, on transforming

sanitation in the rural areas, said, “Over 52,000 community toilets have been constructed to do away with open defecation. In order to make local governance more responsive, village secretariats have been established in every gram panchayat. This will make local governance effective for development needs and to provide benefits of government schemes to all. The government has also been providing uninterrupted power supply to the villages for up to 20-22 hours a day.”

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[TOP ↑](#)

## **GeM Bags CIPS Award for ‘Best Use of Digital Technology’ Beating Industry Toppers**

Leaving behind some of the renowned and big public and private players in the procurement sector, Government eMarketplace (GeM) emerged out as the winner in the “Best Use of Digital Technology” category at the CIPS Excellence in Procurement Awards 2021. GeM made through and bagged the CIPS Award competing with names like Jaguar Land Rover, Royal Dutch Shell, GEP, Vendigital and Shell. The Government eMarketplace was shortlisted as a finalist in two more categories ‘Public Procurement Project of the Year’ and ‘Best Initiative to Build a Diverse Supply Base’. In these categories, GeM was placed alongside some big organisations with path-breaking initiatives. Rohit Vadhwa, First Secretary (Economic), High Commission of India received the award on behalf of GeM at the ceremony held in London on September 23. The Awards held under the aegis of the Chartered Institute of Procurement & Supply (CIPS), London, are considered one of the leading recognitions in the procurement sector worldwide. CIPS is a global not-for-profit organisation and professional body which is dedicated to promoting good practices in procurement and supply management with a community across 150 countries.

Ministry of Commerce and Industry, in a statement, said that recognition of GeM on a global platform of this level is a great shot in the arm for the GeM team and a testament to Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s vision. In order to bring in transparency, efficiency and inclusiveness in public procurement, GeM has taken several technology-based initiatives, the ministry added. The design and development of the GeM platform – its digital features and functionalities, key business processes as well as ancillary offline activities like outreach and training of stakeholders are based on the three goals of GeM – transparent, efficient and inclusive public procurement. With its complete digital interface, GeM offers a cashless, contactless, and paperless experience for sellers and buyers and serves, making it an end-to-end solution for the procurement of common goods and services. Offering a unified and easy-to-use e-marketplace, GeM has completely replaced a previously fragmented public procurement ecosystem by helping to leverage competitiveness, accessibility and economies of scale of a diverse, open and transparent procurement system. Government eMarketplace is a company cent per cent owned by the government under the aegis of the Department of Commerce, Ministry of Commerce and Industry

for procurement of goods and services by the Union and State governments.

From <https://egov.eletsonline.com/> 09/24/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## **Centre Issues Cybersecurity Guidelines for Power Sector**

The Government of India, on October 7, issued a set of guidelines for cybersecurity in the power sector. The move aims to create a secure power cyber ecosystem. The Ministry of Power in an official statement said, “Central Electricity Authority (Technical Standards for Connectivity to the Grid) Amendment Regulations, 2019, has framed Guidelines on Cyber Security in Power Sector to be adhered by all Power Sector utilities to create the cyber secure ecosystem.” Further the statement read, “This is the first time that a comprehensive guideline has been formulated on cybersecurity in the power sector. The guideline lays down required actions for cyber security preparedness across various utilities.” The Centre has formulated the new norms following intensive deliberations with stakeholders. Also, inputs from cybersecurity experts like CERT-In, NCIIPC, NSCS and IIT-Kanpur and subsequent deliberations in the power ministry. The Centre’s guidelines lay down a cybersecurity assurance framework strengthening the regulatory framework that puts in place mechanisms for security threat early warning, vulnerability management and response to security threats and secures remote operations and services among others. All the responsible entities including system integrators, equipment manufacturers, vendors, suppliers, service providers, and original equipment manufacturers (OEMs) for IT hardware and software need to comply with the new norms. As per the guidelines, emphasis has been given on mandating ICT-based procurement from identified ‘trusted sources’ and ‘trusted products’. Otherwise, the product has to be tested for malware/ hardware trojan ahead of deployment for use in the power supply system. Further, the Ministry’s statement said that the move will boost research and development in the cybersecurity domain and will open up the market for setting up cyber testing infrastructure in the public as well as private sectors. Moreover, the CEA is working on cybersecurity regulatory framework too. The guidelines are a precursor to the same.

From <https://egov.eletsonline.com/> 09/30/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## **Central-West Asia**

### **AZERBAIJAN: Entrepreneurs to Start Exporting Products Abroad Through E-Commerce**

Azerbaijani entrepreneurs will be able to export domestically produced products to foreign markets through e-commerce, the Azerbaijani Ministry of Economy told Trend. According to the ministry, the government provides comprehensive support to local businesses in order to expand the geography of sales markets for Azerbaijani

products, promote the 'Made in Azerbaijan' brand, and organize specialized fairs and exhibitions both in Azerbaijan and abroad. The ministry said that the trade missions of Azerbaijan abroad are carrying out activities to support domestic entrepreneurs engaged in the export of local products. "In order to expand the sales opportunities for entrepreneurs, with the support of the Agency for the Development of Small and Medium Business (SME) of Azerbaijan, an online trade portal [www.kobmarket.az](http://www.kobmarket.az) was developed. According to the latest data, 55 online stores have already been created on the portal and more than 700 products have been posted. Registration on the portal allows entrepreneurs to expand their sales opportunities in the shortest possible time, as well as open an online store," the ministry said. The ministry added [kobmarket.az](http://www.kobmarket.az) has a unified and secure payment system, as well as its own delivery service.

From <https://en.trend.az> 09/03/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## **Public-private Co-op to Contribute to Restoration of Azerbaijan's Liberated Territories – Minister**

Joint cooperation of the state, society, business circles and banks can make a significant contribution to the process of restoration of our liberated territories, Minister of Economy of Azerbaijan Mikayil Jabbarov wrote on Twitter, Trend reports. According to the minister, public-private partnership, the role of banks in reconstruction works, and attraction of private investments was discussed with representatives of the Azerbaijan Banks Association, and commercial banks at the Karabakh Revival Fund.

From <https://en.trend.az> 09/08/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## **Azerbaijan's Economy Minister Talks Gov't Support to Private Sector for 8M2021**

Within the framework of the government support to the private sector in Azerbaijan, 48.4 million manat (\$28.4 million) of soft loans were allocated to finance 945 investment projects from January through August 2021, the country's Economy Minister Mikayil Jabbarov wrote on Twitter, Trend reports. Jabbarov said that 59.2 percent of soft loans were allocated to agriculture, 24.2 percent - to manufacturing and processing of industrial products, and 16.6 percent - to other sectors. "Around 97.5 percent of loans were allocated to micro, small and medium enterprises. Implementation of these investment projects will create more than 1,400 new jobs," the minister wrote.

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[TOP ↑](#)

## **TURKMENISTAN: Largest Share of New Jobs Falls on Private**

## Sector

Within the framework of the Program to improve the employment sector and create new jobs in Turkmenistan for 2015-2020, around 111 thousand new jobs were created in the country during the period, Mayagozel Babayeva, the deputy head of the Labor and Employment Department of the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection of the Population of Turkmenistan, said in a commentary published on the country's official media on Tuesday, Trend reports citing Business Turkmenistan. Due to the regular support of small and medium-sized enterprises in Turkmenistan, contributing to their further expansion, around 75% of new jobs were created in the private sector, according to Babayeva. Babayeva said the private sector accounts for about 70% of GDP, allowing it to play a key role in increasing the country's economic potential. The deputy head of the Labor and Employment Department also noted that the creation of large investment projects aimed at developing the manufacturing industry in the country, as well as social sectors, allows creating new jobs and, as a result, expanding employment. The Program of Socio-Economic Development of the President of Turkmenistan for 2019-2025 is an important document that determines the development vectors of the national economy of Turkmenistan for the future, Babayeva said in the article, adding that during this period Turkmenistan aims to create tens of thousands of new jobs. Last month, President of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov took part in the opening ceremony of a new textile complex in Ahal velayat's Kaka etrap. The commissioning of the textile complex created 1,300 new jobs.

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

[TOP ↑](#)

## UZBEKISTAN: Uzbek Bank, ICD Sign Private Sector Financing Agreement

Uzbekistan's Infinbank has signed an agreement with the Islamic Corporation for the Development of the Private Sector (ICD) on attracting a line of financing for the development of small business, Trend reports citing Gazeta.uz. From 1 to 4 September, the 46th annual meeting of the Council of the Islamic Development Bank (IDB) was held at the Tashkent International Congress Center, during which various development issues were discussed. The annual meeting was attended by governors from the IDB member countries - members of governments and high-ranking officials responsible for finance and economics, as well as representatives of banks, international organizations, the business sector and the media. During the meeting of the Council of the IDB member countries, Infinbank and ICD signed an agreement totaling \$10 million. The allocated funds will be used to support and develop small businesses in Uzbekistan according to the murabaha principle. Cooperation between JSCB InfinBANK and ICD began in 2017 with the signing of the first agreement on a financing line in the amount of \$7 million.

From <https://en.trend.az> 09/06/2021

## Oceania

### **AUSTRALIA: Aged Care Sector Facing Staffing Crisis**

One in five aged care workers are ready to walk away from the industry within the next 12 months over poor pay and extreme stress, a new survey has found. The sector is on the verge of a staffing crisis, a report by aged care service consultants CompliSpace found, with some 47,000 workers likely to leave their jobs in the next year. The future of the industry after three years is even more dire, with the number indicating a desire to leave more than doubling to 110,000. In five years, two thirds - or 184,000 - plan to pursue other careers. Aged care workers in the first year of their career and experienced mentors are the most likely to call it quits, the research indicates. The survey of more than 1000 aged care workers identified paltry pay, high stress and excessive paperwork as their driving factors behind their desire to leave.

More than 220,000 live in residential aged care homes across the country, and with the proportion of Australians aged over 65 set to grow rapidly over the coming decades, thousands more workers will be needed. But aged care homes are already woefully understaffed. The recent Royal Commission into aged care found 20 per cent more direct-care staff are needed to lift staffing to "acceptable" levels, and 1.5 times as many staff to meet "best practice" levels. In that context, the figures paint a picture of an "aged care staffing dilemma of unprecedented scale", CompliSpace chief executive David Griffiths said. "This creates an unforeseen public policy crisis for the Australian government, the more than 800 providers of communal aged care facilities, and families who are looking at options for care in the years ahead." The situation is dire, but not surprising, he said, given some aged care workers are paid as little as \$21.62 per hour, or less than \$40,000 a year.

"We pay more to those who stack our supermarket shelves than those who care for some of the most vulnerable Australians in society," Mr Griffiths said. An extra \$17 billion over the next five years has been promised to lift standards in the sector, but workers themselves have been left out of the equation, he said. The Australian Fair Work Commission is currently reviewing an application to increase rates of pay for aged care workers by as much as 25 per cent, and will announce a decision in July 2022. If granted in full, the minimum wage would increase by \$5.41 to \$27.03 per hour.

From <https://au.news.yahoo.com> 09/22/2021

### **Small Business Urged to Let Go of Banks**

Many small businesses are still depending on banks to get a loan, unaware of newer

lenders which offer more ways to help them through difficult times. A Productivity Commission report on lending to small business found most tried for a bank loan to improve cash flow. There are more than two million small businesses in Australia and the government says their survival is important to the economy. Small to medium businesses employ 7.4 million people. However if these companies cannot get loans, they sometimes go bust. Small businesses are likely to have a harder time borrowing from banks in the future. Lending to business compared with other customer types has dropped from 55 per cent in 1990 to 32 per cent in 2020 due to industry change. Yet legal and technological change has helped a new breed of lenders offer more diverse products.

These include loans secured by assets other than property, such as machinery and vehicles, as well as unsecured loans. Business assets could provide security for a loan of about \$5000. Intangible assets on a balance sheet can be another means of security. The most common type is invoice or accounts receivable finance which uses outstanding invoices as collateral. The borrower receives credit based on the value of future invoices, which allows the business to receive payment sooner than waiting for the customer to pay. The report authors said these lesser-known loans could benefit traders significantly. Maintaining cash flow, for example, could help a business avoid late fees or seize a sales opportunity. Lenders offering these types of loans include Earlypay, Moula and Prospa. To help more small businesses take advantage of these loans, the government is encouraging lenders and prospective customers to share information to build trust. However, newer lenders without reputations were having limited success in winning support for products such as online lending, the report said. Having more data on smaller players' lending would help efforts to sustain this market, the report said. Ensuring small businesses can access finance could stop more closing during the tough trading times of the pandemic.

From <https://au.news.yahoo.com> 09/29/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## **Extended Financial Help for ACT Businesses**

Thousands of businesses in the national capital struggling under COVID-19 restrictions are set to benefit from a joint federal-ACT government package of grants. The support is aimed at getting businesses through to mid-October at which point the ACT is set to reach 80 per cent vaccination rates. A grant of \$10,000 for all employing small businesses and \$3750 for non-employing businesses will be paid to all businesses who were eligible for the COVID-19 Business Support Grant in industries still significantly impacted by health restrictions. A top-up payment will also be made available to large businesses. Support of \$10,000 will go to employing businesses with a turnover greater than \$2 million and less than \$5 million, with the figure rising to \$20,000 for those with a turnover greater than \$5 million and less than \$10 million. A \$30,000 payment will apply to businesses with a turnover greater than

\$10 million.

The package will be split on a 50-50 basis between the federal government and the ACT, which will administer it. A program to help tourism, events, hospitality, fitness and dance businesses will offer \$5000 for non-employing businesses, rising to \$25,000 for businesses with turnover greater than \$5 million. ACT Chief Minister Andrew Barr said the business support grant program had been an important lifeline. "Our detailed pathway forward has focused on protecting public health, getting people back to work and supporting the mental health and wellbeing of the ACT community," he said. The ACT's vaccination rate for over-16s leads the nation at 63.2 per cent, while 89.5 per cent have had one dose. Treasurer Josh Frydenberg said the support package would taper once 70 per cent full vaccination was achieved, to ensure support was focused on those industries that remained closed or severely restricted.

"The commonwealth will cease funding state business support programs at 80 per cent full vaccination in line with the national plan for reopening," he said. "At this point it will be a matter for each state to decide whether any additional targeted business support is needed in their jurisdictions as a result of any health restrictions they elect to impose." The ACT recorded 22 new local infections on Wednesday. A source could be found for 12 of them. At least seven were infectious in the community and another seven were in quarantine the whole time. There are 237 active cases in the ACT, 10 of them in hospital including three in intensive care requiring ventilation.

From <https://au.news.yahoo.com> 09/30/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## **Fund to Leverage Carbon Capture Investment**

As many as 1500 jobs are expected to be created through a \$250 million program to develop commercial-scale carbon capture, use and storage technologies in regional Australia. The Morrison government wants the projects and hubs operating by 2029, with co-investment from state and territory governments and international partners. Energy Minister Angus Taylor said the program would operate across two streams: \$100 million for the design and construction of carbon capture hubs and shared infrastructure and \$150 million for research and commercialisation of carbon capture technologies and finding viable carbon storage sites. "The projects supported by the CCUS Hubs and Technologies Program will boost delivery of long-term emissions reductions while generating new jobs across the country, particularly for regional Australia," Mr Taylor said.

The technologies capture CO<sub>2</sub> from the waste streams of industrial processes, or directly from the atmosphere, and convert it into products, ranging from synthetic fuels to food and beverages, chemicals, and building materials. The Australian Conservation Foundation has described it as a "pipe dream". The government



expects to see interest in the program from a range of countries including the US, UK, Japan and Singapore. Mr Taylor told the Australian British Chamber of Commerce this week it was hoped the government's \$20 billion "technology investment roadmap" could leverage at least \$80 billion of total investment over the next decade. The announcement comes as Prime Minister Scott Morrison and Mr Taylor finalise the details of a plan to achieve net zero emissions while ensuring jobs and industries are guaranteed in regional areas - a key demand of junior coalition partner, the Nationals. Labor climate change spokesman Chris Bowen said the government needed to take stronger climate policies to the upcoming Glasgow summit. "It's very clear we need to commit to zero by 2050, Scott Morrison can't even do that," he said. "We need policies underpinning a strong, medium-term projection with policies underpinning better 2030 targets." Mr Morrison has not yet committed to attending the summit, but at least one senior minister will go.

From <https://au.news.yahoo.com> 09/30/2021

[TOP ↑](#)

## **NEW ZEALAND: Additional Resurgence Support Payments to Support Business**

Businesses affected by higher Alert Levels will be able to apply for further Resurgence Support Payments (RSP). "The Government's RSP was initially intended as a one-off payment to help businesses with their fixed costs, such as rent. Ministers have agreed to provide additional payments to recognise the effects of an extended period of alert level restrictions," Grant Robertson said. "This will provide cashflow to businesses and support them in meeting their ongoing obligations as we come down Alert Levels and while Auckland remains at higher Alert Levels than the rest of the country. "Applications for the next RSP will open on Friday 17 September. Ministers have agreed that there will be another two payments after that, three weeks apart, so long as the conditions that trigger the RSP apply. "The payment and eligibility criteria to qualify for the RSP remain the same, including that those applying must experience at least a 30 percent decline in revenue over seven days (for this payment commencing 8 September) as a result of being at Alert Level 2 or higher." David Parker said. The payment includes a core per business rate of \$1,500, plus \$400 per employee, up to a total of 50 full-time equivalents (FTEs) which is a maximum payment of \$21,500. Businesses with more than 50 FTEs can still apply but cannot get more than the maximum payment. "The scheme will be available until all of New Zealand returns to Alert Level 1 for one month," David Parker said. Inland Revenue encourages those applying to ensure the accuracy of the information they provide, as if it isn't correct that will delay processing. "The economy is operating above pre-COVID levels thanks to our strong public health response. These principles will continue to guide our approach to supporting the economy, businesses and workers at this challenging time," Grant Robertson said. Businesses can apply for the payment by logging into their MyIR account. Further information can be found on the Inland Revenue website.

## **Mental Health Stocktake Shows Strong Progress**

The first report of the Government's Implementation Unit has found strong progress has been made since the Mental Health and Addictions Package was announced in 2019. "The report notes most initiatives funded in the Budget 2019 package are on track to deliver what is expected by 2023/24," Grant Robertson said. "For example, there are more than 200 GP sites offering Integrated Primary Mental Health and Addiction Services seeing more than 11,000 people per month and providing coverage for an enrolled population of 1.5 million people. "We know mental wellbeing is not simply about clinical treatment from health practitioners, it is also about housing, addiction services and primary care. "While the report shows there has been progress it also identifies some areas for improvement. This includes setting up systems to provide regular reporting rather than as requests come through, growing and retaining a suitably qualified workforce and ensuring all agencies are consistent in their links to front-line staff.

"One of the most important lessons from the report is that there is no silver bullet to ensure New Zealanders' mental wellbeing. A cross-government approach is crucial and we need to work hard to ensure the whole system is working," Grant Robertson said. "This report has been very helpful and in order to support the Ministry's directorate in the continued roll-out of the programme, I have established an external oversight group chaired by Judy McGregor, encompassing clinical, lived experience and governance," Andrew Little said. "The report identifies there is more to do in the mental health infrastructure space. Although the funding has been provided, the Ministry has struggled to achieve as much as we would have liked them to. "Since receiving the report, the Ministry has written a clear plan for mental health infrastructure. Simple improvements have been made immediately. For example, Ministers have recently agreed that the Ministry is able to provide DHBs with funding for planning, design and consenting of infrastructure projects so that they can be fast-tracked.

"The Ministry of Health has also identified that specialist health infrastructure people are in short supply, so we have asked the Ministry to work with Otakaro to support the delivery of these projects. "It is good to have confirmation that the overall investment is on track to be delivered, and the areas that require more focus have been highlighted," Andrew Little said. "This is the first report back from a number of reviews the Implementation Unit currently has underway," Grant Robertson said. "The unit, which is housed in the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, reports to me as Deputy Prime Minister. Other programmes being reviewed include Jobs for Nature and parts of the NZ Upgrade Programme."

[TOP ↑](#)

# UNPAN-AP Editorial Department, RCOCI

