UNPAN United Nations Public Administration Network

ASIA-PACIFIC GOVERNANCE WATCH

December 2021, Issue 218

UNPAN-AP
Editorial Department, RCOCI

Asia-Pacific Governance Watch

December 2021, Issue 218

UNPAN-AP Editorial Department, RCOCI

1、Government Policy and Legislation

Asia-Pacific

East Asia

South-East Asia

South Asia

Central-West Asia

Oceania

[Labor Has 'Finally' Begun Its 'Policy Push']
[Labor Rules Out Negotiating Increase to 2030 Climate Target to Win Government]
[NEW ZEALAND: Defence Priorities and Principles Released]
[Security Information in Proceedings Legislation Bill Passes First Reading]
[Bill to Boost Housing Supply Passes]
[National Security Intelligence Priorities released]
[New Legislation to Modernise Emergency Management System]
[Omicron: Government’s Pan to Minimise Risk]

2、Government System and Civil Services

Asia-Pacific

[World Bank Supports Improved Management of Public Resources for Service Delivery]

East Asia

[CHINA: Measures Ensuring Religious Freedom Sound, Effective]
[Xinhua Releases Report on China's Approach to Democracy, Freedom and Human Rights]
[China's Democracy Practice a New Form of Political Civilization]
[Online Platform of Consultative Democracy Embodies Chinese Concept of Democracy]
[Chinese People Invited to Advise on Gov't Work Online]
[Structural Reforms Can Ease China’s Transition to High-Quality Growth: Report]
[JAPAN: Online Fundraising Parties for Politicians Raise Both Cash and Questions]
[Japan Govt Found Tampering with Construction Works Data]
[LDP OK’s Adding ‘Family’ to Name of Planned Agency for Children]
[SOUTH KOREA: AI Spokesman, Avatars Enter Election Campaigns]
[KIPO Vows to Take Lead in Setting International Rules on AI Inventions]

South-East Asia

South Asia

Central-West Asia

Oceania

3、Management, Capacity Building and Innovation

Asia-Pacific

East Asia

South-East Asia

South Asia

Central-West Asia

Oceania

4、Economic and Social Development and ICT

Asia-Pacific

East Asia

South-East Asia

Vietnam's Economy Grows 2.58 pct in 2021
Agricultural, Forestry and Fishery Export Turnover Reaches Record High in 2021
Banking Industry Directed to Support Economic Recovery
Top 10 Major Economic Events in 2021

South Asia

INDIA: PM Modi to Dedicate Kashi Vishwanath Corridor Project to People This Month
Sustainability: The Next Frontier of Digital Transformation
Delhi Police Launches Unnati Platform to Educate Economically Weak Youths
E-commerce Skyrocketing MSME Sales
Augmenting Business Ecosystem in Uttar Pradesh
Chhattisgarh's Rural Economy Gets Impetus with Gothan & Godhan Nyay Yojana
Uttarakhand CM Pushkar Singh Dhami Launches Free Tablet Distribution to Students
SRI LANKA: Loops, Truecaller Partners to Enable Safety and Efficiency to Daily Life Business Communications
PAKISTAN: Uttarakhand Gets First Internet Exchange in Dehradun

Central-West Asia

ARMENIA: Azerbaijan Calls on International Organizations to Assess Armenian Cyberattacks
AZERBAIJAN: Talks 4G Network Coverage in Liberated Territories
Real GDP Growth to Reach 5.1% in Azerbaijan in 2021
Azerbaijani Economy to Grow Due to Several Factors – Gazprombank
Azerbaijan Talks Cyberthreats Faced by Local Users in Several Large Cities
Azerbaijan's CERT Expands Public Awareness About Cases of Cyber Fraud
Average Broadband Internet Download Speeds Increases in Azerbaijan
Azerbaijan Reveals Increase of Salaries in Number of Spheres
Over Half of Azerbaijani Karabakh's Territory Covered by Mobile Internet – Minister

Azerbaijan Prepares E-Map of Monuments of Shusha City
Major Achievements of Azerbaijani Economy in 2021
GEORGIA: Intensifying Efforts to Develop Digital Economy - European Commission
UZBEKISTAN: UNDP to Help Uzbekistan Engage Youth in Digital Economy
Uzbekistan's FTO Jumps Up to 15%

Oceania

AUSTRALIA: Job ad Rise Points to Falling Unemployment
Australia Population Faces Slow Recovery
Will 2022 Be Better? Aussie Outlook Mixed
Will the Economic 'Roller Coaster' Continue in 2022? Here's What These Experts Think
NEW ZEALAND: Save the Children New Zealand
Government Upgrades Local Hospitals Throughout New Zealand
NZ Economy’s Resilience Shown Despite COVID Impacts
Strong Govt Accounts and Economic Outlook

5、Public Finance

Asia-Pacific

Government Support Cushions Tax Revenues in OECD Countries from the Worst Impacts of the COVID-19 Crisis
Global Community Steps Up with $93 Billion Support Package to Boost Resilient Recovery in World’s Poorest Countries
OECD Releases Pillar Two Model Rules for Domestic Implementation of 15% Global Minimum Tax
The World Bank Will Finance COVID-19 Vaccines for 20 Million Peruvians
World Bank Issues Sustainable Development Bonds While Raising Awareness for the Importance of Road Safety in Developing Countries
$600 Million ADB Loan to Boost Sustainable and Reliable Electricity Services in Western and Central Java
ADB Allocates $4.1 Million to Support COVID-19 Rural Recovery

East Asia

South-East Asia

South Asia

INDIA: PM Modi to Transfer Rs 1,000 Crore in the Accounts of 1.60 lakh SHGs of UP on December 21
Centre & ADB Inks $350 Million Loan to Enhance Access to Sustainable Urban Services
Despite COVID, Haryana Govt Maintained Good Financial Management
PAKISTAN: 4th General Assembly of ISA Promises to Achieve $1 Trillion Global Investments by 2030
Centre Signs $4.5mn Loan with ADB to Augment Mobility in Aizwal

Central-West Asia

AZERBAIJAN: Considering Providing IT Companies with Tax Incentives – MP
Azerbaijan Discloses Funds Planned to Be Invested in Industrial Zones
Central Bank of Azerbaijan Expanding Capabilities of Digital Identification Project
Foreign Direct Investments in Azerbaijan's Economy Reach $60B over Past Few Years
Central Bank Projects Real Economic Growth in Azerbaijan in 2022
UZBEKISTAN: Sharing Data on Interest Expenses of Banking Sector
ADB Approves $162mn Loan to Modernize Railway and Boost Tourism in Uzbekistan
Uzbekistan to Issue New Banknotes
YEMEN: World Bank Approves US$170 Million in Grant Support for Yemen to Restore Critical Urban Services and Support Climate Resilient Rural Road Access

Oceania

AUSTRALIA: Ending Native Logging in NSW Could Save Millions of Dollars a Year, Study Claims
No Great Secret in Balancing Budget: PM
Aussies Still in Dark over Cryptocurrency and NFTs, Survey Finds
Aviation Gets $78m, Recovery Plan Launched
Energy Crisis Propels Aussie Resources Exports to Record $379

6、Private Sector

Asia-Pacific

East Asia

1、Government Policy and Legislation

Asia-Pacific

Global Agriculture and Food Security Program Puts Farmers First in New Funding for Producer Organizations & Countries

The Global Agriculture and Food Security Program (GAFSP), a global fund dedicated to reducing food insecurity and poverty in low-income countries, today announced $121 million in new grants for nine national governments and, for the first time, an additional $30 million for producer organizations based in 12 countries worldwide. This funding aims to strengthen sustainable, inclusive, and resilient food systems in the world's poorest countries, in response to rising food insecurity linked to COVID-19 and climate change. For over a decade, GAFSP has supported locally-led, inclusive projects across the entire agriculture value chain – from 'farm to fork'. For the first time in its history, GAFSP is now providing small-scale grants directly to producer organizations to help meet the demand for financing for smallholder farmers and their organizations. Farmers, through civil society and farmers' organizations representatives, have always had a seat at the table in GAFSP's decision-making process and are now designing, implementing, and leading on solutions that address their needs as key stakeholders in building sustainable food systems.

"Over the past two years, producer organizations have influenced COVID-19 responses plans adopted by policymakers. The opportunity to directly fund these organizations helps increase their agency in revising food and related policies," said Ibrahima Coulibaly, President of the Network of Farmers' Organizations and Smallholder Farmers in West Africa (ROPPA), "As smallholder farmers, we believe that such critical initiatives will certainly increase the efficiency of COVID-19 response plans, as well as move us closer to a world with Zero Hunger." The open Call for Proposals attracted approximately US$1 billion in funding requests – ten times what GAFSP can fund with current resources – and signals the high demand for investment in agriculture in the world's poorest countries. The new country grants – to Bangladesh, Bhutan, Kyrgyz Republic, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Nepal, Senegal, South Sudan, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu – will help countries achieve their national development priorities, such as improving farmers' incomes and enhancing climate resilience, while strengthening private sector engagement. The new producer organization grants – in Bangladesh, Burundi, Cambodia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Haiti, Honduras, Maldives, Nicaragua, Niger, Senegal, Tanzania, and Uganda – will help strengthen the institutional capacities of these organizations as key economic players in the value chain, including through better access to finance, markets, and innovative solutions for their farmers. In addition, the Steering Committee approved four country projects totaling $71 million in Cambodia, Honduras, Mauritania, and Somalia contingent on additional donor contributions to the fund.

"Investing in resilient, sustainable agriculture and food systems is key to ending hunger and improving food and nutrition security for all in a changing climate. This unprecedented demand for agricultural funding in response to the latest GAFSP Call for Proposals is a clear signal to the international community that we must all step up and put more resources where they can be most impactful," said Dirk Schattschneider, Assistant Director-General, Federal Ministry of Economic

Cooperation and Development (BMZ), Germany. This is the sixth call for agricultural investments in countries eligible for development assistance from the International Development Association (IDA) – the part of the World Bank that helps the world's poorest countries. Proposals were selected based on recommendations of an independent review conducted by global agriculture experts, and then selected through a competitive process by the fund's Steering Committee, composed of donors, recipient countries, civil society organizations, and multilateral development agencies, including the World Bank. "Our farmers need finance to lift themselves out of poverty but accessing formal sources of finance is difficult for farmers. GAFSP's innovative approach of providing finance to farmers' organizations directly makes it possible for us to make the investments we need to uplift our community," said Beauty Khatun, member of the Sara Bangla Krishak Society (national network of farmers' organizations) in Bangladesh.

From https://www.worldbank.org/ 12/07/2021

TOP ↑

APEC's Agenda in 2022

"We need to rethink our approach and adopt a future growth model that creates a paradigm shift and addresses the inherent inequalities and imbalances that render our economies vulnerable," said Permanent Secretary of Foreign Affairs, Thani Thongphakdi, 2022 Chair of the APEC Senior Officials who are meeting in Phuket this week to agree on priorities for 2022. This comes just three weeks after APEC Leaders agreed to policy actions designed to respond to COVID-19 and commitments in accelerating economic recovery and achieving sustainable and inclusive growth, including further actions in tackling climate change, empowering groups with untapped economic potential, supporting the region's micro, small and medium enterprises and addressing the digital divide. Chairing the meeting on Friday, Thani assured APEC member economies that there will be continuity from New Zealand's priority areas to Thailand's hosting year, with a focus on charting a post-COVID-19 future for the Asia-Pacific region. "As we move forward from the health and economic crisis, we need to promote long-term growth that is resilient, inclusive, balanced and sustainable," said Thani. "In this regard, there are opportunities to be derived from economic models like the bio-circular-green economy to place APEC on this desired growth trajectory." Revealing APEC's focus for 2022, Thani announced the theme, "Open. Connect. Balance." "Together, we hope to make APEC open to all opportunities, connected in all dimensions, and balanced in all aspects," he stated. "Our priority is to facilitate open trade and investment and to advance regional economic integration including the Free Trade Area of the Asia-Pacific or FTAAP in the post-COVID context."

"We also seek to restore safe and seamless cross-border travel in the immediate future, while enhancing business mobility in a more inclusive manner in the long term," explained Thani. "To truly facilitate trade and investment, the region must be reconnected again." Driven by the bio-circular-green economy concept, APEC is committed to advancing its sustainability and green growth agenda by scaling up and accelerating actions through existing work streams and building on past progress. Thailand aims to host a fully physical APEC 2022, acknowledging the remaining threats of COVID but ensuring members that vigorous consideration to public health measures will be taken to ensure the safety and security of all meeting participants, as well as local staff and communities. "What makes APEC unique as the premier economic forum is its role as an incubator of ideas and its ability to deliver practical and innovative solutions that respond to our people's needs and challenges," he concluded. "We look forward to working closely with member economies and all our stakeholders to deliver a successful APEC 2022 that is relevant and addresses today's key challenges in the region. Thailand will chair APEC throughout 2022. The First APEC Senior Officials' Meeting and related technical meetings will take place on 8 to 27 February 2022 in Pattaya, about 150km southeast of Bangkok.

From https://www.apec.org/ 12/03/2021

TOP ↑

East Asia

CHINA: Releasing Guidelines to Improve Sentence Reduction, Parole Hearings

Chinese authorities on Wednesday released guidelines for court hearings in sentence reduction and parole cases as part of efforts to ensure leniency is only granted to those who are truly repentant. The key issue in hearing parole and sentence reduction cases is how to decide whether a convict is repentant, according to the Supreme People's Court (SPC), which released the document together with the Supreme People's Procuratorate, the Ministry of Public Security and the Ministry of Justice. Apart from convicts' acts of repentance during their prison sentence, the court should take into consideration whether the convicts truly feel sorry for their criminal activities and realize the damage they caused to society, according to the SPC.

From http://www.news.cn/ 12/08/2021

TOP ↑

China Unveils 5-year Plan to Advance Agricultural, Rural Modernization

China has released a plan to advance agricultural and rural modernization during the 14th Five-Year Plan period (2021-2025), Deng Xiaogang, vice minister of agricultural and rural affairs, told a press conference on Wednesday. After five years of efforts, the foundation of agriculture is expected to be further consolidated, comprehensive progresses are expected to be made in rural vitalization, and significant advancement is expected to be made in modernizing agricultural and rural areas, according to the plan. Regions with better conditions will take the lead in basically realizing agricultural and rural modernization, while consolidating and expanding the achievements in poverty alleviation will be effectively aligned with rural vitalization in regions that have shaken off poverty, stated the plan. By 2035, China will have made decisive progress in rural vitalization, and modernization of agriculture and rural areas will be basically achieved, according to the plan.

From http://www.news.cn/ 12/08/2021

TOP ↑

China to Keep Macro Policies Prudent, Effective in 2022: Key Meeting

China will continue implementing proactive fiscal policies and prudent monetary policies for steady economic progress next year, according to a statement released after the annual Central Economic Work Conference held in Beijing from Wednesday to Friday. Proactive fiscal policies should be more effective and emphasize precision and sustainability, the statement said. The meeting highlighted efforts to ensure the intensity of fiscal expenditure and accelerate the spending progress. It also pledged to implement new tax and fee cut policies, strengthen support for small and medium-sized enterprises, individually-run businesses, manufacturing and risk-defusing, and take a moderately proactive approach in advancing infrastructure investment. The statement urged local governments to resolutely curb new hidden debt. Prudent monetary policies should be flexible and appropriate, and liquidity should be maintained at a reasonable and ample level, the statement said. It underlined efforts to guide financial institutions to ramp up support for real economy, especially for small and micro enterprises, technological innovation and green development. Fiscal and monetary policies should be coordinated, and cross-cyclical and counter-cyclical macro-regulation policies should be integrated, the statement said. Efforts should also be made to fully implement the domestic demand expansion strategy and reinforce the endogenous growth momentum, according to the statement.

From http://www.news.cn/ 12/10/2021

TOP ↑

China Sets Tone for 2022 Economic Development with Clear-cut Policy Toolbox

China's top leaders have mapped out priorities for next year's economic work as the annual Central Economic Work Conference concluded in Beijing Friday, highlighting efforts to maintain stability while pursuing progress. In a speech at the conference, Xi Jinping, general secretary of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee, Chinese president and chairman of the Central Military Commission, reviewed the country's economic work in 2021, analyzed the current economic situation and arranged next year's economic work. Li Keqiang, Li Zhanshu, Wang Yang, Wang Huning, Zhao Leji and Han Zheng, who are members of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee, attended the three-day conference.

STEADY PROGRESS

Economic work next year should prioritize stability while pursuing progress, according to the meeting. Actions should be taken to safeguard macroeconomic stability, keep major economic indicators within an appropriate range and maintain social stability to prepare for the Party's 20th National Congress, the meeting said. The year 2021 has been a milestone for both the Party and the nation, according to the meeting, which noted that China has maintained a leading position in the world in economic development and epidemic control, with progress made in scientific strength, industrial chain resilience, reform and opening-up, people's livelihood and ecological civilization. However, it cautioned that China's economic development is facing pressure from demand contraction, supply shocks and weakening expectations, and the external environment is becoming increasingly complicated, grim and uncertain.

"We must face the difficulties squarely while staying confident," said a statement released after the meeting, citing China's strong economic resilience and unchanged fundamentals underpinning long-term growth. The meeting called for remaining committed to China's own cause, consolidating the economic foundations, enhancing the abilities of scientific and technological innovation and adhering to multilateralism. It also urged making proactive efforts to align with the high-standard international economic and trade rules, deepening reform via high-level opening-up, and boosting high-quality development. The meeting stressed the necessity to adhere to the centralized, unified leadership of the CPC Central Committee, promote high-quality development and pursue progress while ensuring stability. It highlighted the timing, extent and efficiency of policy adjustments and reform to ensure their steady advancement, as well as coordination and systems thinking.

THE 2022 POLICY TOOLBOX

China will continue implementing proactive fiscal policies and prudent monetary policies for steady economic progress next year, according to the meeting. It pledged to implement new tax and fee cut policies, strengthen support for small and medium-sized enterprises, individually-run businesses, manufacturing and risk-defusing, and take a moderately proactive approach in advancing infrastructure investment. Prudent monetary policies should be flexible and appropriate, and liquidity should be maintained at a reasonable and ample level, the meeting said. It underlined efforts to guide financial institutions to ramp up support for the real economy, especially for small and micro enterprises, technological innovation and green development. In 2022, China will wield its microeconomic policies to stimulate the vitality of market entities, deepen the supply-side structural reform with a focus on smoothing the circulation of the national economy, and firmly advance the implementation of policies related to science and technology, said the meeting.

Next year's economic priorities also include vitalizing development through policies of reform and opening-up, promoting more balanced and coordinated regional development, and ensuring that its social policies well safeguard people's well-being. Efforts will be made to boost the employment of young people, including college graduates, and optimize flexible employment and social security policies. In the first 10 months of 2021, China created 11.33 million new jobs in its urban areas, achieving its whole-year target in advance, official data showed. Reiterating the principle that "housing is for living in, not for speculation," the meeting said China will support the property market to better cater to the reasonable demand of home buyers and adopt city-specific policies to boost the virtuous cycle and healthy development of the sector. The country will also expand high-quality and institutional opening-up, grant foreign-funded enterprises national treatment, attract more investment from multinational companies, and facilitate the early implementation of major foreign-invested projects.

From http://www.news.cn/ 12/11/2021

TOP ↑

China Rolls Out Policies to Shore Up Industrial Economy

China on Tuesday announced new measures to boost its industrial economy as part of the country's efforts to drive high-quality development in the sector. The policies, jointly issued by the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) and the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology, aimed to release more market potential and stimulate the vitality of market entities, said a statement on the NDRC's official website. The country will ensure energy security, stabilize the supply and prices of bulk raw materials, and smooth key industrial and supply chains. Demand potential will be further fulfilled with measures to help implement major projects, advance technological updates of enterprises, cultivate new business forms and models, and promote foreign trade and foreign capital utilization. China will step up safety measures in the industrial sector, improve policy systems in key regions, strengthen financing support for the manufacturing industry, and help firms navigate employment challenges. More efforts will be made to reduce burdens on medium and small companies and optimize market environments, added the document.

From http://www.news.cn/ 12/14/2021

TOP ↑

China to Improve Incentives for Government Policy Implementation

China will enhance incentives and support for local efforts in implementing major policies with noticeable results during the 14th Five-Year Plan period (2021-2025), said a circular released by the General Office of the State Council. Taking the forms of funding and investment, among others, incentives will cover areas such as innovation, intellectual property rights (IPR), vocational education, foreign trade, and environmental governance, the circular said. Central funds will tilt toward scientific and technological development in provincial-level regions with great progress in innovation-driven development and application of scientific and technological outcomes. Well-performing provincial-level regions will get support in building IPR protection centers, launching pilot programs for financial reform and innovation, and improving vocational education, among others. In allocating central fiscal funds, incentives will also be offered if they achieve remarkable results in protecting high-standard farmland, enhancing medical care services and boosting employment.

From http://www.news.cn/ 12/20/2021

TOP ↑

Chinese Lawmakers Review Legal Amendments to Improve Corporate Governance

Chinese lawmakers on Monday started to review a draft revision of the country's Company Law to improve corporate governance and operations. The draft revision has been submitted to the ongoing session of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress (NPC), the top legislature, for deliberation. Consisting of 15 chapters and 260 articles, the new draft updates the current law by revising or adding around 70 articles. It stipulates the Communist Party of China's leadership over state-owned enterprises (SOEs) and improves rules on state-funded companies. The draft improves the system for company registration to facilitate the establishment and exit of companies, offers greater autonomy to companies in terms of corporate structure, and improves the capital system for companies. It also strengthens the responsibility system of shareholders and management personnel, and highlights corporate social responsibility efforts. Adopted in 1993, China's Company Law has been amended several times. The current version was enacted after an amendment concerning the capital system of companies in 2018. Wang Ruihe, an official with the Legislative Affairs Commission of the NPC Standing Committee, said the revision is necessary for deepening SOE reform, improving the modern corporate system with Chinese characteristics, optimizing the business environment, enhancing property rights protection, and facilitating the sound development of the capital market.

From http://www.news.cn/ 12/20/2021

TOP ↑

Xi Stresses Improving Party Regulations to Safeguard Party's Leadership, Governance

Xi Jinping, general secretary of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee, has stressed the important role of the Party's internal regulations in maintaining the centralized and unified leadership of the CPC Central Committee. The regulations are also vital to the Party's long-term governance and the country's enduring prosperity and stability, said Xi, also Chinese president and chairman of the Central Military Commission, in an instruction to a national meeting on the work of the Party's internal regulations held in Beijing Monday. Noting the remarkable progress in strengthening Party regulations since the 18th CPC National Congress, Xi stressed further efforts to willingly and firmly implement rule-based governance over the Party and improve intra-Party regulations. The major roles of intra-Party regulations should be better leveraged to ensure the Party's firm leadership in upholding and developing socialism with Chinese characteristics, he said. Wang Huning, a member of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee and a member of the Secretariat of the CPC Central Committee, presided over the meeting and delivered a speech. Noting that Xi's instruction has taken into consideration of the Chinese nation's rejuvenation and profound changes happening in the world, Wang said the CPC Central Committee's policies and Xi's instruction must be thoroughly implemented.

From http://www.news.cn/ 12/20/2021

TOP ↑

China Issues Plan on Digitalization, Networking of Manufacuturing

China will see 70 percent of its major manufacturing firms basically digitalized and networked by 2025, according to a development plan on smart manufacturing. The plan, issued by the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology and other departments, also states that all of China's manufacturing firms above a designated size will be digitalized and networked by 2035. China will also build more than 500 industry-leading smart-manufacturing demonstration plants by 2025, according to the plan. Although China's smart manufacturing has progressed from the pilot test phase to application, it still lags behind the standard of high-quality development. The plan proposes a range of special actions, including innovation, application, supply and support, to advance the development of smart manufacturing.

From http://www.news.cn/ 12/28/2021

TOP ↑

China Unveils Five-year Plan to Boost Raw Materials Industry

Chinese authorities on Wednesday unveiled a plan to facilitate the development of the country's raw materials industry during the 14th Five-Year Plan period (2021-2025). By 2025, a new development pattern for China's raw materials sector that features higher quality, better profitability and distribution, low carbon, and more security will take shape, said the plan. It was issued jointly by the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology and two other government bodies. The sector will become a highland for the research and development, production, and application of the world's vital raw materials. The industrial system will be safe, independent, and controllable, the plan said. Including steel, nonferrous metals, building materials, and new materials sub-sectors, the raw materials sector has long served as the bedrock for the real economy. Official data showed the industrial output of China's raw materials sector in 2020 accounted for 27.4 percent of all sectors The plan also called for efforts to promote a digital and green shift in the raw materials sector. The production capacity for bulk commodities such as crude steel and cement should not increase, with the industrial-capacity utilization rate kept at a reasonable level.

From http://www.news.cn/ 12/29/2021

TOP ↑

SOUTH KOREA: Ministry Announces Guideline on Stable Online Services by Netflix, Google

The Ministry of Science and ICT on Tuesday unveiled a guideline on a revised law requiring Netflix and other tech giants to improve their online service quality. Last December, South Korea passed a law revision holding online content service providers accountable if they fail to maintain stable services amid growing complaints against streaming giants Netflix and Google after their services experienced a number of outages. The revised law, informally dubbed the "Netflix law" in the country, stipulates that large online content providers, including Google, Meta Platforms and Netflix, as well as local rivals Naver, Kakao and Wavve, are also required to report service errors to the ICT ministry. Under the new guideline, the online content service providers are advised to secure enough network capacity and to notify local users in Korean in case of an outage or service error. Netflix and other service providers are also advised to strengthen the verification of service errors to preemptively detect such problems and to allocate a storage system to recover the content when an error occurs. On Dec. 14 last year, multiple Google services, including YouTube, Gmail and Google Calendar, went down for around an hour globally due to an authentication system error. The company posted a statement on its Twitter account in English, but it did not notify local users.

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

TOP ↑

Gov't to Reintroduce Strengthened Gathering Restriction amid Latest Virus Crisis PM

The government will reintroduce a toughened private gathering restriction in order to tackle the fast spread of COVID-19 infections and increases in deaths, Prime Minister Kim Boo-kyum said Wednesday. "The government assesses the current virus situation very sternly and plans to implement a much more powerful social distancing scheme," Kim said during a meeting of the Central Disaster and Safety Countermeasures Headquarters.

From https://en.yna.co.kr 12/15/2021

TOP ↑

Lee Pledges to Complete Moon Landing Project by 2030

Ruling party presidential candidate Lee Jae-myung pledged Wednesday to complete the country's first moon landing project by 2030 if elected in the March presidential poll. The Democratic Party (DP) nominee also said he will establish a new position of deputy prime minister for science, technology and innovation to oversee planning and budget issues in the science industry. The plans, which were unveiled during a press conference at the DP headquarters, are part of Lee's top seven campaign pledges for the science and technology sector. "I will turn South Korea into a top 5 global science power alongside the United States, the European Union, China and Japan," the candidate said. The DP previously said it is looking into a pledge to land an unmanned probe on the moon by 2030. Lee's other pledges include establishing technological sovereignty by developing future national strategic technologies, and expanding research into technologies that will help resolve social issues.

From https://en.yna.co.kr 12/22/2021

TOP ↑

South-East Asia

VIETNAM: Hà Nội Announces Plan to Promote Key Industrial Products in 2022

Hà Nội has launched a plan to foster the development of key industrial products (KIP) in 2022, expecting 30-35 products to earn the recognition next year. The city is also working to ensure 100 per cent of the firms manufacturing KIPs will benefit from its support policies, and such firms will push their production value up by 10-12 per cent against 2021 and contribute 35-40 per cent of the city's total industrial production and 15 per cent of total exports. To this end, the city is taking six measures, namely improving the business environment for KIP firms, supporting KIP firms in technological development, developing human resource, selecting and honouring KIP, promoting trade and investment, and formulating supportive policies. Previously, Hà Nội honoured 26 products as KIP in 2020 and 46 products this year. So far, the city has recognised 163 products from 107 firms after four years, from 2018 to 2021. For the 2021-2025 period, the municipal authority aims to have 150-180 products recognised as KIP. The city hopes that KIP recognition would add value to brand names, allowing them to fare better amid the pandemic, and create favourable conditions for development. Meanwhile, Hà Nội's index of industrial production in November went up 4.8 per cent month-on-month and 7.1 per cent compared to the same period last year.

From https://vietnamnews.vn/ 12/06/2021

TOP ↑

Regulations to Shield Off-Plan Property Purchases

Off-plan property is an asset chosen by many professional and retail investors. However, as the legal framework for off-plan buildings is not synchronised and complete, there are many potential risks in buying such property. Off-plan buildings are properties in the process of construction. At the time of signing the contract, the buyer can only access the project's legal documents or refer to the model house to visualise the property. According to experts, the current Laws on Housing, Real Estate Business, Land, Investment and the Civil Code have inconsistent regulations on off-plan property, creating obstacles for the implementation and application of laws in real estate. The Ministry of Construction is collecting opinions on draft amendments to the Law on Real Estate Business 2014. The Ministry also points out the shortcomings and limitations related to this type of asset. Firstly, regulations on off-plan business concentrate on housing, but there is a lack of details for construction works, which has not created favourable conditions for future construction work. The rights of investors in off-plan business activities are limited by forms of sale, transfer and lease purchase. There are still no regulations for investors to use off-plan to mobilise capital for project implementation.

Meanwhile, the Law on Real Estate Business has not regulated clearly on off-plan property for business purposes, such as whether all construction work or just some cases are for sale or lease purchase. Besides, regulations on the guarantee in sale and lease purchase of off-plan properties, they still lack details as they are not applicable for off-plan that is for sale or lease. The Law on Real Estate Business also lacks regulations on transferring contracts of purchase, sale and lease purchase of off-plan properties. The inadequacies and lack of synchronisation in the legal system have caused significant damages in the past. Many customers who put their trust in investors were deceived. They spent all their savings and even borrowed from banks to buy houses, but still have not received their assets after a decade. Lê Văn Hồi, director of My Way Law, said that only housing has its own law, which was the Law on Housing 2012, while others were mainly regulated in the Law on Real Estate Business, resulting in many challenges in applying and implementing the law.

Recently, there has been a boom in transactions of tourist accommodation and tourist villas, but there is no clear legal framework for these types of property, Hồi said. Thus it has created many problems, requiring a lot of guiding documents from related State agencies. Although in the contract of sale and purchase of off-plan properties, the two parties specifically acknowledge the brand, quality of materials used in constructing, installing and completing the properties, disputes still frequently occur; typically the product is not the same as the design model. The difference in the quality of actual and sample products, and the different expectations of each party has led to prolonged disputes. However, buyers are often at a disadvantage after paying for most of the assets. Therefore they often have to accept the final product even if they are not satisfied. Regarding the risks of buying off-plan, Hoàng Trung Hiếu of the Faculty of Law, Vietnam Youth Academy, said that the progress on house building may have a guarantee mechanism from banks, but regulations on product quality assurance had not been adjusted on the Law of Real Estate Business. Regulations on the acceptance of construction work were also difficult to adjust in terms of quality of actual assets, compared to signed contracts. And the risk was always on the buyer, causing disputes during the transfer process.

In fact, the contract of purchase and sale of off-plan property that violated the law will be declared invalid, and the parties will return to each other what they have received. However, judgment enforcement will struggle in disputes when the regulations are not strong enough and have not yet resolved the consequences arising from the contract being breached. Thus it requires a mechanism to ensure the enforceability of judgments for disputes related to apartment purchase and sale contracts in order to support the real estate market to develop. Even though off-plan projects have been guaranteed by a bank, buyers must be granted letters of guarantee from banks when the projects are behind schedule. Regarding this issue, economist Nguyễn Trí Hiếu said that the Law on Real Estate Business 2014 stipulated that that off-plan projects could only be sold if they had bank guarantees. This regulation acts as a shield to protect buyers from investors drawing projects on vacant land and then raising capital without knowing the risks that may occur. Despite the regulation, since 2015 there has been no official number showing how many projects have been guaranteed by banks and how many have been fulfilled, Hiếu added. Therefore, it is necessary to amend the law in the direction of tightening more regulations to force investors to properly perform their obligations. Buyers need to have bilateral guarantee contracts, including bank guarantee certificates, to secure their interests. In the draft to propose the amendment of the Law on Real Estate Business, the Ministry of Construction said that there would be amendments and updates on the law to cover these shortcomings.

From https://vietnamnews.vn 12/18/2021

TOP ↑

HCM City Issues Guidelines for Pandemic Level Assessment in All Districts

The HCM City Department of Health’s new guidelines for pandemic assessment in all districts and Thủ Đức City will be based on the rate of new cases in the community, vaccine coverage, and medical facilities’ treatment capacity. The number of weekly cases confirmed by RT-PCR test results (recorded between Friday and next Thursday) will be sent by the city Centre for Disease Control (HCDC) to its health centre and announced by the Ministry of Health. The number of new weekly cases excludes the number of imported cases, which are quarantined upon arrival. The health centre will verify information about the cases such as address, phone number and test results and immediately respond to any data errors within 24 hours. For vaccine coverage, the rate is based on the number of vaccinated people in a district (both permanent and temporary residents) regardless of vaccination location. The People’s Committees of districts, Thủ Đức City, wards, communes and townships will submit this data to the Department of Health. HCDC is responsible for checking the vaccination rates of wards, communes, towns, districts and Thủ Đức City. The Health Department and HCDC will evaluate the vaccination rate in districts and Thủ Đức City and give them feedback.

The city began administering COVID-19 booster vaccine shots this month, with priority given to people aged 50 and over and frontline workers. As for medical facilities’ treatment capacity, districts and Thủ Đức City must plan to maintain enough mobile medical stations and groups of medical workers to take care of COVID-19 patients in the community, and provide sufficient oxygen supply for potential outbreaks. City districts and Thủ Đức City should report personnel shortages to the Department of Health. They must also ensure a sufficient number of medical workers at different levels, provide more training to medical workers on testing, and improve their capacity in receiving and treating patients, especially in the ICU. According to the guidelines issued by the Ministry of Health, the number of new COVID cases in the community will be categorised into four levels based on the World Health Organisation's guidance. Level one will be for areas with fewer than 20 new cases per 100,000 residents; level two, fewer than 50; level three, fewer than 150; and level four, more than 150. At level four, provinces and cities must establish treatment facilities and ensure a sufficient number of intensive care units (ICU), including both public and private. The rate of adults who have received at least one dose will be divided into two levels, above 70 per cent or under 70 per cent. The Department of Health will work with the HCDC to review the weekly reports on pandemic level assessment. Since the fourth COVID wave beginning in late April, HCM City has had almost 500,000 cases, including nearly 20,000 deaths.

From https://vietnamnews.vn 12/24/2021

TOP ↑

HCM City Set to Approve Outdoor Advertising Plans

The HCM City government needs to have plans to develop outdoor advertising, experts said. Nguyễn Quang Nhựt, head of the HCM City Outdoor Advertising Club, said outdoor advertising revenues account for about 20 per cent of the country’s total advertising spending of US$1.5-2 billion a year. But admittedly they have fallen by 30-40 per cent during the pandemic. At the 2021 Outdoor Advertising Awards last week, Trần Thị Thanh Mai, general director of Kantar Media Việt Nam, said this year global advertising revenues increased by 16 per cent, and are expected to grow by 25 per cent next year. The segment has enormous potential for development in Việt Nam, she said. Trần Thanh Vương of the City Department of Culture and Sports said for nearly 16 years the city has not had an outdoor advertising plan, and so hoardings and advertising board positions are not well organised. At the event, many advertising enterprises raised questions about the status of outdoor advertising plans. It is expected to hold a meeting this week to approve the plans. "This time the outdoor advertising plan is expected to be approved," Vương said. According to the city Department of Culture and Sports received 2,200 outdoor advertising applications in 2021, down 26 per cent from last year. But the numbers have been increasing since the lifting of COVID restrictions.

From https://vietnamnews.vn/ 12/30/2021

TOP ↑

South Asia

INDIA: MeitY Releases National Strategy on Blockchain to Leverage It in Government Departments

In a developmental move towards digitalisation, the Ministry of Electronics and IT (MeitY) released the National Strategy on Blockchain for adopting technology in the government systems, on December 3. The national strategy on blockchain identifies as many as 44 potential areas of leveraging technology and lays out the broad contours of how it can be implemented across different sectors. For the implementation of the national strategy on blockchain, MeitY has suggested setting up a National Blockchain Framework (NBF) with three types of participants which include confident user of technology (application developers), provider or operator of technology (infrastructure and services, Blockchain as a service), and complete technology stack builder (IP creator). The Ministry has joined hands with the Centre for Development of Advanced Computing (C-DAC) for research and development of the national blockchain framework. Also, National Informatics Centre (NIC) and National Informatics Centre Services Inc. (NICSI) have been roped in for hosting the framework and offering blockchain as a service. The strategy document reads, “Involvement of innovative startups and industry would bring in the agility.

The institutional mechanism within MeitY and a collaborative framework with other ministries/ departments and states may be evolved.” Further, the document notes that a dedicated team would be constituted to handhold the implementers at various central/ state government applications. Also, the services offered by MeitY currently and other government organisations would also be onboarded onto the trusted digital platform. The IT Ministry has proposed that the adoption of blockchain should encompass the assessment of the value proposition of blockchain technology, run pilots and prototypes, conduct assessments and accordingly adopt them for other applications. As reported by a national daily, the Ministry said, “The National Strategy to evolve a trusted digital platform for providing e-governance services using blockchain lays out overall vision and the development and implementation strategies for a National Blockchain Platform covering the technology stack, legal and regulatory framework, standards development, collaboration, human resource development and potential use cases. It is hoped that this strategy document would provide the necessary guidance and support for realizing the vision and creating a nationwide ecosystem for creating the National Blockchain Platform and development of relevant applications using this platform in various domains."

From https://egov.eletsonline.com/ 12/04/2021

TOP ↑

IT Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw Emphasises Need for Stricter Norms on Cybercrime

Union Minister of IT and Electronics Ashwini Vaishnaw, in the Lok Sabha session on December 8, highlighted the need for tighter regulations to deal with cybercrimes. The Minister emphasised the need to have "a lot of discussions and a broader consensus" on bringing "stricter norms" for over-the-top (OTT) platforms to check the telecast of movies and shows that cause disharmony among various communities and religions. During the question hour, Vaishnaw said, "This subject of cybercrimes, the way it is affecting our children, actually there is a need to have a consensus for making much tighter regulation. There is no doubt about it." Wherever the government makes an attempt to tighten cyber laws even a little, the members here start shouting that it is an attack on democracy and people's right to freedom, he added. Congress member Hibi Eden raised the issue of cybercrimes and children becoming victims of cyberbullying. He was of the view that the existing cyber laws were "quite weak" to deal with the problem and asked the IT Minister if there was a specific instruction from the ministry to increase the awareness level of officials in various government departments on cybercrimes. Answering a question on making stricter censor norms for OTT platforms. Vaishnaw said, "Across the world, people are really worried where the entire cyber world is heading because of the way social media intermediaries have become all-pervasive today. So the point that the member has raised today needs a broader consensus, not only in India but across the world. We need to have lots of discussions and a broader consensus in our society for this." (With inputs from PTI)

From https://egov.eletsonline.com/ 12/10/2021

TOP ↑

PM Modi to Kickstart Development Initiatives in Varanasi on December 23

It has been the constant endeavour of the Prime Minister to work for the development and economic progress of his constituency, Varanasi. Moving ahead in this direction, Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi will visit Varanasi and kickstart multiple development initiatives on December 23, 2021, at around 1 PM. Prime Minister will lay the foundation stone of 'Banas Dairy Sankul' at UP State Industrial Development Authority Food Park, Karkhiyaon, Varanasi. Spread across 30 acres of land, the Dairy will be built at a cost of about Rs 475 crores and will have a facility for processing 5 lakh litre of milk per day. This will strengthen the rural economy and help farmers of the region by creating new opportunities for them. Prime Minister will also digitally transfer about Rs 35 crore bonus to the bank accounts of more than 1.7 lakh milk producers associated with Banas Dairy. Prime Minister will also lay the foundation stone for the Biogas based Electricity generation plant for the Milk Producers Cooperative Union Plant, Ramnagar, Varanasi. It will be a key step towards making Milk Producers Cooperative Union Plant energy self-sufficient. Prime Minister will also launch a Portal and Logo dedicated to the Conformity Assessment Scheme of milk products, developed by the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) with the help of the National Dairy Development Board (NDDB). The unified logo, featuring logos of both BIS and NDDB quality marks will simplify the certification process for the dairy sector and will reassure the public about dairy product quality.

In another effort to reduce the land ownership issues at the grassroots level, the Prime Minister will virtually distribute the rural residential rights record ‘Gharauni’ under the Swamitva scheme of the Union Ministry of Panchayati Raj, to over 20 Lakh residents of Uttar Pradesh. The programme will also witness the Prime Minister inaugurating and laying the foundation stone of 22 developmental projects worth over Rs. 870 crores in Varanasi. This will further strengthen the ongoing 360-degree transformation of Varanasi. Prime Minister will inaugurate multiple urban development projects in Varanasi. These include six projects of the redevelopment of Old Kashi wards, a parking and surface park at Beniabag, beautification of two ponds, one Sewage Treatment Plant at village Ramna and provisioning of advanced surveillance cameras at 720 locations under Smart City Mission. Projects in the education sector that will be inaugurated by the Prime Minister include the Union Education Ministry’s Inter-University Centre for Teachers Education, built at a cost of around Rs 107 crore and a Teachers Education Centre at Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies, built at a cost of over Rs 7 crore. Further, residential flats and staff quarters at BHU and ITI Karaundi will also be inaugurated by the Prime Minister. In the health sector, a project comprising a Doctors hostel, a Nurses hostel and a shelter home amounting to Rs 130 crore, at Mahamana Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya Cancer Centre will be inaugurated by the Prime Minister. He will inaugurate a 50-bed Integrated Ayush Hospital at Bhadrasi. He will also lay the foundation of Rs 49 Cr Government Homeopathic Medical College in tehsil Pindra under the Ayush Mission. In the road sector, the Prime Minister will lay the foundation stone of two ‘4 to 6 lane’ road widening projects for Prayagraj and Bhadohi roads. This will improve the connectivity of Varanasi and will be a step towards resolving the problem of the city’s traffic congestion.

To give a fillip to the tourism potential of the holy city, the Prime Minister will also inaugurate the Phase-1 of Tourism Development project related to Shri Guru Ravidas Ji Temple, Seer Govardhan, Varanasi. Other projects being inaugurated by the Prime

Minister include a Speed Breeding Facility at International Rice Research Institute, South Asia Regional Centre Varanasi, a Regional Reference Standards Laboratory at village Payakpur and an Advocate building at Tehsil Pindra.

From https://egov.eletsonline.com/ 12/23/2021

TOP ↑

SRI LANKA: MTI Unveils National ICT Eco-System Framework

Given the criticality of ICT (Information & Communication Technology) to a Nation's Economic Development, MTI has unveiled a National ICT Eco-System Framework. The strategic intent is to provide a holistic framework for nationally strategic ICT decisions, which otherwise tends to suffer from 'silo' based, sub-optimal initiatives. Given the pervasive nature of ICT, it is important to take a holistic perspective of the entire ICT eco-system of a country. This would be the most effective way of critiquing the current state of ICT in a country. MTI's National ICT Eco-system Model (graphically illustrated below) has can be used as the framework to assess and critique country's current state of ICT. This will also enable a country to assess how international trade agreements will benefit the country – vis-à-vis alternate routes to achieving the end result. MTI's National ICT Eco-system models is based on: 4 Verticals i.e. Consumption, Devices, Connectivity and Life Applications. 7 Enablers i.e. Policies, Regulatory, Security, Institutional Framework, Enabling Infrastructure, Human Capital and Investment Climate. 3 Value Chain Components i.e. R&D, Components and Manufacturing / Development. Augmented with a Device to Connectivity Enabler (i.e. Network Devices) and Connectivity to Life Applications Enabler (i.e. OTT Applications).

The Models starts with assessing how ICT is 'consumed' in a country (in terms of primary, secondary and integrated demand) and the device types used for ICT 'consumption'. The country specific challenges in terms of acquiring, funding (affordability) and usage (contents) the devices will be explored at this stage. The next phase studies how the Devices are connected to a multitude of Life Applications. In doing so, the different forms of connectivity infrastructures, from Spectrum to Fiber Optics is studied. Devices and Connectivity will require the Research, Development and Manufacturing of the Hardware and Software. Enabling the 4 Verticals will be the National Enablers – given that all 7 of these Enablers (impacting horizontally across the entire eco-system) are key drivers of the state of ICT in a country. Therefore, the enabling role that is expected from the Government. MTI Consulting is an internationally-networked boutique management consultancy – enabling clients to 'Analyze > Strategize > Realize' effective outcomes. Their practices cover Strategy, Operations, Corporate Finance Digital & Analytics. In the last 24 years, they have carried out 670 projects across 49 countries – covering diverse industries, businesses and challenges.

From https://www.lankabusinessonline.com/ 12/25/2021

TOP ↑

PAKISTAN: Cabinet Nods to Implementation of PM Gati Shakti National Master Plan

In a recent development, the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) has given a green signal to the PM Gati Shakti National Master Plan including the institutional framework for launching, executing, monitoring and support mechanism for establishing multi-modal connectivity. Prime Minister of India Narendra Modi, recently, launched the PM Gati Shakti NMP for multi-modal connectivity on October 13, 2021. The implementation framework for the NMP includes Empowered Group of Secretaries (EGOS), Network Planning Group (NPG) and Technical Support Unit (TSU) with required technical competencies. EGOS will be led by the Cabinet Secretary and will consist of Secretaries of 18 Ministries as members and Head of Logistics Division as Member Convenor. The Group has been tasked to review and monitor the implementation of the PM Gati Shakti NMP to ensure logistics efficiency. It is empowered to prescribe framework and norms for undertaking any subsequent amendments to the NMP. EGOS shall also set out the procedure and definitive framework for synchronisation of various activities, and ensure that various initiatives of infrastructure development are a part of the common integrated digital platform. EGOS will also look at the interventions required to meet the demand side, for efficiently transporting bulk goods on the requirement of various Ministries like Steel, Coal, Fertilizer, etc. The Cabinet Committee has also nodded for the formation, composition and terms of reference for Network Planning Group (NPG). The Group will consist of heads of the Network Planning wing of respective infrastructure ministries and it will assist the EGOS.

Further, in view of the complexities involved in the overall integration of networks, enhancing optimisation to avoid duplication of works for holistic development of any region as well as reducing logistics costs through micro-plan detailing, the Technical Support Unit (TSU) is approved for providing the required competencies. The structure of TSU has also been approved. TSU shall have domain experts from various infrastructure sectors as Aviation, Maritime, Public Transport, Rail, Roads & Highways, Ports, etc. and Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) as Urban and Transport Planning, Structures (Roads, Bridges and Buildings), Power, Pipeline, GIS, ICT, Finance/Market PPP, logistics, Data Analytics, etc. The PM Gati Shakti NMP is intended to break Departmental Silos and bring in more holistic and integrated planning and execution of projects with a view to addressing the issues of Multi-Modal connectivity and last-mile connectivity. This will help in cutting the logistics cost. This will translate into enormous economic gains to consumers, farmers, youth as well as those engaged in businesses. With the Cabinet Committees nod, the rollout of the PM Gati Shakti will get further momentum which will result in the holistic and integrated planning framework for infrastructure development in the country. Also, the NMP shall bring various stakeholders together and help integrate different modes of transportation. Further, it will ensure holistic governance that is citizen-centric, industry-centric, apt for manufacturers and the farmers of the nation.

From https://smartcity.eletsonline.com/ 12/20/2021

TOP ↑

Central-West Asia

AZERBAIJAN: Cabinet of Ministers Adopts New Rules of Agricultural Insurance

New rules for agricultural insurance have been defined in Azerbaijan, the Cabinet of Ministers told Trend. Decree #431 of October 30, 2020 'On Approval of Agricultural Insurance Rules' was adopted in order to fulfill the order of the president of Azerbaijan 'On the Application of the Law of Azerbaijan 'On Agricultural Insurance' and the establishment of the Agricultural Insurance Fund' #809 dated August 19, 2019. According to the rules, for insurance of agricultural plants and crop products, the subject of agricultural insurance is: wheat, barley, corn, potatoes, sugar beets, orange, lemon, tangerine, tea, rice, tobacco, grapes, hazelnuts and cotton, for insurance of agricultural livestock - dairy cows and buffaloes from one to seven years, aquaculture products - fish, including fertilized eggs, larvae and fry. In connection with the application of the rules, the risks faced by farmers in this area will be reduced, the damage and losses caused to them will be eliminated, the investment attractiveness of the agricultural sector will be increased, the creation of a stable business environment in agriculture, the development of insurance in the agricultural sector, as well as practical regulation of the mechanism of state support in this area.

From https://en.trend.az/ 11/04/2020

TOP ↑

Azerbaijan Discloses Plan for Strategic Dev't of Agrarian Sector on Liberated Lands

The strategic plan for the development of the liberated territories of Azerbaijan in the field of agriculture, firstly, provides for the early return of citizens to their native lands, director of the Center for Agrarian Research under the Ministry of Agriculture of Azerbaijan Firdovsi Fikratzade told Trend. According to Fikratzade, all the projects planned by the center are related to the provision of agricultural services and the creation of conditions for farmers to engage in animal husbandry. "All this work has already been planned, and the implementation will be carried out gradually with the return of the population to the liberated lands. In addition, the Azerbaijani government decided that the economy of the liberated territories should be built on innovative technologies," he said. The head of the center also said that all work will be carried out according to the model of "smart" agriculture. "From an economic point of view, this model is several times more profitable than the traditional one.

Therefore, all mechanisms and development tools will be built exclusively on the basis of innovations and modern technologies," Fikratzade added.

From https://en.trend.az/ 12/15/2021

TOP ↑

Azerbaijan Approves Law on 'Budget of Unemployment Insurance Fund for 2022'

Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev signed the law "On the budget of the Unemployment Insurance Fund for 2022" on Dec. 23, Trend reports. The budget revenues of the Unemployment Insurance Fund for 2022 were approved in the amount of over 180.4 million manat (over $106.1 million), expenses – over 180.4 million manat (over $106.1 million).

From https://en.trend.az/ 12/23/2021

TOP ↑

Azerbaijan Approves Rules on Open Tenders

Azerbaijan's Prime Minister Ali Asadov signed a decree "On approval of amount, Rule of payment and use of funds for participation in purchases carried out via e-procurement by the method of open tender or request for quotations", Trend reports with reference to the Cabinet of Ministers. The decree was developed in pursuance of Article 29.3 of the Law of Azerbaijan "On public procurements". According to the law, the amount, payment and procedure for the use of funds collected from participation in purchases carried out through online procurement by the open tender method or request for quotations on a centralized Internet portal of public procurements are determined. "The funds are used for the operation, improvement and maintenance of a centralized Internet portal for public procurements, ensuring the security of the Internet portal, integrating with other government agencies, connecting to the online system of settlements, protecting information and data systems," the Cabinet of Ministers said. Besides, according to the Cabinet of Ministers, the funds are used for strengthening the social protection of employees of the Ministry of Economy of Azerbaijan, increasing their scientific-technical potential and strengthening the material-technical base. "As a result of the introduction of the Rule, the scope of application of e-procurement according to the principle of public-private partnership in the relevant field will further expand. Along with the creation of equal competitive conditions for all entrepreneurs on the basis of transparency, the digitalization of the procedure for requesting quotations will be ensured, determination of a fixed amount of participation fees, active participation of micro, small and medium-sized entrepreneurs who must participate in open tenders, including electronic accessibility and clarity of public procurements," the Cabinet of Ministers added.

From https://en.trend.az/ 12/24/2021

TOP ↑

UZBEKISTAN: Senate Approves Law on Organ Transplantation

At the twenty-second plenary session, Uzbek senators discussed and approved the Law on Transplantation of Human Organs and Tissues. The law defines the goals and conditions of transplantation, the objects of transplantation, the circle of donors (living and dead), the rights of donors and recipients, and the conditions for obtaining organs and tissues from living and dead donors. The legislation of Germany, Poland, Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, and the USA concerning transplantation was studied, for further development of the law. It was noted that for many years the absence of a legislative basis for transplantation led to the stagnation of transplantology as a clinical science and the loss of the opportunity to save the lives of many patients with the relevant diseases. This situation forces some patients to undergo these operations in foreign medical institutions, despite their high cost. They are faced with various difficulties in treatment abroad, high financial costs, and difficulties in communicating in foreign languages when traveling abroad. The present law was developed in order to eliminate these shortcomings, to expand the range of qualified medical care to our citizens, and to make it possible for seriously ill patients to return to a full life.

From https://uzreport.news/ 12/16/2021

TOP ↑

Oceania

AUSTRALIA: Fighting Trolls or Helping Media Mates? The Truth About Morrison's Social Media Bill

When Prime Minister Scott Morrison and Attorney-General Michaelia Cash announced a social media bill, they said it was about one thing: stopping online anonymous trolling. "The government is going to take further steps to protect Australians and, in particular, young Australians online because that is what we all deserve," Cash said. More became clear on Wednesday. The Attorney-General's Department released an exposure draft of the Social Media (Anti-Trolling) Bill, along with a commitment to establish an inquiry investigating online harms. What these show is that, beyond the spin, this law is primarily about cleaning up a messy High Court decision about defamation. Devil in the detail The additional details answer some questions and raises some more. The bill seeks to make it easier to reveal the identity and contact details of online users so an individual could sue them for defamation.

It does this through two main mechanisms. The first is incentivising social media companies (who will be required to have a legal presence as a business in Australia) to create a simple process that allows users to request that a comment is taken down and that the contact details of the commenter are provided to them so they can sue for defamation. The company will then carry out that request if the commenter agrees to either ask. The second part is the establishment of an “end user disclosure order”, a court order that requires a social media company to reveal the contact details of a commenter who is accused of making a defamatory statement on their service. The exposure bill reveals that social media companies have 72 hours from when a complaint is made to contact the commenter to reveal the details. They also be able to reject a complaint if they reasonably believe it “does not genuinely relate to the potential institution by the complainant of a defamation proceeding”.

It remains to be seen how social media companies will determine the validity of a defamation claim from someone making a complaint within such a tight timeframe. It establishes that the end user disclosure order would be granted only if the court reasonably believes that the complainant would be able to obtain relief (i.e. get a court to rule in your favour) for defamation. University of Sydney media law lecturer Professor David Rolph says this differs from the current process, preliminary discovery, and possibly may make it a higher bar to clear to get someone’s details.

From https://www.msn.com 12/03/2021

TOP ↑

Labor Has 'Finally' Begun Its 'Policy Push'

Sky News Political Editor Andrew Clennell says Labor has "finally" begun its "policy push". "Labor's begun its policy push, finally, and they've gone for this 43 per cent target on climate as well as promised an extra 20,000 university places and more than 400,000 free TAFE places," Mr Clennell told Sky News Australia. "Despite two big spending budgets, the government now are attempting to frame Labor as the irresponsible fiscal party once again." He said, however, "as is always the case with big policies", there are holes to expose. "Richard Marles on Sunday Agenda yesterday ... unable to say just how much the safeguards mechanism Labor is promising to introduce will cost the top 200 omitting companies who are subject to it."

From https://www.msn.com 12/06/2021

TOP ↑

Labor Rules Out Negotiating Increase to 2030 Climate Target to Win Government

Labor has ruled out any chance its 2030 climate target could be pushed higher if it is forced to negotiate with other parties to form government at the next election. Prime Minister Scott Morrison has been quick to attack Labor's weekend commitment to reduce emissions by 43 per cent from 2005 levels by the end of the decade if it wins government, calling it an "opening bid" that could be sent higher if Labor is forced to make a deal with the Greens at the election. The Greens are advocating for a 75 per cent target for 2030 — and several independents campaigning on climate change action have called for targets to be brought into line with the UN's recommendation to halve emissions by then. The contest on targets is ultimately about how quickly and drastically the country's worst polluters will be required to go green in order to meet the commitment to reduce emissions to net zero by 2050.

At a National Press Club address, Labor's shadow climate change minister Chris Bowen was unambiguous when asked whether the 43 per cent target was negotiable in the event of a hung parliament at the election. Mr Bowen offered a single word in response: "No." He went on to say that it would not be changed, even if a future parliament threatened to reject it. "That's our target. That's what we'll implement and legislate," he said. "We'll say to the parliament — there's the target. We're not negotiating about it, we're not changing it and amending it. "The parliament can vote it up or down. That will be the legislation that we put to the parliament." Labor has announced that a key mechanism to further reduce greenhouse gas emissions beyond the government's commitments will be to tighten the Coalition's 'safeguard mechanism', which is already legislated.

The safeguard mechanism sets a limit on the emissions of heavy-polluting companies. If they go above that, they must purchase carbon offsets, but if they fall below the threshold they can sell their credits. Labor is proposing to gradually lower that threshold until Australia reaches net zero emissions. The government is arguing any tightening of that mechanism could make energy and resource companies uncompetitive, and threaten their viability. Mr Bowen rejected that claim, saying the watchdog that oversees the mechanism, the Clean Energy Regulator, would be instructed to ensure that no emissions-intensive industries would be exposed to greater constraints than their competitors. "That's factored into the modelling," he said. Mr Bowen was also asked what job losses and coal plant closures were projected in Labor's modelling, to which he responded: "As a result of Labor's policies? Not one. Not one."

Bowen denies policies amount to possible 48 per cent reduction Mr Bowen also responded to claims that Labor's target may in fact be as high as 48 per cent, based on the modelling done by the party to calculate the effect of its policies. Labor's modelling, done by RepuTex, calculated that the effect of Labor's policies amounted to a 13 per cent greater reduction in emissions than current policy, totalling a 43 per cent reduction. However, government modelling suggests Australia is on track to reduce emissions by 30 to 35 per cent over the decade, meaning Labor's policies could result in a 48 per cent reduction, if optimistic projections are realised. Mr Bowen said the modellers did not consider the optimistic projections to be realistic. "The modellers advised us that the correct conservative starting point was 30 per cent," he said.

"They regarded that as being the starting point which was defensible from an economic modelling point of view. "They did not regard 35 per cent as a defensible starting point." Mr Bowen said 43 per cent was the minimum needed for Australia to have any chance of reaching net zero emissions by 2050. He said if Labor was elected, it would take an updated target of 43 per cent to the United Nations climate change conference, and nothing higher. The Coalition maintains its 26 to 28 per cent target strikes the right balance, though the country is tracking to achieve better reductions by 2030. Both Labor and the Coalition have committed to reducing emissions to net zero by 2050.

From https://www.msn.com 12/06/2021

TOP ↑

NEW ZEALAND: Defence Priorities and Principles Released

Minister of Defence Peeni Henare today announced a new set of Defence Priorities and Principles that will ensure the Defence Force remains in the best position to continue serving New Zealanders as our region responds to the COVID-19 pandemic. "The Government priorities for Defence will put a stronger focus on our people, infrastructure, and the region in which we live – the Pacific," Peeni Henare said. "People are our most important asset and capability and we need to ensure our personnel are well-trained, and effective at serving our communities here but also be ready for international commitments overseas." Part of the People priority includes, an increased focus on culture and diversity, to ensure the forces reflect New Zealand and the communities they serve. "Infrastructure will ensure members of the Defence Force can live and work in buildings that are healthy, safe and fit-for-purpose." Peeni Henare said.

"Investment in defence infrastructure will also help accelerate the economic recovery by providing opportunities for local businesses. For example, at Base Ohakea in Manawatū- Whanganui, the new $250 million facility to house the P-8A Poseidon fleet represents a substantial economic boost for the region providing up to 400 jobs with 65% of workers coming from the local Manawatū – Whanganui region," said Peeni Henare. "In line with the Pacific Resilience focus of this Government, Pacific is the third focus and here Defence has a vital role to play in Te Moana-nui-a-Kiwa; working together with our Pacific partners to maintain peace and security in our region, and responding to Pacific priorities including: extreme weather events and climate change, transnational crime, illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing, and discrete incidents where required.

"The security and stability of our neighbourhood is of the utmost importance to New Zealand. The accelerating impacts of climate change continue to have fundamental impacts on global security, but are being felt early and deeply in the Pacific. COVID-19 has also exacerbated some of the challenges our region is facing, including social, environmental and economic challenges which can threaten wider regional security. "A recent example of our Pacific focus is the deployment of Defence and Police personnel to the Solomon Islands, following a formal request for assistance. Maintaining Defence engagements and operations in the wider

Indo-Pacific will continue to be an important part of New Zealand's contributions to international security and peacekeeping," Peeni Henare said. The four new Principles for Defence, also released today, also reinforce the diversity and values of New Zealand's defence agencies.

"The Principles are: Angitu, which stands for success, effort and striving; Kotahitanga which speaks to unity, togetherness and collective action; Mana and Pono reflects the influence, trust and integrity in Defence; and Kaitiakitanga speaks to their work as guardians and stewards for the future," Peeni Henare said. "These Priorities and Principles have been set alongside and are informed by the Secretary of Defence's Defence Assessment 2021: He moana pukepuke e ekengia e te waka: A rough sea can still be navigated." Defence Assessments are generally conducted every five years by the Secretary of Defence, in consultation with the Chief of Defence Force, as independent advice to the Government of the day. Defence Assessments can help shape future policy development alongside advice from other agencies, but are not Government policy. "He moana pukepuke e ekengia e te waka: A rough sea can still be navigated continues to find the two principal challenges to New Zealand's defence interests are the intensifying impacts of climate change and greater strategic competition," Peeni Henare said. "This assessment has helped inform the new Defence Principles and Priorities and will be further taken into account, alongside other advice, when the Government conducts its next comprehensive defence policy review to ensure our policy settings are fit for purpose," Peeni Henare said.

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

TOP ↑

Security Information in Proceedings Legislation Bill Passes First Reading

The Security Information in Proceedings Legislation Bill has passed its first reading and will now be considered by Parliament's Justice Committee. The Justice Committee will soon call for public submissions on the Bill. "The Bill adds to the Government's work to strengthen New Zealand's protections against security threats, in line with the recommendations of the Royal Commission of Inquiry into the March 15 mosques attack," Minister of Justice Kris Faafoi said. "This legislation will also provide a clear and consistent framework for dealing with national security information in civil and criminal proceedings relates to," he said. National security information is information that, if disclosed, would be likely to prejudice New Zealand's security, defence, or international relations.

"Currently there is a lack of assurance that national security information can be adequately protected if it needs to be used in court proceedings. The Law Commission has reviewed the use of security information in court and found that current law in this area lacks clear and consistent protections for individuals and national security," Kris Faafoi said. The Bill will: provide greater assurance to the

Crown that national security information can be used in court proceedings while still being protected; standardise and clarify protections for non-Crown parties; and ensure clear, consistent processes are followed in a way that addresses natural justice requirements as far as possible. “The current law may also disadvantage non-Crown parties who may not know the reason for a decision against them and may not be in a position to challenge the actions or decisions of the Crown. These disadvantages have implications for natural justice rights,” Kris Faafoi said.

To address this, the Bill will also introduce a special closed court process for both a preliminary and substantive civil hearing, and a preliminary (but not substantive) criminal hearing. “While the court would be closed to the public, media, and any non-Crown parties and their lawyers, the non-Crown party would be represented by a security cleared special advocate. The special advocate and judge would have full access to the national security information, and the judge would only allow proceedings to continue if they were satisfied that a fair trial could take place” Kris Faafoi said. “The role of the special advocate in the closed court hearing is an important safeguard in the Bill, which ensures national security information is adequately protected while providing for natural justice rights,” Kris Faafoi said.

“While there are very few cases which will warrant these measures, the sensitive nature of such cases and evidence relating to them needs to be dealt with in a consistent and secure way. “That includes ensuring that our international partners, who may need to share sensitive information in confidence for such cases, can trust the information is handled securely,” Minister Faafoi said. The Bill will replace schemes for managing national security information in a number of pieces of legislation including the Passports Act 2005, the Terrorism Suppression Act 2002 and the Telecommunications (Interception Capability and Security) Act 2013. “The select committee process is an important part of developing legislation; providing the opportunity for communities to provide their thoughts on the Bill. I look forward to people providing submissions,” Kris Faafoi said.

From https://livenews.co.nz 12/15/2021

TOP ↑

Bill to Boost Housing Supply Passes

Legislation to cut red tape for more new housing has passed in Parliament with cross-party support that provides an enduring solution to fixing New Zealand’s housing crisis. The changes to the Resource Management Act enable much-needed homes to be built faster in our biggest cities, Housing Minister Dr Megan Woods and Environment Minister David Parker said. People can build up to three homes of up to three storeys on most sites without the need for a resource consent, from August next year. “Passing this legislation with support from the National Party, the Green Party and the Maori Party delivers stable, enduring policy on urban density. This gives New Zealand homeowners, councils, developers and investors greater certainty," Megan Woods said. "These changes address the overly restrictive planning rules that limit the types of homes people can build and where they can build them.

These changes to the Resource Management Act will allow more affordable homes to be built more easily in areas with good access to jobs, transport, and community facilities like schools and hospitals. "The cost benefit analysis from PwC and Sense Partners showed these changes will have a significant impact on supply, with tens of thousands of additional homes in our largest cities over the next five to eight years. "Having seen a large increase in townhouses and units consented in Auckland in recent years, we know the construction sector is ready and able to deliver this kind of housing," Megan Woods said. "Housing intensification is critical to accelerating housing supply. It also has a range of benefits, including smarter use of land and less urban sprawl, more accessible public transport, more even growth across cities, and multi-generational ways of living," Environment Minister David Parker said.

"There has been robust public discussion on this legislation. Submissions to the Environment Select Committee have contributed to improvements including a reduced height in relation to boundary, increased outdoor living spaces, and new landscaping and glazing requirements," he said. "It was good to see the committee also recommended changes to make it clear councils can continue to plan and manage infrastructure as they do currently. This means they can influence how housing development is delivered in line with how they provide infrastructure. "The Bill's new streamlined process will enable tier 1 councils in Auckland, greater Hamilton, Tauranga, Wellington and Christchurch to implement the National Policy Statement for Urban Development from August 2023, at least a year earlier than under the current timeline. "The focus now turns to implementation, with tier 1 councils required to publicly notify the new rules enabling intensification in their plans by 20 August 2022," David Parker said. The Ministry for the Environment and Te Tūāpapa Kura Kāinga – Ministry of Housing and Urban Development will provide implementation support to councils. They will also develop a national medium density design guide, in consultation with local government and stakeholders.

From https://livenews.co.nz 12/15/2021

TOP ↑

National Security Intelligence Priorities released

Minister of National Security and Intelligence Jacinda Ardern has today released the Government's 2021 National Security Intelligence Priorities – Whakaarotau Marumaru Aotearoa. "The safety, wellbeing and protection of New Zealanders and our nation's sovereignty will always be paramount for the Government," Jacinda Ardern said. "The National Security Intelligence Priorities help us to identify threats, risks, and challenges to New Zealand's security and wellbeing, while outlining current areas of interest where intelligence can support the Government to make informed decisions. “These Priorities build on the previously released 2018 Priorities, and have been grouped into 13 overarching themes covering a range of threats and risks to New Zealand including; foreign interference and espionage, climate change and environmental issues, malicious cyber activity, terrorism and violent extremism,” Jacinda Ardern said.

The release of the Priorities is part of a wider work programme to address the relevant findings and recommendations of the Royal Commission of Inquiry into the Terrorist Attack on Christchurch Masjidain. “The Government remains absolutely committed to implementing all recommendations made by the Royal Commission of Inquiry into the Christchurch Masjidain, and are acting on the findings that there should be more informed public dialogue around our national security,” Jacinda Ardern said. “The 2021 Priorities will make more information available to New Zealanders about our intelligence priorities than ever before, and enable a more informed public discussion on where our national security intelligence agencies focus their ongoing efforts,” Jacinda Ardern said.

The Royal Commission made findings about the broadness of the previous Priorities and the need for them to support better system-wide coordination on national security and intelligence. The 2021 version of the Priorities provides a more detailed description of each priority, including key areas of focus and how they support our National Security Objectives. “The Priorities are next due to be reviewed in 2023 and will be informed by public engagement on national security through a wide range of stakeholder engagement, including academics, Māori, youth, businesses, ethnic communities, faith-based communities, and other interest groups,” Jacinda Ardern said. “Understanding New Zealanders’ most pressing national security concerns is vital to inform us where the public would value intelligence to keep New Zealanders safe and secure.”

From https://livenews.co.nz 12/16/2021

TOP ↑

New Legislation to Modernise Emergency Management System

New legislation will ensure that our emergency management system is inclusive, modern and fit-for-purpose, Minister for Emergency Management Kiri Allan says. “A new Bill that builds on what already works will be introduced to replace the now two decades old Civil Defence Emergency Management Act 2002. “The proposed Emergency Management Act will not be a fundamental transformation of the emergency management system but will instead address a number of identified shortcomings to ensure the system can meet current and future needs,” Kiri Allan said. “A programme of work to build capacity and capability has been underway since a Ministerial Review highlighted vulnerabilities in the system, particularly in the response phase, following the 2016 Kaikoura earthquake and the 2017 Port Hill fire.

“Since then the Government allocated $46.6m over four years in Budget 2021 to the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) to strengthen our emergency management system and support inclusive, community-led responses to natural disasters and health events “The new Bill will introduce changes that clarify the roles and responsibilities at the national, regional, and local levels, and those of our critical infrastructure providers – the services that are essential for everyday life – to ensure optimal use of resources and coordination of effort. “NEMA’s chief executive will have the power to authorise ‘emergency management rules’, making the system more flexible. For example, rules could be used to specify what health and disability services will do in an emergency, or set out who is responsible for what during a mass evacuation. “It currently requires considerable time and effort to update even the most minor provisions. “The Bill will also better enable Māori throughout the system, at governance, planning and operational levels – by recognising the crucial role Māori and marae play in community responses to emergencies,” Kiri Allan said.

From https://livenews.co.nz 12/17/2021

TOP ↑

Omicron: Government’s Pan to Minimise Risk

The interval between the second dose and the booster shot reduced from 6 months to 4 months Over 82 per cent of vaccinated New Zealanders eligible for a booster by end of Feb 2022 Eligible border and health workers required to get booster dose Pre-departure test requirement to enter NZ reduced from 72 hours to 48 hours before travel Phased border re-opening pushed out to the end of February Temporary change to MIQ – length of stay increased to 10 days for all travellers, with no self-isolation component Everyone on an international flight with a positive case to be treated as a close contact All countries removed from Very High Risk country list Cabinet confirms decision to roll out paediatric doses of Pfizer for 5-11s. Rollout to start from 17 January prior to school returning in 2022.

Cabinet confirms use of traffic light system to manage outbreak and in the event of Omicron outbreaks areas will move into the red traffic light setting Cabinet has agreed a suite of precautionary measures to keep Omicron out of the community for as long as possible, COVID-19 Response Minister Chris Hipkins said today. “All of the evidence so far points to Omicron being the most transmissible COVID-19 variant yet and public health advice says that soon, every case that comes into MIQ will be Omicron,” Chris Hipkins said. “But experts still don’t know how severe it is. So while it’s sweeping the globe at a bewildering speed and appears to be the dominant variant, how sick it makes people and the impact it has on health systems is not yet fully understood. “With over 70 countries around the world reporting Omicron cases and its high transmissibility, our plan is to get as prepared as we can by speeding up boosters and strengthening our border to keep Omicron out of the community for as long as possible.

“We start our response to Omicron with a number of advantages on our side. We have over 90 per cent and rising of the population fully vaccinated, we still have our border protections and MIQ in place, school has finished for the year and we are heading into summer when we are outdoors more. “But we need to do more. Parts of the world are going back into lockdown and experiencing major disruption, and with these extra steps we aim to keep Omicron at bay to ensure New Zealanders get the break they deserve and businesses can remain open. Boosters “The first step in our plan is accelerating the booster rollout, following advice from the Director-General. “The advice from the COVID-19 Technical Advisory Group is that shortening the period between the second and booster doses of the Pfizer vaccine is an appropriate and pragmatic step and is in line with what other countries are doing.

“Data is emerging that a booster dose with Pfizer provides better protection than two-dose course against the Omicron variant. “While two doses is likely to hold a good degree of protection against severe disease from Omicron, a third dose is likely to offer great protection against transmission of COVID-19 and reducing the chance of more serious infections. “The shorter timeframe will start in January and we’ll continue to follow health advice if it recommends the gap in doses can and should reduce further. “Over 82 per cent of vaccinated New Zealanders will be eligible for a booster by the end of February 2022. “We know that the most likely place for Omicron to enter the community is at the border, so we want all border and eligible health workers to have the extra protection the booster vaccine provides to protect them and their families.

The border continues to be our first line of defence. “More than half of border workers eligible for a booster at 6 months have already had it – which is a great response – but we need to get the numbers up quickly. “Cabinet has therefore agreed in principle that where workers are required to be vaccinated, that this mandate will also extend to boosters. “Initially this will be for those workers most likely to come into contact with Omicron — border and health workers — who will be required to have their booster by the end of January, or not later six months after their second dose for those who were only recently vaccinated, and then to all others who are under a vaccination mandate by the 1st of March. Strengthening MIQ “We are fortunate we still have MIQ in place. Without it, Omicron would already be in the community and Christmas plans would be under threat.

“To further strengthen the border, we’re shortening the pre-departure test requirement from 72 hours to 48 hours before travel in order to assist in picking up more people with the virus before they get on a plane. “And we’ve sought advice on implementing a requirement for all non-New Zealand citizens entering to New Zealand to have had a booster dose before flying. “We are also making a temporary change to MIQ that increases the length of stay from 7 to 10 days. Currently returnees do their final 3 days of isolation at home. Bringing those final three days back into MIQ reduces the risk of the virus entering the community. Changes to re-opening plan "To slow the rapid spread we have seen overseas, we are pushing out the start of non-MIQ travel until the end of February 2022. "There's no doubt this is disappointing and will upset many holiday plans, but it's important to set these changes out clearly today so they can have time to consider those plans.

"COVID-19 keeps throwing new curve balls and we have to respond in a way that continues to protect lives and livelihoods without putting in place restrictions and lockdowns unless absolutely necessary. "Waiting till the end of February will increase New Zealand's overall protection and slow Omicron's eventual spread. Use of traffic light system to manage outbreaks "With these changes, we're buying New Zealand as much time as we can, as scientists here and overseas race to get a clearer picture of Omicron. "In moving to the traffic light system, we signalled that we would be adjusting to more of a reactive stance when it came to protective measures and would apply them when case numbers grew and the health system came under pressure. "Omicron has changed that. When it does arrive, we expect that it will spread fast, and that's what we're seeing in other places.

To slow that spread, we may use the red traffic light settings earlier on. That will give us the best chance to avoid returning to more restrictive alert level settings. "It is not our intention to move to lockdowns unless absolutely necessary in the event of a widespread outbreak where our health system comes under considerable strain – and even then the strong preference is for the lockdown to be highly targeted. Chris Hipkins said faced with alternative courses of action, and looking at overseas jurisdictions, Cabinet is strongly of the view that this plan is the best approach for New Zealand. "By the end of February when we revisit the phased border re-opening, around 3 million more Kiwis will be eligible for the booster shots and the rollout to 5-11 year-olds will be well underway." Chris Hipkins said.

From https://livenews.co.nz 12/21/2021

TOP↑

2、Government System and Civil Services

Asia-Pacific

World Bank Supports Improved Management of Public Resources for Service Delivery

The World Bank approved an $80 million grant from the International Development Association (IDA) to support Mozambique's efforts to improve domestic tax management, budget execution, and transparency and accountability in the management of public resources. The grant will complement $20 million in financing received under a Multi Donor Trust Fund established in partnership with the European Union, Finland, and Norway to support reforms in these areas. "COVID-19 plunged Mozambique into its first economic recession in almost three decades, weakening domestic consumption and investments and worsening living conditions, especially for the urban poor engaged in the informal sector," noted Idah Z. Pswarayi-Riddihough, World Bank Country Director for Mozambique, Madagascar, Comoros, Mauritius, and Seychelles. "This put added pressure on public finances as the need to find efficiencies across government spending is greater than ever to ensure the delivery of services." Recent diagnostic studies of the government's performance in public expenditure and financial accountability identified challenges to effective service delivery, including budget planning; procurement of goods and services; and the effectiveness of external oversight mechanisms in the implementation of the fiscal decentralization policy, which is critical to ensuring that funding is provided to support service delivery across Mozambique.

The Managing Public Resources for Service Delivery project will support a series of activities to address these constraints, strengthening domestic tax management; improving expenditure management and controls in key areas, such as treasury management and public procurement; reinforcing internal controls and internal audit arrangements; and enhancing the institutional capacity for external audits conducted by the Tribunal Administrativo, the country's audit institution. In addition, the project will strengthen citizen engagement in budget preparation and execution; and support the government's capacity to conduct effective oversight over state-owned enterprises. Lastly, it will boost efforts to enhance the delivery of services from the municipalities by strengthening the availability of sufficient resources to support their activities. "By strengthening tax administration, expenditure control, fiscal decentralization, and citizen engagement, the project aims to enhance transparency and accountability in the management of public resources in Mozambique and thus contribute to improved service delivery in the country," added Joseph Mubiru Kizito, Lead Financial Management Specialist and the project's task team leader. "In this regard, the project builds on ongoing reforms but also includes new initiatives, such as the piloting of Citizens Assemblies (CA) to enable citizens to provide inputs to the budget formulation and execution process."

This operation is aligned with the World Bank Group Country Partnership Framework (CPF) for Mozambique FY17-21 and complements other projects financed by the World Bank and other development partners that aim to improve public financial management in Mozambique. * The World Bank's International Development Association (IDA), established in 1960, helps the world's poorest countries by providing grants and low to zero-interest loans for projects and programs that boost economic growth, reduce poverty, and improve poor people's lives. IDA is one of the largest sources of assistance for the world's 74 poorest countries, 39 of which are in Africa. Resources from IDA bring positive change to the 1.3 billion people who live in IDA countries. Since 1960, IDA has provided $458 billion to 114 countries. Annual commitments have averaged about $29 billion over the last three years (FY19-FY21), with about 70% going to Africa. Learn more online: IDA.worldbank.org. #IDAworks

East Asia

CHINA: Measures Ensuring Religious Freedom Sound, Effective

China's measures respecting and protecting freedom of religious belief have proven sound and effective, contributing to the ethnic unity, social harmony and comprehensive development of the world's most populous country. Protecting freedom of religious belief and adapting religions to the modern era are common tasks facing all countries around the world, and the Chinese leadership has remained committed to this pursuit. China's commitment to freedom of religious belief is unswerving. At a recent national conference on work related to religious affairs, Chinese President Xi Jinping, also general secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and chairman of the Central Military Commission, stressed the importance of respecting people's religious beliefs, managing religious affairs in accordance with the law, as well as upholding the principle of developing religions in the Chinese context.

China has nearly 200 million religious believers, over 380,000 clerical personnel, some 5,500 religious organizations and more than 140,000 lawfully registered venues for religious activities. Under such circumstances, it is only natural for China to attach great importance to religious affairs. The recent conference has sent a clear message that China will stick to the policies and practices that have proven effective and suitable for the country. The protection of the people's freedom of religious belief is well reflected in China's legal system and the country's religious affairs have been managed in line with the law. In addition to being explicitly mentioned in the country's Constitution that the citizens of the People's Republic of China enjoy freedom of religious belief, China has also made specific laws and regulations regarding different aspects of this freedom, and different aspects of freedom of religious belief are protected under a number of different laws.

For example, the Law on the Protection of Minors stipulates that minors enjoy equal rights to life, development, protection, participation and education in accordance with the law, irrespective of their religious beliefs. In 2018, a set of revised regulations on religious affairs came into effect. Highlighting religious and social harmony, the regulations stipulate that believers and nonbelievers, as well as believers of different religions, should respect each other. The regulations also include provisions that protect the rights of believers, places of worship and religious organizations, and require local governments to provide public services to them. China's efforts in ensuring freedom of religious belief have inspired religious personnel to contribute to the development of socialism with Chinese characteristics. For example, religious personnel have been active participants in the deliberation and administration of state affairs.

As of 2018, approximately 20,000 prominent figures from religious circles served as deputies and members at all levels of people's congresses and committees of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, according to the 2018 white paper titled "China's Policies and Practices on Protecting Freedom of Religious Belief." In addition, the efforts have inspired different religions to respect and learn from each other, and take part in exchanges and dialogues. In China, national and local religious groups have established a mechanism of joint conferences to discuss issues concerning religious affairs, creating modes of religious dialogue with Chinese characteristics and enhancing mutual understanding and friendship. Religious groups stand as a bridge and bond connecting the Party and the government with people from religious circles and the countless religious believers. The country's effective policies and measures to safeguard freedom of religious belief will continue to be fully and faithfully implemented.

From http://www.news.cn/ 12/06/2021

TOP ↑

Xinhua Releases Report on China's Approach to Democracy, Freedom and Human Rights

New China Research (NCR), the think tank of China's Xinhua News Agency, released a report on Tuesday titled "Pursuing Common Values of Humanity -- China's Approach to Democracy, Freedom and Human Rights" together with a related documentary. Guided by the important remarks by Xi Jinping, general secretary of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee, on common values of humanity and based on China's long-term practice in pursuing these values, the report illustrates the institutional strength, cultural background, intrinsic law and world significance of China's practice of "the running of the country by the people" from an academic point of view. The report consists of four major sections: The Running of the Country by the People: The Overarching Logic of Pursuing the Value of Democracy; Whole-process Democracy: a New Form of Implementing People's Sovereignty; A Democracy that Works: a Touchstone for Testing Institutional Effectiveness; and The Wisdom of Practice: The Enlightenment of Pursuing Common Values of Humanity.

With "the running of the country by the people" at its core, China's democracy adheres to a people-centered approach. It transcends "democracy for the few," "one-time democracy," and "pseudo-universal democracy," ensuring that the broad masses of the people enjoy democratic rights, the report says. It points out that China is exploring a path of inheritance and innovation in realizing democratic values and is pursuing a "substantial democracy" in which the people are the masters of the country. The democracy China practices is a "whole-process democracy" that covers all aspects and all procedures, a "governance democracy" for good governance, an "efficient democracy" with vitality, a "democracy as a driving force" with collective wisdom, and a testable "systematic democracy. The Chinese people have come to the conclusion, based on experience, that there is only one criterion for democratic governance: that ordinary people enjoy the dividends of peace and development and live peaceful and happy lives, according to the report.

Well functioning democracy can guarantee and develop freedom and human rights, and can realize the unification of process and results-based democracy, procedural democracy and substantive democracy, direct democracy and indirect democracy, as well as people's democracy and state will, the report says. Democracy is not a decorative ornament. China is a faithful and innovative practitioner of democracy, freedom and human rights. China has achieved remarkable results in implementing "the running of the country by the people." The success of China's democracy can be attributed to three leading features of its approach to governance: an advanced non-partisan party, a people-centered philosophy, and a development-focused worldview, the report notes.

It argues that in the socialist practice of defending democracy, freedom and human rights, the CPC has put people's overall interests on top of the agenda in its political endeavors, maintained the logic of giving democracy back to the people, and advocated the principles that freedom should enhance the all-round development of the people and happiness is the ultimate standard of human rights. The CPC has pioneered a new path to China's modernization, and created a new model for human civilization, thus offering Chinese solutions of world significance as answers to the questions of our times, it added. The report points out that China's exploration has established important principles for the realization of common values of humanity: result-oriented, self-determining, steady-paced and ever-progressing.

The report and the documentary were released in Beijing and Geneva on Tuesday. Experts and scholars from some 100 think tanks of more than 40 countries and regions joined the release event online and offline. To produce the report, the NCR team conducted in-depth investigations and researches in nearly 30 provincial-level regions across China, interviewed a wide array of experts at home and abroad, and held a series of seminars. In the documentary, six ordinary Chinese people share their own stories to illustrate China's approach to democracy, freedom and human rights. The NCR is the only media-based think tank among China's national high-end think tanks. It has produced a series of influential studies, including "Chinese Poverty Alleviation Studies: A Political Economy Perspective," and "People First: Political Commitment of the Century-old Communist Party of China."

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

TOP ↑

China's Democracy Practice a New Form of Political Civilization

Thousands of years in the past witnessed human society's unceasing pursuit of democracy, a common value of humanity. A think tank report on China's approach to democracy now provides a perspective on Chinese people's exploration. The report, issued on Tuesday, contains the logic of China's democratic practice of "the people running the country," its whole-process democracy, the touchstone for institutional effectiveness, as well as the enlightenment of pursuing the common values of humanity. The West launched the process of modern democracy, but that does not mean the development of democracy will end with the Western model. The Western-centric yardstick of democracy should not be the only criterion for judging good or bad governance. Through experience and participation, the Chinese people have come to the conclusion that there is only one criterion for democratic governance: ordinary people should enjoy the dividends of peace and development, and live peaceful and happy lives.

China has achieved rapid economic development and long-term social stability, eradicating absolute poverty and becoming one of the safest countries in the world. All of these achievements point to the fact that China's approach to democracy is broad, genuine and effective. Based on the country's own reality, culture and history, the democracy China practices is a "whole-process democracy" that covers all aspects and procedures, such as elections, decision-making, administration and supervision, guaranteeing the running of the country by the people via a set of ever-improving systems, institutions and mechanisms. Socialist democracy with Chinese characteristics has demonstrated a new form of political civilization. China's approach to sound governance features an advanced non-partisan party, a people-centered philosophy, and a development-focused worldview, according to the think tank report. This approach is particularly enlightening in the contemporary world, which is experiencing changes unseen in a century.

Government failures in tackling major challenges such as the fight against COVID-19 in some developed countries are examples of malfunctioning democracies. China's democracy is a people-centered democracy, rather than a capital-oriented model. It is centered on governance rather than elections. China's whole-process people's democracy is ever-progressing and increasingly vivid and vigorous, unlike the stagnant or even degenerating models in certain countries. It transcends "democracy for the few," "one-time democracy," and "pseudo-universal democracy," ensuring that the broad masses of the people enjoy democratic rights and democratic achievements. As a faithful and innovative practitioner of democracy, freedom and human rights, China has boosted confidence in tackling challenges in these fields and in the governance deficit facing the world, and offered solutions to realizing the common values of humanity.

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

TOP↑

Online Platform of Consultative Democracy Embodies Chinese Concept of Democracy

During a field trip to Youxian, a mountainous county in central China's Hunan Province, a poorly protected ancient tree caught the attention of Lai Mingyong. "I saw electric wires and switches nailed to the 1,500-year-old tree," recalled Lai, vice chairman of Hunan provincial committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), the provincial political advisory body. He immediately left advice on the CPPCC Cloud, an online advice-soliciting platform, calling for a thorough inspection of ancient trees across Hunan and the establishment of a universal protective mark to ensure that every ancient tree is under protection. The provincial forestry department responded quickly and decided to launch a pilot "tree chief" scheme to step up ancient and rare trees protection and promote the construction of a batch of theme parks to conserve ancient and rare trees. The CPPCC Cloud, launched by the Hunan provincial committee of the CPPCC in January 2017, serves as a platform connecting all levels of committees of the CPPCC, political advisors, Party and government departments, and the general public in Hunan. The CPPCC Cloud has received over 2,050 pieces of advice, with over 75 percent having been handled, covering issues in the areas of politics, economy, society, culture and ecological civilization.

The CPPCC Cloud played an important role in the early days of the COVID-19 outbreak when anti-epidemic supplies were running short, as companies suspended operation and traditional offline channels were not available. Connected to the provincial Red Cross online platform, the CPPCC Cloud was used to coordinate demands and donations and provide a reference for government decision-making. At this year's provincial "two sessions", the annual meetings of Hunan provincial lawmakers and political advisors to discuss local economic and social development in the past year and make plans for the year to come, 23 members of the CPPCC Hunan provincial committee from the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region were unable to make their trips to Hunan due to the epidemic. They, instead, participated in the meetings via the cloud platform. "The CPPCC Cloud allows the public to understand what political advisors are doing and effectively shortens the distance between them," said Liu Zhifeng, deputy director of the research office of the Hunan provincial committee of the CPPCC. Liu said the CPPCC Cloud provides an all-weather platform for local political advisors to perform their duties, and makes the consultative democracy of the CPPCC more extensive, multi-tiered and flexible.

From http://www.news.cn/ 12/12/2021

TOP ↑

Chinese People Invited to Advise on Gov't Work Online

Chinese people are invited to offer their advice online on government work in a massive opinion-seeking campaign that has been held annually for eight consecutive years. Starting Monday, members of the public will be able to participate in the campaign called "Share Your Ideas with the Premier" to put forward their suggestions on more than 20 topics, including business operation, employment and entrepreneurship, technological innovation, education, health, elderly care and childcare, epidemic prevention and control, and rural vitalization. The campaign will run through to the annual sessions of the national legislature and the national political advisory body -- a key event on the country's political calendar known as the "two sessions" -- in 2022. Some valuable suggestions can play a role in government policy-making. In last year's campaign, nearly 1,200 pieces of advice made it to the drafting group of the annual report on the work of the government, a flagship document to be delivered for deliberation during the two sessions. Suggestions can be submitted at www.gov.cn, the State Council's mobile application and applets on multiple platforms, and other relevant websites and platforms. The campaign was launched by www.gov.cn in cooperation with 22 online platforms, including people.com.cn and xinhuanet.com.

From http://www.news.cn/ 12/20/2021

TOP ↑

Structural Reforms Can Ease China’s Transition to High-Quality Growth: Report

To achieve quality growth over the medium-term, China will need to rebalance its economy across several dimensions, according to Rebalancing Act, From Recovery to High-Quality Growth, the latest China Economic Update released today by the World Bank. Following a strong rebound in the first half of 2021, economic activity in China cooled rapidly in the latter half of the year. Real GDP growth is projected to reach 8.0 percent this year, before moderating to 5.1 percent in 2022. The economic slowdown reflects less-favorable base effects, diminished support from exports, and the government’s continued deleveraging efforts. Although full-year growth is projected to slow in 2022, momentum is expected to pick up, aided by a more supportive fiscal stance following the rapid withdrawal of fiscal policy support in 2021. Risks to China’s economic outlook are tilted to the downside. Renewed domestic COVID-19 outbreaks, including the new Omicron variant, could require more broad-based and longer-lasting restrictions leading to larger disruptions in economic activity. A severe and prolonged downturn in the highly leveraged property sector poses another downside risk which could have significant economy-wide reverberations.

While the authorities should stand ready to ease fiscal policy to support domestic demand in 2022 and provide liquidity to stem risks of contagion from distressed developers, the report argues that the traditional playbook of boosting growth through infrastructure and real estate investment has run its course. “The pandemic and subsequent recovery have worsened domestic and external economic imbalances,” said Martin Raiser, World Bank Country Director for China, Mongolia and Korea. "The transition to high quality growth is a challenging re-balancing act, but structural reforms could help reduce policy trade-offs." Three challenges stand out: first, rebalancing from external to domestic demand and from investment and industry-led growth to greater reliance on consumption and services; second, rebalancing from the significant weight placed on state leadership and regulation to a greater role for markets and the private sector; and third, transitioning from a high to a low-carbon economy.

"Addressing distortions in factor markets and further opening up of the protected services sector would not only support the shift to more private sector-led growth but also encourage rebalancing towards higher value services jobs," said Ibrahim Chowdhury, World Bank Acting Lead Economist for China. To support the rebalancing towards domestic consumption, fiscal reforms could create a more progressive tax system while boosting social safety nets and spending on health and education, the report notes. The wider use of carbon pricing along with power sector reforms and the development of a wider set of green financing instruments would help accelerate China's low carbon transition while encouraging green innovation, thereby boosting medium-term growth prospects.

From https://www.worldbank.org/ 12/22/2021

TOP ↑

JAPAN: Online Fundraising Parties for Politicians Raise Both Cash and Questions

A growing number of political fundraising parties are being held online amid the COVID-19 disaster, as a way to raise money while avoiding crowded venues. According to political funds reports released by the Internal Affairs and Communications Ministry and other agencies for last year, many political organizations included expenses for "video distribution" in their reports. Such online events may become common, but a number of issues also need to be dealt with, including unclear rules and insufficient transparency in reporting. The ruling Liberal Democratic Party's Shikokai faction, headed by LDP heavyweight Taro Aso, held an online fundraising party in addition to an in-person event for the first time in July last year. "It was nice that we could have this once-a-year interaction with our supporters despite the coronavirus disaster," a person in charge of the event said.

Of approximately 7,000 individuals and companies that paid to attend the party, about 1,000 gathered at the venue, a luxury hotel in Tokyo. The remaining participants attended from their homes and elsewhere by accessing the URL for the live broadcast of the event. Although the faction had to bear the cost of video distribution and other expenses, the revenue from the party remained at the same level as the previous year, at about ¥217 million. Fundraising revenues for political organizations under the jurisdiction of the ministry totaled ¥6.38 billion last year, down 28% from the previous year. Many of the organizations included such expenses as “video distribution” and “lighting for filming” — indicating their efforts to use online events to maintain the level of revenue they derive from fundraising parties. “[An online party] has the advantage that the elderly and physically impaired can easily participate without having to travel,” a secretary of a member of the Constitutional Democratic Party of Japan said.

An official in the office of an LDP member of the House of Representatives who also held an online party in July said it took more time and effort than expected. “It’s hard to get a sense of unity with supporters online, and some of them may lose interest,” the official said. The Political Funds Control Law requires that donors’ names and other information about them be included in the reporting of donations of more than ¥50,000 per year. But in the case of fundraising parties, supporters’ names and other information do not need to be included in a report if they paid ¥200,000 or less to attend. Revenues from fundraising parties are differentiated from donations in that they are deemed to be “compensation for business.” One LDP member of the House of Councillors said, “How can we say that just video distribution deserves ‘compensation?’ … Many of my colleagues don’t feel they can go online.” The rules are also vague about how to record income and expenditures in political funds reports.

An upper house member who held an online and in-person party earned about ¥16 million from the event. Details about individuals and groups who gathered at the venue were included in the relevant report, but the number of online participants was not. A situation has developed in which political funds reports do not reflect the actual situation. While more online-only parties are expected to be held in the future, the ministry says it is difficult to classify gatherings that do not physically bring people together as political fundraising parties. Therefore, organizers are not obliged to include details about their supporters in the political funds reports even if they pay more than ¥200,000 for the event. “[Holding political fundraising parties] online can encourage people to get involved in politics,” said Prof. Takashi Tomizaki of Komazawa University. “In view of a key purpose of the Political Funds Control Law — which stipulates that political funds should be open to the public in principle — the ruling and opposition parties should work together to create rules to ensure transparency regarding revenue and spending from online fundraising parties, among other events,” Tomizaki said.

From https://the-japan-news.com 12/08/2021

TOP ↑

Japan Govt Found Tampering with Construction Works Data

The Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism Ministry had tampered with data for statistics on construction works since 2013, it was learned Wednesday. The ministry was found rewriting data regarding orders for domestic construction works projects from public institutions and private firms, which is one of the core statistics used in calculating Japan’s gross domestic product. It double-counted some data to overestimate the number of orders. The ministry corrected its data calculation procedures in April this year to end the double-counting. The data tampering may constitute a violation of the statistics law, and the ministry is investigating the facts of how the miscounting began. Infrastructure minister Tetsuo Saito admitted to and apologized for the data tampering at a meeting of the Budget Committee of the House of Representatives on the same day. Prime Minister Fumio Kishida also expressed regret over the data tampering, saying that the government must make efforts to prevent recurrences. The admission came after a question from Takeshi Shina of the main opposition Constitutional Democratic Party of Japan, who called for launching a third-party investigation into the matter.

When the ministry introduced the current statistics method for construction works orders in April 2013, it allowed businesses that could not complete their surveys on time every month to submit multiple months’ worth of data in one survey to make up for their failures to report data from past months. The ministry also adopted a rule under which the statistics would use estimate figures for businesses failing to submit their surveys on time instead of booking zero orders. This caused the ministry to sometimes count both the actual figures from businesses that submitted multiple months’ worth of data all together and their estimate figures. The ministry had ordered prefectural governments to rewrite businesses’ surveys to make them look as though those who reported multiple months’ worth of data received all the orders in the latest month. A ministry source said that the aim of allowing submissions of multiple months’ worth of data all at once was to reduce the burden on small businesses, and that “there was no intention to manipulate figures.” In late 2018, the government was found padding monthly employment data collected by the Health, Labor and Welfare Ministry. This led to the erosion of trust in the country’s statistics collection.

From https://the-japan-news.com 12/15/2021

TOP ↑

LDP OK’s Adding ‘Family’ to Name of Planned Agency for Children

The ruling Liberal Democratic Party approved Wednesday the government’s basic policy proposal on a new agency to be in charge of children’s affairs, giving a green light to a name change from the originally planned “child agency” to “child and family agency.” The name was altered apparently in consideration of conservative members in the LDP and its junior coalition partner Komeito, but the move caused frustration among some LDP members. The government presented the draft of the basic policy at a joint meeting of groups including the LDP Headquarters for Creating Bright Future Society for Children and Young People. With the decision left to senior executives of the headquarters, Katsunobu Kato, former chief cabinet secretary who chaired the meeting, said: “Support for families is indispensable to realize a society centered on children, which the party aims to create. Let us allow the name to be 'child and family agency.'"

The draft policy stated that a full-time minister will be assigned at the new agency, which will oversee affairs regarding childcare facilities, among other policies. Divisions of the Health, Labor and Welfare Ministry and the Cabinet Office that are currently in charge of those facilities will be abolished. The new agency will work together with the Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology Ministry, which oversees preschools, to formulate educational content. The government aims to have the draft policy approved by the Cabinet by the end of the year. To establish the envisaged agency in fiscal 2023, it plans to submit related bills to the ordinary Diet session next year. The new agency had been tentatively called a "child agency" in the government since discussions started during the administration of former Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga. Wednesday's change to include the word "family" was intended to clarify the agency's role in supporting parents and other guardians who are often isolated from society during the period of child-rearing. Conservative members of the party had voiced opinions that the responsibility to raise children should lie with families.

At the meeting, some members opposed including the word "family" in the name, saying that consideration should be given to children who have lost their parents or who have been abused by them, as well as those who live in orphanages. Komeito also approved the draft policy on the day. The party had pledged to establish a child and family agency during the House of Representatives election campaign in October. The now defunct Democratic Party of Japan, which has become part of the leading opposition Constitutional Democratic Party of Japan, once tried to create a child and family ministry. "Including the word family in the name will give us broader support from both the ruling and opposition parties," a former cabinet minister from the LDP said. "The decision was made after not only our conservative members but also Komeito were involved," an LDP member, who had promoted the "child agency" name, said with regret.

From https://the-japan-news.com 12/16/2021

TOP ↑

SOUTH KOREA: AI Spokesman, Avatars Enter Election Campaigns

At the kickoff ceremony of an election committee for the main opposition party's presidential candidate Yoon Suk-yeol, a familiar face showed up to encourage support for the nominee, calling himself "AI Yoon Suk-yeol." "Hello. I am AI Yoon Suk-yeol. Are you surprised because we look alike?" the digitally created character resembling the People Power Party's presidential candidate said in a video clip shown at the ceremony on Dec. 6. "AI Yoon Suk-yeol is a first in the political arena, and it symbolizes Korea's new future that Yoon will create [when he is elected president],” it added. While not perfect, presidential candidates running for the March election are bringing in advanced technologies to show off their digital engagement to appeal to voters. The AI Yoon Suk-yeol was slightly awkward when making some gestures, but the character perfectly re-created the voice of the candidate. The digitized Yoon also lacked some of the distinct habits of the nominee, who has been criticized for shaking his head sideways too often and for opening his legs too wide in public events.

The People Power Party election committee is also ramping up efforts in digital canvassing, announcing that it will utilize Namuwiki, a local online encyclopedia, to collect public opinions on election pledges. On Dec. 7, Kim Dong-yeon, a former finance minister who threw his hat in the ring for the presidency in August, introduced an artificial intelligence spokesperson named Aidy as the first hired employee of his election committee. He also presented an avatar character named Windy, who is his second hired employee. “I want to be chosen by the people with a new way of campaigning that fits the new era, instead of the usual time-consuming activities that wastes taxpayer money,” Kim said in the announcement, adding that the two major political parties receive over 100 billion won ($85 million) as a state subsidy for election campaigning. “Korean politics has been a burden to the people for a long time, costing an astronomical amount of money,” Kim said. “Adopting an AI spokesman is an attempt to cut down on the cost of campaigning.” The AI spokesperson appeared in a short video to introduce himself. “Hello, I am Kim Dong-yeon’s spokesman Aidy. I will be working hard to support Kim’s philosophy and for a better world,” Aidy said.

Taking on the usual task of a spokesperson, Aidy also criticized the ruling and main opposition parties for hiring campaign employees only for show and that lack genuineness. “Kim Dong-yeon [on the other hand] is actually recruiting me and Windy as his first and second campaign employees in his attempt to introduce the right figures, in the era of the fourth industrial revolution and digitalization,” the AI spokesman added. Kim, who served the ministerial position for the incumbent Moon Jae-in Administration, formed a new party dubbed New Wave in October. According to Kim, his election camp plans to utilize Aidy and Windy to better approach voters online. Aidy will be delivering various messages from the candidate together with spokeswoman Song Moon-hee. Windy, the avatar, would be working as “the other half” of the candidate, presenting his policies and appearing in places on behalf of Kim, he added. Lee Jae-myung, the presidential candidate from the ruling Democratic Party of Korea, operated an election camp headquarters inside a metaverse to communicate with the users during the party’s primary. There, he presented an AI-based chat bot, which automatically gave answers to questions.

Other candidates, including Ahn Cheol-soo of the minor opposition People’s Party and Sim Sang-jung of the progressive Justice Party, are also preparing digitized electioneering activities, party officials said. Amid the efforts to highlight that the candidates are “up-to-date,” there are some concerned voices that these AI and deepfake technologies may be abused to manipulate campaign efforts. “Thinking about the political ethics, I think the People Power Party has gone too far,” Ko Sam-seog, former standing member at the Korea Communications Commission said on Facebook. He served his post at the communications commission at the recommendation of the ruling Democratic Party. “It is obvious why the PPP adopted Yoon Suk-yeol’s avatar. They wanted a makeover of the candidate’s bad image, with his head-shaking, wide-legged standing and poor speaking ability,” Ko said. “Whether it is with good intentions or bad, deep fake technology should be used sparingly, and very carefully.”

From https://the-japan-news.com 12/22/2021

TOP ↑

KIPO Vows to Take Lead in Setting International Rules on AI Inventions

The Korean Intellectual Property Office (KIPO) said it will play a leading role in setting up international rules on creations and inventions by artificial intelligence next year. The KIPO, a member of the Intellectual Property Five (IP5), or a forum of the five largest intellectual property offices including those of the US, Europe, China and Japan, said it will also discuss among the IP5 ways to improve protection of trademarks and designs in the virtual world. “As the digital transformation accelerates, the value of intellectual property data is growing,” KIPO Commissioner Kim Yong-rae said as the patent office outlined plans for next year. “We will make good use of excellent IP data; protect and foster new types of digital IP to promote economic growth through IP in the digital era.”

The KIPO plans to tackle the changing IP trade environment by analyzing how IP-related articles in major trade agreements such as the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership can affect South Korea’s trade. The patent office said it will support regional industries by providing them with patent analysis, regional brand and design development strategies, IP consulting service and IP expenses. To foster IP experts specializing in regional industries, Chungnam National University will be added next year to the list of universities that receive state support for relevant degree programs, which currently comprises Gyeongsang National University, Chonnam National University and Chungbuk National University.

From http://www.koreaherald.com 12/29/2021

TOP ↑

South-East Asia

CAMBODIA: Inaugurating New Defense Ministry Office Building

Cambodia on Wednesday inaugurated the new office building of the Ministry of National Defense in central area of the capital Phnom Penh. Speaking during the inauguration ceremony, Prime Minister Samdech Techo Hun Sen said construction of the new building responds to the country's rapid development and the need for decent workplaces. "I'd like to express my gratitude to all stakeholders in both public and private sectors, as well as to the People's Republic of China and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam for aiding this project," he said. According to Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister Tea Banh, construction of the building located on the Russian Federation Boulevard in Phnom Penh began in June 2018 and was completed in October 2021. The premises include a six-floor building and a large courtyard, and have functional facilities including a press conference venue and a large auditorium which can house more than 1,000 people for national and international events, according to him. Banh said that there is a helipad on the roof of the building, which cost about 30 million U.S. dollars. The office building was constructed by China Railway Urban Construction Group Co. Limited (CRUCG), which is a wholly-owned subsidiary of China Railway Construction Corporation Limited (CRCC).

From https://english.news.cn 12/29/2021

TOP ↑

MALAYSIA: Leading Coalition Records Landslide Win in State Election

Malaysia's Gabungan Parti Sarawak (GPS), a coalition of parties based in the northern Borneo state of Sarawak allied to the federal government retained its hold on the state government by a landslide victory on Saturday. The GPS took 75 of 82 state assembly seats, while the main opposition party Pakatan Harapan (PH) won two seats and another opposition party Parti Sarawak Bersatu (PSB) won four seats, the election commission said. The results for one remaining seat have been delayed due to continuing bad weather hitting the country. The elections were triggered following the expiry of the state government's 2016 mandate, but had been delayed by COVID-19 pandemic, with a state of emergency imposed in the state from July to November this year to slow the spread of the outbreak.

From https://english.news.cn 12/19/2021

TOP ↑

PHILIPPINES: Duterte Withdraws Candidacy for Senator in 2022 Elections

Outgoing Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte on Tuesday formally dropped out of the Senate race in the May 2022 elections. Duterte, 76, went to the Commission on Elections in Manila to formally withdraw his candidacy for a Senate seat. His office released a statement of withdrawal and a picture of Duterte holding the document. Acting presidential spokesperson, Cabinet Secretary Karlo Nograles, said that

Duterte views the withdrawal "as an opportunity to concentrate on efforts to ensure transparent, impartial, orderly, and peaceful elections" in the Southeast Asian country. "The president believes that withdrawing from the senate race will allow him to better focus on managing our pandemic response in order to sustain the progress we have made in the country" and to safely reopen the economy, Nograles said in a statement. "After over four decades in public service, the president plans to retire from the government to spend more time with his family when his term ends in June 2022," Nograles said. Duterte filed his certificate of candidacy on Nov. 15, the last day for making candidate substitutions, though he announced in October that he was retiring from politics and will not run in next May's elections. Duterte's withdrawal happened a few hours after Senator Christopher Go formally notified the poll body that he was dropping out of the race for the May 2022 presidential election. Go was Duterte's long-time aide before being elected senator in 2019. The Philippine constitution only permits presidents to serve a single six-year term. Duterte was elected president in 2016, and his term ends on June 30, 2022.

From https://english.news.cn 12/14/2021

TOP ↑

VIETNAM: Heavy Tasks Ahead for State Treasury in 2022

State Treasury will have to take on challenging tasks next year as public spending is expected to rise, according to Deputy Minister of Finance Võ Thành Hưng. This statement was made at a conference reviewing the performance of the State Treasury in 2021 and setting tasks for 2022. Hưng said rising government expenditure will require a sound plan of fundraising right from the beginning of next year. Capital control will also need to be improved to deal with new projects from support packages. Therefore, the State Treasury tasks will be pretty heavy, he stressed. Under State Budget Plan for 2022, the State will run a budget deficit of around VNĐ372.9 trillion in the fiscal year of 2022, equivalent to 4 per cent of GDP and up 8.5 per cent compared to the projected deficit of 2021. At the conference, the treasury was also tasked with speeding up administrative reforms, promoting cashless payments and tightening risk control to help customers and agencies tap into the state budget with ease. The deputy minister also called for more training programmes to keep local treasuries well-informed about new regulations of capital control on public projects. These regulations will come into force on January 1, 2022.

Regarding performance in 2021, the leader of the finance ministry highly praised the treasury for its efforts in settling payments to people in need during the pandemic, which made a substantial contribution to the fight against COVID-19. By December 15, the State Treasury and its local agencies carried out control on frequent expenditures worth VNĐ883.1 trillion and investment expenditures worth VNĐ302.2 trillion. Through expenditure control, the treasury has also declined payments amounting to VNĐ22.6 billion. Additionally, the treasury’s bond issuances were met with success as bonds went on sale with lower interest rates, longer maturities and larger volumes. This is the first year that the State Treasury successfully offered online public services across the board, reaching a rate of 100 per cent online procedures processing.

From https://vietnamnews.vn 12/27/2021

TOP ↑

Vietnamese Parliament to Discuss Urgent Economic Issues at Extraordinary Session

The 15th National Assembly (NA) of Vietnam, the country's top legislature, will gather online from Jan. 4 to 11 next year for its first extraordinary session, to discuss "really urgent issues" concerning national development, NA secretary-general Bui Van Cuong said Thursday. In particular, the legislators are expected to look into fiscal and monetary policies for the implementation of a socio-economic recovery and development program, which is very urgent given difficulties and challenges generated by the COVID-19 pandemic, he told a press briefing here. He said the legislators will also mull over an investment policy on construction of the North-South expressway for the 2021-2025 period, on special policies and mechanisms for the development of the southern Can Tho city, which is known as the leading growth engine in the country's Mekong Delta region, and on many legislative amendments to facilitate investment and the operation of businesses. According to him, the legislators will hold the session via video-conferencing due to complicated developments of the COVID-19 pandemic in the Southeast Asian country. In its second session in November, the Vietnamese top legislature set the country's economic growth target for 2022 at between 6 and 6.5 percent.

From https://english.news.cn 12/30/2021

TOP ↑

South Asia

INDIA: Dr Srivari Chandrasekhar Appointed as Secretary, Department of Science & Technology

The Government of India, on December 4, issued orders to appoint Dr Srivari Chandrasekhar to the post of Secretary for the Department of Science & Technology (DST). As per the orders issued by the Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT), Dr Chandrasekhar will be serving the newly appointed charge for a period of two years with effect from the date he assumes the post or till attaining the age of 60 years or until further orders from the government, whichever is the earliest. In his current capacity, Dr Chandrasekhar is serving as Director, Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR)-Indian Institute of Chemical Technology (IITC), Hyderabad.

From https://egov.eletsonline.com/ 12/06/2021

TOP ↑

Cabinet Approves Electoral Reforms Including Voter IDs & Aadhaar Linking & More

Now, voter IDs will be linked with Aadhaar cards as the Union Cabinet nods to approve a bill on electoral reforms that underlines a key proposal to allow linking of Aadhaar to voter ID cards. The bill, pushed by the Election Commission of India (ECI), will also enable those exercising their franchise for the first time to get as many as four turns to register in a year. On the contrary, currently, those turning 18 on or before January 1 are only allowed to register as voters once. Besides, the electoral reforms will also bring in changes to the electoral law making them gender-neutral for service voters. Earlier, the Election Commission of India has reached out to the Centre for several electoral reforms including making paid news an offence and increasing the punishment for filing a false affidavit to two years of imprisonment. However, ECI, in June 2021, had written to the law ministry urging it to urgently take up the pending electoral reforms which also included allowing first-time voters to have multiple registration attempts in a year. As per reports, as many as 40 electoral proposals are pending with the government. The electoral reforms are passed a year ahead of assembly elections due to be held in several states including Uttar Pradesh and Punjab. Earlier in 2019, the ECI had proposed wide-ranging electoral reforms which included remote voting for NRIs and migrant workers, and eliminating duplication of voters. However, in the initial months of 2021, the poll panel commenced a research project for enabling remote voting in consultation with IIT Madras and eminent technologists from IITs and other leading institutions.

From https://egov.eletsonline.com/ 12/16/2021

TOP ↑

Highlights of Swachh Bharat Mission 2.0 & AMRUT 2.0: Urban Affairs Ministry

Minister of State for Housing and Urban Affairs Kaushal Kishore, in a written reply to the Rajya Sabha on December 13, highlighted the key focus areas of the Swachh Bharat Mission (Urban) 2.0 and Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT) 2.0. The two flagship missions of the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, Government of India, were launched on October 1, 2021, to make cities in India garbage-free and secure water during the mission period of five years from 2021 to 2026. As described by the Minister, the highlights of SBM (U) 2.0 are as follows: All households and premises have to segregate their waste into “wet waste” (from kitchen and gardens) and “dry waste” (including paper, glass, plastic, and domestic hazardous waste and sanitary waste wrapped separately). Complete (100 per cent) door to door collection of segregated waste from each household/ premise. Proper and scientific management of all fractions of waste, including safe disposal in scientific landfills. All legacy dumpsites to be remediated. All used water including faecal sludge, is safely contained, transported, processed and disposed of so that no untreated faecal sludge and used water pollutes the groundwater or water bodies, in cities with less than one lakh population. A phased reduction in the use of single-use plastic will be carried out.

On describing the highlights of AMRUT 2.0, the Minister submitted: Universal coverage of water supply from 500 cities to about 4,800 statutory towns. Focus on making the cities 'self-reliant' and 'water secure'. Universal coverage of sewerage and septage management in 500 AMRUT cities. Target to provide 2.68 crore drinking water tap connections and 2.64 crore sewer connections. Focus on the financial sustainability of Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) through enhanced creditworthiness and market borrowing. 'Pey Jal Survekshan' will be undertaken in cities to promote healthy competition among them and function as a monitoring tool and Mission accelerator. Technology sub-Mission under AMRUT 2.0 will help in identifying proven and potential global technologies in the water sector. Entrepreneurs/ startups involved in low-cost indigenous equipment and processes will be encouraged. All the cities of Uttar Pradesh including Firozabad are covered under the SBM (U) 2.0 and are eligible to avail all components as per operational guidelines. Out of 4,372 ULBs, 4,371 ULBs of the country have been declared Open Defecation Free (ODF) under SBM (U). The one ULB remaining is in West Bengal, the city of Purulia. SBM (U) 2.0 and AMRUT 2.0 aims to cover all the cities in the country to make them garbage-free and water-secure. (With inputs from PIB)

From https://egov.eletsonline.com/ 12/23/2021

TOP ↑

Haryana Governor Reallocates Portfolios Among Members of Council of Ministers

Governor of Haryana Bandaru Dattatraya, on the advice of Haryana Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar, reshuffled portfolios amongst the members of the Council of Ministers consequent to the induction of two new ministers to the Council. Dr Kamal Gupta will now hold the portfolio of Urban Local Bodies and Housing For All. Devender Singh Babli will hold the portfolio of Development and Panchayats and Archaeology and Museums, while Anoop Dhanak (Minister of State) will hold the portfolio of Labour and Employment (Independent Charge), Revenue and Disaster Management (Attached with Deputy Chief Minister), Industries and Commerce (Attached with Deputy Chief Minister) and Food, Civil Supplies and Consumer Affairs (Attached with Deputy Chief Minister) with immediate effect. It is also pertinent to mention that CM Khattar will no more hold the portfolio of Housing for All, while Deputy CM Dushyant Chautala will no more hold the portfolios of Development and Panchayats and Labour and Employment. Also, Home Minister Anil Vij will cease to hold the portfolio of Urban Local Bodies while Anoop Dhanak will cease to hold the portfolio of Archaeology and Museums.

From https://egov.eletsonline.com/ 12/30/2021

TOP ↑

Central-West Asia

AZERBAIJAN: New President of Wrestling Federation Appointed

Azerbaijani Economy Minister Mikayil Jabbarov has been elected as new president of Azerbaijan Wrestling Federation, Trend reports. Minister of Youth and Sports Farid Gayibov, speaking at the election event, greeted the participants of the meeting and wished them success. The minister said that great success has been achieved in wrestling, one of the most popular sports in Azerbaijan, and expressed confidence that these achievements will remain unchanged. After the approval of the members of the credentials committee and the agenda of the meeting, Secretary General of the Azerbaijan Wrestling Federation Orkhan Mammadov made a report on the results achieved in 2018-2021. Then the Minister of Economy Mikayil Jabbarov was elected a member of the Azerbaijan Wrestling Federation by voting. After that, Jabbarov was nominated for the post of president of the federation. According to the results of the vote, Jabbarov was elected President of the Azerbaijan Wrestling Federation for a term of four years.

From https://en.trend.az/ 12/08/2021

TOP ↑

UZBEKISTAN: Ministry of Education to Implement All Suggestions of Parents and Teachers

A total of more than 7,000 suggestions were received. 70% were made by education employees. Another 25% of suggestions came from parents and more than 5% from concerned citizens. As it turned out, most parents suggest reducing the number of students in classes, solving teacher and class shortage, improving the quality of teaching and textbooks. Officials advocate raising the status of teachers, reducing the rate of teachers in elementary grades from 18 to 16 hours, raising salaries, and making proposals for lesson assignments and a grading system. "Given the importance of each proposal, they have all been studied by the ministry's team and included in the draft National School Education Development Program for 2022-2026 and will be implemented in the coming years" - Minister of Public Education, Bakhtiyor Saidov has promised.

From https://uzreport.news/ 12/13/2021

TOP ↑

Uzbekistan Launching New Single Cross-Border Money Transfers System

The government has adopted a resolution on measures to launch a payment system that ensures the timely transfer of cross-border remittances, Trend reports citing Kun.uz. In order to implement cross-border money transfers from abroad to

Uzbekistan, a payment system "Single Cross-border Money Transfers" will be established on the basis of the National Bank for Foreign Economic Activity (NBU). The payment system carries out settlements on cross-border transactions for its participants (credit institutions) through correspondent accounts. JSC "Asia-Invest Bank" (Moscow) is one of the settlement banks in the Russian Federation for cross-border transactions implemented through this payment system. A loan allocation project will be developed to cover the employment costs of Uzbek citizens working in Russia.

From https://en.trend.az/ 12/25/2021

TOP ↑

Oceania

AUSTRALIA: COVID-19 Outbreaks Sweep Across More Than 100 Aged Care Facilities

More than 100 aged care facilities across the country have been hit by COVID-19 outbreaks over Christmas, plunging dozens of residents into isolation and prompting restrictions to be placed on visitors. It is the nation's highest number of active aged care outbreaks reported this year, and almost double the figure recorded last week. The surge in infections, with 385 cases across residents and workers, has prompted consumer aged care bodies to renew calls for state and federal governments to mandate visitor policies that would allow residents to have at least one caregiver visit, regardless of an outbreak in a home. Across NSW, 65 aged care homes are managing coronavirus outbreaks, including twenty-seven facilities that have two or more active cases and four homes where at least a dozen residents and workers have been infected.

Ian Yates, chief executive of Council on the Ageing, the national peak body for elderly Australians, said despite high vaccination uptake and fewer severe COVID-19 cases in residents and aged care workers compared to last year, some facilities are denying entry to visitors. "It is a very difficult situation for providers right now. We are seeing so many complaints about people being locked in rooms. Which is leading people to question if their lives are worth living," Mr Yates said. "It is essential residents be permitted at least one visitor, but there is confusion about what is and isn't allowed in the guidance from state and federal governments." The rise in cases, fuelled by the Omicron variant, comes as tens of thousands of residents and aged care workers are due for boosters within weeks.

According to data provided by the federal government, more than 1500 residential aged care facilities across Australia have a COVID-19 booster clinic on-site for residents and workers who are eligible. That is roughly half of the 2700 aged care homes in Australia. Aged Care Matters director Sarah Russell said despite the spike in cases, only one aged care resident death was reported in NSW this week. "For around one-third of residents in aged care homes, this will be their last Christmas. Yet residents who are in lockdown will not be able to celebrate Christmas with families and loved ones, even when both residents and families are fully vaccinated, including having their booster," Ms Russell said. "The Royal Commission found residents' depression, anxiety, confusion and loneliness all increase due to the absence of visitors and long confinements in their rooms."

Omicron's rapid spread across the community is prompting facilities to shut down and block visitors pre-emptively, Professor Lee-Fay Low said, the leader of the University of Sydney's Ageing and Health Research Group. In some cases, significant delays in PCR test results are leading providers to place temporary bans on visitors while facilities wait days for results. "Lots of residents are being strongly discouraged from leaving and in many cases visitors just aren't allowed. Two weeks ago, a resident would have been allowed out," Professor Low said. "What's happening is whole aged care chains are locking down, even if only one of their facilities has an active case," Professor Low said. The latest federal health department weekly data report, released on Christmas Eve, shows there are 385 active cases in residents and workers, up from 213 cases reported at the same time the previous week. There are a total of 105 active COVID-19 outbreaks, an increase from 54 reported last week.

St Basil's Lakemba and Uniting Lillian Wells North Parramatta aged care facilities have more than 20 cases in residents in each home. High-risk groups such as the elderly, aged care residents, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults and frontline workers were the first groups to have access to booster shots when the program launched in November. Federal Health Minister Greg Hunt told reporters on Thursday that "every aged care facility that has been able and willing to receive because they were eligible and they were ready has had their deliveries done so far." "Those that are still to be done are on the basis of their own timing. And so, we're well ahead of schedule." For four months during NSW's Delta outbreak visitors were barred from all aged care homes in greater Sydney when the city went into lockdown. From October 11, residents have been permitted to have two fully vaccinated visitors aged 12 years and over, plus two children aged under 12 years per day. "Omicron has spread so fast and there was little early action from governments to clamp down on cases," Professor Low said. "This has caused facilities, even if they have only one case, to completely lockdown."

From https://www.msn.com 12/26/2021

TOP ↑

Prime Minister Scott Morrison, Cabinet Members Openly Push for Former NSW Premier Gladys Berejiklian to Run in Warringah

Prime Minister Scott Morrison and senior Liberals are openly encouraging the former New South Wales premier Gladys Berejiklian to run as the party's candidate in

Warringah at next year's federal election. Ms Berejiklian suddenly quit as her state's premier in September after being named as the subject of an Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC) inquiry. However, Liberal figures have been quietly sounding her out about a tilt at federal politics, believing she could be the party's best chance at reclaiming the once-safe seat of Warringah, currently held by Independent Zali Steggall. Despite the stunning evidence and phone taps presented at the ICAC inquiry, Liberals have been buoyed by polling published in Nine papers last month suggesting Ms Berejiklian's "likeability" had rebounded after her appearance at those hearings.

Mr Morrison appears to have picked up on this sentiment, recently launching an extraordinary attack on the ICAC, likening the watchdog to a "kangaroo court" that had "done over" Ms Berejiklian. Today, he continued his criticism, saying the former premier had been the victim of a "pile-on" and was a person of "great integrity". "I think this is a great opportunity, if Gladys wishes to run, but that's up to her," he told reporters. The Prime Minister sidestepped repeated questions about the ICAC investigation itself, which is inquiring into whether Ms Berejiklian breached public trust, saying he would "let the people decide". "There is no suggestion of criminal conduct by Gladys Berejiklian, none whatsoever," he said. "Gladys was put in a position of actually having to stand down and there were no findings of anything. "If she wants to have a crack at Warringah for the Liberal Party, I suspect the people in Warringah would welcome that."

Ministers express support for Berejiklian Earlier, Finance Minister Simon Birmingham said he would "love" to see Ms Berejiklian run for the seat, saying she had shown "exceptional leadership" in public office. "Gladys has been a friend of mine for decades and I know she has immense and incredible talent, but that's entirely her call," he told ABC News Breakfast. Environment Minister Sussan Ley said voters were dismayed by the former premier's treatment during the ICAC investigation and the public hearings into her relationship with disgraced former state MP Daryl Maguire. "What I trust [are] the voters' reactions," she said. "And I was actually quite surprised with the number of people [who] came to me and said they really didn't like this, and that's how they described the process. And it was pretty awful. "And did it need to play out in such a way, on our TV screens? I don't think so."

The Liberals lost Warringah for the first time at the 2019 election when Ms Steggall, a former Olympic skier, won the seat, defeating the former prime minister Tony Abbott. Heading into the 2022 election, both sides believe the election will be patchy because of the pandemic's varying effect on the states and territories and will come down to hand-to-hand combat in certain seats. The coalition needs to hold all of its 75 seats and pick up at least one more to govern in its own right, while offsetting anticipated losses in WA and Victoria. Labor heads into the election with a notional 69 seats, meaning it would need to win another seven to form a majority government. The opposition is hoping to make integrity an election issue, as the government's commitment to establish a federal corruption watchdog continues to be delayed.

It is not yet clear when the ICAC will finish its investigation but Ms Berejiklian has until next month to decide whether to run. Federal Labor Leader Anthony Albanese said the speculation about Ms Berejiklian was "getting a bit absurd". "I note this ongoing obsession by the media with a premier who is still subject to proceedings under the ICAC," he said. "I think people should allow those processes to take their course." Ms Steggall said voters in Warringah want a credible climate policy and a federal integrity commission. "I think popularity is one thing, but position on issues still really matter, so people have an issue with trust, especially in the federal government, right?," she said. "The fact that Scott Morrison hasn't introduced a federal integrity commission really bothers people. "So, yes, personality and politics can be important but at the end of the day, electorates like Warringah are actually saying, "We want a real position on issues. We have got important problems we need to deal with."

From https://www.msn.com 12/06/2021

TOP ↑

NEW ZEALAND: Self-Identification a New Milestone in New Zealand's History

History has been made today with the passing of a Bill that recognises the rights and wellbeing of New Zealand's rainbow community, Internal Affairs Minister Jan Tinetti says. "Today is a proud day in Aotearoa's history. Parliament has voted in favour of inclusivity and against discrimination," Jan Tinetti said. "The passing of the Births, Deaths, Marriages, and Relationship Registration Bill brings with it a more accessible and inclusive process for people to change the sex recorded on their birth certificate. This law change will make a real difference for transgender, non-binary, takatāpui and intersex New Zealanders." The Bill had its third and final reading in Parliament today. "Self-identification on birth certificates was first introduced in 2018 in response to a petition and now in 2021, after a thorough parliamentary inquiry, New Zealanders will no longer require proof of medical treatment or need to persuade a court to have the sex on their birth certificate match the gender they know themselves to be.

"The changes will also support young people to make their own decisions about how they are identified on their birth certificates. It gives them agency over their identity, which will promote their mental health and sense of well-being. "The self-identification provisions come into force in 18 months' time. This will give the government opportunity to consult with the rainbow community and ensure the legislation works to support the people at its heart. Consultation will begin next year on the regulations which will: determine who is a suitably qualified third party to support applications for young people find a way to make sure the sex markers available for the birth certificate include non-binary and cultural options determine any additional requirements for anyone seeking to amend their registered sex more than once. “I would like to acknowledge that there will be disappointment from overseas-born New Zealanders as they will not be able to access self-identification at present. This is because the changes only apply to New Zealand birth certificates at this stage. “Work will be done to address this, starting with further consultation with those affected. This will only further strengthen the milestone we have achieved today,” Jan Tinetti said.

From https://livenews.co.nz 12/09/2021

TOP ↑

New Appointments to the Climate Change Commission Board

Minister of Climate Change James Shaw has announced three appointments to the Climate Change Commission Board. Deputy Chair Lisa Tumahai has been reappointed for a second term and will be joined on the Board by new members Dr Andy Reisinger and Dr Tanira Kingi. “I was really impressed with the calibre of nominations we received for these crucial roles. The appointments we have made will bring some tremendously valuable expertise to the Commission. “I am delighted that Lisa Tumahai will continue in her role as Deputy Chairperson. The Board has benefited from her expertise in governance and te ao Māori. In Dr Reisinger the Board gains a climate scientist of international repute, and in Dr Kingi decades of research experience in New Zealand’s primary industries.

“I want to thank the Commission and the Board for their hard work over the past year and, in particular, the delivery of Ināia tonu nei: a low emissions future for Aotearoa. The Commission plays a crucial role in the way we as a country tackle climate change – and with these appointments I am confident it is ready to continue delivering that mahi,” James Shaw said. The Climate Change Commission was established in 2019 to provide independent, expert advice to government on emissions budgets, risk assessment, and progress towards New Zealand’s legislated climate targets. Board members are chosen to form the necessary mix of expertise to tackle the many challenges of climate change. Minister Shaw also expressed his appreciation for the contribution of retiring Commissioner Dr Harry Clark. “Dr Clark’s expertise and perspectives have made a significant contribution to the ability of New Zealand to confront climate change while recognising the unique profile of our emissions and our economy,” James Shaw said.

From https://livenews.co.nz 12/22/2021

TOP ↑

3、Management, Capacity Building and Innovation

Asia-Pacific

Learning Losses from COVID-19 Could Cost this Generation of Students Close to $17 Trillion in Lifetime Earnings

This generation of students now risks losing $17 trillion in lifetime earnings in present value, or about 14 percent of today's global GDP, as a result of COVID-19 pandemic-related school closures, according to a new report published today by the World Bank, UNESCO, and UNICEF. The new projection reveals that the impact is more severe than previously thought, and far exceeds the $10 trillion estimates released in 2020. In addition, The State of the Global Education Crisis: A Path to Recovery report shows that in low- and middle-income countries, the share of children living in Learning Poverty – already 53 percent before the pandemic – could potentially reach 70 percent given the long school closures and the ineffectiveness of remote learning to ensure full learning continuity during school closures. "The COVID-19 crisis brought education systems across the world to a halt," said Jaime Saavedra, World Bank Global Director for Education. "Now, 21 months later, schools remain closed for millions of children, and others may never return to school. The loss of learning that many children are experiencing is morally unacceptable. And the potential increase of Learning Poverty might have a devastating impact on future productivity, earnings, and well-being for this generation of children and youth, their families, and the world's economies."

Simulations estimating that school closures resulted in significant learning losses are now being corroborated by real data. For example, regional evidence from Brazil, Pakistan, rural India, South Africa, and Mexico, among others, show substantial losses in math and reading. Analysis shows that in some countries, on average, learning losses are roughly proportional to the length of the closures. However, there was great heterogeneity across countries and by subject, students' socioeconomic status, gender, and grade level. For example, results from two states in Mexico show significant learning losses in reading and in math for students aged 10-15. The estimated learning losses were greater in math than reading, and affected younger learners, students from low-income backgrounds, as well as girls disproportionately.

Barring a few exceptions, the general trends from emerging evidence around the world align with the findings from Mexico, suggesting that the crisis has exacerbated inequities in education: Children from low-income households, children with disabilities, and girls were less likely to access remote learning than their peers. This was often due to lack of accessible technologies and the availability of electricity, connectivity, and devices, as well as discrimination and gender norms. Younger students had less access to remote learning and were more affected by learning loss than older students, especially among pre-school age children in pivotal learning and development stages. The detrimental impact on learning has disproportionately affected the most marginalized or vulnerable. Learning losses were greater for students of lower socioeconomic status in countries like Ghana, Mexico, and Pakistan. Initial evidence points to larger losses among girls, as they are quickly losing the protection that schools and learning offers to their well-being and life chances.“The COVID-19 pandemic shut down schools across the world, disrupting education for 1.6 billion students at its peak, and exacerbated the gender divide. In some countries, we’re seeing greater learning losses among girls and an increase in their risk of facing child labor, gender-based violence, early marriage, and pregnancy. To stem the scars on this generation, we must reopen schools and keep them open, target outreach to return learners to school, and accelerate learning recovery," said UNICEF Director of Education Robert Jenkins. The report highlights that, to date, less than 3 percent of governments’ stimulus packages have been allocated to education. Much more funding will be needed for immediate learning recovery. The report also notes that while nearly every country in the world offered remote learning opportunities for students, the quality and reach of such initiatives differed – in most cases, they offered, at best, a rather partial substitute for in-person instruction. More than 200 million learners live in low- and lower middle-income countries that are unprepared to deploy remote learning during emergency school closures.

Reopening schools must remain a top and urgent priority globally to stem and reverse learning losses. Countries should put in place Learning Recovery Programs with the objective of assuring that students of this generation attain at least the same competencies of the previous generation. Programs must cover three key lines of action to recover learning: 1) consolidating the curriculum; 2) extending instructional time; and 3) improving the efficiency of learning. In terms of improving the efficiency of learning, techniques like targeted instruction can help learning recovery, which means that teachers align instruction to the learning level of students, rather than an assumed starting point or curricular expectation. Targeted instruction will require addressing the learning data crisis by assessing students’ learning levels. It also necessitates additional support to teachers so that they are well-equipped to teach to the level of where children are, which is crucial to prevent losses from accumulating once children are back in school.

“We are committed to supporting governments more generally with their COVID response through the Mission Recovery plan launched earlier this year,” emphasized Stefania Giannini, UNESCO Assistant Director-General for Education. “With government leadership and support from the international community, there is a great deal that can be done to make systems more equitable, efficient, and resilient, capitalizing on lessons learned throughout the pandemic and on increasing investments. But to do that, we must make children and youth a real priority amidst all the other demands of the pandemic response. Their future – and our collective future – depends on it.” To build more resilient education systems for the long-term, countries should consider: Investing in the enabling environment to unlock the potential of digital learning opportunities for all students. Reinforcing the role of parents, families, and communities in children’s learning. Ensuring teachers have support and access to high-quality professional development opportunities. Increasing the share of education in the national budget allocation of stimulus packages. This report was produced as part of the Mission: Recovering Education 2021 by which the World Bank, UNESCO, and UNICEF are focused on three priorities: bringing all children back to schools, recovering learning losses, and preparing and supporting teachers.

From https://www.worldbank.org/ 12/06/2021

TOP ↑

Latest Child Mortality Estimates Reveal World Remains Off Track to Meeting Sustainable Development Goals

The world remains significantly off track to meet the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) on ending the preventable deaths of newborns and children under five, according to the latest estimates released by the United Nations Inter-agency Group for Child Mortality Estimation (UN IGME) today. According to the report, more than 50 countries will not meet the under-five mortality target by 2030, and more than 60 countries will miss the neonatal mortality target without immediate action. The SDGs call for an end to preventable deaths of newborns and children under age 5, with all countries aiming to have a neonatal mortality rate of 12 or fewer deaths per 1,000 live births, and an under-five mortality rate of 25 or fewer deaths per 1,000 live births, by 2030. The report states that more than 5 million children died before their fifth birthday in 2020 alone, along with 2.2 million children and youth aged 5 to 24.

“We are still losing too many young lives from largely preventable causes, often because of weak and underfunded health systems which have faced enormous pressure over the pandemic. And the burden of these deaths is not carried equally around the world. Children in sub-Saharan Africa and Southern Asia continue to face the highest risk of death in the world, and to bear the brunt of this child mortality burden,” said Mark Hereward, UNICEF’s Associate Director on Data and Analytics. “If we are going to achieve the child mortality SDGs in all countries, we must redouble efforts to ensure access to effective and high-quality care along with the continued expansion of coverage of life-saving interventions.” The UN IGME report also said that recent and reliable data on child, adolescent and youth mortality remains unavailable for most countries of the world, particularly for low-income countries, and the COVID-19 pandemic has posed additional challenges to improving data availability and quality. Only about 60 countries, mainly high-income, have a well-functioning Civil Registration and Vital Statistics System which produces timely, high-quality mortality data.

In low- and middle-income countries, huge data gaps remain – two thirds (97 out of 135 countries) have had no reliable mortality data in the past 3 years. Likewise, the COVID-19 pandemic posed more challenges to data collection and highlighted the urgent need to fill data gaps. “Countries must invest in quality health services, nutrition, and other life-saving interventions for women and children to ensure the hard-won gains in combating child mortality are not lost and to meet the SDGs,” said

Feng Zhao, Practice Manager for the Health, Nutrition and Population Global Practice of the World Bank. "The World Bank continues to be committed to helping low- and middle- income countries improve health outcomes for women and children and accelerate reductions in child mortality, including through partnerships like the Global Financing Facility (GFF)."

The UN IGME analyzed COVID-19-related excess mortality based on mortality data the group received from over 80 countries, half of which are low- or middle-income countries. Following analysis of these data and recommendations from its Technical Advisory Group, the UN IGME has not adjusted the 2020 rate for COVID-19-related mortality. However, as more good-quality data become available, further monitoring is needed for a more complete picture of child, adolescent and youth mortality, as well as the relevant contributing factors. Future investments in the COVID-19 response and in global health should strengthen all elements of global healthcare infrastructure, including leaving a lasting impact on data and primary health systems to help end preventable child deaths.

"Intensified efforts are needed to deliver quality health care services for all children and adolescents, which also means collecting the necessary data to ensure that their physical, developmental and emotional needs are being met throughout their life," said Dr. Anshu Banerjee, Director of Maternal, Newborn, Child and Adolescent Health and Ageing at the World Health Organization (WHO). "Investing in children is one of the most important things a society can do to build a better future." The report warns that because the data remains poor, outcomes for children and adolescents in 2021 and beyond remain unknown. For example, the COVID-19 pandemic may affect child mortality differently by age group and socioeconomic status. Timely and accurate data and close monitoring will be needed to understand the long-term impact of COVID-19.

From https://www.worldbank.org/ 12/20/2021

TOP ↑

ADB Strengthens Cooperation with ASEAN on Disaster Risk Management

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has announced a grant of $1.3 million to advance disaster risk management in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) through technical assistance (TA). The TA will support the implementation of the ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response Work Programme, 2021–2025, which will strengthen regional cooperation on understanding, reducing, and managing transboundary risks. "This new support is a continuation of ADB's strategic cooperation with the ASEAN Secretariat and developing member countries (DMCs) on disaster risk management, building on our earlier support to ASEAN's 2016–2020 work plan," said ADB Disaster Risk Management Specialist Steven Goldfinch. "ADB is helping to build regional cooperation and collaboration critical for reducing and better managing disaster risk across the region.”

The TA will increase actionable knowledge and greater understanding between ASEAN DMCs on the transboundary implications of disasters. It will enhance evidence-based decision-making, including through multicountry scenario planning and risk assessments on key transboundary hazards, such as floods, cyclones, and heat stress. In alignment with ASEAN’s ICT Roadmap on Disaster Management for 2025 and Beyond, ADB will support the introduction of high-level technology for regional cooperation on transboundary risks, such as predictive analysis for slow onset hazards, social media monitoring, and artificial intelligence. Assistance will also be provided to advance interregional cooperation through capacity building and knowledge exchange. The TA will be administered by ADB and is being financed on a grant basis by the Regional Cooperation and Integration Fund and the High-Level Technology Fund, each providing $500,000 financed by the Government of Japan and a grant of $300,000 by the Government of Canada.

From https://www.adb.org/ 12/13/2021

TOP ↑

East Asia

CHINA: To Accelerate Improvement of Rural Living Environment

China has released a five-year action plan on improving rural living environment amid the bid to promote rural vitalization and upgrade the living conditions of rural residents. Rural living environment upgrade is closely related to the well-being of farmers and the construction of a beautiful China, according to the plan jointly issued by the General Office of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and the General Office of the State Council. Noting the achievements made in rural areas since China launched a three-year rural living environment upgrade campaign in 2018, the plan urged efforts to speed up the improvement of rural living environment. By 2025, rural living environment should be significantly upgraded, with the penetration rate of clean toilets in rural areas steadily increased, and toilet waste effectively treated, according to the plan. It also urged efforts to continuously increase the treatment rate of rural domestic sewage and strongly raise the level of harmless treatment of rural household garbage by 2025.

From http://www.news.cn/ 12/05/2021

TOP ↑

China to Build 100 National Major Cold-chain Logistics Bases by 2025

China plans to set up about 100 national backbone cold-chain logistics bases during the 14th Five-Year Plan period (2021-2025), the country's top economic planner said on Monday. The move aims to enhance service capacity and boost the efficiency of the cold-chain logistics sector, Zhang Jiangbo, an official with the National Development and Reform Commission told a press conference, adding that the first batch of the 17 key bases is under construction. To further enhance the cold-chain transportation network, China will establish eight major channels for cold-chain logistics across the board by 2025, linking core areas for farm production and 19 city clusters, according to Zhang. Moreover, a national-level logistics platform will also be built by then to enhance cold-chain food logistics tracking and management, he said.

From http://www.news.cn/ 12/13/2021

TOP ↑

China Expected to Leverage Multiple Tools to Stabilize 2022 Growth

China is expected to leverage a slew of both macro and micro tools to stabilize economic growth in 2022 as the recently-concluded tone-setting economic conference has arranged policy priorities. Expecting a mix of measures to stabilize growth next year, experts forecast that the world's second-largest economy's fiscal policy is highly likely to be intensified, and its monetary policy to manifest marked structural features. In the context of increasing downward pressures, the Central Economic Work Conference reiterated that economic work next year should prioritize stability while pursuing progress, and the cross-cyclical and counter-cyclical macro-regulation policies should be integrated, which suggests that multiple stabilizing measures will be adopted, said Gao Ruidong, an economist at Everbright Securities. Fiscal policies will have a larger part to play in 2022, with major policies focusing on public consumption and weak links in the economy, according to Zhong Zhengsheng, an economist at Pingan Securities.

New tax and fee cut policies are expected to be unveiled to reduce corporate costs and bolster entrepreneurs' confidence, while the issuances of special-purpose bonds are likely to be promoted, Gao said, noting that investment into infrastructure construction is forecast to be enhanced. Proactive fiscal policies should be more effective and emphasize precision and sustainability, according to a statement released after the meeting, which was held in Beijing last week. In terms of monetary policies for 2022, the statement said prudent monetary policies should be flexible and appropriate, and liquidity should be maintained at a reasonable and ample level. The statement also urged local governments to resolutely curb new hidden debt. Next year, China is expected to make its aggregate loan growth more stable and reasonably lower the financing interest rates for the real sector, according to Feng Xuming, a research fellow from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.

In addition, the country is also expected to promote the steady implementation of supporting tools aiming for its carbon peaking and neutrality goals, Feng said. In the statement, the leadership has urged efforts to guide financial institutions to ramp up support for the real economy, especially for small and micro enterprises, technological innovation and green development. Li Qilin, a researcher at Hongta Securities, estimated that in 2022, China will continue to implement the structural monetary policy tools, including re-lending and the targeted cut of reserve requirement ratio. Despite increasing difficulties, China has ample favorable conditions for its economic growth, with strong resilience, a complete industrial chain, rich human resources, convenient infrastructure and a huge domestic market, said Han Wenxiu, a senior official with the Central Committee for Financial and Economic Affairs. With adequate leeway for policy maneuvers, China's sound economic fundamentals for long-term growth remain unchanged, Han said.

From http://www.news.cn/ 12/13/2021

TOP ↑

China Adjusts Tariffs on Imported Commodities

China will implement provisional tariffs that are lower than the most-favored-nation rates on 954 imported commodities, according to a circular issued by the Customs Tariff Commission of the State Council on Wednesday. The adjustment, involving commodities including cancer drugs, aquatic products and baby clothing, will take effect on Jan. 1, 2022. The 954 products also include ski gear, artworks, auto parts that help reduce greenhouse gas emissions, high-voltage cables for high-speed trains, and fuel-cell components. Considering the development of domestic industries and changes in supply-demand conditions, the country will raise import and export tariffs from Jan. 1 on some commodities within the range of its accession commitments to the World Trade Organization, said the circular. For instance, it will impose higher export tariffs on phosphorus and blister copper to push forward the upgrades and high-quality development of related industries. In accordance with the free trade agreements and preferential trade arrangements with other countries or regions, China will impose conventional tariff rates on some products from 29 countries and regions amid efforts to open up at a higher level. According to the circular, China will also grant preferential tariff treatments next year to the least developed countries that have established diplomatic relations and completed the exchange of letters with China.

From http://www.news.cn/ 12/15/2021

TOP ↑

China to Adopt Cross-cyclical Adjustment Measures, Promote Stable Growth of Foreign Trade

China will continue to expand opening-up, roll out measures to respond to difficulties and challenges, ensure cross-cyclical adjustments and help ease problems facing enterprises with a special focus on supporting smaller ones, as part of effort to secure business orders, anchor market expectations and underpin steady growth of foreign trade, the State Council's Executive Meeting chaired by Premier Li Keqiang decided earlier this week. The meeting also decided on arrangements for the implementation of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) following its entry into force. The meeting noted the fast growth in China's imports and exports this year, as well as their important contributions to economic stability and recovery. That said, foreign trade is faced with rising uncertainty, instability and imbalance. "Foreign trade is a major highlight in the Chinese economy this year, yet we still need to be fully prepared for the challenges in keeping foreign trade stable next year.

With China's economy so deeply integrated into the global economy, stable foreign trade is crucial to steady economic growth. Early measures must be taken wherever possible," Li said. The meeting decided on greater policy support for imports and exports. Tax and fee cut measures will be implemented. Export tax rebates will be processed faster, to cut the average time needed for export tax rebates to no more than six working days. Banks will be guided toward developing new products around the needs of foreign trade enterprises, including insurance policy-based financing. The RMB exchange rate will be kept basically stable, and banks will be encouraged to conduct forward foreign exchange settlement and sales services in a targeted manner, to make foreign trade enterprises more resilient to exchange rate risks. Terms for the underwriting and claim-settlement of export credit insurance will be improved, to scale up support for micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) in foreign trade and against the risks of cancellation of orders before shipment.

Cooperation and pair-up programs between the eastern region and the central, western and northeastern regions will be deepened, and cross-regional relocation and transfer of processing trade will be supported. Efforts will be made to ensure commodity import. Development of new forms of foreign trade such as cross-border e-commerce will be encouraged. More integrated pilot zones for cross-border e-commerce will be established, and off-shore trade center cities and regions nurtured. Support for the development and use of overseas warehouses will be intensified in a market-oriented approach. The catalogue of retail imports via cross-border e-commerce will be updated and optimized, and the categories of imports will be expanded. "Market expectation on foreign trade is trending downward. Anchoring expectation of MSMEs in foreign trade calls for clear and targeted measures, to help them reduce costs and overcome difficulties," Li said, "Private firms are the leading force in export, a large number of which are MSMEs, including those in cross-border e-commerce."

Supporting services for enterprises will be enhanced, and efforts will be made to resolve their problems in ensuring products for domestic sales are produced on the same production lines, meet the same standards, and be of the same quality as products for export, expanding trade channels and improving supply chains. In 2022, interests on the deferred tax payments will be temporarily exempted for the domestic sales of processing trade enterprises. Efforts will be made to ease the pressure in international logistics. Long-term contracts between foreign trade firms and shipping companies will be encouraged. Irregularities such as arbitrary charges and freight gouging will be tackled in accordance with laws and regulations. Financial institutions will be supported in providing logistics-related inclusive finance to eligible micro and small foreign trade enterprises. Localities will be supported in developing and improving systems based on actual conditions and proactively undertaking trade adjustment assistance, to help keep stability in industrial and supply chains.

The meeting also noted that the RCEP will take effect and get implemented on Jan. 1. Enterprises will be supported in seizing the opportunity of RCEP implementation, to boost competitiveness on international markets, elevate the level of trade and investment and push for upgrading by domestic industries. Enterprises will be encouraged to leverage the tax cuts in participating countries and the regional cumulation provisions on the rules of origin, to expand export of advantageous products and import of competitive products. Opening-up commitments and rules will be well harnessed, to strengthen intra-regional cooperation on high-end, green industrial chains and manufacturing projects, and raise the level of openness in the services sector and investment. A more enabling business environment will be fostered in line with advanced international standards. Greater efforts will be made to attract funds and talent from within the region and to participate in the making of and align with international standards.

Public service platforms and expert teams for implementing the free trade agreement will be put in place, and training for MSMEs intensified through government procurement of services, to help MSMEs better understand and apply the rules in the agreement. Specialized services such as custom clearance and foreign trade documents will be developed, to provide convenience for MSMEs. Efforts will be continued to promote the entry into force and implementation of the RCEP in more participating countries, and institutionalization of the agreement actively advanced, to jointly build a major platform for regional economic and trade cooperation. Efforts will be made in support of WTO to play its due role and uphold fair trade.

Negotiations on other multilateral and bilateral free trade agreements will be advanced to pursue opening-up at a higher level. "Active participation in regional economic cooperation of RCEP will serve as a key fulcrum for stabilizing foreign trade. Most the 15 participating countries are export-oriented economies, and 90 percent of goods will be tariff free. The rules of origin in the RCEP will also play a positive role in keeping industrial chains stable," Li said, "We must seize the opportunity, and provide a package of services, to bring in foreign companies and investment and encourage more MSMEs and cross-border e-commerce firms to go global. This will enable them to improve the level of development in the competition," Li said.

From http://www.news.cn/ 12/23/2021

TOP ↑

China's Energy Regulator Pledges Energy Security, Green Development

China's National Energy Administration (NEA) has made specific arrangements to ensure energy security and promote green and low-carbon development next year, said the administration chief. The tone of next year's work will be seeking progress while maintaining stability, Zhang Jianhua, head of the NEA, told a national energy work conference. He stressed efforts to safeguard energy security, boost oil and gas exploitation, and improve the country's capability of a safe and sound power supply. Zhang urged speeding up the green and low-carbon development of the energy sector, moving faster in substituting renewable energy for fossil fuels, and developing nuclear power through a safe and orderly approach. Works will also push for scientific and technological innovation, deepen institutional reform, improve regulatory efficiency, and expand international cooperation on energy, said Zhang.

From http://www.news.cn/ 12/28/2021

TOP ↑

Easier Market Access a Recipe for China's Sound Business Environment

Earlier this month, China's top economic planner published a list of 18 typical cases of local governments and authorities setting up illegal market barriers that curb fair competition. The list is the first of its kind compiled by the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC), following which investigations into violations of the negative-list-based market access regime will be intensified and a regular report system of the typical violations will be established. The cases involve some local governments and authorities erecting market access barriers by adding extra administrative licenses, imposing illegal administrative charges, and demanding enterprises to set up subsidiaries locally, among others. Irregularities in all 18 cases have been rectified, the NDRC said in a statement. The negative list for market access, acting as an important "traffic light" for capital at the market entry point, outlines sectors, fields and businesses off-limits for investors, and concurrently gives the green light to all other areas.

The negative list for market access and the negative list for foreign investment jointly form a unified legal system for market access in China. Both domestic and foreign investors only need to consult the negative list to know whether they can invest in their industries and fields. The negative list system of market access is not only a key part of the modern market system but also an important means of stabilizing investment and expectations, said Guo Liyan, a researcher with the Chinese Academy of Macroeconomic Research. Revised on an annual basis, the 2020 negative list for market access trimmed the number of items to 123 from 131 in 2019 and 151 in 2018. Besides, the number of items that are off-limits for foreign investors will be cut to 31 in the new 2021 national negative list from 33 in the 2020 version.

The revision of the negative list is conducive to further easing market access, boosting fair competition, and promoting the better integration of an efficient market with a capable government, said Meng Wei, an NDRC official. The negative list approach is just one endeavor among the country's efforts to clear the roadblocks on the way toward a market-oriented and law-based business environment for all market players. China has recently announced in a tone-setting economic meeting to set up "traffic lights" for capital, in a bid to give full play to the positive role of capital while effectively reining in its negative effects. As a crucial tool for regulating traffic flow, the "traffic light" metaphor sends a clear message that China will step up efforts in smoothing the passage for orderly capital flow and steering it toward stable and healthy development to foster fair competition.

Efforts will be made to abolish the regulations and rectify practices that hinder the building of a unified national market to ensure fair competition, said Lian Weiliang, NDRC deputy director, in a recent interview with Xinhua. Problems including local protectionism should be addressed to support China's dual circulation development paradigm, in which domestic and overseas markets reinforce each other, with the domestic market as the mainstay, Lian noted. The country has also formulated high-standard policies, including implementing a guideline for improving the business environment and enacting the Foreign Investment Law, to establish long-term and law-based mechanisms to ensure that problems that have been tackled do not recur.

China has witnessed an increase in the number of new taxpaying market entities in the first nine months. A total of 9.7 million new market entities handling tax-related business were registered during the period, up 16.1 percent from the same period last year, data from the State Taxation Administration showed. In 2020, China was placed 31st among 190 economies in the World Bank's ease of doing business ranking, rising from 91st position in 2012, according to a white paper titled "China's Epic Journey from Poverty to Prosperity." The country will continue to provide better support and service to market entities, create a fair market environment, protect intellectual property rights, and coordinate efforts to solve the practical problems encountered by enterprises, Lian said.

From http://www.news.cn/ 12/28/2021

TOP ↑

China's Market Watchdog Vows Stable Business Environment

China will ensure a more stable business environment next year for all types of market entities, said Zhang Gong, head of the State Administration for Market Regulation. While paying closer attention to market entities' performance and needs, market regulators will improve policy accuracy and effectiveness to help market entities cope with pressure and better support their sound development, Zhang said in a recent interview with Xinhua. The country will also step up efforts to create a fair, transparent and stable institutional environment for all market entities, according to Zhang. On innovating regulatory measures, Zhang noted that China will ensure its market entry and licensing rules are streamlined, efficient and fair, provide more convenient services for market entities, and reduce administrative costs for transactions. Credit regulation or smart regulation will be put into wider use to help regulatory measures adapt better to the rapid expansion of the domestic market, Zhang said. "Policies or measures for improving the business environment and bolstering market entities must be formulated and implemented as soon as possible," Zhang said, calling for a tougher crackdown on irregularities that disrupt market security and industrial chains. Data from the administration showed that the number of market entities of all types has exceeded 150 million in China, with around 70 percent of them running actively.

From http://www.news.cn/ 12/29/2021

TOP ↑

JAPAN: NEC Eyes AI Technology to Help Wheat Production

NEC Corp. has embarked on the development of artificial intelligence technology that will support large-scale farming operations in Japan and overseas. In June, the company started an experiment on wheat production, analyzing data collected from satellite images, soil sensors and agricultural machinery. It aims to use AI analysis to boost wheat output volume by improving on ways to apply fertilizer and judging the best timing for harvest. The AI technology is also intended to make it easier for people to enter into agricultural business, which will ease a labor shortage due to the aging of farmers, while ensuring a stable supply of agricultural products. NEC is carrying out the experiment at an about 170-hectare farm in Memuro, Hokkaido, jointly with MSK Farm Machinery Corp., which imports and sells agricultural equipment. Sensors are used to collect a vast volume of data, such as the water content in the soil and daylight hours. Based on the data, the AI technology determines the best time and amount of fertilizer to be spread.

In the experiment, images from a satellite and a drone are also used to identify plots where the growth of crops is lagging. By spreading additional fertilizer in such plots, farmers can increase their yield. Wheat is often grown on large areas of farmland, so the growing conditions vary from plot to plot, making it necessary to apply subtle and precise adjustments to how much fertilizer is used and when to harvest. So far, such matters have been largely decided by the “experience and intuition” of farmers, but the use of the AI technology would enable even inexperienced farmers to handle these matters. The experiment will continue for two years. If the effectiveness of the AI technology is confirmed, NEC intends to start making the technology commercially available in 2023 or later. The annual fee for using this AI service package, which will include sensors and other equipment and expertise on how to use the AI technology, is expected to be several thousand yen per hectare of farmland. NEC also plans to promote this service in the United States, Australia and other agricultural countries, which have vast cultivated fields and are likely to receive great benefit from the AI technology.

Hopes are also high that this technology will help overcome Japan's problems stemming from the aging of farmers and lack of successors. “We want to support new farmers, companies and other entities trying to enter the agricultural industry,” said an NEC employee in charge. Amid concerns about food shortages due to global population growth, the government has placed a focus on improving the efficiency and competitiveness of the nation's agriculture from a security point of view. One of the measures to achieve this end is so-called smart agriculture, which uses advanced technologies such as robots, AI and the Internet of Things, in which everything is connected to the internet. According to statistics from the Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries Ministry, as of Feb. 1 this year, the number of full-time farmers was about 1.3 million, of whom about 70% were 65 or older. This figure is three-fourths the figure in 2012, when there were about 1.78 million full-time farmers. The Annual Report on Food, Agriculture and Rural Areas, which the government released in May, stresses the need to “build a sustainable production system through innovation” using information technology and other means in order to cope with the aging and decreasing number of farmers.

From https://the-japan-news.com 12/09/2021

TOP↑

Govt's Vaccination Certificate App Goes into Operation

The government on Monday launched a smartphone app to issue COVID-19 vaccination certificates electronically, albeit with some hiccups. The app can be downloaded free of charge on smartphone app stores, but My Number identification cards are necessary to obtain the certificates. Some local governments were unable to make preparations by Monday to issue the certificates using the app. The certificates also cannot be issued via the app if there are errors or omissions in the information registered in the government's Vaccination Record System (VRS). After the app is downloaded, applicants must enter their four-digit personal identification numbers that they set for their My Number card and scan the card with their smartphones. The procedures connect them to the VRS, allowing vaccination certificates to be displayed on the screen. Passports are also needed to issue vaccination certificates for overseas travel. The certificates will be displayed in about 30 seconds after the entry of required information is completed.

As of Sunday, about 170 municipalities, including Chiyoda Ward, Tokyo; Kadoma, Osaka Prefecture; and Onojo, Fukuoka Prefecture, were not ready for issuances via the app, according to the Digital Agency. People who do not have a smartphone or My Number Card can obtain paper vaccination certificates issued at their local government office. Before the government's app went into operation, a series of errors and omissions were found in the information registered in the VRS. In preparation for the app's launch, the city government of Toda, Saitama Prefecture, began cross-checking the records registered in the VRS of about 90,000 people who had been vaccinated twice with preliminary examination forms that they submitted when receiving the shots. As of Wednesday, the city government found that the dates of vaccinations and other information had been incorrectly entered for about 4,800 people, which accounted for 5% of the total. But it managed to correct the data.

The central government had asked local governments to check records in the VRS in September. "I wish the government informed us earlier, as we had to check records of all the vaccinated residents," said an official of the Toda city government. According to the Digital Agency, about 100,000 people nationwide needed to have their records in the VRS corrected as of Thursday. In many cases, the date of the second vaccination is earlier than that of the first one, or the lot number of the vaccine is incorrect. In addition, the records of about 4.33 million people were given "confirmation required" status, which is likely to involve registration errors. There were also some errors that appear to have been attributable to special devices provided by the central government. Local governments assign each resident a 10-digit vaccination voucher number, which is registered in the VRS along with the resident's name in advance.

At a vaccination site, the vaccination voucher number and six-digit municipality number are read by the camera of one of these special devices, and the resident's vaccination is recorded in the VRS. However, there have been many cases in which the numbers 3 and 5 were mistaken for each other, as well as 1 and 7. If the vaccination voucher number is incorrectly entered, the information will be overwritten on the record of a different person. If the municipality number is wrong, a record showing "inoculator unknown" will be created for a different municipality. Such cases could have been prevented if barcodes, which are more accurate, were used. However, a Digital Agency official said, "In the beginning, all vaccination vouchers issued nationwide carried only numbers, such as voucher numbers, so we adopted a specification to read numbers." The central government hopes the app will be widely used, as it intends not to restrict the number of people in restaurants and events even under a state of emergency if they prove they have been vaccinated using the app or other means.

From https://the-japan-news.com 12/20/2021

TOP ↑

NEC Develops Secure Biometric Authentication Tech to Enable

Certification with Encrypted Face Information

NEC Corp has announced the development of a secure biometric authentication technology that allows users to authenticate themselves with encrypted face information. This technology reduces the risk of misuse if face information is leaked and contributes to the expansion of safe and secure biometric authentication use cases. With the application of this technology, all face information handled by service providers is encrypted. Therefore, even if encrypted face information is leaked, the risk of being misused for spoofing is low. Moreover, since users have a secret key for decryption, service providers cannot decrypt face information, enabling users to take advantage of the face recognition service with peace of mind. Face recognition is increasingly being introduced as a means of identity verification, but in the unlikely event that registered face information is leaked, it may lead to misuse, such as spoofing. As a result, greater attention is being paid to technologies that perform biometric authentication while encrypting information, such as face information.

Specifically, homomorphic encryption (*1) is known to perform authentication processing while biometric features are encrypted, and without deteriorating the accuracy of certification. However, homomorphic encryption can only perform simple operations, and processing speed is greatly reduced when performing the complex processing required by biometric authentication. As a result, it has been limited to "1:1 Identification," which is used for logging into online services with relatively light processing. Conversely, the method has been difficult to apply for "1:N Identification," such as facility entry control and transaction settlements, which require greater processing speed. In order to overcome this challenge, NEC developed a secure biometric authentication technology that can be applied to 1:N Identification by streamlining the processing of face recognition using homomorphic encryption.

Conventionally, 1:N Identification has required authentication processing that includes complex arithmetic operations that are difficult for homomorphic encryption. However, this technology reduces processing by focusing on promising candidates through simple operations, rather than processing all registered users. This narrowing down greatly reduces the number of authentication operations, including complex operations, so that 1:N Identification can be performed at high speed, even with homomorphic encryption. With 1:N Identification for 10,000 registered users, for example, NEC's new technology can narrow down the number of user candidates in about 0.01 seconds. If the system narrows down the number of candidates to about 1% of the total number, it can perform face authentication processing in a speed of about 1 second. In addition, the use of this technology does not impact the accuracy of certification.

From https://japantoday.com 12/20/2021

TOP↑

Japan Mulls Fully Automated Driving Service in Limited Areas

Japan is considering a system to screen and approve providers of fully automated driving services within limited areas, under the supervision of prefectural public safety commissions, the police agency said Thursday. The National Police Agency aims to submit an amendment to the road traffic law to parliament next spring, as the government intends to start the "Level 4" automated mobility service in designated areas of the country, such as abandoned railroads, in the fiscal year through March 2023, according to the agency. At Level 4, a vehicle always performs the functions of acceleration, steering and braking, including in emergencies, according to the Economy, Trade and Industry Ministry. A government panel, which has been discussing the autonomous driving services and new mobility such as electric scooters, on Thursday released its final report, which will serve as a basis for the police agency's amendment bill.

According to the agency, the amendment will stipulate that fully automated driving will be allowed only by vehicles operated in designated areas for the purpose of providing mobility service for passengers, instead of private cars. In such a service, a vehicle will be operated autonomously under remote monitoring without a driver. It must follow traffic rules and needs to secure safety measures such as stopping when its system fails. Service providers will be required to submit their operational plans to respective prefectural public safety commissions, according to the agency. If there are any traffic violations or incidents not abiding by the submitted plans, the public safety commissions can suspend or revoke the permission, as well as give necessary orders. A draft bill is also expected to include regulations on electric scooters, stipulating that riders must be at least 16 years old but a driver's license is not required. It will also likely encourage users of electric scooters and bicycles to wear helmets.

Vehicles will be categorized depending on their sizes and speeds. Electric scooters will be among "small low-speed vehicles" defined as sizes similar to bicycles with a maximum speed of 20 kilometers per hour. If drivers of those vehicles can show they are controlling them under 6 kph, they will be allowed to run on a sidewalk. Violators of the rules will be served with traffic tickets and repeat offenders will be obliged to take a traffic safety class. Electric scooter sharing service operators will be encouraged to provide safety education for riders as well, according to the agency. "Sidewalk vehicles," including autonomous delivery robots, will be defined as those in sizes similar to electric wheelchairs and with a maximum speed of 6 kph. Operators of remotely controlled robots will be obliged to register their names of users and operating locations.

From https://japantoday.com 12/24/2021

TOP↑

Japan Aims to Have 1st Japanese Astronaut Land on Moon in Late 2020s

Japan will aim to put its first astronaut on the moon in the latter half of 2020s, Prime Minister Fumio Kishida announced Tuesday at a meeting of the government body dealing with space policy. The mission was included in the revised Basic Plan on Space Policy compiled by the Strategic Headquarters for National Space Policy, of which Kishida is the head. The government hopes to solidify its position as an advanced nation in space development through manned lunar exploration following the United States. The United States plans a manned mission to the moon as early as 2025 in a program termed "Artemis." Japan announced its participation in the U.S.-led manned lunar exploration program, and will contribute by developing a new type of unmanned cargo ship to transport supplies to the Gateway, a manned outpost orbiting the moon, as well as a lunar rover. The plan calls for a Japanese astronaut to land on the lunar surface via a module launched from the Gateway.

The project schedule for the Basic Plan on Space Policy is revised annually based on international circumstances and other factors. For the first time, the revised version incorporates a time frame for a moon landing by a Japanese astronaut, setting a target for "the latter half of the 2020s." It states the astronaut will be "the first outside of Americans." While making clear Japan's strong commitment both at home and abroad, the government plans to contribute to the U.S.-led program in a bid to realize an envisaged lunar landing as soon as possible. European and Canadian space agencies are also participating in the Artemis program, aiming for a moon landing by their astronauts. The project schedule also calls for the establishment of Japan's own observation network using a constellation of small satellites by the end of fiscal 2025. It also includes a plan to realize a space solar power system that can generate electricity unaffected by weather, and verify by around fiscal 2025 the technology for transmitting electricity from space to the ground. The Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency recently started recruiting new Japanese astronauts for the first time in 13 years, with those selected possibly getting the chance to land on the moon.

From https://the-japan-news.com 12/28/2021

TOP↑

SOUTH KOREA: From Cryptocurrency to Evs, 'Green' Chips Are All the Rage

"Green" chips, or low-power semiconductors, have become bestsellers among both crypto miners and electric vehicle makers looking to increase their profitability and driving range. According to industry sources Monday, major chipmakers including Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Co. and Samsung Electronics are producing advanced, low-power chips at full throttle, as miners of cryptocurrencies desperately search for chips that consume less electricity. "Conventional chips can't offer crypto miners the performance and power efficiency they need. Crypto miners need 5-nanometer chips for their operations, allowing TSMC and Samsung Electronics to maintain a high level of operation rate at their advanced chip production lines," said Claire Kim, an analyst at Hana Financial Investment. "Though it was only last year when TSMC began the mass production of 5-nm chips, they account for 18 percent of the firm's sales. The figure will only rise as clients are placing more orders."

Five nanometers refers to the distance between two transistors on a 5-nm chip, with 1 nanometer being one-billionth of a meter. The smaller the distance, the more transistors can fit inside and the faster the chip becomes. The shorter the distance also means less power is required to reach all the billions of transistors packed in a chip. Simply put, 5-nm chips are both faster and consume less electricity than more typical 7-nm chips. Samsung Electronics and TSMC are in a tight race to further push the limits of chips. Samsung Electronics announced in October that it will mass-produce 3-nm chips in the first half of next year, which would be at least one month earlier than TSMC's mass production timeline scheduled for July. To further catch up with its archrival TSMC, Samsung Electronics aims to produce the 3-nm chips with a breakthrough technology called gate-all-around, or GAA, which would allow up to a 35 percent decrease in area, 30 percent higher performance or 50 percent lower power consumption compared to 5-nm chips. TSMC is expected to apply GAA technologies starting with 2-nm chips, which are set for mass production in 2025.

Meanwhile, in the electric vehicle market, demand for green chips is spiking, as conventional chips eat up too much electricity and shave kilometers off the driving range. Inside an electric vehicle, especially one capable of self-driving, all sorts of chips -- more than 2,000 -- are installed, which is far greater than the 200 to 300 chips used for an internal combustion engine vehicle. Among them, power chips are perhaps the most important chips inside electric vehicles. Their role is to minimize power loss as batteries supply and distribute electricity throughout the vehicle. Typical power chips are made of silicon, but market leader Tesla is leading the market trend once again with the wholly new silicon carbide, or SiC, power chips. In recent years, Tesla has ditched conventional silicon-based power chips and switched to SiC power chips. Since 2017, Tesla has installed SiC power chips inside the inverters of the Tesla Model 3 series, which resulted in a significant performance improvement. "Tesla was the first in the industry to install SiC power chips inside the inverters of EVs. With SiC power chips, Tesla's inverters became 10 times more efficient, 43 percent smaller and 6 kilograms lighter compared to conventional inverters," Ko Yeong-min, an analyst at Shinhan Investment, said.

"Benchmarking Tesla, automakers including Hyundai Motor, BYD and Toyota are opting for SiC power chips." Inverters are key devices that control the rotating speed of the motors of electric vehicles. When batteries supply high-voltage electricity, inverters convert that and feed it to the motors. SiC power chips help inverters to convert, manage and distribute the power more efficiently. Compared to typical silicon-based power chips, SiC power chips can withstand voltages 10 times higher.

That means SiC power chips can offer the same performance at just one-tenth of the thickness. SiC power chips can also endure temperatures up to 600 degrees Celsius, meaning they do not require a cooling system. Above all, SiC power chips consume less electricity, which translates to a greater driving range, and makes them a potential game changer in the electric vehicle market. Buoyed by the trend toward self-driving electric vehicles, the size of the global automotive SiC chip market is expected to reach 17 trillion won ($14.3 billion) in 2025 from this year’s 2 trillion won, according to Shinhan Investment. “SiC chips will become a megatrend in 2022,” predicted Roh Geun-chang, an analyst at Hyundai Motor Securities.

From http://www.koreaherald.com 12/20/2021

TOP ↑

Gov't to Improve Regulations for Commercial Adoption of Self-Driving Cars

The government unveiled a revised road map on improving regulations for self-driving cars Thursday to hasten their commercial adoption starting next year. The road map, confirmed at an interagency government meeting earlier in the day, came as South Korea is expected to see a fast adoption of autonomous driving for commercial vehicles beginning in 2022, starting with the launch of Level 3 self-driving cars -- made for conditional driving automation that requires human intervention. The government expects Level 4 autonomous vehicles, capable of high automation with little need for human input, to be widely adopted in the country by 2027. Under the road map, the government will take a phased approach by adding and upgrading regulations and laws related to technology, communications and insurance in steps in order to meet the standards and structure associated with operating autonomous vehicles, according to the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure and Transport.

Over the next two years, the government will start allowing self-driving software to be upgraded wirelessly outside of maintenance stores, as well as upgrading the authentication process to enhance overall security systems. Between 2024 and 2026, the government will focus on devising a legal framework for Level 4 self-driving vehicles in terms of insurance policy and traffic systems so as to provide clear standards for legal responsibilities. The land ministry will also apply "a regulation sandbox," or a grace period on regulations, to the mobility sector in order to support autonomous driving in the passenger and freight sectors. According to the ministry, detailed action plans for regulation improvements will be announced in the first half of next year.

From https://en.yna.co.kr 12/23/2021

TOP ↑

S. Korea to Double Electric, Hydrogen Cars in 2022 in Net Zero Emission Drive

South Korea plans to double the number of electric and hydrogen vehicles on its roads next year as part of efforts to achieve its goal of net zero carbon emission by 2050. The government will seek to bring up the number of electric and hydrogen cars in use to about 500,000 in 2022, from the current level of about 248,000 units, the environment and four other ministries said in their joint announcement of policy plans for next year. Under the plans, the numbers of electric cars will rise by 200,000 units and hydrogen vehicles by 35,000 units, respectively. The government will also expand battery chargers installed across the nation for electric and hydrogen vehicles to 160,000 units and 310 units next year. South Korea has declared its goal of reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 40 percent from 2018 levels by 2030 to eventually attain its net zero emission target by 2050. With a view to speeding up efforts for carbon neutrality starting 2022, the government will focus on helping its country make a shift to a coal-free, more digitalized economy, the ministries said. The implementation plans set for 2022 also include a 1.93 trillion won ($1.62 billion) budget to finance research and development on the subject of zero emissions as well as a scheme to introduce 58 eco-friendly state vessels to eventually bring in a total of 528 such ships by 2030. "Carbon neutrality is not an option but a necessity to safeguard the future and survival," Environment Minister Han Jeoung-ae said.

From http://www.koreaherald.com 12/28/2021

TOP ↑

South-East Asia

VIETNAM: Driving Growth and Innovations with 5G

The contribution of 5G to Vietnamese GDP growth is forecast to reach 7.34 per cent by 2025, shown by research of the National Institute of Information and Communications Strategy at an online forum on digital transformation yesterday. The online forum titled "Digital Transformation - Driving Growth and Innovations with 5G" was organised by the Việt Nam Investment Review Newspaper in Hà Nội. The digital economy is growing very quickly around the world, becoming the key for many economies to reach out globally. In Việt Nam, despite being heavily affected by the pandemic, the digital economy is expected to reach US$21 billion this year, up 31 per cent over last year, equivalent to Malaysia and only behind Indonesia and Thailand. The document of the 13th National Party Congress determined that the digital economy will account for 20 per cent of GDP by 2025 and 30 per cent by 2030. Speaking at the forum, Võ Thành Thống, Deputy Minister of Planning and Investment, said that digital transformation has become even more urgent when the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted and changed people's lives and habits, causing unprecedented difficulties and challenges, which forces organisations, individuals and even State management agencies to change and adapt.

The Ministry of Planning and Investment has closely co-ordinated with stakeholders, especially the Ministry of Science and Technology, and the Ministry of Information and Communications in jointly researching, advising, proposing and implementing solutions to promote the process of digital transformation and innovation of Vietnamese enterprises. Lê Trọng Minh, Editor-in-Chief of Việt Nam Investment Review Newspaper, said that 5G was considered an important tool to promote digital transformation in all fields. Many business models, even entirely new industries and services, are emerging and replacing traditional ones with the help of new technologies. 5G will have a strong impact on the global economy, estimated to create $13.1 trillion and two million new jobs by 2035, said Minh. With favourable foundations both in terms of the legal corridor being gradually completed and the awareness of businesses and people about the essentials of digital transformation, 5G has strong potential for development in Việt Nam, Minh noted. In the coming years, it would become a foundation for innovation and growth, he added. Vũ Quốc Huy, director of the Việt Nam National Innovation Centre (NIC), said that digital transformation did not just stop at the application of information technology, but in fact it was a complete change in thinking, perception and ways in which a business or an apparatus operates. For businesses, it was also necessary to have a long-term vision in implementing digital transformation, he noted. The project of the Ministry of Planning and Investment in collaboration with USAID is also consulting and orienting for 100 businesses on digitalisation, not only digitising information but more importantly, building operation processes to manage the business based on database exploitation and analysis.

Commercialising 5G next year

The Ministry of Information and Communications targeted to officially license 5G commercialisation next year, said Nguyễn Phong Nhã, Deputy Director of the Việt Nam Telecommunications Authority (VNTA) under the Ministry of Information and Communications. Nhã said that the ministry has determined that Vietnamese telecommunications must go along with developed countries in the world in research, deployment and application of new technologies, including 5G mobile networks. The Ministry of Information and Communications has directed telecommunications units and businesses to deploy many solutions. Accordingly, regarding frequencies, it has submitted to the Government for promulgation Decree No 88/2021/NĐ-CP on the collection of fees for granting the right to use radio frequencies, auction, licensing and transfer of the right to use radio frequencies. The ministry has also promoted and guided mobile telecommunications businesses to test 5G technology and services. Accordingly, telecommunications businesses such as Viettel, VNPT, and MobiFone have now tested 5G in 16 provinces and cities. Especially, for telecommunications infrastructure, the ministry set a goal of 100 per cent of villages to be covered with fiber optic broadband by 2025. Nhã noted that the Ministry of Information and Communications aimed to officially license 5G commercialisation next year and soon cover high-tech industrial parks and areas with high demand for use. “This is the determination of the information and communication industry in bringing Việt Nam along with leading countries in 5G. In the future, VNTA will continue to strengthen co-ordination with telecommunications units and businesses to urgently summarise and evaluate the testing process of 5G networks, develop criteria for coverage and quality for granting licenses; push solutions on using common infrastructure to save investment costs; improve efficiency in network use and exploitation, and master 5G technology through the use of Make-in-Việt Nam equipment," said Nhã.

From https://vietnamnews.vn/ 12/15/2021

TOP ↑

Gov't Works on Stopping Coal-Fired Power Development After 2030

Việt Nam will not develop coal-fired power plants after 2030 to meet its international commitments on achieving net-zero carbon emissions by 2050. Accordingly, the Government has assigned the Ministry of Industry and Trade (MoIT) to study and implement the National Power Development Plan for the 2021-30 period with a vision to 2045 (PDP8) so as to make it include measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to achieve net-zero carbon emissions by 2050 as per the Vietnamese Prime Minister Phạm Minh Chính's commitments at the COP 26 UN Climate Change Conference (COP26). Under this direction, the MoIT will have to review coal-fired power plants to not further develop them and find alternative fuel sources for the plants after 2030. Besides, the Government has also required the MoIT to map out incentive policies to encourage the development of offshore wind power sources. It also needs to research policies and solutions for more efficient and rational use of solar energy sources, the Government noted. The MoIT must clearly define the criteria of important projects and investment priorities to ensure the implementation of the PDP8 to be open, transparent and feasible. In addition, it is necessary to propose effective and feasible management mechanisms to ensure the PDP8 succeeds and absolutely avoids a power shortage in the country.

The MoIT is streamlining the PDP8, which provides the roadmap for the country's power sector including an exhaustive list of proposed projects. Under the latest version of the plan presented by the MoIT at last month's conference, power generation capacity from new imported LNG will be slashed to 22.4 gigawatts (GW) by 2030 from 40.95GW in the draft published in March. The planned power generation capacity from new LNG by 2045 will also fall to 55.75GW, from 83.55GW in the March draft. However, power generation capacity from domestic natural gas and the conversion of coal-fired plants to LNG will be kept unchanged at 14.78GW by 2030 in the new draft. Coal-fired power generation will be reduced to 39.7GW by 2030 in the latest draft, down from 46.4GW in the March draft. Meanwhile, offshore wind power will be raised to 4GW by 2030 from 3GW in the March draft, while electricity storage capacity will be doubled to 2.4GW from 1.2GW in the March draft. The most significant change in the latest version is the pipeline of new LNG-based power projects being cut by nearly half, dampening expectations that Việt Nam will be the next big market for LNG in Southeast Asia. At COP26, besides commitments to achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2050, Việt Nam signed the Global Methane Pledge aimed at reducing methane emissions, and committed to phase out and not build or invest in new coal-fired power plants under the Global Coal to Clean Power Transition Statement.

From https://vietnamnews.vn/ 12/20/2021

TOP ↑

Three Packages to Help Businesses with Digital Transformation

Three aid packages will be carried out in 2022 to help promote digital transformation in Vietnamese enterprises, according to the Ministry of Planning and Investment (MPI). The support is part of a programme assisting businesses in digital transformation in the 2021 - 2025 period. This programme, approved by the Minister of Planning and Investment on January 7 this year, aims to help boost digital transformation in businesses through the application of digital technology, thus improving their efficiency, capacity, and competitiveness and creating new values for them. Of the three packages to be launched, the first is designed for small-scale firms, helping them embark on digital transformation. Each enterprise will be provided with VNĐ20 million - VNĐ50 million (US$870-2,180) funded by the State budget per year. The second one will assist medium-sized ones with a maximum of VNĐ100 million per year. Meanwhile, the third targets exporters and will cover a maximum of 50 per cent of the costs to open and maintain their accounts on transnational e-commerce platforms. Bùi Thu Thủy, Deputy Director of the MPI’s Enterprise Development Agency, said businesses were still facing many barriers and difficulties in digital transformation such as high investment expenses, underdeveloped IT infrastructure, cybersecurity risks, and limited human resources. However, she noted, Vietnamese enterprises were holding numerous opportunities to boost digital transformation, which would help them grasp chances relevant to changes in consumption behaviour, the shift in global supply chains, and the surge in online transactions as a result of the pandemic’s impact.

From https://vietnamnews.vn/ 12/22/2021

TOP ↑

Ministry Points Out Challenges in Applying Digital Technology

The COVID-19 pandemic has boosted enterprises to change models, shifting business activities to digital platforms to find more markets, cut costs and improve operational efficiency. Digital transformation has taken place in recent years as a natural need to meet changes in consumer behaviour and management demand. Many businesses have applied software solutions in sales management, online marketing, distribution channel management, business administration, and creating new products and services. However enterprises still struggle during the process for many reasons, even if they are well prepared. A recent survey of 1,300 enterprises conducted by the Enterprises Development Agency showed that the biggest challenge was the large investment capital needed for carrying out the process. Accordingly, up to 60.1 per cent of respondents said that the biggest barrier they faced when applying digital technology was application costs. This is partly due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, causing falling revenues and lack of capital, which affect funds for investment, implementation and solutions for digital transformation.

Another big challenge was difficulties in changing business habits and practices, affecting 52.3 per cent of participants. The transformation leads to changes in habits and ways of working, but not all employees are willing to adapt to the new norms. Some businesses said that they had applied software, but employees do not use it, or only partially used it, making enterprises fail to achieve digital transformation goals. The report also pointed out that the lack of internal human resources to apply digital technology was another difficulty, affecting 52.3 per cent of enterprises. In the past year, awareness of businesses on digital transformation has improved a lot, as many businesses have the intention and need for it. However, "when businesses start carrying out the transformation plan, they lack staff with experience, knowledge and skills to implement digital transformation projects for their businesses," the report said. The fourth biggest challenge for businesses in the process of transforming is a lack of digital infrastructure, while short of information on digital technology and difficulty in integrating digital technology solutions are other obstacles.

On the other hand, not many enterprises were concerned over securities issues like personal and business data leakage. The difficulties are somewhat different between micro-enterprises, small-sized enterprises, medium-sized enterprises, and large-scale enterprises, the report noted. At the moment, Việt Nam has about 870,000 enterprises in operation, with more than 97 per cent of enterprises being small- and medium-sized. In general, the biggest challenge of micro- and small-sized enterprises with limited financial potential is capital for investment and technology application. Meanwhile medium- and large-sized enterprises that have better financial conditions are struggling in changing business habits and practices. This is partly because medium- and large- enterprises have more complex apparatus and procedures than micro- and small-sized enterprises, so it is more difficult to adapt to changes. The report also showed that 39.5 per cent of the enterprises approach digital transformation knowledge to apply and improve their production and management activities, while more than 22 per cent said that they just wanted to study and research the process.

From https://vietnamnews.vn 12/29/2021

TOP ↑

Đà Nẵng , FPT Boost 'Smart City' Project

The central city and IT giant FPT Group have inked a Memorandum of

Understanding (MoU) on digital transforming in 2021-25, accelerating the 'smart city' project in 2030. The MoU, which was signed on Tuesday, was developed from the cooperation deal between FPT and Đà Nẵng in 2018-20 in boosting the digitalisation process and putting the city on the list of ASEAN smart city network in 2030. Chairman of the city's people's committee, Lê Trung Chinh said the MoU was part of the positive cooperation in the IT industry – one of four key roles of the city's strategic socio-economic development plan in 2030. He said the new deal would help speed up the digital transformation process in the city and build Đà Nẵng into an eco-urban and a 'liveable and smart' city in the coming years. The 2021-25 MoU will focus on the smart city framework in traffic, education, natural resources and environment, health, agriculture, trade and industry and information and communications. FPT will begin the digitalisation among business and administration in tourism hub Ngũ Hành Sơn District before expanding to the other six districts in 2021-25.

The IT group had launched a management system at 12 hospitals in the city in providing service for 3 million patients per year. FPT said it had enrolled 5,000 students for training at its own education system, including a secondary school, high school and university. Chairman of FPT Group, Trương Gia Bình, said the group, which has invested VNĐ2.5 trillion (US$108 million) in Đà Nẵng, earned revenue of VNĐ5 trillion in 2021 – making up a 30 per cent share in the city's information and communications industry revenue. FPT also helped Đà Nẵng in the development of the 10,000-Bridge Software Engineer programme in boosting the Japan market, and built up an IT service centre and urban, the FTP City Complex. Earlier, Đà Nẵng and Viettel signed an MoU on the 'smart city' project in 2021-25, launching a 5G network at Đà Nẵng Software Park No 1 and No 2, with an Internet of Things service, a digital database centre and cybersecurity services.

From https://vietnamnews.vn/ 12/30/2021

TOP ↑

HCM City to Treat All Domestic Waste with Incineration, Recycling by 2030

The HCM City Department of Natural Resources and Environment targets increasing the volume of domestic waste treated with incineration and recycling technologies to at least 80 per cent by 2025 and 100 per cent by 2030, department director Nguyễn Toàn Thắng has said. The department will pay special attention to treatment of all industrial waste and medical waste. It is continuing to invite qualified and experienced investors to invest in renovation projects for two landfill sites, Gò Cát in Bình Tân District and Đông Thạnh in Hóc Môn District. More than 10 units have submitted applications to turn the two landfill sites into public parks and eco-tourism areas. The renovation projects will create a "clean" (no buildings or infrastructure) land fund to form a new urban area or build a new power-generating incineration plant. The department will propose a plan on curbing pollution at the two landfills while waiting for adjustments to plans for the two projects. It is also speeding up support for private garbage collectors to help transform their operating model into a cooperative or an enterprise with legal status.

So far, nearly 93 per cent of private garbage collectors in the city have shifted to cooperative or enterprise status. Authorities in districts and Thủ Đức City are encouraging more than 84 private garbage collectors to join cooperatives or enterprises. The approved project on development of the city's environmental quality monitoring network to 2020, with a vision to 2030, has not been implemented due to lack of funding. The project calls for automatic environment monitoring stations to provide timely alerts, environmental quality forecasts and other information for the public. The department has asked the People's Committee to approve the adjustment of the project's investment policy for the 2021-2025 period, with total investment capital estimated at VNĐ495 billion (US$21.7 million).

Administrative reform

Besides improving environmental quality, the department will continue administrative reform to speed up the issuance of certificates for land-use rights and house ownership, and conduct land auctions. To ensure safety, flexibility and effective control of the COVID-19 pandemic towards economic recovery in the post-pandemic period, the department has received dossiers and has returned results via email since mid-November. Within one to three working days after receiving the dossier, its one-stop-shop returns results to businesses or residents. "Processing dossiers online helps to reduce the travel time for local residents and businesses, and helps COVID prevention," Thắng said. The department is simplifying more 51 administrative procedures, meeting the demand of public services provided at levels 3 and 4. All administrative procedures have been uploaded on the department's website www.donre.hochiminhcity.gov.vn. The department has granted 359,495 land-use right certificates this year, including more than 5,400 certificates issued for the first time. Next year, it targets processing about 400,000 applications for security transaction registration, among others. It will speed up the issuance of certificates for home buyers in residential projects with about 20,000 applications, and continue to auction land plots in the Thủ Thiêm new urban area in Thủ Đức City. It has asked the municipal People's Committee to approve shortening the processing time for 13 land-use registration and related administrative procedures. It has also asked the committee to allocate VNĐ69.6 billion ($3 million) to invest in three projects under the smart-city programme on infrastructure, digitisation, and quality of public services for local residents.

From https://vietnamnews.vn/ 12/30/2021

TOP ↑

South Asia

INDIA: Centre Launches GPS-based App for Defining Land Allotment, Tripura First to Implement

Girriraj Singh, Union Minister for Rural Development and Panchayati Raj launched the National Generic Document Registration System (NGDRS) and Banadhikar App, on December 3. The Banadhikar application is a GPS-based mobile app for the demarcation of forest land rights for the landless indigenous people under the Forest Rights Act. Also, with the launch, Tripura became the first state in India to introduce the Banadhikar App. At the launching, the Minister said that he has been informed that as many as 1.3 lakh tribal people in Tripura would get access to a uniform map of their land through the Banadhikar app which will add a sense of ownership of the land. The Minister added, “Land registration and land rights are some of the main areas that need to be addressed with a priority and that’s why the scheme has been rolled out across the country.” While speaking about Tripura, he said that the state has potentials for growth in the primary sectors like agriculture and other allied sectors. Moreover, in the last three-and-a-half years, a lot of work has been done for the upliftment of these sectors. The rural development minister asked the Chief Minister of Tripura Biplab Kumar Deb to explore new avenues for innovation and development of horticultural crops in the forest land. Viewing the abundance of raw materials in Tripura, the Minister emphasised tapping the potential of business through active bamboo charcoal. On the occasion, CM Biplab Kumar Deb said that through these new schemes, each and every forest land in Tripura would get a unique ID making the registration process convenient. “People would get a single stop centre for all their queries and the whole land registration system would be made online with zero space for corrupt practices,” he added.

From https://egov.eletsonline.com/ 12/06/2021

TOP ↑

Delhi Tops Globally in CCTV Coverage

Announcing a major achievement in terms of strong surveillance, Chief Minister of Delhi Arvind Kejriwal said Delhi has surpassed cities like London, Washington and Paris and has been placed number one in terms of CCTV coverage in the world. While making the big announcement on November 3, the CM also the announced Delhi government’s decision to increase the quantum of CCTV coverage in the national capital. He said, following the installation of 1.40 lakh cameras under the second phase of the project in the coming days, the existing tally of the cameras will go up to 2.75 lakh. The city will have a total of 4.15 lakh CCTV cameras. CM Kejriwal mentioned that in the past seven years, the national capital has witnessed the installation of 2.75 lakh CCTV cameras covering each and every corner of the city. He expressed his delight while announcing that Delhi ranks the highest when it comes to the number of CCTV cameras per square mile in a city. He also highlighted findings from a survey covering 150 States wherein Delhi stood first with 1,826 CCTV cameras per square mile. London followed with 1,138 cameras per square mile. Also, he mentioned that in India, Chennai stands second in terms of CCTV cameras per square mile but Delhi has thrice the number of cameras and nearly 12 times more than Mumbai. The CCTV cameras have not only been a great help to the police force for conducting surveillance, investigation, etc. but also in enhancing women's safety. The CCTV cameras installed in the city are state-of-the-art devices. Apart from having four megapixels, they are capable of sounding an alarm to alert the command centre in case a camera has been damaged or a feature stops working. The CM further mentioned, "The cameras can store 30 days of recording. Only three to four authorised personnel will have access to the live feed and will be able to view it from anywhere in the world. A command centre based in Delhi receives the live feed of all CCTV cameras for real-time monitoring."

From https://egov.eletsonline.com/ 12/13/2021

TOP ↑

EDMC Launches Pilot for Maintenance of Green Spaces; Launches Websites for Schools

East Delhi Municipal Corporation (EDMC) launches a pilot project for maintenance of parks and green spaces under its jurisdiction. Announcing the initiative, EDMC Commissioner Vikas Anand, on December 9, said that the pilot project is based on the public-private partnership (PPP) model. Under this, the municipal body will allot eight of its parks to private nursery owners for a period of five years. As per a senior official from EDMC, the allottee will be charged a licence fee of Rs 37.94 per square metre annually. Also, the allottee will have to provide the civic body with plants and shrubs every year. Under this pilot, 20 per cent of the park's area can be used for running a commercial nursery and the remaining area will have to be maintained by the allottee. However, the applicant should be registered with the Indian Nurserymen Association, the official added. EDMC has shortlisted parks in Preet Vihar, Geeta Colony and Mayur Vihar-II for the pilot project that is a combined area of 15.96 acres. There are a total of 2,200 parks under EDMC spread across 900 acres, as per the civic body officials. If the pilot fetches favourable results, the EDMC will be able to earn revenue since the maintenance of the parks won't be handled by the civic body. Also, "this can help us with our financial constraints," the official said. EDMC Commissioner Vikas Anand said that the civic body has created separate websites for each of the 354 schools under their jurisdiction. The websites display schedule for online classes, students' information, teachers' information, staff details, and more. These have been developed under the EDMC's management information (MIS) lab. The websites provide an easy medium for the parents to access information regarding circulars, classes and information about the school from their smartphones. "The project is still in a nacent phase but we will keep improvising in order to make it a completely automated system. Links to the schools' websites can be accessed through the EDMC homepage," the Commissioner said. Earlier, EDMC Mayor Shyam Sunder Aggarwal said that 230 of the 354 schools under the EDMC's jurisdiction will open English-medium sections from Classes I to V, while the remaining 124 schools will increase their number of existing English-medium sections.

From https://egov.eletsonline.com/ 12/13/2021
TOP ↑

UP Government-Sponsored Startups Display Their Prowess to Global Investors in Dubai

A delegation comprising of 10 Startups, all supported by the Department of IT & Electronics, Government of Uttar Pradesh under the UP Startup Policy, displayed their prowess and range of innovative business ideas to global investors from the UAE and the world over at the fourth edition of the 'Elevate' pitching series. Founders of 10 Uttar Pradesh startups presented their business ideas and made strong pitches to investors at the popular pitching series. 'Elevate' is a key initiative of the India Pavilion at EXPO2020 Dubai that aims to display unconventional solutions created by 500 Indian Startups over the course of five months under the Innovation Hub umbrella. The startups presented their ideas across sectors like health & wellness, sustainability, agriculture, IT, technology, education, industries and many more. The 10 UP Startups selected for the International market exposure and business opportunities are as follows: 1. Phool.co (Kanpur Flowercycling® Pvt. Ltd.): A social enterprise that has pioneered the 'flower cycling' technology to reduce pollution in rivers by up-cycling flower temple waste in India; the Startup already has notable investors and Bollywood celebrities like Alia Bhat betting on their idea. 2. Farmers Family: Farmers Family is an initiative that aims to provide healthy and quality farm produce directly from the farms to consumers. 3. Edu Gorilla: A startup from the Edutech sector providing Online Mock Tests, interviews, and live classes (in progress) with an emphasis on State Competitive Exams in vernacular languages. 4. E-Spin Nanotech Pvt Ltd: Founded in the year 2010 under the aegis of SIDBI and IIT Kanpur, the company has emerged as a leading high-tech enterprise for manufacturing high quality and cost-effective multi-functional nanofibers. It has designed the innovative SWASA N95 Masks during the COVID pandemic. The mask was notable worn by the Prime Minister during his visit to Ayodhya. 5. Vyamanik Aerospace: Vyamanik Aerospace is a customised Drone manufacturer and Aerial Surveillance, Mapping and Inspection company. It was amongst the few startups selected for the Defence Expo 2020 in Lucknow. 6. Constems AI Systems Pvt Ltd.: An Artificial Intelligence (AI) company working to digitalise Consumer Products (CPG) Industry Product Quality control and Retail (brick-and-mortar) distribution by using Computer Vision (image analytics – IR) based AI. 7. Life & Limb Pvt. Ltd: This company provides solutions to people with upper limb amputation. 8. Infrastructure (P) Limited – AIPL: AIPL manufacturers modular floatation products that can be attached together in the desired configuration and used for inland and offshore marine explorations. 9. Atma Nirbhar: A social venture that trains women to ride motorised scooters with the goal of increasing female labour force participation. 10. TechEagle: TechEagle is a pioneer & lead Drone delivery Startup from India, founded in 2015 by IIT Kanpur alumni. On November 26, 2021, TechEagle became India's first company to deliver lifesaving medicine via Hybrid e-VTOL Drone in partnership with Meghalaya

Government.

Apart from their participation in Dubai Expo 2020, the StartInUP team felicitated their participation in India Global Forum UAE 2021 and TiE Global Summit-Dubai 2021, where they got the opportunity to meet over 20 Global & Indian Unicorn Startup Founders, attended the keynote session by the elite Startups founders, business leaders and few of our Startups again got the opportunity to pitch in front of the global investors. Highlighting the significance of such international market exposure which state government has provided a UP based Startup, TechEagle Innovations, a drone delivery Startup for last and mid mile logistics, announced that they have entered into a strategic partnership and signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Astral Aerial Solutions, a Kenyan UAV technology company which embarks their journey into GCC region. Three startups received the commitment and LoI for approximately Rs 10 crore and a few startups are in an advanced stage of their fundraising. India is amongst the top 3 creators of unicorns in the world and Uttar Pradesh is progressing with a fast pace and is committed towards creating a world class Startup ecosystem in the state by developing a robust infrastructure and providing conducive policy environment with world class exposure to its Startups. "Government of UP is supporting the Startups from emerging technology sector and is establishing the required infrastructure including the launch of Centre of excellences and incubators across the state. I am happy that our Startups are leveraging such international opportunities to grow their businesses and attract foreign investment in the state" said Mr. Arvind Kumar, Additional Chief Secretary IT & Electronics Department, Government of UP. "State government is continuously working towards fostering a world class Startup ecosystem in the state and providing our Startups with an opportunity to present their business ideas on global platforms like Dubai Expo, India Global forum UAE 2021 and TiE Global Summit Dubai 2021 and gain knowledge about the global sectoral trends, best practices followed around the world, get mentoring & funding support from sector experts and a networking window to interact with new-age entrepreneurs, innovators, and investors." said Dr. Ujjwal Kumar, Special Secretary and MD IT & Electronics Department, Government of UP.

From https://egov.eletsonline.com/ 12/23/2021

TOP ↑

Uttar Pradesh Holds the Potential to Become Export Hub

The State of Uttar Pradesh holds immense potential in the export sector, especially with area-specific popular products like chikenkari from Lucknow, leather products from Kanpur, locks from Aligarh, and more. To handhold exporters and help them expand to new markets, the Ubharte Sitaare scheme was launched. Elaborating on the scheme and unveiling the potential of the state in exports, Rahul Mazumdar, Assistant General Manager, India Exim Bank addressed the Ubharte Sitaare of Uttar Pradesh Conference. Rahul Mazumdar emphasised three major aspects through his presentation – macroeconomic scenario in Uttar Pradesh, growth of exports in the state in the past 10 years, and which sectors hold the most potential for growth in exports. “The Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) of Uttar Pradesh has touched $17 trillion, but in terms of per capita income, Uttar Pradesh is slightly behind when compared with the overall per capita income growth of the country. However, I’m of the view that with the state government policies, positive growth can be seen in times to come,” he added. Any sector is based on three major domains – Agriculture, Industries, and Services. Uttar Pradesh is an agrarian economy and holds tremendous potential for growth in the sector. Besides, the industries in the state have grown from 27 percent to 29 percent and is a domain that can open doors to greater economic growth for Uttar Pradesh, especially after the success of the ‘One District One Product’ (ODOP) scheme of the state government. During the presentation, Mazumdar said, “If we look at the merchandise and exports of Uttar Pradesh, we see that not much growth has been achieved. However, despite the slow growth, Uttar Pradesh is the fifth largest exporter in India. This is evident enough to show the immense potential that the state holds in the exports sector.” Rahul Mazumdar, Assistant General Manager, India Exim BankHe cited a quote from the address of MSME and Export Promotion Minister of Uttar Pradesh Siddhart Nath Singh, saying, “the Minister rightly said that many products that are manufactured and produced in Uttar Pradesh are exported from Delhi and hence the national capital takes the credit. This is one of the reasons why exports show a slow rise and dips at points. Also, the landlocked geography of the state adds on to the scenario.”

Mazumdar pointed out that “as per our study, there is a potential of $12 billion in the exports sector of Uttar Pradesh which if tapped will take the exports of the state from $16 billion to $28 billion.” “As per our study, there is a potential of $12 billion in the exports sector of Uttar Pradesh which if tapped will take the exports of the state from $16 billion to $28 billion.” Discussing solutions to improve the exports in the state of UP, Mazumdar said, “The exporters must stay updated and aware of the various free-trade agreements that India has signed with the other countries. Also, government authorities and export promotion councils should spread awareness among exporters about the schemes, policies and trade agreements.” He added that Uttar Pradesh has the potential to be a hi-tech manufacturing (manufacturing electronic items) hub and for that being landlocked is no disadvantage. Supporting his point, he cited the example of Chengdu city in China which is a landlocked region but is one of the major centres for China’s hi-tech production. “The exporters must stay updated and aware of the various free-trade agreements that India has signed with the other countries.” He said, “The Government of Uttar Pradesh needs to build cold storages to ensure that the agro produce does not get spoiled. Such a facility can pose a great help to the exporters of agricultural products.” Exporters should focus on tapping into newer markets overseas and need to understand the demands of those markets for successfully expanding their businesses, he added. Naming a few potential sectors as per the market trends, Mazumdar said, “Electric Vehicle is among the focussed areas. If Uttar Pradesh starts manufacturing EVs before other states it will get the first-move advantage. Most states are offering incentives on the line of 50 percent for the manufacturing of EVs while Uttar Pradesh is offering only 25 percent. So increasing that would help. UP is the largest sugar producer after Maharashtra so the state can also come up with Ethanol production. Solar power is another sector where components can be manufactured, most of which are presently being imported from China. Also, Uttar Pradesh should focus on enhancing tourism in the state to boost economic growth.” Under the ODOP scheme, many products have been GI tagged. This has been really helpful to enhance exports as the tags mark the authenticity of the product’s manufacturing and ensure the customers of its quality.

From https://egov.eletsonline.com/ 12/31/2021

TOP ↑

Dharmendra Pradhan Launches NEAT 3.0 to Empower Ed-tech in India

Union Minister for Education and Skill Development Dharmendra Pradhan launched NEAT 3.0, a single platform to provide the best-developed ed-tech solutions and courses to students of the country. He also launched AICTE prescribed technical books in regional languages. Speaking on the occasion, the Minister said that National Education Alliance for Technology (NEAT) will be a game-changer in bridging the digital divide, especially among the economically disadvantaged students and also in fulfilling the knowledge-based requirement of India and the world. He also informed that 58 global and Indian startup ed-tech companies are onboard NEAT and are offering 100 courses and e-resources for bettering learning outcomes, developing employable skills and overcoming learning loss. He is of the view that the e-content & resources and digital frameworks like NEAT are a step in the right direction in minimising learning loss. The Minister encouraged AICTE to integrate courses in NEAT with skill India to tap the opportunities in emerging areas of skill to boost employability and prepare our youth for the future. He urged AICTE and ed-tech companies to offer e-resources at the least possible cost. Pradhan complimented the global ed-tech companies and Indian start-ups who are a part of NEAT 3.0. He said that all ed-techs are welcome to work with a collaborative approach for making education accessible and affordable. But, ed-techs must remember that there is no place for monopoly and exploitation, he added. The Minister expressed his happiness that today, more than 12 lakh socially and economically disadvantaged students have received free ed-tech course coupons worth over ₹253 crores under NEAT 3.0. This is one of the biggest gifts to the student community from Prime Minister Narendra Modi in the new year 2022… India will lead the global economy in the 21st century and will be the most preferred market for trade and economy, he added.

On technical books in regional languages, Pradhan said that our diverse languages are our strength and harnessing them is the key to building an innovative society. He further said that learning in regional languages will further develop the critical thinking capacity and enable our youth to become global citizens. National Educational Alliance for Technology (NEAT) is an initiative to provide the use of best-developed technological solutions in the education sector to enhance the employability of the youth on a single platform for learners' convenience. These solutions use Artificial Intelligence (AI) for a personalised and customised learning experience for better learning outcomes and skill development in the niche areas. AICTE is acting as the facilitator in the process while ensuring that the solutions are freely available to a large number of socially and economically backward students. NEAT has 58 Education Technology Companies with 100 products that help to develop employable skills, capacity building, and bridge learning gaps. Secretary for Higher Education Sanjay Murthy; Prof Anil Sahasrabudhe, Chairman, AICTE; Prof M P Poonia, Vice Chairman, AICTE; Prof Rajiv Kumar, Member Secretary, AICTE and senior officials of the Education Ministry were present on the occasion.

From https://egov.eletsonline.com/ 12/31/2021

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, 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/ 12/19/2021

TOP ↑

"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.

From https://egov.eletsonline.com/ 12/24/2021

TOP ↑

Central-West Asia

AZERBAIJAN: Developing New Training Programs for Qualified Workers – Minister

The discussions are being held in Azerbaijan with the corresponding state structures and new programs for the training of qualified workers are being developed in connection with the growing demands of the labor market, Azerbaijani Minister of Labor and Social Protection of the Population Sahil Babayev said, Trend reports on Dec. 8. The minister stressed that the development of self-employment in Azerbaijan is one of the priorities of the government. “The number of employment contracts increased by 30 percent, out of which 75 percent accounted for the private sector,” Babayev said. “The payroll fund increased by 92 percent. Employment structures provided more than 2,300 people with jobs, 36,000 micro and small enterprises were created.” “More than 100,000 young people enter the labor market annually, but there are few qualified workers among them,” the minister said. “It is necessary to strengthen measures in this sphere.”

From https://en.trend.az/ 12/08/2021

TOP ↑

Azericard Looks to Expand Innovative Payment Tools in Azerbaijan

Azericard Processing Center plans to expand innovative tools for making payments in Azerbaijan, the center’s Director General Farid Guliyev said on Dec. 8 at the 5th International Banking Forum in Baku, Trend reports. "Currently, Azericard's network consists of more than 30,000 POS-terminals and 1,600 ATMs. Payments with cards of MasterCard [served by the processing center] have grown by 40 percent since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic and accelerated the digitalization process for seven years ahead. We also ensure the safety of partner banks with making payments," Guliyev noted. According to him, those areas in which non-cash payments weren’t conducted before the pandemic were immediately digitalized [after its outbreak]. "Our processing center, in partnership with Azerbaijani banks, provides them with all the necessary tools to expand non-cash payments and digitalize products. Consequently, we plan to implement a project, within which citizens will be able to make payments without the use of a physical card," the CEO also said. "To date, 3.7 million contactless cards have been registered on our platform. Our activities fully provide the banks of the country with the solutions they need - both in the field of financial technology and in ensuring security. We are providing services to 16 banks in the country and intend to expand this indicator in the future," added Guliyev.

From https://en.trend.az/ 12/08/2021

TOP ↑

Merger of Two Companies to Help Turn Azerbaijan into Center of Innovation in Region – Ministry

The merger of AzInTelecom LLC and the Information Computing Center (ICC) acting under the Ministry of Digital Development and Transport into one company will give an impetus to the country's transformation into a center of innovation in the region and the development of the digital economy, the ministry told Trend. "The merger will optimize the operation of the infrastructure in the data center, form and create new government information systems and resources based on cloud technologies, concentrate technical personnel for organizing electronic services in one center, optimize costs in this area and provide a single mechanism for controlling income. In addition, the new approach will contribute to the development of a digital signature certificate in the country. This project of an electronic signature, which combines biometric authentication and cloud technologies, will allow to provide services based on a digital signature more quickly and easily," the ministry said. It was also noted that the merger will allow integrating the systems of LLC and ICC into a single one, as well as create new services and products, will allow the formation of new business entities, give impetus to the effective implementation of transformation processes, and will also serve to transform Azerbaijan into a center of innovation in the region and the development of the digital economy.

From https://en.trend.az/ 12/30/2021

TOP ↑

Oceania

AUSTRALIA: Huge Changes to School Start and Finish Times Could Come

Radical changes could be made to the average school day in New South Wales as part of an effort from the state government to support working parents and reduce traffic congestion. The overhaul would mean principals can offer options to parents other than the standard 9am-3pm school day. During a speech at the annual Bradfield Oration, NSW Premier Dominic Perrottet suggested school times should be changed to better suit the lives of working families. 'Despite the progress we have made, so many public services are still designed around government, not around the people we are here to serve,' he said on Thursday. 'Education should be designed around our children, not simply around the schools themselves.' He used the speech to declare his plans to bring NSW into the '21st Century' by leading a modern government that 'doesn't accept the status quo'.

At one point the Premier directly challenged Education Minister Sarah Mitchell, asking if the existing school day was fit for working parents. 'Why does the school day run from 9am to 3pm — and does it still suit the lives of busy working families?' asked Mr Perrottet. His speech has reignited debate over whether the traditional

9am-3pm school day should be overhauled to provide flexibility for families. In June, the government staggered the start and finish times of public schools as part of a push to modernise the traditional school day and reduce traffic congestion. The bold plan allowed schools to participate in trials where principals could offer parents options that differed from the standard 9am to 3pm school day. Alternatives include a 7am to 1pm day, or extended after-school care. NSW Teachers Federation President Angelo Gavrielatos previously claimed most schools across the state already offered varied school hours.

'The majority of schools do not operate between nine and three [o'clock], there's all sorts of variations,' he told the Sydney Morning Herald. 'There are schools with nine-day fortnights, or four-day weeks. But these matters are not straightforward and require significant consultation to achieve a consensus across a broad parent body and staff body, all of whom are impacted.' Merrylands East Public in the city's west already operates an 8am to 1.15pm school day. The scheme could also see an ease of pressure on Sydney's heavily-congested roads by staggering when students are picked up and dropped off from school. The cost of Sydney's traffic congestion to the state economy is estimated to reach $13.1billion by 2031, according to the NSW Productivity Commission.

From https://www.msn.com 12/03/2021

TOP ↑

Labor Has Defended Its New Climate Policy Platform, Saying the Market Will Decide When Carbon-Spewing Coal Power Plants Cease Operation

Days after releasing the climate policy platform it will take to the next election, the federal opposition has defended its pledge not to mandate the closure of coal-fired power plants before the market decides their time is up. Appearing before the National Press Club in Canberra on Monday, Shadow Minister for Climate Change and Energy Chris Bowen touted Labor’s pledge to reduce emissions 43% by the end of the decade if it wins government. That commitment forms the basis of Labor’s policy framework, which goes beyond the Coalition government’s promise to lower net emissions between 26% and 28% by 2030. The Labor framework suggests a pivot to green energy will be instrumental to reaching those emission targets, and promises that renewables will supply 82% of the power available on the National Electricity Market by the decade’s end.

It suggests the party will invest $20 billion to upgrade the national grid so it can facilitate that wave of green power, and deploy $300 million to build solar banks and community batteries across the map. However, the policy framework makes no mention of reining in coal power stations, which remain the largest contributor of electricity to the market and a major contributor to Australia’s scope 1 greenhouse gas emissions. While green power is becoming increasingly affordable, and ageing coal power plants, like NSW's Liddell facility, are set to cease operations in the coming decades, coal power generation could maintain a pivotal role in Australia's power mix under Labor's proposed policy settings. When questioned by The Sydney Morning Herald's climate and energy correspondent Mike Foley about the party's plan to boost renewable energy market share without mandating coal plant closures or accelerating plans to do so, Bowen defended Labor's hands off approach.

"Let me be very clear: No coal-fired power station closures as a result of Labor policy," Bowen said. Using Liddell as an example, Bowen said the market is choosing not to extend the lifespan of coal generation out of its own volition. "The market will determine that. The market is determining that," he said. "Is there any policy lever that a Labor government will pull that will bring any of those coal fire power station closures forward? No. If you're asking me to rule out if any coal-fired power station will close? No, I can't do that, because some are already scheduled to close. "Those coal fire power station also close regardless who is in office, because that's been determined by the market. We should be straightforward about that." Those policy settings split the difference between the Coalition, where Deputy Prime Minister Barnaby Joyce has called for "low-emissions" coal plants in Australia's future energy mix; and the Greens, whose leader, Adam Bandt, has pledged to phase out coal power completely if his party hold the balance of power in the next Federal Parliament.

By letting the market decide the fate of coal power, a prospective Labor government would also stand apart from 40 nations which recently declared their intention to actively phase out coal power generation by the 2040s. The Labor policy handbook comes some two years after it the party faced a polling booth backlash, which was partly linked to its campaigning against the Adani coal mine project in Queensland. Incidentally, that election campaign also saw the party pledge to cut emissions by 45% by 2030 — 2% less than the current target, which Bowen today said was "ambitious, but it's also achievable." Climate scientists say a global reduction of 50% of carbon emissions by 2030 is required to keep temperatures from rising 2 degrees Celsius above pre-Industrial levels. Labor's overall climate policy plan is a "good first step, but it will need to be strengthened significantly over time to tackle climate change," the Climate Council said Monday. The post Labor has defended its new climate policy platform, saying the market will decide when carbon-spewing coal power plants cease operation appeared first on Business Insider Australia.

From https://www.msn.com 12/06/2021

TOP ↑

Australia to Get First Nuclear Submarine Early as China Tensions Rise

Rising tensions with China have fast-tracked the delivery of the first Australian nuclear submarine under the $90billion deal with the USA and the UK. Australia now looks set to launch its first nuclear-powered submarine five years ahead of schedule as the West braces for confrontation with China. Defence Minister Peter Dutton has revealed the UK and US are 'pulling out all the stops' to speed up the massive project. The controversial deal - which saw Australia abandon its contract with France for a fleet of diesel submarines - could now see the new subs coming into operation in the first half of the 2030s. They were originally not expected to join the Australian naval fleet until 2040 at the earliest, but the US Defense Department is pushing to bring the timeline forward. It comes as fears grow of a stand-off between the West and China over Taiwan, with Australian pledging to support any US response if the situation escalates.

'I think we are advancing at a quicker pace than what we could have imagined even at the time of the announcement,' Mr Dutton told The Australian. 'There has been no game-playing, no roadblocks, they are pulling out all stops to make this work. It’s a capability that we want to acquire quickly and we are in those discussions right now.' He added: ' I think it’s the Americans’ desire to see us with capability much sooner than 2040 and obviously options are being explored at the moment. 'I believe very much we can realise the capability in the first half of the 2030s and we are absolutely working towards that and I am only encouraged, not discouraged, out of the conversations we have had.' Mr Dutton also hinted the submarines could even be built in Australia, despite the current lack of suitable shipyard facilities or nuclear power knowledge.

Australia has yet to decide if they will be using the US Virginia Class nuclear submarine design or the UK's similar Astute Class. But any move to manufacture them in Australia will require training shipyard workers, new equipment and specialist nuclear experts. Some experts have predicted that may not be possible within the new shortened timeframe to rush the submarines into service. However moving production to Australia may be inevitable as Mr Dutton said the UK and US had limited spare production capacity to build the Australian submarines. And he said work was already underway with the international partners on designing local shipyards. The new timeframe now matches the original plan for the introduction of the axed French submarines which were due to come into service in 2035. Australia's current Collins Class submarines would need major overhauls to extend their service life beyond 2038, making it vital to get the nuclear subs in the water as soon as possible.

The deal with the US and UK is for eight nuclear submarines, and they are likely to be built in Adelaide if the plan to manufacture them locally goes ahead. China branded the AUKUS deal as 'extremely irresponsible'' and has now pushed its backing for a nuclear-free treaty for south-east Asia. A Chinese government official Lijian Zhao said the deal will 'intensify regional tensions, provoke a military arms race and threaten regional peace and stability.' Mr Dutton said the rhetoric against Australia should be seen as just part of China's attacks on all the other nations which oppose it and speak up against them. He added: 'We want a productive and fruitful friendship with China. 'But we have values that we adhere to and we will not deviate from those values and adherence to international law.'

From https://www.msn.com 12/24/2021

TOP ↑

Government Drops Demand for Electric Charging Points in Some Premises

The Government has backtracked on plans which would have required every shop, office or factory in England, including new and existing non-residential buildings, to have at least one electric car charger installed if they have a car park for 20 cars or more. But the Department for Transport (DfT) has now said it will only be compulsory for new or refurbished commercial premises. According to a response to a consultation the DfT has said the move comes after fears over the costs for businesses. Environmental campaigners and car industry experts have warned this could lead to charger access lagging behind the growing demand for electric vehicles, The Guardian reports. 10-point plan at a glance ELECTRIC VEHICLES Banning new sales of petrol and diesel cars by 2030. Investment in battery technology and the roll-out of electric car charging points.

OFFSHORE WIND Installing thousands of offshore turbines to produce enough energy to power every home by 2030. HYDROGEN Working with industry to generate five gigawatts of the low carbon fuel by 2030. NUCLEAR Investing in new technology to develop mini- reactors. Decision still pending on major new power stations like Sizewell, in Suffolk. PUBLIC TRANSPORT Cycling and walking: £5 billion investment in low carbon transport, with cycle lanes to benefit from a share of £2 billion fund. JET ZERO Supporting the development of the world's first commercial zero carbon plane. HOMES AND BUILDINGS Making homes, schools and hospitals greener and warmer, with improved insulation and heat pumps phased in to replace conventional boilers. CARBON CAPTURE Becoming a world-leader in technology to capture and store harmful emissions.

NATURE Protecting and restoring the natural environment, including planting 75,000 acres of trees every year. INNOVATION & FINANCE Developing new green technology and making the City the global centre of green finance. According to data from the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders, plug-in cars accounted for 28 per cent of November's new car sales in the UK. Greg Archer, the UK director of campaign group Transport & Environment said: 'It is inexplicable that a government committed to phasing out conventional cars has failed to follow through and implement its own proposals from more than two years ago, and instead say it needs longer to consider the options.' However the DfT's said it would draft an alternative policy, and that it wanted a 'more tailored approach' for non-residential buildings in its consultation response.

It also declined to share who objected the policy for cost reasons although only a 'small number of respondents raised concerns about who would pay'. The average cost of a commercial charging point ranges from £1,000 to £1,500 + VAT, according to renewable energy installer Spirit Energy. A DfT spokesperson told The Guardian: 'We have recently introduced world-leading legislation which requires new homes and non-residential buildings, such as offices and supermarkets, with associated parking to have charge points installed. 'This will see the installation of up to 145,000 new charge points across England each year, ensuring consumers are able to buy homes ready for an EV future, and more charge points are available at shops and workplaces.

'With about 80 per cent of all EV charging happening at home, this is a significant step forward as we accelerate towards our net zero targets and power up the electric revolution.' Last month Boris Johnson unveiled the 'world-leading' move to require new homes and buildings to install electric vehicle charging points from next year in a speech to the Confederation of British Industry annual conference, announcing legislation to drive an electric car 'revolution'. He said: 'We will require new homes and buildings to have EV charging points, with another 145,000 charging points to be installed thanks to these regulations. 'We are investing in new projects to turn wind power into hydrogen, and the ten-point plan investments have already triggered about £90billion of private sector investment.' The Prime Minister in November faced a backlash after he unveiled a new environment plan, including introducing the curbs a decade earlier than originally planned, and announced a ban on sales of new petrol and diesel cars from 2030. Mr Johnson, heralding a 'green industrial revolution', launched a ten-point, £12billion plan for the environment, saying it could create 250,000 jobs and slash the country's carbon emissions.

From https://www.msn.com 12/29/2021

TOP ↑

NEW ZEALAND: Regenerative Agriculture Research Receives Government Boost

The Government continues to invest in farm sustainability, this time backing two new research projects to investigate the impacts of regenerative farming practices, Agriculture Minister Damien O'Connor announced today. Soil health and regenerative agriculture "We're contributing $2.8 million to a $3.85 million five-year project with co-investment by Synlait Milk and Danone that aims to understand how to measure and manage soil health to boost environmental and economic performance on New Zealand farms," Damien O'Connor said. The announcement coincides with World Soil Day, which aims to raise awareness of the importance of maintaining healthy ecosystems and human well-being by addressing the growing challenges in soil management, fighting soil salinization, increasing soil awareness and encouraging societies to improve soil health.

“We simply cannot take soil health for granted. It’s the basis of our food systems, and also New Zealand’s economic health. “AgResearch will work with Synlait Milk and Danone supplier farmers on the project, which will run across ten commercial dairy farms in Canterbury, Southland, and Waikato. “In each region the farms will be paired for comparison based on location, soil type, and farm performance. Soil health will be measured within each farm, with one paddock in each managed conventionally, and another using regenerative farming practices.” Native plantings to boost farm yields The second project sees the Government contributing $2.2 million to a five-year research project aimed at boosting New Zealand farm yields by attracting beneficial insects to farms using specifically designed native planting.

“By looking at the relationship that specific native plants have with insects, the researchers will be able to see which ones increase pollination and tackle pests most effectively.” Based in the Canterbury region, the project is being led by Plant and Food Research, with a range of industry partners investing just over $1 million into the work. Forty-five Canterbury farms will plant land that is currently under-utilised – such as fence lines, road verges and watercourses – with local native plants that have been proven to support and maintain beneficial insect life. “By increasing the number of pollinating insects, the project team expects to see increased yields across the farms, which will lead to improved economic and environmental outcomes for the farmers involved. “Increasing the number of predator insects to tackle pests could also reduce the use of pesticides and insecticides.”

Sustainable Food And Fibre Futures Fund Both projects are being funded through the Ministry for Primary Industries’ Sustainable Food and Fibre Futures fund (SFF Futures). “To date we’ve co-invested more than $160 million through SFF Futures into 171 industry projects worth almost $355 million in total. “There’s a surge of interest in regenerative agriculture in high-value markets overseas. These projects are just two of a portfolio of ‘regen’ projects we are backing through the fund. “Collectively they’re contributing to growing our evidence-base on the effectiveness of applying regenerative agriculture practices in New Zealand. “They align with the environmental goals of Fit for a Better World, our food and fibre sector roadmap that’s driving New Zealand’s economic recovery from COVID-19. “Through Fit for a Better World we aim to strengthen the environmental credentials of our food and fibre products and drive further value growth,” Damien O’Connor said.

From https://livenews.co.nz 12/05/2021

TOP↑

4、Economic and Social Development and ICT

Asia-Pacific

OECD Economic Outlook Sees Recovery Continuing but Warns of Growing Imbalances and Risks

The global recovery is continuing but its momentum has eased and is becoming increasingly imbalanced according to the OECD's latest Economic Outlook. The failure to ensure rapid and effective vaccination everywhere is proving costly with uncertainty remaining high due to the continued emergence of new variants of the virus. Output in most OECD countries has now surpassed where it was in late-2019 and is gradually returning to the path expected before the pandemic. However, lower-income economies, particularly ones where vaccination rates against COVID-19 are still low, are at risk of being left behind. The Outlook projects a rebound in global economic growth to 5.6% this year and 4.5% in 2022, before settling back to 3.2% in 2023, close to the rates seen prior to the pandemic. The strong pick-up in activity seen earlier this year is losing momentum in many advanced economies. A surge in demand for goods since economies reopened, and the failure of supply to keep pace, have generated bottlenecks in production chains. Labour shortages, pandemic-related closures, rising energy and commodity prices, and a scarcity of some key materials are all holding back growth and adding to cost pressures. Inflation has increased significantly in some regions, early in this recovery phase.

Real GDP growth projections
G20 economies, % change, year-on-year

	2021	2022	2023		2021	2022	2023
World	+ 5.6%	+ 4.5%	+ 3.2%	G20	+ 5.9%	+ 4.7%	+ 3.3%
Australia	+ 3.8%	+ 4.1%	+ 3.0%	Argentina	+ 8.0%	+ 2.5%	+ 2.3%
Canada	+ 4.8%	+ 3.9%	+ 2.8%	Brazil	+ 5.0%	+ 1.4%	+ 2.1%
Euro area	+ 5.2%	+ 4.3%	+2.5%	China	+ 8.1%	+ 5.1%	+ 5.1%
France	+ 6.8%	+ 4.2%	+ 2.1%	India	+ 9.4%	+ 8.1%	+ 5.5%
Germany	+ 2.9%	+ 4.1%	+ 2.4%	Indonesia	+ 3.3%	+ 5.2%	+ 5.1%
Italy	+ 6.3%	+ 4.6%	+ 2.6%	Mexico	+ 5.9%	+ 3.3%	+ 2.5%
Spain	+ 4.5%	+ 5.5%	+ 3.8%	Russia	+ 4.3%	+ 2.7%	+ 1.3%
Japan	+ 1.8%	+ 3.4%	+ 1.1%	Saudi Arabia	+ 2.9%	+ 5.0%	+ 3.0%
Korea	+ 4.0%	+ 3.0%	+ 2.7%	South Africa	+ 5.2%	+ 1.9%	+ 1.6%
United Kingdom	+ 6.9%	+ 4.7%	+ 2.1%	Turkey	+ 9.0%	+ 3.3%	+ 3.9%
United States	+ 5.6%	+ 3.7%	+ 2.4%				

Source: OECD Economic Outlook, Volume 2021 Issue 2

Alongside cost pressures from manufacturing supply bottlenecks and food price increases, imbalances in the energy market are a key factor driving up inflation in all economies. Gas prices have risen sharply, notably in Europe, and risks are high, with storage levels around 28% lower than they would normally be at this time of the year. Rising food and energy costs are inevitably hitting low-income households the hardest. Inflationary pressures are proving stronger and more persistent than expected a few months ago. Consumer price inflation in the OECD is now projected to start fading in 2022, before moderating as key bottlenecks ease, capacity expands, more people return to the labour force and demand rebalances. The Outlook underlines the risk that continued supply disruptions, perhaps associated with further waves of COVID-19 infections, may result in longer and higher inflationary pressure. Another risk, exposed by the emergence of the Omicron variant in recent days, is a worsening health situation due to COVID-19 resulting in further restrictions that would jeopardise the recovery. The Outlook says ensuring better access to vaccines for all must be an urgent policy priority. A faster, better coordinated, worldwide vaccine roll-out is not only essential for saving lives and preventing the emergence of new variants, but would also help tackle some of the bottlenecks undermining the strength of the recovery by allowing factories, ports and borders to re-open fully.

A potential sharp slowdown in China, if activity in the property market declined abruptly amid concerns about the financial soundness of some of the largest real estate developers, could also disrupt the global recovery. The impact of such a slowdown would spread rapidly to other countries, particularly if it generated uncertainty in global financial markets and added to the current bottlenecks in supply. Presenting the Economic Outlook alongside Chief Economist Laurence Boone today, OECD Secretary-General Mathias Cormann said: “The strong rebound we have seen is now easing and supply bottlenecks, rising inflation, and the continuing impact of the pandemic are clouding the horizon. The risks and uncertainties are large - as is being seen with the emergence of the Omicron variant - aggravating the imbalances and threatening the recovery. Keeping the recovery strong and on track will entail addressing a number of imbalances, but above all it will mean managing the health crisis through better international coordination, improving health systems and massively stepping up vaccination programmes worldwide.”

Laurence Boone said: “Governments acted swiftly and effectively during the height of the crisis to support people and businesses. But the job is not finished. The lack of global coordination on vaccine deployment is putting all of us at risk. It is crucial that lessons are learnt, that we invest in the future, by reviewing healthcare systems, investing in infrastructure, helping children catch up their missing months of schooling, and by putting ambitious strategies in place to help train people for the jobs that are needed in a changing world.” And she added: “Governments must rethink how public resources are put to use. They must spend more wisely, to raise potential growth and to accelerate the transition to clean energy.” The Economic Outlook says the removal of pandemic-related government support will need to be gradual to avoid weakening activity. But changes in the composition of spending are required, to provide space for higher levels of public investment and accommodate the deep economic transformation of addressing climate change. Clear guidance by fiscal and monetary authorities on their policy strategies will be crucial to maintain market confidence and public support.

From https://www.oecd.org/ 12/01/2021

TOP ↑

GCC Returns to Growth amid High Oil Prices and Strong Responses to COVID-19 but Large Wage Bills Threaten Its Economies

Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) economies are expected to return to an aggregate growth rate of 2.6% in 2021, according to the latest issue of the World Bank Gulf Economic Update (GEU), “Seizing the Opportunity for a Sustainable Recovery.” The six-member GCC is composed of the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Oman, Kuwait, and Bahrain. Their robust recovery, which is due to stronger oil prices and the growth of non-oil sectors, will accelerate into 2022 as OPEC+-mandated oil production cuts are phased out and higher oil prices improve business sentiment and attract additional investment. These favorable oil market conditions have shrunk fiscal and external imbalances as export earnings recover. However, the outlook in the medium-term is subject to risks from slower global recovery, renewed coronavirus outbreaks, and oil sector volatility. The World Bank’s latest GEU report focuses on addressing the wage bill in the GCC—the amount of government spending devoted to the salaries and benefits of state employees. Well-paid, public sector jobs are part of the region’s social contract, as well the free health care, education, social security benefits, and subsidized housing and utilities which citizens are often also offered.

“With high population growth and limited options in the private sector, the wage bill has become unsustainable in some GCC countries, as it is a large part of government spending and of the economy overall,” said Issam Abousleiman, World Bank Regional Director for the GCC. “Given their improved fiscal situation, this is an opportune time for GCC governments to accelerate their reforms agenda and reach the goals they set for themselves.” According to the report, the average GCC wage bill over the past two decades has exceeded the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) average, except in Qatar and the UAE. Many GCC countries have public sectors that are well within OECD norms size-wise, in terms of the numbers of employees. However, public servants are paid a wage premium of between 50–100%, which results in a high wage bill relative to the countries’ total spending and GDP.

Despite the oil price crash, spending on the wage bill and the numbers of people employed in the public sector have both risen inexorably upwards. Kuwait’s 2022 budget allocated KWD 12.6bn (about US$42bn) for salaries and benefits, or 55% of its total expenditure. Other countries in the GCC are in a similar position: Oman’s wage bill has doubled in the past decade despite efforts to cap its growth. Saudi Arabia’s allowances for civil servants rose from SAR 44bn in 2016 to SAR 148bn in 2019 and now form more than a third of the government’s total wage bill. These high wage bills are adding excessive pressure to GCC budgets, especially in countries with fewer resources and limited fiscal buffers. In consequence, most are either introducing or expanding their tax bases, trimming back benefits, and exploring early retirement options for some staff. Rather than providing a prescriptive solution in their report, World Bank economists highlight some of the options adopted by other countries and suggest GCC countries reach consensus among stakeholders before moving forward.

From https://www.worldbank.org/ 12/02/2021

TOP ↑

Insect and Hydroponic Farming Could Boost Food Security, Business, and the Circular Economy

Insect and hydroponic crop farming, for both human food and animal feed, have the potential to increase access to nutritious food, while creating millions of jobs, improving the climate and the environment, and strengthening national economies, according to a new World Bank report 'Insect and Hydroponic Farming in Africa: The New Circular Food Economy'. "The world's natural resources cannot sustain the current footprint of agriculture, especially when it comes to animal feed. To reverse current trends, we need a heavily disruptive and resilient food production model. The report makes a persuasive case for insect and hydroponic farming to complement conventional farming," said Juergen Voegele, World Bank Vice President for Sustainable Development. "Together with other investments in climate-smart agriculture, these technologies are part of a promising menu of solutions that can help countries move their agriculture systems toward greater sustainability and reduced emissions."

The consumption of insects is not new, with an estimated 2 billion people globally consuming insects that are collected in the wild. What's new is farming insects specifically for human and animal consumption to provide a year-round supply, increase insect quality and meet growing demand for animal protein. Combining hydroponic crops, that also use very little water and require no arable land, with insect farming is also novel and provides benefits ranging from improved nutrition to climate resilient production synergies. Together, these technologies improve food and nutrition security while reducing waste, taking pressure off land and water resources, and helping to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. They can also save farmers money and governments hard currency reserves by decreasing food, feed, and fertilizer imports and purchases. Small-scale operations can be established at low cost, opening opportunities for climate resilient jobs, including for women, youth, and refugees who often live in locations with limited resources.

Both technologies fit within a circular economic model that can supplement conventional farming. Insects can be fed organic waste - from conventional agriculture, hydroponics, leftover food or even breweries - to quickly produce nutritious and protein-rich foods for humans, fish, and livestock. Waste from insects can then be fed back into the system as organic fertilizer. "The world needs a food production system that can feed everyone, everywhere, every day with nutritious food while providing economic benefits and protecting the environment, including in countries with few resources. A circular food economy and insect and hydroponic farming can deliver on this promise," said Dorte Verner, World Bank Lead Agriculture Economist and lead author of the report. Acute food insecurity is on the rise in Sub-Saharan Africa, where about one in five people is undernourished. The situation is worse in African countries affected by fragility, conflict, and violence (FCV), where 29 percent of people do not have access to enough food. The report team collected the first insect farming data on the continent at the national and farm level in 13 African countries, including in FCV settings.

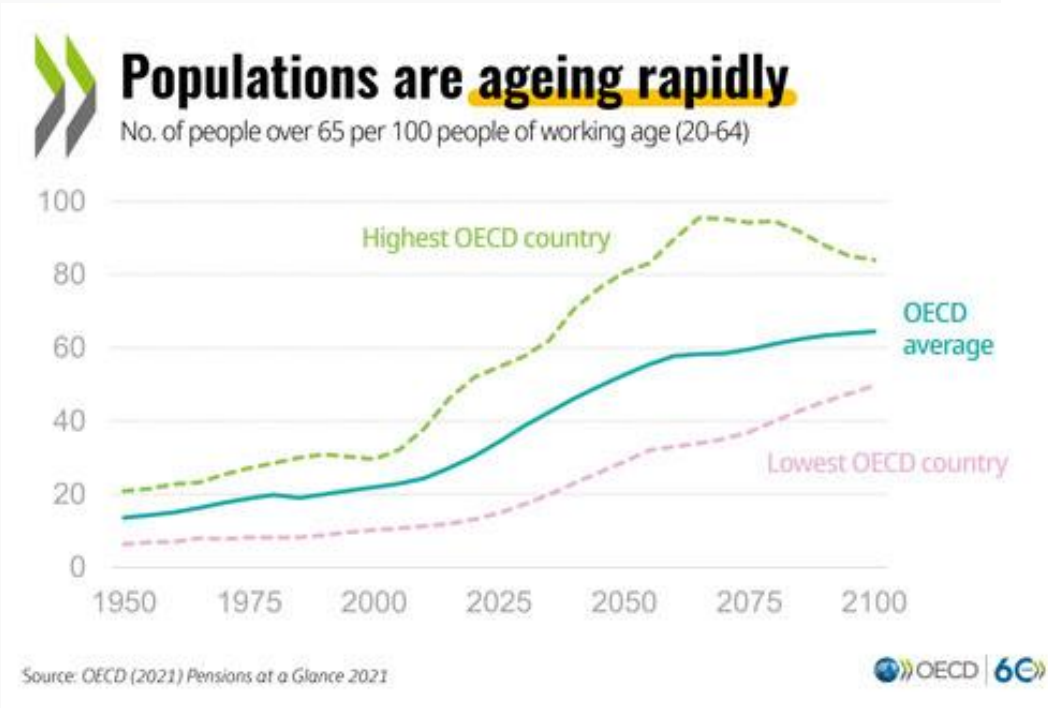
The number of new entrants and markets for insects around the world is increasing. It is estimated that the global market for insects as food and animal feed will be worth up to $8 billion by 2030, a 24 percent annual growth rate over the next decade. To expand insect and hydroponic farming, the report recommends establishing and piloting these technologies, then scaling them up to bring down costs and enhance their competitiveness. Currently, the World Bank is starting pilots in selected African countries with partners. Africa already has hydroponic farms and more than 850 insect farms that produce food and feed. African insect farming using agriculture waste as feed could annually generate crude protein worth up to $2.6 billion and biofertilizers worth up to $19.4 billion. That is enough protein meal to meet up to 14 percent of the crude protein needed to rear all the pigs, goats, fish, and poultry in Africa.

From https://www.worldbank.org/ 12/08/2021

TOP ↑

Pensions Protected During COVID-19 Pandemic but Ageing Challenges Persist, Says OECD

The COVID-19 pandemic has taken a heavy toll among elderly people although retirees have seen their pension payments well protected across OECD countries. Future pension entitlements have also been well protected thanks to the exceptional policy response to the crisis, according to a new OECD report. Pensions at a Glance 2021 says however that the long-term financial pressure from ageing persists. Pension finances deteriorated during the pandemic due to lost contributions, and shortfalls have been mainly covered by state budgets. Putting pensions systems on a solid footing for the future will require painful policy decisions,



Although life expectancy gains in old age have slowed since 2010, the pace of ageing is projected to be fast over the next two decades. The size of the working-age population is projected to fall by more than one-quarter by 2060 in most Southern, Central and Eastern European countries as well as in Japan and Korea. Young people have been severely affected by the crisis and might see their future benefits lowered, especially if the pandemic results in longer-term scarring and difficulties in building their careers. Allowing early access to pension savings to compensate for economic hardship, as observed in some countries such as Chile, may also generate long-term problems: unless future higher savings offset these withdrawals, low retirement benefits will be the consequence. Mandatory schemes provide an average future net replacement rate of 62% to full-career average-wage workers, ranging from less than 40% in Chile, Estonia, Ireland, Japan, Korea, Lithuania and Poland to 90% or more in Hungary, Portugal and Turkey.

Over the last two years, many countries significantly reformed earnings-related pension benefits, including Estonia, Greece, Hungary, Mexico, Poland and Slovenia. Chile, Germany, Latvia and Mexico also increased income protection for low earners. Action on retirement ages was limited. Sweden increased the minimum retirement age for public earnings-related pensions; the Netherlands postponed the planned increase while reducing the pace of the future link to life expectancy; and Ireland repealed the planned increase from 66 to 68 years. Denmark, Ireland, Italy and Lithuania have extended early retirement options. Based on legislated measures, the normal retirement age will increase by about two years in the OECD on average by the mid-2060s. The future normal retirement age is 69 years or more in Denmark, Estonia, Italy and the Netherlands, while Colombia, Luxembourg and Slovenia will let men retire at 62. Women will maintain a lower normal retirement age than men in Colombia, Hungary, Israel, Poland and Switzerland. Pensions at a Glance 2021 says that the biggest long-term challenge for pensions continues to be providing financially and socially sustainable pensions in the future. Many countries have introduced automatic adjustment mechanisms (AAM) in their pension systems that change pension system parameters, such as pension ages, benefits or contribution rates, when demographic, economic or financial indicators change. These automatic adjustment mechanisms are crucial to help deal with the impact of ageing.

About two-thirds of OECD countries use some form of AAM in their pension schemes, adjusting retirement ages, benefit levels and contribution rates and using an automatic balancing mechanism. OECD analysis shows that, over the years, the automatic adjustment mechanisms were sometimes suspended or even eliminated in order to avoid pension benefit cuts and retirement-age increases. Yet, compared to the alternative of discretionary changes, AAMs can be designed and implemented to generate changes that are less erratic, more transparent and more equitable across generations. The report and country notes for France, Germany, Italy, Mexico, Spain, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States are available at https://www.oecd.org/pensions/oecd-pensions-at-a-glance-19991363.htm. For more information, journalists should contact Monika Queisser or Hervé Boulhol of the OECD's Social Policy division. *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.*

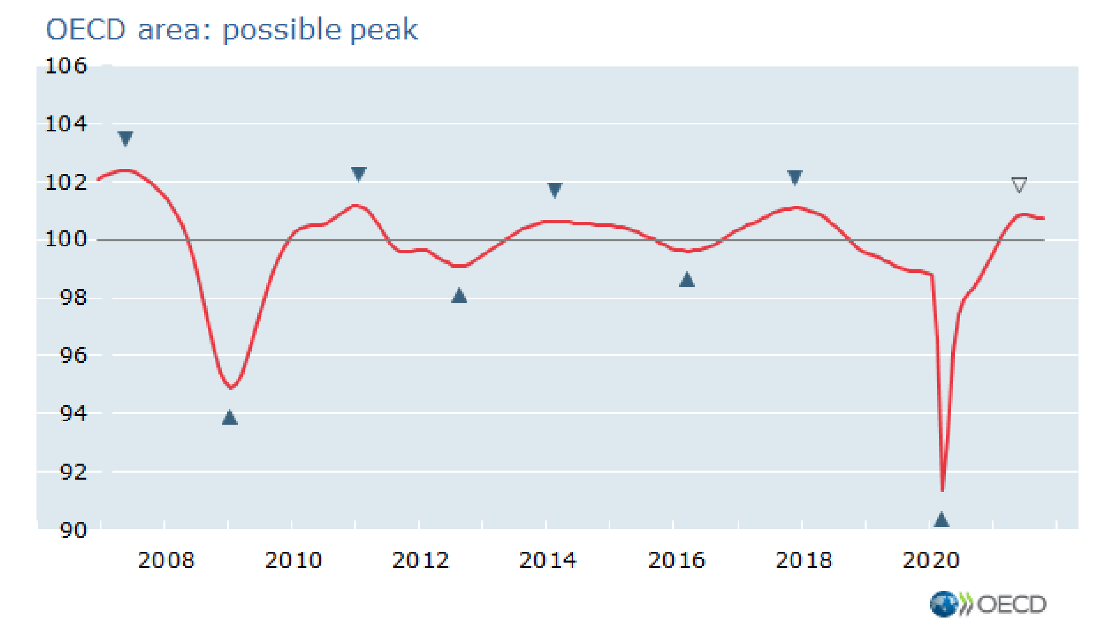
From https://www.oecd.org/ 12/08/2021

TOP ↑

OECD CLIs Point More Firmly Towards an Upcoming Peak in Growth

The OECD Composite leading indicators (CLIs), designed to anticipate turning points in economic activity relative to trend, continue to suggest that economic growth in the OECD area as a whole may reach a peak in the coming months. The latest CLIs reaffirm last month's assessment which showed signs of a possible upcoming peak in the growth of economic activity in the United States, Japan, Germany and the United Kingdom. Similar signals have now emerged in Canada and the euro area as a whole, including Italy. However, in France, the CLI is pointing to a continuation in growth, albeit at a moderating pace. Among major emerging-market economies, the CLIs continue to anticipate growth losing momentum in China (industrial sector). In India, the CLI indicates stable growth while in Brazil, the outlook continues to deteriorate with the CLI now contracting to below trend levels. By contrast, the CLI for Russia continues to point to a steady increase in growth above long-term trends.

The OECD composite leading indicators, which include order books, building permits, confidence indicators, long-term interest rates, new car registrations and many more, are cyclical indicators designed to anticipate fluctuations in economic activity over the next six to nine months. They paint a broad picture of economic activity based on a large amount of recent forward-looking data. Persisting uncertainties stemming largely from recent developments in the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic may result in higher than usual fluctuations in the CLI and its components. As such, the CLIs should be interpreted with care and their magnitude should be regarded as an indication of the strength of the signal rather than a precise measure of anticipated growth in economic activity.



From https://www.oecd.org/ 12/09/2021

TOP ↑

More Than Half a Billion People Pushed or Pushed Further into Extreme Poverty Due to Health Care Costs

New evidence compiled by the World Health Organization and the World Bank shows that the COVID-19 pandemic is likely to halt two decades of global progress towards Universal Health Coverage. The organizations also reveal that already before the pandemic more than half a billion people were pushed or further pushed into extreme poverty because they had to pay for health services out of their own pockets, and that the pandemic is likely to make the situation worse. The findings are contained in two complementary reports, launched on Universal Health Coverage Day, highlighting the devastating impact of COVID-19 on people's ability to obtain health care and pay for it. In 2020, the pandemic disrupted health services and stretched countries' health systems beyond their limits as they struggled to deal with the impact of COVID-19. As a result, for example, immunization coverage dropped for the first time in ten years, and deaths from TB and malaria increased. The pandemic also triggered the worst economic crisis since the 1930s, making it increasingly difficult for people to pay for care. Even before the pandemic, half a billion people were being pushed (or pushed still further) into extreme poverty because of payments they made for health care. The organizations expect that that number is now considerably higher.

“There is no time to spare,” said Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, WHO Director-General. “All governments must immediately resume and accelerate efforts to ensure every one of their citizens can access health services without fear of the financial consequences. This means strengthening public spending on health and social support, and increasing their focus on primary health care systems that can provide essential care close to home.” He added: “Prior to the pandemic, many countries had made progress. But it was not robust enough. This time we must build health systems that are strong enough to withstand shocks, such as the next pandemic and stay on course towards universal health coverage.” The new WHO/World Bank reports also warn that financial hardship is likely to become more intense as poverty grows, incomes fall, and governments face tighter fiscal constraints. “Even before the COVID-19 pandemic struck, almost 1 billion people were spending more than 10 per cent of their household budget on health,” said Juan Pablo Uribe, Global Director for Health, Nutrition and Population, World Bank. “This is not acceptable, especially since the poorest people are hit hardest. Within a constrained fiscal space, governments will have to make tough choices to protect and increase health budgets,” he added.

In the first two decades of this century, many governments had made progress on service coverage. In 2019, prior to the pandemic, 68 per cent of the world’s population was covered by essential health services, such as pre-and post-natal care and reproductive health services; immunization services; treatment for diseases like HIV, TB and malaria; and services to diagnose and treat noncommunicable diseases like cancer, heart conditions, and diabetes. But they had not made such advances in ensuring affordability. As a result, the poorest groups and those living in rural areas are the least able to obtain health services, and the least likely to be able to cope with the consequences of paying for them. Up to 90 percent of all households incurring impoverishing out-of-pocket health spending are already at or below the poverty line - underscoring the need to exempt poor people from out-of-pocket health spending, backing such measures with health financing policies that enable good intentions to be realized in practice.

Besides the prioritizing of services for poor and vulnerable populations, supported through targeted public spending and policies that protect individuals from financial hardship, it will also be crucial to improve the collection, timeliness and disaggregation of data on access, service coverage, out-of-pocket health spending and total expenditure. Only when countries have an accurate picture of the way that their health system is performing, can they effectively target action to improve the way it meets the needs of all people. Together, these two new reports offer both a warning and guideposts to all countries as they strive to build back better from COVID-19 and keep their populations safe, healthy, and financially secure.

World Bank Group Response to COVID-19
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 strengthen pandemic preparedness, protect the poor and jobs, and jump start a climate-friendly recovery. The Bank is also supporting over 60 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/ 12/12/2021

TOP↑

ADB Revises Developing Asia Growth Outlook Down Slightly to 7.0% in 2021, 5.3% in 2022

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) revised its economic growth outlook for developing Asia down slightly to 7.0% this year and 5.3% next year, after renewed outbreaks of coronavirus disease (COVID-19) led to slower growth in the third quarter. ADB's latest estimates, presented in a regular supplement of the Asian Development Outlook (ADO) 2021, compare with the bank's September forecasts of 7.1% growth for 2021 and 5.4% for 2022. Prospects for this year have been revised slightly downward for all subregions except Central Asia. "Developing Asia's steady progress in dealing with COVID-19, through continued vaccination drives and more strategic application of containment measures, helped boost growth prospects in the early part of the year," said ADB Acting Chief Economist Joseph Zveglich, Jr. "However, new outbreaks in the third quarter muted gross domestic product growth, and the advent of the Omicron virus variant is causing renewed uncertainty. Recovery efforts will have to take these developments into consideration."

The main risk to the growth outlook remains a resurgence in COVID-19 cases. The average number of daily cases globally rose to almost 573,000 on 30 November from 404,000 on 15 October. Developing Asia's vaccination rate has increased significantly to 48.7% (fully vaccinated) as of 30 November, although the region still lags behind the United States at 58.1% and the European Union at 67.2%. Rates of fully vaccinated people also vary widely within the region, from as high as 91.9% of the total population in Singapore to as low as 2.2% in Papua New Guinea. Bucking the overall trend for developing Asia, Central Asia's economy is expected to grow 4.7% this year, reflecting higher commodity prices and increased public spending. The forecast for next year has also been raised to 4.4% from 4.2% in September. East Asia's growth outlook has been downgraded by 0.1 percentage points for both 2021 and 2022, to 7.5% and 5.0%, respectively, amid slight downward adjustments in the forecasts for the People's Republic of China (PRC)—the region's largest economy. The PRC's economy is now expected to grow 8.0% this year and 5.3% next year.

South Asia is forecast to grow 8.6% in 2021, compared with September's forecast of 8.8%. The subregion's 2022 outlook remains at 7.0%. India, South Asia's largest economy, is now expected to grow 9.7% in fiscal year (FY) 2021, which ends 31 March 2022. The reduction of 0.3 percentage points comes amid supply chain issues that are affecting industry. India's outlook for FY2022 is maintained at 7.5%, as domestic demand is expected to normalize. Southeast Asia's 2021 outlook has been revised down by 0.1 percentage points to 3.0% as economies in the subregion imposed targeted restrictions in the face of COVID-19's Delta variant. Next year's growth forecast is increased to 5.1% as economies are expected to continue easing overall restrictions and reviving economic activities. The growth forecast for the Pacific is maintained at -0.6% this year and revised slightly down to 4.7% for 2022.

Regional inflation is expected to remain manageable at 2.1% in 2021 and 2.7% in 2022, allowing for a more accommodative monetary policy and supporting pandemic recovery efforts. ADO, ADB's annual flagship economic publication, is published every April, with an Update published in September and brief supplements published normally in July and December. Developing Asia refers to the 46 developing members of ADB. ADB is committed to achieving a prosperous, inclusive, resilient, and sustainable Asia and the Pacific, while sustaining its efforts to eradicate extreme poverty. Established in 1966, it is owned by 68 members—49 from the region.

From https://www.adb.org/ 12/14/2021

TOP ↑

ADB-World Bank Partnership Helping Pacific Reach Development Goals

- ADB and World Bank are partners in promoting development in the Pacific.
- ADB collaborates with World Bank in projects that support better transport, connectivity, and health systems in the Pacific.
- In 2020, the World Bank Group cofinanced with ADB nine projects for a total of $1.3 billion, including three COVID-19-related projects.

The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has affected economies globally, especially so for countries in the Pacific. Border closures and travel restrictions to stem COVID-19 transmission have had a pronounced impact on the Pacific islands whose narrow economic bases are heavily dependent on tourism. The first 12 months of the pandemic saw the region's growth contract by 5.3%, according to ADB's Pacific Economic Monitor. However, thanks to the region's travel bubbles and rising vaccination rates, that growth is set to bounce back by 4.0% in 2022. Another factor has been the key role of development partners, such as ADB and the World Bank. In 2020, the World Bank Group (WBG) cofinanced with the Asian

Development Bank (ADB) nine projects for a total of $1.3 billion, including three COVID-19-related projects. The WBG provided a $5.5 million grant to the Strengthening Macroeconomic Resilience Program for Tonga, which, along with a $12.2 million grant from ADB, aims to strengthen Tonga's macroeconomic resilience, including the mitigation of COVID-19's impact by supporting the government's COVID-19 response.

From January 2014 to December 2020, the WBG provided almost $410 million in loans and grants to support the development of the Pacific. Aside from assistance to ensure Pacific economies can withstand external shocks, the WBG also supported infrastructure to provide better transport, connectivity, water, and sanitation systems in the region. The Strengthening Macroeconomic Resilience Program supports the reduction of adverse social and economic impacts stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic and builds on previous policy-based operations to strengthen Tonga's macroeconomic resilience. The program will help the government manage and control COVID-19 and its immediate impact on the Tongan economy without jeopardizing debt sustainability, with other policy actions supporting macroeconomic resilience in the future by addressing sources of fiscal risk.

Better transport systems

Recognizing that safe and resilient transport infrastructure is essential for connecting Kiribati's population to economic opportunities and social services, particularly for those living on the outer islands, the WBG provided a $30 million grant to the Kiribati Outer Islands Transport Infrastructure Investment Project. Approximately 55% of Kiribati's total population live on the main island of Tarawa, which includes the capital, South Tarawa, while the remaining population is spread across the outer islands. Through this project, which also received a grant of $12 million from ADB, Kiribati can enjoy safe and resilient maritime transport infrastructure, which is essential for connecting the country's population to economic and social opportunities, particularly for those living on the outer islands. It is also important for stemming the tide of migration from outer islands. The WBG also provided a $22 million grant to the Kiribati Road Rehabilitation Project, which, bolstered by $23.4 million in loans and grants from ADB, helped rehabilitate 36 kilometers of highway and construct 9.2 kilometers of feeder roads, 57 kilometers of footpaths for cyclists and walkers, and 36 bus shelters. It also supported the capacity building of local communities in road maintenance for road safety.

Water and sanitation, internet access

The WBG provided a grant of almost $13 million to the South Tarawa Water Supply Project, which will increase South Tarawa's access to safe and climate-resilient water supply. South Tarawa, the capital of Kiribati, is a highly urbanized area. The combination of overcrowding and inadequate water, sanitation, and hygiene is closely linked to waterborne diseases such as diarrhea and dysentery in the capital. The WBG also supported the Solomon Islands Urban Water Supply and Sanitation

Sector Project with a $15 million loan. The project will develop a sustainable, inclusive, and climate-resilient water supply and improve sanitation in the Greater Honiara Area and five other towns in the Solomon Islands. ADB and the WBG worked with Palau to provide affordable, high-quality internet access through the North Pacific Regional Connectivity Investment Project, which built a submarine cable system linking Palau to the internet cable hub in Guam. The WBG provided a $22.5 million loan to the project, which helped match a loan from ADB of $25 million. The WBG also provided a $16 million grant to the Samoa Submarine Cable Project, to go with a grant of $25 million from ADB, to build a submarine cable that will link Samoa to Fiji's international cable network.

Private sector support

The WBG's collaboration with ADB also recognizes the important role of a healthy, vibrant private sector. The WBG provided almost $80 million in loans to the Fiji Sustained Private Sector-Led Growth Reform Program, which assisted the Fijian government in creating an environment where the private sector was able to develop and better drive national economic growth through investment. It improved the management of public finances, strengthened the performance of state-owned enterprise, opened opportunities for private investment, and enhanced the policy, legislative, and regulatory environment for business operations. Since 1972, the WBG has been working with ADB to implement sustainable solutions to reduce poverty and build shared prosperity in developing countries in areas such health, education, infrastructure, agriculture, public administration, macroeconomic management, institutional development, governance, financial and private sector development, environmental protection, and natural resource management. As the Pacific region works to rebound from the impacts of the pandemic, that partnership is now more important than ever.

From https://www.adb.org/ 12/16/2021

TOP ↑

The Future of Work Is About People,Not Tech: Report

The future of work—with advanced technologies and new working arrangements—is here and is changing economic opportunities and employment relationships. However, according to the 2021 APEC Economic Policy Report, certain economic structures, laws and institutions across APEC remain products of the past. The report highlighted four megadrivers of the future of work. These are technological change, climate change, globalization and demographic change. It also pointed out how these drivers promote innovation and advance development, although each comes at a cost. Unresolved issues such as environmental degradation and climate change resulting from the rise of industrialization, growing inequality and structural unemployment due to globalization, as well as the ageing population, are some of the remaining challenges that policymakers need to address.

On top of this, COVID-19 sent the world into isolation, left policymakers with many lessons to learn, and propelled people and businesses to adapt and accelerate digital technology adoption. Some managed to keep their jobs and businesses afloat but many had to face closure and unemployment, highlighting the need to make people the center of future-of-work policy. “The future of work is not about technology, but about people,” said Dr James Ding, Chair of the APEC Economic Committee, the group that produced the report alongside the APEC Policy Support Unit. “Even as we get excited about the latest technology and advancements in artificial intelligence, discussions about the future of work should still be about the well-being of people and society in an increasingly digitalized economy.” “There is an urgent need to address the real social and economic impacts that will bring change,” Dr Ding added. “We have to look at ensuring our economic security with structural reform and targeted policies, upskilling and reskilling the workforce, updating the relevant laws and regulations as well as strengthening our cross-border cooperation.”

The report, among others, recommends APEC member economies focus on improving their systems by expanding the scope and coverage of unemployment benefit programs to cover the most vulnerable, as well as include better health coverage in their social protection policies. Policies that promote skills building are deemed crucial to mitigating the skills gap and strengthening the resilience of the workforce, and this can be supported by building better skills-forecasting systems, upskilling and reskilling workers, making targeted investments in education and promoting lifelong learning to keep up with the changing labor market. Improving employment protection legislation is another policy lever to effectively react to changing market conditions. The report suggests policymakers upgrade the scope and coverage of employment protection laws by including non-standard employment, such as those who work in the informal sector, workers in temporary contracts and gig-economy workers. “International cooperation is needed more than ever as we embrace the future of work and APEC needs to continue to be the forum where innovative approaches to addressing the challenges are developed, policies are discussed and consensus for implementation is achieved,” Dr Ding concluded.

From https://www.apec.org/ 12/20/202

TOP ↑

Reviving the Economy and Resuming Travel and Tourism in the COVID-19 Era

- To ensure safe resumption of travel and tourism during the COVID-19 pandemic, harmonized health and safety guidelines should be observed in all points of transit.
- The threat of COVID-19 transmission during travel can be mitigated through a set of harmonized industry-wide health and safety protocols.

- Wearing face masks, proper handwashing, social distancing, and observing other similar health and safety protocols are highly recommended to stem COVID-19 transmission during travel.
-

The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic triggered an unprecedented collapse of the travel and tourism industry and the recovery is now expected to be slower than first thought. Reviving the sector requires collaboration and coordination across the entire travel and tourism ecosystem. Globally, the COVID-19 pandemic has generated extraordinary losses around the world—with millions of lives claimed, millions of people unemployed, and hundreds of millions more at risk of unemployment and soaring poverty. According to ADB's Asian Development Outlook 2020 report, tourism-driven economies—including the Cook Islands, Fiji, Palau, Samoa, and Vanuatu—were the hardest hit by the COVID-19 pandemic. The Asia and Pacific region, alone, was expected to lose almost 70 million jobs and $1.1 trillion in GDP—more than any other region in the world. "These policy recommendations are the result of widespread consultation with airport, airline, hotel, and government leaders. They provide a roadmap for how countries across the Asia and Pacific region can reopen this critical sector in the most careful, responsible, and effective way possible."

But the rising rates of vaccinations are seeing many countries slowly rebooting their international and domestic travel sectors. Precautionary measures against contracting COVID-19 have been put in place to ensure passenger health and safety as the transport industry deals with travel and tourism challenges in this "new normal." The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has released a set of health-focused policy recommendations *Reopening Borders to Revive the Economy and Resume Travel in Asia and the Pacific* to help members in our region make the best policy decisions for their circumstances. The recommendations came from months of extensive collaboration with key partners, including the International Civil Aviation Organization, the International Air Transport Association, the Pacific Asia Travel Association, and other stakeholders and industry leaders. "These policy recommendations are the result of widespread consultation with airport, airline, hotel, and government leaders," said ADB's Health Sector Group Chief Dr. Patrick Osewe. "They provide a roadmap for how countries across the Asia and Pacific region can reopen this critical sector in the most careful, responsible, and effective way possible." The recommendations have been grouped into four categories: (1) strengthening management and planning; (2) introducing transmission barriers; (3) improving sanitation; and (4) promoting health screening. A three-phase approach to each category also serves as a checklist for advised actions in every perceived phase of COVID-19.

What is the "Phased Approach"?

Phase	**Phase Description in relation to COVID-19**	**Travel permission**

Emergency	Disease still in acute phase as determined by local health authorities	Limited travel. Necessary to address urgent needs.
Restart	Downward trajectory of disease transmission as determined by local health authorities.	Countries reopen and travel is gradually re-started. Risk mitigation measures in place.
Recovery	Disease has been sufficiently contained as determined by local health authorities.	Risk mitigation and preparedness measures to be sustainably implemented.

* For the full list, see *Reopening Borders to Revive the Economy and Resume Travel in Asia and the Pacific: Health-Focused Policy Recommendations.* pp. 5. Key stakeholders from across the travel and tourism ecosystem—from government to the private sector—have already taken some of these steps to restart and recover the industry. Ongoing dialogue focusing on multisectoral collaboration and targeted supportive actions should continue as the COVID-19 pandemic unfolds. "Ultimately, these recommendations are intended to promote health and safety, encourage best practice, reduce incoherence in health protocols, and complement existing efforts," Dr. Osewe said. ADB is committed to helping governments speed up their COVID-19 response and recovery and is currently working with countries in Asia and the Pacific to implement the recommendations identified in this report. With unprecedented and evolving health and travel-related implications—highlighted by the discovery of the new Omicron strain of the virus—the long-term impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the industry remains. Travel and tourism will eventually rebound through a collective response that can help build the foundation now for a more sustainable future.

From https://www.adb.org/ 12/23/202

TOP ↑

East Asia

CHINA: Foreign Trade Sustains Resilience, Upward Momentum

China's foreign trade maintained growth momentum in the first 11 months of the year amid signs of global economic recovery and resilient demand. During the Jan.-Nov. period, total imports and exports of the country expanded 22 percent year on year to 35.39 trillion yuan (5.55 trillion U.S. dollars), official data showed Tuesday. The figure, already surpassing the 32.16-trillion-yuan total for all of 2020, marked a 24-percent increase from the pre-epidemic level in 2019, according to the General Administration of Customs. Both exports and imports continued double-digit growth in the first 11 months of the year, surging 21.8 percent and 22.2 percent from a year earlier, respectively. In November alone, the country's imports and exports rose 20.5

percent year on year to 3.72 trillion yuan, up 11.4 percent from that in October, the data showed. The continuing global recovery is supporting China's exports in terms of demand, said Zheng Houcheng, director of Yingda Securities Research Institute, adding that he expects overseas demand to remain resilient in the coming month. Sun Binbin, chief fixed-income analyst at Tianfeng Securities, attributed the surge in imports last month to the increase in purchasing managers' indices and the easing of production capacity constraints.

Tuesday's data also showed month-on-month pick-ups in both imports and exports in November, which reflected export production's strong demand for raw material imports as well as domestic year-end consumer demand at the same time, Sun noted. In the Jan.-Nov. period, China's trade with its top three trading partners -- the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, the European Union and the United States -- maintained sound growth. During the period, the growth rates of China's trade value with the three trading partners stood at 20.6 percent, 20 percent and 21.1 percent, respectively, customs data showed. Private enterprises saw the fastest growth rate in imports and exports by increasing 27.8 percent to 17.15 trillion yuan in the first 11 months, accounting for 48.5 percent of the country's total. The imports and exports of foreign-invested firms and that of state-owned enterprises rose 13.1 percent and 27.3 percent, respectively, in the period. China rolled out a slew of measures in 2021 to ramp up foreign trade growth, including accelerating the development of new business forms and modes, further deepening reform to facilitate cross-border trade, optimizing its business environment at ports, and promoting reform and innovation to facilitate trade and investment in pilot free trade zones.

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

TOP ↑

China Capable of Achieving Steady, Sound, Sustainable Economic Development: Official

China is still in an important period of strategic opportunity for development and is fully capable of realizing steady, sound and sustainable economic development, an official said Saturday. The country's economy is resilient and has great potential, said Han Wenxiu, a senior official with the Central Committee for Financial and Economic Affairs, at an annual meeting on Chinese economy. Han stressed multiple favorable conditions for China's economic development, such as the complete industrial system, abundant human resources, convenient infrastructure, strong domestic market and surging market vitality. While China's economic development faces pressure from demand contraction, supply shocks and weakening expectations, the country should stay confident and face difficulties squarely, said Han, adding that the trend of continuous economic recovery and the fundamentals of China's economy with a positive long-term outlook remain unchanged. In terms of achieving carbon neutrality goals, Han urged taking into full account of China's basic national conditions, including its energy mix and industrial structure, and optimizing the use of coal and new energy.

From http://www.news.cn/ 12/11/2021

TOP ↑

China Strengthens Guidance on Capital to Spur Economic Growth

China has sent a clear signal to step up efforts in guiding capital to develop in a stable and orderly manner in a recent tone-setting economic meeting. China announced it would set up "traffic lights" to give full play to the positive role of capital while effectively reining in its negative effects, according to the annual Central Economic Work Conference held in Beijing last week. Stressing the need to understand the nature of capital and its law of behavior, the meeting said China will strengthen its effective supervision of capital in accordance with the law and prevent its unchecked growth. After decades of sustained development, China's economy has accumulated huge capital resources. However, problems including monopoly involving platform enterprises and disorder in competition, among others, have also emerged. Amid efforts to crack down on the disorderly expansion of capital and foster fair competition, Chinese authorities have taken a slew of measures targeting monopolies and other irregularities. China's State Administration for Market Regulation imposed administrative penalties on several companies for violating anti-monopoly law earlier this year.

The regulations are necessary measures to improve the healthy development of relevant industries and promote social fairness and justice, said Xu Shanchang, an official with the National Development and Reform Commission. The capital market is a key area for the authorities to guide capital to develop in an orderly and healthy way. The country will reinforce the guidance on capital, exercise strict oversight on financing, mergers and acquisitions in specific sectors, and work with relevant parties to establish sound systems and mechanisms to prevent the disorderly expansion of capital, said the China Securities Regulatory Commission in a meeting held Monday. China will give full play to the positive role of capital as a production factor and continue to facilitate the role of the capital market in promoting the circulation of capital, industry, and science and technology, the meeting noted.

"To curb the disorderly expansion of capital does not mean that we do not need capital, instead we need it to develop in an orderly manner," said Han Wenxiu, a senior official with the Central Committee for Financial and Economic Affairs. Among measures to empower capital to better serve the market-oriented economy, China has issued a guideline in April on advancing reforms to streamline administration and delegate power amid efforts to improve the business environment and push high-quality development. In the meantime, China has witnessed an increase in the number of new taxpaying market entities in the first nine months as the country's economy continues to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic. A total of 9.7 million new market entities handling tax-related business were registered during the January-September period, an increase of 16.1 percent from the same period last year, data by the State Taxation Administration showed.

Besides, tax reductions, trimmed negative lists for foreign investment and the lifting of foreign-ownership caps have also brought in a large inflow of capital, boosted the Chinese economy via increased competition and enhanced cooperation. As an important source of capital, foreign direct investment (FDI) into the Chinese mainland, in actual use, is expected to surpass 1 trillion yuan (about 157.49 billion U.S. dollars) in 2021, and China's FDI inflow totaled 999.98 billion yuan in 2020, skyrocketing 157.7 percent from 338 billion yuan registered in 2001, said Gao Feng, an official with the Ministry of Commerce, at a virtual press conference last week. China will further shorten the negative list on foreign investment, facilitate services for foreign-funded enterprises and projects, and foster a law-based, international, and convenient business environment to share its market opportunities globally, said Gao.

From http://www.news.cn/ 12/15/2021

TOP ↑

Growing Foreign Trade Shows China's Economic Resilience

Against COVID-19 headwinds, China's foreign trade has come under global spotlight this year with better-than-expected growth due to strong impetus from innovation and enhanced economic resilience. In the first 11 months of this year, total imports and exports expanded 22 percent year on year to 35.39 trillion yuan (5.55 trillion U.S. dollars), beating the figure of 2020. Chinese ports have been bustling through the year with cargo throughput totaling 12.87 billion tonnes in the first 10 months, up 7.8 percent year on year, while China-Europe freight train service recorded more than 40,000 trips, becoming a crucial link to support countries in combatting the COVID-19 pandemic. The stellar performance of the world's second largest economy added vitality to global economic activities as an abundant market contributed 14.8 percent to the global import growth in the first half of 2021. The figure stood out among major economies that have struggled due to supply bottlenecks and vulnerable trade activities due to the blow from the pandemic, which is wreaking havoc across the world with new variant Omicron.

Successful containment of the pandemic and China's strong manufacturing system have continued to sustain the country's rapid economic recovery, said Liu Yuanchun, vice president of Renmin University of China (RUC). The country has overcome the negative impacts of the virus and leveraged its advantages in complete supply chains and sound foundation of manufacturing industry, filling the gap between global supply and demand, said Ren Hongbin, vice minister of commerce. Improvements were not only seen in the growth rate of foreign trade but also in its structure, as exports of high-quality, high-tech and high value-added products expanded rapidly, and private enterprises have taken a larger share of 57.6 percent in the total exports value during the Jan.-Oct. period. "It indicated that the endogenous impetus for trade development is growing," said Wang Xiaosong, a research fellow with the National Academy of Development and Strategy under RUC.

Wang added that innovation concerning technologies and business forms played an important role in pushing high-quality development of foreign trade. New business forms and models have seen rapid expansion with the cross-border e-commerce volume soaring tenfold in the past five years, while the total area of overseas warehouses topped 16 million square meters, according to the Ministry of Commerce (MOC). Goodcang, an overseas warehouse firm owned by Chinese logistics network provider Zongteng Group, has built a cross border e-commerce logistics network covering more than 30 countries, said Li Cong, vice president of Zongteng Group. Warehouses operated by the firm exceeded one million square meters as at March this year. Through trade platforms including the Canton Fair and the China International Import Expo, enterprises have gained opportunities to tap into markets both at home and abroad, said Ren. Looking forward, challenges are no lightweight.

More uncertainties come from resurgence of COVID-19 cases, high prices of bulk materials, supply bottlenecks and energy shortage, said an MOC report. The prospect of global economic recovery has faded amid mounting pressure as the International Monetary Fund said in October that the growth of the world economy will moderate to 5.9 percent, down by 0.1 percentage points from July's forecast. To address these challenges, Ren said the country will take more measures involving cross-cyclical adjustment, the structure of goods trade, new modes of foreign trade and better risk control system to help firms navigate difficulties and meet their needs. Foreign trade will maintain stable growth due to stronger resilience, more vitality of market entities and policy support from high-level opening up, said the MOC report. Taking into account factors including the gap between worldwide supply and demand and huge uncertainty brought in by the Omicron variant, the country's exports are expected to be resilient in the first half of next year, said a research team with CITIC Securities.

From http://www.news.cn/ 12/16/2021

TOP ↑

Supporting Ecological Protection and Water Pollution Control in China’s Yangtze River Basin

The World Bank’s Board of Executive Directors today approved a US$400 million loan to help enhance ecological protection and reduce water pollution in China’s Yangtze River basin. This financing complements more than $6 billion of China’s own resources and will help reduce water pollution from plastics and animal manure and improve wastewater treatment. The project is in line with the World Bank’s support to

China in areas relating to global public goods, such as environmentally sustainable growth. The Yangtze River basin covers 19 provinces in China and provides the main source of water for almost 600 million people, and as a region accounts for 45 percent of China's GDP. It is reportedly a major conveyer of plastic and other pollutants to the world's oceans. It is also home to a third of China's endangered species and 40 percent of its rare or endangered plants. The Yangtze River Protection and Ecological Restoration Program will support China's strategy for the basin and help implement key elements of the Yangtze River Protection Law. Adopted on December 26, 2020, the Law aims at improving the management of water resources in the basin, including through better coordination across line agencies and levels of government. The Program will support this coordination by strengthening data collection and sharing, and by improving water management and allocation. Local level activities will help reduce plastics pollution by developing incentives for the collection of agricultural plastic film, improve wastewater management and collection systems at the township level, and address agricultural pollution through improved management of livestock manure.

"The Program is an excellent example of the evolving partnership with China, with a focus on strengthening institutions and contributing to global public goods." said Martin Raiser, World Bank Country Director for China, Mongolia and Korea. "By supporting coordination across line agencies and levels of government, improving data collection and accountability, and leveraging considerable budget resources, this Program will help China achieve real impacts in pollution reduction in the Yangtze basin at scale." Total financing for this program over the five-year period is expected to be 94 percent funded by the government, mostly at the provincial level, to support the achievement of the targeted results. The basin-scale activities will be implemented through the National Development and Reform Commission's Yangtze River Economic Belt Coordination Office by the Yangtze River Water Resources Commission. Provincial level activities will support water management and pollution control programs in Jiangxi and Hunan, two provinces along the middle ranges of the Yangtze basin, containing some of its largest tributaries. The World Bank Group supports efforts to address marine plastic pollution and is the world's largest multilateral source of financing for water in developing countries, working closely with partners to achieve "A Water-Secure World for All" by sustaining water resources, delivering services, and building resilience.

From https://www.worldbank.org/ 12/17/2021

TOP ↑

Chinese A-Share IPOs, Funds Raised Will Hit Record High in 2021: Report

Companies listed on Chinese A-Share market through initial public offerings (IPOs) and the funds raised will hit a record high in 2021, according to a recent report released by the consulting firm Ernst & Young (EY). A total of 492 companies are estimated to be listed on the Chinese A-share market in 2021, up 25 percent year on year, and the proceeds raised expanded by 14 percent from a year ago to reach 536.3 billion yuan (about 84.26 billion U.S. dollars), data from the report showed. The Shanghai and Shenzhen stock exchanges are expected to rank second and third, respectively, among global bourses by the number of IPOs. Six Chinese companies entered the world's top 10 IPOs in terms of the funds raised, according to the report. It also revealed that 2021 has been the most active year for IPOs in the past two decades globally, with a total of 2,388 companies going public worldwide and raising 453.3 billion U.S. dollars by the time of this report's release. The number was up by 64 percent and 67 percent, respectively, compared with last year.

From http://www.news.cn/ 12/18/2021

TOP ↑

Chengdu-Chongqing Economic Circle to Boost 160 Key Projects in 2022

The Chengdu-Chongqing economic circle will boost 160 key projects in 2022, involving about 2 trillion yuan (313.97 billion yuan), amid the country's efforts to foster a key growth pole in western China, local authorities said. The Chengdu-Chongqing economic circle is another important regional development strategy, following the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region, the Yangtze River Delta and the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area. In October, the country issued a master plan for the construction of the Chengdu-Chongqing economic circle. By 2025, the Chengdu-Chongqing economic circle will witness significant increases in economic strength, development vitality and international influence, and about 66 percent of its permanent residents are expected to be living in urban areas, said the plan. Covering about 185,000 square km, the Chengdu-Chongqing economic circle takes up 1.9 percent of the country's total land territory. In 2019, the economic circle had a permanent population of around 96 million and a GDP of 6.3 trillion yuan, accounting for 6.9 percent and 6.3 percent of the national total, respectively.

From http://www.news.cn/ 12/19/2021

TOP ↑

China Strives to Keep Employment Stable

Facing the COVID-19 impact and downward pressure of the economy, China is looking to keep employment stable. As measures keep rolling out to ensure people get jobs, more policies are needed to cope with the COVID-19 impact. Employment bears the brunt of the downward pressure on the economy, said Lian Ping, chief economist at Zhixin Investment Research Institute, noting that it is crucial to give priority to employment in economic and social development as well as macro policies. The country's job market continued to pick up in 2021 with the further recovery of China's economy and enterprises up on their feet. China's surveyed urban unemployment rate stood at 5 percent in November, 0.2 percentage points lower than the same period last year, data from the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) showed. During the first 11 months of this year, the country created 12.07 million new urban jobs, over-fulfilling its annual target, according to the NBS.

Yet, China's economic development is facing pressure from demand contraction, supply shocks and weakening expectations, a recent annual Central Economic Work Conference cautioned. China should strengthen the implementation of the job-first policy in its pursuit of high-quality development and better leverage the role of economic growth in boosting employment, according to a statement released after the meeting. "This requires fiscal, financial, investment, industrial and other policies to support employment, enhance the ability of economic development to create jobs, and benefit low- and middle-income groups," Lian said. To ease the downward pressure on the real economy, China has recently announced a cut in the reserve requirement ratio for financial institutions, which sent a positive signal to China's labor market. In the first nine months of this year, 67.2 billion yuan (about 10.6 billion U.S. dollars) of employment subsidies were distributed, while insurance premiums worth 15.1 billion yuan were returned to enterprises to help them sustain stable payrolls, according to the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security.

As a key group of employment, college graduates in 2022 are expected to reach 10.76 million in China, 1.67 million more than this year. "The unemployment rate among those aged between 16 and 24 is still relatively high, but the problem is mainly structural," said Lian, adding that there is a shortage of skilled talent, especially highly skilled talent. Efforts will be made to boost the employment of young people, including college graduates, and optimize flexible employment and social security policies, said the annual Central Economic Work Conference. Lian suggested that more jobs should be created with supply and services optimized, while efforts should be made in career guidance and vocational training, such as increasing jobs at the primary level communities.

From http://www.news.cn/ 12/19/2021

TOP ↑

Government Investment in Transportation Totals 7.5 Tln Yuan in 2016-2020: Report

Governments at all levels in China invested a total of 7.5 trillion yuan (about 1.2 trillion U.S. dollars) in the transportation sector during the 13th Five-Year Plan period (2016-2020), driving related investment in fixed assets to exceed 16 trillion yuan, according to a report from the Ministry of Finance. When delivering a work report on the allocation and use of government funds for transportation at an ongoing session of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress on Tuesday, vice minister of finance Yu Weiping said that during the five-year period, 5.69 trillion yuan, 1.16 trillion yuan, 0.39 trillion yuan and 0.23 trillion yuan were respectively directed to the highway, railway, civil aviation and water transport sectors. Government investment in transportation also served to support poverty alleviation efforts, the coordinated development of regional transportation, and the fight against COVID-19, the report said. It called for further efforts to improve the mechanism ensuring financial input in transportation, further optimize the composition of fiscal spending in the field of transportation, better leverage the guiding role of government investment, and improve the efficiency of government funds in the transportation sector.

From http://www.news.cn/ 12/21/2021

TOP ↑

China Confident of Keeping Economy Running Within Reasonable Range

China is confident that it has both the conditions and capabilities to ensure the economy keeps running within an appropriate range despite the headwinds, an official with the country's top economic planner told Xinhua in a recent interview. Although it faces pressure from demand contraction, supply shocks and weakening expectations, China's economy has sustained sound momentum, said Ning Jizhe, deputy head of the National Development and Reform Commission. The country's gross domestic product in the first three quarters expanded 9.8 percent year on year, data from the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) shows. Ning, who is also head of the NBS, said China has maintained a leading position globally in coordinating epidemic control and economic development, which underpins its long-term stable economic growth. A complete industrial system, abundant human resources and the world's largest middle-income group of over 400 million people also provide the country with comparative advantages, he said. "China has sufficient policy space to stabilize economic growth," said Ning, adding that the country has a clear-cut policy toolbox for economic development in 2022.

Ning noted that China will continue implementing proactive fiscal policies and prudent monetary policies, as well as making good use of investment and consumption policy tools for steady economic growth next year. A string of measures will be taken to propel reform and opening-up, such as promoting market-based allocation of factors of production, deepening the mixed-ownership reform and shortening the negative list for foreign investment, said Ning. Efforts will also be made to smoothen the national economic cycle, improve the core competitiveness of the manufacturing sector and boost regional coordinated development, he said. Ning highlighted that the intensity of fiscal expenditure should be ensured and spending progress should be accelerated, adding that the timing, extent and efficiency of policy implementation is also a concern. "Cross-cycle adjustment should be coordinated with counter-cycle adjustment," said Ning, explaining that it is conducive to avoiding drastic economic fluctuations and making macro-control more effective. China will focus on stabilizing the economy and making unremitting progress on promoting high-quality development, he said.

From http://www.news.cn/ 12/22/2021

TOP ↑

Minister Prioritizes Stable Growth for Industrial Development

China's Ministry of Industry and Information Technology (MIIT) has stated that stabilizing industrial growth in 2022 is its top priority, and it has urged efforts to promote the upgrading of manufacturing and facilitate digital and green transformations. In a recent interview with Xinhua, Xiao Yaqing, minister of industry and information technology, said that ensuring stable industrial growth, particularly a good start in the first quarter of next year, should be set as the most important task at present, citing high commodity prices and supply chain challenges. According to Xiao, the ministry will roll out multiple measures to boost the development of the industrial sector, which is the "ballast stone" of the macroeconomic market. Xiao called for efforts to guarantee smooth supply channels for key products and relieve the chip shortage in the automobile sector and elsewhere. Financial institutions will be encouraged to enhance support for enterprises' digital upgrade and low-carbon development, and foreign-funded firms will be supported in participating in China's industrial and supply chain construction, according to Xiao. The minister also pledged measures to promote the consumption of new-energy vehicles (NEVs), low-carbon and intelligent home appliances, and cultivate sectors such as intelligent connected vehicles and winter sports equipment that not only lead to sci-tech development but also improve people's livelihoods.

To boost the development of small and medium-sized enterprises, Xiao said the ministry aims to incubate about 3,000 "little giant" firms next year, referring to small enterprises in their early stage of development and focusing on high-end technologies. He also noted that China has made great progress in advancing the digital upgrade and green growth of the industrial sector. Currently, China boasts nearly 1.4 million 5G base stations and over 150 large industrial internet platforms. China's production capacity of crude steel has been cut by over 150 million tonnes in recent years. Looking forward, Xiao called for promoting the application of "5G plus industrial internet" in more scenarios and improving companies' capabilities in using digital technologies. Efforts should also be made to improve green and low-carbon transformation activity in the manufacturing industry, and prevent the disorderly expansion of high-emission sectors, according to Xiao.

From http://www.news.cn/ 12/23/2021

TOP ↑

China Goes All Out to Pursue Low-carbon Growth

Over a year ago, China declared to the world that it would strive to peak its carbon dioxide emissions before 2030 and achieve carbon neutrality before 2060. Behind this solemn commitment, a wide-ranging and profound economic and social transformation has taken shape. Various levels of government are adopting low-carbon policies tailored to local conditions, and industries are exploring their own green development paths, making concerted efforts to achieve the ambitious goals.

GREEN HEATING

It was a freezing midwinter day in Xi'an, capital of northwest China's Shaanxi Province. Zhao Haiyan, 45, wore just a T-shirt and shorts at her home in Lintong, a suburban district of Xi'an as the temperature indoors reached 26 degrees Celsius. Zhao lives in an affordable housing community of more than 400 households, which is equipped with Lintong's first zero-carbon and zero-emission clean energy heating project and the first "geothermal+" new energy heating project. Residents were able to enjoy warm green winters as soon as they moved in back in 2018. Home to the world-renowned terra-cotta warriors, Lintong and the surrounding area have rich geothermal resources. The geothermal heating technology applied in Zhao's community has been updated to prevent any polluting of underground water reserves, said Wang Chao, director of the Lintong New Area Management Committee.

Statistics of the Shaanxi provincial government show that more than 100,000 households in its central plain area have enjoyed green and clean heating services, and the number is expected to reach at least 600,000 over the next few years, reducing the annual emission of carbon dioxide by 3.6 million tonnes than heating by burning coal. Utilizing green energy has also brought additional financial benefits. "Based on the 70-square-km urban planning area of the Lintong New Area, comprehensive geothermal energy utilization is expected to create an annual income of about 8.7 billion yuan (about 1.37 billion U.S. dollars)," said Wang.

GREEN POWER

A "Golden Triangle" of energy and chemical industries is located in the Muus Desert in northwest China, which accounts for 47 percent of the country's total fossil fuel reserves. Thanks to years of sand control, photovoltaic power stations and windmills have sprung up in the desert over the years, and an electrical power system combining wind and solar energy has been established in the region. Yulin City of Shaanxi Province is a core component of the triangle region. According to data of the State Grid Yulin Power Supply Company, as of Dec. 20, Yulin's new energy on-grid power consumption totaled 20.2 billion kWh this year, up 37 percent over the same period last year, reducing emissions of carbon dioxide by 15 million tonnes, sulfur dioxide by 10,100 tonnes, nitrogen oxides by 42,500 tonnes and dust by 4,900 tonnes.

The region is also making breakthroughs in the fields of carbon capture, energy storage and integrated emission management technology. The carbon dioxide capture and storage project constructed by the Guohua Jinneng Company of Guoneng Group is currently the largest post-combustion carbon dioxide capture project in China's coal-fired power plants. It was put into operation in Jinjie Industrial Park of Yulin in June. Meanwhile, China continues to export green and low-carbon technologies to the world. Earlier this year, the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology released the sixth batch of "individual champions" in the manufacturing industry, which included the "Blast Furnace Top Gas Recovery Turbine Unit" developed by Shaanxi Blower (Group) Co., Ltd.

This technology, referred to as TRT, converts useless residual pressure and heat, nitric acid tail gas, industrial waste gas and other waste materials into valuable mechanical energy, thus driving the generator to generate electricity. When applied in the industrial field, it can save costs and also realize green production. "Taking the 5,000-cubic-meter blast furnace as an example, after installing the TRT device, about 28,000 kilowatts of residual heat and pressure energy can be recycled per hour," said Li Xuefeng, a staff member of the company. "At present, we have developed and produced more than 1,200 TRT devices, which are distributed in various projects in China and around the world. The total installed power is 21.5 GW, which can save 48 million tonnes of standard coal every year, equivalent to an annual carbon dioxide emission reduction of 125 million tonnes," Li added.

GREEN LOGISTICS

Located in the Xi'an International Port Area, the "Asia No. 1" intelligent industrial park of China's e-commerce giant JD.com is one of the largest intelligent logistics centers in northwest China, with a capacity to process over 500,000 orders daily. Green and low-carbon infrastructure can be seen everywhere in the nearly 300,000-square-meter park. Roofs spanning some 100,000 square meters are equipped with photovoltaic power-generating equipment with a capacity of 9 MW. From January to October this year, the facility generated 8,500 MWh of electricity, equivalent to the electricity consumption of 4,000 households in a year and a reduction of 5,670 tonnes of carbon emissions, said Xing Xiaoguang, head of warehousing in the park. With the help of an intelligent control platform, the automated warehouse does not need to turn on any lights in operation, and the transmission device can automatically cut off power within 1 minute when there is no transmission task, said Xing.

The green trend has also extended to packaging. According to Wang Kai, who is in charge of the automated stereoscopic warehouse of the park, unlike commonly used cartons made of five-layer corrugated boards, they use three-layer models and ensure that each carton weighs no more than 400 grams. "This alone can eliminate the use of more than 200,000 tonnes of paper pulp every year," said Wang. "We are constantly exploring paths to saving energy and reducing carbon in all aspects of our operations. We will make every effort to build the first 'carbon neutral' demonstration park in China's logistics industry in 2022," said Xing.

From http://www.news.cn/ 12/29/2021

TOP ↑

China Sees Surge in Manufacturing Power Development: Report

China has witnessed the largest increase in the manufacturing power development index of any major country in the world, according to a report published Wednesday. The report from the Chinese Academy of Engineering (CAE) revealed that China is the only major country that has seen its manufacturing grow in scale in 2020. Besides the scale of development, the manufacturing power development index also takes into account other criteria, including quality and benefit, structural optimization and sustainable development. The index reflects the development level of a country's manufacturing industry. China's manufacturing industry has a complete system and is developing to a medium and high level, with continuous improvements in competitiveness, said Shan Zhongde, an academician with the CAE.

From http://www.news.cn/ 12/29/2021

TOP ↑

Cross-Strait Trade Volume Sets Record High in 2021: Mainland Spokesperson

The trade volume between the Chinese mainland and Taiwan set a record high in 2021, as the figure jumped 27.3 percent to nearly 298.3 billion U.S. dollars in the first 11 months of this year. Ma Xiaoguang, a spokesperson for the Taiwan Affairs Office of the State Council, made the statement Wednesday at a press conference. During the January to November period, the mainland exports to Taiwan amounted to 70.8 billion U.S. dollars, up 31.2 percent year on year, while the mainland imports from Taiwan reached 227.5 billion dollars, up 26.2 percent year on year, according to Ma. At the same time, a total of 5,923 Taiwan-funded enterprises were newly established on the mainland, a year-on-year increase of 34.7 percent, said Ma. Two new cross-Strait industrial cooperation zones and two new cross-Strait bases devoted to boosting employment and entrepreneurship for youth were also set up on the mainland, Ma added.

From http://www.news.cn/ 12/29/2021

TOP ↑

What an Unusual 2021 Says About the Future of China's Economy

In a year highlighted by unexpected disruptions and mounting uncertainties, China is set to secure stable growth with the help of its swift policy response. The world's second-largest economy expanded 9.8 percent year on year in the first three quarters, a hard-won result amid various challenges including pandemic resurgences and mounting debt pressures, reflecting the effectiveness of policies to support growth while defusing risks. For the full year, the World Bank projected that China's economy would grow 8 percent, higher than the government target of "above 6 percent." A review of the government's fine-tuned policymaking in 2021 gives a glimpse into how China addressed the common challenges facing the global economy and what that means for the year 2022 and beyond.

PRECISE PANDEMIC CONTROL

Two years into the pandemic, global policymakers are still trying to find the best way to balance growth with pandemic control. China has adopted stringent pandemic control policies in 2021, wiping out new outbreaks as soon as possible with early detection, swift response, targeted containment, and effective treatment of COVID-19 patients. Such policies have proved effective not only in ensuring public health, but also in an economic sense as the gains from normalized production and consumption outweigh pandemic control costs, analysts said. "Overall the policies have brought significant benefits. Thanks to the policies, the growth rate of the Chinese economy outpaced the majority of other economies for the past year," said Lu Ting, chief China economist with securities firm Nomura. Next year, striking a balance between precise pandemic control and economic growth will be increasingly critical, Lu said. While COVID-19 has brought disruptions to consumption, the impact will be mitigated by the "learning effect," reflected in strengthened government capabilities in precisely containing COVID-19 and improving people's willingness to consume offline, the China International Capital Corporation (CICC) said in a report. "For 2022, we should not be overly pessimistic about the possible impact from COVID-19. We expect household consumption to mildly recover thanks to pro-growth policies," CICC said.

TARGETED CREDIT SUPPORT

Another challenge facing global policymakers in 2021 is how to provide much-needed credit support to the COVID-battered economy without adding excessive debt. Instead of printing money and pumping cash into the whole financial system, China has adopted a prudent monetary policy in 2021, channeling funds through targeted monetary tools to specific sectors such as manufacturing as well as the more vulnerable small and medium-sized companies. The country's central bank has cut the reserve requirement ratio (RRR) for financial institutions twice this year to offer liquidity to the real economy. In addition, the country has been more proactive in taking fiscal measures to shore up growth, cutting taxes and fees for companies while transferring central funds to support regions hit by natural disasters.

On the other hand, the country has remained cautious in channeling funds to the housing sector, continuing its deleveraging campaign that has been going on for years under the principle of "housing is for living in, not for speculation." In its latest effort to bolster the real economy, the country cut the one-year market-based benchmark lending rate by 5 basis points in December but kept unchanged the over-five-year benchmark rate, on which many lenders base their mortgage rates. The recent cuts in the reserve requirement ratio and lending rate signal a more accommodative monetary policy stance, although financial sector de-risking efforts are expected to continue, the World Bank said in a report. In 2022, China will continue implementing proactive fiscal policies and prudent monetary policies, the tone-setting Central Economic Work Conference decided, adding that the country will boost the virtuous cycle and healthy development of the property sector with city-specific policies.

ORDERLY GREEN TRANSITION

Despite mounting growth pressure, China has been steadily pushing its carbon peaking and carbon neutral agenda with institutional innovations in 2021. As a market-based mechanism to incentivize carbon emission cuts by companies, a national carbon market started trading in July, which has seen active trading of carbon emission quotas. While encouraging the use of green energy, policymakers have paid special attention to the potential disruption to the energy supply and economic activity, reiterating that local governments should avoid "campaign-style" carbon reduction. "Achieving carbon peaking and carbon neutrality is an inherent requirement for promoting high-quality development, which requires unswerving efforts.

It is impossible to achieve the goal all at once," the Central Economic Work Conference said. To ensure a smooth transition toward low-carbon development, China has been stepping up investment in green technologies, and creating opportunities for both domestic and foreign companies. Under the carbon goals, investment into the green manufacturing sector will see notable growth for the next year, especially sectors including pollution control, the digital economy as well as new energy and materials, said the Bank of Communications in a report. Investment in these areas will stimulate short-term demand and aid China in transitioning to new growth engines in the long term, the report said.

From http://www.news.cn/ 12/30/2021

TOP ↑

JAPAN: To Help Developing Nations Improve Cybersecurity

The government adopted on Tuesday its basic policy for helping developing countries to improve their capacity in the field of cybersecurity. The importance of promoting digitalization is increasing in developing countries amid the spread of the novel coronavirus. Under the policy, Japan will expand the scope of its aid to cover economies in the Indo-Pacific region, after focusing its support in the field on member states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. “Amid the rapid expansion of digitalization in developing countries, it’s important to globally spread the philosophy of ‘ensuring a free, fair and secure cyberspace,’ which was set forth in the [government’s] cyber strategy,” Chief Cabinet Secretary Hirokazu Matsuno said at a meeting of the government’s cybersecurity strategy headquarters the same day. Matsuno heads the headquarters. Cybersecurity has become one of the areas for international cooperation, with the United States and China expected to start offering assistance to ASEAN member states to help improve their cybersecurity measures. Specifically, Japan plans to strengthen its support for electricity providers, railway and other important infrastructure operators through a public-private partnership. In addition, Japan will work on making international rules on the use of cyberspace. As there is a global shortage of highly skilled cybersecurity experts, the government will also make efforts to nurture human resources to give medium- to long-term support to Japanese companies operating abroad. As for the scope of aid recipients, the basic policy says that Japan will consider the possibility of offering support to African countries.

From https://the-japan-news.com 12/15/2021

TOP ↑

Govt Projects 3.2% Economic Growth

The government Thursday adopted an official projection of 3.2% growth in gross domestic product in price-adjusted real terms for fiscal 2022 from next April. The government revised up its GDP growth estimate from the 2.2% forecast in July this year, factoring in a boost from large-scale stimulus measures to cushion the impact of the novel coronavirus pandemic. The new economic outlook, adopted at an extraordinary Cabinet meeting, will be used to calculate the government’s tax revenue estimate in its fiscal 2022 budget proposal. If the 3.2% GDP growth is realized, it will be the steepest rise since the 3.3% increase in fiscal 2010. In fiscal 2022, Japan’s real GDP is forecast to hit a record high of ¥556 trillion, against the previous high of ¥554 trillion marked in fiscal 2018. In nominal terms, the government expects GDP growth of 3.6%. For fiscal 2021, the government revised down its real GDP growth projection to 2.6% from 3.7%, reflecting steep cuts in automobile production due to a surge in new coronavirus cases in summer this year and supply chain disruptions. The government delayed its target of bringing the country’s GDP back to the level of October-December 2019, before the novel coronavirus crisis, to January-March 2022 from the end of this month. The government believes that its new economic stimulus measures with record fiscal spending of ¥55.7 trillion will push up the real GDP by a total of 5.6%, including 3.6% expected for fiscal 2022. In fiscal 2022, the government expects personal consumption to grow 4% following a 2.5% rise in fiscal 2021 and corporate capital expenditures to rise 5.1% after a 2.5% increase. The average real GDP growth forecast among private-sector economists surveyed by the Japan Center for Economic Research stood at 2.7% for fiscal 2021 and 3% for fiscal 2022.

From https://the-japan-news.com 12/23/2021

TOP ↑

Japan Seeking Regional Revitalization Through Digital Tourism

The Japan Tourism Agency is conducting trials at five locations in the country to promote local revitalization through new tourism services using digital technologies. In some of the experiments, a quick response, or QR, code and a facial recognition system are being used to encourage people visiting large-scale event venues and other facilities to tour around nearby areas as well and spend more on goods and services. The Kashima Antlers, a team in the J1 top division of the Japan Professional Football League, or J.League, attracted some 20,000 spectators on average for its matches held at its home stadium in the city of Kashima, Ibaraki Prefecture, in 2019. But this had little effect in boosting the local economy as many spectators tended to return home soon after matches without visiting nearby facilities. In a test conducted for three days last month when Antlers matches were held, people were allowed to obtain points by scanning a QR code at some 40 locations near the stadium, including restaurants, souvenir shops and "michi no eki" roadside rest areas, using their smartphones and exchange the points with Antlers goods, such as jerseys and towels. The QR code was scanned over 3,000 times, far more than the target of 2,000 times.

"Usually, I only visit an eatery after a match, but I went to a michi no eki and two other locations" during the test period, a 56-year-old Antlers supporter said. In areas around five famous lakes known as "Fuji Goko" in Yamanashi Prefecture in November, Fuji Kyuko Co. started to sell a digital ticket that can be used to pay fees for some 30 tourist facilities, including the Fuji-Q Highland amusement park in the city of Fujiyoshida, and railway and bus fares. Also, a facial recognition system has been introduced for the convenience of tourists. "We'll explore the possibility of offering broader services, such as by expanding the scope of facilities" where the digital ticket can be used, Masao Amemiya, a Fuji Kyuko executive officer, said. The Japan Tourism Agency is planning to continue similar tests in fiscal 2022, which starts next April. "Our goal is to establish a business model that makes it possible to continue operations without relying on state subsidies," an official at the agency said.

From https://the-japan-news.com/ 12/26/2021

TOP ↑

SOUTH KOREA: 5G Users Top 19m in October Data

The number of smartphone users on 5G mobile networks had topped 19 million as of October, data showed Wednesday, as new smartphone launches boosted user growth in the latest generation networks. The total number of 5G users reached 19.38 million in October, accounting for around 27 percent of the total 72.15 million mobile subscriptions in the country, according to the data from the Ministry of Science and ICT. South Korea, which has a population of 52 million, first commercialized 5G networks in April 2019 and has so far secured 5G coverage across its 85 cities. The latest data marks an increase from 18.41 million 5G subscriptions in September, with the launches of Samsung Electronics Co.'s new foldable phones -- the Galaxy Z Fold3 and Galaxy Z Flip3 -- in late August. The release of Apple Inc.'s new iPhone 13 series in October further boosted user growth.

Samsung's new foldable smartphones have been widely popular here, with their sales topping 1 million in just 39 days after its launch. The new iPhones were also met with warm reception in South Korea, with the first series of preorders from top carrier SK Telecom selling out in just nine minutes in October. SK Telecom Co., the country's largest mobile carrier by subscriptions, had the most 5G users at 9.13 million, followed by KT Corp. at 5.92 million and LG Uplus Corp. at 4.29 million, the data showed. The total number of 5G users is likely to reach 20 million by the end of this year, given that the average monthly net additions in 5G users stood at around 720,000.

From http://www.koreaherald.com 12/01/2021

TOP ↑

ADB Maintains Its 2021 Growth Outlook for S. Korean Economy at 4 Pct

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) on Tuesday kept its 2021 growth outlook for the South Korean economy at 4 percent, as economic recovery momentum has extended amid robust exports. The estimate by the Manila-based bank -- unchanged from its previous forecast in September -- is on par with the growth forecasts by the Bank of Korea and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. The International Monetary Fund forecast 4.3 percent for South Korea this year. The ADB kept its 2022 growth outlook for South Korea at 3.1 percent. The South Korean economy is on a recovery track on the back of solid exports. Exports, which account for half of the country's economy, grew 32 percent on-year to a record high of US$60.44 billion in November, extending their gains to the 13th straight month. But it also faces growing downside risks from the latest upsurge in COVID-19 cases and the spread of the omicron variant.

The South Korean economy grew 0.3 percent in the third quarter from three months earlier, from a 0.8 percent on-quarter gain in the second quarter, according to central bank data. The ADB, meanwhile, raised its 2021 outlook for South Korea's consumer prices to 2.3 percent from its September estimate of 2 percent, citing improving consumer spending and surging energy costs. The bank's 2022 inflation forecast was raised to 1.9 percent from 1.6 percent. The ADB lowered its 2021 growth outlook for 46 developing Asian countries to 7 percent from its September estimate of 7.1 percent, citing the global flare-up in COVID-19 cases. It also cut its 2022 growth forecast for the region to 5.3 percent from 5.4 percent. The bank said the spread of the omicron variant and the slow progress in vaccinations in some countries will serve as major downside risks for the economic growth in the region.

From https://en.yna.co.kr 12/14/2021

TOP ↑

Korea to Provide 10 Times Faster Wi-Fi in Subways for Free

Starting next year, subway passengers in South Korea will be able to enjoy free Wi-Fi services that are 10 times faster, the Ministry of Science and ICT said Tuesday. According to the ministry, subway commuters will be able to use Wi-Fi 6E that has a more reliable internet connection, and is 10 times faster than the current Wi-Fi speed. The upgraded Wi-Fi speed will be on par with that of private telecoms networks. Previously, the ministry had limited the transmitted signal power level in subways to prevent frequency interference with local mobile carriers and broadcast media. “By relaxing the regulations, we’ve decided to take a huge leap forward to enhance the quality of subway Wi-Fi for the citizens,” said Choi Woo-hyuck, director of network policy, in a statement. Citing a strong demand for faster Wi-Fi in subways, the ministry said it had completed tests with the three telecommunications networks -- KT, SKT and LG Uplus -- and didn’t find any frequency interferences with their relay stations. “During the test on Seong-su line of Seoul’s Subway Line No. 2, data showed the Wi-Fi speed was 10 times faster than the current speed in subways when we used WiFi 6E under a controlled experiment,” a ministry official said. “We will continue to give policy support for the three mobile carriers that have agreed to expand the fast Wi-Fi service nationwide, starting from Seoul Subway Lines No. 2, 5, 6, 7 and 8,” the official added. The new Wi-Fi services will be available in subways starting early next year.

From http://www.koreaherald.com 12/21/2021

TOP ↑

S. Korea to Open Up Public Wi-Fi in Network Outage, Disasters

The Ministry of Science and ICT said Wednesday it will open up public Wi-Fi networks in case of network outages to help citizens gain access to basic telecommunication services. The decision came two months after KT Corp., a major South Korean telecom operator, suffered a nationwide network outage of services due to a routing error in the process of upgrading its equipment. The outage crippled businesses, including schools, restaurants and other facilities, for over an hour on Oct. 25. The government plans to provide Wi-Fi network under the name "Public WiFi Emergency" in regions affected by the outage once a telecommunication warning is issued, the science ministry said. The ministry said it will also foster cooperation among telecom operators, including SK Telecom and LG Uplus, to build a backup system that allows users to gain access to the internet via third-party wired networks.

From https://en.yna.co.kr 12/29/2021

TOP ↑

South-East Asia

MALAYSIA: Unemployment Rate Dips to 4.3 Pct in October, Lowest Since April 2020

Malaysia's unemployment rate dipped to 4.3 percent in October 2021, down 0.2 percent from 4.5 percent in September, the lowest rate since April 2020, official data showed Wednesday. "The continuous resumption of more economic and social and recreation activities led the labor force situation to remain stable in October. This was reflected by the higher number of employment during the month while unemployment was on a declining trend," the Department of Statistics Malaysia (DOSM) said in a statement. According to the DOSM, the upward trend of employed persons persisted during October by registering an addition of 0.6 percent month-on-month to 15.55 million persons, with the employment-to-population ratio going up by 0.3 percentage points to record 65.8 percent. Meanwhile, the number of unemployed persons continued to fall 3.4 percent to 705,000 from 729,600 in September. "Although the number of unemployed persons was on a declining trend, it remained relatively higher than the pre-pandemic period," said the DOSM. The number of the labor force in October also gained by 0.4 percent month-on-month to record 16.26 million persons with the labor force participation rate stepping up further by 0.2 percentage points to 68.8 percent. Going forward, the DOSM sees the implementation of the National Recovery Plan which has accelerated the vaccination process among Malaysia's population, and Budget 2022 which focuses on rejuvenating the labor market, to support the businesses as well as employees, hence accelerating the recovery of the labor market.

From https://english.news.cn 12/08/2021

TOP ↑

PHILIPPINES: Poverty Incidence Up to 23.7 Pct in First Half of 2021

The poverty incidence among the Philippine population increased to 23.7 percent during the first half of 2021, the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) said on Friday. "This translates to 26.14 million Filipinos who lived below the poverty threshold estimated at 12,082 pesos (241.72 U.S. dollars), on average, for a family of five per month in the first semester of 2021," PSA head Dennis Mapa said in an online briefing. On the other hand, he said subsistence incidence among Filipinos, or the proportion of Filipinos whose income is not enough to meet even the basic food needs, was registered at 9.9 percent or about 10.94 million Filipinos in the first six months. On average, Mapa said the monthly food threshold for a family of five for the same period was estimated at 8,393 pesos (167.92 U.S. dollars). Socioeconomic Planning Secretary Karl Kendrick Chua said regions with stricter COVID-19 quarantines tended to see more significant poverty increases than regions under less stringent quarantines. Chua said the poverty incidence in Metro Manila, home to more than 13 million people, increased by around 1.2 percentage points. The government imposed hard lockdowns in the capital region, the epicenter of the COVID-19 outbreak in the Southeast Asian country. "With stronger growth in the second half of 2021, as we further relax restrictions and increase the vaccination rate, we can expect poverty incidence to decrease," Chua said. "Our policy to reopen the economy has accelerated our recovery and moderated the impact of the pandemic on the poor," he said. Chua said the start of the vaccination program enabled the safer reopening of the economy, allowing some 1.3 million workers to regain their employment compared to the pre-pandemic level.

From https://english.news.cn 12/17/2021

TOP ↑

SINGAPORE: 2021 GDP Growth Forecast Revised Up to 6.9 Pct

Singapore's GDP is expected to grow by 6.9 percent this year according to economists and analysts in the Survey of Professional Forecasters, the Monetary Authority of Singapore (MAS) said in a report on Wednesday. This is slightly above the 6.6-percent forecast in the previous survey released by the MAS in September. In the current survey, the respondents expect the economy to grow by 4.6 percent year-on-year in the fourth quarter of 2021. As for inflation, the respondents forecast that Singapore's Consumer Price Index for all items (CPI-All Items) would grow by 2.1 percent in 2021, and the MAS core inflation, which excludes the costs of accommodation and private road transport, would come in at 0.9 percent. The economists and analysts forecast that Singapore's GDP would grow by 4 percent next year, when the CPI-All Items inflation is expected to hit 2.1 percent, and the MAS core inflation is forecast to come in at 1.8 percent. The MAS said this month's survey report reflects the views received from 22 respondents and does not represent MAS' views or forecasts.

From https://english.news.cn 12/08/2021

TOP ↑

THAILAND: Launching 1st 5G Smart Hospital

Thailand on Thursday launched a new 5G smart hospital project at Siriraj Hospital in Bangkok, marking the first-of-its-kind in Thailand and the ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) region. With the help of Chinese tech company Huawei, patients administered in Siriraj Hospital will be able to access a full package of digital services such as 5G ambulance, cloud-based AI diagnoses and telemedicine. The project, jointly established by the National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission (NBTC), Siriraj Hospital, and Huawei Technologies (Thailand) Co., aims to bring a more efficient and convenient experience to patients and promote the hospital to become a model for smart hospitals in Thailand and the region. "Today is an important first step in the utilization of digital technologies and 5G in the medical field. This will help reduce processes for medical personnel, decrease overall risk, and will improve the effectiveness and efficiency of healthcare for patients," Thai Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha said at the event.

Meanwhile, Siriraj Hospital and Huawei will establish a Joint Innovation Lab with the goal to innovate new 5G applications. Currently, the two have started piloting portable medical boxes, unmanned vehicles, medical carts, and smart hospital beds based on 5G technology. Around 30 5G medical applications are expected to be incubated and promoted nationwide next year. Chinese Ambassador to Thailand Han Zhiqiang highly praised the China-Thailand 5G cooperation so far, saying "it has become a model for the region, helping Thailand become the first country in Southeast Asia to launch 5G for commercial use." "China is glad to work together with Thailand to address common challenges and drive economic development, and will keep supporting companies like Huawei in improving the lives of Thai and Chinese people through concepts such as Smart Hospitals," he added. Digital transformation of the medical industry is one of the important parts of Thailand 4.0 Strategy. Thailand's Ministry of Public Health signed a memorandum of understanding with Huawei in September, with the goal to primarily utilize 5G technology to boost the country's healthcare infrastructure.

From https://english.news.cn/ 12/17/2021

TOP ↑

VIETNAM: E-vehicles to Consume over 71.87 Billion kWh by 2050

Domestic e-vehicles will consume about 71.87 billion kWh by 2050 when the whole population will use 100 per cent e-bikes and 70 per cent e-automobiles, according to experts. The comments were made during a seminar to discuss the future of e-vehicle development in Việt Nam held yesterday in Hà Nội. Energy expert Nguyễn Quốc Khánh said the consumption was equivalent to 10 times the output of the Hòa Bình hydropower plant. He said in the 2014-2020 period, some 5.14 million motorbikes and 255,000 cars were registered. Of this figure, the energy consumption for the traffic sector accounted for 21.4 per cent of the country’s total energy consumption in 2014, or an increase of 4.9 per cent between 2014-19. The emissions totalled 33.2 million tonnes, or 19.3 per cent of the country’s energy sector. During the seminar, Khánh outlined three main scenarios for e-vehicle development. In the first scenario, the number e-motorbikes will be low, mainly focusing on e-motorbikes with 18 per cent by 2030 and 40 per cent by 2050. For the second scenario, the ratio of e-motorbikes will account for 34 per cent by 2030 and 65 per cent by 2050. And e-automobiles will account for 30 per cent by 2030; 70 per cent by 2050; e-buses 10 per cent by 2030; 30 per cent by 2050 and medium and light trucks will account for five per cent by 2030 and 30 per cent by 2050. Khánh said with such scenarios, the power consumption demand will be huge. Of which, the electricity consumption for the transport sector will reach 3.99 billion kWh by 2030. This figure will reach 17.57 billion kWh by 2050.

Electric and battery safety is a must

Nguyễn Đức Tuyên of the University of Science and Technology said apart from Việt Nam’s automotive manufacturer (Vinfast)'s 200 charging stations, there was no infrastructure for e-vehicle development in Việt Nam. Vietnamese standards for the development of e-vehicles were not available. To promote the development of e-vehicles in Việt Nam, it was essential to complete technical standards relating to electric safety for fast charging stations and battery systems. In addition, the Government needed to offer incentives for purchasing prices, charging costs, installation of charging stations and tariffs on high carbon emissions. Private e-vehicle lanes should also be developed, said Tuyên. Sharing Tuyên's view, Trần Quang Hà of the Ministry of Transport said that electrical and battery safety was a must for e-vehicles. The country has worked out a plan to develop a battery standard by 2022. To invest and conduct testing in line with international standards is a problem, involving technical factors such as vibrations and the environment, according to industry insiders.

From https://vietnamnews.vn 12/22/2021

TOP ↑

Việt Nam Targets Further Digital Transformation in 2022

The new year will be one of promoting digital transformation across all industries on a national scale. It will be the first year of implementing new strategies on digital infrastructure, data, technology industry and technology enterprise. Minister of Information and Communications Nguyễn Mạnh Hùng made the prediction at a conference held on Wednesday. A report from the ministry showed that the ranking indicators in many fields of the information and communication industry are highly regarded by international organisations. In 2021, the revenue of the information and communication industry reached VNĐ3.4 quadrillion, hitting all set targets and representing a nine per cent year-on-year increase. The largest contribution to the industry's revenue came from the ICT industry, with this year's revenue estimated at more than US$136 billion, an increase of more than $11.4 billion compared to 2020. The main contributor was FDI enterprises with more than $117 billion. This year also marked a strong growth in the number of ICT businesses. Việt Nam currently has 64,000 digital technology enterprises, adding 5,600 enterprises since 2020.

The challenges of the pandemic have promoted the digital transformation process. In just a short time, the national digital transformation has spread widely at a rapid pace, creating a wave of digital transformation across ministries, branches, localities, agencies, and businesses across the country. In this digital transformation process, Vietnamese digital technology enterprises have demonstrated their pioneering role in research, development and innovation, mastering technology and making important contributions to the development process of the digital economy. Hùng said that COVID-19 is a hundred-year push for digital transformation. The year 2021 has pushed the whole country into digital transformation. To promote digital transformation, it is necessary to synchronise digital institutions, digital infrastructure, digital production tools, digital management tools, digital human resources, digital markets, and digital law management to create a healthy digital environment, managing risks in cyberspace. The ministry set the target of an information technology, electronics and telecommunications industry with the new mission of shifting from outsourcing and assembly to "Make in Việt Nam", which means making products in Việt Nam, mastering and creating technology. In which, the proportion of "Make in Việt Nam" by 2025 would reach over 45 per cent.

The country will have 100,000 digital technology enterprises by 2025, forming at least 10 digital technology enterprises that play a leading role. The firms would have international competitiveness, with a turnover of over $1 billion each. The whole country has at least 10 localities with revenue of the information technology industry over $1 billion. Deputy Prime Minister Vũ Đức Đam said the ministry had developed strategies and projects for digital transformation. They needed to promote digital transformation and application of information technology in localities by modelling, leading and supporting. From experience in dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic, the Ministry of Information and Communications needed to continue to set up many working groups with the participation of businesses and experts to solve the specific digital transformation problem for each commune, district and province. He said that in 2022, there should be stronger changes in database building. Three large databases on population, business, and land, along with e-payments, digital transformation, digital economy, digital society and the digital government would make substantial progress. In the face of unpredictable developments of the COVID-19 pandemic, the information and communication industry needed to continue to improve technological solutions to help control the pandemic, in the spirit of proactively taking the initiative and changing platforms in response to the situation. In addition, the ICT industry and IT enterprises needed to continue to develop platforms that promote digital transformation such as e-commerce, e-learning with the support of sectors, localities and people.

From https://vietnamnews.vn/ 12/24/2021

TOP ↑

Online Learning Platforms Must Improve as Online Learning Here to Stay Under 'New Normal'

Việt Nam’s education system has adapted well to online teaching and learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, but online tests conducted across different applications has revealed some limitations, raising doubts in the community about the quality of online learning. The limitations centre around the organisation and management of online tests. Experts say that, along with building a common foundation for online teaching, schools also need to invest in digitising learning resources and building smart classrooms that are adaptable to both in-person and online teaching. The common platform must be suitable for different localities. Teachers of the Đống Đa Junior Secondary School in Đống Đa District in Hà Nội are familiar with teaching through applications such as Zoom, Google Meet and Microsoft Teams. However, the management of learners and organising online tests to ensure quality and efficiency is a concern for teachers and the school managing board. Đinh Thị Vân Hồng, principal of the school, said the school conducted first-semester exams online.

For each subject, teachers in different classes used different online platforms, so the students' tests were also on different platforms, for example, LMS or Azota. “It leads to the problem that there is no uniformity so we have difficulty in management,” she said.

Currently, there are too many online applications used in schools across the country. For example, a lesson may be held on Zoom, checked on Google forms, then tests sent on Azota or Zalo. Headteachers have a hard time managing and monitoring the number of students in each online class. Therefore, a powerful online training software system that is suitable for general use is the desire of many schools. Nguyễn Quốc Bình, principal of the Lương Thế Bình Junior Secondary and High School in Hà Nội, said that schools had to self-discover and self-research online teaching platforms and select the most suitable one. Online teaching platforms have advantages, but also limitations. “If only we had an identical online teaching and learning system, I think the quality of teaching and learning would be better,” he said. Education experts said that to overcome limitations and improve the quality of online training in the context of "flexibly and safely adapting to the pandemic", it would be necessary to unify the system.

Professor Nguyễn Đình Đức, from the Hà Nội National University, said that first of all, Việt Nam should build a public online teaching software platform for schools, and upgrade facilities and internet quality, so that teaching could be taught in any form. “This online software is very important because we can build lessons. Based on that software, we can share experiences and we can control the learning process in a unified way. Managers and even parents can check and supervise," he said. With many years of experience in organising and managing distance learning programmes, PhD Trương Tiến Tùng, former principal of the Hà Nội Open University, said that the idea was to build software specifically for online training so that schools across the country could use it together. It should be a long-term and national strategy, so that the educational sector could take advantage of the current online education platforms available and then design more appropriate features to make them more suitable to Vietnamese education. The close combination of in-person and online training is considered a new teaching method in the "new normal" context. Experts say that, along with building a public platform for online teaching, schools also needed to invest in digitising learning resources and building smart classrooms that most effectively exploit these platforms.

From https://vietnamnews.vn/ 12/27/2021

TOP ↑

Vietnam's Economy Grows 2.58 pct in 2021

Vietnam posted a modest gross domestic product (GDP) growth of 2.58 percent in 2021 amid severe impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, lower than the rate of 2.91 percent in 2020, the country's General Statistics Office announced Wednesday. The sector of agriculture, forestry and fishery grew by 2.9 percent against the same period last year, while industry and construction grew 4.05 percent, and services up 1.22 percent. They respectively contributed 13.97 percent, 63.8 percent and 22.23 percent to the overall growth, said the office. In the fourth quarter alone, the country's economy expanded 5.22 percent year on year, firmly bouncing back from the sharpest contraction ever of 6.17 percent in the third quarter as many major economic centers were hit by the COVID-19 pandemic. In a report released October, the World Bank lowered Vietnam's economic growth forecast this year to 2-2.5 percent from the August projection of 4.8 percent, citing stringent social distancing rules and manufacturing facilities shutdown as the leading causes. Vietnam will strive to achieve a GDP growth of between 6 and 6.5 percent in 2022 while effectively combating the COVID-19 pandemic, according to a plan recently adopted by its top legislature.

From https://english.news.cn 12/29/2021

TOP↑

Agricultural, Forestry and Fishery Export Turnover Reaches Record High in 2021

Export turnover of agricultural, forest and fishery products in Việt Nam reached a record high of US$48.6 billion this year, an increase of nearly 15 per cent compared to 2020. As well as reaching a record high, turnover was also $4.6 billion more than the target set for the country’s agriculture sector earlier this year.Speaking at a meeting on Wednesday to review this year’s performance of agriculture sector, Deputy Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development Phùng Đức Tiến proudly reported that in 2021, ten Vietnamese agriculture products had a turnover of over $1 billion, and six had a turnover of more than $3 billion, which are timber, shrimp, vegetable and fruits, cashew, rice and rubber products. Export turnover of timber and forestry products is estimated to reach $15.6 billion this year, accounting for more than 30 per cent of the total export turnover of agricultural, forestry and fishery products. Việt Nam is now ranked first in ASEAN, second in Asia and fifth in the world in terms of timber and forestry product export. Việt Nam enterprises generated $8.9 billion from exporting aquaculture products, despite most aquaculture export activities being halted for three months due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Deputy Minister Tiến said that in facing the challenges and difficulties of the COVID-19 pandemic, the agriculture industry took drastic but flexible measures. Crop production became more efficient and reached 43.86 million tons, meeting the demand for both domestic consumption and export. The proportion of high-quality rice accounted for over 89 per cent of total rice production and the price of exported rice increased from $496 per ton in 2020 to $503 per ton in 2021. The total area of fruit trees reached 1.18 million hectares, an increase of 44,800 hectares compared to 2020. The output and quality of fruit trees in every region increased with some yields increasing from five to 19 per cent. Regarding livestock production, more farms applied clean, organic farming and biosafety measures. Meat output of all kinds reached 6.69 million tonnes, up 3.2 per cent compared to 2020. Fresh milk output reached over 1.2 million tonnes, up 10.5 per cent. The country produced about 17.5 billion eggs, up 5.1 per cent over last year. In the fisheries sector, the sustainable development of both farming and fishing were accelerated. Total aquacultural production reached over 8.73 million tonnes, up 1.0 per cent compared to 2020.

Tiến said that agricultural restructuring was more practical and effective during 2021 and led to increased production size and levels. Agricultural production has been shifting towards commodity production based on promoting the advantages of each region and locality. The agricultural product consumption market continued to develop locally and internationally. Việt Nam's agriculture sector also paid more attention to developing production-supply chains, better linking farmers and cooperatives with enterprises, Tiến said. In 2021, 1,250 new agricultural cooperatives were established, bringing the total number of agricultural cooperatives in the country to 19,100. About 1,649 enterprises were established or re-opened this year, bringing the total number of agricultural enterprises to 14,400.

More to do

Applauding positive results that the agriculture sector did this year, Prime Minister Phạm Minh Chính said that the sector closely followed real situations and directions of the Government to implement solutions, innovations and resolutions to raise the value of farming products. However, the PM said that the development of the agricultural sector has not yet realised its full potential. For example, agriculture production and consumption still rely heavily on particular markets, weather and other factors which limit capacity. Up to this point, Việt Nam's agricultural industry has not developed sustainably nor taken advantage of science, technology and digital transformation. The export market is not yet diversified, leaving a heavy reliance on certain markets. "As a result, when exporters make changes, we will be confused and passive," Chính said.

Another example PM Chính gave was that Việt Nam's rice export turnover was $3 billion, but $7-8 billion was spent on importing corn and soybean. The PM urged agriculture to solve this problem. "We must determine that 2022 will be more difficult than 2021. It is necessary to identify key tasks to allocate resources reasonably," he said. Chính also emphasised the importance of long-term planning and strategy for the sector. He asked for an improved legal framework to facilitate sustainable agriculture with further scientific and technologic applications, digital transformation and increased labour productivity. Chính said that first it was necessary to diversify products, improve product quality and develop strong branding for Vietnamese agricultural products. "To fully take advantage of the 17 free trade agreements that Việt Nam has with more than 60 countries, Vietnamese products need a brand," he said. "We need to improve food processing capacity, develop large raw material areas for commodity production, apply advanced sciences and technology in agriculture production," he said. Regarding the blockage of Vietnamese farming products at border gates, the PM said that once the country develops high-quality products that meet import requirements, the products will pass any technical barriers and entering overseas markets will become easier.

From https://vietnamnews.vn 12/30/2021

TOP ↑

Banking Industry Directed to Support Economic Recovery

The whole banking industry must implement effective monetary and credit policies to contribute to developing production and business and support the recovery of the economy, Deputy Prime Minister Lê Minh Khái said. During a conference of the banking industry in Hà Nội on Wednesday, Khái said the State Bank of Vietnam (SBV) needs to further reduce lending interest rates, especially for priority industries and sectors, besides improving credit quality and boosting up lending to production, business and infrastructure projects. It is also necessary to promote the development of consumer finance to contribute to reducing loan sharks and crimes on lending apps, he said. Besides, the SBV must closely direct banks to have plans and solutions to handle and keep their bad debt ratios of the banking system under control, which will help ensure the banking system operates safely, healthily and sustainably, Khái noted. According to the SBV's deputy governor Đào Minh Tú, the spread of the Omicron variant has caused difficulty to forecast the global economic outlook and inflation in 2022, thereby posing many challenges for the Vietnamese banking industry.

Therefore, Tú forecast, the SBV's monetary policy management next year will be greatly influenced by inflationary pressure, especially in the context that a loose monetary policy has lasted for the past few years. The banking industry next year will also suffer a stronger impact on rising risks of debt recovery. If including debts, which had repayment terms restructured or interest rates reduced according to the SBV's Circular 01/2020/TT-NHNN, the bad debt ratio of the banking system is about 7.31 per cent to date, Tú said. He was also concerned if there is no timely and effective support from fiscal policy, an excessive expansion of credit size and preferential interest rate programmes can cause difficulties not only for the SBV's monetary policy management but also the country's strategy on improving the financial strength of banks. Current policies on restructuring and delaying the debt payment time are a temporary and necessary solution in the short term, but extending the restructuring time will be risky for the banking system in the medium term, Tú explained, adding the implementation of many credit packages with different preferential interest rates will also distort the interest rate and credit markets. As for the capital hike of banks, Tú said it is necessary to increase charter capital for State-owned banks to help them have enough capital to implement the Government's many preferential credit programmes; lend to large and national key infrastructure projects in electricity, build-operate-transfer (BOT), transport, airports and, seaports; or increase loans for the Government's priority fields such as agriculture and rural areas, import-export, small and medium-sized enterprises. At the conference, chairman of the Joint Stock Commercial Bank for Investment and Development of Vietnam (BIDV) Phan Đức Tú also suggested relevant authorities to create conditions for banks to increase their charter capital and raise the capital adequacy ratio.

From https://vietnamnews.vn/ 12/31/2021

TOP ↑

Top 10 Major Economic Events in 2021

2021 has been a turbulent year for economies around the world, including Việt Nam, due to the complex development of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the Government, businesses and people have made outstanding efforts in both fighting the pandemic and stabilising the domestic economy. Vietnam News Agency has selected the top 10 major Vietnamese economic events in 2021 as follows:

1. Some economic sectors record higher-than-expected results amid COVID-19
The outbreak of the fourth wave of COVID-19 infections in the middle of the year took a heavy toll on Việt Nam's economy as many localities had to implement large-scale social distancing measures, halting many business activities. Despite the lockdowns, a number of economic targets have recorded positive growth such as GDP increasing by nearly 3 per cent; the two-way trade value surpassed US$600 billion, up 22.4 per cent year-on-year and bringing Việt Nam to the group of the 20 leading economies in terms of international trade; trade surplus reached about $3 billion; and foreign direct investment flows into Việt Nam topped more than $29 billion, up $500 million over 2020.

2. Resolution issued to permit unprecedented measures in COVID-19 combat
On July 28, at the first session of the 15th National Assembly, the parliament issued Resolution No 30/2021/QH15, which endorsed the Government and Prime Minister to take unprecedented measures to meet urgent requirements in COVID-19 prevention and control. Under this resolution, the Government promulgated many policies, especially Resolution No 86/NQ-CP on urgent anti-pandemic solutions, which helped ministries, sectors, and localities to proactively take steps against COVID-19, guarantee social security, and assist pandemic-hit people and businesses. Data from relevant agencies show that as of early December 2021, authorities exempted, reduced, or extended payment deadlines for about VNĐ140 trillion ($6.1 billion) worth of taxes and fees for enterprises; disbursed VNĐ1.754 trillion for helping to pay salaries; and exempted and reduced about VNĐ31 trillion in interest and fees for clients of credit institutions.

3. National Assembly adopts economic restructuring plan
On November 12, at the second session, the 15th National Assembly approved a

resolution on the economic restructuring plan for 2021-25. This resolution pointed out the need to form a reasonable and efficient economic structure, develop many national products based on new and high technology, make breakthroughs in the competitiveness of some key economic sectors, and improve the economy's self-reliance, adaptability, and resilience. Amid opportunities and advantages intertwined with challenges and difficulties, especially amid the COVID-19 pandemic, the Government stressed that this plan needs to be implemented strongly to accelerate economic recovery and create an impetus for breakthroughs in the future.

4. Việt Nam commits to achieving net zero emissions by 2050

At the World Leaders Summit of the 26th UN Climate Change Conference (COP26), Prime Minister Phạm Minh Chính declared Việt Nam's commitments to climate change response. Accordingly, the country pledged to reduce net emissions to zero by 2050 and agreed to support the important declarations and initiatives on forest protection, transition to renewable energy, assistance for local communities' adaptation, and methane reduction. It also committed to gradually omitting coal from electricity production and stopping support for the building of new coal-fired power plants. The strong commitments by Việt Nam have received praise from the international community and shown its leading role in the fight against global climate change in Southeast Asia and the world at large.

5. Việt Nam marks 15 years of WTO membership, affirms stature in integration

The country marked the 15th year since it became a member of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) on November 7, 2006. According to the WTO, among the 50 countries with the largest trade in goods in the world, Việt Nam has recorded breakthrough growth. Total trade turnover rose by more than 7-fold to exceed $667 billion in 2021, from only $84.7 billion in 2006. The country has continually seen a growing trade surplus since 2016, with a record of over $19 billion in 2020. This year, trade surplus still reached about $3 billion despite difficulties caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Together with the WTO, the 17 free trade agreements that have come into force or are under negotiation have turned Việt Nam into an economy with its openness equivalent to 200 per cent of GDP.

6. First-ever country strategy dialogue between Việt Nam and WEF

On October 29, Prime Minister Phạm Minh Chính co-chaired a country strategy dialogue held both in person and via videoconference between Việt Nam and the World Economic Forum (WEF). The event was attended by nearly 70 leading businesses in the region and the world that have invested or planned to invest in Việt Nam. It was a chance for the Government to share economic restructuring plans so as to promote cooperation with enterprises in resuming production and business activities, especially in industrial, export processing, and special economic zones.

7. Việt Nam sees higher position in global soft power rankings

Việt Nam is the only ASEAN country to record a higher position in the Global Soft

Power Index Report 2021 released by Brand Finance, the world's leading brand valuation consultancy. It saw an improvement of 2.5 points in overall score to rank 47th among the 105 countries on the list. According to Brand Finance, Việt Nam seems to have managed all aspects of its perception quite well, especially the integration and alignment of its national brand and the brands from the country.

8. Việt Nam becomes one of top 10 emerging logistics markets

In the 2021 Emerging Markets Logistics Index released by the world’s leading logistics company Agility, Việt Nam jumped three places from 2020 to 8th position in this year’s rankings. As the world’s logistics industry underwent a year full of challenges and fluctuations, Việt Nam ranking among the top 10 emerging logistics markets has opened up promising opportunities for investment attraction. It is expected to help achieve the Government’s target that by 2025, logistics services will contribute 5 - 6 per cent of GDP and grow by 15 - 20 per cent.

9. New records in the stock market

In 2021, the stock market of Việt Nam set new records. The benchmark VN-Index hit 1,500.8 points, the highest score so far, on November 25, rising by nearly 36 per cent from the end of 2020. Liquidity frequently reached billions of US dollars and set a record of nearly VNĐ53 trillion (almost $2.3 billion) on December 23. In the first 11 months of this year, domestic investors opened more than 1.3 million securities accounts, higher than the combined number of the four previous years.

10. First urban rail route in Việt Nam put into use

On November 6, the Ministry of Transport and the Hà Nội People’s Committee officially put the Cát Linh – Hà Đông urban rail route in the capital city into operation. As the first urban rail route in Hà Nội and the whole country, this mode of public passenger transport is hoped to help reduce traffic congestion in the capital. The elevated route, 13.05km in total length, consists of 12 stations, starting at Cát Linh Station and ending at Yên Nghĩa Station, and 13 trains. It was funded by China’s official development assistance with total investment of VNĐ18 trillion, rising by 57 per cent from the initial estimate. The construction took 10 years and missed deadlines multiple times.

From https://vietnamnews.vn 12/31/2021

TOP ↑

South Asia

INDIA: PM Modi to Dedicate Kashi Vishwanath Corridor Project to People This Month

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will inaugurate the Kashi Vishwanath temple corridor in Varanasi on December 13. The project, worth approximately Rs 800 crore, is one of the key projects that the Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath-led Government of Uttar

Pradesh wants to showcase ahead of the assembly elections in the state early next year. The Divisional Commissioner of Varanasi Deepak Agarwal shared the details of the project in a press briefing. “It has been built over a sprawling area of 5,000 hectares, the corridor has decongested the temple complex, which was earlier surrounded by buildings on three sides. The project will connect the two things Varanasi is well known for the Kashi Vishwanath Temple (KVT) and the Ganga river.” Giving out the details of the project, Agarwal further explained that when the project was conceptualised, it was considered an impossible thing considering the dense structure of the temple premises. However, with the organised and dedicated efforts of both the Centre and the state governments, despite two waves of the Covid-19 pandemic, the entire process is being completed in record time with utmost transparency. “To start with, the Kashi Vishwanath Special Area Development Board (KVSADB) was entrusted with the task of planning and execution of the project. The project was taken forward on a war-footing basis right from getting the properties vacated to compensating the owners,” the Divisional Commissioner said. The execution of the project was done in the most transparent manner, as a result of which the project faced no litigation, he added. The demolition of buildings around the temple led to the recovery of at least 40 very ancient temples. All those ancient temples were buried under other construction around them and people had built kitchens, bathrooms and much more atop those temples. Centuries-old ancient temples, earlier hidden, are now visible and they will be preserved and opened to the public.

Another area of concern was a direct link between Kashi Vishwanath Temple (KVT) and the Ganga river. Now with a direct link between the temple and the Ganga river, one can reach the temple premises within minutes, without going around in the lanes. This will give Kashi Vishwanath Temple complex a brand-new look and more space. Once situated in the congested space among the surrounding buildings, the temple complex will now have an area of its own. The architect of the project, Bimal Patel, informed that without tampering with the original structure of the temple, along with the beautification, the facilities for the tourists have been increased. “The work includes the construction of Temple Chowk, Varanasi city gallery, museum, multipurpose auditoriums, hall, devotee facilitation centre, public convenience, salvation home, Godowlia gate, Bhog shala, shelter for priests and sevadars, spiritual book space, and others. About 70 per cent of the 5.50 lakh sqft area of the project would be kept open for the green cover,” informed Patel. Bimal Patel went on to say that PM’s vision was to enable devotees to take water from Ganga to the temple and we worked to reorganize the temple premises to restore its grandeur. The Divisional Commissioner further informed that a total of nearly Rs 800 crore has been spent on the entire project which includes Rs 70 crore which was spent on the rehabilitation of people living in the said area. Giving out the details, Agarwal added that, “Even during the time the construction was going on, no entry was prohibited to the site to enable transparency and public participation.”

It may be recalled that Prime Minister Modi laid the foundation of the corridor in March 2019. Over 300 buildings were purchased and demolished to create the space for the project. The Uttar Pradesh government constituted the board to expedite the work on it. Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has inspected the work on it three dozen times. The idea is to preserve existing heritage structures, provide new facilities in the temple complex in the public-private partnership (PPP) mode, ease the traffic and movement of people around the temple and connect the temple with Ghats with direct visibility. Hundreds of small temples have been made a part of the corridor. The project ensures easy pedestrian movement for pilgrims with the least wait, travel and walking time, and comfortable holding zones, as well as crowd management and emergency operational procedures and better experiences around the religious rituals.

From https://egov.eletsonline.com/ 12/2/2021

TOP ↑

Sustainability: The Next Frontier of Digital Transformation

Climate change is increasingly becoming more and more impacting with the potential to create a socio-economic divide never seen before. The recent scientific report from the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change made it very clear that human activity is changing the climate in unprecedented and irreversible ways. We are not short of evidence that we are, indeed, heading for a catastrophe. The amount of carbon dioxide in the earth's atmosphere is at the highest level in over four million years. 2020 was the joint warmest year globally, and the last six years were the warmest on record. In another seven years, global warming could be irreversible. Thus, we have very little time to act, writes, Dr Lovneesh Chanana, Vice PresidentGovernment Affairs, Asia Pacific & Japan, SAP. At the organisational level, the stakeholder expectations are already demanding the CEOs to act on sustainability. From a consumer perspective, there is 5.6 times faster growth of sustainable consumer packaged goods. An estimated $90 trillion of investment for climate-smart infrastructure is required by 2030. Responsible employers are the top priority amongst job-seeking millennials and Gen-Z. A 34 per cent increase in global sustainable investment was observed between 2016 and 2018. Sustainable businesses today have the advantage of increased customer loyalty, access to capital, the reputation of responsibility, and employee engagement. The issue of making sustainability profitable and profitability sustainable is now interlinked. Sustainability in governance is indeed becoming a top management issue. The various parts of the organisation are required to embed sustainability into the end-to-end processes. Sales need to reorient to the shifting consumer preferences for 'green products' while mentioning sustainability to the portfolio and messaging. HR needs to demonstrate responsibility as a caring company to attract best-in-class employees. Manufacturing needs to comply to supply chain laws, carbon tax rules and vendor certification. Finance must ensure compliance with new rules and regulations for financial governance and taxes.

The primary requirement from the stakeholder is to infuse sustainability into the core of the business. While regulatory compliance can be aided by data and supply chain transparency, the seamless integration of established processes to convert insights into action can help drive sustainability into the business core. Sustainability also offers the potential for innovation and growth with new business models and value propositions. The world today needs to move to zero emissions, zero waste, and zero inequality: Zero emissions – through climate action to manage environmental footprint including compliance, regulations, and carbon-trading. Zero waste – through the circular economy by redefining design, production, demand, and supply of products through their use cycles for reusability, waste reduction, and new value creation. Zero inequality – through social responsibility across the workforce, sourcing, and procurement to enable equality and social fairness. But the question is how? Sustainability is essentially a resource management issue. Companies are looking to issue. Companies are looking to reduce GHG emissions, reduce waste, increase circularity, and use socially responsible business practices. The key requirements are access to comprehensive data insights and business process activation. Sustainability is a journey and not a destination. The success is directly dependant on data transparency and process action working together. The way forward, therefore, is to embed sustainability insights into end-to-end industry-specific business processes. This can help companies gain key financial insights into their carbon footprints, material flows, and diversity and inclusion initiatives. That way, we can optimise carbon emissions, increase operational efficiency by activating circular business processes and connect with socially responsible partners across the network.

The balancing of the bottom line with green line objectives can be facilitated by embedding sustainability metrics into the business process. Technology can help address all relevant areas of carbon footprint accounting, environment, health and safety, circular economy, supply chain, and product compliance, environment social and Governance reporting, and zero-waste management to provide end-to-end sustainability. Technology companies, therefore, have the dual role of being an exemplar as well as an enabler. For example, like SAP, we work both as an enabler and an exemplar. Let’s work together to create a technology-enabled world with zero emissions, zero waste and zero inequality.

From https://egov.eletsonline.com/ 12/10/2021

TOP ↑

Delhi Police Launches Unnati Platform to Educate Economically Weak Youths

Delhi Police Commissioner Rakesh Asthana launches an e-learning initiative Unnati by Southwest district of police to educate youths and impart skill training to school dropouts hailing from weaker sections of the society. The Delhi Police launched the

Unnati platform at the All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) Auditorium under the Delhi Police's flagship scheme 'YUVA'. As per the officials, the scheme aims to help youth from the weaker sections of society and school dropouts get an education and skills training to realise their dreams of a secure future. The 'Unnati' portal is simple in design, accessible and hence allows anyone to learn from anywhere using a laptop, desktop, tablet or smartphone, the officials added. Moreover, the platform provides training, counselling and placement to trainees. The platform also offers recordings of live sessions available online in case someone misses a class. Lauding the initiative, Asthana said, every year, over 1.5 lakh people are arrested by the Delhi Police for several crimes. More than 85 per cent of these offenders are first-timers and only 10-15 per cent of them are regular offenders. Unnati is an initiative that targets these 85 per cent of people allowing them to make a fresh shot at life and join the mainstream contributing positively towards the growth of society. The courses offered include digital literacy courses comprising basic computer courses and typing training, preparatory courses for competitive exams and sports courses, and more.

From https://egov.eletsonline.com/ 12/13/2021

TOP ↑

E-commerce Skyrocketing MSME Sales

E-commerce platforms have brought a revolution in branding, marketing and selling of products giving a makeover to the entire market ecosystem. Emphasising on the importance of e-commerce in uplifting the artisans, craftsmen and MSME workers in Uttar Pradesh under the One District One Product (ODOP) scheme, Hasan Yaqoob, Chairman e-commerce Council, CIIUP and Associate Director, Flipkart, addressed the Ubharte Sitaare of Uttar Pradesh Conference-cum-Expo. E-commerce is playing a significant role in the upliftment of the ubharte MSMEs, entrepreneurs, startups, artisans, especially those from small towns and villages." He said, "The title 'Ubharte Sitaare' is apt for the conference where we are talking about empowering businesses, especially exports in the state of Uttar Pradesh… The e-commerce sector is also an ubharta (emerging) sector. It is playing a significant role in the upliftment of the ubharte MSMEs, ubharte entrepreneurs, ubharte startups, ubharte artisans and especially those craftsmen in small towns and rural areas." He acknowledged Gaurav Shrivastava's address wherein he detailed the Government of Uttar Pradesh's flagship scheme ODOP and said "ODOP is doing a wonderful job and we are working shoulder to shoulder with ODOP for making it a success." Speaking on artisans and craftsmen in the countryside and remote areas, Yaqoob said, "There are many artisans and craftsmen in the countryside and remote areas of Uttar Pradesh who needs handholding for their upliftment which is the core role, initiative and objective of the ODOP programme. So, e-commerce is playing a role at the ground level to encourage people, to invite people to get the national reach for selling their product, for brand visibility and for revenue generation. These are the aspects that will help the artisans, craftsmen and MSME sellers to grow their businesses."

E-commerce is also playing a major role in promoting sustainability as well. Most e-commerce companies have made it a mandate not to use plastic. These companies have adopted a sustainability model not only in terms of packaging but are also leveraging EVs for delivery purposes, he added.

"When any artisan registers with us, firstly we inform them about the benefits of selling on e-commerce portal. Next, we inform the artist about cataloguing the product, how we can provide assistance in photography, how to list products, etc. Apart from this, we also provide warehousing support to the artisans," Yaqoob highlighted. He further mentioned that with all the assistance, when an artisan hailing from a small town or a village gains eyeballs on his products and make good sales his business growth motivates other such artisans too. Most artisans from rural areas seek information and help from their children as the young generation is more aware and knows the power of the internet. These youth turn up as entrepreneurs who are not only involved in the manufacturing of the product like their parents but are also keen to develop the branding of their products. E-commerce platforms are coming up as an opportunity for these young entrepreneurs, he added. Yaqoob referred to Gaurav Shrivastava's address wherein he mentioned kaala namak rice and said "I am delighted to inform you that Flipkart has onboarded the rice variety and it is seeing successful sales." On a concluding note, he said, "We have different programmes for extending benefits to the artisans, craftsmen and MSME sellers. If a person is having 'Artisan Card' and 'GST number' we provide benefits including free cataloguing, free photography at their doorstep." It is to be noted that for selling on e-commerce websites/ portals GST number is a must. So, as a solution to this, Yaqoob pointed out that his team provide assistance to the artisans and MSME workers in procuring GST number. Continuing on the benefits, he said, "We also train the artisans on how to list their products and display them to generate more revenue." These are some of the moves we have taken to empower artisans, craftsmen and MSME workers of Uttar Pradesh. "We also train the artisans on how to list their products and display them to generate more revenue." "Its a privilege and honour that we are a part of the ODOP initiative." Recalling the record sales of Rs 1000 crore of ODOP products on Flipkart, Yaqoob said "Abhi toh aagaz hua hai, anjaam abhi door hai (its just the beginning, there's a long way to go)."

From https://egov.eletsonline.com/ 12/14/2021

TOP ↑

Augmenting Business Ecosystem in Uttar Pradesh

In an effort to support businesses, especially MSMEs and exporters, the Government of Uttar Pradesh in partnership with Indian Exim Bank and SIDBI implemented the Ubharte Sitaare scheme. Addressing the role of SIDBI in augmenting the business ecosystem in the state and implementing the Ubharte Sitaare scheme, Srikant Das, DGM, SIDBI addressed the Ubharte Sitaare of Uttar Pradesh Conference-cum-Expo. Das said, "If we see pre-COVID and post-COVID, we will be able to understand how alarming the situation was in terms of employment in the country. Hundreds and thousands of migrant workers working in developed states and metro cities faced adversities as the industries, manufacturing units, transport were shut down owing to the nationwide lockdown. This caused a massive exodus of these workers to their home states.” However, after reaching their home towns, these workers realised that the situation there was worse so they returned to the big cities with hopes. Throughout this mass movement, many lives were lost. The situation was complicated, alarming and posed an eyeopener for the government authorities, he added. Highlighting how the COVID crisis pointed out the need for holistic development which is centred majorly in developed states and big cities, Das said, “The situation brought out the flaws in the system and the huge gap in opportunities that are centred in and around metros. This made the government realise the need to develop adequate infrastructure and employment opportunities in every state in the country. So, the number of people migrating to developed states can be reduced significantly.” It is a known fact that after the agriculture sector, MSME is the second largest industry to provide job opportunities in India. And, MSMEs were the worst impacted by the COVID situation.

“If we look at the growth in the economy, we see it is recovering and heading on a positive graph. But, we call it “jobless growth”. This is because the economy is growing but no new jobs are being created,” Das pointed out. The government has shifted its focus towards this issue and is taking measures to create more job opportunities. However, the most important factor in raising the number of people getting employed is ‘skill development’. Das mentioned, “There is a huge demand in many sectors but there is a lack of appropriate skills in the population. To address this SIDBI has started organising numerous skill training programmes for different sectors. May programmes are being organised through our grants fund to ensure that people acquire the skills required in the market today.” The microfinance sector in India gives huge employment. In this sector, opportunities are created for poor women in rural areas to empower them and enable them to be entrepreneurs. SIDBI has been supporting such microfinance institutions, self-help groups (SHGs), NGOs on a large scale so that adequate entrepreneurship can be created at village-level, block-level, and district-level so that people work in their home districts to earn a living instead of migrating to other states, Das highlighted. Continuing on initiatives SIDBI is taking to empower people with knowledge and skills, Das said, “We are regularly organising entrepreneurship programmes across the country for women, backward classes, students, and more. We try to reach out to young children and imbibe the idea of being an entrepreneur in them. We share with these youngsters how the government is handholding budding entrepreneurs and uplifting them to do business successfully through various schemes.” SIDBI is supporting startups in a big way. Marketing is another challenge that startups and MSMEs face. “To address this issue we are helping them participate in events, expos, and to develop the quality of tier products.” He said, SIDBI extended a helping hand to artisans or craftsmen and provided them stall space for free of cost to showcase their products.

Also, SIDBI bore the cost for refreshments of that person who was present at the stall.

From https://egov.eletsonline.com/ 12/16/2021

TOP ↑

Chhattisgarh's Rural Economy Gets Impetus with Gothan & Godhan Nyay Yojana

Rural economy has got a new impetus with the Gothan and Godhan Nyay scheme built in villages for the conservation and promotion of livestock by the Government of Chhattisgarh. So far, cow dung worth more than Rs 116 crore has been purchased in Gauthans under the Godhan Nyay Yojana. The production of Vermi Compost and Super Compost is being done on a major scale in about 7800 Gauthans of the State by the women's groups from the purchased cow dung. The cost of compost manure produced and sold to date is over Rs 100 crore. The enthusiastic participation of the villagers in the Godhan Nyay Yojana has not only made it popular, but the results that have come before us through this are very pleasant. Godhan Nyay Yojana is such a unique scheme in itself, which has incorporated multi-dimensional objectives in itself. In the initial phase of this scheme, there were many questions and apprehensions in the minds of the people regarding its success, which has been proved to be futile by the Gauthan Steering Committee and the women associated with Gauthan. With this scheme, a new atmosphere of enthusiasm has been created in the villages. New employment opportunities have increased. Organic farming is encouraged and livestock farmers and villagers have got a means of additional income. Women Self Help Groups (SHGs) have got a new way of self-reliance through Gauthan and Godhan Nyay Yojana. With the aim of protecting and promoting livestock as well as giving them a source of fodder and water, in coordination with the Gauthan and Godhan Nyay Yojana established in the villages, in fact, Gauthan is now becoming a new source of livelihood for the villagers. The dedication and hard work with which the income-oriented activities are being successfully conducted by the women groups in the Gauthans is commendable in itself. Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel says that our villages have been at the centre of power. Rural resources have so much power that they can run the economy of the state and the country. If we want to increase the pace of development by staying connected with our culture, identity, self-respect and respect, then the best means for this is such a development, in which a large number of rural people have direct participation, while preserving and adding value to our traditional resources.

Godhan Nyay Yojana and Gothan are actually the plans of the villagers and it is run by them for their own good. Under the Godhan Nyay Yojana, the figure for the purchase of cow dung has crossed 116 crores. This is no small thing. Those who sell and buy cow dung and prepare various products from vermicompost to it belong to the village itself. It is clear from this that villages can become the centres of employment and production, which is the objective of Gandhiji's Gram Swaraj.

Chhattisgarh government is moving fast towards fulfilling the dream of village swaraj through Suraji Gaon Yojana – Narva, Garuwa, Ghurwa, Bari and Godhan Nyay Yojana. Under Godhan Nyay Yojana, till now dung worth Rs 116.63 crore has been purchased in Gauthans. While Rs 41.96 crore has been distributed to Gauthan committees and Rs 27.44 crore has been distributed to women SHGs. From making vermicompost in Gauthans to earning income, the women of the group are working diligently. Their dedication and hard work have proved that no matter how odd the circumstances are, they can be defeated with effort. Women's groups have created a new record by preparing high-quality vermicompost and super compost manure. Neighbouring states have also started demanding vermicompost produced in the Gauthans of Chhattisgarh.

The state of Jharkhand has received orders for the supply of one and a half lakh quintals of vermicompost to Raigad district. It's a matter of pride. Farmers of border states adjoining Chhattisgarh state are also buying vermicompost by coming to Gauthans in the border area of Chhattisgarh. Getting the Skach Gold Award for the Godhan Nyay Yojana of the Government of Chhattisgarh is a proud achievement for the state. So far, 10 thousand 584 Gauthans have been approved in the state under Godhan Nyay Yojana, out of which 7836 Gauthans are built and operated. About 44.82 per cent of the beneficiaries of this scheme are women. More than 89,000 landless families have got access to additional income through this scheme. So far over 9.79 lakh quintals of vermicompost and 4.21 lakh quintals of super compost have been produced by women groups in Gauthans. The purpose of generating electricity from cow dung has started in Gauthans. Now preparations are being made to start the work of manufacturing natural paint from cow dung. With the successful purchase of cow dung and conducting income-oriented activities in Gauthans, 2029 Gauthans have become self-supporting. This is the result of the significance of Godhan Nyay Yojana and the benefits that accrue through it.

From https://egov.eletsonline.com/ 12/28/2021

TOP ↑

Uttarakhand CM Pushkar Singh Dhami Launches Free Tablet Distribution to Students

Chief Minister of Uttarakhand Pushkar Singh Dhami has launched the free tablet scheme on Saturday, January 1, 2021, and distributed 100 tablets to the students. Under the scheme, over 2.65 lakh students from government degree colleges and government-run schools from classes 10th and 12th will get benefited in the state. On the occasion, the CM said that an amount of Rs 12,000 is being provided to students through direct benefit transfer (DBT). So far, over 1.59 lakh students of classes 10th and 12th of government schools have been benefited from this. Amid the pandemic, the school and college education is taking place online and the students who couldn't afford a tablet, smartphone or laptop can benefit from the CMs free tablet distribution scheme. Hence, the scheme will enable students to pursue online education. For the purpose of digital learning, the state government has facilitated 500 government schools with virtual classes while 600 more schools will start the virtual classes soon. The state government has kept a target of establishing 1418 smart classes at 709 government schools across the state by January 15.

From https://egov.eletsonline.com/ 12/31/2021

TOP ↑

SRI LANKA: Loops, Truecaller Partners to Enable Safety and Efficiency to Daily Life Business Communications

Loops Integrated enters into a landmark partnership with Truecaller. Loops Integrated – a creative-led integrated marketing agency acclaimed for their creative and digital marketing excellence, will now be an authorized reseller for Truecaller for Business. Truecaller is well known in Sri Lanka for identifying contacts and blocking unwanted communication. Businesses, particularly the services sectors, reach out to potential customers for customer service and engagement needs via phone. However, many of these calls go unanswered, which results in wasted resources and overall inefficiency. Market research indicates that the main reason for calls to go unanswered or be declined by recipients is simply because they do not know who is calling and the reason behind the call received. To address this, Truecaller Verified Business Caller ID, leverages the reach and penetration of the Truecaller app, to provide verified caller ID services to businesses. This solution provides businesses the ability to customize their caller name and even display the purpose for the call to the recipient, so they know who is calling and why before they pick up. This creates a trusted mechanism where call recipients can know for sure exactly who is calling and whether it is genuine. Announcing the partnership, Wasaam Ismail – CEO at Loops Integrated, said, “Truecaller is very popular with over 292 million active users globally. By providing Truecaller Verified Business Caller ID, we can help companies in Sri Lanka improve their calling efficiency and also establish more credibility for the respective brands associated. Loops focus is on providing online and offline integrated marketing solutions, and this will be a good addition for us and a great value-added service for our clients and others as part of their overall holistic offering. For consumers, it will help to reduce their risk of exposure to fraud and scams, which are becoming rampant in Sri Lanka. We look forward to working with Truecaller and Quantei, Truecaller’s master reseller for this partnership, to deliver this new suite of solutions to business and enterprise customers in Sri Lanka.”

Verified Business profiles name, logo & tag edits are restricted by the user community, ensuring businesses represent their identity accurately. Businesses also enjoy the benefits of a detailed analytics dashboard to easily manage business’ numbers and view unique insights into calling patterns to discover the health of your brand’s call campaigns. “Truecaller for Business enables enterprises to project trust, safety, and the context in business communication by enriching user experience for calls from verified businesses. With Truecaller Business Caller ID, the appearance of the brand logo and name on the screen will lead to improved service delivery. The recently launched Call Reason feature can add context to a business call and improve customer confidence by communicating this even before the call is answered. Loops, strong market presence, and experience in Sri Lanka will play a key role in growing our business together and drive significant value for the enterprise ecosystem," said Priyam Bose, Global Head, GTM at Truecaller Enterprise.

From https://www.lankabusinessonline.com/ 12/15/2021

TOP ↑

PAKISTAN: Uttarakhand Gets First Internet Exchange in Dehradun

Minister of State for Electronics & Information Technology and Skill Development and Entrepreneurship Rajeev Chandrasekhar, inaugurated the first Internet Exchange in Dehradun, Uttarakhand, on November 1. The Minister virtually inaugurated the facility through a video conference from Delhi. This is the 10th internet exchange of the National Internet Exchange of India (NIXI). The move will enhance and augment the quality of Internet and Broadband services in the hilly state. Addressing the occasion, Rajeev Chandrasekhar, said that in 2015, Prime Minister Narendra Modi laid the foundations of 'Digital India' with the objective of bringing efficiency, ensuring corruption-free governance, promoting entrepreneurship, creating jobs and developing competencies in certain strategic areas of technology by increasing the size of the digital economy. Post-COVID, the digital economy has seen a surge in growth rate with the addition of many new jobs and Unicorns in the technology sector. The sector is able to attract a huge volume of investments, the Minister added.

Sharing his take on the growing digital economy, he said that over the last 18 months, the world suffered through the worst pandemic of the century. It disrupted our daily activities and had a significant impact on our economy. The early investments that were made in the Digital Indian programme played a key role in faster economic recovery. The Minister further committed that the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) will support the efforts of bringing a digital revolution in Uttarakhand. The exchange will not only pose a boon for the netizens of Dehradun but will also promote the arrival of more Internet Service Providers and more Content Delivery Networks in the State's capital. Chandrasekhar further announced that the next internet exchange in Uttarakhand will be set up in Nainital district. Anil Baluni, Member of Parliament (Rajya Sabha) Government of India and Ajay Prakash Sawhney, Secretary, Ministry of Electronics and IT and Chairman NIXI, delivered the Keynote during the event. Bansi Dhar Bhagat, Cabinet Minister, Government Of Uttarakhand, Ganesh Joshi, Cabinet Minister, Government Of Uttarakhand, Umesh Sharma Kau, Member of Legislative Assembly (MLA), Khajan Dass, MLA, Sunil Uniyal Gama, Mayor of Dehradun and Madan Kaushik, BJP State President, attended the event, *From https://smartcity.eletsonline.com/ 12/31/2021*

TOP ↑

Central-West Asia

ARMENIA: Azerbaijan Calls on International Organizations to Assess Armenian Cyberattacks

The Center of Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT) of Azerbaijan has appealed to international cybercrime combat organizations in connection with the attacks of three Armenian cyber groups, Chief Information Security Officer at the State Service for Special Communications and Information Security Tural Mammadov said, Trend reports. Mammadov made the remark at an online conference on "Cyber fraud in Azerbaijan during the pandemic." "In the summer of 2020, Azerbaijani users received letters from a suspicious email address on behalf of some Fuad Musayev. The results of our investigation showed that this cyber attack was organized by the Armenian Security LLC company," he noted. "Thus, we found out that the attacks were carried out by the employees of this company, Armen Gnuni (Armen Gnuni), Iranian Armenian Ara Babahani and Ashot Mnatsacanyn." "Having collected a sufficient database, we appealed to international structures to assess this crime," added the expert.

From https://en.trend.az/ 12/13/2021

TOP ↑

AZERBAIJAN: Talks 4G Network Coverage in Liberated Territories

Over 90 base stations of mobile operators function in Azerbaijani territories liberated from Armenian occupation [in the 2020 second Karabakh war], Rashad Hasanov, advisor to the minister of digital development and transport of Azerbaijan, said, Trend reports. Hasanov made the remark at the conference "Opportunities for innovative development of liberated territories". According to him, 72 percent of the territories are covered by 2G and 52 percent by 4G network. He also said that television and radio broadcasting has already been restored in the liberated territories. "Recently, President Ilham Aliyev laid the foundation of a radio and television station in Shusha city, and now we are working on the development of human capital. In this regard, special importance is attached to public-private partnership," the official noted. "We have already begun to implement projects within the framework of such a partnership to create research laboratories, train new employees in the field of cyber-security or data analysis." The adviser stressed that the ministry attaches great importance to the application of ICT technologies and innovations in the liberated territories. "Last year, Azerbaijan achieved a great victory. Mobile operators began operating in the liberated territories in a short time. The ICT sector is the most demanded investors in the post-conflict period. Therefore, a very important factor in attracting investors is the restoration of this sector in the liberated territories," Hasanov added. "This work will have a direct impact on increasing economic activity, improving macroeconomic indicators and will lead to the development of the service sector," he concluded.

From https://en.trend.az/ 12/06/2021

TOP ↑

Real GDP Growth to Reach 5.1% in Azerbaijan in 2021

Azerbaijan's real GDP growth will reach 5.1 percent in 2021, Executive Director of the Azerbaijani Center for Analysis of Economic Reforms and Communication, Doctor of Economics, Professor Vusal Gasimli said at a press conference on the monitoring and evaluation report of the "Strategic Roadmaps for the National Economy and Key Sectors of the Economy of the Republic of Azerbaijan" for 2017-2021, Trend reports on Dec. 20. "The main goal was achieved as a result of the implementation of the "Strategic Road Maps for the National Economy and Key Sectors of the Economy" under the leadership of Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev," Gasimli said. "Azerbaijan's economy has stabilized in the short term." "Despite the consequences of low oil prices, climate change, COVID-19 pandemic and second Karabakh war, the immunity acquired by the Azerbaijani economy allowed to minimize the consequences of the crisis we faced in 2020," the executive director added. Gasimli said that as a result of the successful implementation of the strategic roadmaps, the goal was set to ensure the real average annual GDP growth of more than three percent in Azerbaijan by 2025.

The executive director said that the real growth of Azerbaijan's GDP will reach 5.1 percent this year, including the non-oil sector. Gasimli stressed that GDP growth is projected at 6 percent while economic growth - 3.9 percent in 2022. "Proceeding from an increase in export volume of the non-oil products from $170 per capita in 2015 to $260 this year, it is possible to gain $450 in 2025," the executive director said. "The strategy of Azerbaijan's social and economic development and the Action Plan for 2022-2026 has been prepared and presented," Gasimli added. "After the approval of the new strategic document and the Action Plan, the implementation period of the "Strategic Road Maps for the National Economy and Key Sectors of the Economy" will expire from January 1, 2022," Gasimli said. "The additional funds were not allocated from the state budget for the development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the Strategic Roadmaps for the National Economy and Key Sectors of the Economy while the state structures took all measures within the funds allocated from the budget," the executive director said.

From https://en.trend.az/ 12/08/2021

TOP ↑

Azerbaijani Economy to Grow Due to Several Factors – Gazprombank

The demand for hydrocarbons and the implementation of new projects in Karabakh will add one percent to the growth of the Azerbaijani economy in 2021, which will amount to 5.1 percent, deputy head of the market analysis department of the Russian Gazprombank Gulnara Haydarshina told Trend. According to Haydarshina, in 2022, following Gazprombank forecasts, with the updated baseline scenario of the average price of Brent oil at $81.7 per barrel, the growth of the Azerbaijani economy will amount to 4.5 percent, while the contribution of new projects in Karabakh to it will grow to two percent. "In the crisis year 2020, the Azerbaijani economy suffered from the fall in hydrocarbon prices (the average price of Brent Crude Oil decreased by 32.7 percent) and rather tough forced internal COVID-19 quarantine measures, which were in effect until the end of the year. As a result, the economic decline in 2020 amounted to 4.3 percent," she said. "In the absence of a renewed tightening of restrictive measures and with the health system coping well with the new waves of the pandemic, we are seeing a recovery in economic activity in Azerbaijan, and the economy is being supported by higher-than-expected oil prices amid rising global demand for hydrocarbons," Haydarshina noted. She also noted that Gazprombank considers Azerbaijan's Eurobonds as fairly valued by the market in comparison with the securities of countries in a close rating group. "The Z-spread of 2032 Eurobonds maturing is about 200 basis points. At the same time, as further diversification of economic growth due to the non-oil and gas component in the form of new projects in Karabakh and an increase in non-oil exports, we see the potential for narrowing Z-spreads in the medium term," Haydarshina said.

From https://en.trend.az/ 12/12/2021

TOP ↑

Azerbaijan Talks Cyberthreats Faced by Local Users in Several Large Cities

Some 87 percent of users in the cities of Baku, Sumgayit and Ganja have faced cyber threats over the past year, Mushvig Mammadov, the official representative of Kaspersky in Azerbaijan, said on Dec. 13, Trend reports. Mammadov made the remark at an online conference on the topic "Cyber fraud in Azerbaijan during COVID-19 pandemic". According to him, this indicator shows that in the mentioned cities every nine out of 10 users faced the cyber threats. “Most of the threats (80 percent) came from instant messengers (WhatsApp, SMS, Viber), 32 percent - from social networks, and 28 percent - phone calls from 11:00 (GMT +4) to 18:00. Besides, 27 percent of the fraudsters said they represented banking structures, 27 percent - companies, 17 percent - shopping facilities and 15 percent - sellers of online platforms," he noted. The expert also said that in 34 percent of cases, the fraudsters offered to allegedly transfer the winnings from a lottery, in 25 percent - profit from investments, while in 14 percent of cases - to take part in a simple and profitable transaction. “The cyber fraudsters aim to obtain information about card data (36 percent of cases), transferring funds from card to card (21 percent), personal and payment data of citizens (21 percent), and in 16 percent of cases, attackers are asked to switch to “fraudulent link", added the representative of Kaspersky.

From https://en.trend.az/ 12/13/2021

TOP ↑

Azerbaijan's CERT Expands Public Awareness About Cases of Cyber Fraud

The Center for Combating Computer Incidents (CERT) of Azerbaijan has increased the awareness of the population about cases of cyber fraud by 40 percent since the beginning of 2021, the head of the State Service for Special Communications and Information Security, the Center for Combating Computer Incidents (CERT) of Azerbaijan Tural Mammadov said at an online conference on "Cyber fraud in Azerbaijan during COVID-19 pandemic," Trend reports. According to Mammadov, this is due to the wider use of non-cash payments in Azerbaijan, which is why the number of cyber-attacks by fraudsters has increased. "Since the beginning of the year, Azerbaijan's CERT has increased the awareness of the population about cases of cyber fraud and how to protect against it by 40 percent. Over the past two months, taking advantage of the relevance of the COVID-19 pandemic, scammers have sent emails with malicious links in the Azerbaijani language. Unfortunately, we see growth in cyber threats using the Azerbaijani language, which testifies to the need to expand the education of the population in the field of information technologies," he said. The head of the department also said that in order to expand the education of the population about the relevance of cyber threats in Azerbaijan, the online platform blacklist.gov.az was launched, where information on copies of the websites of state structures, banks, and other institutions of Azerbaijan, as well as links to them, was posted. Mammadov also said that a corresponding platform for educating citizens and government agencies in the field of IT was launched jointly with the Center for the Development of the Electronic Government of Azerbaijan. It is noted that 87 percent of the population of Azerbaijan are active Internet users.

From https://en.trend.az/ 12/13/2021

TOP ↑

Average Broadband Internet Download Speeds Increases in Azerbaijan

Azerbaijan ranked 121st among the countries of the world in terms of the average speed of fixed broadband Internet access in November 2021, Trend reports citing the Speedtest Global Index report. According to the report, this figure was 16.47 MB/s last month. It is noted that in terms of mobile Internet speed, the rating dropped by three points to the 64th position (28.25 MB/s). The research on fixed broadband Internet speed has been conducted for 181 countries. The first place was taken by Singapore (184.65 MB/s), the last - Afghanistan (1.67 MB/s).

From https://en.trend.az/ 12/16/2021

TOP ↑

Azerbaijan Reveals Increase of Salaries in Number of Spheres

President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev signed an order on the salaries increase of workers in a number of spheres, Trend reports. According to the order, from January 1, 2022, the minimum wage is set at 300 manat ($176.52).   The salaries of persons working in the following areas and institutions, from January 1, will increase by an average of 20 percent: - Presidium and apparatus of the National Academy of Sciences of Azerbaijan, apparatus of the Ganja branch;   - Heydar Aliyev Center;   - National Encyclopedia of Azerbaijan Research Center;   - Ataturk Center in Azerbaijan;   - State archives and their branches, district (city) state archives;   - A permanent working group of the State Commission on Combating Drug Addiction and Illicit Drug Trafficking;   - Baku International Center for Multiculturalism;   - Science Development Fund under the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan;   - Office of the Agrarian Innovation Center of the Ministry of Agriculture;   - Financial Research and Education Center under the Ministry of Finance;

- Scientific and Methodological Center for Culture and Professional Development of the Ministry of Culture;   - State Film Fund of the Ministry of Culture;   - Guba Genocide Memorial Complex, subordinate to the Ministry of Culture;   - Staff of the National Aerospace Agency of the Ministry of Defense Industry;   - Center for Forensic Medical Examination and Pathological Anatomy and Forensic Psychiatric Examination of the Ministry of Health;   - Territorial Financial Settlement Center of the Ministry of Education;   - National Culinary Center of the State Agency for Tourism;   - The Foundation for the Promotion of Spiritual Values under the State Committee for Work with Religious Organizations;   - Department of preschool educational institutions and orphanages in the city of Baku under the Executive Power of the city of Baku;   - Centralized accounting under the executive authorities. Two other orders signed by President Ilham Aliyev raised the salaries of 165,000 education workers. With the aim of increasing, annual additional funds in the amount of 273 million manat ($160.6 million) are envisaged. For employees of state educational institutions: - Monthly salary of teachers who have passed the knowledge and skills diagnostics (20 percent increase on average);

- Monthly official salaries of directors and deputy directors of educational institutions (20 percent increase on average);   - Monthly official salaries of managers of pre-conscription youth training (40 percent increase on average). Increase for employees of state institutions of vocational education: - Monthly salary of teachers who have passed the knowledge and skills diagnostics (20 percent increase on average);   - Monthly salaries of heads of physical culture (30 percent increase on average);   - Monthly official salaries of managers of pre-conscription youth training (40 percent increase on average);   It is noted that social reforms are carried out in accordance with the order of the head of state "on additional measures in the field of protecting the social well-being of the population" dated October 16, 2021. For these decisions, which will be applied from 2022, an additional 1.5 billion manat ($882.6 million) will be allocated per year. The increase in wages will cover more than 2.1 million people.

From https://en.trend.az/ 12/18/2021

TOP ↑

Over Half of Azerbaijani Karabakh's Territory Covered by Mobile Internet – Minister

Some 52 percent of Azerbaijan’s Karabakh region has been covered by mobile internet, Azerbaijani Minister of Digital Development and Transport Rashad Nabiyev said at the scientific-practical conference entitled "Karabakh: New Panorama of South Caucasus Opening to the World", Trend reports on Dec. 24. “We plan to increase investments in this sphere to achieve great results,” he said. “The restoration of infrastructure in the Azerbaijani lands liberated from the Armenian occupation is the basis for the development of ICT and logistics in the region,” the minister added. Nabiyev said that the work is underway to strengthen human capital for the transition to the digital transformation both in Karabakh region and in the rest of Azerbaijan's territory. The minister also stressed that the Zangazur corridor opens up new opportunities not only in the field of transport, but also in other spheres. “I think that the innovations that we will create in Karabakh region will contribute to the creation of new products and new markets in the future,” Nabiyev added. “This also includes new services, start-up projects, innovations and technologies.”

From https://en.trend.az/ 12/24/2021

TOP ↑

Azerbaijan Prepares E-Map of Monuments of Shusha City

An e-map of the monuments in Azerbaijan’s Shusha city has been prepared, Azerbaijani Minister of Culture Anar Karimov said on Dec. 28 at a press conference dedicated to the results of the ministry’s activity in 2021, Trend reports. Karimov added that there are information boards on 46 historical monuments of this city. “The museums of occupation and victory have been established in Aghdam, Fuzuli and Jabrayil districts,” the minister added. “The Ministry of Culture also took part in the restoration of the House-Museum of Bulbul in Shusha. The project entitled "Qarabaga kitabla gedek" ("Let’s go to Karabakh with a book") has been implemented. The Book Fund of Karabakh has been created.”

From https://en.trend.az/ 12/28/2021

TOP ↑

Major Achievements of Azerbaijani Economy in 2021

The year 2021 was marked by significant achievements in the economy of Azerbaijan. The coronavirus pandemic, which started in 2020, posed a lot of challenges to the global economy, which have not yet been fully resolved. However, if to speak about the socio-economic sphere, Azerbaijan not only solved the problems in 2021 but also re-entered the stage of dynamic socio-economic development. GDP, non-oil industry growth.The Azerbaijani Economy Ministry forecasted a GDP growth of 5.1 percent in 2021, while the non-oil sector is projected to grow by 7.1 percent, due to the growth in services, agriculture, and industry. It is worth noting that the World Bank forecasted economic growth in Azerbaijan in 2021 from 2.9 percent to 5 percent. At the same time, the non-oil industry grew by more than 20 percent this year. Non-oil exports increased by 44 percent and are projected to reach $2.6 billion by the end of the year. It should be noted that the non-oil exports have never exceeded $1.9 billion in the history of Azerbaijan’s independence. Stability of national currency. Taking into account that the world currency market is unstable today, the situation in Azerbaijan is different.

The situation in Azerbaijan’s economy, the demand level for foreign currency, and the situation with foreign trade determine the stability of the national currency. Azerbaijan’s strategic currency reserves exceed $53 billion. At the same time, the export situation in the energy and non-oil sectors and the volumes of inflow of foreign currency into the country create the basis for a rather stable exchange rate of the national currency. Moreover, the factors, such as an acceptable level of government debt, a surplus in the balance of payments, and the rapid recovery of economic growth, have a positive impact on the national currency’s exchange rate. Reintegration of liberated lands. 2020 was marked by Azerbaijan’s victory in the Second Karabakh War, the liberation of the country’s territories, and the restoration of territorial integrity. In 2021, Azerbaijan continues expanding the scale of reconstruction works started in the liberated territories in the post-conflict period. At present, these territories are being restored according to a unified concept, and important steps have been taken to establish economic and social infrastructure there.

The focus is on the reintegration of these territories into Azerbaijan’s economy, providing employment, creating production, services, trade, transport, logistics, and other areas. All this will lead to further strengthening of Azerbaijan's economic potential and a significant increase in GDP. At the same time, investments in these areas will be important in terms of increasing non-oil exports and import substitutions. The attraction of new technologies will also be accompanied by innovations in economic development. The demand for the non-oil products produced in the liberated territories is expected to increase in foreign markets. Thus, Azerbaijan's non-oil exports are expected to increase significantly due to these areas, which will be an additional impetus for economic development. The liberation of Azerbaijani territories has created a new geopolitical and geoeconomic situation in the region, and the reintegration of these territories into the overall economy will further accelerate the economic development of Azerbaijan.

Sustainable improvement of well-being. Sustainable improvement of the well-being of the country's population is the focus of the state's social policy. In this regard, President Ilham Aliyev signed numerous new decrees and orders on increasing salaries, pensions, and social benefits. Some AZN 1.5 billion will be allocated for the implementation of these decrees and orders, which will cover 2.1 million people and further improve their well-being. The new stage of reforms in this area is implemented under the president's order "On additional measures to protect the social well-being of the population". The increase of the minimum wage from AZN 250 to AZN 300 from January 1, 2022, is important in terms of minimizing the impact of inflation on the population's welfare. Strengthened social protection of martyrs', war veterans' families.

Strengthening the social protection of martyrs' and war veterans' families is one of the priorities of the country's social policy. The state has always paid great attention to this category of citizens and implemented numerous social projects and programs that serve the well-being of martyrs' families and war veterans. In this context, 11,000 apartments and private houses will be provided to this category of citizens in stages over five years. About 3,000 apartments and individual houses are planned to be provided in 2021. One of the measures to further improve the social conditions of disabled war veterans is to provide them with a car. To date, 7,200 disabled war veterans have been provided with cars. At the same time, the amount of pensions paid to the martyrs' families and war veterans is constantly increasing. The state also provides comprehensive support and care for all other segments of the population. Against this background, Azerbaijan will continue to strengthen its position among the leading world countries with the model of sustainable economic and social development.

From https://www.azernews.az/ 12/29/2021

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.

From https://en.trend.az/ 12/10/2021

TOP ↑

UZBEKISTAN: UNDP to Help Uzbekistan Engage Youth in Digital Economy

The Ministry of Economic Development and UNDP are launching a joint project to empower youth in the digital economy, Spot reports with reference to the ministerial press service, Trend reports citing Kun.uz. The corresponding agreement was signed by the First Deputy Minister of Economic Development Ilkhom Norkulov, UNDP representative Matila Dimovskaya and adviser to the Russian ambassador to Uzbekistan Valentin Gusev. The Russian government will finance the project jointly with the Ministry of Economic Development and IT Park. The total project budget is $2.1 million. The main focus of the project is to improve the digital business environment, as well as develop digital skills in young businessmen - from the ability to search and evaluate important information on the Internet to e-commerce and marketing. In addition, it involves the development of policies in the digital economy with an emphasis on the involvement of young people. The project is also aimed at reducing barriers and creating affordable financing opportunities for youth business projects and startups in the digital sphere. Empowering young people - in particular girls - in the digital economy through skills, tools and a conducive business climate will be the main goal of the collaboration. UNDP stands ready to continue supporting Uzbekistan's efforts to promote decent work and livelihood opportunities, Dimovska said. “The specific objectives of the project are to increase youth access to and participation in the digital world, as well as to expand opportunities for appropriate education and employment,” the UNDP spokeswoman said. The project was a logical continuation of UNDP’s activities to support digital and green transformation, improve labor market policies and improve the business skills of young people.

From https://en.trend.az/ 12/20/2021

TOP ↑

Uzbekistan's FTO Jumps Up to 15%

In the period from January to November, Uzbekistan's foreign trade turnover (FTO) reached $37.9 billion. Compared to last year, it increased by $4.9 billion (15%), the press service of the State Statistics Committee has reported. According to the Committee, exports amounted to $15.4 billion (8.9%), and imports – 22.4 billion (19.7%). At the same time, the balance of the republic's foreign trade turnover reached a passive balance of $7 billion. Recently, there has been an active foreign trade balance of Uzbekistan with four countries: Afghanistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Turkey. It is noted that Uzbekistan carries out trade relations with 181 countries of the world. The republic trades most with China (17.7%) and Russia (17.4%). Then there are Kazakhstan (9.3%), Turkey (8%), Korea (4.4%), Kyrgyzstan (2.2%), and Germany (1.8%).

From https://uzreport.news/ 12/22/2021

TOP ↑

Oceania

AUSTRALIA: Job ad Rise Points to Falling Unemployment

Job advertising has risen sharply as COVID-19 lockdowns ease and now stands at its highest level in 13 years, suggesting a rapid fall in the unemployment rate is on the cards. The ANZ job ads series released on Monday jumped 7.4 per cent in November to 222,093 vacancies. Ads have now risen more than 15 per cent in the past two months to stand 44.2 per cent above their pre-pandemic level. ANZ senior economist Catherine Birch says this reflects the robust economic recovery in NSW, Victoria and the ACT as restrictions eased. It suggests a drop in the unemployment rate below five per cent again in the coming months after unexpectedly spiking to 5.2 per cent in October. "We expect it to fall to around four per cent by the end of 2022 and even further in 2023," Ms Birch said. "We think competition for labour will get even hotter and workers will exercise their new power by changing to better jobs and asking for higher wages in 2022."

She believes that will push annual wage growth up to about three per cent in the second half of 2022. The Reserve Bank of Australia wants to see inflation sustainably within its two to three per cent target before lifting the cash rate from its record low of 0.1 per cent. To get there it believes unemployment will need to be around four per cent or lower and wage growth at above three per cent compared with 2.2 per cent now. The RBA will hold its last monthly board meeting of the year on Tuesday. Inflation has been lifted globally by supply chain disruptions caused by the pandemic and rising fuel costs. However, Commonwealth Securities senior economist Ryan Felmans said world oil prices are now under pressure on concern rising COVID-19 cases and the emergence of the Omicron variant could reduce global crude demand. "The fall in international fuel costs is good news for Aussie motorists ahead of summer driving holidays," he said. The Australian Institute of Petroleum said the national average unleaded petrol price declined by 2.5 cents last week to 167.9 cents a litre. It had struck a record high the previous week. However, pump prices in Sydney and Hobart still hit all-time highs in the past week.

From https://www.msn.com 12/06/2021

TOP ↑

Australia Population Faces Slow Recovery

Australia's population levels face a slow recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic off the back of harsh international travel restrictions and a loss of skilled migrants. New figures from the Centre for Population show the rebound is set to take years. Population growth is forecast to amount to just 0.3 per cent in 2021/22 before rising to 1.4 per cent by 2024/25. Populations across every jurisdiction except the Northern Territory are set to record a fall in 2020/21 compared with 2019/20 levels. Australia's total population is also projected to be 1.5 million people smaller after 10 years, compared with pre-pandemic estimates. Assistant Treasurer Michael Sukkar said a fall in migration levels was a major contributor to the drop. "This largely reflects restrictions on international borders and the impact on net overseas migration, typically the main source of Australia's population growth," he said. Net overseas migration has fallen from a net inflow of 193,000 people in 2019/20 to a net outflow of 100,000 in 2020/21.

There was a slight improvement forecast for this financial year, with a net outflow of just 41,000 in 2021/22. As border restrictions ease and overseas migration returns, capital cities are forecast to have higher growth rates. It comes after forecasts showed a 0.1 per cent decline in population growth in 2020/21 for capital cities. However, there was a small uptick of 0.5 per cent growth for non-capital city areas. Mr Sukkar said high growth rates would return for major cities from 2022/23 once regular travel resumed. Business leaders have called for the federal government to lift the cap on migration in response to labour shortages caused by the pandemic and international border closures. Visa holders, which include skilled workers and overseas students, have been able to fly into Australia without the need for a travel exemption since December 15.

From https://www.msn.com 12/20/2021

TOP ↑

Will 2022 Be Better? Aussie Outlook Mixed

Will 2022 be better? Australians are uncertain about how optimistic, or not, to feel going into a third year of the COVID-19 pandemic. While 82 per cent of people polled by Ipsos anticipate a "better" 12 months, just 37 per cent of those canvassed by a separate Roy Morgan survey think the same. Fewer people are as gloomy about the coming year compared with Roy Morgan's previous poll a year ago. But its latest snapshot of 1184 people in late November shows 23 per cent think 2022 will be even worse than this year while 31 believe it will be the same. "During the past two years, the only certainty we have had during the pandemic has been dealing with uncertainty," Roy Morgan chief executive Michele Levine said. "The emergence of the Omicron variant shows there will still be a large degree of uncertainty going forward into 2022." Victoria is the most optimistic state, with 46 per cent of respondents believing 2022 will be better, followed by NSW where hope springs eternal for 44 per cent of people.

In Queensland, only 29 per cent of people are similarly optimistic. Just 24 per cent of Western Australians think next year holds better things, followed by 22 and 20 per cent of people in South Australia and Tasmania, respectively. Ipsos surveyed people across more than 30 countries about their expectations between October and November. Of the 1000-odd polled in Australia, 82 expect 2022 to be better. This exceeds global optimism averaged at 77 per cent across various countries including the United States, Canada, Israel, China, the Netherlands, Great Britain and South Africa. "Despite another tough year, particularly after it started relatively optimistically, Australians continue to show their positivity, optimism and ability to bounce back," Ipsos' Australian director David Elliott said. Some 69 per cent of Australians think the global economy will improve next year, although 77 per cent expect prices to rise faster than incomes. The survey also found 76 per cent anticipate city centres becoming busy again. And nearly seven in 10 Australians expect more climate change-induced extreme weather events.

From https://www.msn.com 12/20/2021

TOP ↑

Will the Economic 'Roller Coaster' Continue in 2022? Here's What These Experts Think

As the end of 2021 draws near, despite the emergence of the Omicron variant there's an air of optimism about 2022. Vaccine rates are continuing to climb, businesses that survived two years of uncertainty are reopening, the workforce is growing, state border restrictions have eased (although some states are reintroducing testing and/or isolation requirements in response to a rise in COVID cases), international travel is gradually resuming and there's an election on the horizon. But will that optimism last? And what are the key economic trigger points to keep an eye on next year? ABC News speaks to five leading economists about what they expect to happen in 2022. COVID-19 is here to stay As much as we might all be ready to move on from COVID-19, if the last two years, and recent weeks, have taught us anything, it's that the virus runs its own race and remains king.

"COVID is the main game," says Deloitte Access Economics partner Chris Richardson. "When the economy was recovering to COVID free, that was magnificent, but it was fragile. And that was the story in the first half of 2021. "The story for 2022 is likely to be a recovery off the back of booster vaccinations. Now that may not be quite as good as COVID free, but it should be much more reliable." Chief Australia economist at BIS Oxford Economics Sarah Hunter agrees vaccination boosters are what's needed to help us get off the "roller-coaster ride" of 2021. "The Omicron variant has definitely raised the level of uncertainty compared to a few weeks ago," she says. "But, given vaccination rates and the initial reports of their effectiveness against severe disease outcomes, I'm more positive on 2022 compared to 2021." A booster shot is now available to Australians five months after their second dose, with uptake expected to rise.

"It's still going to be there, we're still going to be living with the fallout, we're still going to be adjusting — but I think it's going to lessen over time, and we can already see that through the data," says Dr Hunter. "The disease globally goes in waves and we can see that really clearly, if you look at the case numbers. But if you look at the economic impact of those, every time we get another resurgence, another wave, the impact on the economy lessens. "So we're really learning to live with COVID, what it means, how we adapt to it, and how we tackle it, from an economic perspective, and also from a public health perspective." The labour force recovery will continue One of the biggest surprises for our economists in 2021 was how well the jobs market recovered after the Delta outbreak shut down New South Wales, Victoria and the ACT. That momentum is expected to carry on into 2022 if lockdowns become a distant memory.

The unemployment rate is now the second lowest it's been in 13 years, at 4.6 per cent, after a record 366,100 jobs were added in November. "An unemployment rate with a 4 handle on it is not something we've had for many, many years pre-COVID," says the Commonwealth Bank's head of Australian economics, Gareth Aird. "I think conditions in the labour market, notwithstanding the lockdown, look very good. "And I think that's a genuine surprise to the extent that we went through a large negative shock, which is COVID, but we're going to come out on the other side in better shape than we went into it." There remains a lot of demand in the labour force, with the number of Seek job ads at the highest level they've been in 23 years, while the number of people applying for jobs is 53.6 per cent below December 2019 levels. The expectation is that supply and demand tension will finally lead to a meaningful lift in wages.

"As we head through next year, the forward-looking indicators of the economy look very, very good," argues Mr Aird. "A tight labour market means upward pressure on wages and we think, by the time we get to the end of next year, wages growth will be upwards near 3 per cent." Dr Hunter's also expecting 2022 will deliver wage growth. "Even in the public sector wages, we're starting to see the wage freezes that many of the state and federal governments put in place are being unwound, pay negotiations are happening and more significant increases are being baked in," Dr Hunter explains. "So you put that together, that strength in the labour market and some robust growth in private sector wages, with public sector movements, the outlook for the overall index, I think is pretty positive and I do think we'll see wages growth pick up next year."

Inflation will increase As the world continues to adapt to life with COVID, our experts say temporary spikes that have fuelled higher inflation will moderate. "Petrol prices aren't going to keep going up over 20 per cent a year," notes Dr Hunter. "Some of those indirect fallout's from supply chains, travel restrictions, limited migration, will to some extent still be there in 2022. "The impact of these factors is likely to fade —

there are already signs of this — but they're still going to be significant in 2022 and to be honest with you, going into 2023 too. But how we adapt to deal with and tackle these issues, I think is shifting." AMP Capital Senior Economist Diana Mousina says what has, until now, been called transitory inflation is becoming more long term. "There are definitely some supply chain issues that are going on in the global production cycle.

"But that could still last for another six months, so I don't know how long you can call that transient for if it's lasted for six to 12 months, that to me seems like a pretty persistent level of inflation." "I think that will still be affecting goods prices over the next year, and of course, the huge increase in demand that you've had from consumers for global goods, is also putting additional upward pressure on goods prices. "As well as that you're now starting to see services prices are likely to increase as consumers shift their demand from goods towards services as the services economy reopens." The increase in demand will continue to see the prices we pay for goods and services increase, leading to ongoing inflation. Which is key for the Reserve Bank of Australia (RBA).

The official interest rate will (maybe) lift Since it cut the official cash rate to 0.1 per cent in November 2020, the RBA has been saying it won't start to lift rates "until actual inflation is sustainably within the 2 to 3 per cent target range." While trimmed mean inflation hit 2.1 per cent in the September quarter, the RBA's "central forecast is for underlying inflation to reach 2.5 per cent over 2023." Based on that forecasting, the current cash rate will remain in 2022. But some of our economists disagree. "We think the RBA will be hiking rates for the first time next year, for the first time for about a decade, and we think that that will start in November next year," forecasts Ms Mousina. Mr Aird agrees the cash rate will lift by the end of next year, with increases of about 0.25 per cent each quarter after that.

"Ultimately, we think the cash rate ends at a pretty low level of around 1.25 per cent as we get through towards the end of 2023." But Dr Hunter doesn't expect the cash rate to change just yet. "I think we're probably looking at the first half of 2023, from where I'm standing right now, but we'll obviously see how things play out in the numbers as we go through the next 12 months," says Dr Hunter. Independent economist, Nicki Hutley observes that banks are already moving on interest rates. "The way the financial markets are pricing interest rates, we're already seeing mortgage rates, at least at the fixed end, start to increase and creep up. "My money would be on, if not 2022, then certainly early 2023 would be more likely for the first interest rate rise." "It may be 2023," says Mr Richardson. "But that will be a sign of success. It's only going to happen if the economy is strong enough for long enough and it should be welcomed when it arrives."

House price rises will slow The record 22.2 per cent house price increase recorded nationally in the past year is unlikely to be continued, but price rises aren't over yet.

"Those monthly growth rates, which were incredibly strong through 2021, should moderate as we go through 2022," explained Mr Aird. "As we head into through 2023 the outcomes that we get on the housing front will be very much linked to what the Reserve Bank does on interest rates." CBA is forecasting prices will increase another 7 per cent in 2022, before falling 10 per cent in 2023. "House prices obviously have had a number of very unique one-off factors that have really driven them up over the last 18 months and certainly through the last year," adds Dr Hunter. "We're already seeing first-time buyers are getting into the market less than they were compared with six to 12 months ago, mortgage rates are climbing and auction clearance rates are falling.

"They are all signs that affordability is getting squeezed and that will naturally dampen the momentum in prices." The election, climate change policies and relations with China The Morrison government announced how Australia would achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2050 in late October, ahead of COP26. "This really is the death knell for fossil fuels," Ms Hutley said. "It's a warning sign to governments that they need to be planning the transition, that they need to be supporting those communities that are going to be most affected by this, because we cannot continue to bury our heads in the sand." She adds: "We are seeing something very significant happening here and of course COP 27 in Egypt next year is all about even more, an even firmer plan. "So the pressure is on across all sectors of society, to see that change unfolding and I think it's a very exciting time."

Ms Mousina predicts the upcoming election will impact consumer sentiment. "We tend to see that around the election, we can get some pretty large movements in consumer sentiment. So that could be one of the main things that drives consumer spending in the second half of next year." She also expects the election will weigh on equity markets. "It's another source of risk for share markets because share markets do still react and they can react aggressively to changes in leadership or even around volatility when it comes to elections." Mr Richardson warns relations with our largest trading partner will be the biggest issue, after COVID, to impact Australia next year. "While our attention was very much on COVID and the fight against it, relations with China went down, but also the Chinese economy began to slow," he observes. "It's been slowing in ways that hurt the Australian economy, showing up in things for example, like a lower iron ore price, that will make it a more of a challenge. "China, having been our friend in economic terms for so long, may not be as friendly to the economy in 2022."

From https://www.msn.com 12/29/2021

TOP ↑

NEW ZEALAND: Save the Children New Zealand

Save the Children New Zealand's Advocacy and Research Director Jacqui Southey welcomed the findings of this year's Child Poverty Monitor showing overall improvement in child poverty levels, but says more needs to be done to ensure every child in Aotearoa lives in a household with enough to thrive “Sadly, some groups of children are not seeing the same lift and are still too far behind their peers. The Government needs policies specific to Māori, Pasifika and disabled children to ensure they are not being left behind. “Children with disabilities have the right to expect the same standards of living and opportunities as their non-disabled peers, it is essential we recognise these rights and do much better as a nation for our disabled children and their whānau.

“Ensuring every child lives in a family with an adequate income means they are likely to have improved school attendance and achievement, better health outcomes, and reduced food insecurity. “Incomes that are too low have significant effects for children long term – poorer education outcomes and health status leading to reduced opportunities in their future. Every child has the right to a good life now and a bright future to look forward to. “The impacts of these challenges will be felt in Aotearoa New Zealand well into the future if we don’t put in the effort to get it right for our kids now.” Ms Southey says it was positive to see programmes such as food in schools making a difference for tamariki. “We know that ensuring children have adequate nutrition will support their health and wellbeing, and contribute to their achievement at school in the short, and will benefit us all as a society through increased productivity in the future.

“When the spotlight is on poverty, positive change can be achieved. There is no reason that any child should be left behind due to poverty, and we urge the New Zealand Government to continue to invest in our tamariki that need greater support.” Save the Children works in 120 countries across the world. The organisation responds to emergencies and works with children and their communities to ensure they survive, learn and are protected. Save the Children NZ currently supports international programmes in Fiji, Cambodia, Bangladesh, Laos, Nepal, Indonesia, Thailand, and Mozambique. Areas of work include education and literacy, disaster risk reduction, and alleviating child poverty.

From https://livenews.co.nz 12/06/2021

TOP ↑

Government Upgrades Local Hospitals Throughout New Zealand

The Government will upgrade 24 local hospitals next year to support planned and routine care, to ensure non-COVID patients are safe when COVID patients are being treated. This includes projects announced last week to add ICU capacity to some hospitals. With high vaccination rates and better treatments and prevention methods, we are shifting to better support planned and routine care while also safely caring for COVID-19 patients. Treating COVID patients can be disruptive to other treatment as additional precautions are taken for infection prevention and control. Today’s announcements are about minimising that disruption. We asked DHB regions to prioritise projects that would strengthen local hospitals to provide planned and routine care in the age of COVID-19, and could start as soon as possible in 2022, with some projects completed as early as March.

Today I can confirm we will fund 36 different local hospital upgrades throughout the country, and the operational costs to support them, at a total cost of $644 million from the COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund. This includes the ICU and other upgrades at North Shore, Tauranga and Christchurch that were announced last week. The previous National Government left a legacy of massive underinvestment in health infrastructure, including ICU. For two whole years National didn't invest a single cent in health infrastructure, despite a growing and ageing population. By contrast, the Labour Government has already put $6 billion into health infrastructure. Now in 2022, we will also add 75 new standard inpatient beds in hospitals.

Additionally, 355 existing inpatient beds will be converted into isolation or negative pressure environments, and a number of hospitals will have ventilation upgrades. These upgrades will allow routine and planned care to continue and patients with mild to moderate COVID-19 to be treated, while helping to protect all patients, visitors and staff from the virus. The upgrades include 23 new ICU/HDU beds, as well as 8 temporary bed conversions to ICU. New Zealand's success in responding to the pandemic means there has never been more than 11 COVID-19 patients in ICU at any one time. The vast majority of people who get COVID won't need to go to hospital, let alone need an ICU bed. Increasing ICU/HDU capacity is part of the wider plan to rebuild our health system.

From https://livenews.co.nz 12/16/2021

TOP ↑

NZ Economy's Resilience Shown Despite COVID Impacts

The resilience of the economy in the face of the impact of the Delta outbreak was reflected in today's GDP figures and reinforces the Government's actions to support businesses and workers to secure the recovery, Grant Robertson said. GDP declined a less than expected 3.7 percent in the September quarter, following an increase of 2.4 percent in the previous June quarter and a 1.5 percent rise in the quarter before that. The Treasury forecast a quarterly decrease of 6 percent in the Half Year Economic and Fiscal Update. Economic commentators had initially forecast the economy would contract around 7 percent before revising that down using more recent data to around 4.5 percent. On an annual basis, the economy was 4.9 percent larger than the previous year. The size of the economy was $345 billion.

"A decline in the September quarter was not unexpected as New Zealand raised Alert Level restrictions in mid-August in response to the Delta outbreak. But the strength of the economy that had built up before the outbreak put us in a strong position to cushion the impacts of Delta with support from the Wage Subsidy Scheme and the Resurgence Support Payment to protect jobs and livelihoods," Grant Robertson said. "We have already seen recent economic reports that show household spending has rebounded as restrictions have eased. Businesses are also employing more people while job ads have risen. The greater freedoms under the new traffic light system and gradual opening of the border will support the economy and accelerate the recovery.

"It shows our actions since the start of the pandemic to protect lives and livelihoods are working and has been the best economic response. We know, however, that the impact of Delta is uneven on some sectors and regions. The global environment also remains volatile as uncertainty surrounds the impact of the Omicron variant. We will continue to closely monitor and assess the situation to secure their 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.

From https://livenews.co.nz 12/16/2021

TOP ↑

Strong Govt Accounts and Economic Outlook

The Government's books are forecast to be back in surplus sooner than expected as economic and fiscal outlooks improve. The Treasury today released its latest economic and fiscal forecasts in the 2021 Half Year Economic and Fiscal Update. "The New Zealand economy has performed well since the beginning of 2021, though that strength has been tested by the arrival of Delta," Grant Robertson said. "While the Treasury is forecasting a decline in GDP in the September quarter, the outlook is positive with a forecast bounce back in the December quarter of 3.7 percent. "The labour market continues to be resilient with unemployment falling to a record 3.4 percent in the September quarter and Treasury forecasting a further drop to 3.1 percent in the March quarter before heading towards 4.1 percent at the end of the forecast period.

"Inflation is forecast to peak in the March quarter next year then fall across the rest of 2022 towards the Reserve Bank's two percent mid-point over the rest of the forecast period." While the Operating Balance before Gains and Losses (OBEGAL) deficit increases in the current year it is expected to return to surplus in 2023/24. This is earlier than expected – at Budget 2021 the books were not projected to return to surplus until 2026/27. Net debt is forecast to peak at 40.1 percent of GDP in 2022/23 before falling to 30.2 percent at the end of the forecast period. This is lower than the peak of 48 percent forecast at Budget 2021. Core Crown expenses are forecast to drop significantly from 35.3 percent of GDP to 30.5 percent next year, and then track lower over the rest of the forecast period. "We can look forward to 2022 with cautious optimism as the economic and fiscal outlook is good. Our Government invested in our people and businesses through the Delta outbreak and that investment is paying off as the economy recovers. “There are challenges ahead with supply chain disruptions, higher inflation and ongoing COVID impacts that may affect these forecasts, but New Zealand is well placed to meet those challenges,” Grant Robertson said.

From https://livenews.co.nz 12/16/2021

TOP ↑

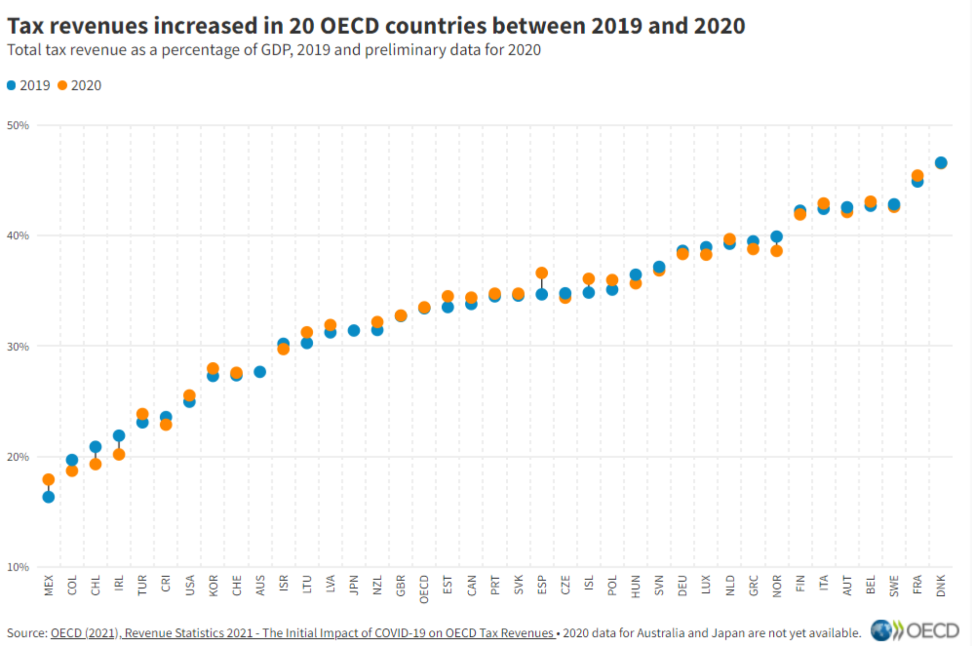
5、Public Finance

Asia-Pacific

Government Support Cushions Tax Revenues in OECD Countries from the Worst Impacts of the COVID-19 Crisis

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on tax revenues was less pronounced than during previous crises, in part due to government support measures introduced to support households and businesses, according to new OECD research published today. The 2021 edition of the OECD’s annual Revenue Statistics publication shows that the OECD average tax-to-GDP ratio has risen slightly to 33.5% in 2020, an increase of 0.1 percentage points since 2019. Although nominal tax revenues fell in most OECD countries, the falls in countries’ GDP were often greater, resulting in a small increase in the average tax-to-GDP ratio. This year's edition includes the first comparable analysis on the initial tax revenue impacts of COVID-19 across OECD countries, which suggests that government support measures contributed to the relative stability of tax revenues by protecting employment and reducing corporate bankruptcies to a considerably greater extent than in the global financial crisis in 2008-2009.

The report also finds that many of the tax policy measures implemented to support households and businesses often had a direct revenue cost via reductions in tax liabilities, enhanced tax credits and allowances and reductions in tax rates. The sharp reduction in economic activity in 2020 reduced labour force participation, household consumption and business profits, further affecting tax revenues, although the shock was shorter and more sector-specific than the global financial crisis, contributing to its more muted impact on tax revenues. The report shows that countries’ tax-to-GDP ratios in 2020 ranged from 17.9% in Mexico to 46.5% in Denmark, with increases seen in 20 countries and decreases in the other 16 for which 2020 data were available. The largest increases in tax-to-GDP ratios in 2020 were seen in Spain (1.9 percentage points), which experienced the largest fall in nominal GDP and a lower fall in nominal tax revenues. Other large increases were seen in Mexico (1.6 p.p.) and Iceland (1.3 p.p.). The largest decreases were seen in Ireland (1.7 p.p.), partially due to lower VAT revenues following a temporary reduction in VAT and decreased economic activity. Other large decreases were seen in Chile (1.6 p.p.) and Norway (1.3 p.p.). In Norway, the fall was due to a sharp decrease in corporate income tax revenues due to temporary changes in the Petroleum Tax Act during the pandemic.



Across the OECD, corporate income tax and excise tax revenues were the most negatively affected by the COVID-19 crisis. Corporate income tax revenues saw the largest average decrease (0.4 p.p. of GDP, with declines in 26 countries); and lower fuel use due to mobility restrictions led to a small but widespread decrease for excise revenues (0.1 p.p. on average with declines in 28 countries). By contrast, personal income taxes and social security contributions saw an increase in revenues, on average (by 0.3 p.p. in both cases, and in 28 and 29 countries respectively). The fact that revenues from these two taxes held up most likely reflects that governments provided considerable support to maintaining the connection between workers and the labour market in this crisis. No change was seen in property taxes or VAT as a share of GDP, on average. To access the Revenue Statistics report, data, overview and country notes, go to http://oe.cd/revenue-statistics. For further information or to obtain a copy of the report journalists should contact Lawrence Speer in the OECD Media Office (+33 1 4524 7970), Pascal Saint-Amans (+33 1 4524 9108) or David Bradbury in the OECD Centre for Tax Policy and Administration (+33 1 4524 1597). Working with over 100 countries, the OECD is a global policy forum that promotes policies to improve the economic and social well-being of people around the world.

From https://www.oecd.org/ 12/06/2021

TOP ↑

Global Community Steps Up with $93 Billion Support Package to Boost Resilient Recovery in World's Poorest Countries

The World Bank today announced a $93 billion replenishment package of the International Development Association (IDA) to help low-income countries respond to the COVID-19 crisis and build a greener, more resilient, and inclusive future. The financing brings together $23.5 billion of contributions from 48 high- and middle-income countries with financing raised in the capital markets, repayments, and the World Bank's own contributions. The financing package, agreed over a two-day meeting hosted virtually by Japan, is the largest ever mobilized in IDA's 61-year history. IDA's unique leveraging model enables it to achieve greater value from donor resources – every $1 that donors contribute to IDA is now leveraged into almost $4 of financial support for the poorest countries. "Today's generous commitment by our partners is a critical step toward supporting poor countries in their efforts to recover from the COVID-19 crisis," said World Bank Group President David Malpass. "We are grateful for the confidence our partners have in IDA as a non-fragmented and efficient platform to tackle development challenges and improve the lives of millions of people around the world."

The funds will be delivered to the world's 74 poorest countries under the 20th replenishment (IDA20) program, which focuses on helping countries recover from the impacts of the COVID-19 crisis. In these countries, the ongoing pandemic is worsening poverty, undermining growth, and jeopardizing the prospects of a resilient and inclusive development. Countries are struggling with falling government revenues; increasing debt vulnerabilities; rising risks to fragility, conflict, and instability; and dropping literacy rates. About a third of IDA countries are facing a looming food crisis. To help countries build back greener, a substantial portion of these funds go to tackling climate change, with a focus on helping countries to adapt to rising climate impacts and preserve biodiversity. IDA will also deepen support to countries to better prepare for future crises, including pandemics, financial shocks, and natural hazards. While IDA20 will support countries globally, resources are increasingly benefiting Africa, which will receive about 70 percent of the funding. With this strong package, IDA will be able to scale up its support in the pandemic and address health challenges, helping 400 million people receive essential health and nutrition resources. The social safety nets program is also expected to reach as many as 375 million people.

The IDA20 program has more ambitious policy commitments that will support countries in prioritizing investments in human capital, covering issues such as education, health and nutrition, vaccines, safety nets, and support for people with disabilities. IDA will also increase its ambition in addressing other major development challenges such as gender inequality, job creation, and situations of fragility, conflict and violence, including in the Sahel, the Lake Chad region, and the Horn of Africa. A continued emphasis on governance and institutions, debt sustainability, and digital infrastructure interventions will help foster economic and social inclusion. Due to the urgent development needs of IDA countries, the replenishment was advanced by one year. IDA20 will cover the period of July 1, 2022, to June 30, 2025. The IDA20 policy architecture builds on the strong foundation of IDA19, with enhancements to make IDA20 even more ambitious and fit for today's challenges.

IDA19 achievements key to IDA20 include:
Strong COVID-19 response with nearly 70 countries benefiting from IDA financing for vaccines, health professionals' training, and hospital equipment. Over 60 percent of climate financing, in fiscal year 2021 alone, focused on adaptation and resilience; IDA helped 62 countries institutionalize disaster risk reduction plans. Greater debt transparency through the Sustainable Development Finance Policy introduced in IDA19, with 19 countries publishing annual and timely debt reports in fiscal year 2021.

From https://www.worldbank.org/ 12/15/2021

TOP ↑

OECD Releases Pillar Two Model Rules for Domestic Implementation of 15% Global Minimum Tax

The OECD today published detailed rules to assist in the implementation of a landmark reform to the international tax system, which will ensure Multinational Enterprises (MNEs) will be subject to a minimum 15% tax rate from 2023. The Pillar Two model rules provide governments a precise template for taking forward the two-pillar solution to address the tax challenges arising from digitalisation and globalisation of the economy agreed in October 2021 by 137 countries and jurisdictions under the OECD/G20 Inclusive Framework on BEPS. The rules define the scope and set out the mechanism for the so-called Global Anti-Base Erosion (GloBE) rules under Pillar Two, which will introduce a global minimum corporate tax rate set at 15%. The minimum tax will apply to MNEs with revenue above EUR 750 million and is estimated to generate around USD 150 billion in additional global tax revenues annually. The GloBE rules provide for a co-ordinated system of taxation intended to ensure large MNE groups pay this minimum level of tax on income arising in each of the jurisdictions in which they operate. The rules create a "top-up tax" to be applied on profits in any jurisdiction whenever the effective tax rate, determined on a jurisdictional basis, is below the minimum 15% rate.

The new Pillar Two model rules will assist countries to bring the GloBE rules into domestic legislation in 2022. They provide for a co-ordinated system of interlocking rules that: define the MNEs within the scope of the minimum tax; set out a mechanism for calculating an MNE's effective tax rate on a jurisdictional basis, and for determining the amount of top-up tax payable under the rules; and impose the top-up tax on a member of the MNE group in accordance with an agreed rule order. The Pillar Two model rules also address the treatment of acquisitions and disposals of group members and include specific rules to deal with particular holding structures and tax neutrality regimes. Finally, the rules address administrative aspects, including information filing requirements, and provide for transitional rules for MNEs that become subject to the global minimum tax.

“The model rules released today are a significant building-block in the development of a two-pillar solution, converting the foundations of a political agreement reached in October into enforceable rules,” said Pascal Saint-Amans, Director of the OECD Centre for Tax Policy and Administration. “The fact that Inclusive Framework members have managed to reach a consensus on this detailed and comprehensive set of technical rules demonstrates their commitment to a co-ordinated solution to addressing the challenges raised by an increasingly digitalised and globalised economy.” In early 2022, the OECD will release the Commentary relating to the model rules and address co-existence with the US Global Intangible Low-Taxed Income (GILTI) rules. This will be followed by the development of an implementation framework focused on administrative, compliance and co-ordination issues relating to Pillar Two. The Inclusive Framework is also developing the model provision for a Subject to Tax Rule, together with a multilateral instrument for its implementation, to be released in the early part of 2022. A public consultation event on the implementation framework will be held in February and on the Subject to Tax Rule in March.

To access the full text of the model rules, including an overview, FAQs as well as fact sheets on the application of the rules, visit https://oe.cd/pillar-two-model-rules. Further information on the two-pillar solution for addressing the tax challenges arising from digitalisation and globalisation of the economy is available at https://oe.cd/bepsaction1. Media enquiries should be directed to Grace Perez-Navarro (+33 1 45 24 18 80), Deputy-Director of the OECD Centre for Tax Policy and Administration (CTPA), or Achim Pross (+33 1 45 24 98 92), Head of CTPA’s International Co-operation and Tax Administration Division, or to Lawrence Speer (+33 1 4524 7970) in the OECD Media Office (+33 1 4524 9700). Working with over 100 countries, the OECD is a global policy forum that promotes policies to preserve individual liberty and improve the economic and social well-being of people around the world.

From https://www.oecd.org/ 12/20/2021

TOP ↑

The World Bank Will Finance COVID-19 Vaccines for 20 Million Peruvians

The World Bank Board of Directors today approved a US $ 500 million loan to strengthen Peru’s Vaccination Plan through the procurement of 40 million COVID-19 vaccines to vaccinate 20 million people (62 percent of the population), including adults who have not completed their vaccination schedule and minors. The vaccines, from Pfizer and Moderna laboratories, will be delivered during the first half of 2022. In Peru, like in the rest of Latin America, COVID-19 has seriously affected the population’s health and livelihoods, as well as the country's economy. The pandemic has also threatened the country's important social and economic gains of the past two decades, exacerbating poverty and inequality. To address the impact of this crisis, the country must accelerate efforts to close vaccination gaps. Peru has made considerable progress in vaccinating the population in 2021. In just seven months, the country increased its fully vaccinated population from 2 percent in May to 69.7 percent in mid-December. The shift towards a territorial strategy was crucial for increasing the pace of vaccination. To date, more than 19.5 million people have received two doses, and 22.8 million have one dose. "The pandemic has had a devastating impact on every aspect of development and people's well-being. In this context, vaccination represents hope for a better future," said Marianne Fay, World Bank director for Bolivia, Chile, Ecuador and Peru. "Peru has made significant progress with the implementation of the National Vaccination Plan. From the World Bank, we will help strengthen and accelerate these efforts to improve the protection of life and health of people, as well as the prospects for the country's economic growth and sustainable development."

With this operation, the World Bank continues its support for Peru's response to the social and economic impacts of the pandemic. In 2020 and 2021, the World Bank has provided nearly US $ 1 billion in contingent and policy program support financing for economic reactivation. It has also offered technical assistance in critical areas to mitigate the effects of the pandemic, such as social protection, health and education, and has contributed to financing emergency bonds for vulnerable populations. More recently, it approved a US$ 68 million loan to improve and expand the services of the National Public Health Surveillance System in 25 departments. Currently, the World Bank offers technical assistance to the Ministry of Health to strengthen pandemic monitoring throughout the country, as well as to inform targeted mitigation and economic reactivation activities.

World Bank Group COVID-19 Response
Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, the World Bank Group has deployed over US$ 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 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. It is making US$ 20 billion in financing available for this purpose until the end of 2022.

From https://www.worldbank.org/ 12/20/2021

TOP ↑

World Bank Issues Sustainable Development Bonds While Raising Awareness for the Importance of Road Safety in Developing Countries

The World Bank (International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, IBRD, Aaa/AAA) today issued a Georgian lari 31 million 2-year Sustainable Development Bond while engaging with investors on the importance of road safety. The Record Emerging Market Sustainable Finance Fund is the sole investor in this transaction. Bank of America arranged the transaction. The World Bank raises funds by issuing Sustainable Development Bonds in the international capital markets to support the financing of sustainable development projects in developing countries across a range of sectors, including among others: agriculture and food security, education, energy, finance, healthcare and social services, environment and gender equality. The World Bank supports programs and activities in its member countries designed to achieve a positive social and environmental impact in line with the World Bank's "twin goals" of eliminating extreme poverty and promoting shared prosperity. These "twin goals" are aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Jingdong Hua, Vice President and Treasurer, World Bank, said, "We are thankful to investors for their continued support of World Bank Sustainable Development Bonds and interest in supporting our work in developing countries on a variety of important development themes, such as road safety. We are pleased to issue IBRD bonds in a variety of currencies, helping to diversify our investor base while contributing to the development of countries' local currency markets."

With this investment, the World Bank is raising awareness for the importance of road safety and how it is working with member countries to introduce transportation policies and systems that increase safety and reduce road fatalities. Improving the safety of transportation systems directly contributes to SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-Being) and SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities). Investments that incorporate road safety also contribute to many other SDGs by saving lives, preserving human capital, and promoting economic development. Riccardo Puliti, Vice President for Infrastructure, World Bank, said, "Ninety percent of road fatalities occur in low- and middle-income countries, making this a very important issue for the World Bank and our borrowing member countries. We are pleased that this Sustainable Development Bond raises awareness on this topic."

Road safety is an important development challenge because road crashes rank as the leading cause of death globally for children and youth aged 5-29. The World Bank is implementing a Safe System approach to support road safety in its member countries. It includes strengthening countries' capacity to design and implement effective road safety interventions and create a holistic, country-level road safety management system. Dr. Dmitri Tikhonov, CIO, Record, said, "Given Record Emerging Market Sustainable Finance Fund's commitment to responsible investment and development of local currency markets, we are pleased to support World Bank Sustainable Development Bonds denominated in Georgian lari, while highlighting the importance of road safety and connecting our investments to the SDGs."

World Bank (IBRD) Project Examples*
Pakistan
Karachi Mobility Project
https://projects.worldbank.org/en/projects-operations/project-detail/P166732?lang=en
Some corridors in Karachi experience one fatality per kilometer per year, one of the highest rates in the world for urban corridors. Karachi also lacks a formal mass transit system. The Karachi Mobility Project is designed to rehabilitate road infrastructure and construct a Bus Rapid Transit system along the 21-kilometer Yellow Corridor. Expected results include lowering the annual number of traffic fatalities by 50%, saving 15,000 lives, and reducing serious injuries. These human capital gains are equivalent to an economic saving of $142 million over 20 years. In addition, the project is expected to reduce carbon dioxide emissions by 28,000 tons per year through increased use of low-carbon transport.

Georgia
East West Highway Corridor Improvement
https://projects.worldbank.org/en/projects-operations/project-detail/P149952
While 76% of international roads in Georgia are in good or fair condition, most of the secondary roads (45%) and local roads (85%) have deteriorated and lack maintenance funding. Reducing road fatalities requires, amongst other factors, a coordinated road safety strategy and action plan. The project supports the development of key sections of the East West Highway corridor, as well as supporting the development of information technology systems for the roads department to improve traffic control. The system can be used to support analysis of the causes of road accidents. Expected project results include various outputs including the endorsement of an annual road safety action plan, improving the safety of roads, and reducing carbon dioxide emissions by over 20% by shortening travel distance and reducing congestion. In addition, the project, together with earlier phases of the corridor development, supports the development of institutional capacities, including road safety functions. *These examples of projects are for illustrative purposes only and no assurance can be provided that disbursements for projects with these specific characteristics will be made by the World Bank during the term of the bonds described herein. For More Information on the World Bank's Road Safety Program

From https://www.worldbank.org/ 12/20/2021

TOP ↑

$600 Million ADB Loan to Boost Sustainable and Reliable Electricity Services in Western and Central Java

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has approved a $600 million results-based loan to help state-owned power company Perusahaan Listrik Negara (PLN) improve the reliability and resiliency of electricity services in the western and central regions of

Java island and promote the use of clean energy. The Sustainable and Reliable Energy Access Program will rehabilitate, strengthen, and expand PLN's power grid and promote clean energy use. It will improve PLN's waste and asset management, procurement, and community education. The program will benefit five provinces in the area, home to about 112 million people: Banten, Central Java, Jakarta Special Capital Region, West Java, and Yogyakarta Special Region. "The program will enhance access to sustainable and reliable energy in western and central Java island, home to 41% of Indonesia's population, including about 30 million people who are poor or living near the poverty line," said ADB Senior Finance Specialist Daniel Miller. "The area also hosts 11.3 million, or 56%, of the country's micro and small enterprises (MSEs). By providing reliable and sustainable electricity, the program will improve the quality of life, support the delivery of essential public services, and create jobs. It will accelerate Java's economic recovery and help transform its poorer areas into growth engines through agro-industries, tourism, and MSEs."

Java, which dominates Indonesia's economic output, has achieved universal electricity access, but economic growth has been constrained by poor power quality, frequent interruptions, and electricity losses. To achieve sustained and higher economic growth, Java will require 259 terawatt-hours of electricity by 2030, or 66.4% of the country's projected demand. Meeting that demand requires strengthening Java's power grid and transitioning to a low-carbon economy, with the ability to integrate more renewables in the power grid. The loan, with a sovereign guarantee from the Government of Indonesia, will improve PLN's transmission lines, power grid automation, and hazardous waste storage facilities. It will bolster PLN's digitalization of business processes, such as e-procurement and support the installation of more charging stations for electric vehicles. The program will benefit women and girls, who carry the burden of household responsibilities, by expanding their participation in energy-reliant, income-generating activities such as the local production of goods, agricultural processing, and tourism.

In addition, ADB will administer a $500,000 grant from the Republic of Korea e-Asia and Knowledge Partnership Fund for the program. The technical assistance will fund PLN's staff training in emerging technologies, including power grid system planning and automation, grid operation with increasing amounts of renewable generation capacity, electric vehicle charging services, and utility-scale energy storage systems. ADB's country partnership for Indonesia, 2020–2024, focuses on boosting Indonesia's economic recovery through sustainable and resilient energy infrastructure. Under results-based lending, disbursements of funds are linked to the achievement of program results to enhance the accountability and effectiveness of government reforms by creating incentives for delivering and sustaining results.

From https://www.adb.org/ 12/13/2021

TOP ↑

ADB Allocates $4.1 Million to Support COVID-19 Rural Recovery

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has allocated $4.1 million in technical assistance to help agri-food value chains and rural economies in Asia and the Pacific recover from the impacts of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. The Green and Resilient Rural Recovery through Agri-Food System Transformation in the Asia and Pacific Region program will assess the impacts of COVID-19 on the region's food and nutrition security and rural livelihood. It will also help developing member countries (DMCs) transform investments toward a green, resilient, and inclusive recovery from COVID-19, which has exacerbated rural poverty and food and nutrition insecurity, particularly among women and the vulnerable. “Our food systems, nature, and climate are inextricably linked," said ADB Vice-President for Knowledge Management and Sustainable Development Bambang Susantono. “As ADB looks to achieve its climate ambition and scale up nature capital investment, food system transformation has become a pressing priority.” The technical assistance will help develop the concept of a three-pillared Innovative Natural Capital Financing Facility (INCFF) consisting of a regional Natural Capital Lab, a Natural Capital Fund, and a Digital Marketplace Platform. The INCFF will catalyze climate-positive adaptation and mitigation investments and reduce the erosion of biodiversity while protecting rural livelihoods.

The program will help DMCs support risk and vulnerability assessments to understand the impact of the pandemic on key agribusiness value chains and the development of appropriate policy and investment responses. Funds will be deployed to test climate-smart agriculture interventions and build new approaches to developing sustainable and inclusive agribusiness value chains. ADB expects to implement the technical assistance with partners from academia, multilateral, and bilateral agencies, as well as DMCs. Funding for the assistance comes from the ADB's Technical Assistance Special Fund ($1.5 million), the Climate Change Fund ($750,000), Regional Cooperation and Integration Fund ($500,000), Strategic Climate Fund ($550,000), and the People's Republic of China Poverty Reduction and Regional Cooperation Fund ($800,000).

From https://www.adb.org/ 12/27/2021

TOP ↑

East Asia

CHINA: To Beef Up Financial Support for MSMEs with Market-based Measures

China will adopt market-based measures to double down on financial support for micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs), to support market players and cushion the new downward economic pressure, the State Council's Executive Meeting chaired by Premier Li Keqiang decided on Wednesday. The meeting noted the importance to act on the guiding principles adopted at the Central Economic

Work Conference, put economic development front and center, prioritize stable performance while pursuing progress, maintain stability on the six priority fronts and provide protections in the six key areas. "The MSMEs and the self-employed are facing great difficulties. In the first half of next year, the impact of the commodity price rises will be felt by downstream enterprises and add to their pressure. We need to take multi-pronged measures to help the smaller businesses and the self-employed to get through this difficult period," Li said. The meeting decided to replace the inclusive loan repayment extension support tool for micro and small enterprises (MSEs) with inclusive loans for them. From the beginning of next year till the end of June 2023, the People's Bank of China will provide funds to local banks who issue inclusive loans to MSEs and the self-employed equivalent to one percent of the increase in their loan balance, to encourage them to issue more such loans.

From next year, inclusive credit loans to MSEs will be incorporated into the re-lending program for agriculture and small firms. The 400-billion-yuan (about 63 billion U.S. dollars) re-lending quota previously designated for MSE inclusive credit loans can be rolled over, and expanded if needed. Qualified local banks making inclusive credit loans to MSEs can apply to the People's Bank of China for low-cost re-lending financial support. "These are relief policies for businesses. We must get them started fast, make sure they're easy to do, and deliver real results," Li said. The meeting stressed that an integrated financing credit service platform network will be put in place at the national level, with a focus on financing service for MSMEs. On the premise of law compliance and data security, information regarding business registration, administrative penalties, court judgments and its enforcement, tax payments and social insurance contributions will be shared, to help banks raise their capacity for serving MSMEs. Regulations will be improved concerning evaluation of financial institutions' performance on loan-issuing to MSMEs, and exemption of liability when due responsibilities are fulfilled. Financial institutions will be supported to issue special financial bonds for MSEs. The size of government financing guarantee targeting MSEs will be expanded and its cost lowered.

From http://www.news.cn/ 12/15/2021

TOP ↑

China to Enhance Financial Support for Small Businesses

China will take market-oriented approaches to strengthen financial support for micro, small and medium-sized enterprises, a State Council executive meeting chaired by Premier Li Keqiang decided on Wednesday. Micro, small and medium-sized enterprises and self-employed individuals face great difficulties at present, the meeting noted, urging efforts to support market entities and address new downward economic pressure. The meeting decided that the inclusive loan repayment extension support tool for micro and small enterprises will be replaced with an inclusive loan tool. Inclusive credit loans for micro and small firms will also be incorporated into the relending plan targeting agriculture and small enterprises from

2022. Wednesday's meeting also said that a national financing credit services platform will be established to improve financing services for micro, small and medium-sized enterprises.

Financial institutions will be encouraged to issue special financial bonds for small and micro enterprises. The meeting also called for the specification of measures to increase support for China's manufacturing sector and facilitate the steady development of the real economy. Priority should be given to manufacturing firms when implementing tax and fee cut policies, and the scale of medium and long-term loans and credit loans for the sector should be expanded, the meeting said. Efforts should also be made to accelerate the digital transformation in the manufacturing sector, support foreign companies in increasing investment in medium and high-end manufacturing and research centers, and ensure the stability of industrial and supply chains.

From http://www.news.cn/ 12/15/2021

TOP ↑

Debt Risks of China's Local Gov'ts Generally Under Control: MOF

China's Ministry of Finance (MOF) said on Thursday that the debt risks of local governments in the country are generally under control. By the end of 2020, local governments in China had 25.66 trillion yuan (about 4.03 trillion U.S. dollars) in outstanding debt. If compared to the financial strength of local governments, their debt ratio stood at 93.6 percent, below the international standard of 100 percent to 120 percent, said vice minister of finance Xu Hongcai. By the end of last year, the outstanding debt of the Chinese government stood at 46.55 trillion yuan, putting its debt-to-GDP ratio at 45.8 percent, which is below the 60-percent prudential limit recognized by the international community. The government debt-to-GDP ratio is also below the levels of major market economies and emerging market economies, Xu added. In recent years, the hidden debt risks of local governments have been steadily released, Xu said, adding that the risks are on the whole manageable. "By forestalling and defusing hidden debt risks, our ultimate goal is to completely eliminate all hidden debts nationwide," Xu said, stressing that the country would also establish an institutional framework on long-term supervision to contain the formation of hidden debts.

From http://www.news.cn/ 12/16/2021

TOP ↑

Chinese Shadow Banking Assets to Further Decline: Moody's

China's shadow banking assets will continue to drop as regulators in the country increase focus on containing systemic risks in the financial sector, according to a report from Moody's Investors Service. "The ratio of shadow banking assets as a share of China's nominal GDP at the end of 2020 reached the lowest level since 2013," said Lillian Li, a Moody's Vice President and Senior Credit Officer. Trust lending and asset management led the decline in shadow banking assets, said the report. Trusts will continue to shift away from the real estate and infrastructure sector next year as Chinese authorities will strictly monitor the financing channel to curb speculative housing purchases and limit developers' leverage, according to forecasts from the Moody's.

From http://www.news.cn/ 12/18/2021

TOP ↑

JAPAN: Enacting Record ¥36 Tril Extra Budget to Fund Economic Package

The Diet on Monday enacted a record 36.0 trillion yen supplementary budget for fiscal 2021, partially financing the government's latest economic package to get the coronavirus pandemic-hit economy back on a solid recovery path. Lavish spending plans under the first extra budget for the current fiscal year through March highlight Prime Minister Fumio Kishida's stance of prioritizing economic revitalization while putting on the back burner for the time being the restoration of the nation's fiscal health, the worst among advanced economies. The government will be forced to issue new bonds worth 22.1 trillion yen to cover most of the supplementary budget, with the outstanding balance of government bonds, which need to be cleared by tax revenue, expected to top 1,000 trillion yen by March. The draft extra budget passed the House of Representatives on Wednesday after being approved by Kishida's cabinet late last month. The budget allocates 31.6 trillion yen for the government's new stimulus plan, which was revealed in mid-November, with fiscal spending totaling a record 55.7 trillion yen.

With the policy package, Kishida, who took office in early October, will also prepare for another wave of COVID-19 infections that could occur this winter amid fears over the spread of the Omicron virus variant. Of the total, 18.6 trillion yen is earmarked for measures to curb the virus spread and support medical institutions including 2.0 trillion yen in subsidies to help them secure more beds for COVID-19 patients. For further promotion of the government's COVID-19 vaccination program and procurement of treatment drugs, 1.3 trillion yen and 601.9 billion yen are set aside, respectively. As a key policy measure in the stimulus package, 1.2 trillion yen will be used for the government's handout program of 100,000 yen in cash and vouchers for children aged 18 or younger in households where the primary earner's annual income is less than 9.6 million yen. Kishida's government had originally planned that local governments would first give 50,000 yen in cash and the remainder in vouchers but later decided to allow them to deliver 100,000 yen entirely in cash, amid criticism that issuing vouchers would cost more and add to burdens on municipalities.

To prop up the pandemic-stricken domestic tourism sector, 268.5 billion yen is allocated to restart the government's Go To Travel subsidy program. The scheme was suspended nationwide in December last year following a spike in new virus cases. Under the extra budget, 617 billion yen is set aside to help chip-making companies build semiconductor manufacturing bases in the country by funding up to half of the cost. Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Co is expected to be the first to receive such assistance in building an advanced chip-making plant in Kumamoto Prefecture in southwestern Japan. Other than the supplementary budget, the economic package will be financed by the initial budget for fiscal 2022 expected to be approved by the cabinet on Friday, along with reserve funds for fiscal 2021 to fight the virus that the government can use without Diet approval.

From https://japantoday.com 12/21/2021

TOP ↑

Cabinet OKs ¥107.60 Tril Budget, Largest Ever, for FY2022

Japan's cabinet approved Friday a 107.60 trillion yen draft budget for fiscal 2022, the largest ever, to finance measures against the coronavirus pandemic, swelling social security costs and record defense spending. Compared to fiscal 2021's initial 106.61 trillion yen, the budget for the new fiscal year starting in April will be a record high for the 10th year in a row. The largest policy spending component is social security, growing by around 440 billion yen to a record 36.27 trillion yen and accounting for more than a third of the overall budget, as the aging population continues to push up medical costs. New state bonds worth 36.93 trillion yen will be issued, down from the fiscal 2021 initial budget's 43.60 trillion yen, but the government remains dependent on borrowing to fund its expenditures despite the country's worst fiscal health among major economies. The budget includes 24.34 trillion yen in debt-servicing costs, up from 23.76 trillion yen a year ago.

"Although we should take all possible countermeasures against the pandemic for the time being, we need to address the structural problem of an imbalance between social security's public benefits and financial burdens, which Japan's finances have been facing," Finance Minister Shunichi Suzuki told a press conference. "Finance is the basis for a nation's credibility," Suzuki added. The government of Prime Minister Fumio Kishida expects a record-high tax revenue of 65.24 trillion yen, larger than 57.45 trillion yen originally projected for the current fiscal year when compiling the year's initial budget, as the government expects the domestic economy to continue recovering from a pandemic-triggered slump. Supported by better-than-expected corporate profits so far despite repeated resurgences of virus infections, the tax revenue estimate for fiscal 2021 was later upwardly revised to 63.88 trillion yen when a supplementary budget was drawn up earlier this month to finance the government's latest economic stimulus package.

Kishida's administration will submit the draft budget to an ordinary Diet session expected to be convened on Jan 17, aiming to have it enacted by the end of March.

Defense outlays will rise to the largest-ever amount of 5.40 trillion yen, a record high for the eighth successive year, reflecting Japan's efforts to promote development of new technologies and enhance capabilities in new security domains such as cyberspace and outer space in the face of China's assertiveness and North Korea's missile threats. The national security costs include 291.10 billion yen of research and development expenditures such as a next-generation fighter jet development, rising 1.1 percent from the previous year and up for the 10th consecutive year. The government will set aside 5 trillion yen as a reserve fund for future responses to the pandemic, the same amount appropriated for the current fiscal year. The funds can be spent without Diet approval.

The number of new COVID-19 cases has stayed low in Japan after dropping sharply in late August on the back of progress in vaccinations, but the country is bracing for another virus resurgence as more cases of community infections of the Omicron variant have been reported in western Japan and daily cases have shown gradual increases in Tokyo recently. Using the reserve fund, the government will "prepare for unexpected changes of situation including infection spread triggered by virus variants," a Finance Ministry official said. The government debt is expected to grow to 1,026.50 trillion yen by the end of fiscal 2022, topping the 1,000 trillion yen threshold for the first time, compared to an estimated 990.30 trillion yen at the end of fiscal 2021. The government has maintained the goal of bringing its primary balance -- tax revenue minus expenses other than debt-servicing costs -- into the black by fiscal 2025, but a primary deficit of 13.05 trillion yen is expected for fiscal 2022, improving from the 20.36 trillion yen deficit under the fiscal 2021 initial budget. Suzuki said the goal does "not need to be reviewed at this point."

From https://japantoday.com 12/24/2021

TOP ↑

Japan Record Budget Plan Unlikely to Provoke Debate on Fiscal Health

Japan's record budget plan for fiscal 2022 has laid bare the urgent need to have real discussions about how to restore its debt-ridden finances, but the chance of seeing them anytime soon seems very slim, at least until the House of Councillors election scheduled for July next year. The draft budget, approved Friday by the Cabinet of Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, totals 107.60 trillion yen ($940 billion), marking a record high for 10th straight year, while there are deep-seated concerns that the government may spend more in the fiscal year starting in April through extra budgets, as in recent years. Still, politicians tend to have reservations about bringing the issue of fiscal reconstruction under the spotlight especially in the run-up to an election, as it reminds voters about the possibility of facing higher taxes. "Prime Minister Kishida has avoided such debate and is expected to do the same for the time being," said Yuichi Kodama, chief economist at Meiji Yasuda Research Institute.

The approval of the initial budget plan came less than three months after Kishida took office and nearly two months after the Liberal Democratic Party and its junior coalition partner Komeito retained a majority in the House of Representatives, the more powerful lower chamber of parliament, in the general election. "Originally, Mr. Kishida is said to be a person who emphasizes fiscal discipline. After the next upper house election, there could be no national elections for a while, so I hope he starts policy debates over how to secure financial resources if the ruling parties win the election, at the latest," Kodama said. In Japan, upper house elections are held every three years to appoint half the chamber to six-year terms, while lower house elections take place every four years unless the prime minister dissolves it. As the LDP pledged during the campaign for the Oct. 31 general election, the government drew up a large-scale stimulus package last month to support the COVID-19-hit economy. It then compiled a 35.99 trillion yen extra budget for fiscal 2021 earlier this month, including 22.06 trillion yen in new debt issuance.

Although the number of new COVID-19 cases has been at low levels in Japan in recent weeks, 18.61 trillion yen under the extra budget was earmarked for measures to curb the spread of the coronavirus and assist medical institutions. Meanwhile, the extra budget included some outlays that seem to be nonurgent, and the size of this fiscal year's whole budget eventually totaled 142.60 trillion yen, out of which only 63.88 trillion yen is estimated to be financed by tax revenue. "While trying to keep the size of an initial budget as small as possible, it has become an every-year practice for each administration to form extra budgets to roll out its preferred policy measures," said Takuya Hoshino, a senior economist at the Dai-ichi Life Research Institute. "This is a major reason why it is easy for government spending to swell," Hoshino said, noting that the wish of the Finance Ministry to keep the size of initial annual budgets smaller accords with that of the ruling coalition to come up with unique economic and welfare policies by extra budgets. Japan's public finance law limits the purpose of formulating a supplementary budget to "especially vital expenses" caused by events that occurred after compiling the initial budget.

Hoshino thinks the government's way of planning how to use money is not wise enough, proposing that outlays for long-term growth strategies such as those for decarbonization and digitalization should be included in initial budgets. "Such expenditures should be planned on a multiyear basis," he said, as it would help to induce more investment from the private sector and companies will likely find it easier to make business plans. But if the government includes greater expenses in initial budgets, it will become more difficult to meet the goal of putting its primary balance -- tax revenue minus expenses other than debt-servicing costs -- into the black by fiscal 2025. Under the fiscal 2022 budget, a primary deficit of 13.05 trillion yen is projected. It will improve from the 20.36 trillion yen deficit under the fiscal 2021 initial budget but still worse than the 9.63 trillion yen in red ink for fiscal 2020.

The government has said it will examine the fallout from the coronavirus pandemic on Japan's economy and finances, suggesting that achieving a primary surplus in fiscal 2025 in line with its goal could be delayed. However, Finance Minister Shunichi Suzuki said at a press conference after Friday's Cabinet approval that the goal does not need to be reviewed "at this point." Hoshino believes the government sticking to the primary balance goal will not lead to "wise fiscal spending" because its investment for economic growth and efforts to aim for a primary surplus will both be tepid. Kodama has a contrasting view, saying, "No one may believe that a primary surplus is achievable, but the biggest meaning of maintaining this goal is to show that the government has a will to rebuild the country's finances." "If it was retracted, that could look as if Japan has brought down the banner of fiscal consolidation," he said.

From https://japantoday.com 12/26/2021

TOP↑

SOUTH KOREA: Corporate Retirement Pension Funds Gain 16.1 Pct in 2020

Corporate retirement pension funds under management expanded more than 16 percent in 2020 from a year earlier as the system has taken root here, government data showed Thursday. Cumulative corporate retirement pension funds stood at 255 trillion won (US$214 billion) as of end-December last year, up 16.1 percent from a year ago, according to the data first compiled by Statistics Korea. A total of 408,000 companies adopted the scheme for their employees as of last year, up 3.5 percent from the previous year. About 6.65 million workers, or 52.4 percent of all 11.87 million employees, were covered by the corporate retirement pension program last year. The scheme introduced in 2005 aims to help fund retirees' severance payments. Companies and employees make contributions to the pension funds, and employees can receive the pension after their retirement. South Korea has been encouraging companies to adopt the retirement annuity program as part of efforts to help reduce the financial burden of severance payments, as well as allow employees to receive stable pension payments and higher retirement payments.

From https://en.yna.co.kr 12/23/2021

TOP↑

S. Korea to Invest 642.4 Bln Won on Nuclear Safety R&D by 2029

South Korea said Monday it will inject 642.4 billion won (US$541.1 million) on research and development (R&D) in strengthening safety of the country's nuclear reactors by 2029. The budget is part of a five-year plan for 2022-2026 that is focused on reinforcing safety of the country's nuclear industry and to create new strategic business based on accumulated technology. The plan was finalized at a government meeting presided over by Prime Minister Kim Boo-kyum earlier in the day. The government also said it will separately spend 430 billion won on R&D of storing and disposing spent nuclear fuel by 2029 in an effort to decrease the environmental cost burdens of future generations.

From https://en.yna.co.kr 12/27/2021

TOP ↑

Lawmaker Plans to Accept Political Donations in Cryptocurrencies

A ruling party lawmaker plans to accept political donations in cryptocurrencies, his office said Thursday, amid rising interest in virtual assets in the country. Rep. Lee Kwang-jae of the ruling Democratic Party is trying to get campaign contributions in virtual currencies and issue non-fungible tokens (NFTs) as a receipt for such donations starting mid-January. If realized, Lee would be the first lawmaker in South Korea to accept virtual assets for campaign finance. "We are currently reviewing selection of local (virtual asset) wallet providers," an official from Lee's office said. "We will reveal our wallet address on our blog, Facebook page and YouTube channel in early January." Since it is an experimental project, Lee's office said it first plans to receive 10 million won (US$8,450) worth of virtual asset donations, with a 1 million won limit set for each donor. His office is looking to take Bitcoin and Ethereum, the two largest cryptocurrencies by market cap, and a couple of homegrown virtual currencies. The donated virtual assets will be converted into cash at a local cryptocurrency exchange and will be used in accordance with political finance regulations. Due to its high volatility, Lee's office said the actual value of donated cryptocurrency could be different when it is converted into cash, meaning donors can see tax deduction amounts that are different from their expectations when they conduct year-end tax settlement for their donations.

From https://en.yna.co.kr 12/30/2021

TOP ↑

South-East Asia

INDONESIA: ADB Approves Loan Worth 600 Mln USD for Power Services

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has approved a yield-based loan of 600 million U.S. dollars to help Indonesia's State Electricity Company (PLN) improve the electricity services in the western and central parts of Java, an ADB specialist said. The loan will be used for the Sustainable and Reliable Energy Access Program which will strengthen and expand the PLN's electricity network, as well as encourage the use of clean energy, the ADB's Senior Finance Specialist Daniel Miller was quoted by Antara news agency as saying on Tuesday. He pointed out that the loan, under a guarantee from the Indonesian government, would improve the PLN's transmission lines, power grid automation, and hazardous waste storage facilities. In addition, Miller said the program will accelerate economic recovery in Java by providing support for agro-industry, tourism as well as micro and small enterprises (MSEs). The ADB's country partnership for Indonesia in the 2020-2024 period focuses on enhancing the archipelago's economic recovery through sustainable and resilient energy infrastructure.

From https://english.news.cn/ 12/14/2021

TOP ↑

Indonesia Records Trade Surplus of 3.51 Bln USD in November

Indonesia recorded a trade surplus of 3.51 billion U.S. dollars in November of 2021, with exports valued at 22.84 billion dollars and imports valued at 19.33 billion dollars, according to the Statistics Indonesia (BPS). In the non-oil and non-gas commodity category, mineral fuels, vegetable oils, as well as iron and steel gave the biggest contribution to the surplus, the BPS' head Margo Yuwono told a virtual press conference in Jakarta on Wednesday. Indonesia's trade balance with the United States underwent a surplus of 1.8 billion dollars through the trade of fashion and accessories, Yuwono said, adding that the Southeast Asian country also won a trade surplus of 801.8 million dollars from the Philippines in the trade of mineral fuel as well as vehicles and their spare parts. He also mentioned that Indonesia experienced trade deficits with several countries including Thailand, China and Australia.

From https://english.news.cn 12/15/2021

TOP ↑

CAMBODIA: ADB Provides 332 Mln USD to Boost Economic Recovery

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) on Wednesday signed up to provide 332 million U.S. dollars for Cambodia to support its response to COVID-19, further develop the financial sector, build urban infrastructure and help improve the road network. Cambodian Minister of Economy and Finance Aun Pornmoniroth and ADB acting country director for Cambodia Anthony Gill signed the loan and grant agreements for 30 million dollars for Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) Health Security Project, 180 million dollars for Livable Cities Investment Project, 82 million dollars for Road Network Improvement Project in the second phase, and 40 million dollars for Inclusive Financial Sector Development Program, said the lender's press release. "As Cambodia's long-standing development partner, ADB is committed to supporting the country's economic competitiveness and inclusive development," Gill said.

"The projects will boost Cambodia's economic recovery by improving health facilities, financial inclusion, infrastructure and urban services at strategic locations, including road networks," he added. The GMS Health Security Project is aimed at improving laboratory services and infection prevention control at 81 provincial and district hospitals across Cambodia, the press release said, adding that it is expected to boost disease surveillance and response systems, COVID-19 outbreak management and contact tracing at central, provincial, and district health agencies. The Livable Cities Investment Project will help provide better wastewater and solid waste management services to more than 140,000 residents in Bavet, Kampot, and Poipet cities, it said. The second phase of the Road Network Improvement Project will rehabilitate 48 kilometers of national and provincial roads in Prey Veng and Kandal to boost economic development along the GMS Southern Economic Corridor, the press release said. It added that the Inclusive Financial Sector Development Program will help the Cambodian government expand access to credit of micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises, implement reforms to boost financial stability, and upgrade financial sector infrastructure.

From https://english.news.cn/ 12/08/2021

TOP ↑

PHILIPPINES: World Bank Offers 600 Mln USD Loan to Boost Recovery

The World Bank on Saturday approved a 600 million U.S. dollars loan to support the Philippine government's reform program to position the Southeast Asian country for a competitive and resilient economic recovery. The World Bank said the loan will support ongoing government reforms for promoting private investment, reducing the cost of doing business, and expanding broadband services to encourage investments in information and communications technology. According to Ndiamé Diop, World Bank Country Director for Brunei, Malaysia, Philippines and Thailand, these reforms are crucial for addressing immediate and long-term barriers to growth, paving the way for inclusive recovery. "Reforms that promote competition in broadband and mobile telecommunications will benefit a large portion of underserved populations by increasing coverage and quality of service, increasing their access to markets, as well as access to remote education and health services," Diop said. Internet access has been essential during the COVID-19 pandemic as employed individuals have shifted to home-based work, and school-aged children also have relied on distance learning. "Similarly, reforms that lower the costs of trade and improve the business environment are expected to benefit all firms but especially small and medium enterprises, which will have access to a larger market for their products and services," Diop added.

From https://english.news.cn/ 12/11/2021

TOP ↑

World Bank Adds Loan to Boost COVID-19 Vaccination in Philippines

The World Bank approved 300 million U.S. dollars of additional loan on Wednesday to boost the Philippines' efforts to scale up national vaccination, strengthen the country's health systems, and recover from the COVID-19 pandemic. The bank said the financial project will cover procurement and delivery of doses to individuals aged 12 to 17; additional doses for at-risk population sub-groups including immunocompromised individuals and senior citizens; and booster doses for health workers and the wider population. Ndiamé Diop, World Bank Country Director for Brunei, Malaysia, Philippines and Thailand, said the loan, which is expected to provide approximately 27 million vaccine doses, will also finance primary doses for children under 12 in support of the country's efforts to reopen schools safely. He said the new loan "is critical for the Southeast Asian country to safely reopen the economy and resume economic and social development activities." The World Bank on Dec. 11 approved a 600-million-U.S. dollar loan to support the Philippine government's reform program to position the Southeast Asian country for a competitive and resilient economic recovery. The Philippines has administered more than 101.6 million doses of COVID-19 vaccines as of Monday and more than 44 million people have been fully vaccinated. The country, which has an around 110 million population, now has over 2.83 million confirmed COVID-19 cases, including 50,794 deaths.

From https://english.news.cn 12/22/2021

TOP ↑

Philippine President Duterte Signs 2022 Budget to Fund Recovery from Pandemic

Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte signed on Thursday the nearly 100 billion U.S. dollars national budget for 2022 to fund the country's sustained recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. "The budget is set to inspire actions that focus on building resilience amidst the pandemic, sustaining the momentum towards recovery, and continuing the legacy of infrastructure development," Duterte said during the signing ceremony at the Malacanang presidential palace in Manila. The 5.024 trillion pesos (roughly 98.44 billion U.S. dollars) budget, 10 percent higher than the 2021 budget, will prioritize the people's health by ensuring affordable and accessible healthcare for all Filipinos, said Duterte. To guarantee the streamlined operation of the current health system, Duterte said 88.9 billion pesos were allocated for the health facilities operations program and the procurement of drugs, medicines, and vaccines. The budget allotted 17 billion pesos to the Human Resources for Health Deployment Program to fund the salaries and benefits of public health personnel. Duterte said the 2022 budget will also provide essential funding requirements to safeguard and support displaced workers affected by the COVID-19 pandemic to foster socio-economic recovery. The Philippines has been grappling with the pandemic since 2020. It now has over 2.8 million confirmed COVID-19 cases, including 51,213 deaths. (1 U.S. dollar equals 51.05 pesos)

From https://english.news.cn 12/30/2021

TOP ↑

VIETNAM: HCM City Augments COVID Relief Payments by $179Mln

HCM City has added VNĐ4.1 trillion (about US$179.6 million) to its COVID-19 relief package, according to Lê Minh Tấn, director of its Department of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs. Thủ Đức City and District 12 will each receive an additional VNĐ500 billion, Hóc Môn and Tân Phú districts will get more than VNĐ300 billion, and several other districts will get VNĐ200 billion each. Some 1.58 million people in difficult circumstances who did not receive support in the last support package in September will get relief this time. The city People's Committee has instructed localities to distribute the money by January 15. The list of people receiving support will be published at local people's committees and on bulletin boards and information groups in each area. District leaders will use their administrator accounts in the SafeID Delivery app to monitor progress. According to statistics from the department, during the fourth wave of the pandemic the city rolled out several support packages and spent more than VNĐ12 trillion to aid over 8.8 million people. But some 1.5 million disadvantaged people have not yet received any relief amount.

From https://vietnamnews.vn/ 12/28/2021

TOP ↑

Việt Nam's Trade Revenue to Surpass $660 Billion by Year-End

Việt Nam's total trade value this year may reach more than US$660 billion, surging 21 per cent year-on-year, according to the latest forecast of the Ministry of Industry and Trade (MoIT). Of the sum, the country is expected to earn $331.1 billion from exports, up 17.2 per cent year-on-year while its imports will likely hit $329 billion, a yearly hike of 25.2 per cent. That may result in a slight trade surplus of $2.1 billion, MoIT said. This year will see 37 groups of products with export turnover of over $1 billion, four groups higher than that of the previous year. According to the ministry's forecast, the group of industrial processing goods will reel in the largest share of total export earnings, expected at 86.1 per cent. That is considered a decisive factor in creating a breakthrough in the national export value as well as its trade surplus. Meanwhile, the group of agricultural, forestry and fishery products will account for 8.4 per cent of the national export turnover. Deputy Minister of Industry and Trade Trần Quốc Khánh attributed these positive figures to the close direction of the Government, the drastic involvement of ministries, branches and local authorities and the great efforts of the business community and the effectiveness of trade promotion activities.

Amid the extremely difficult context due to the impact of COVID-19 pandemic, ministries, sectors, localities and associations have made efforts to facilitate on-line trade promotions which have been highly appreciated by the local business community, said Khánh during the Việt Nam Export Promotion Forum 2021 on Wednesday. Participants at the forum held in both in-person and virtual forms also agreed that organising online trade sessions with import-export partners have become an effective solution that has helped domestic businesses connect with their customers. Director of the Trade Promotion Agency Vũ Bá Phú said the MoIT has co-ordinated with localities to organise more than 1,000 virtual conferences and millions of online trading sessions, supporting millions of businesses to participate in trade promotion activities on digital platforms in 2021. It has also created favourable conditions for local firms to join virtual domestic and international trade fairs and exhibitions, Phú said at the event.

Trade promotion activities on digital platforms have helped Vietnamese exporters save costs, shorten the time used for accessing export markets and potential customers, thereby contributing to the country's positive export performance in the past two years. He added adopting trade promotion on digital platforms has also become an effective solution to support businesses to connect with the market amid the pandemic and has come in line with the national digital transformation process and number of countries and international trade trends. Thân Đức Việt, General Director of Garment 10 Co said the prolonged COVID-19 pandemic has more or less negatively affected direct trade promotions. Thus, businesses wanted trade promotions to be carried out on digital platforms and e-commerce activities to be developed. That would be the right solution to resuming and developing supply chains. Through these trade promotion activities, enterprises wished to bring their products directly to customers instead of through intermediary companies, Việt said, adding that firms also expected to access updated information on the market demand and domestic enterprises by their operating areas.

Information on tariff rates that foreign rivals have enjoyed should be also provided so that domestic enterprises could make timely adjustments when dealing with customers, Việt noted. In order to help local firms take advantage of opportunities from the recovery of export markets after the COVID-19 pandemic is under control, Phú said the MoIT would continue to co-ordinate with other ministries, branches and localities on trade promotion activities. In addition, it will facilitate the implementation of the project on promoting the application of information technology and digital transformation in trade promotion activities in the 2021-30 period while focusing on medium and long-term trade promotion programmes for key export industries. The US remained the biggest buyer of Vietnamese products, importing $84.8 billion worth of goods from the Southeast Asian country in the period, a year-on-year increase of 22.2 per cent. It was followed by China, the EU, ASEAN, South Korea and Japan. In the 11-month period, China was the largest supplier of products for Việt Nam, exporting to the Southeast Asian country $98.5 billion worth of goods, up 32 per cent from the same period last year. The country posted a trade surplus of $225 million from January to November, compared to $20.19 billion in the same period last year.

From https://vietnamnews.vn/ 12/17/2021

TOP ↑

Central Bank Promotes Licensed Consumer Finance

The State Bank of Vietnam (SBV) will enhance inspections to discover illegal finance companies and protect the interests of consumers and licensed finance companies, according to SBV's Governor Nguyễn Thị Hồng. The decision was made in the Governor's written response to questions from a National Assembly delegate on banking activities after the media reported some individuals and companies have recently set up and advertised unlicensed loan apps and websites that have affected the interests of consumers. According to Hồng, the SBV has also received a request to co-operate in providing information to the Police for fraud and companies that violate the law. The Governor said the SBV had directed its branches in provinces and cities to proactively report and propose to the municipal and provincial People's Committees measures to prevent fraud, stopping individuals and companies from carrying out or advertising banking products and services without getting licences from the SBV. According to the Governor, consumer loans play an important role in socio-economic development as they improve the quality of life for people through the provision of credit to promote consumption. The increase in consumer demand will help promote production and create more job opportunities, making a positive contribution to economic growth.

Sharing the same view, economist Vũ Đình Ánh said in the context of declining incomes due to the pandemic, consumer lending is an important factor to stimulate domestic aggregate demand through a rise in retail and consumption. There will be a large number of people who need this type of consumer finance to enable them to fulfil needs and stabilise their lives. Consumer credit is often used to describe an unsecured or collateralised loan to support financial resources to meet consumers' needs such as housing, transportation, living facilities, study, travel and healthcare before they can afford it. Compared with usury from unreliable sources, consumer loans from credit institutions will be a better and safer choice for consumers. However, experts noted when having access to credit, consumers need a written consumer loan contract, the form and minimum contents of which are specified in the State Bank of Vietnam's Circular 43/2016/TT-NHNN dated December 30, 2016, to protect their interests and avoid undesirable consequences. Sixteen finance companies are licensed to provide consumer lending with total charter capital worth more than VNĐ22 trillion (US$948 million). Those with the largest charter capital include FE Credit (VNĐ7.328 trillion), SBIC Finance (VNĐ2.532 trillion), EVN FC (VNĐ2.5 trillion), Home Credit (VNĐ2.05 trillion) and HD Saison (VNĐ1.4 trillion). A number of banks have launched finance companies, such as VP Bank with FE Credit, HDBank with HD Saison, SHB with SHB Finance and MBBank with Mcredit. Banking expert Cấn Văn Lực said Việt Nam's consumer credit market had significant potential for development. Consumer loans are estimated to account for around 18-20 per cent of the total outstanding loans in the economy.

From https://vietnamnews.vn 12/17/2021

TOP ↑

Vietnamese Capital to Spend 80 Mln USD in 5 Years to Alleviate Traffic Congestion

The Vietnamese capital city Hanoi will pour in some 1.8 trillion Vietnamese dong (nearly 80 million U.S. dollars) to mitigate traffic congestion and ensure road safety in the 2021-2025 period, according to a target plan recently approved by the municipal legislature. With the money allocated from its budget over the five-year term, Hanoi targets to resolve seven to 10 traffic congestion hotspots each year. It will timely eliminate black spots in traffic accidents to cut traffic accidents by between 5 and 10 percent per year in terms of cases, number of deaths and injuries, local media Vietnam News cited the program by Hanoi People's Council as reporting on Friday. To achieve the goals, local authorities figured out solutions including relocating residents out of urban areas in order to reduce population density, improving public transport capacity, gradually limiting private vehicles in the long term, as well as applying technologies in traffic management. Notably, industrial production sites causing environmental pollution, universities, vocational schools, and administrative units are set to be relocated out of the city's center to increase land funds for traffic activities. Also, Hanoi will build an online digital traffic map to serve the management, operation and regulation of traffic and develop a smart parking spot search software to help people find and pay parking spots conveniently, according to the plan.

From https://english.news.cn 12/17/2021

TOP ↑

Tax Collection Exceeds Estimate

The total State budget revenue managed by the tax authorities reached nearly VNĐ1.3 quadrillion this year, exceeding the estimate by over VNĐ177 trillion (US$7.7 billion). The General Department of Taxation held an online conference on Friday to review the tax work this year and implement solutions for tax tasks next year. The General Department of Taxation said that State budget collection task was significantly affected by economic difficulties and challenges, especially since the end of April when the COVID-19 pandemic broke out again. Many key economic areas have implemented prolonged social distancing; production and business activities of enterprises have stalled; supply chains have been disrupted; and the economy has gone down, the department said. "However, with the close direction of the Government, the Ministry of Finance and efforts of all tax authorities, tax departments have successfully completed their assigned tasks," said General Director of Taxation Cao Anh Tuấn at the conference. As a result, the total state budget revenue managed by tax agencies exceeded the estimate by over VNĐ177 trillion.

According to the report on revenue estimates of tax departments for the year, 60 of 63 localities assessed exceeded the estimate of State budget revenue for the year. In order to continue to support people and businesses to overcome the difficulties of the pandemic and accelerate economic recovery, the General Department of Taxation has asked the Ministry of Finance to submit to the Government to promulgate Decree 52/2021/NĐ-CP to extend tax and land rent for businesses, business households and individuals in fields facing difficulties due to the pandemic. It is estimated that there will be nearly 140,000 applications for tax payment extensions his year. The total amount of tax and land rent to be extended is VNĐ92.9 trillion. As of the end of November, tax authorities have exempted and reduced land rent according to Decision 27/2021/QĐ-TTg of the Prime Minister, with a total amount of about VNĐ3.5 trillion. For business households and individuals, it is estimated that the total tax exempted until the end of this month was about VNĐ6.7 trillion; the paid tax amount will be deducted next year.

The tax authority has extended the excise tax under Decree No 104/2021/NĐ-CP, with a total amount of about VNĐ4 trillion. To facilitate businesses in tax declaration and payment, the General Department of Taxation has accelerated reform, in which it has deployed technical infrastructure, a system connected to the national public service portal, and completed integration of 150 tax administrative procedures on the national public service portal. The General Department of Taxation has advised the Ministry of Finance to issue Circular 78/2021/TT-BTC and decisions to implement phase 1 of e-invoices at six tax departments: Hà Nội, HCM City, Quảng Ninh, Hải Phòng, Phú Thọ, and Bình Định. These six localities account for 60 per cent of taxpayers in the country and the total number of invoices issued in a year accounts for about 70 per cent. After one month of implementation, the number of taxpayers who have registered to use e-invoices was 263,182 enterprises, accounting for 71 per cent of the total in the six provinces and cities.

The number of invoices with codes received by the six tax departments was 1,707,871 invoices as of 4 pm on December 20, of which 1,702,069 invoices have been issued with a code. Tax authorities collected VNĐ 1.3 trillion from Vietnamese organisations that have signed online advertising contracts with foreign organisations that have not established legal entities in Việt Nam such as Google, Youtube and Facebook. The revenue from self-declared individuals, tax arrears, fines through inspection and examination for individuals residing in Việt Nam providing cross-border services at social networking sites was VNĐ498 billion as of October. The National Assembly, the Government and the Ministry of Finance assigned budget revenue estimates for the tax sector to be VNĐ1.17 quadrillion next year, with VNĐ28.2 trillion from crude oil, and VNĐ1.14 quadrillion from domestic revenue.

From https://vietnamnews.vn/ 12/25/2021

TOP ↑

World Bank Loan to Support Vietnam's Economic Recovery

The government of Vietnam and the World Bank has signed an agreement for financing of 221.5 million U.S. dollars to support the country's recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic through policy reforms. The credit is a budget support operation and comes in the form of concessional terms for a period of 30 years with a grace period of five years, World Bank said Monday in a press release. The loan will encourage policy reforms under two pillars, with the first supporting an inclusive economic recovery by easing the tax burden on businesses, improving access to financial assistance among vulnerable groups, reducing gender gaps in the workplace, and promoting financial inclusion. The second pillar contributes to greening trade policies, accelerating the adoption of e-government, and increasing the uptake of renewable energy. According to the bank, the Vietnamese government has moved quickly in recent months on the implementation of those reforms. The pace of reform is expected to accelerate as part of the recovery package to be discussed at the National Assembly next week, it said. In October, the World Bank lowered Vietnam's economy growth forecast for this year to between 2 and 2.5 percent as the third quarter figures revealed the severe impacts of the fourth COVID-19 wave, well below the August forecast of 4.8 percent.

From https://english.news.cn/ 12/27/2021

TOP ↑

Vietnam Posts 4 Bln USD in Trade Surplus in 2021

Vietnam reported an estimated trade value of 668.5 billion U.S. dollars in 2021, up 22.6 percent year on year, with a trade surplus of 4 billion dollars, the General Statistics Office announced Wednesday. The export stood at 336.25 billion dollars, up 19 percent year on year, while the import totaled 332.25 billion dollars, surging 26.5 percent. The United States remained Vietnam's biggest importer with turnovers of 95.6 billion dollars, followed by China with 55.9 billion dollars and the European Union with 39.9 billion dollars, said the office. China is Vietnam's largest exporter, with 109.9 billion dollars of turnovers, followed by South Korea and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, according to the office.

From https://english.news.cn 12/29/2021

TOP ↑

Nearly $18 Billion Needed to Develop the National Airport System by 2030

An ambitious plan to invest billions of dollars into Việt Nam's airport system is one step closer to reality. According to a new master plan, the development of the country's airport network is expected to cost up to VNĐ400 trillion (US$17.4 billion) by 2030. A strategy was previously submitted to the Government in early November. The Ministry of Transport has just submitted the revised plan to the Prime Minister for the development of the national airport system for the 2021-30 period.Under the plan, the Ministry of Transport aims the total passenger capacity of the nation's airports will be about 276 million per year, with about 4.1 million tonnes of cargo by 2030. The current capacity of airports is only 95 million passengers per year, compared with the planned target of 144 million passengers per year, reaching just 66 per cent. Freight transport reached 1 million tonnes per year, compared with the target of 2.5 million tonnes of goods per year, reaching 40 per cent of the goal.

A leader of the Ministry of Transport said that priority would be given to investment in a number of large airports, which act as hubs in Hà Nội and HCM City such as Nội Bài, Tân Sơn Nhất and Long Thành, over the next 10 years. Work will also be undertaken to gradually upgrade 22 existing airports and invest in six new airports to increase the total number of operating airports across the country to 28, with a total capacity of about 283 million passengers per year. By 2050, there will be 31 airports across the country, including 14 international airports (Vân Đồn, Hải Phòng, Nội Bài, Thọ Xuân, Vinh, Phú Bài, Đà Nẵng, Chu Lai, Cam Ranh, Liên Khương, Long Thành, Tân Sơn Nhất, Cần Thơ and Phú Quốc). There will also be 17 domestic airports, namely Lai Châu, Điện Biên, Sa Pa, Cao Bằng, Nà Sản, Cát Bi, Đồng Hới, Quảng Trị, Phù Cát, Tuy Hòa, Pleiku, Pleiku, Buôn Ma Thuột, Phan Thiết, Rạch Giá, Cà Mau, Côn Đảo and the second airport southeast of Hà Nội capital. This is an addition of two airports compared to the previous plan. It is calculated that the expected land use area of the airport master plan to 2030 is about 20,378ha, requiring an additional land area of about 7,970ha.

The investment capital for the development of the airport system by 2030 is about VNĐ400 trillion, accounting for about 22 per cent of the investment capital of the whole industry. The investment capital will be mobilised from the State budget, non-budget capital and other legal capital sources. By 2050, there will be two international air transport hubs of regional stature in Hà Nội and HCM City. By the end of 2030, the country is to operate a network of 28 airports with Hà Nội and HCM City as two main transport hubs. By 2050, there will be 31 airports, including 14 international and 17 domestic airports. Regarding investment, according to the Ministry of Transport, for investment planning projects after 2030, in case localities have investment needs to serve socio-economic development and mobilise financial resources, they can report to the Prime Minister for approval of investment. Data from the Ministry of Transport shows that the country is currently exploiting 22 out of 23 planned airports. In which, there are nine international airports and 13 domestic airports. The current system of 22 airports in Việt Nam has a reasonable distribution, ensuring that 86 per cent of the population can access airports within a radius of 100km, higher than the world average of 75 per cent and equivalent to countries with large coverage in the region and in the world.

From https://vietnamnews.vn/ 12/31/2021

TOP ↑

Nghệ An Grants Investment Licence to $200m Electronic Component Project

Ju Teng International Holdings Ltd has been granted an investment certificate for its electronic component and automobile accessories project worth US$200 million at Hòang Mai Industrial Park in the central province of Nghệ An. Work on the project is expected to commence in March 2022 and come into operation in October 2023. The plant will manufacture electronic components, plastic products, spare parts and auxiliary parts for automobiles. Speaking at the handover ceremony, Chairman of the provincial People's Committee Nguyễn Đức Trung said once the project began operation, it would create new momentum for the province's socio-economic development, contributing to promoting growth, generating jobs and raising incomes for employees and maximising the potential and advantages of Nghệ An Province and the region in general. Favourable conditions would be created for the investor in terms of policies and investment environment, he said, adding that provincial agencies and localities would be asked to coordinate in settling emerging difficulties with the aim of putting the project into operation as soon as possible.

From https://vietnamnews.vn/ 12/31/2021

TOP ↑

South Asia

INDIA: PM Modi to Transfer Rs 1,000 Crore in the Accounts of 1.60 lakh SHGs of UP on December 21

Giving more financial independence to women of Uttar Pradesh, Prime Minister Narendra Modi will be transferring Rs 1,000 crore in the bank accounts of 1.60 lakh Self Help Groups benefiting as many as 16 lakh women members on December 21 at Prayagraj. The PM will also lay the foundation stone for 202 Supplementary Nutrition Manufacturing Units, and transfer a total of Rs 20.20 crores to about 1,01,000 beneficiaries under the Mukhya Mantri Kanya Sumangala Scheme. A total of 80,000 SHGs will be receiving Community Investment Fund (CIF) at a rate of Rs 1.10 lakh per SHG i.e. (Rs 880 crore) and 60,000 SHGs will receive Revolving Fund at the rate of Rs 15,000 per SHG, i.e. (Rs 120 crore). PM will also lay the foundation stone of 202 Supplementary Nutrition Manufacturing Units, each costing approximately Rs 1 crore (including the civil works). These units are being funded by the Self Help Groups and will directly employ 4,000 SHG members and benefit 60,600 SHGs by paying against their equity contribution. These units will supply Supplementary Nutrition under the Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) in 600 blocks out of 826 blocks in UP, providing the annual business opportunity of Rs 5,000 crores. The State is running two pilot projects established with the help of the World Food Programme. The SHG members running the plants are being paid Rs 8,000 per month. Meanwhile, an amount of Rs 20.20 crores will be transferred by the PM to as many as 1,01,000 beneficiaries under the Mukhya Mantri Kanya Sumangala Scheme. This Scheme envisages conditional cash transfer to a girl child at different stages. The total transfer is Rs 15,000 per beneficiary —- at birth (Rs 2,000); completing one year (Rs 1,000); on admission in class 1 (Rs 2000); on admission in class 6 (Rs 2,000), on admission in class 9 (Rs 3,000); on admission in any degree/diploma course after passing class 10 and 12 (Rs 5,000). So far, the benefit has been extended to 9.92 lakh beneficiaries and after PM Modi's transfer of benefit to 1.01 lakh more beneficiaries, the total number will reach 10.93 lakh. Kanya

Sumangala Scheme also helps in improving the sex ratio and promoting girl child education.

From https://egov.eletsonline.com/ 12/20/2021

TOP ↑

Centre & ADB Inks $350 Million Loan to Enhance Access to Sustainable Urban Services

The Government of India and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) on December 17, 2021, signed a $350 million policy-based loan to improve access to urban services in India by accelerating policy actions and reforms to enhance service delivery and promote performance-based central fiscal transfers to urban local bodies (ULBs). Rajat Kumar Mishra, Additional Secretary, Department of Economic Affairs signed for Government of India, the loan agreement for the first subprogram of $350 million under Sustainable Urban Development and Service Delivery Program while Takeo Konishi, Country Director of ADB's India Resident Mission, signed for ADB. The first subprogram will establish essential policies and guidelines for urban reforms at the national level followed by specific reform actions and program proposals at the state and ULB-level under the second subprogram. After signing the loan agreement, Mishra stated that the program is aligned with the Government of India's national flagship programs that promote cities as engines of economic growth by improving the quality of urban life through the creation of high-quality urban infrastructure, assured service provisions, and efficient governance. "The program builds upon ADB's long engagement with India in the urban sector with continued support to the central and state governments to undertake reforms to ensure universal and improved access to basic urban services such as water supply, sanitation, and affordable rental housing, especially for the poor most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic," said Konishi.

These outcomes will be achieved with support to India's recently launched national flagship missions, Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT) 2.0 that envisages accelerated universal access of piped water supply and sanitation, and the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana that aims to provide affordable housing to all, including poor, urban migrant and industrial workers. The program will also promote performance-based central fiscal transfers to ULBs on the recommendations of the 15th Finance Commission by linking fiscal transfers to improved urban service delivery. This will help boost local financial resource generation in ULBs resulting in improved urban governance. ADB will provide knowledge and advisory support to the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA) in program implementation, including monitoring and evaluation. It will also support urban local bodies, particularly in select low-income states to implement policy reforms, prepare investment plans, and provide recommendations on cross-cutting issues like climate change, environmental and social safeguards assessment, and gender equality and social inclusion. With increasing urbanization, cities are expected to become a strong engine of growth for India—generating economic activity and outputs, creating jobs for a significant volume of workers, improving competitiveness and urban livability, and protecting the environment. (With inputs from PIB)

From https://egov.eletsonline.com/ 12/21/2021

TOP ↑

Despite COVID, Haryana Govt Maintained Good Financial Management

Haryana Chief Minister, Manohar Lal Khattar said that the Haryana Government has managed its finances well in spite of Corona. The state government developed a separate strategy to enhance the economic situation from the point of view of economic management. The Chief Minister was interacting with the media persons after the pre-budget meeting with Union Finance Minister, Nirmala Sitharaman, in Delhi, on Thursday. The CM said that the Union Finance Minister had called the Finance Ministers of all the states for their suggestions in the pre-budget meeting. The Haryana Government has demanded that as NABARD gives loans for rural infrastructure at 2.75 per cent interest rate, similarly loans should be given under NCR Planning Board at 2.75 per cent interest rate. This is to ensure rapid development in the NCR region. Along with this, the Haryana Government has demanded a hybrid model for GST, in which the production share should be included along with the consumption. This will boost employment opportunities in high producing states. The CM also demanded a separate budget provision for Rakhigarhi located in Hisar. He said that a large number of people are getting loans through Mudra scheme under the Mukhyamantri Antyodaya Parivar Utthan Yojana. In this, a scheme for interest waiver should be made. The loan limit for FPOs is currently Rs 2 crore, it should be increased so that big food processing projects can be set up in the state. The CM said that MSMEs are expanding. It has been demanded from the Union Finance Minister that subsidy should be fixed for export to ensure MSMEs to export. Along with this, containers should also be made available, so that goods can be sent easily to the ports. There has also been a demand to increase the amount of capital expenditure to the states without interest for 50 years. The Haryana government has made a demand for Rs 5000 crore.

From https://egov.eletsonline.com/ 12/30/2021

TOP ↑

PAKISTAN: 4th General Assembly of ISA Promises to Achieve $1 Trillion Global Investments by 2030

The fourth general assembly of the International Solar Alliance (ISA), was held virtually between October 18 and October 21, 2021. It was presided by Union Minister RK Singh, Minister for Power, New and Renewable Energy, Government of India and the President of the ISA Assembly. A total of 108 countries participated in the Assembly, including 74 Member Countries and 34 Observer & Prospective

Countries, 23 Partner Organisations and 33 Special Invitee Organisations also participated. US Special Presidential Envoy for Climate John Kerry delivered the keynote address and the European Commission Executive Vice President for the European Green Deal, Frans Timmermans addressed the gathering on October 20. Delivering the Presidential address, RK Singh, Union Minister of Power and Minister of New and Renewable Energy, said that it is time for all of us to get together to make energy access using solar and renewable energy available. We have successfully done this in India and it can be replicated globally. Solving the problem of energy access is more important than the energy transition. The energy transition is meaningless for those without energy. The ISA can enable energy access for 800 million people worldwide. He emphasised that it is time for developed countries to direct the energy transitions funds they had committed at previous climate conferences. ISA will cover credit guarantees and help in driving green energy investments in these countries. Developed nations must decide whether economic development should take place through clean energy, or by burning coal and firewood, the Minister added. Dr Ajay Mathur, Director General, the ISA said, “Solar will catalyse the world’s transition to a lower-carbon economy, being the lowest cost and most economical solution for increasing power generation capacity in countries. It also has the potential to help lift no less than a billion people out of energy poverty, but only if adequate investments are mobilised and the right policy frameworks are erected. ISA targets US$1 trillion of investment in solar by 2030 which would be significant in bringing the world closer to energy transitions needed.”

French Minister of Ecological Transition and Co-President at the ISA Assembly, Barbara Pompili said, “This is an important year for all of us to access modern and sustainable energy. The ideas shared in the first energy summit convened by UN General Assembly are also our priorities in the International Solar Alliance. Closing the energy access gap by 2030, decarbonising energy systems by increasing solar and wind power capacity and mobilising large scale financing and technological dissemination in renewable energy are key objectives. At COP26, we are working hard to ensure no one is left behind. Thus, international cooperation is at the heart of the conference.”George Freeman, Member of Parliament; Minister for Science, Technology & Innovation for the United Kingdom, said, “The UK has made clean power transition a top priority. The main challenge is the transition to green power, figuring out how to build and operate electricity grids and meeting our global power needs sustainably, affordably and reliably. To meet these challenges, we need new transmission lines coordinated with mini-grids and off-grid energy access solutions, supported by modern power systems. The IEA has made it clear that without global cooperation, a clean transition could be delayed by decades; decades we don’t have. Under the Modi-Johnson leadership, UK and India will together bring the ‘Green Girds Initiative’ and ‘One Sun, One World, One Grid’ at COP26. This is aimed at mobilising the global technical, financial and research cooperation because it is only by working together that we will deliver the scale and pace of the clean power transition aim.” US Special Presidential Envoy for Climate John Kerry, said, “Solar energy is the most powerful tool that the world has in its toolkit to combat the climate crisis. Building a solar-powered economy won't just slash carbon emissions, it will open enormous economic opportunities. The ISA is unique in its focus on spreading solar to emerging economies including small island states. So, I commend the tremendous work that every country here is doing as part of the International Solar Alliance. Solar energy is critical to our collective climate goals."

Highlighting the important milestones achieved by the ISA since its launch in Paris in 2015, H.E. Frans Timmermans, European Commission Executive Vice President for the European Green Deal, said, "Developing renewable energy will be the engine for our global recovery from the COVID crisis and to keep energy prices in check. It is fast becoming the most cost-effective option to generate electricity and address the needs of a rapidly growing population. Clean and efficient energy investments create new markets, offer new business opportunities and provide good numbers of local skilled jobs. It is more than climate action. Today it is simply smart business." Speaking at the 'Enhancing the Capacity of Women to Support Energy Transition' session, Indu Shekhar Chaturvedi, Secretary, Ministry of New & Renewable Energy shared, "to increase the participation of women in the renewable energy sector, the private sector has to contribute in a big way. Capacity is essential for ensuring employability. Going ahead the ministry will focus more on women in our skill and capacity building programs. We are working on the concept of decentralised RE applications & proposes to turn it into a scheme in the coming months to enable women to use things such as solar dryers and solar grinders etc. and improve women's lives and enable them to earn a livelihood. During the assembly, two new programmes were launched: Management of Solar PV panels & battery usage waste & solar hydrogen programme. The new hydrogen initiative is aimed at enabling the use of solar electricity to produce hydrogen at a more affordable rate than what is available currently (USD 5 per kg) by bringing it down to USD 2 per kg. Making hydrogen cost-competitive with natural gas presents major challenges for both supply and performance. However, bringing down the costs can unlock a cascade of benefits. The discussions at the Assembly highlighted that the MSME clusters can replace diesel gensets with hydrogen, which are viable even at today's solar hydrogen prices. The discussions also focused on how ISA's waste management programme will be pivotal for the growing volume of waste & toxic materials, lack of waste specific legislation and high cost of waste treatment.

An update on the 'One Sun One World One Grid' (OSOWOG) initiative was also discussed at the Assembly. The concept of a single global grid for solar was first outlined at the First Assembly of the ISA in late 2018. It envisions building and scaling inter-regional energy grids to share solar energy across the globe, leveraging the differences of time zones, seasons, resources, and prices between countries and regions. The OSOWOG will also help decarbonise energy production which is today the largest source of global greenhouse gas emissions. Aiming to synergise its efforts and actions with other similar initiatives globally, OSOWOG has joined hands with GGI to form a unified GGI-OSOWOG initiative that aims to contribute to the collaborative, rapid development of resilient grids globally – building on continental, regional and national grid infrastructure programs. The UK COP Presidency, the Government of India and the Presidency of the ISA, are expected to announce this collaboration at COP26, to facilitate increased technical, financial, and research cooperation to help deliver the joint vision of the two initiatives. This collaboration will be another leap towards a global ecosystem of interconnected renewables shared for mutual benefits and global sustainability and collectively become one of the most resilient steps to mitigate Climate change and support the global energy transition. The International Solar Alliance (ISA) also announced a partnership with Bloomberg Philanthropies to mobilise $1 trillion in global investments for solar energy across ISA's member countries. The two organisations will work with World Resources Institute (WRI) to develop a Solar Investment Action Agenda and a Solar Investment Roadmap which will be launched at COP26.

From https://smartcity.eletsonline.com/ 12/20/2021

TOP ↑

Centre Signs $4.5mn Loan with ADB to Augment Mobility in Aizwal

With a motive to augment mobility in the capital city of Mizoram, Aizawl, the Government of India and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) inked a $4.5 million project readiness financing (PRF) loan to support project preparation and design activities. The Additional Secretary, Department of Economic Affairs in the Ministry of Finance, Rajat Kumar Mishra, signed for the Government of India the PRF for the proposed Aizawl Sustainable Urban Transport Project, while Takeo Konishi, Country Director of ADB's India Resident Mission signed for ADB. After signing the agreement, Mishra said that the PRF supports the development of long-term solutions to improve urban mobility in Aizawl by identifying high-priority urban transport investments for the ensuing project and enhancing its readiness by supporting due diligence and other preparatory activities. "The PRF will develop a Comprehensive Mobility Plan (CMP) for Aizawl that outlines the urban transport development strategy and build synergies with urban development planning initiatives in the state and promote climate and disaster resilience, and gender inclusiveness in its interventions," said Konishi. Urban mobility in Aizawl, the centre of Mizoram's administrative and service industry, is severely constrained due to rapid and unplanned urbanisation. This results in traffic congestion on narrow road widths and adversely impacts road safety, efficiency in the movement of people and goods and environmental sustainability. The ensuing project, being developed through the PRF, seeks to resolve the city's transport problems by adopting sustainable urban mobility solutions. The PRF will conduct feasibility studies for prioritised projects identified in the CMP, and prepare detailed project reports and detailed designs for the ensuing project. It will help develop the institutional capacity of the state's Urban Development and Poverty Alleviation Department in pre-implementation and project preparation activities.

From https://smartcity.eletsonline.com/ 12/25/2021

TOP ↑

Central-West Asia

AZERBAIJAN: Considering Providing IT Companies with Tax Incentives – MP

Companies working in the field of information technology in Azerbaijan may be provided with tax incentives, Chairman of the Committee on Economic Policy, Industry and Entrepreneurship of Azerbaijani Parliament Tahir Mirkishili said at the II Forum of Young Entrepreneurs, Trend reports. According to him Mirkishili, relevant meetings have already been held with entrepreneurs working in this area, who have voiced certain requirements. "One of the main requirements of IT companies concerns tax benefits. During the meeting with entrepreneurs, issues related to the simplification of the import of IT equipment into Azerbaijan, the exemption of its imports from taxes and fees were discussed. In the near future, appropriate steps will be taken in this direction," he said. The MP noted that similar benefits are applied in many neighboring countries. “There are entrepreneurs in Azerbaijan who are exempted or may be completely exempted from income tax for a period of up to eight years. However, in many countries, the practice of tax cuts is only 1-2 percent. For example, this model is used in Russia, Poland, Belarus, and Ukraine," Mirkishili added.

From https://en.trend.az/ 12/10/2021

TOP ↑

Azerbaijan Discloses Funds Planned to Be Invested in Industrial Zones

Azerbaijan plans to invest $250 million in industrial zones, acting chairman of the Agency for the Development of Economic Zones of Azerbaijan Elshad Nuriyev said at a briefing on the work done in the Sumgayit Chemical Industrial Park and industrial zones in Karabakh, Trend reports. According to Nuriyev, currently Azerbaijan has five industrial zones. "The main goal of industrial zones is to ensure sustainable development of the non-oil sector, create and expand new production areas in Azerbaijan using innovative technologies, as well as expand the export map of these products. Currently, 55 economic entities are registered as residents in industrial zones. A total of $3.7 billion has been invested in industrial zones, and in the future it is planned to invest half a billion manats, or $250 million, and create 1,500 new jobs," he said.

From https://en.trend.az/ 12/10/2021

TOP ↑

Central Bank of Azerbaijan Expanding Capabilities of Digital Identification Project

The Central Bank of Azerbaijan (CBA) continues to expand the capabilities of the digital identification project based on the blockchain technology (decentralized database) in the country, head of the CBA's IT department Anar Guliyev told Trend. According to Guliyev, the capabilities include remote opening of bank accounts for both individuals and legal entities. "This project will also contribute to the expansion of tools for obtaining loans online. At present, the main banks of the country already have wide access to the project. Its capabilities based on blockchain technology and digital solutions have already been launched by some banks. We expect that other banks of Azerbaijan will also join it," he stressed. Guliyev noted that the CBA is also implementing a number of other projects in the field of introducing innovative technologies in the country.

From https://en.trend.az/ 12/18/2021

TOP ↑

Foreign Direct Investments in Azerbaijan's Economy Reach $60B over Past Few Years

The direct foreign investments in Azerbaijan's economy over the recent years amounted to nearly $60 billion, acting head of the Azerbaijan Export and Investment Promotion Foundation (AZPROMO) Yusif Abdullayev told Trend. According to Abdullayev, in the first nine months of 2021, this indicator made up around $580 million, which is several times higher than the figure for the same period last year. "If such rates of investment in Azerbaijan continue, then we'll be able to approach the indicator of 2019 [in terms of investment] soon. The main driver of investment in the economy of Azerbaijan is the non-oil sector," he noted. "The indicators of non-oil exports are also growing rapidly. As of December 10, this figure amounted to nearly $2.5 billion, thus rising by 44 percent compared to the same date in 2020." He also said that currently, Azerbaijan's non-oil exports achieved a record level. "In the near future foreign direct investments in Azerbaijan will reach the pre-COVID-19-pandemic level," added Abdullayev.

From https://en.trend.az/ 12/21/2021

TOP ↑

Central Bank Projects Real Economic Growth in Azerbaijan in 2022

Real economic growth in Azerbaijan in 2022 is forecasted to reach 3.9 percent, Trend reports on Dec. 30 via the country's Central Bank (CBA). According to the CBA, next year, global economic growth will continue amid risks and growing uncertainty over new strains of the COVID-19 virus. The world economy will grow 4.9 percent in 2022, according to an October report from the International Monetary

Fund. The economic growth processes in developed and developing countries are expected to take place at different rates, depending on the scale of COVID-19 vaccination, the duration of the constraints and the sustainability of the stimulus measures. Economic growth in developed countries is projected to equal 4.5 percent and in developing countries - 5.1 percent. Through various stimulus programs, fiscal support and monetary policy are expected to change depending on economic growth, employment and inflation, and the rise in global commodity prices will relatively slow down as global supply increases.

The growing problems of global warming will possibly affect world food prices next year. According to the forecast, world oil prices will be formed next year under the influence of global economic activity, geopolitical factors and decisions taken within the framework of OPEC ++. The consensus price for 2022 is estimated by major brain centers (IMF, World Bank, US Energy Agency, Standard Chartered, Fitch, Barclays, and others) at $70.9 per barrel. Overall, global oil demand is projected to continue to grow in 2022. The dynamics of world prices for raw materials will remain one of the factors affecting inflation in the world. It's possible that inflation will be high in some developed and developing countries the upcoming year mainly due to pressure from world food prices and rising energy prices for importers. Despite short-term disruptions in the global supply chain, global trade is projected to grow by 6.7 percent in 2022. Trade in services is expected to recover at a slower pace than trade in goods. It's also expected that next year the expansion of global demand and the dynamics of oil prices, the macroeconomic situation with trading partners, the dynamics of non-oil exports will become the main factors affecting the balance of payments of Azerbaijan.

According to estimates, in 2022 the current account of the oil balance of payments, even at the level of $50, should have a surplus of nearly four percent of GDP. The growth of the real sector of the Azerbaijani economy is projected to continue in 2022. Real economic growth in Azerbaijan in 2022, according to the forecast, will be 3.9 percent, and in non-oil sector - 4.9 percent. Easing social exclusion measures, continuation of stimulating macroeconomic policies, gradual acceleration of private investment growth, reconstruction and rehabilitation works in the territories liberated from Armenian occupation [in the 2020 second Karabakh war], countercyclical fiscal policy and macroeconomic stability form the basis of economic growth forecasts. In 2022, government demand will also play an important role in supporting economic activity.

From https://en.trend.az/ 12/30/2021

TOP ↑

UZBEKISTAN: Sharing Data on Interest Expenses of Banking Sector

Interest expenses of the banking sector of Uzbekistan increased by 34.1 percent from January through October 2021, compared to the same period last year (18.6 trillion soums, or $1.7 billion), reaching 25 trillion soums ($2.3 billion), Trend reports via the Uzbek Central Bank. During this period, the interest income of Uzbek banks increased by 27.6 percent compared to the same period in 2020 (30.1 trillion soums, or $2.8 billion), reaching 38.5 trillion soums ($3.5 billion). The interest margin from January through October 2021 amounted to 13.4 trillion soums ($1.2 billion), increasing by 17.2 percent, in comparison with the figure for the corresponding period last year (11.4 trillion soums, or $1 billion). At the same time, non-interest income reached two trillion soums ($185.9 million), showing an increase of 1.4 trillion soums ($138.5 million), compared to the specified period last year (510 billion soums, or $47.4 million). Net profit of the banking sector of Uzbekistan from January through October 2021 increased by 11.9 percent compared to the same period in 2020 (4.5 trillion soums, or $425.2 million), reaching 5.1 trillion soums ($476 million).

From https://en.trend.az/ 12/05/2021

TOP ↑

ADB Approves $162mn Loan to Modernize Railway and Boost Tourism in Uzbekistan

The Asian Development Bank has approved a $162 mn loan. The funds will electrify 465km of the railway line connecting major urban centers in western Uzbekistan, improving railway services and boosting trade and tourism in the region. The project will electrify the track linking Bukhara, Miskin, Urgench, and Khiva. It will enable the operation of high-speed trains that run at up to 250 km/h, cutting travel time between Bukhara and Khiva by up to two hours, and making the journey to Khiva from the capital Tashkent possible in seven hours. The project is part of the Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation Corridor 2, which links the People's Republic of China to Europe via Central Asia. It will help improve Uzbekistan's connectivity and trade with neighboring countries and further afield, by expanding the frequency and quality of train services. ADB will also support the development of the tourism industry in the project area by developing an electronic ticketing system, training and involving women in tourism management, and guiding urban development around train stations with access and safety features for women, children, the elderly, and the mobility impaired. Once the Bukhara to Khiva line is electrified, annual passenger traffic is expected to increase from around 280,000 passengers this year to more than 1,000,000 passengers by 2026. Freight is projected to reach a total of 11.8mn tons per year by 2026.

From https://uzreport.news/ 12/16/2021

TOP ↑

Uzbekistan to Issue New Banknotes

On December 22, 2021, Central Bank will put into circulation new banknotes with the face value of 50,000 soum and 100,000 soum. The theme of these banknotes is dedicated to the "Great Silk Road" and the ancient history of the Surkhandarya and Khorezm regions. The banknotes are printed on protected paper, with the front and back sides covered with a special varnish. The new banknotes put into circulation will be in parallel with the banknotes of 50,000 som model 2017 and 100,000 som model 2019.

From https://uzreport.news/ 12/16/2021

TOP ↑

YEMEN: World Bank Approves US$170 Million in Grant Support for Yemen to Restore Critical Urban Services and Support Climate Resilient Rural Road Access

The World Bank’s Board of Executive Directors today approved two grants for a total of US$170 million to restore critical urban services in Yemen, boost climate resilience and address food insecurity in rural areas through improved road access. The grants are from the International Development Association (IDA), the World Bank’s fund for the poorest countries. They will support two projects – a second phase of the Yemen Integrated Urban Services Emergency Project II and a new rural road access project that will open up vital corridors to get food to the neediest and better connect farmers to their markets. More than six years into Yemen’s conflict, the hardships faced by its people are extreme. Yemen‘s humanitarian crisis, already one of the direst in the world according to the United Nations, has been exacerbated by COVID-19 and a cholera epidemic. The conflict has led to the displacement of more than 3.6 million people. Civilian access to basic services and livelihoods has deteriorated and displacement from areas of active conflict to relatively safe urban areas has increased. “Yemen’s economy has contracted by more than 40 percent since 2015, which has left four out of every 10 Yemeni households without a regular source of income and driven poverty levels to above 80 percent. Supporting Yemenis now is more crucial than ever,” said Tania Meyer, World Bank Country Manager for Yemen. “These projects will support job creation and entrepreneurship opportunities for vulnerable Yemenis that have suffered from years of conflict and food insecurity.”

Yemen Integrated Urban Services Emergency Project II ($US120 million)
The new funding will scale up activities supported by the original project, with a greater focus on building cities’ resilience to climate change. It will also continue to support the restoration of critical urban services impacted by the conflict and by recent flooding. The original project, which began in 2017, provided support for 3 million beneficiaries by creating 1.5 million person-days of work, and restoring 240 kilometers of roads, and helping 1.2 million people gain access to water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) services. Yemen’s unmet needs for urban infrastructure and service delivery remain immense, however, due to the extent of damage caused by the conflict. In light of the needs, YIUSEP II was launched in June 2021, initially a

US$50 million IDA operation designed to restore urban services to an estimated 1.5 million people affected by flooding as well as conflict.

Yemen Emergency Lifeline Connectivity Project ($US50 million)
This new project will address food insecurity in rural areas by helping to improve road access for people living in isolated villages and to farmers who have been unable to get their products to market due to a lack of all-weather roads. The project is also expected to provide direct employment opportunities, get food aid to the most vulnerable more quickly and reduce food prices because of lower transportation costs offered by improved roads. The newly approved funds bring the total IDA grants for Yemen to US$2.89 billion since 2016. In addition to funding, the World Bank provides technical expertise to design projects and helps put them in place by developing partnerships with UN agencies and local partners working on the ground.

From https://www.worldbank.org/ 12/21/2021

TOP ↑

Oceania

AUSTRALIA: Ending Native Logging in NSW Could Save Millions of Dollars a Year, Study Claims

New South Wales taxpayers would save millions of dollars every year if the harvesting of native timber was stopped, a study has found. The study by Frontier Economics and Professor Andrew Macintosh, from the Australian National University, estimates taxpayers would be better off by approximately $62 million over the next 30 years. Professor Macintosh said the study showed native forests in the state's south-east would be better left untouched and believed one of the major benefits would be carbon abatement. "One of those benefits is the possibility of putting some of the money associated with carbon credits, if they are sold, into supporting the expansion of the plantation estate," he said. "There is a great demand for plantation wood at the moment, so putting some of those resources into subsiding the expansion of the plantation estate would provide employment for the region."

The study weighs up the economic, social and environmental benefits of ending logging against Forestry Corporation profits and local employment. Other states are already making a move away from logging — Western Australia is set to ban native forest logging under a state budget plan unveiled in September and Victoria will phase the practice out over the next decade. Professor Macintosh said that was not surprising. "State forest agencies across the nation haven't really turned much of a profit – if a profit at all – since about 2010," he said. "I think in the most recent years you're talking about a couple of hundred thousand dollars' profit." Claim numbers 'undercooked' Former Institute of Foresters president Rob de Fegely said Professor Macintosh's report was not particularly "well founded" or "well researched." "It would appear from reading that report that he's certainly not trained in forestry or forest management," Mr de Fegely said.

"So he makes some basic mistakes in how they've undertaken the analysis." He said a lot of it came down to how forests were managed. "That debate around native versus plantations is a false one and it doesn't exist in reality," Mr de Fegely said. "We can't grow the products that we harvest and use from natural forests in plantations — they're not durable, they don't have the same qualities." Mr de Fegely also disputed the impact ending native logging would have. "I think the numbers are undercooked — I think there are more people employed in the industry," he said. "The impact on the region would be significant and I don't think we'd get any benefit."

From https://www.msn.com 12/06/2021

TOP ↑

No Great Secret in Balancing Budget: PM

Scott Morrison has reminded Australians of his economic credentials, saying he was the treasurer that brought the budget back into balance by increasing employment. "There is no great secret to this," the prime minister told reporters in Sydney on Monday as part of what is seen as an unofficial election campaign. "You get people off welfare and you get them into a job. They go from taking a payment to paying taxes." But budget deficits have since ballooned to record levels under his prime ministership, recording a $134 billion shortfall in 2020/21, while a $106.6 billion deficit is forecast for 2021/22. Finance Minister Simon Birmingham says this was overwhelmingly due to the revenue hit resulting from COVID-19 lockdowns and restrictions, and spending on health measures and economic supports. But Senator Birmingham ruled out raising taxes to improve the budget bottom line, saying it would be counterproductive to growing the economy.

"Our low tax approach is not only fuelling Australia's successful economic recovery, but it is also leading to improvements to our budget position," Senator Birmingham told an Australian Financial Review conference on Monday. "With more Australians in work and less on welfare we can make significant indents in that budget position quite quickly." The government's financial statement for October released on Monday shows the underlying budget deficit for the 2021/22 financial year running at $43.9 billion, $7.8 billion smaller than expected after four months. Receipts were $20.2 billion higher than expected at that stage of the year and were only partly offset by payments being $12.4 billion above forecast. The deficit for the full financial year was forecast at $106.6 billion in the May budget. Senator Birmingham said this was part of a trend that saw the final budget outcome for the 2020/21 financial year - released in September - being $80 billion smaller than forecast in the delayed October 2020 budget.

It was also a $27 billion improvement on expectations in the May budget. "We certainly won't be looking at ways to increase taxes on businesses or households in the future, as we see that as being very much a counterproductive thing that will only dampen confidence and hurt growth," Senator Birmingham said. He said the government was backing lower taxes as an essential way to drive confidence and investment. Senator Birmingham and Treasurer Josh Frydenberg will hand down the mid-year budget review on December 16. Opposition Leader Anthony Albanese noted Mr Frydenberg began his budget speech last year by wanting to go back to how Australia was before the pandemic. "I think that Australians can aspire to better," he told reporters on the Central Coast of NSW. "We should be ambitious for our country. I want to lead a government that's as optimistic, as positive, as determined, as hopeful as the Australian people are themselves." But the prime minister took aim at Mr Albanese unveiling policies to provide "free" services such as TAFE. "Whenever Labor tells you something is going to be free, I guarantee you, you will end up paying for it, every single time," Mr Morrison said.

From https://www.msn.com 12/06/2021

TOP ↑

Aussies Still in Dark over Cryptocurrency and NFTs, Survey Finds

Despite the rise of Bitcoin and the looming possibility of an Australian government digital currency, Australians know very little about cryptocurrencies, a new survey has found. Only one in 10 Australians feel they understand what a cryptocurrency is, according to a Saxo Markets survey, while those older than 65 are even less certain. There is also a divide between the sexes. Around 21 per cent of Australian men claim to have a handle on what cryptocurrencies are and how they work, the survey found, compared to just seven per cent of women Bitcoin was easily the most well-known of all the cryptocurrencies (there are more than 10,000), with 38 per cent of Australians surveyed recognising the name which is synonymous with digital currencies. The next most recognised cryptocurrencies were Ethereum, hitting home with 12 per cent of Australians surveyed, and Dogecoin on 8 per cent.

And although non-fungible tokens — or NFTs — rocketed to prominence in 2021, 75 per cent of Australians have still never heard of them. NFTs are one of the hottest commodities coming out of the blockchain industry in 2021 — earlier this year a jpg file sold for more than $88 million — but their popularity has yet to reach Australia. NFT works, including digital art, GIFs and even tweets, have been thrust into the spotlight in what many are calling a digital art boom. Last week, Federal Treasurer Josh Frydenberg estimated more than 800,000 Australians have owned cryptocurrency at least once. Cryptocurrencies were a "fast-moving area" which the government needed to get ahead of, Mr Frydenberg said, while at the same time declaring the Commonwealth and Reserve Bank are in planning to launch a central cryptocurrency currency. Forty-two per cent of Australians surveyed said they would use a cryptocurrency if it was made legal tender tomorrow, but only one in four agreed that cryptos should be declared legal by the government. If cryptos were in legal circulation, one in three Aussies said they would use it by putting it in their savings or a retirement plan. Foreshadowing a regulatory framework was now needed for cryptocurrencies and its associated industries, Mr Frydenberg acknowledged a "digital revolution" triggered by Bitcoin was now well underway in Australia's financial sector.

From https://www.msn.com 12/13/2021

TOP ↑

Aviation Gets $78m, Recovery Plan Launched

The federal government is spending another $78 million to help Australia's aviation sector recover from the COVID-19 pandemic. Deputy Prime Minister Barnaby Joyce has unveiled an aviation recovery framework aimed at rebuilding the workforce and upgrading regional infrastructure. A strategic aviation advisory forum will brief the federal government and provide annual "health checks" about the state of the sector. "As a critical enabler of economic activity, the government is focused on ensuring the industry returns to pre-pandemic levels as soon as it is safe to do so," Mr Joyce said. "We are putting in place policies and regulation to foster a competitive, safe and secure aviation sector that all Australians can rely on, and not just for travel and leisure purposes." The framework also includes support to rebuild the workforce, boost general aviation, drive emerging technologies, modernise regulation and reduce red tape.

It's accompanied by $78 in new funding, including $4 million to increase the number of women in the sector and $15 million to upgrade remote aerodromes. Another $29 million will be made available through the third round of a regional aviation infrastructure program. A $30 million rebate program will help general and recreational aviation operators upgrade aircraft safety. An existing regional airline support program is also being extended until March 31. Funding also includes $32.6 million through a previously announced program aimed at emerging aviation technologies such as drones. The Australian Airports Association said the funding boost, particularly for regional airports, was much-needed. "While domestic borders are beginning to reopen and international travel is back on the cards for Australians, airports are by no means out of the woods yet," chief executive James Goodwin said.

He was disappointed some support programs, including those designed to help maintain mandatory security screening obligations during the depths of lockdowns and border closures, would not continue after December. Mr Goodwin cited industry modelling that anticipates it will take several years to return to pre-pandemic levels. Before the pandemic, Australia's aviation sector supported more than 90,000 jobs. Since then, the sector has reaped more than $5.3 billion in government support. Qantas expects domestic capacity to be at 102 per cent of pre-pandemic levels in the third quarter of 2022. This is expected to rise to 117 per cent in the final months of next year.

From https://www.msn.com 12/20/2021

TOP ↑

Energy Crisis Propels Aussie Resources Exports to Record $379 Billion

Surging gas and coal prices and a weaker Australian dollar are set to propel the country's resources and energy exports to a record $379 billion this financial year. The boom time for Australian companies was today outlined in the Resources and Energy Quarterly published for the December quarter. Energy expert Ken Baldwin told Nine.com.au the study showed Australia was benefitting from a global energy shortage. "The prices are driven by the global post-pandemic recovery ... There is also a gas and thermal coal shortage in Europe, where gas is in short supply due to a very cold winter," Professor Baldwin, of the Australian National University in Canberra said. This year's total is expected to surpass last year's record figure by 22 per cent. Coal and Liquified Natural Gas (LNG) prices will remain buoyant due to strong demand and shortages for the commodities. The quarterly report also forecast demand for minerals such as lithium, nickel, zinc and copper will benefit Australian resources exporters. But it also said there will be a marked decline in iron ore earnings as global demand for eases. While the high demand for coal exports is expected to put a dent in climate change targets, Australia is well placed to become a green energy powerhouse. Hydrogen, ammonia and carbon capture and storage has attracted $185 billion of potential investment, the report said. Professor Baldwin said these developments would enable Australia to remain a major global resources exporter for the coming decades.

From https://www.msn.com 12/20/2021

TOP ↑

Australia Drives Up Debt to Menzian Levels with No End in Sight

Australian government debt has increased the most of any major economy this century, more than doubling over two decades, with the nation facing at least another 10 years of budget deficits. Government and household data collated by the International Monetary Fund show federal government debt has grown by 221 per cent since 2000. At 44.1 per cent of GDP, federal debt is at its highest share of the economy since Sir Robert Menzies was prime minister in 1964. Australia is the only member of the G20, the world's 20 largest economies, to have increased debt by more than 200 per cent over a period that includes the dot.com recession, the global financial crisis and now the coronavirus recession. Other nations that have driven up their debt include the United States (188 per cent), Britain (185 per cent), South Korea (174 per cent) and Spain (121 per cent).

But some have managed to reduce their debt levels, including Switzerland (down 40 per cent), Indonesia (down 55 per cent) and Turkey (down 3 per cent). Australia's gross government debt will finish the year at $855 billion, with another $60 billion expected to be issued over the next six months. This month's mid-year budget update points to debt levels continuing to climb. Gross debt is expected to reach a record $1.2 trillion by 2024-25. The budget is expected to remain in deficit until at least 2031-32. Treasurer Josh Frydenberg on Tuesday acknowledged the government had spent up to deal with the impact of COVID-19, saying it had put the economy in a strong position for the coming year. "Australia knows the Morrison government threw the kitchen sink at the challenge we faced and we put an unprecedented amount of economic support to work and that's helped see Australia recover to the point that we are at now," he said.

"We go into 2022 with confidence and a lot of hope. We have one of the highest vaccination rates in the world and now one of the strongest economic recoveries in the world. That is something that all Australians can be proud of." But Market Economics' Stephen Koukoulas said whichever party won next year's federal election would have to deal with the large amount of debt run up over the past decade. He said the Coalition's cap on tax as a share of GDP would run into the growing cost of programs such as the National Disability Insurance Scheme and the government's own promise to increase expenditure on defence. Labor had not outlined any spending cuts or revenue increases it might take to the election due by May. "Whoever wins the election is going to have to deal with the state of the budget and the level of debt. I'm not saying we need an austerity budget, but small reductions in spending - maybe a quarter of a per cent of GDP - will certainly improve the situation," he said.

"The debt level is sustainable but we've got record low interest rates. If rates go up 100 or 200 basis points, the net interest rate bill really starts going up." Net interest is expected to reach a record $14.8 billion in 2021-22, more than is forecast to be spent on the pharmaceutical benefits scheme this year. And it is not just the federal government that has ramped up debt. Australian households are the second most indebted in the world, according to the IMF, with only Swiss residents owing more. As a share of GDP, Australian household debt is at 123.53 per cent, with Switzerland at 131.9 per cent. Just five other nations - Norway, Canada, Demark, the Netherlands and South Korea - have household debt levels above 100 per cent.

Most debt is tied up in mortgages which, due to record low interest rates across the world, are at their most affordable this century. But some central banks have already started lifting interest rates to deal with emerging inflation pressures while banking regulators have raised concerns about the sharp increase in property prices that has occurred in many nations including Australia. While the Reserve Bank has said it will not lift official interest rates until 2024, financial markets and economists believe the RBA will move as early as the middle of next year.

From https://www.msn.com 12/29/2021

TOP ↑

COOK ISLANDS: $101 Million ADB, New Zealand Program to Support Economic Recovery

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) will provide an $80 million loan and the Government of New Zealand a $21 million grant to help the Cook Islands' economy transition from recovery to sustainable, private sector-led growth. Through the Supporting Sustainable Recovery Program, the funding will help the Government of the Cook Islands progress ongoing reforms to improve public financial management and foster private sector activity. The program also provides a precautionary financing option that will allow the government to access critical funds for public sector operations, services to vulnerable households, and private sector recovery if economic and fiscal conditions deteriorate. "The Cook Islands' nascent economic recovery could unwind if further impacts from the pandemic delay the revival of its tourism industry," said ADB Public Sector Economist and program team leader James Webb. "Reforms supported under this program will address both immediate recovery needs as well as longer-term development constraints by improving budget and revenue management and encouraging the private sector to grow and diversify. The precautionary financing option also allows the government to guard against a slower than expected recovery, and better manage its use of debt financing."

As part of the program, new fiscal, cash management, and tax compliance strategies, along with a new audit reporting legislation, will help improve fiscal stability and management. To drive private sector growth, the government has established a multi-agency task force to facilitate quarantine-free travel; introduced more flexible processes for migrant workers to undertake new or secondary jobs; prepared a new, rules-based immigration bill that eliminates discretionary decision-making; established an online business registry and a competition regulator; and removed monopoly protection in the telecommunication sector. These reforms will help better manage the country's fiscal and cash position, improve tax compliance, reopen the economy, ease labor shortages, improve business registration, and promote competition. The program builds on the $21.49 million COVID-19 response funding and assistance ADB has provided to the Cook Islands in 2020, as well as a range of technical assistance provided to the Ministry of Finance and Economic Management.

From https://www.adb.org/ 12/13/2021

TOP ↑

ADB, Cook Islands Sign $80 Million Financing to Support Economic Recovery

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the Government of the Cook Islands signed an $80 million loan agreement to help the Pacific country's economy transition from recovery to sustainable, private sector-led growth. ADB will help the Cook Islands pursue reforms to improve public financial management and foster private sector activities. The Supporting Sustainable Recovery Program will provide an initial $40 million to meet immediate financing needs, and up to $40 million as a precautionary financing option, which will allow the government to access critical funds for public sector operations, services to vulnerable households, and private sector recovery if economic and fiscal conditions deteriorate. “We appreciate the ongoing support provided by the Asian Development Bank during this unprecedented time,” said the Cook Islands’ Prime Minister and Minister of Finance Mark Brown. “This program supports the government’s efforts to guard against the worst impacts of the economic downturn and position us for a strong recovery moving forward.”

These reforms will help better manage the country’s fiscal and cash position, improve tax compliance, reopen the economy, ease labor shortages, improve business registration, and promote competition. “The program is the culmination of years of close support and collaboration with the government, as well as recent efforts to address the economic impacts of COVID-19,” said ADB Director General for the Pacific Leah Gutierrez. “The precautionary financing option allows the Cook Islands to better manage the uncertainty surrounding the recovery and its impacts on the government’s financing needs.” The program builds on the NZ$31.3 (around $21.49 million) COVID-19 response funding and assistance ADB provided to the Cook Islands in 2020, as well as a range of technical assistance provided to the Ministry of Finance and Economic Management.

From https://www.adb.org/ 12/16/2021

TOP ↑

NEW ZEALAND: Budget 2022 to Boost Health and Climate Action

Budget 2022 will include a focus on the Government’s health reforms and investing in initiatives to reduce emissions and met our climate goals. “COVID-19 has highlighted how critical a prepared health system is to protect New Zealanders and support their wellbeing. “Budget 2022 will make significant investments in establishing the new entities that will replace District Health Boards. Managing rising health costs will be a major challenge in coming decades – we will ensure the new entities have a solid base for tackling that challenge. “The Budget will also begin a multi-year approach to funding the health sector. Initially this will be a two year funding path, then from 2024 we will move to a three year funding plan in line with New Zealand’s first Health Plan,” Grant Robertson said. Climate change is one of the most pressing long-term challenges facing New Zealand. To respond effectively, we need to make significant investments across multiple Budgets.

“In Budget 2021 I announced the Government would be spending the proceeds of our Emissions Trading Scheme on emissions reductions programmes from Budget 2022 onwards. The Climate Emergency Response Fund (CERF) is the mechanism through which we will do this,” Grant Robertson said. Climate Change Minister James Shaw confirmed that the fund has been established with $4.5 billion from the Emissions Trading Scheme, based on forecasted proceeds over the next four years.

“The Climate Emergency Response Fund is a game-changer that will provide billions of dollars over the next four years to help meet our Government’s climate goals. It has been made possible only because of the changes we made to the ETS that now mean our largest polluters are finally paying a proper price for their climate pollution.

“Next year our Government will publish an Emissions Reduction Plan that will set the direction for climate action in New Zealand for the next 15 years. Over this time we will need to cut carbon pollution from nearly everything we do – from the way we grow our food, to how we generate energy to heat our homes, to the way we get around our towns and cities. “The Climate Emergency Response Fund will help deliver these emissions reductions and in turn, create more of the jobs and opportunities for prosperity that can be driven by the transition to a low-carbon future,” James Shaw said. “We are lifting the operating allowance to a one-off $6 billion per year for Budget 2022 to invest in major programmes, including the health reforms. The allowances will then reduce to $4 billion at Budget 2023, then $3 billion in Budgets 2024 and 2025. The multi-year capital allowance will increase to $9.8 billion,” Grant Robertson said. “This one-off increase in operating allowance is designed to ensure we can forge ahead with major reform programmes that will have long term benefits for New Zealand. The remainder of the allowances will cover significant cost pressures and fulfilling our manifesto commitments. “This will require prioritisation, and striking a careful balance between the important projects that need to be done and the ongoing need for fiscal sustainability,” Grant Robertson said.

From https://livenews.co.nz 12/16/2021

TOP ↑

Funding Helps Projects Spring into Action

Enhancing wetland areas, restoring the mana of a famous natural spring, maintaining a native plant nursery and protecting native species by reducing predators all feature in a tranche of conservation projects backed by funding through the Government’s Jobs for Nature programme. “What really impresses me about these projects is how they strive to build on existing conservation work or seek to recover lost natural heritage, habitats or important taonga species alongside a commitment to train up new staff,” Conservation Minister Kiri Allan said. “A great example is Te Mauri o Waihou, a project led by Raukawa iwi to restore Te Puna – the Blue Springs – near Putaruru, an area where high visitor numbers has seen the gradual degradation of a truly beautiful location. “Ngā wai o Te Nehenehenui is a Wai Ora River Care initiative that will see more than 40,000 native trees grown, nurtured and planted in Maniapoto. The project involves riparian planting and management on both private and Māori-owned land.

“Pest and weed control are the focus of the Waipapa Pikiāriki project, with a local company pitching in to help protect several threatened native species, including North Island kōkako and whio in Pūreora forest. Four field roles specifically designed to upskill workers, and provide practical qualifications for a career in pest management, are also being created. “Meanwhile an investment in work being done at Sanctuary Mountain Maungatautari – a mainland ecological island south of Cambridge surrounded by one of the world’s longest pest-proof fences provides – provides funding for four conservation cadet roles. “An urban conservation initiative led by the Mangaiti Restoration Trust and supported by the Waikato Environment Centre (Go Eco) also gets a funding boost to help its efforts in enhancing the Mangaiti Gully, home to a resident long-tail bat population.

“COVID-19 has had an unprecedented impact on our communities. It’s immensely satisfying that as the economy reopens the Jobs for Nature programme is helping generate employment in a sector that has such an important role in protecting the country’s biodiversity into the future,” Kiri Allan said. Overview of the projects Te Mauri o Waihou led by Raukawa Charitable Trust, to restore and protect Te Puna/The Blue Spring; near Putaruru. Te Puna was previously a “hidden gem” but is now a popular tourist attraction. The $993,000 investment will employ 14 people over three years, with work including visitor infrastructure to mitigate visitor impacts on native flora and fauna, biodiversity and environmental plans and monitoring, as well as pest control and revegetation. Ngā wai o Te Nehenehenui is a Wai Ora River Care initiative aimed at the restoration and revitalisation of waterways in Te Nehenehenui (Maniapoto area). The one-year project has been funded $405,000, retaining six existing staff to propagate and plant native plants in the Mōkau catchment which will address historic changes in land use.

Waipapa Pikiāriki is a two-year project delivering ecologically-friendly pest and weed control by Kaitiaki Pest Control Solutions. Funding of $760,000 will allow effective pest control over 3388 hectares in the Pikiāriki and Waipapa blocks of Pureora, assisting in the protection of an area of great cultural and environmental significance and home to many taonga species. Maungatautari Ecological Island Trust has received $589,416 to provide four conservation cadet roles for rangatahi on the Maunga which will focus on pest and species management and infrastructure maintenance on the mountain, as well as the associated training for the young conservation professionals to deliver the work.

Mangaiti Gully – A Hamilton-based organisation has received $653,359 for weed removal and riparian planting over three years in a gully within the city’s boundaries. Led by the Mangaiti Gully Restoration Trust and supported by the Waikato Environment Centre (Go Eco) it aims to enhance the Mangaiti Gully – part of Hamilton’s extensive gully network. The majority of work will be undertaken by a small team of four staff, including trainees and offender employment roles, overseen by the trust, and supported by Hamilton City Council’s Parks and Recreation Unit and the Department of Conservation. The four team members will be offered Wintec courses for work-related training and personal growth. The Trust have a number of valued volunteers who will also be contributing to the success of this restoration project.

From https://livenews.co.nz 12/17/2021

TOP ↑

Funding to Improve Water Quality in Pleasant River Catchment

Otago’s Te Hakapupu/ Pleasant River Catchment Restoration Project will receive $4 million over the next four years to improve water quality in the Pleasant River catchment. The project is being funded through the Government’s Jobs for Nature initiative and is expected to create about 40 jobs. “This much-needed project helps to address high nitrogen levels and sedimentation in the Pleasant River estuary, which are degrading both ecosystem habitat and health,” Environment Minister David Parker said. The funding will support the Otago Regional Council and project partners to reduce pollution from entering waterways by constructing 60km of riparian fencing and planting 100,000 plants. The project will also restore up to 25 hectares of wetlands and gather much needed water quality data.

“It’s great to see a catchment-wide approach to the restoration. Activities upstream can have a major impact on sensitive ecosystems downstream, such as estuaries and wetlands,” David Parker said. “Community catchment management groups, in collaboration with local government, are one of the most effective solutions to New Zealand’s water quality problems. We hope more catchments will take this approach. “Central to the new essential freshwater package is the principle of Te Mana o Te Wai, protecting the life-supporting capacity of freshwater. “This project is a great example of putting Te Mana o Te Wai into practice,” David Parker said. The $1.2 billion Jobs for Nature programme aims to create nature-based jobs to benefit the environment and support the economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. At the latest stocktake of the programme, as of September 30, projects approved to date are forecast to create 8873 full time equivalent (FTE) jobs over the life of the programme. As at September 30, up to 5698 people had started employment.

From https://livenews.co.nz 12/21/2021

TOP ↑

6、Private Sector

Asia-Pacific

Strong Producer Organizations Key to a Vibrant Farming Sector

Scaling up agricultural production among small farmers through clustering and organizing them into cooperatives and various types of producers' organizations, and forging partnerships with agribusiness firms can help raise their incomes and subsequently spur the socio-economic transformation of the Philippine countryside.

A report titled “Realizing Scale in Smallholder-Based Agriculture: Policy Options for the Philippines” – launched jointly by the World Bank and the Department of Agriculture (DA) – said that there are rich lessons in the country and abroad for these clustering and consolidation of activities on-farm and along the value chain to succeed and transform the agricultural sector. One notable example of this approach, the report said, is the Philippine Rural Development Project (PRDP), which is currently implemented by the DA. The PRDP clusters or organizes producers into enterprises that take a business-oriented approach to farming and fishing, supported through complementary investments in infrastructure such as farm-to-market roads, irrigation, post-harvest facilities, and cold storage.

“To succeed, efforts at clustering and consolidation needs to be voluntary, built on trust and confidence, and collaborative relationships among stakeholders—whether they are farmers, communities, municipalities, other local government units, or small and larger agribusiness enterprises,” said Ndiame Diop, World Bank Country Director Brunei, Malaysia, Thailand, and the Philippines. “Where different approaches to clustering land management are not feasible, support for the mechanization of farming and post-harvest operations may be an alternative or complementary strategy for smallholder-based systems to increase farmer productivity and incomes, both on and off the farm," Diop said. Philippine agriculture is dominated by small farmers and fishers who operate independently, mostly using traditional production practices and earning low incomes. A typical farmer earns an average of P100,000 pesos each year, well below the poverty line (based on 2015 PSA figures). Average farm size declined from three hectares (ha) per family per holding in the 1980s to only 0.9 ha per family per holding in 2012. These increasingly smaller farms are often split into more fragmented blocks. The country has some 5.56 million farms, totaling 7.2 million hectares, of which more than half (57 percent) are one ha or less, 32 percent are one to three ha, 9 percent are three to seven ha, and only two percent are seven ha or larger.

Agriculture Secretary William Dar has highlighted that using modern technology, schemes like block farming, trust farming, and contract farming can make farming more efficient and profitable for farmers and their partners in agribusiness ventures. With higher and better-quality production, linking agriculture to the domestic and global manufacturing sectors and accessing markets become easier, he said. “Finding opportunities for clustering and consolidation of small and medium-sized farms as well as partnerships with agribusiness enterprises – to bring about economies of scale (and lower per-unit cost of production), particularly for crops that require mechanization and extensive use of technology – is part of the ‘new thinking’ of the Department of Agriculture,” said Secretary Dar. “We want to collectively empower farmers, fisherfolk, and the private sector to increase agricultural productivity and profitability, taking into account sustainability and resilience,” the DA chief added.

Global experience shows that forcing collaboration among farmers and agribusiness enterprises through decree or subsidies (top-down approach) usually does not work but those that emerge from farmers' bottoms up collective initiatives yield good results. The report says that the country can explore various arrangements based on global experiences, including: Realizing scale in primary production. In the Philippines, perhaps the most promising areas to pursue clustering can be among selected irrigation schemes where water user associations are already well established; and within Agrarian Reform Communities supported by the Department of Agrarian Reform. Supporting market-oriented producer organizations. Encouraging the growth of cooperatives and producer organizations. In the East Asia region, Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan have had especially rich experiences promoting farmer groups or cooperatives. Fostering contract farming, productive alliances, or other linkages between farmers groups and agricultural enterprises. These are well understood in the Philippines and can be scaled up. Elsewhere in the region, contract farming has become increasingly common in some value chains, including value chains for specialized rice varieties or rice production systems.

From https://www.worldbank.org/ 12/03/2021

TOP ↑

Pilot Auction Facility: World Bank's Bond Payments Mobilize Private Sector to Reduce Methane Emissions

The World Bank (International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, IBRD) has made a bond payment worth $3.2 million as part of the repayment of bonds issued in connection with the Pilot Auction Facility for Methane and Climate Change Mitigation (PAF). The payment, the sixth and final payment under the piloting phase of the facility, supports the reduction of methane emissions at landfill project sites in Brazil and Malaysia, representing 1.6 million tons worth of eligible emission reductions. The PAF is an innovative program that uses auctions and price guarantees to leverage private sector investment in climate action. IBRD issued bonds in connection with the PAF after companies competed in the PAF's fourth online auction, in March 2020, by bidding on the lowest financial incentives they needed to make climate-friendly investments and reduce emissions. The winners of the auction paid to purchase IBRD bonds that gave them the right, but not the obligation, to sell eligible carbon credits from methane abatement projects to the PAF at a specified price level in the future.

The investors received redemption payments on their bonds only after achieving and delivering to the PAF independently verified emissions reductions. The bonds allow investors flexibility as they can sell their bonds to other firms if they either cannot deliver the relevant emission reductions or if they choose to sell the relevant emission reductions to another buyer, taking advantage of favorable carbon markets prices for their carbon credits. Since the start of the program in 2015, US$54.7 million have been paid to investors in exchange for carbon credits representing 21.3

million tons of CO_2 equivalent, in effect reducing more emissions than a country like Kenya produces in a year. The carbon credits represent the amount of harmful greenhouse gases that companies have prevented from being released in the atmosphere. The climate auctions model, piloted by the PAF, is being explored for replication in other high-emitting sectors. The results achieved through the four auctions and the redemption of bonds in exchange for verified emission reductions has demonstrated its potential to be used by governments and other institutions to leverage private sector financing for climate action.

From https://www.worldbank.org/ 12/04/2021

TOP ↑

ADB Urges Private Sector Investments in Energy Efficiency in CAREC Region

Energy efficiency projects in Central Asia represent a promising investment opportunity that can also help to reduce the region's carbon emissions and meet its growing energy needs, participants at the region's flagship energy investment event heard today. "In the face of climate change, energy efficiency is one of the most potent tools to decarbonize the energy sector," said Asian Development Bank (ADB) Vice-President Shixin Chen at the 5th Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC) Energy Investment Forum. "This is especially true in Central Asia which holds some of the world's most energy-intensive economies." "Energy efficiency technologies exist, are affordable, and offer very good returns on investment—and that's why they're often labeled the fuel of first choice. They're readily available to improve security of supply, affordability, and environmental protection," added Mr. Chen. "The acceleration of energy efficiency will be among the most promising investment opportunities in the years to come."

The CAREC Energy Investment Forum is a unique knowledge and networking event bringing together policy makers, financiers, and project developers to promote private investments in the energy sector in Central Asia. Today's virtual event, co-chaired by ADB and the Government of Azerbaijan, focused on energy efficiency—a key priority in a region suffering from old and aging infrastructure, low energy pricing, and a lack of policy and regulatory support. At the 4th Energy Investment Forum in 2019, CAREC Energy Ministers signed a historic declaration committing to doubling regional energy efficiency levels by 2030. "To meaningfully accelerate investment in energy efficiency, we need robust financial intermediaries and a dynamic private sector to trigger a chain of secured financial returns and foster innovation," said ADB Director General for Private Sector Operations Suzanne Gaboury. "It is the energy that we don't use today that will save our energy needs of tomorrow." The region (excluding the People's Republic of China) needs about $400 billion in energy sector investment by 2030 and governments acknowledge that the public sector alone can't meet those financing needs. A CAREC Green Energy Alliance is being conceptualized to provide a platform to match investment-ready green projects with suitable financiers. CAREC promotes economic growth and sustainable development through cooperation among its member countries, supported by development partners. ADB is the secretariat of the CAREC Program.

From https://www.adb.org/ 12/02/2021

TOP ↑

ADB Signs Agreement with DBS for SME Supply Chain Support

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) and DBS Bank of Singapore have signed an agreement to help small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in developing countries of Asia and the Pacific to participate in global supply chains. The risk participation agreement will support supply chain finance products such as pre-shipment finance and post-shipment finance, as well as working capital loans, all of which are vital for smaller companies operating in global trade networks. “Supply chain finance is critical to boosting support to SMEs and therefore the growth that creates jobs to improve peoples lives,” said ADB Trade and Supply Chain Finance (TSCFP) Head Steven Beck. “We’re delighted to sign this agreement with DBS, which strengthens our partnership in closing SME financing gaps and supporting closer trade ties with developing countries in the region.” The TSCFP’s 2021 Trade Finance Gaps, Growth, and Jobs Survey estimated that the funding gap for trade finance grew to $1.7 trillion in 2020 from $1.5 trillion in 2018. Smaller companies were the worst affected, receiving 52% of rejections despite making only 41% of the requests for trade finance. Women-led companies fared particularly badly, with about 70% of their applications for trade finance totally or partially rejected. “Our partnership with ADB aligns with DBS’ commitment to help SMEs build resilience in these challenging times and reduce the working capital gap,” said DBS Bank Group Head of Product Management Sriram Muthukrishnan. “As a leading provider of global transaction services, we are delighted to contribute our experience and expertise, with integrated solutions in trade finance, cash management, and working capital advisory, powered by our innovative digital capabilities.” Backed by ADB's AAA credit rating, TSCFP provides loans and guarantees to more than 200 partner banks to support trade, creating import and export opportunities for enterprises across Asia and the Pacific.

From https://www.adb.org/ 12/09/2021

TOP ↑

ADB, ECOM Sign Loan to Support Livelihoods, Boost Climate Resilience of Smallholder Farmers

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) and ECOM Agroindustrial Corp. Limited (ECOM) signed a loan of up to $60 million to help sustain the livelihoods of smallholder farmers amid the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and improve their ability to withstand the impacts of climate change. The loan will support ECOM’s continued operations in India, Indonesia, Papua New Guinea (PNG), and

Viet Nam by financing inventories of coffee and cacao procured from more than 27,800 smallholder farmers. It will also fund advance payments and extension services to farmers to provide liquidity and support to these farmers and reduce the impacts on their business from the disruptions to agricultural value chains caused by the pandemic. Extension services provided by ECOM focus on improving farmers' capacity to adapt to climate change by introducing sustainable farming techniques, data solutions, and financial literacy.

“Climate change and the ongoing pandemic are intensifying the pressure on smallholder farmers in Asia and the Pacific. COVID-19 has reduced their incomes and made it more difficult for them to invest in climate-resilient measures,” said ADB Agribusiness Investment Unit Head Martin Lemoine. “Commercial banks are reducing their exposure to commodity players. ADB’s support for agricultural merchants like ECOM will help bridge this funding gap and ensure reliable income to farmers, enabling them to take steps to adapt to climate change.” An accompanying technical assistance grant will provide capacity building in climate-smart cocoa and coffee farming best practices and financial literacy in Indonesia and PNG, further supporting farmers’ recovery from the pandemic. The technical assistance will benefit about 4,000 farmers and also promote gender-inclusive practices. The grant comprises $205,000 from ADB’s Technical Assistance Special Fund for COVID recovery and $425,000 from the Strategic Climate Fund, administered by ADB. The borrowers are ECOM Agroindustrial Corp. Limited (EACL), ECOM’s ultimate holding company incorporated in Switzerland, and ECOM Agroindustrial Asia Pte. Limited, a wholly owned subsidiary of EACL, incorporated in Singapore. ECOM is the world's largest coffee miller and one of the world's top merchants of coffee, cocoa, and cotton. It works with over 800,000 farmers in 40 countries. As an integrated commodity originator, processor, and merchandiser, ECOM focuses on partnering with smallholder farmers to provide traceable and certified products to branded product manufacturers.

From https://www.adb.org/ 12/23/2021

TOP ↑

East Asia

CHINA: E-commerce Revives "Toy Capital"

After posting a video of a bucket-wheel excavator building block toy, YouTuber Thomas Panke received over 100,000 views within two hours and a thank-you letter from thousands of miles away. The sender, Yuxing Technology Industry Co., Ltd., is the manufacturer of the toy, located in Chenghai District of Shantou City, south China's Guangdong Province. Chenghai is a major toy manufacturing base. Dubbed China's "toy capital," it is home to over 10,000 toy companies, with roughly 130,000 workers engaged in these businesses, creating an annual output value of toy-related products of over 50 billion yuan (about 7.9 billion U.S. dollars). To cater to the rising demand for toys during the annual peak season, Chenghai's production lines have been rumbling round the clock for the past four months. "The error tolerance of the building blocks we produce is less than one-tenth of a hair," said Xie Weichun, the company's general manager.

According to Xie, their production, sorting and packaging are highly automated, and products must pass rigorous standard checks in the form of scans similar to B-mode ultrasound imaging, which has significantly improved both their efficiency and quality. "Now a worker can take charge of four production lines and several hands can manage the workload of hundreds of workers in the old days," said Lin Zezhe, general manager of Sembo Block, another company specializing in producing high-quality building blocks. "Our warehouses are also getting smarter, where robotic hands are deployed to sort products. To overcome the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the toy industry, the local authorities have been actively supporting the upgrading the toy industry and helping enterprises build sales platforms as well as open up new sales channels.

Xiaoniao Cloud, an online toy display and ordering system developed by Guangdong Hoton Business Exhibition Co., was launched in February 2020 to help toy companies trade directly with overseas clients. Now over 2.1 million toys from about 44,000 companies have been added to the platform to build a massive online showroom that can be accessed online around the globe, generating an estimated trade volume of over 10 billion yuan over the past year. In the first three quarters of 2021, the toy production value of Chenghai hit 9.29 billion yuan, while from January to July this year, the district exported toys worth 2.73 billion yuan, accounting for 56.64 percent of the district's total exports. In Xie's view, as traditional sales channels remain restricted, the global e-commerce market is taking shape, and countries in Southeast Asia, Europe, South America and the Middle East are accelerating their embrace of e-commerce.

"This year, we established cooperation with global e-commerce platforms such as Amazon, AliExpress and Lazada, and our products have been sold to more than 100 countries and regions around the world," Xie added. A new toy industrial park is also being planned in Chenghai to promote the development of the industry, encourage and support enterprises to obtain more high-end IP licensing, and accelerate the integration of toys with animation and games, films and TV shows. After receiving the letter of thanks, Panke replied quickly, expressing his willingness to learn more about the company's products. "We hope more toys made in Chenghai can ride the waves of e-commerce and bring laughter to families around the world," Xie said.

From http://www.news.cn/ 12/14/2021

TOP ↑

China to Create 1 Mln Innovative SMEs by 2025

China aims to cultivate 1 million innovative small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) by 2025, according to a government guideline on the development of SMEs during the 14th Five-Year Plan period (2021-2025). By then, the country will also incubate 100,000 SMEs that feature specialization, refinement, uniqueness and innovation, and 10,000 "little giant" firms, which refer to small enterprises in their early stage of development and focusing on high-end technologies, said the guideline jointly released by the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology and 19 other ministries and government departments. Specifying the targets, the guideline said that research and development expenditure of small industrial firms above designated size will maintain an annual growth of above 10 percent by 2025, and the number of patent applications will also increase by 10 percent annually. Related work during the 14th Five-Year Plan period will focus on mitigating difficulties faced by SMEs with financing, it said, underscoring efforts to support new business models, coordinate research and production, and increase the connectivity between large companies and SMEs in terms of innovation. Efforts will also be made to improve the efficiency of services for SMEs and upgrade services with digital technologies, the guideline said.

From http://www.news.cn/ 12/17/2021

TOP ↑

China's Largest Single Capacity Offshore Wind Farm Connected to Power Grid

China's largest offshore wind farm in terms of single-unit capacity off the eastern province of Jiangsu was connected to the power grid at full capacity on Saturday. Electricity generated by 134 wind turbines in sea waters around 35 km from the city of Qidong was successfully transmitted to the power grid through undersea power cables, said the State Grid Jiangsu Electric Power Co., Ltd. The Qidong offshore wind power project has a total installed power generation capacity of 802 MW. The project is expected to send to the power grid annually about 2.2 billion kWh of electricity, an amount equalling the annual consumption by 900,000 households. As of Dec. 22, the total installed capacity of wind farms off the coast of Jiangsu that are connected to the power grid had exceeded 10 GW. The economic powerhouse province is undergoing the energy mix transition, planning to have 37 percent of its total installed capacity powered by new energy mainly including wind and solar.

From http://www.news.cn/ 12/25/2021

TOP ↑

JAPAN: Gov't Maps Out Steps to Enable Smaller Firms to Transfer Costs to Bigger Companies

The Japanese government on Monday unveiled a package of steps aimed at enabling small and midsize companies to pass on costs from higher raw material prices and pay hikes properly to bigger firms, as Prime Minister Fumio Kishida pushes for wage growth. The government aims to strengthen monitoring to prevent big firms from taking advantage of their relative superiority and setting unfairly low prices when they do business with subcontractors. Such a practice, which goes against the country's law, often squeezes profitability at small and midsize companies. Kishida sees wage growth as an integral part of his drive to create a new form of capitalism that aims to achieve economic growth and wealth redistribution. The first three months of every year will be a designated period to intensify efforts to tackle issues faced by small and midsize firms as annual wage talks between management and labor unions go into full swing.

"We will set the stage for small and midsize companies, which support employment in local economies, to be able to properly pass on costs to their prices and make profits," Kishida said during a meeting with business leaders. Representatives from 27 organizations attended the meeting, including the powerful business lobby Japan Business Federation and the Japan Chamber of Commerce and Industry. The package envisages doubling the number of government investigators in charge of checking the reality facing subcontractors, to 248 in the next business year starting in April from the current 120. They will conduct interviews with over 10,000 small and midsize companies a year.

The Japan Fair Trade Commission and the government agency for small and midsize companies plan to compile a report by June on unfair practices. To this end, a new website will be set up, enabling subcontractors to anonymously submit information on bigger companies whose practices are seen as illegal. Based on the results, three sectors in which big companies appear reluctant to allow smaller firms to transfer higher costs will be chosen every year for intensive on-site inspections. To avoid bigger firms from exploiting startups and marketing products based on their business secrets, the government will conduct a survey covering around 5,000 firms. Many small and midsize firms are still facing difficult business conditions as their recovery from the COVID-19 fallout has lagged. Surging energy and raw material costs have become a headache for companies as they need to carefully decide to what extent they will raise prices to transfer such costs.

From https://japantoday.com 12/28/2021

TOP↑

SOUTH KOREA: Bio Firms Expand Network, Gain State Project Boost

The government’s Innovation-Communication Open Network (i-CON) project has been helping Korea’s small and medium-sized bio companies expand their networks and improve the quality of their products, according to the Korea Biotechnology Industry Organization. The organization is currently running the bio and health program of the i-CON project to support small and medium-sized enterprises to develop technology capabilities by using infrastructure and manpower owned by research institutes. Recently, it wrapped up a seminar on introducing next generation smart hospitals as part of the Ministry of SMEs and Startups' i-CON project at Kintex in Gyeonggi Province on Nov. 19. The seminar follows a series of forums and discussions aimed at helping companies build relations with experts in the industry. The organization also serves as a window for receiving industry opinions such as new business proposals through i-CON events and delivering them to the government.

The i-CON project, launched in 2019, is aimed at supporting the development of new companies in the fields of bio and health, smart services, and smart systems for semiconductor manufacturing. Through the i-CON project, the government has put efforts into setting up a network for companies to interact and cooperate with experts from universities, research institutes and venture capitals. The ultimate goal of the i-CON project is to lay down the foundation for innovation and growth for companies by communicating and working together. Last year, the Korea Bio gathered on-site opinions from companies about improving regulations in the bio and health industries through the i-CON project. The organization also helped the emergency approval for COVID-19 test kits, supported the presentation of internal relations for companies and recommended research and development projects for the Ministry of SMEs and Startups.

The organization conducted networking events and uploaded videos of the activities on its YouTube channel. This year, the organization has offered similar opportunities for stakeholders in the field of bio and health industries by providing networking events and relevant information. Companies, for instance, had opportunities to learn about global investment trends, expanding their businesses and creating intellectual property. They got to meet with the heads of venture capitals and received feedback on how they can grow. In particular, it helped guide companies seeking to go public or attract investors with their application process. In addition, the Korea Bio recommends well-performing companies it evaluated for the SME Ministry's research and development projects.

Through the organization's recommendations, four companies were selected by the ministry in the first half of this year and have benefited from governmental support. The companies developed functional cosmetics using natural extracts, cell culture and structure formation, cell-derived drug delivery systems and real-time tissue reading systems using artificial intelligence. "Through the ministry's i-CON project, we are building networks for various stakeholders in the field of new convergence industry and providing support to generate communication and cooperation among them," said Shin Kwang-min, director of fostering industry division at the Korea Bio. "Regarding the characteristics of the bio industry, we will push for a way that benefits both consumers -- medical institutions and workers -- and suppliers -- bio and health companies -- by backing up the network formation between them."

From http://www.koreaherald.com 12/01/2021

TOP ↑

Samsung, Ministry of SMEs Team Up to Support Smaller Tech Firms

Samsung Electronics and the Ministry of SMEs and Startups on Wednesday signed a memorandum of understanding to set up a 30 billion won ($25.4 million) fund supporting smaller tech firms here. Samsung and the ministry are contributing 15 billion won each with the aim of supporting research work for locally-developed materials, parts and equipment for the next five years between 2022 and 2026. “In order to respond to changes in this new normal era, innovation should occur not at a company but in the whole supply chain,” said Samsung Electronics President and CEO Kim Hyun-suk. “The latest MOU aims to elevate technical prowess and independence of local SMEs and seek a shared growth with them.” The Korean tech giant, in a partnership with the ministry of SMEs, has already donated 20 billion won since 2013 to support a total of 31 smaller tech firms who develop new eco-friendly materials and key parts as part of efforts to nurture homegrown technologies. Aside from funding, the firm has also carried out joint projects to support planning and testing. Of the 31 projects, 19 completed technologies have been adopted for Samsung’s products and services like its micro LED TV and Samsung Pay, with more to come. For the new funding program, the company said it plans to focus more on futuristic technologies like system-on-chips, artificial intelligence, robotics, biohealth and new materials.

From http://www.koreaherald.com 12/01/2021

TOP ↑

PM Says Gov't Mobilizes All Possible Resources to Support Small Businesses

Prime Minister Kim Boo-kyum said Friday the government has mobilized all possible resources to provide additional financial support to small businesses that will be affected by the new virus curbs. Kim spoke at a joint press briefing with economy-related ministers on the government's plan to pay 1 million won (US$844) each to 3.2 million small business owners following its announcement of stricter social distancing measures the previous day. "We came up with additional support measures that will actually be felt by small business owners and self-employed people by fully mobilizing all of the disposable financial resources at this time," the prime minister said. The measures have been devised to account for the losses that will come from a further reduction of the maximum private gathering size, he said. Under the new curbs, which will be in effect from Saturday until Jan. 2, private gatherings will be limited to four people, while restaurants and cafes will be forced to close at 9 p.m. The restrictions mark a sharp reversal of the government's "living with COVID-19" scheme that launched last month with the aim of beginning a return to normal but has been blamed for a recent spike in coronavirus infections and deaths. Daily case numbers have been approaching the 8,000s, while the number of COVID-19 deaths hit an all-time high of 94 on Tuesday.

From https://en.yna.co.kr 12/17/2021

TOP ↑

Bio Sector Output, Exports Grow at Fastest Pace in 2020 amid Pandemic

Output and exports of South Korea's bio industry expanded at the fastest clip ever in 2020 amid the coronavirus pandemic, data showed Monday. Output of the local bio industry was estimated at 17.5 trillion won (US$14.7 billion) last year, up 38.2 percent from the previous year, according to the data from the Korea Biotechnology Industry Organization and the trade ministry. It was the highest on-year growth rate to date. The bio industry's production had been growing at a double-digit rate since 2016. The biopharmaceutical sector accounted for the largest portion of last year's total production with 28.9 percent. The proportion of the bio medical equipment industry surged to 22 percent last year from 8.2 percent a year earlier on strong demand for test kits during the COVID-19 pandemic. The data also showed exports of bio products spiking 53.1 percent on-year to slightly over 10 trillion won. It was the largest on-year gain and marked the first time the country's bio exports have passed the 10 trillion-won mark. The stellar increase was led by a 439.1 percent surge in overseas shipments of testing devices amid the coronavirus pandemic. Bio sector imports gained 13.5 percent on-year to 2.3 trillion won last year, with biopharmaceuticals taking up the largest portion with 79.6 percent. The bio industry's workforce numbered 53,546 in 2020, up 10 percent from a year earlier, with its investment rising 3.7 percent on-year to 2.7 trillion won, according to the data.

From https://en.yna.co.kr 12/20/2021

TOP ↑

Number of Small Firms Rises 4.7 Pct in 2020 Despite Pandemic

The number of small companies in South Korea expanded nearly 5 percent in 2020 from a year earlier despite the pandemic, but their profit fell sharply, government data showed Tuesday. The country had 2,902,000 companies with fewer than five workers as of the end of 2020, up 4.7 percent from a year earlier, according to the data from Statistics Korea and the Ministry of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) and Startups. The largest number of such companies were retailers and wholesalers with 915, followed by hotels and restaurants with 710, and manufacturers with 369. The number of hotels and restaurants rose 7.5 percent on-year, with that of manufacturing firms increasing 3.7 percent. Yet, the number of workers hired by those small firms shrank 13.5 percent on-year to 5,573,000 as of end-2020. Art, sports and leisure firms posted a decrease of 20.5 percent in their combined workforce, with payrolls of retailers and wholesalers sinking 16.7 percent.

Average sales per company stood at 224 million won (US$188,806) in 2020, down 4.5 percent from the previous year, with operating profit per firm plunging 43.1 percent to 19 million won. Their debts totaled 294.4 trillion won last year, up a whopping 19.3 percent from the previoys year. Small firms and merchants have taken the brunt of the COVID-19 outbreak in South Korea as tough social distancing rules have led to a sharp drop in customers and demand for their products.

From https://en.yna.co.kr 12/28/2021

TOP ↑

South-East Asia

VIETNAM: Trà Vinh Provides Support Package of VNĐ88.5 Billion to SMEs

Trà Vinh Provincial People's Committee will support small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in the province from 2022 to 2025 with a total budget of VNĐ88.5 billion. With the project, the city set the target of having more than 2,000 new businesses established. The province will improve the investment and business environment for SMEs which will be supported in technology, human resources, finance, production, sales, marketing, and internal management. The project is expected to contribute to help the province rank in the top 10 in economic development in the Mekong Delta before 2030.

From https://vietnamnews.vn/ 12/08/2021

TOP ↑

Việt Nam Has 5,600 New Digital Technology Firms in 2021

In 2021, Việt Nam recorded 5,600 newly-established digital technology businesses, stemming from the need to work, sell and communicate online in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Nguyễn Thanh Tuyên, Deputy Director of Information Technology Department under the Ministry of Information and Communications (MIC), said statistics from the ministry showed that Việt Nam currently had about 64,000 digital technology enterprises with more than one million employees. The working environment and non-contact economy due to the COVID-19 pandemic had made digital transformation faster and stronger as well as promoted the digital business community. "The number of Make-in-Vietnam businesses has increased sharply," Tuyên said. The department said in 2020, there were more than 34 platforms announced by the MIC as Make-in-Vietnam products. Many information security products had been also launched by Vietnamese enterprises. Digital technology enterprises such as VNPT, Viettel, CMC and FPT had potential and made great contributions to the development of digital government and digital economy with the construction of national digital platforms.

In 2021, with the ministry's leadership, Vietnamese businesses have researched new technologies such as 5G, artificial intelligence (AI), and Big Data. This has never been seen before. “That is the spread of the Make-in-Vietnam spirit and we hope that it will spread more to build more Make-in-Vietnam businesses and have more products, platforms, and pride of Vietnamese people in the near future," he added. Deputy Minister Phạm Đức Long said that Make-in-Vietnam enterprises were both Vietnamese enterprises as well as foreign enterprises investing, researching, and manufacturing in Việt Nam. The country's digital technology industry has also achieved impressive growth results. In 2020, due to the impact of the pandemic, the world economy witnessed negative growth. Việt Nam achieved a GDP growth rate of 2.91 per cent and became one of the few economies with positive growth. Việt Nam's digital technology industry had a growth rate of over 9 per cent, which was three times higher than GDP growth.

Long said currently, Vietnamese digital technology enterprises had not only processed and assembled products for foreign countries, with the spirit of Make-in-Vietnam, but also manufactured and mastered products and platforms for the country’s digital transformation. With the spirit of Make-in-Vietnam, the products of local digital technology enterprises had been used and brought about many benefits. The Deputy Minister gave specific examples that the digital transformation of public services and document management systems in localities were by Make-in-Vietnam firms. The smart city management centres in 38 localities had been built by Vietnamese digital technology enterprises. Meanwhile, in the economic sector, Vỏ sò (Viettel Post) and Postmart (Vietnam Post) are two e-commerce platforms completely Make-in-Vietnam, which have helped farmers, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. "The spirit of Make-in-Vietnam has solved the problem of Việt Nam and achieved many successes," he added.

From https://vietnamnews.vn/ 12/11/2021

TOP ↑

New Rules for Private Placement of Corporate Bonds

As the corporate bond market has shown signs of fast growth, some capital mobilisation through bonds did not comply with the provisions of the law. Therefore, to ensure the market develops sustainably, transparently and effectively, it is necessary to continue to improve the legal framework, and strengthen management and supervision. The Ministry of Finance has assessed the market situation to develop a draft Decree amending and supplementing a number of articles of the Decree on private placement of corporate bonds. There are some notable contents in the draft Decree, including amending regulations on the purposes of bond issuance to strengthen the responsibilities and obligations of issuers in using funds from bond issuance. Secondly, it will supplement regulations on credit ratings for some types of issued bonds to raise publicity and transparency of issuances, contributing to improve the quality of issued bonds, and help the market get used to credit ratings to assess the risks of bonds, in line with international practices, to limit risks for investors. The draft also supplemented regulations on bondholders' representatives to strengthen the supervision of the purpose of using the capital, as well as other commitments of the issuer. In addition, the ministry adds regulations to accelerate the establishment of the private placement of corporate bond markets at stock exchanges for professional investors to increase liquidity. It proposed to amend a number of regulations on terms and information disclosure, and enhance the transparency of bond issuers. Besides completing the legal framework, the ministry continues to direct the State Securities Commission (SSC) and other units to strengthen management and supervision, and deploy inspection teams to control the bond issuance of real estate enterprises, credit institutions related to real estate enterprises, enterprises with large issuance volume or high interest rates, enterprises with negative business results, and issuers without collateral.

From https://vietnamnews.vn/ 12/15/2021

TOP ↑

COVID Boosts Digital Transformation in Property Sector

The COVID-19 pandemic has prompted developers of commercial buildings, apartments and residential areas to embrace digital transformation and adopt digital technologies in their projects, a conference heard in HCM City on Wednesday. Speaking at the Vietnam IT Outsourcing (VNITO) Tech Series on ‘Real estate technology in the digital economy,’ Cao Thị Phi Vân, deputy director of the Investment and Trade Promotion Centre of HCM City (ITPC), said the fourth industrial revolution and pandemic forced digital transformation upon all industries everywhere, and Việt Nam is no exception. The country’s advantages such as a young and tech-savvy population, 64 million internet users, and embrace of information technology in all fields were powerful factors in fostering digital transformation, she said. Speakers said terms such as digital assets, proptech and digital real estate were becoming increasingly popular around the world. In Việt Nam, promoting digital transformation in the property sector would help reduce transaction and management costs, increase market, information and data access and enhance connectivity, they said. Digital transformation opens up new services and business opportunities, and increases the property sector’s ability to participate in domestic and international value chains, according to the experts.

The VNITO Tech Series brought to real estate firms and investors new breakthroughs and new concepts in the sector, Phạm Thị Kim Phượng, deputy director of Quang Trung Software City (QTSC) and director of the Digital Transformation Consulting and Support Centre of HCM City, said. Trần Phúc Hồng, VNITO deputy chairman, said COVID-19 did create new challenges related to safety and security control at buildings, offices and residential areas, but also helped accelerate adoption of technologies to solve them. Nguyễn Duy Thanh, chairman of Global Home Company and founding member of the HCM City Real Estate Club, said digital technologies were imperative in the property sector. Building managements faced difficulties in ensuring epidemic control, complying with 5K regulations, social distancing, and supplying food to residents, he said. This was a driving force for developers management units to adopt digital technology and speed up digital transformation, he said. Hồng said, “Vietnamese technology companies have invested in many products and solutions for … the real estate sector, and these can compete with those made by foreign firms. “Digital real estate will be an investment trend in the coming years.” Within the framework of the conference, technology companies showcased a wide range of solutions for smart buildings and residential areas, digital real estate, construction technologies, and others. Organised by the ITPC, QTSC and VNITO Alliance, the conference attracted leading firms in the IT and real estate sectors.

From https://vietnamnews.vn 12/18/2021

TOP ↑

South Asia

INDIA: Fortinet Again Named Visionary in 2021 Gartner Magic Quadrant for Enterprise Wired & WLAN Infrastructure

Fortinet, a global leader in broad, integrated and automated cybersecurity solutions, today announced that Fortinet has again been named a Visionary in the 2021 Gartner Magic Quadrant for Enterprise Wired and Wireless LAN Infrastructure for the second year in a row. Fortinet believes that this recognition is in part due to its ability to offer customers an intelligent Local Area Network (LAN) Edge solution that delivers a robust set of features—including built-in Network Access Control (NAC)—and integrated, pervasive security with simplified management supported by artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning. By offering customers a LAN Edge solution that takes a Security-driven Networking approach, Fortinet enables organisations to tightly integrate their network infrastructure and security architecture to more easily deliver new digital innovation outcomes, allowing IT teams to focus on strategic initiatives rather than spending time managing common network issues. Robust Security with Reduced TCO: By bundling all of its key features into the FortiGate next-generation firewall without the need for additional licenses, Fortinet’s LAN Edge solution reduces overall TCO and eliminates overlays to improve security and network visibility. No additional license or cost is required to enable LAN Edge management, and even network access control (NAC) features can be enabled and leveraged without the need for additional costly licenses. Simplified Management: Fortinet’s LAN Edge solution simplifies management by utilizing a single management platform—the Fortinet Fabric Management Center—for LAN and network security.

Improved Performance: Fortinet’s LAN Edge solution leverages AI to reduce LAN complexity by centralizing LAN management and security functions into the FortiGate appliance. With a single view of complex LAN networks, IT teams are able to ensure fewer disruptions and better performance overall. Seamless integration across the Fortinet Security Fabric: The ability to share information across all network edges allows the Fortinet Security Fabric, the industry's highest-performing cybersecurity mesh platform, to deliver a fully holistic view of the network, from LAN to WAN to the cloud, and allows our intelligent management and artificial intelligence to leverage a broader set of data to make better-informed decisions. Rajesh Maurya, Regional Vice President, India & SAARC, at Fortinet said, "By taking a Security-driven Networking approach, Fortinet's LAN Edge solution delivers robust security features and simplified management with AI and machine learning to support customers' digital innovation initiatives. We believe that being recognized as a Visionary in the Enterprise Wired and Wireless LAN Infrastructure Magic Quadrant for the second year in a row is a testament to Fortinet's ongoing commitment to innovate, break down technology silos, and deliver intelligent, integrated networking and security solutions." Fortinet remains committed to continued innovation in this mature market and believes that its LAN Edge solution stands apart as a result of its focus on features over licensing, security by design, and platform integration with built-in intelligence that addresses digital innovation requirements.

From https://egov.eletsonline.com/ 12/06/2021

TOP ↑

Ubharte Sitaare Supports MSMEs with Export Potential

In an effort to empower exporters in India, the India Exim Bank and SIDBI came together to implement the Ubharte Sitaare scheme. Detailing the scheme, Meghana Joglekar, General Manager, India Exim Bank presented on 'Ubharte Sittare Programme' at the Ubharte Sitaare of Uttar Pradesh Conference. Meghana Joglekar commenced her address by saying "The Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman launched the Ubharte Sitaare scheme in Lucknow in August this year. Meanwhile, the India Exim Bank released a study on the export potential of Uttar Pradesh." In her address, she cited a reference on 'starting a helpline for exporters' from Navneet Sehgal, ACS, Department of MSME and Exports, Government of Uttar Pradesh, address and said, "We have a website https://eximmitra.in/en/. So, if exporters have any queries regarding the scheme or any other relevant query they can visit our website for the same." She briefed on the Exim Bank and its operations. "Our role is to promote the foreign trade of India and take Indian companies to a global scale. So, this is the mandate we work with. We're 100 per cent owned by the Government of India… We implement some of the major programmes of the Central government. One of the flagship programmes is Lines of Credit, wherein India gives bilateral assistance to various companies. This is implemented through India Exim Bank." Adding on she said that the second leg of the Exim Bank is the commercial programme or the export capability creation. "For exporters, any sought of your export capability creation, India Exim Bank provides grants and support you," she added. "For exporters, any sought of your export capability creation, India Exim Bank provides grants and support you."

On the origin of the Ubharte Sitaare programme, she said, “We submitted a policy paper to the Government of India and the Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharama announced the Ubharte Sittare programme during her budget speech in February 2020. SIDBI is our partner institution for this programme.” Due to the COVID pandemic, things slowed down in 2020. However, this year the programme gained significant traction, Joglekar pointed out. On the Ubharte Sitaare, she said, “We’re trying to identify Indian companies that are future champions with export potential. For a company to be identified under Ubharte Sitaare, there has to be a unique value proposition. This differentiating criterion is going to put the companies in the league of those shortlisted for the programme.” The Finance Minister gave a breakup of Rs 1000 crore of which Rs 900 crore will be given as debts. Further, SIDBI and Exim Bank brought in Rs 40 crore each and have developed an Ubharte Sitaare fund and Rs 10 crore each from the two organisations has been assigned for grants, she added. So to identify and nurture companies having unique or different technology, product or process, the programme will extend handholding support to them. The move will, eventually, push the country’s export and economic growth. Uttar Pradesh has been one of the front runners in promoting the Ubharte Sitaare programme at the district level. “There is no way a single institution can help such a large cause. We want to do it with the existing banks… Our target is the small and medium enterprises,” she highlighted.Adding on, Joglekar said, “There are three broad pillars under the Ubharte Sitaare programme – Debt, Equity and Technical Assistance.” Each company is operating in a different way, therefore, the programme offers customised loans as per the requirement of the companies, she added.

“There are three broad pillars under the Ubharte Sitaare programme – Debt, Equity and Technical Assistance.” She spoke of a small pharma company that makes phospholipids and cater to pharmaceuticals and nutraceuticals company. The export orientation of the company is 80 to 90 per cent but they wanted to expand their facilities but large pharma companies were not supporting them owing to inadequate capacity. “We supported this company as this company is the only supplier for India for mRNA COVID vaccines to Pfizer and Moderna. We identified this aspect of the company and supported them under the Ubharte Sitaare programme,” Joglekar said. Further, she cited a few examples of the beneficiary companies of the Ubharte Sitaare programme working for drone manufacturing, solar powered-cold storage manufacturing, waste management and plastic recycling.

From https://egov.eletsonline.com/ 12/27/2021

TOP ↑

Central-West Asia

UZBEKISTAN: To Provide Loans to Young Entrepreneurs

The government has adopted a resolution on measures to launch a payment system that ensures the timely transfer of cross-border remittances, Trend reports citing Kun.uz. In order to implement cross-border money transfers from abroad to Uzbekistan, a payment system "Single Cross-border Money Transfers" will be established on the basis of the National Bank for Foreign Economic Activity (NBU). The payment system carries out settlements on cross-border transactions for its participants (credit institutions) through correspondent accounts. JSC "Asia-Invest Bank" (Moscow) is one of the settlement banks in the Russian Federation for cross-border transactions implemented through this payment system. A loan allocation project will be developed to cover the employment costs of Uzbek citizens working in Russia.

From https://en.trend.az/ 12/23/2021

TOP ↑

Oceania

AUSTRALIA: Central Australian Tourist Accommodation, Experiences Close for Summer Season

Several popular Central Australian tourism experiences and accommodation options will be closed for renovations over the summer period leaving tourists wondering what to spend their tourism vouchers on. A fourth round of tourism vouchers is intended to help boost a struggling tourism industry. Both Kings Canyon and Glen Helen resorts were recently purchased by the Discovery Parks and G'Day Group, and CEO Grant Wilckens said both properties were in need of significant upgrades that would see Glen Helen closing mid-January until mid-March. "We've tried to stay open for as long as we can to make sure we're open for Christmas at least," he said. "But for Kings Canyon, it's actually already happened. We closed Kings Canyon on November 22 and we're not really looking to open up until the beginning of February." Mr Wilckens said that the closures were essential to get the properties up to standard for the next peak season.

"When we bought them we always knew we had to spend a fair bit of capital to get them up to speed and make sure they were consistent with the customer experience that we were looking for," he said. "We are working through a pretty major refurbishment and development of both Kings Canyon and Glen Helen." Mr Wilckens said the initial spend would be around $20 million at Kings Canyon and $10 million at Glen Helen resort. "We will be adding to that, certainly, in terms of future developments over the years," he said. "We certainly need more accommodation at Glen Helen and more fixed accommodation … but they won't be there for next season. But they will be there the following season." Mr Wilckens said the Northern Territory tourism voucher scheme was not his priority but getting the resorts ready for the next season was.

Centre closures Tourism Central Australia's CEO Danial Rochford said the closures in the region were necessary for the ongoing viability of the tourism industry. "I guess [this is] unfortunate for us locals," he said. "But from a tourism perspective, now is no better time to do these types of works and to get ready for what will hopefully be a big bumper tourism season in 2022." Mr Rochford said some accommodation at Yulara, near Uluru, had been closed but a number of hotels were still open. "With respect to Voyages they've got some of their hotels still closed and hibernating," he said. Mr Rochford said the vouchers had been useful for operators who had struggled with cash flow as a result of the withdrawal of domestic visitors due to hotspot declarations and lockdowns. "We've been calling, for many months now, for some form of targeted assistance and we were hopeful that their governments would answer that call urgently," he said.

"Many businesses across the region have had to make some very difficult decisions, just because of the costs of operating their businesses, to either hibernate or shut down or retract services significantly." Northern Territory Parks and Wildlife announced earlier that Ellery Creek Big Hole, a popular outback waterhole, would also be closed for most of the school holidays as the 2km access road into the region was sealed. Tourism Minister Natasha Fyles has been approached for comment.

From https://www.msn.com 12/05/2021

TOP ↑

Law Firm May Have to Give Back Funds Used in Mandatory Jab Challenge

A Supreme Court judge has warned lawyers acting on behalf of an anti-vaccination activist that they may be obligated to return some of the fees they collected after an "exorbitant" amount of money was used in a failed challenge to a vaccine mandate. NSW paramedic John Edward Larter collected hundreds of thousands of dollars from donors online to challenge the vaccination mandate and now faces being liable for paying the legal costs of the NSW state government after losing the case. Mr Larter, a paramedic from Tumut in the NSW Riverina, sought an exemption from vaccination on religious grounds. He also challenged the validity of NSW's COVID-19 public health orders that made it mandatory for him to get vaccinated. The court rejected his application and upheld the public health orders saying it would be of no comfort to a patient infected by an unvaccinated healthcare worker to be told they were "unlucky by being in the wrong ward at the wrong time because most healthcare workers had been vaccinated."

In a decision handed down last week, Justice Christine Adamson said even though the proceedings appeared to be conducted in a cost-effective manner, it involved expenditure which was "exorbitant". "The proceedings, which were apparently (as far as was evident from what occurred at the final hearing) conducted in a cost-effective manner, involved an expenditure on costs which is, on its face, exorbitant," Justice

Adamson found. The court heard that as of November 22 Mr Larter had collected $244,420 through crowdfunding platform gofundme via 3,700 donations. Mr Larter also solicited funds from followers on social media site Telegram by asking supporters to make a direct deposit to an account he said was controlled by his lawyers, though how much was collected via this means was unclear. Mr Larter was represented by Sydney law firm Pryor Tzannes & Wallis Solicitors. Firm partner Robert Macaulay told the Age and Herald that they were instructed to appeal the costs order and have filed a notice to begin that process.

With the matter again before the court, Mr Macaulay declined to comment further on the case. Mr Larter's solicitor, Jarryd Wilson, previously told the Supreme Court that the money raised in crowdfunding donations was completely exhausted by the litigation. "Following my review of the records maintained by [Pryor Tzannes & Wallis], I believe the funds raised by Mr Larter including via donations from third-party sources have been entirely exhausted in payment of his legal fees and disbursements in preparing for and running these proceedings," he said in an affidavit. Justice Adamson also said that Mr Larter was presumably warned this was a risk of pursuing the legal challenge. The judge rejected Mr Larter's argument that he should not have to pay costs because he brought the claim in the public interest.

"If the monies raised for the litigation have already been distributed to the plaintiff's legal advisers, issues may arise as to the duty owed by the plaintiff's solicitors to the plaintiff which may require them to remit the funds to the plaintiff in order that he can meet any costs liability to the [the government]," Justice Adamson said. Court documents show that when Mr Larter was collecting money, he was told by his solicitors that he would need an additional $50,000 to "fight this to the end". The case was brought against NSW Health Minister Brad Hazzard, NSW Health and the state of New South Wales. A handful of lawyers have put themselves forward as advocates for the anti-vaccination movement. Between them, they have collected more than $1 million in legal funds for challenges which have changed neither the approach nor the laws of state or federal jurisdictions.

From https://www.msn.com 12/13/2021

TOP ↑

Shortage of Key Ingredient Puts Australia's 2022 Wine Vintage at Risk

Wine industry suppliers have been warned to plan ahead amid rising costs and international shortages of a key ingredient in the winemaking process. The sector has been affected by reduced supplies of diammonium phosphate (DAP), a nitrogen fertiliser commonly used during grape fermentation. Jason Amos, the chair of Wine Industry Suppliers Australia (Wisa), told Guardian Australia that shipping delays and a reduction in supply of DAP from China had combined to increase costs. “I've seen prices up to five times more expensive for us in the wine sector,” he said. Related:

National fuel supply at risk due to AdBlue shortage, Australian defence expert warns Amos estimates that previously, between 65 and 80% of the DAP used by the Australian wine industry was imported from China. “The quantities that are required in the wine sector are nowhere near as great as … [for] broadacre agriculture,” he said.

While there are European and local suppliers of DAP, Amos said it was more expensive to source the product from these markets. Wisa is most concerned that small-to-medium wine producers such as family businesses may not be able to secure supplies of DAP ahead of the harvest for the 2022 vintage. “What we’re also seeing is that the big corporate companies … they’ve got big tenders and they’ve been able to secure continuity of supply,” Amos said. Grape picking will begin in warmer regions at the end of January and last until April in cooler areas. Why is DAP needed to make wine? Grapes are high in sugar when harvested. Strains of yeast are used to ferment that sugar into ethanol – drinking alcohol – and carbon dioxide. Yeast are living organisms that use nitrogen as a food source. “If they don’t have enough nitrogen … the ferment won’t go to completion,” Amos said. “Also, the nitrogen has a big impact on flavour and aroma.”

The nitrogen the yeast consume can either come from inorganic sources – those that do not contain carbon, such as DAP – or chemically organic (carbon-containing) sources. Supplies of organic nitrogen, such as those produced by other yeasts – are available and could be used as alternatives to DAP, but winemakers will not be able to rely on them wholly. “If the conditions are poor – and we don’t know that until harvest time – winemakers need a mix of both inorganic and organic nitrogen to optimise the winemaking process,” Amos said. “It’s not one or the other.” He said it was too early to say what impact the DAP shortage would have on consumers. “In terms of quality of wine produced, I don’t have any concerns,” he said. “Technically the winemakers will have to work really hard.”

From https://www.msn.com 12/25/2021

TOP ↑

NEW ZEALAND: Strong Pipeline for Construction Sector

Minister for Building and Construction Poto Williams says the National Construction Pipeline Report 2021 released today shows the construction sector has held up well during the COVID-19 pandemic and the future outlook is positive. “The sector can be confident that current levels of demand are expected to continue for some time,” Poto Williams said. “Today’s report shows that despite disruptions from COVID-19, construction activity is forecast to grow steadily to about $48.3b in 2024, driven largely by the residential sector,” Poto Williams said. The annual report provides a projection of national building and construction activity through to 31 December 2026, based on current settings. It includes national and regional breakdowns of actual and forecast residential building, non-residential building and infrastructure activity.

Residential construction remains the largest contributor of national construction activity, making up 58 percent of total construction value in 2020. “Demand for housing remains strong and will continue to play a lead role in the industry’s COVID-19 recovery, with residential construction forecast to keep growing for the next few years,” Poto Williams said. The construction sector is now the fourth-largest largest employer in the country employing over 281,400 people for the year ended September 2021. “This has been helped by the Government’s ongoing investment in skills and training with the Construction Skills Action Plan exceeding its target of supporting an additional 4,000 people into construction related education or employment since it as launched in 2018,” Poto Williams said. “The report also forecasts an increase in infrastructure activity, reflecting the high levels of government investment in this area.

Infrastructure activity is expected to grow steadily, from $9.2b in 2020 to reach $11.2b in 2026. Growth is expected to be particularly strong in Auckland and Waikato/Bay of Plenty. “This Government’s swift actions to invest in infrastructure development at the start of the COVID-19 response has meant that the sector has been able to retain and attract talent at a critical time. The sector is now in a robust position to build back better and continue to deliver on this strong pipeline of work,” Poto Williams said.

From https://livenews.co.nz 12/06/2021

TOP ↑

Stronger Screen Sector Focal Point of Review

The government has launched a review of the way it funds parts of the film and television industry to ensure the screen sector has a more secure long-term future. Arts, Culture and Heritage Minister Carmel Sepuloni and Economic and Regional Development Minister Stuart Nash have released terms of reference for the review. It is the first step towards formal public consultation in 2022 on potential options for change. “We are immensely proud of the way our home-grown stories and distinctive culture are told at home and abroad, and we remain absolutely committed to supporting this to continue, said Carmel Sepuloni. “Our screen sector has not escaped the global impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, which further underlines our Government’s focus on strengthening the resilience, recovery and growth of the sector.

“This sets the backdrop for why support to the screen sector needs to continue evolving to keep pace with the way productions are filmed, edited, distributed and viewed. While there are challenges, there are enormous opportunities to focus on high quality productions. “These opportunities will contribute to the screen heritage and reputation which we can truly be proud of, harnessing our jaw-dropping scenery and utilising our state-of-the-art post-production facilities. “We will work closely with the sector throughout the review. We are picking up the challenges spelled out in the Aotearoa New Zealand Screen Sector Strategy 2030 delivered by industry to government last year," Carmel Sepuloni said. "The screen sector is worth more than $3.3 billion to the economy and directly employs more than 16,000 people," said Stuart Nash.

"It has flow-on benefits to many other industries such as building and construction, catering, transport and rental services, music, costume, hairdressing and beauty services, and accommodation, hospitality and tourism sectors. "Government investment has grown to around $300 million per annum in 2020/2021, through direct funding from the Arts and Economic Development portfolios. We will continue to invest in international and local productions and look at how to make it more sustainable. "This review will look at ways to build the New Zealand brand and reputation for quality productions, create better pay and conditions for our talented screen sector workers, drive innovation, and maximise the benefits to the economy. "The review will also consider the links between the screen, gaming and interactive media sectors, and the work currently underway to develop an Industry Transformation Plan for digital technologies," said Stuart Nash.

Carmel Sepuloni and Stuart Nash said the review is based on four objectives for Crown investment: Develop a more sustainable and resilient screen sector that is less vulnerable to global shifts in screen financing and incentives. Support better pay and conditions and improved career pathways for New Zealanders, and grow the number of Kiwis in well paid roles on and off screen. Develop more local content to reflect our cultural diversity and reach broader audiences. Maximise the benefit to the economy by driving innovation, attracting global talent, and building our global brand and reputation for quality productions. Funding to NZ On Air and Te Māngai Pāho from the Broadcasting and Media, and Maori Development portfolios is not included in the review.

From https://livenews.co.nz 12/09/2021

TOP ↑

Government Investment Delivers More Jobs in Arts and Culture Sector

Targeted government investment has created an estimated 1,576 jobs to March 2021 in the arts and culture sector and wider economy. Part of the Screen Production Recovery Fund preserved jobs for approximately 1,654 crew, 438 actors and 729 extras The Aotearoa Touring Fund supported 1,441 shows by 176 music artists across 105 towns and cities in Aotearoa New Zealand Creatives in Schools provided professional opportunities for 197 creatives. 74% reported the programme contributed to building a sustainable career The Government's Arts and Culture COVID Recovery Programme shows the first full year of funding (to 30 June 2021) has helped protect the cultural sector from the worst early impacts of COVID-19, an impacts report has shown.

“The Government’s strong economic management and investment in the arts and culture sector in response to COVID-19 has protected jobs, supported livelihoods and cushioned the blow for the arts and culture sector,” Minister for Arts, Culture and Heritage Carmel Sepuloni said. “The report shows, that up to 30 June 2021, our Government’s significant investment in the sector has created over 1,500 jobs, many of these in the Arts and Creative sector,” Carmel Sepuloni said. “In addition to creating and protecting jobs, the results show that our Government’s focus on securing the recovery has helped cultural organisations stay afloat, and encouraged New Zealanders’ ongoing participation in, and enjoyment of, the arts. “Right across the sector, we’ve seen great resilience and adaptability. If we look at Te Papa for example, they used the circumstances to further connect with domestic audiences, delivering a summer programme tailored to Kiwis. The result was a huge boost in New Zealanders discovering, or rediscovering, the magic of Te Papa.

“Of course, some parts of the sector were more vulnerable to COVID-19 conditions. This data paints a picture of a cultural sector still in recovery, but one that is making strides towards building back better,” Carmel Sepuloni said. The latest sector employment forecast to March 2021 estimates a 1.7% decline in employment, which would have been significantly higher without Government support. “The data provides heartening optimism and shows that the financial support provided by Government to the sector over the next several years will have a positive impact on employment and economic activity in the arts and culture sector and wider economy. “Delta has changed the rules of the game considerably, which is why when Delta hit, we worked as fast as we could to reprioritise funding to meet the cultural sector’s need for urgent support. “In the new year, I’ll look to undertake bilateral meetings with my counterparts across the globe to compare our responses to COVID-19 in the arts and culture sector, as we continue to evolve and adapt our approach in a rapidly changing environment. “As we continue to face the challenges posed by the pandemic, it’s encouraging to see our Government’s support is paying off with the positive impact reflected in the data,” Carmel Sepuloni said.

From https://livenews.co.nz 12/21/2021

TOP ↑

UNPAN-AP
Editorial Department,
RCOCI